

## **Mayfly Round Mull - Part I** by Elizabeth Baker

*Mayfly is a 12' 9" x 5' 6" hard chine dinghy, marine ply, Bermudian rig, no motor. For details of how Liz set her boat up for cruising see adjacent extract from Bulletin 106-15 (1985/1).*

Why Mull? When studying maps to choose a cruising area, I was looking for a circular tour which would provide a challenge without creating a marathon, give plenty of time to explore, and avoid a difficult land journey to retrieve car and trailer at the end of the fortnight.

I became fascinated by the deeply indented NW coast of Mull and its off-lying islands and determined to sail there; but how to get "Black Swan" round? Could I afford the ferry fare to get car and boat across to the Island, then drive to the far side? I decided I couldn't. But Fingal's Cave, Iona, the Treshnish Isles and Gometra were calling loudly now ... I HAD to sail there ... so ... why not sail round Mull? It was about the right size for a leisurely fortnight's cruise.

A quick glance at a map of Mull will reveal that most of the Island can be encompassed within an equilateral triangle, each side measuring approximately 40 miles; total distance 120 miles. 120 miles ... not an enormous distance for an experienced dinghy cruiser to cover in a fortnight, but look at the map again ... within those 120 miles there is more than three times that distance in coastline, incorporating deep sea lochs, numerous coves and dozens of small islands, all beckoning exploration. It would take a whole Summer and more to see it all.

Mull is a funny shape, rather like a sleeping cat, with the Ross of Mull as its tail, Caliach Point its head, and Lochs Tuath and Loch Na Keal between its paws. At the head of Loch Na Keal on the Atlantic shore, you are only three miles by land from the sheltered Sound of Mull, but to sail there is a journey of 45 miles. In an emergency, however, one could walk to Salen on the Sound of Mull in an hour or so and from there catch a ferry to Lochaline or Oban.

I acquired relevant charts and OS maps, photocopied any useful information I could glean from books and the Clyde Cruising Club Sailing Directions, waterproofed as much as possible with Transpaseal and purchased, very cheaply from a local graphics shop, a useful plastic tube with screw top to help protect the rolled charts and keep them dry. John Quantrell agreed to crew. We were almost ready!

### **SUNDAY, 6 JULY 1986**

At 7 pm after a two day drive from Sussex, we launched "Black Swan" into Loch Etive from a rough, but adequate, slip on its northern shore by the Loch Nell Arms Hotel, just below Connell Bridge, about five miles NE of Oban. It was High Water, so we let her dry out on the beach while we transferred and stowed a mountain of equipment from the car. Then we enjoyed an excellent meal in the Hotel, entertained the while by a local band playing Scottish jigs and reels, including a couple of bagpipe solos - earsplitting when the piper is only two feet from your table! From the window we could study the eddies below Connell Bridge as the tide ebbed swiftly from the Falls of Lora. It was a glorious, starry night when we returned to "Black Swan" and raised her tent.



## MONDAY, 7 JULY 1986

Up early Monday morning to catch the tide. It was sunny but the wind was keen, NW F4 gusting 5, and we donned warm clothes and oilies, reefed the mains'l and left Connell at 8.15 am, bound for Mull.

"Plenty of wind for your sail" said a lady on the beach. "There certainly is!" I agreed, secretly wishing there was rather less.

Beating to windward was exhilarating, particularly in the squalls when the horizon was temporarily blotted out by rain. At midday, after beating hard for four hours we felt we deserved a rest, so anchored in the lee of a tiny, H-shaped island called Eilean na Cloiche, just off Lismore, for lunch. Out of the wind the sun was warm. A seal popped up to inspect us and we enjoyed our two hour sojourn peering through the clear water at the marine life beneath us.

Well refreshed, we continued through the sheltered waters between several small islands and the Lismore shore, tacking carefully to avoid the rocks. Throughout our Scottish sailing, both on this holiday and others, we have found rocks easy to see through the calm, clear water. When a swell is running, breaking waves betray their presence. It is also possible to pick out a patch of sand ten feet down on which to anchor.

