

# Langlands of Whitby's voyage from Kerrera (Oban) to Limekilns, September 2004

**Crew: Douglas Milne, Alex Birrell, Jim Cobb, Richard Pearson**

**Passage – Sailing Langlands of Whitby from Kerrea (Oban) to Limekilns. Proposed timescale – 10 days, beginning September 15th 2004, via The Sound of Mull, Ardnamurchan Point, Sound of Sleat, Kylechan, Loch Alsh, Inner Sound, Cape Wrath, Scrabster, Wick, Moray Firth, Rattray Head, Peterhead, Aberdeen, Arbroath and Port Edgar. In effect the trip was completed in 9 days due to favourable weather conditions, where a low followed up The Scottish West Coast providing a South East wind, and remained in position behind us across the top of Scotland, turning to a West North West pushing us down The East Coast of Scotland and home into The Firth of Forth. The wind speed remained high from the second day onwards, maintaining Force 5 to Force 8 throughout the passage until we reached Port Edgar on The Firth of Forth.**

## **Day #1**

**From Oban to Tobermory (54miles), beginning in idyllic motor sailing conditions, (swift tidal streams were encountered on the entrance to the sound) motoring up The Sound of Mull in beautiful surrounds. Close to Fuinary Rock we passed Westbound Adventurer, coming in the opposite direction, Alex completed his Day Skipper and First Aid courses last year at sea aboard Westbound Adventurer. Alex could not see if Paul McNeill (Principal) was on board, before we new it, Westsbound Adventurer was passed. Passing Lady's Rock, Duart Castle, Ardrornish Point and Fuinary Rock Buoy led us to Tobermory Bay, where we tied up to a floating mooring at 21.00 hours This leg of the trip was appx 54 miles.**

## **Day #2**

**From Tobermory to Kyleakin (56.6 miles) would genuinely put a tear in your eye. This section of the passage had absolutely everything for us, scenery on a splendiferous scale , seas even bigger going around Ardamurchan Point which took us to new heights of excitement without wetting ourselves, and above all respect and admiration for “Langlands” what a yacht. This was to be the first of many such feats of strength, ability, grace and elegant power, which she would exhibit throughout this testing passage, and testing it, was, well for most of us. (I think you can only be tested if you recognise the challenge).**

**With the wind blowing a Force 8 around Ardamurchan Point it was difficult to concentrate on the scenery, even more difficult for Dougie who was at the helm from Tobermory to well up The Sound of Sleat until we reached Isleornsay where we stopped for a lunch break, to allow us for the gates (tide) being open at Kyleakin to turn in our favour. During our stop at Isleornsay ( third attempt successful to tie up to a swinging mooring) we used the well earned break to grab 40 winks, which lasted for about 3 hours (GREAT).**

**Richard was seasick and poorly all day, so only three people manning Langlands, it was hard going!!!!**

**Arriving at Kyleakin at 18.30 hours (with some tacking tuition for Alex who was on the helm, from our illustrious skipper), caused a little concern as we needed to find gas to cook with, since there was “apparently” no time to get gas in Oban. We are not sure why we had no time there, as we had time for most other things, such as talking and looking over boats and discussing which types of trailer was required and how it should be built. The need for gas allowed for a trip over The Skye Bridge to Lochalsh to investigate the whereabouts of a supplier. We Alex and myself secured a source, but unfortunately could not buy some until the following day when the chandlers opened at 09.00 hours. We knew this would be unpopular with the remainder of the crew, but Dougie made an executive decision to delay the departure and replenish our dwindling gas supplies. To pass the time until the next bus back to Kyleakin we decided to sample the local hostelry offerings. Two pints convinced us that the samples were to our liking. Back to Langlands and imparting the dreadful news on the late departure on the morrow gave us a deep sated feeling of well-being. Some people have genuine difficulty in readjusting to changing circumstances and see it as adversity, rather than an opportunity to sample change. Anyway custom does not change its mind in The Highlands of Scotland, thank god.**

