

Destination Wales, a passage through Covid.

by Chris H Jones - “*White Knight of Purbeck*”

Our plan for 2020 was to explore the Clyde, Loch Fyne and the Whisky Islands before sailing down the Irish coast, through into the Irish Sea, to the Isle of Man and eventually North Wales. Three working days before we were due to launch came Covid Lockdown, leaving a host of jobs to finish off. Most of them two borders and a confusing array of Covid regulations, rules and advice away. So close yet so far.

So, things frustratingly remained for four months and some of the most glorious sailing weather for years, passed by.

Within hours of the borders reopening and restrictions being eased I headed north with a trailer load of boat parts. Three intense days of refitting, reloading and anti-fouling followed. Eventually, into an onshore swell, our Contessa 32 White Knight was relaunched and I took her the short hop to Largs where Ian took over to complete the refitting of the fore cabin. The following weekend Jan and I headed back North to tidy up, complete the remaining jobs before our Summer Cruise

Week 1: - Jan’s Loch Fyne Gastronomic Odyssey

The first week of our summer cruise was Jan’s “Gastronomic Odyssey” combining a thorough shake down with a gastronomic tour of Loch Fyne and Arran. After being hauled up our mast to refit wind vanes, anemometers, radar reflectors and a broken flag halyard, then a neighbouring yachts mast to refit a wind vane, Elin took her boyfriend Scott off to the Marina’s restaurant for a slap up burger, while Jan and I headed into Largs for fish and chips sitting in the car on the sea front.

Next morning, round Great Cumbre and up the beautiful Kyles of Bute for our first night afloat in Cladagh Harbour. Sunday dawned with a rising gusty wind coming over the hills. Out in Loch Riddon the fluky winds boxed the compass before giving us a lively beat down the West Kyle then out into Inchmarnock Water and lower Loch Fyne.



Ideal conditions to try White Knight and her new reefing system in F6+. East Loch Tarbert was our base for the next couple of nights with a day sail to Loch Ranza and our first gastro stop, the Arran Distillery to stock up the drinks cabinet.



Lochranza



Loch Fyne

Flat calm gave us the opportunity to calibrate the log and give the engine a long run up Loch Fyne through the Otter Narrows, Loch Gaire, slipping in a bit of Man Overboard practice, then through Minard to Inveraray. Back down the Loch a short way to gastro stop number 2, the Creggan Inn for a meal in their newly reopened, socially distanced restaurant and a night on their visitor's mooring.

A dreich morning of steady drizzle and calm entailed another morning under engine, heading to the top of Loch Fyne and Gastro stop number 3, the Loch Fyne Oyster Bar. All seats in the restaurant were booked for the next week and a half, so we took a shellfish platter back on board for a socially isolated lunch. Late in the afternoon, nearing East Loch Tarbert, came the first sign of the engine problems which were to dominate the next few days. The temperature warning light came on. Removing some weed from the sea water inlet strainer and reducing the leak from the seawater impeller were the obvious fixes.



Next morning we sailed for Brodick on Arran followed by a night sail to Kilchatten Bay on Bute, then an early morning motor with the temperature warning light blazing to Largs Yacht Haven, emptying our remaining drinking water through the calorifier to dump heat as we went.

There were no Engineers available to look at the engine but with the advice from a Volvo Penta dealer over the next two days, I gradually dismantled, cleaned out and reassembled the seawater cooling system and heat exchanger. Just as I was refitting the heat exchanger the new crew arrived for Week 2. Jonathan and Jess replacing Jan and Scott for our delivery trip to North Wales.

Week 2: - Heading South and the revenge of the Green Donkey



The first leg of week 2 was to head east to Port Bannatyne on Bute for the night. The plan was to introduce Jonathan & Jess to the beautiful Kyles of Bute, then cross to Arran, down Kilbrannan Sound to Campbelltown, our departure point for the Antrim coast. Then following the Ulster coast to Ardglass before crossing directly to North Wales. The Isle of Man was closed to visitors with no landing permitted. The “Green Donkey” had other ideas. Our green painted Volvo Penta 2002 is stabled in a locker under the cabin steps and was clearly not wanting to head south from the crystal-clear waters of the Hebrides.