We passed Lady Rock Lighthouse off the SW tip of Lismore and could see up the Sound of Mull. Decision time! Clockwise or anti-clockwise round Mull? It looked like being a beat whichever way we went. The wind had moderated considerably and the weather was improving; although still a headwind, it seemed prudent to tackle the exposed Ross of Mull while the weather was fine. It was 4 pm and the tide would be with us until 8.30 pm. We could choose between Lochs Don, Spelve or Buie for the night. We were off the entrance to Loch Spelve by 5.30 pm. The wind had freed slightly and we were going so well we decided to carry on to Buie.

Buie was not recommended as a good anchorage, but we thought we should find somewhere good enough for a dinghy. This proved a mistake, because from then on the wind headed us more and more, pushing us out into the middle of the Firth of Lorne. We held this tack almost to Insh Island, hoping the next leg would take us clear round the big bluff at the entrance to Loch Buie. Here "Black Swan" felt the big Atlantic swell for the first time. It didn't worry her at all, but her skipper returned a cup of coffee to the deep. The view was terrific, islands, mountains, blue sea and sky, golden sunlight ... but the wind was dropping ... "we must tack and try and regain the Mull shore before we lost the tide".

At 8 pm we sailed into a small cove on Mull called Port Ohirnie with thoughts of stopping there the night, but I felt it was too exposed to the SE. Even though the wind was NW and not expected to change, I was still worried about being caught on a lee shore with the tent up in the middle of the night. Here the deceptiveness of distance caused by the height of the mountains was brought home to me. When we were, as I thought, only a few yards from the beach, I was puzzled by the sight of a lot of little animals about the size of small dogs apparently grazing on the grass. What ever were they? The answer was cows, and we were of course a lot further out than we realised!

A brief increase in wind and some short sharp tacking took us between Frank Lockwood's Island and the shore, or Eilean Sneth Dian to give it its Gaelic name. We kept carefully clear of the suck and surge of the swell round its base. A bare, round, flat topped rock, about 4 miles across; Frank Lockwood was welcome to it, I decided.

By the time we had negotiated the big rounded bluff at the entrance to Loch Buie, the sun had sunk behind the mountains and clouds were gathering, obscuring the heights. Lord Lovat's Cave, right on the point, looked a wild and frightening place, and Loch Buie dark and unwelcoming. With tide under us again, and a light following wind, we ghosted quietly up the Loch, but in the dark it was impossible to select a safe anchorage, and there were no lights to guide us. The chart showed a small island off the village and I had hoped to find shelter behind it, but the tide was out and it had become a peninsular. Eventually at Midnight we anchored in five fathoms a couple of cables off the shore, had a quick cuppa and a bite to eat and bivvy'd in our oilies till morning, which in July in Scotland is not long coming.

We had covered 26 miles, all to windward, which was good going for our first day out.

### **5 am TUESDAY, 8 JULY 1986**

A quick cuppa, a yawn and a stretch while we surveyed our surroundings. It was a beautiful morning. Wind was N F3 and the tide was up, turning last night's peninsular into our elusive island. We sailed over to the NW corner of the Loch where a small stream ran out, and two fishermen appeared as if from nowhere and helped haul "Black Swan" onto a patch of beautiful, soft green grass strewn with wild flowers. A perfect place to camp. We pitched our shore tent, intending to catch up on lost sleep, but somehow in such beautiful surroundings on such a morning, all thoughts of sleep deserted us. We ate a hearty breakfast and spent a lazy day exploring. The Post Office was located in a small, wooden hut, and the Postmistress told us the population was 20 in the Summer months, and falling. There was no shop. Our fishermen friends warned us not to drink from the stream, which was polluted, but let us have water from their house.

We re-launched on the evening tide, and at the invitation of our new friends, tied up alongside their big fishing boat and slept under its cuddy for the night. It appeared to be used for taking holiday-makers for day trips. Here we watched with amusement a flock of sheep queuing up on the beach waiting for the tide to ebb so they could cross over to the island.

### **WEDNESDAY, 9 JULY 1986**

Forecast W-SW 3-4.

Slept well, but woke to heavy rain, which continued all day. Breakfasted on board the fishing boat, then rowed "Black Swan" inshore to photograph Buie Castle in the rain.

At 9.30 am we set off, followed by a seal and still rowing as no wind at all, and very poor visibility till half way to Rubha Dubh (Gaelic for Dark Point - and dark it was that day!) at the entrance to the Loch. There the wind came up F3 from SW. We beat round the headland and into Carsaig Bay. Carefully avoiding the rocks, we anchored in the shelter of the Gamnash Islands, a line of rocky islets strung across the entrance to the bay, and thankfully erected the tent. It was only midday, but we were so wet we'd had enough and my fingers were like a washer-woman's.

