



Annie C – Scotland August 2017

A BEGINNERS GUIDE – HOW NOT TO PARK A YACHT

JANE MCMEEKIN

Yacht Annie C (Elan 36)

Crew

Patrick McMeekin

Paul McMeekin

Ben McMeekin

Conor McVeigh

Jane McMeekin (author)



Introduction

A throw away comment sometime in July about wanting to take the boys on a cheap as chips holiday resulted in the McMeekin Clan being offered the loan of the McVeigh Family yacht, Annie C. To put the lunacy of the offer in context, the boys are all dinghy sailors and I can shout a lot at the juniors. Yachting experience pretty much zero. After confirming that Laurence had not had a mental breakdown or some other mental impairment, we naturally jumped at the offer.

But where to go? Many an evening was then spent reading up on places that the totally clueless sailor could minimise potentially crashing into. Decision made; our destination would be to sail up to Scotland and visit some of the Islands in Argyll and do the Crinan Canal. My game plan was to pick up moorings rather than risk marina landings, at least until we learnt how to handle the yacht.

And then there was the when? The last two weeks in August seemed to be the most suitable, slotting in between the remaining junior sailing events.

And finally, we needed to invite our additional crew, the McVeigh children. After all we needed someone to take the blame if it all went wrong! Annie turned us down as the thought of being onboard ship with lots of smelly boys wasn't the most inviting. Conor on the other hand leapt at the offer.

At this point most people might try and get some practice in before setting off on their first sailing adventure but weekends slipped by with different factors and commitments conspiring to prevent any trips in the yacht before our departure date. The crash course became an hour on the boat with Laurence reading through a list of "how to...". Engine – easy, turn the key, press a button; chart plotter – we would work that out as we went (YouTube) and download Navionics just in case; logging a TR (what is a TR?) with the Coastguard, etc. On the practical side I saw where the engine was hiding. This

was more by luck than design as Laurence was just checking that the boat was dry before we left. Then a quick tour of important things like the location of the keel bolts and the tool box.

Just before our departure date, Laurence announced that he had taken the day off work and that he and Annie would accompany us on the first leg of the journey. I think this was to give himself some reassurance that we weren't going to wreck his yacht and possibly drown his only son. I was also delighted...at least we would have had one days "training" before being let loose on our own.

Monday 14th August – Day 1 – Ardglass Marina to Glenarm

House scrubbed from top to bottom – we are ready for the off. Bags packed, supplies bought. But the weather gods have decided otherwise. Forecast abysmal for the next week and long-range forecast not looking any better. We will be lucky if we manage to get a sail every other day. I am rethinking our travel plans and thinking we will be sailing in Strangford Lough. Laurence is also starting to doubt his decision. Sailing to Scotland may be a bad decision. Weather not exactly forgiving for the uninitiated.

We are scheduled to meet the McVeigh's at the marina at about 10.30am but a message from Laurence informs us that the water is crashing over the breakwater and that they are off to visit his brother for lunch as we were not sailing anywhere. Later on, in the afternoon Patrick and I head down to the marina to drop off our gear and food supplies hopeful that the storm would blow through during the night. And more importantly, to get given Captain Conor for the next week. Laurence and Annie head back up the road to Armagh and we are now officially in charge of the yacht and Conor. The parting words from Annie were to throw Conor overboard at every and any opportunity. We promised we would try our best. With all thoughts of sailing abandoned for the day we head back up to the house, light the fire and play ping pong with Conor to fill the time. We also spend some time trying to rethink our trip. Where could we go that would be sheltered from the Southerly winds and still be able to deposit Conor somewhere handy the following Sunday? Lough Foyle started to look like a possible option. With very vague plans in place we all head to bed praying that the weather improves.

Tuesday 15th August – Day 2 – Ardglass Marina to Glenarm - again

Weather much improved. Sun is shining. We are sailing today. Destination Glenarm Marina. The team are slow at getting on the move. Ping pong to be played...Conor has his honour to play for. Lost again!



Eventually at about 10.30am we are ready to head down to the marina.