The engine temperature warning light killed our plan the next morning as we made our way through the drizzle up the East Kyle. Back to Largs for the stripping down checking, flushing and reassembly of the freshwater side of the Green Donkey’s cooling system. A new thermostat, restricting the flow to the calorifier and an hour’s engine running check showed no problems. Taking a cautious approach, we replanned our route to keep to the Scottish mainland shore with lots of safe havens, which could easily be reached by road, before committing ourselves to the Irish Sea crossing.

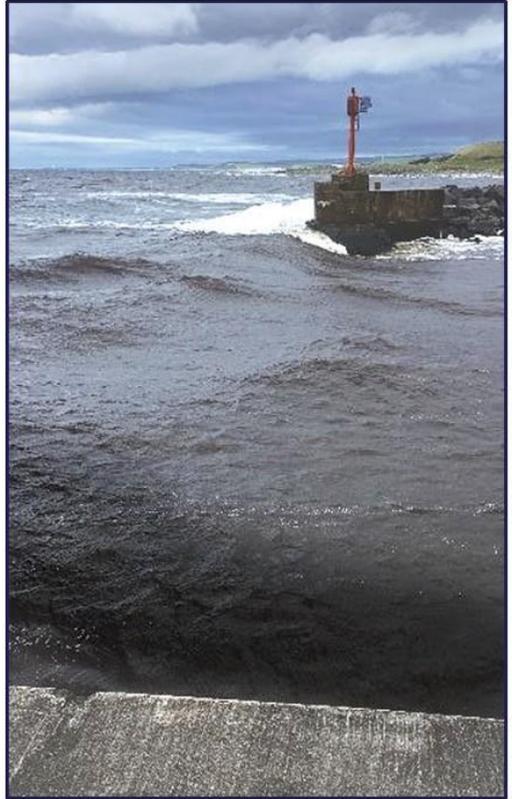
Another grey start was lifted by a common dolphin inspecting the boat and Elin’s poached eggs with smoked salmon breakfast. As we headed south the weather thickened to rain with just over a mile’s visibility and the wind increasing. We bailed out at Girvan, surfing over the shoals at 4.5 knots under bare poles into the narrow harbour entrance. A swift turn and a perfect landing on the available berth in the harbour. The engine was behaving. Tuesday was spent wind bound in Girvan.

There was still a significant onshore swell as we broke out of Girvan harbour next morning and turned south again for the Rhin's of Galloway. Clawing off the coast the swell reduced, then as we approached Corsewall Point, the tide turned favourable to carry us through the North Channel.

Off the Mull of Galloway, the crew agreed that the quickest way to their beds was to head south to Peel.

Entering behind the breakwater just after sunset we picked up a mooring for the night. The forecast for Thursday was confused and complex, but after an early and rough start there was a chance of better conditions if we kept east of the rhumb line to Anglesey.

Thursday 06:00 and we were heading out into a fierce swell and head wind but with the tide under us. Half an hour out, with green water over the bows, I looked below to see the hatches from the cabin sole floating in an inch of water. Handing the tiller to Jonathan I nipped below to switch on the bilge pump and check for leaks. Tasting the water, it was salty but warm, no obvious leaks through the hull but, shining a torch into the Green Donkey's stable, water was spraying around the stern gland.



The pumps were fortunately beating the incoming water. Time to turn around and head back to Peel. A call to Isle of Man Marine Operations to let them know we were returning Peel and may need to enter the inner harbour or dry out. We agreed there was no need at this stage to notify the Coastguard as the pump was dealing with the water. Back on the mooring and a hand into the engine locker located the problem, the exhaust muffler was leaking, and the water was being thrown around by the drive shaft. It took a few minutes to remove the box to find a couple of gouges where the box had become dislodged by the pounding and had lain on the drive shaft. After a mutiny quelling pot of tea and breakfast, we called the harbour master who managed to find us some quick curing epoxy and delivered it to us.

14:30 and off again. The swell was slightly reduced but the tide was turning foul. Off Elby Point we set the double reefed main and genoa and headed offshore. Rounding the Calf of Man the tide carried us east of the rhumb line and the wind and swell eased. Then the Green Donkey threw in another bray and stopped. Topping up the fuel tank and bleeding out an air lock soon had the donkey working again. However, fed up with the donkey's din we had a beautiful quiet evening sail across towards Wales arriving in Holyhead at 02:00 Friday morning. The crew returned home to their beds.

Jan & I sailed White Knight around the North coast of Anglesey to Conwy on Saturday morning.



Big grins from Elin on the helm