

Stella Maris' Log

June 2007 Summer Cruise

From the wife's perspective!!!!

For all the technical data beautifully written out in black pen, see the accompanying official logbook.

For the last 2 years we had been trying to make Ireland in Stella Maris. Having been to a family wedding in Ireland the week before we had managed to do a bit of a reckie and thought we should have a go.

We had just 10- 12 days so we packed a bag and went.

Sunday 17th June

Today is Father's Day, so after seeing the family and Den well supplied with his favourite tippie we loaded up the car and set off for Gourock where Stella Maris is moored.

Phil, the boatman, did not turn a hair at the amount of supplies to be taken out to the boat. Included in these supplies was the latest must have for the boat! A new life raft. Having trailed 'Achilles' our dingy for more than 3000 miles it can now be stowed on the fore deck.

Stella Maris had been left for more than 3 weeks so as we approached the boat we could see there was growth and brown staining on the water line. More work!!

As it was getting late we decided that our first night would be in Holy Loch Marina. I booked a table at the Holy Loch Inn on the way across – A treat for Den, and as it was after 1900 hours neither Den nor I fancied cooking or washing up.

We have made Holy Loch Marina our homeport where we always get a warm welcome. We had some fun with the crew of a new Bavaria 38 ahead of us. The boat had been chartered for Day Skipper training and after dinner they were leaving for Rothesay. Unfortunately they could not figure out the steaming lights – so we tried to give surreptitious advice to the acting skipper as to where the lights were and which lights should be on. They finally got away at 22.30 after Den had checked the lights for them and given them a replacement bulb for the fwd light

Monday 18th June

After breakfast Den wanted to change the oil and filter before leaving. I had not slept well and that was my excuse for not tackling the waterline. We left at 12.30. The forecast was F3-4, light showers. I can manage that!!!

We put up both sails and Den left on the engine to charge the batteries. There was hardly any wind leaving Holy Loch but as our wind machine seems to be reading backwards it was hard to tell.

We made our turn into the Clyde and had a pleasant sail past Dunoon. As we approached the Largs Channel, which I hate with a passion, I decided to make bacon sandwiches for lunch before the wind piped up. As I went below I requested that the

boat be steadied. The wind according to Den was now blowing a good NE F5. Which really means a F6. As the frying pan disappeared over the back of the GIMBALLED cooker, the engine was turned off and the main taken down before I could assemble the bacon butties. At this stage we were doing 6.5 knts trailing the dingy just on the Genny.

Once through the Largs Channel I took over the steering, the weather calmed down and we maintained 6 knts on the Genny until reaching Troon. We arrived at 17.40 and were able to enter the inner harbour whilst we got the fenders and warps ready.

The berth that we had been allocated was far too small with only a fender separating us from the adjacent boat. I don't know how Den even got the boat in. When checking the berth we also realised that we could not reach the electric! Well that was it, no electric means no hot water, hairdryer or tele. We called the marina office and they found us another berth, Den somehow managed to get us out of the berth without touching the other boat.

Troon Marina is owned by Largs but much smaller. They have fabulous showers and even a bath!!!. I had already organised dinner on board so we went up to the bar whilst it was cooking. Note to myself: Don't be so organised in future, as they had a great restaurant.

Tuesday 19th June

We had hoped to anchor at Lady's Bay in Loch Ryan tonight as a good point to head to Ireland tomorrow. The forecast is NE F 4/5 increasing F6, heavy rain and thunder. Not good for anchoring so we have decided to head for Girvan. We needed to delay our departure due to tide times in Girvan, Oh well time to tackle the port side water line whilst Den deflates the dingy ready for the crossing.

As we set off on our course friends of ours were leaving Southampton on a luxury cruise to Norway!! Posh frocks – cabins cleaned – all food provided. Just a thought.

As we left Troon, I was at the helm, flat calm, very warm, even Den is in shirtsleeves. It is magical as we pass Lady's Island and a Fifer with its red sails up. Met office had got it wrong again. We are still heading for Girvan just incase the weather blows up tonight. Girvan is only 20 miles away so it will make our trip to Ireland longer but better safe than sorry.