All the gear is thrown into the boat in a most un-shipshape manner to be dealt with later. It is time to get sailing. Conor and Patrick are put in charge of quickly blowing up the tender, tying it off the back off the boat and then engine on and we are off. Our first ever marina exit is not exactly textbook but presumably entertained the Ardglass locals. The southerly wind driving us onto the pontoon made for a somewhat chaotic exit with Paul valiantly pushing us off a threatening pontoon, managing to dislodge one of the guard rail stays. Both our faces are pictures of horror. Conor just shrugs and says that it was already broken. That's a relief. Bit of rope provides a temporary fix. The incident also confirmed my thoughts that marinas should be avoided as much as possible! Once out of the marina and safely into the somewhat choppy sea we hauled up the sails, plotted a route to Glenarm using Navionics on the phone; a lot simpler than using the chart plotter and settled down. Spirits are definitely on a high.

At some point, we remember to radio in our TR. No idea what we are meant to do other than radio channel 16. No one told us we then had to switch to another channel as directed. Somehow we managed to get something sensible communicated to the Coastguard and promised to radio back in when we had safely arrived at Glenarm.

Captain Conor has now also taken on the role of chef and has whipped up a very tasty Mexican rice to keep his crew happy. The perfect host, although his ability to plaster a cooker in rice is nothing short of spectacular.

Throughout the day the weather proved to be very changeable; 18 knots from the south and sun as we head east, squalls and rain as we head North past Millisle and 12 knots by the Copeland Islands. By 4pm the winds have dropped to an uninspiring 4knots. The decision is made to drop the sails and motor on up to Glenarm. Sailing past The Maidens we are treated to a visit from a group of dolphins. Conor informed us of the McVeigh rule that the person who spotted the most dolphins etc got the same number of ice-creams or treats. Paul and I won the game after seeing an enormous pod of whales and a family of mermaids that no one else spotted! Arrival time in Glenarm was at 8.30pm. A not too disastrous landing was followed by Patrick, Ben and Conor taking the tender and going on a mission to find food. The good folk of Glenarm actually laughed at them when they asked where the chip shop was.



Three very unimpressed boys returned to the boat. So a quick pasta dinner was thrown together. At this point Paul decided to have a minor meltdown with the gas cooker. Very funny watching an intelligent boy getting defeated by a match. Also ranting as to why he can't put his cup down on something that isn't a cupboard. Dinner eaten, boat tidied, cards played. Time for bed.

Wednesday 16th August – Day 3 - Glenarm to Ballycastle

Yet again we wake up to another lousy day. Winds of 23 knots gusting up to 36 knots with lots of rain forecast around lunchtime. If we are to get to Ballycastle the best time to leave to get the correct tides is 6am. With that forecast and my cautious head on it looks like we will be spending a long day in Glenarm. Although if the wind drops as per the forecast perhaps we can make the jump to Ballycastle late afternoon.

The morning is spent talking to Billy the marina manager and using the showers. Not much else to do in the mist and rain. Billy's advice is that we could leave at 5pm to catch the perfect tide to whip us up to Torhead and then race round to Ballycastle. Weather permitting of course.

To fill in some time, we decide to go up to the café in the Glenarm Estate for lunch. Walking through the carpark at the marina we happen to look across at a parked car. Familiar faces grinning at us. Conor's Grandpa, Laurence Snr and partner in crime, Henry Middleton just happened to be in the area. Apparently, they were just out for a drive, not hunting us down to check up that Conor was still in one piece. I don't believe that for one minute. We then all headed up to the café for lunch and spent an entertaining few hours listening to Henry and Laurence Snr regaling tales of their sailing exploits. By about 3pm the weather looked like it may be improving. Henry's advice was to keep in tight to the coast and we would be fine. But still the wind, rain and mist persisted. Laurence Snr and Henry said their farewells and then headed off to visit more marinas (allegedly). By 4pm I was ready to write my own forecast; 12 knots and sunshine. We either made the break for it at 5pm or we potentially could get caught again by bad weather for another day. The forecast is proving extremely volatile and unpredictable. Kids happily playing games while I check out tide tables, weather