**Ardnamurchan Point lived up to its reputation as being Scotland’s Cape Horn. Langlands is now entitled to a sprig of Scottish heather, Dearie me it was rough.**

### **Day #3**

**Kyleakin to Gareloch (26 miles) began with a bus ride across The Dreadful Skye Bridge for gas. We arrived early at 08.20 hours, went to the toilet and decided to have a shower whilst waiting for the return bus to Kyleakin (40 mins later). The toilets here have to be visited to be appreciated; we could not adequately describe them!! Appropriately. They are magnificent, by far the best and most interesting**

**We have ever encountered, it’s a must.**

**By the time we had showered and gassed up, returned to Langlands and cast off, it was midday, not an entirely popular departure time.**

**In pouring rain and F6 South West we set sail for Gairloch 26 miles away. This was to be a relatively short day in comparison with previous days, and those still to come. Sailing into F6 was difficult, even more so when it was gusting. We eventually had to take down the main sail and sail on foresail only. By the time we were sailing into Gairloch it was blowing F7/8 with a F9 forecast overnight.**

**Thankfully we picked up a mooring buoy in a secluded part of the loch. No reception for mobile phones unfortunately. Rough sailing – but not just as bad as yesterday.**

### **Day #4**

**Gairloch – Scrabster (117.8m). We did not initially intend for this leg of the voyage to be this long, but due to adverse weather conditions we aborted our intention to visit Kinlochbervie and decided to continue to Scrabster.**

We departed Gairloch (Badachro) at 07.55 and rounded Longa Island an hour later and sailing into an increasing wind. On reaching Rudha Reidh, the wind was F6 and increasing. Going round Cape Wrath in the dark and with the wind F7 made it very uncomfortable. Douglas was on the helm at this time. It was decided to run the engine as a support for the foresail. We were later to find our Chief Navigator was in a state of high anxiety. Alex was 'encouraged' by him to go below and try to sleep as he would be 'on duty' later. This was a gross error, as Alex lasted approx. 15-20 minutes before he re-appeared feeling dreadful and continued to do so for the rest of the night.

We arrived at Scrabster at 3.00am and we could not wait to escape to our sleeping bags. Alex was acutely aware that he had not 'pulled his weight' on this leg and vowed not to repeat this again.

Entering Scrabster Harbour illustrated to me the benefit of having 'additional' methods of navigational equipment. The Chart Plotter produced the goods just when we needed it. We thought the light on the Dunnet Head Lighthouse was in fact the entrance to Scrabster Harbour. The plotter showed differently and correctly, the entrance to the harbour. We were nearly put on a drying out mooring when the Harbour Master wrongly thought we drew 2ft instead of 2m. This is a good stopping place – good harbour and good toilets – a bit from the town centre though. Thurso is about 2 miles away.

We arrived at 3am after a very (very) long and arduous day and half of a night. Another great and very exciting day and an even greater feeling for getting to bed quickly!

#### Day #5

Scrabster – Wick (33.6 miles) by way of the Pentland Firth. This reminded us of when Dougie and I took Langlands to Kerrera at the start of the season. Only this time we got the tide times right. Dorus Mor (Sound of Luing) presented much more resistance – if only we had waited at Crinan – but we would have missed the bus to Glasgow (that's another story for another time!).

The trip through the Pentland Firth was another great experience and the speed Langlands was travelling at was illustrated really well by watching the speed the shoreline was passing by. Eventually we reached Wick Harbour, which was very pleasing to the eye. Very clean and obviously well kept. We tied up alongside a classic boat called 'Isabella Fortuna'. We had a great kip after a wander round the town – a fish supper and a pint. We fuelled and watered the boat before "going on the town". That took approximately half an hour, walking slowly. Chips were good and beer in Witherspoons finished the tour of Wick very nicely. This was one of our shorter days – leaving Scrabster at 10.30am after our 03.00 arrivals. We travelled only 33.5miles to Wick arriving at 17.30.