We arrived Girvan in glorious sunshine and were met by Roddy, the harbour master. He gave us the low down on the town and not to worry if we touched bottom!

Girvan harbour is very pretty but has no facilities for visiting yachts. Showers were available at the swimming pool but are only open from 12.30 to 18.00. We missed them then.

Donning shorts we headed for the Roxy beer garden overlooking the harbour for a large glass of cold white wine, then back to the boat for passage planning and an early night ready for the 05.00 start.

The forecast is not great, but at my suggestion, we leave the VHF on overnight to catch the early forecast. I was not to know that there was a forecast at 02.00!!! The

weather has turned during the night, very heavy rain, and a strong wind warning. The next forecast was at 05.00 and confirmed the strong winds. F6/7 and the Irish Sea – forget it- bed is a much better option.

Roddy came round for coffee at 11.00. He was very informative about the history of the harbour and its future plans but as he only has 173 days to retirement he will not see them. His local forecast said the winds were dropping to F2/3 – the rain had cleared and we should be able to get out of the harbour by 13.00hrs.

We had missed the tides to make the crossing to Bangor, in Belfast Lough. Den re-planned and said we could try the 40-mile crossing straight across the Irish Sea to Glenarm 20 miles north of Bangor. Well let's go for it I said.

The forecast of 2/3 with sea state slight to moderate was never seen. A god F5/6 with, in Den's words, 'a very confused sea state'. After the first hour it was rough – the sort of sea that makes it difficult too more around. Thankfully we missed all the rain and the wind was warm. It always amazes me how quickly the 6 hours of passage goes, sitting around doing nothing but make hot drinks and watching the sea. In the middle 3 hours we did not even make hot drinks as we thought it was too dangerous to handle boiling water. As we approached the Irish coast there was a lot of black cloud and we were getting tired and ready to get out of the heavy swell, especially Den as he had done all the navigating. His words were 'If it is like this when we are due to leave we will leave the boat in Ireland'

We entered Glenarm about 19.30. It was magical, flat calm, the sun came out and a very friendly chap called Billy took our lines. He left us whilst we got ourselves sorted and spoke to the family. Denis jnr called just as we docked as he had expected us to be in Bangor at 14.00. Billy came back to give us the local information. 3 pubs but nowhere to eat. Thankfully I had prepared a chicken casserole to cook on the way across. I must have been joking, the cast iron casserole would have come through the glass oven door. Nothing for it then than to put it in the oven and sample one of the pubs whilst it cooked. A quick wash and brush up and two happy but weary sailors headed for the delights of Glenarm.

Thursday 20th June

We had discovered before leaving Girvan that we had overfilled the water tanks and it had caused water to flow into the bilges. We bailed the engine area before leaving but with the heavy seas it had gone into all the bilges. So before breakfast we had to pump and mop the bilges. Den also had to reseal the top of the water tank to stop it happening again; this meant everything out of the aft cabin. We finally got tidied up, cabin back together again and showered in time to catch the tides for Bangor. Still no breakfast!!! And only 2 cups of tea. The couple in the next boat gave us information on the marinas in Belfast Lough and on their recommendation we are going to Bangor Marina.

We left the peace and calm of Glenarm at 11.30 and straight into the swell. Not as bad as yesterday and I managed to make breakfast. The sun came out and it all looked very Mediterranean. We had more dramatic confused seas passing Larne, which we had sailed out of on the P & O Sea Cat the week before. It was sunny and

warm and really very enjoyable. About a mile passed Larne I spotted the Sea Cat coming out of Larne kicking up a huge swell behind it doing about 35knts. Den's words were 'Oh please God don't let it be coming this way' God must have heard him because at that point the Sea Cat altered course and headed East. As we rounded the point into Belfast Lough, the sea calmed and the sun is hot and it all looks so beautiful. We secured in the marina at 15.15.

We had arranged to visit Den's sister who lives outside Newry and she wanted us there as soon as possible. We did a quick tidy round, packed a bag, secured the boat and walked the 15 minutes up hill to the station in 23 degrees. We spent a lovely evening and following day with the family.

