

## Maurice Taggart's Scottish West Coast Adventure

The weather forecast was good for the beginning of August and I therefore made my plans accordingly. On Tuesday 3rd August I left Bangor Marina, hoping for a fast trip to Ballycastle, but in the middle of Belfast Lough I encountered a thick sea mist accompanied by a steady drizzly rain, which reduced visibility to almost zero. I tried to persevere for a while but eventually progress became so slow that I reluctantly decided to stay overnight in Glenarm.

On that occasion it took 3.5 hours to travel 23.4 miles using 50 litres of fuel.

The next morning I set out again for Ballycastle, and enjoyed a beautiful trip with light winds and calm seas, with just a slight chop as I rounded Fair Head.

On that occasion it took 2.3 hours to travel 23.3 miles using 64 litres of fuel.

I took a break in Ballycastle for a couple of days to buy fresh food and restock the fridge. I also took the opportunity to refuel, buying 108 litres for £105.75.

On Saturday 7th August I left Ballycastle for Rathlin Island, having an uneventful trip.

On that occasion it took 1.45 hours to travel 8.7 miles using 27 litres of fuel.

I decided to take a couple of days to explore the Island, and plan for the potentially hazardous crossing of the North Channel to Port Ellen.

Tuesday 10th August was the day I selected for the crossing to Port Ellen, and it turned out to be a beautiful hot summer day with light winds and a calm sea. When I was ready to cast off I noticed that lots of children were splashing about in the water around my boat making me very anxious for their safety. As I moved off I rushed from side to side warning the children to stay clear, but unfortunately I neglected to watch my own position, allowing myself to drift into the shallows, grounding on the soft sand. I found it impossible to release the boat at that time so I decided to wait for the tide to return, which it did after about 2 hours. I was then able, with some help, to pull the boat back to its original position on the pontoon. I then spent the next few days physically checking the stern gear for any signs of damage and found none. I also subjected the equipment to rigorous testing before deciding that it was safe to proceed with the journey.

I then began studying the weather forecasts again to select the best day for making the potentially hazardous crossing of the North Channel to Port Ellen and decided that Sunday 15th August was the most suitable. On either side of the Channel the winds were light and the sea was calm, but in mid Channel there was a heavy swell which gave me a very undulating trip, which was not too uncomfortable at moderate speed.

On that occasion it took 2.9 hours to travel 26.5 miles using 76 litres of fuel.

Port Ellen has an excellent restaurant serving fine meals and carry-outs, plus 2 well-stocked food shops. I decided to stay there for a few days to get fresh food and re-stock the fridge.

On Thursday 19th August I decided to depart from Port Ellen and travel up the Sound of Jura and Loch Craignish to Ardfern Yacht Centre. It was a beautiful trip with no wind and a calm sea and magnificent scenery all the way.

On this occasion it took 3.8 hours to travel 50.9 miles using 126.5 litres of fuel.

The Village Store in Ardfern is well stocked with fresh food and beautiful home baking, so I decided to stay for several days to get well fed and re-stock the fridge. I also took the opportunity to refuel and obtained 267 litres for £267.00

On Tuesday 24th August I decided to travel to Croabh Haven Marina which is equipped with excellent facilities, but, surprisingly, had no food available, due, I was told, to temporary staffing problems. However, I managed to find an excellent Cafe in a water sports centre in the next bay, around 30 minutes walk away. Unfortunately, although this cafe served beautiful mid-day meals and snacks, it was not open in the evening.

This trip, in calm weather, took 1.65 hours to travel 13.13 miles using 30.5 litres of fuel.

On Saturday 28th August, having been away for almost a full month, I decided to retrace my steps and start the homeward journey by returning to Ardfern.

This trip, in thick fog, took 2.1 hours to travel 12.76 miles using 21.5 litres of fuel.

On Wednesday 1st September I travelled down the Sound of Jura to Port Ellen.

This trip, in calm weather, took 3.7 hours to travel 51.3 miles using 130 litres of fuel.

Tuesday 7th September was selected as the most suitable day for making the Channel crossing to Ballycastle and I set off in fine weather. As I approached mid-Channel and the swell began to build, suddenly, without warning, I suffered a complete loss of power. I suspected that it was an electronic cut out triggered by some safety device, so I switched everything off, waited a few minutes, and then switched everything back on. To my relief most things were working and I was able to re-start one engine, but only one. Since my boat is designed to operate in an emergency with only one engine I decided that it would be reasonably safe to continue with the journey. However, in the meantime, the swell and the wind had increased dramatically, making the sea quite rough and my progress, with one engine, painfully slow.

This trip took 6.1 hours to travel 33.1 miles using 41.0 litres of fuel.

I relaxed in Ballycastle for a few days to recover from my ordeal, and then took time to check out my electrical systems and get the second engine operational. I also took the opportunity to re-fuel, obtaining 159.8 litres for £157.2.

On Sunday 12th September I travelled from Ballycastle to Bangor and home.

This trip in excellent weather took 4.1 hours to travel 45.2 miles using 143 litres of fuel.

Finis. Maurice.