The rest of the day was spent pleasantly enough watching and photographing the birds, and drying over the hurricane lamp those charts which I hadn't Transpasealed and which were rapidly turning into papier mache. John made a shelf for my radio under the foredeck using a bit of driftwood we'd picked up, and wedges to hold the floorboards far enough away from the c/b case to facilitate insertion of the pump; there was a hole for it, but it was a bit too small.

Total run for day - 4 miles in 4 hours!

## **THURSDAY, 10 JULY 1986**

Better weather, higher cloud and even some sun. Wind W F3.

11.30 am: Rowed ashore to jetty in search of shop, PO and water. No shop, no PO, and no water. Locals (probably holiday-makers from the towns) unfriendly and unhelpful. Obtained water from stream at other side of bay. We had adequate food, but were short of bread.

1 pm: Left Carsaig, beating as usual, but with the tide under us. Gradually as we progressed westward, the high mountains fell away and the scenery became lower and more gentle. The high cliffs gave way to sandy coves and heather covered hill-sides which reminded me very much of the West Coast of Ireland. On this leg we met a cruising catamaran and were photographed by the crew, and a MacBrayne steamer.

We were searching for an anchorage described in the Clyde Cruising Club Sailing Directions as, "not in Ardalanish Bay, but behind the headland immediately to the Westward". The bay in which we eventually anchored was the wrong one, so we subsequently named it "Not Not Ardalanish"!

We beat well out to sea to give a long inshore tack, and with the flattening effect headlands have when viewed from seaward, we failed to realise we'd already rounded it. When we eventually felt our way, cautiously, into a bay that seemed the right shape, a compass bearing taken on a beacon on one of the Torran Rocks was not what it should have been. In the vicinity of Lochs Buie and Spelve the chart warns of "Local Magnetic Anomalies". As we were not clear how far these "anomalies" extended, we didn't know whether to believe the compass or not. However, the bay was a beautiful one even if wrong, and perfectly adequate for us. We anchored in an almost landlocked corner, near a sandy beach, dropping our anchor carefully onto a patch of sand. It was too beautiful to erect the tent before dark, so we cooked supper in the open while enjoying a superb sunset. Harbour Master Seal came over to inspect us. I counted his whiskers as he swam round the boat. Satisfied that we were anchored correctly, he returned to his vantage point on a neighbouring rock.

## **FRIDAY, 11 JULY 1986**

We woke to a warm, sunny morning, and were in such a beautiful anchorage that we didn't want to leave. Instead we rowed ashore, explored the surrounding hillside, took photos; John dug for bait, and we had a picnic lunch on the beach. Consequently when we decided to move off, "Black Swan" was high and dry on the sand, which necessitated unloading a large portion of her gear in order to lighten her enough to roll her on her inflatable rollers down to the water.

Still in doubt about our precise location, we proceeded cautiously, looking out for definite landmarks; one small island looks very much like another on that stretch of coast. We hadn't been sailing more than half-an-hour when I realised I was looking up the Sound of Iona and could clearly see the Cathedral on Iona itself. In spite of our late start, we were destined for a short sail today. It was sunbathing weather and for the first time on our cruise we had a following wind, a light SW F2.

About 5 pm, with the help of the chart, we carefully negotiated some rocks to land on a sandy beach about a mile SE of Martyr's (or St Ronan's) Bay on Iona. I leapt ashore and asked the first person I met if there was a shop anywhere near, and learned that there was one in the village, about a mile away, open until six. Leaving John to attend to the boat, I set off at a gallop and returned later, heavily loaded. Iona is of course equipped to cater for the droves of people who make pilgrimages here every day. In spite of its

popularity, I found Iona a peaceful and very beautiful little island; it's not difficult to get away from the crowds.