#### Day#6

**Wick – Peterhead (76.5miles) – This was a long shift. Departing Wick at 07.30am and arriving at Peterhead 21.10 hrs. It was also a very exciting voyage for several reasons. Firstly the chart plotter decided to withdraw its labour and left us with no pretty pictures to look at, so we had to revert to getting excited about our pencil marks on various charts. After some internal haggling with itself the plotter returned to work. This pleased us, but brought with it a degree of uncertainty. Next exciting episode of the day came in the form of HM Customs launch. They approached us from the rear – requested that we contact them on channel 10, where they requested information on where we were headed, who was on board, who owned the boat and where she was normally kept among other questions. They seemed satisfied that we were not gun runners, smuggling drugs or attempting to overthrow the local council in Peterhead, so they left us alone to proceed on our way, being thrown all over the Moray Firth in a F5/6. As we drew close to Peterhead harbour our potato and carrot peeling skipper/navigator decided to point us in the wrong direction, so that we could have run aground had we not decided on our mutinous course and change direction without permission, thus saving the ship. Alas no commendation for action above and below the call of duty – it's a hard life being the crewman on this ship and under this skipper. His indiscretion caused the local lifeboat team to take a keen interest in our whereabouts and why bouts. They were poised to take action had the crew not disobeyed 'him who had to be obeyed.'**

**We eventually agreed that the people of Peterhead were proud enough of their harbour to have it illuminated so we sailed out of the darkness and in the direction of the lighted area, where we were sure they were not hiding the harbour and their new Marina. The entrance located, we entered and moored in the Marina to end a long, hard, exciting and certainly varied day.**

**As the whole crew began to feel the effects of the voyage and the inherent stress of such an exercise, cracks began to appear in the armour of our 'chosen one.' Maybe they should have been noticed sooner, because in hindsight, they were obvious sometimes prior to this incident and would again appear before the journey's end.**

### **Day #7**

**Peterhead – Aberdeen (30.5 miles). Departed Peterhead at 10.05am in heavy winds yet again. The logbook states F6 but in seemed much stronger to me, as there were other boats in the marina refusing to sail because the wind was too strong. Also prior to leaving there was extended discussion about the technicalities of leaving the berth. Half the crew felt there was a dire need to learn these technical skills while the other half wanted to get home. We left for home without the in depth training. Our original destination was Arbroath, but unfortunately we were forced to divert to Aberdeen, due to the mainsail tearing and badly in need of an immediate repair.**

**Douglas radioed Aberdeen, requesting a berth for the night plus information on whereabouts of a Sail maker who would carry out a quick repair on the mainsail. Aberdeen Harbour Master responded positively on both counts. We completed**

the remainder of this leg of the voyage using only the foresail and maintaining a speed of 4.5-5km. This was quite a scenic part of the voyage, passing Buchan Ness, Slains Castle and Girdle Stone Lighthouse on the way. We arrived in Aberdeen at 16.00 hrs in not very good weather, having completed approx. 30 miles. Langlands appeared miniscule sailing into Aberdeen harbour alongside the enormous vessel tied up here. The assistant Harbour Master came with his van and took Douglas to the sail maker who promised to have it repaired for the following morning at 11.00am. A couple of pints and a good meal in Aberdeen set us up for the night. It could have been oh so different but for prudence. Fantasy nights and Lesbian Spit bubble exchange didn't seem to fit in too well with our plans for the rest of the night. This pub reminded me of the replica cowboy pub Douglas and I went to in Rothesay on the trip to Kerrera at the start of the season. I think we both need a bit of training on how to spot the 'cowp.' Fed, watered and walked, we returned to the boat to be welcomed by our dynamic duo – who almost left the boat!!!