Friday 21 June

We arrived back at the boat late afternoon to pick up the forecast and get ready to leave early on Saturday morning. The forecast is not great and Den and I did not need an excuse to stay another day in Bangor, that night we went out for a great meal at the Bangor Bay Inn.

Saturday 22 June

Bangor Marina is at the heart of Bangor town and there is a harbour festival today. We took the opportunity to clean the boat inside and out and went ashore to re-stock the boat and take in the atmosphere. Everybody is very friendly in and around the marina; the marina staff have been trying to persuade us to stay until next weekend when the tall ships arrive. It was very tempting but we needed to head home tomorrow. Something to do with a regatta at the FCC.

Sunday 24 June

We got the early morning forecast, took fuel and left at 07.00. Well Monday's expected gale is now expected later today but it is a beautiful morning with hardly any wind. I have made a flask of tea and sandwiches just in case. As we left the marina the tide is to be with us to Carswell point, our first landfall in Scotland. There is a gentle F2/3 so with full sail we are making around 6.5 knots. We have seen lots of seabirds and a massive ferry. Fortunately the ferry is not a seacat and gives us a wide berth. As we turn into the Clyde the tide turns against us and we slow down to fewer than 6 knts. We are still a little concerned that the weather will worsen so we press on. At 15.00 the weather turns, the wind is on the nose, wind over tide and increasing. We take in the sails as they are only holding us back and as we enter the safety of Troon harbour 67.6 miles later and a good F5, which is still increasing we are glad to tie up. We have been sailing for 10.5 hours. Dinner and a bottle of wine are on the agenda. We are even too tired to eat out but have had a great day. We expect to be weather bound here tomorrow so we will have dinner out and a bath!!!

Monday 25 June

The weather is fine and warm if a bit breezy. We took a walk into Troon centre and had a relaxing day finishing with a great meal in the marina restaurant.

Tuesday 26 June

It was very windy during the night but the weather is expected to decrease so we are going for it, as it will be no better tomorrow. As we left the marina and entered the inner harbour, which is usually very calm, it was rather choppy so I could guess what it would be like outside. Den put up the main before we left.

The pilot book says that the entrance to Troon harbour can be hazardous in NW winds over F6. Well we now know why. As we went through the harbour entrance, mountainous seas would describe it. My thoughts were that if it were too bad we would surf back into the harbour. Den told me later that it would be very difficult to get back in. Ignorance is bliss! It was still a F7 as we left but with a forecast of decreasing winds we were hopeful. We were also in home waters and could marina hop if it got too bad. Ardrossan which, is our winter port, was only 6 miles away.

Den headed straight for deeper water to try and get us out of the heavy seas. The seas flattened slightly but we knew it would not get any better until we passed Ardrossan. At this stage we were only making 3.5 knts. We decided not to go into Ardrossan but head for Largs. Den decided we would be much more comfortable on the main and engine and started to tack across the wind. We started to have a more comfortable ride and increased our speed to 6 knts OG. With the NW wind moderating to a F5/6 it was a pleasure to enter the Largs Channel for a change. Flatter seas, no small boats or traffic around to cause hassle. We had lunch and were able to take in the surroundings, which we usually were too busy to notice.

It took about an hour to go through the Largs Channel and we decided to keep going to Inverkip. As we came out of the channel the wind increased again and we put up both sails. The nearer we got to Inverkip the calmer the weather became. We went into Inverkip Marina, we refuelled the boat and as we were only an hour from our mooring in Gourock we decide not to stay but head for home. We finally arrived in Gourock at 19.15. 36miles later. We had hoped to sail from Troon through the Kyles to the Colintraive Hotel for dinner and arrive home on Wednesday. The NW winds were against us but we can do the sail to Aran and The Kyles another day.

Did we have a great trip? Yes
Would I do it again? Yes

We are already planning our June 2008 trip, to Southern Ireland and maybe Wales and Cornwall to complete our circumnavigation. We can always dream.

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