**SATURDAY, 12 JULY 1986**

The weather was perfect for visiting Fingal's Cave and the Treshnish Isles, our next planned destination. Instead, we spent the day exploring Iona. First we visited the Cathedral, which was bustling with people and activity. It was actually rebuilt comparatively recently. I found a much more ecclesiastical atmosphere in the little chapel next door. We also discovered a well equipped second-hand book-shop with a very low lintel over the door. I went through that door four times, and each time I bumped my head so hard I saw stars! Then we walked to the northern end of the Island from where we had our first glimpse of the west coast of Mull and the islands we hoped to visit next. We could see a bevy of little boats around Staffa, and through binoculars I could just make out the entrance to the cave. We could also see clearly the Treshnish Isles - the two "Dutchmen", Lunga with its hill, and the flatter Fladda, ranged along the horizon.

*To be continued.....* 123-09

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## Mayfly Round Mull - Part II by Elizabeth Baker

### SUNDAY, 13 JULY 1986 - IONA to FINGAL's CAVE and GOMETRA

Woke at 6.05, to find we'd missed the shipping forecast. A grey, misty morning. Set sail at 07.55 with following wind, SSE2 visibility 2 ½ miles. Low hills in cloud. At 8.30 am we cleared Eilean Annraidh, a small islet off the NE tip of Iona and laid a course for Staffa. Ten minutes later Staffa appeared fine on the port bow. At 9.00 am Staffa again disappeared into the mist.

John, helming with his eye on the compass, had said, "Tell me when you next sight Staffa". At 9.30 am Staffa loomed out of the mist, fine on the port bow and very close. I informed him it was in sight, but unknown to me, he didn't look up. We continued on the same course for another five minutes until ...

"John - I can see breakers ahead - I think there are rocks!" ... "Good grief Liz - you didn't tell me we were that close!"

Well - how was I to know he hadn't looked for himself!

At 9.45 we arrived, bang on our ETA, and hove-to off the cave entrance to eat a bannock for breakfast. Staffa looked dark and awesome in the mist, like a huge and slightly lop-sided organ. Our early arrival had been calculated to give us time to see the island and the cave before the tourist boats arrived. We assumed the mist would clear later; unfortunately it didn't.

John was keen to take "Black Swan" into the cave. I thought it too rough. The wind had increased to F4 and quite a swell was running. We investigated a landing by Clam Shell cave, but there was real danger of "Black Swan" being pounded against the rocks. Then we lowered sail and rowed about, getting the feel of rowing in the swell, and investigated a couple of other possible landing places, but they were all too risky. Eventually John convinced me he could safely row into the cave. The ceiling is very high so there were no fears for the mast, but the channel is too narrow for turning. We entered stern first, John skillfully negotiating the rocks at the entrance. Apparently when it is calm one can land on a beach at the head of the cave, but today we didn't dare go in so far. John kept "Black Swan" as steady as possible as we surged back and forth about 10 ft. in the swell, while I stood by the mast taking photos. Unfortunately my camera had no flash so the results were somewhat dark. When we emerged, John rowing, myself standing by the mast shouting directions, there was the first tourist boat hove-to outside, its passengers lining the rail, cameras at the ready! We waved and they all cheered. They were clearly astonished at our sudden appearance.

We did eventually land in a more sheltered bay to the west of the cave, on a large slab of rock rather like a stone jetty. I dropped an anchor in the middle of the bay and let "Black Swan" fall back till we were not quite touching the rock, hung one of my inflated boat rollers over the transom, and scrambled ashore with a line. John weighted the anchor warp with the spare anchor to hold the boat off the "Quay". Then we set off to explore on foot. I found the walking route into the cave far more frightening than going in by boat. By now the weather was most unpleasant, with a heavy drizzle falling which made the rocks very slippery for walking on in wellies. On one of the wider stretches of hexagonal

pavement I fell flat on my back. The path into the cave is very narrow and definitely not for high heeled shoes or the faint hearted. There is a rope grab rail, but the posts supporting it were cemented into concrete which in some places had broken away from the rock. I felt safer holding the rock itself.

Apparently there is a button to press which will play Mendelssohn's "Fingal's Cave" Overture, but we didn't know that, although John admitted later he thought he'd heard music (some of the tourists had got there before us). But when I'd penetrated as far as I dared, and John was back at the entrance, I decided to try the acoustics so sang a couple of verses of "Eternal Father, Strong to Save" - it seemed appropriate somehow! My voice sounded squeaky and inadequate in that vast chasm.

"How was that?" I asked John later, expecting his usual ribald comment about my singing. "Terrific - it sounded like a whole choir in there!"