As requested by Annie – Conor is thrown overboard



A chance meeting with Laurence Snr and Henry?

forecasts and swither about what to do. By 5pm the decision is made. With mists clearing and winds steadying, we are heading North, engine and head sail only, wind with tide, tucked in tight to the shore with the boys thoroughly enjoying surfing along on the 2m swell. Scenery is stunning. Totally different from Co Down. The forecasted gusts never really appear and we coast along nicely at about 8 knots. As we come around the point to head west towards Ballycastle the wind gusts start to rise again to 20 knots. Conor is now on the helm for an exhilarating beat into Ballycastle. Patrick below deck, shouts up something about water showing above the floor boards. That's strange but will look at it later. We aren't sinking and now is not the time to be pulling a boat apart. As we approach the marina Patrick takes over the helm. Once again, the wind direction makes our landing nothing short of stressful with the wind pushing us away from the pontoon. We can thank two gentlemen for their assistance in hauling us in to land. Once tied up the boys throw their wetgear in a heap and head off to forage for food. I meanwhile stay aboard ship and start the tidy up. Amazing how quickly a boat can go from tidy to bombsite. Once the boat is tidy I start inspecting under the floors to investigate the mystery of the water that Patrick had shouted about earlier. Loads of water; every under-floor compartment that I look in is full. Now I am worried. Have we hit something? I start bailing the boat and trying to see where the water is coming in. Keel bolts fine. No more water coming in that I can see. All a bit weird. By this stage the boys have returned from their scavenging trip so time to put the boat back together to be inspected in the morning. Yet again the chippy proves a point of contention. Becoming a theme of the trip so far. This time the chip shop refused to serve them as they were 1 minute too late. The other customers got served! By all accounts it was a long trek to find another chip shop; it must have been miles away as it took them ages to come back.

A few more games of cards before bedtime plus discussions as to where to go next. I am very aware that wherever we go we need to be handy for Conor's departure on the Sunday plus there is the fact that we may get weather bound again. Conor doesn't give a stuff. He will happily stay for the two weeks being trained in the way of the McMeekin. I feel that Laurence may not recognise his son when he gets him back at the end of the week, slightly more feral and unruly!



Thursday 17th August – Day 4 – Ballycastle to Gigha

Group decision has been made. We are jumping to Gigha today. All up at the crack of dawn. 6.30am (HW Dover) is our departure time. But the phone signal is awful. We have no idea what the forecast is. Conditions look okay from the land but it would be nice to have some reassurance that they are to hold. Paul and I head up out of the marina and start the demented dance of the fool looking for 4G. Eventually I get a message through to Laurence asking him to get us a forecast. His signal in Armagh is equally awful as his broadband box has just died. He is driving to somewhere to get a signal. This holiday is a comedy of errors at times. Word back in from Laurence is that the best of the forecasts that he has reviewed says we are a go. Paul and I leg it back to the boat, scramble the team into action, and we are off again. Breakfast will be in the form of fruit. Yet again the wind is from the South with brisk conditions making for a cracking sail Northwards. As the wind drops through the morning the engine is put on to keep our speed above 5 knots.

Everyone is settling nicely into their various roles; Patrick helming today, Conor and Ben on sail trim, Paul on navigation and me cleaning up (not!). This time we make a textbook landing; it's an easy pick up of one of the visitor's moorings. As in previous days the advance party go for a recce to assess toilets and food. I stay on board to check out the condition of the leaking boat. This time there seems to be even more water...where is it coming in? But that can wait – boat not sinking (yet) and the team (i.e. me) need to eat. Once ashore we call into what was a café last year according to Conor, but is now a posh restaurant. The food smells delicious, but all the tables are full so we head up to the post office for supplies. Chef Conor is in charge of filling our stores, so plenty of dried foods and tonnes of sweets and biscuits are order of the day. Then we venture as far as the Gigha Hotel for scampi and chips and then into the neighbouring art gallery for ice-creams and coffee before heading back to the boat. Once back aboard ship, the boys grab their wetsuits and spend the next couple of hours messing about in the water seeing who could do the most spectacular dive of the deck. While the boys were busy, I begin pulling the boat to pieces again with Laurence texting intermittently with helpful suggestions as to where water might be getting in. Every floor board lifted, water bailed out, compartments dried, still no luck. And then the sound of a drip, drip from a panel near the engine. Happy days...it's the water pump. Easy fix hopefully. All I need is a screwdriver. Naturally its broken and was nearly tossed overboard in disgust and I had to make do with a penknife as