## Day #8

Aberdeen – Arbroath (43.6miles). Departed Aberdeen at 12.48 hrs after a visit to M & S supermarket for food. Douglas went to the sail makers and collected the repaired sail (cost £50). The gate to the inner harbour and marina at Arbroath closed at 19.45 hrs. We thought it coincided with tide times, but apparently not. Getting out of Aberdeen harbour became a very entertaining wee episode. 'He who has to be obeyed' was getting really strung up about our departure time, but again asked Douglas if he would like instruction in manoeuvring the boat in tight situations. The exact words used in the reply escape me, but if I were to paraphrase them the second one would likely sound like OFF! I thought this would end the aforementioned entertaining episode, but no, my luck continued, more was to follow. 'He who has to be obeyed' then began undoing our bowline, stern line and springs whilst Douglas was dressing in an unhurried fashion. The casting off activity was being done as quickly as the undressing was unhurried – quite a contrast in attitude. During this very entertaining but unproductive episode, the crew were desperately holding on to the pier in order not to let the boat drift into the middle of the dock in case we were destroyed by some of the very large vessels moving around in our area. We eventually left Aberdeen harbour with our own cargo of high velocity acrimony – the pay-off being that this time was to be our last day together a crew of 3.25 people – we didn't know this at the time of course – now there's a pity!!

With Aberdeen behind us we set sail – both of them – for Arbroath and it turned out to be a very pleasant voyage with the wind abating F5 and then to a F4. This made for very comfortable sailing, especially for our 'mascot' perched on the stern with a contented smile on his face (when he was awake) – (this is our .25 person). The approach and eventual entry to Arbroath harbour escalated into yet another very entertaining episode. Considering Arbroath harbour is situated between where 'He who has to be obeyed' lives (Montrose) and where he was born and brought up (Dundee), he made really hard work of this activity. Expecting this particular harbour to be a breeze for him, I was surprised when he blew it, BIG time! Even with the benefit of his chart, plus the blow up of the harbour in detail, he was completely unable to find the harbour entrance. After

all the hassle to get away from Aberdeen, here we were with Arbroath in sight and 'Captain Marvel' unable to find the harbour entrance. His last and never to be forgotten instructions to Douglas were 'Here you take the chart and I will steer – you can tell be where to go!' Captain Marvel handing over command!!! I was blown away, my hero had fallen, my shining knight had been unseated, and whatever would we do now? Surprise, surprise we found the harbour entrance just as a fishing boat appeared and entered in front of us. How happy was my fallen hero now? Very happy – he even said we were blessed – but the harbour master (?) didn't agree because he had just closed the gate as we arrived, but he reluctantly agreed to open it again for us to get into the marina and on to a pontoon.

This was a lovely surprise, what a pleasant place to spend the night, with a chip shop and pub 50 yds from the gate out of the marina. Douglas and I had a lovely couple of pints in the Smugglers before our hero joined us and gave us the benefit of his wisdom, especially about this favourite (and only) topic, the wind. He believes he is an expert on it – he should be – he exudes voluminous amounts of it. Mr .25 has still not left the boat. We took on more of our favourite cargo – Acrimony, which would cause much consternation before the journeys end.

#### Day #9

Arbroath – Port Edgar (40miles). The last day dawned and we were prepared to depart this lovely spot for home (well – Port Edgar). Douglas left and paid the marina fee and returned to inform the crew that maybe it was time to divvy up what had been spent on mooring fees throughout the voyage. Instantly Hero and Mr .25 needed to relieve themselves – together. They left the boat in 10 seconds flat and after what transpired to be a secret discussion, they returned to inform Douglas that they felt unable to agree to the request for their share of the expenditure and that they were 'jumping ship' there and then. There then followed the quickest embarkation since the Second World War evacuation at Dunkirk. All of a sudden they weren't there anymore – if only we could have thought about that earlier, things may have been oh so different. With only half the crew remaining 'Langlands' made for home. Out came the auto helm (whisper it!) and up went the feet. We changed bearing about three times and found ourselves at the The River Forth Bridges and decided to remove the auto helm and hand – steer the boat to Port Edgar and home, after a very exciting and interesting voyage lasting 9 days and 446.5m.

Altogether a voyage never to be forgotten with much to be learned from and grateful to Douglas for asking me (Alex) to accompany him on this brilliant experience and to Langlands for taking care of us in sometimes very difficult circumstances. Thank you both to Captain Marvel – Wee thank him for teaching us (still learning) to be aware of hot air and Mr .25 men in the reclining position.