We hurried back to "Black Swan" because the tide was ebbing and we didn't want her drying out on a bed of rocks; also, we were anxious to catch the 13.55 Shipping Forecast. We rowed into deeper water, had lunch and discussed what to do next. Staffa is no place to spend the night in a small boat. Our plan had been the Treshnish Isles, but although the forecast was only S-SW 3-4, the weather seemed to be deteriorating; it was now raining steadily and was still very misty; if we missed Lunga, we'd be amongst rocks. Also we were uncertain what sort of landing we'd find. We finally decided on a land-locked bay on the NW coast of Gometra, which is a small island off the Western end of Ulva, the two islands together forming the southern shores of Loch Tuath.

At 2.30 pm we left Staffa on a bearing of 020° M, sailing at about 2 knots with a following wind. The rain had stopped but visibility was still very poor. At 3.45 pm we sighted Little Colonsay about a mile to starboard. At 5 pm we entered the harbour on the Western shore of Gometra. It is protected by the small island of Eilean Dioghlum and the entrance is to the north of it. There are rocks all along the edges of the channel, and a few large ones on the West side of the entrance. The CCC Sailing Directions state, "Going in, the port hand must be kept". The bottom is largely sandy with long strands of weed in the shallower parts. There was one yacht anchored inside, and a couple more came in later. During our stay a number of yachts came and went, but I noticed that none of the crew of any of them went ashore.

I was dismayed to see a couple of ugly modern motor yachts with Hamble registrations anchored in one corner, but felt better later when we met a Scotsman employed by the English owner of the island to mind the animals being bred there. He told us those boats were badly designed for the local conditions; both had broken down and were awaiting spare parts, and had inadequate stowage for ferrying the sort of equipment one needs on a remote island. For shopping he preferred his little sailing dinghy.

At low tide the weed on the bottom was breaking the surface and I found it hard to dismiss the illusion that I was anchored in a large duck pond!

In the middle of the night I woke, apparently sweating profusely. Feeling damp and uncomfortable I sat up to discover that my sleeping bag was soaking wet. At the time it wasn't even raining, so we could only deduce that the mist condensing on the mast was running down onto the deck and thence dripping onto my sleeping bag.

Next morning, **Monday, 14th July 1986**, dawned wet and windy so we stayed on board under the tent all day. Around noon we realised the anchor was dragging, so it was down

tent, out oars, row back and re-anchor rather more carefully. At this moment the burgee halyard chose to break and burgee came whistling past my ears. It was cold, wet and unpleasant outside, so tent was hastily re-erected and the mopping up process begun again. We amused ourselves watching the deer on shore swimming round the end of a very high fence presumably built to keep them out. One tiny fawn was too frightened to enter the water, and much agitated bleating went on till mother returned to his side of the fence.

**Tuesday** at first seemed no better than Monday, and the first hints of a gale warning were heard on the radio, which did nothing to improve morale. As the morning wore on, however, the sky cleared and it turned into a beautiful day. But for the forecast, it seemed a perfect day to go to Lunga, but it's not sensible to set off for an unknown and exposed anchorage with bad weather threatening. John had got out of his bunk on the wrong side and was not good company today, so I inflated my toy dinghy and rowed ashore alone to explore Gometra. I landed at a little stone jetty in a sheltered corner of the harbour. A pretty little clinker dinghy was bobbing on a mooring nearby; her spars laid out on the quay. In addition to the deer, I discovered cattle and goats grazing on the hills. There was a patch of level, soft grass near the water's edge ideal for pitching a tent, and a stream for fresh water. It was a lovely place.

Later I returned with John. We rowed "Black Swan" ashore and rigged her with a pulley arrangement to the anchor so we could moor her off the quay, but get aboard when necessary. While engaged on this exercise we met for the first time the warden of the island, who was also the owner of the little dinghy I'd noticed, and a keen naturalist. He showed us a rare plant he'd discovered, "Moonwort", and I was thankful I hadn't pitched my tent on the patch of grass where that was growing! The 17.10 shipping forecast was SW Gale 8-9! Well, we had a good hurricane hole here, but so far the sun was shining brightly and the sea was like a millpond. We decided that if the gale had not arrived by morning we would sail. However, the first gusts rattled the tent while supper was cooking over an open fire.