better than nothing! A loose jubilee clip – no, cracked hose – no. It's time to get drastic and get the water-pump off for a closer inspection. That in itself is easier said than done. I am now cursing strong men and their love of over tightening bolts. Eventually the pump is off and being dismantled but still no obvious fault. I call it a day and rebuild the engine as the now cold and hungry boys are looking back into the boat. Pasta for tea followed by showers, cards and Bananagrams. I thought holidays were meant to be restful.

Friday 18th August – Day 5 – Gigha to Campeltown

I am awake early weighing up our options for the day. We need to get moving at some stage today as the weather is to be horrendous tomorrow and we need to get Conor to somewhere that Laurence and Annie can meet us at. We also still have the issue of the water pump. Sneaking out of bed trying not to wake the corpses, I have a quick look through the 'Sail Scotland' magazine to see where has a service yard and therefore determine our next destination. It's back south to Campeltown. Then Laurence and Annie can meet us there on Sunday using the fast ferry from Ballycastle.

Still sneaking around the boat, I start back into the engine taking off the water-pump again for a better investigation. A hint of discolouration, a poke with the broken screwdriver (lucky I didn't throw it overboard yesterday) and the source of the problem is located; a very knackered o-ring. Now to find a spare one. Another text to Laurence confirms that there 'may' be one on board 'somewhere' but as to where? Every cupboard and drawer was hoked through with no joy. Lucky the McVeigh's have no skeletons in the cupboards as I invaded every nook and cranny of the boat!

By this stage the boys are coming out of their comas and mayhem is back up and running with the bacon and eggs being fried up for breakfast. While they are all busy cooking and eating I have the bright idea of phoning the post office. After all, there has to be a plumber on the island. Alistair the plumber is retired, but the helpful lady in the post office gives me his phone number anyway. A couple of minutes later I am talking to Alistair's wife who informs me that he is out and she doesn't know when he'll be back. Eventually I extract his mobile number from her even though I'm warned he seldom answers it. But it's worth a try. As predicted he doesn't answer.



Now in a dilemma. We need to get sailing to miss the bad weather, but now the water pump has no o-ring. The only temporary solution is to fill the void with some grease and hope for the best. But where is the grease. That's also somewhere on board according to Laurence. As yet I haven't seen any, but I know I saw furler lubricant during the previous search. But where? Back on the hunt through every drawer and cupboard again. And then I see it, buried at the bottom of a drawer amongst random bits and bobs. The boys hear me shouting hurrah as I find an o-ring the size of a 5p. Yet again the broken screwdriver comes in useful in the rebuild. By 11am we are back up and running and everyone is back in high spirits as engine is switched back on, as is the heating and every device is put back on to charge.

