

Sailing School

Extracts from, Chris Bussy's diary of her Day Skipper practical course on the Clyde in March of this year.

Monday 20th March

Woke up at 0400hrs (4.0a.m.) to meet up with Roy, my husband, and the rest of the crew, Brian Roberts, David Ellison and Denise and Alan Fleetwood.

With the most experienced navigators (Brian and Alan) in the lead we circumnavigated Glasgow twice before arriving at the sailing at Inverkip marina. There we met our instructor John Sangster and our home for the week 2Rock Adventure2 a 38' Sigma.

After stowing our gear we were instructed in sail and boat handling and then after a gentle sail to Largs marina we had a good meal in the Regatta Pub.

The layout of the boat having three double cabins was ideal and gave privacy to the two married couples except for the loo which was situated off the main saloon.

Succumbing to a call of nature in the early hours of the morning, I found the workings of a marine toilet both difficult and noisy and beyond my ability to operate. Fearing the worst, flooding the boat, I turned to the most experienced member of the crew for help ie. Brian. Waking him gently in my night attire he must have thought it was his birthday! His ego however was quickly deflated when he found his help was required to unblock the loo which he managed to do but not without waking the whole crew.

Tuesday

Much to my embarrassment the loo episode was the main topic of conversation over breakfast.

We then spent the morning motoring around Largs marina berthing the boat in different directions of wind and tide.

Setting sail from Largs we stopped for lunch in Kilchatton Bay on route for a night entry into East Loch Tarbert with Roy on the helm and Alan as skipper (part of the Coastal skipper course is to do a night entry into an unfamiliar port).

The yacht was sailing in a force 5/6 with working jib and two reefs in the main.

Friday

Spent a very uncomfortable night in a very heavy swell. The morning looked dull with lashing rain and a strong wind. It was decided to take the boat to Inverkip so that Brian would have his Yacht master crew and Denise and Roy would go below as passengers.

We set off from the anchorage with me on the helm, set the storm jib and three reefs in the main. Turning into Loch Long we were hit by heavy gusts one of which flattened the boat, John shouted "Keep it straight" as my elbow hit the water (Please which way is straight?) but after many prayers the boat came back up again.

Thankfully Brian took the helm and the boat proceeded down the loch, being flattened by the reversal of the wind direction caused by the steep loch sides. The passengers below being treated to a view of the bottom of the loch through the cabin windows.

The antics of the boat attracted the defence patrol boat to enquire if we were OK. They were calmly informed by radio that when we found a competent helms person in the crew we would be alright. By that time I had severely overloaded heavens telephone.

The skipper decided that as progress was slow (2 miles in 2 hours) we would use the engine to assist the boat. This started and ran for 10 mins before stopping. At this time the waves were flwt and the wind was throwing a top layer of sea at us making it impossible to see forwards.

The jib halyard snap shackle broke and a spare one was fitted. We sailed into Holy Loch and, at the third attempt, picked up a mooring under sail. Listening to reports on the radio we established that the wind speed at Inverkip marina was a constant 44 knots.

Alan nav/engineer bled the engine and it ran. Again we ventured out into Loch Long towards Inverkip with only engine and storm jib. Ten minutes into the trip the engine stopped and we were being blown onto a lee shore. All hands to get the main up while nav/engineer deals with the engine. Before the mains up the command "Try it" and reluctantly it ran. Nav/eng hand primed the engine for a further 1.5 hours until we arrived at Kip marina.

The safe haven was not so safe, berthing the boat in a force 8 proved extremely difficult and we all breathed a sigh of relief when it was safely moored up, not at least our instructor. After slipping out of soaking sailing gear we went for a few calming drinks to the yacht club only to be turned away because of unsuitable footwear, no wellies. (Glasson take note!)

The crew called a meeting on Brian's impending Yacht masters exam tomorrow and decided that as the forecast of wind was similar we were not a strong enough crew to do him justice. He was informed and assured that it was our incompetence and not his lack of ability that had prompted the mutiny. He then told us that he did not intend to take the exam anyway. When informing the sailing school of his decision he was asked to crew for the other boat on the exam as one member had dropped out.

Saturday

A yacht master examiner has just asked me if we are the candidates (Ha! Ha!) We stood around and watched the experts set off under sail in a good force 6. A floating gin palace cut them up and blocked the harbour entrance, we were told later that this was planned and was part of the exam.

We all went shopping and had a quite day ashore.

Sunday

Presentation of certificates. Brian and Alan got Coastal Skippers, Denise, Roy and myself got Day Skippers and David got Competant crew (should have been at least Day Skipper, he was brill!)

Cleaned the boat and drove back to Glasson. Having got the ticket now have to learn how to sail

Christine Bussy