On **Wednesday** morning the gale had arrived. There was no question of sailing anywhere. Instead we climbed Gometra's highest hill, 511 ft. We had sunshine interspersed with torrential showers, but found we could keep dry by crouching in the lee of big boulders and rocks; as the rain was horizontal, it missed us completely. At the top we had splendid views of all the surrounding islands, and could see the whole of Gometra spread beneath us. I wanted to walk right across to the Sound of Ulva, but was worried about "Black Swan" and also my tent in the increasing wind, now so strong we could lean on it.

When we returned we found "Black Swan" safe enough, but my tent was taking a buffeting and would have to be moved; before I could do so it blew down. I knew then the Force 9 had arrived. My tent has stood up well to many Force 8's over the years, but Force 9 was just more than it could take. We re-pitched inside a little roofless building and I felt so secure that night that, on waking, I thought I was in bed at home.

#### **THURSDAY, 17th JULY 1986 - GOMETRA TO ARDTORNISH BAY, SOUND OF MULL**

The gale had moderated to about F6. Forecast was still talking about F8-9, but we knew the worst had passed. John was anxious to sail, knowing that we needed to be back at Connell by Friday night if possible. I was not at all keen and wanted to let the sea moderate first.



was chivvying me to pack up and make ready to leave. I'm afraid I deliberately took my time and consequently when we did leave at 1.30 pm the tide was against us. All we had to do was beat across Loch Tuath and round Treshnish Point, then we would have a fair wind...but the chart shows overfalls off Treshnish; what would they be like in this weather ...?

We started with reefed main only, but finding that insufficient, quickly released the jib. Outside in the Loch the waves were big, but not breaking. All went well at first, then, out in the middle of the loch an extra large wave passed under us - "Black Swan" heeled alarmingly and we scrambled up onto the weather gunwale; for a few split seconds I thought, "I don't like this - I want to go back!" - then - as we regained equilibrium there was an unpleasant sound of splintering wood ...

"What was that?" "I don't know ... back the b----- jib!"

From then on we had to back the jib every time we tacked. I watched the bilge water carefully for a while, but we didn't seem to be leaking. There were occasional mysterious bumping noises for a while, then another splintering sound, and that was the last time we heard it. From then on the concentration required for sailing the boat pushed it from our minds.

"The window has blown out of the jib!" .... "Get it in then!"  
"It's OK, it's only the Polythene, it won't tear any further!"

I realised John was having problems tacking, and without the jib to back it might prove even more difficult. And so, with our strangely reefed jib we carried on ... and on ... and on ... making about a foot over the ground on each tack, but at least we weren't going backwards. We listened to the 13.55 shipping forecast, "Gale 8-9 at first, then moderating 5-6"; but the report from Tiree, which island we could clearly see, was only F6. It was obvious the weather was improving. Four hours later we heard the 17.50 forecast, NW 5-6, backing S4. Report from Tiree was NW4. We were still struggling to round Treshnish Point!

At 7 pm I could look back up the Loch - we had made it! - I suddenly experienced a feeling of pure joy - the sky had cleared and here I was in my own little boat on a tumbling sea, white crests glistening, gazing up a beautiful loch, the mountains of Mull blue in the distance and the sun shining overhead. At last we could free off onto a reach and then a run as we rounded the NW corner of Mull. If there were any overfalls off Treshnish Point we scarcely noticed them compared to what we'd been experiencing all day.

"Better get the plate up", said John, "that is, if there's any left. I've a feeling it's dropped off!"

It had! All that was left in the slot was a jagged edge. There had been none of it under the boat at all. It was a wonder we'd been able to hold our ground, let alone make progress! We both admitted then that we'd privately feared the worst, but had refused to admit defeat. John said he'd worried I'd decide to go back, but once I'd realised we were coping, I was as keen to carry on as he was. In retrospect though, I think if we'd waited till about 5 pm before setting out, we'd probably have still reached Treshnish Point by 6 pm, with a fair tide, calmer seas and a complete centreboard.

We had earlier discussed the possibility of sailing all night to increase our chances of returning to Connell on schedule. Now, with a fair wind, a fair tide until 4 am, but no centreboard, it really was imperative. Now we knew we had no centreboard, we were very

nervous that the wind might head us again. In Scotland in July it is light until 11 pm, and would only be dark for about five hours.