A quick tidy of the boat, hatches closed and we are off again! The forecast is cloudy, damp and with 22+ knots of wind against the tide. With 2 reefs in and the engine on we beat our way southwards in high seas with our eta of about 8.30pm. The boys all took it in turns to helm, sailing Annie C as if she was a dinghy, with the main aim of the day being to soak the crew members who were sitting up on the rails. Some very funny moments as we got absolutely soaked. Nearing the Mull of Kintyre the winds rose up to 28 knots with lots of rain. At the southerly turn, the tide turned for our benefit and we could turn the engine off at last. Once through the choppy waters and in to calmer waters with less wind we were able to shake out the reefs and enjoy a lovely trip towards Sanda Island. More food and a quick tidy below decks. Pretty awful after the southbound sail. Even the kettle hadn't managed to stay on the cooker. Once past Sanda we started heading North towards Campeltown. With winds threatening to rise again we put the reefs back in and got the wet gear back on. As we approached Island Davaar and the entrance into Campeltown Patrick issued the order to drop the sails as the winds were now in excess of 33 knots. With the engine back on, we motored down the channel against the wind in driving rain towards the marina. Then it was the usual discussion as to which side of the pontoon we were going to approach. In this weather Patrick really had drawn the short straw. Fenders out and we aimed for the far side of the pontoon. And then suddenly bedlam descended. Someone on the pontoon was shouting and waving to go to the other side. Patrick threw the boat in reverse, which resulted in the rope from the tender wrapping round the propeller so we had no power. Conor then shouted for the anchor to which the person on shore shouted, 'no anchor... you need to take off the bowsprit, connect electric!'. Yes, of course it was Laurence and Annie on shore about to witness us wrecking their boat! At that point I jumped onto the platform at the back and shouted at Patrick to go into forward and hauled some of the rope off the propeller



and then cut the tender free. At least that freed the propeller. Meanwhile everyone else had leapt into action moving fenders to the other side of the boat. There then followed a none to gracious pontoon approach with the wind driving us off. Tossing of ropes and an enormous jump to shore by Paul followed by a lot of heaving of ropes saw us eventually tied up safe and sound. From then on, we fendered both sides of the boat on any approach to harbour! Patrick definitely in need of a Valium after that one. And Laurence was surprising calm, presumably having an internal meltdown though. I was very glad we had tidied below decks a couple of hours before. Mind you it didn't smell great. Lots of smelly damp trainers and towels did make our visitors wince. Once the wet gear was stripped off and hung up to dry we headed up into the town for food in the local Indian as it was one of the few places that wasn't packed. The meal was pretty special if only for the laughably vile service. Don't think any of us would rush back. Then it was back to the boat for more games before bed. Now 7 of us on the boat. Annie and I in the girls' room in the bow, Patrick and Ben in the stern, with Paul, Conor and Laurence squashed into the main cabin.

Saturday 19th August – Day 6 – Campeltown

We spent Saturday just mooching about Campeltown. Not a lot to do here. The town seems to be dying with lots of empty shops. I made a much needed trip to the laundry, Patrick headed to the library for a couple of hours study (university resit imminent and not much opportunity for study so far on the trip), and the rest of the gang headed towards the local fair to spend some of Laurence's money. The dodgems seeming to be the highlight of the fair. The afternoons entertainment was sending Conor and Ben off the back of the boat for a spot of scuba diving to clear off any remnants of the rope wrapped propeller from the previous night's escapades with a chocolate bar as their reward. Annie and I were put in charge of dinner. Lots of cream filled meringues with fruit proved a great success and filled some of the bellies...for a while. Playing cards a bit stickier after that!



Sunday 20th August – Day 7 – Campeltown to Ardrashaig

Today we lost our able seaman Conor. The boat will be very quiet without him. The McVeigh's hightailed it off the boat just after 7am to catch the fast ferry back to Ballycastle. And now the McMeekin's were on their own with no-one (i.e. Conor) to blame for the next set of disasters!