And so we sailed on round the NW corner of Mull into Loch Sunart, with Ardnamurchan light flashing to the northwards as we passed. About 11 pm we entered the Sound of Mull. Clouds were gathering over the mountains and I wondered whether we were approaching some dirty weather, but no - they were only showers. It was disappointing to have to sail down the Sound of Mull in the dark and so miss the scenery. I had been there once before on a MacBrayne ferry and had been looking forward to reliving the experience from "Black Swan".

About 1 am, I asked John to take the helm as I was nodding off. I slept soundly for a full ten minutes, but then John woke me to identify a blind buoy which transpired to be Fiunary Rocks. At the same time we shook out the reef as the wind had dropped right away. And that was all the sleep I got until back at Connell 24 hours later. At 4 am we passed the entrance to Lochaline, another loch I had hoped to explore but which will have to wait for another time. Then, just as the sky was lightening, we anchored in Ardtornish Bay, on the Morvern shore, for a few hours' sleep while the contrary tide ran its course.

Only those who have sailed an open boat all night will appreciate how cold can be those early hours of dawn. One must wear oilies even if it's fine because the boat gets soaked with dew, and oilies themselves condense inside and feel cold and clammy, which feeling is accentuated every time you move ... and the dew on the sails drips coldly down your neck! Even if it's clear, the rising sun takes a painfully long time to produce any appreciable warmth. That was how I felt when we dropped our hook in Ardtornish Bay. We raised the tent, but dosed down in oilies to save time. John slept well. I didn't.

#### **FRIDAY, 18th JULY 1986 - ARDTORNISH BAY TO CONNELL**

Woken from a fitful doze by my own teeth chattering, I moved over to the tent opening and watched rain squalls chasing each other across Mull. Does it never stop raining on Mull? We had spent ten days walking there with a tent the previous year, and apart from one afternoon, had been in torrential rain the whole time! But here in Ardtornish Bay it was sunny.

The bay was edged by cliffs down which tumbled several beautiful waterfalls. On the point round which we had sailed on our way in stood a ruined castle (I'm told this was the home of Douglas MacLean, the first Lord of the isles), silhouetted against majestic black clouds, and one of those pretty little miniature lighthouses which abound in Scotland. Ashore I could see what might have been a sailing school; a large house in pleasant grounds, fronted by a line of dinghies. I passed the time writing up the log.

At 8 am we lowered the tent in order to gain full benefit from this sunny morning, and ate the last of our bread for breakfast.

At 11.30 am we weighed anchor and set sail on the final leg of our circumnavigation. Fortunately the wind was NW2 and therefore behind us. John got out his mackerel line and wanted to beat to windward for a leg or two while he fished, but without the centreboard "Black Swan" would not tack at all. It must have been the sheer force of the wind which enabled us to do so yesterday. John got out his big sheath knife and planed down my spare paddle until it would go down the centreboard slot as a dagger board. I suppose it had some effect, but there was no noticeable improvement. Concerned that the wind might head us later, we pressed on.

With no wind at all, we rowed cautiously between the Lighthouse island and the tip of Lismore; even at HW we only had about six inches beneath our keel, but it was a worthwhile short cut. Alternately sailing and rowing, we ghosted along the Lismore shore looking for a secluded stream in which to wash before returning to civilisation. One was shown on the chart, but we had difficulty locating it; however we got our baths eventually. Here we made a classic mistake - pulled "Black Swan" well up onto the beach and dug in the anchor - she would float off as the tide rose. When we returned she was rapidly drying out - the tide was EBBING! Fortunately the beach was steeply shelving and we re-launched without difficulty.

At 6.30 pm we left Lismore bound for Connell, our circumnavigation complete. We could see Connell Bridge. It was very clear and the scenery was breathtaking. There were several yachts about; more than when we'd set out, but still sparse compared with those we encounter on the South Coast. This final leg took us three hours of slow sailing. As we approached Dunstaffnage Bay at the entrance to Loch Etive at about 8 pm the wind died right away, so we lowered the sails and decided to row the last two miles; then it increased again to F4 making rowing so difficult we had to reset the sails, and "Black Swan" romped the last mile in fine style and with a bone in her teeth. We beached at 9.30 pm.

On **Saturday** as we packed up it was bitterly cold and raining heavily, but what did I care - I had just fulfilled an ambition and enjoyed one of the best holidays of my life, with a splendid crew and a plucky little boat. Thank you John and "Black Swan" for helping to make it all possible.

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