The next leg of our journey was up to the Crinan Canal. A slow start from the boys with me frying bacon to get them out of their beds. They had expected Conor to bounce in to their cabin and say bye. A bit disappointed he didn't! Once the team is washed and full of tea and coffee we are off again. Light winds from the South make for an easy sail up the coast. Paul on the helm, Ben fishing and Patrick trying to get some revision done (with my help). Weather wise this is probably the driest day yet. Once Patrick has reached his boredom threshold (which isn't that long!) he is needing to do something to amuse himself. Forecasts are studied. Light winds still holding...rubbing of hands in glee...it's time to get the gennaker up. A quick hoke through the lockers soon locates the sail. This is followed by about half an hour's head scratching as Ben and Patrick stretch it from one end of the boat to the other and try to work out what goes where. Then suddenly the penny drops, a flurry of activity and the sail is hoisted. Remembering Laurence's words of warning that the sail is for less than 12 knots of wind, Patrick is back looking at the forecast again with me just telling him to get on with it and get it flying! Does look the business when up, just a pity the wind direction isn't quite right. We persevere for a while and then have to drop it as the angles are just too tight. Next time says everyone! As we approach Ardrashaig we begin to see more boats on the horizon all heading North presumably also heading to the canal. This is about the first time we have seen other boats out and about. It has been amazingly quiet all week. The sun at last appears and we tiddle our way onwards. No-one is in any particular rush, all quite content just watching the world go by. We arrive in Ardrashaig after 6.30pm so have missed the last opening of the sea lock and will have to remain outside until the morning. We decide to moor on the pontoon beside the lock gates for the evening. As we go in we see there is a boat on the port side of pontoon so we head to the starboard. Carefully watching the depth gauge all the time we inch in and quickly decide it is far too shallow and reverse out and decide to spend the night on a mooring further out to sea. Once moored on a clean (and therefore hopefully serviced) mooring, we headed ashore for an exploration of the town and somewhere to eat for dinner. Ardrashaig is pretty in places and stuck in the 60's in others. For those that enjoy the



'Shall we?', ponders Patrick. 'Too right!', replies Ben



marching season it's the place to go. The Lambeg drums and pipes were in full action. After a few hazardous choices of establishments we eventually found decent food and drinks in the Grey Gull Hotel. After dinner we continued our tour of the town and got eaten by the midges. Return to the boat was a long row as the engine on the tender did not seem to like the cold and damp of the dark evening. That night the mooring alarm is used. We are not chancing a breakaway mooring scenario.

Monday 21st August – Day 8 –Ardrahaig to Lock 5

The first scheduled opening of the sea lock wasn't until 8.30am so we were in no rush to get moving. While Patrick and Ben were still snoozing in their beds Paul and I start up the engine and motor in towards the lock, moor up on the pontoon and head up to the office to pay our dues and find out what's what. The advice given is to use plenty of fenders and strong ropes, and that Lock 5 has better amenities than Lock 6 for an overnight stay. Once we are briefed we head back to the boat, cast off and move into the first automated lock and wait. We are soon joined by a Swiss 44 foot Bavaria. More fenders are put out as there is very little room between our stern and their bow. Once we are all roped up to the lock wall the sluices are opened. As front boat we get the brunt of the turbulence and have some job trying to maintain our position without the stern swinging into the other yacht. The captain of the Swiss boat gives the air of knowing what he is doing. Great, he can show us the ropes at the next lock. Once out of the first lock we drive slowly up into the second lock. Patrick and Paul are the land team and Ben and I are the boat team. Once again we squeeze into the lock and Ben and I prepare ourselves for the wrestling match against the turbulence. The gates are closed and the sluices are opened. It's only when the girl from the office legs it up do we realise that the sluice has not been closed on the lower side. No wonder the lock wasn't filling very quickly. So much for the Swiss captain knowing what he was doing! We progress through gates 3 and 4 and then moor up at another pontoon. I would say we have travelled about 400 yards in about 2 hours. This really is a slower pace of life. Patrick is starving and offers to treat us to lunch in the Grey Gull. Another tasty meal, all the nicer because I'm not paying for it! After lunch we visit the local shop and buy some essentials like milk, biscuits and kitchen roll. Once back on the boat we slowly head towards lock 5 where we are going to spend the night. Entertainment is easily found; Ben gets out



the camera and pretends to be a professional photographer dancing around the deck striking many a daft pose, Patrick starts into splicing ropes (better than revision) and Paul chills at the front of the boat listening to music. We are one of the first boats to arrive for the evening stay so get the first slot nearest the shore electrics. As with every stop we all venture off on a recce of the local area. Wifi is quickly located in the hotel, so that is Patrick and Ben gone for the foreseeable as they download more music and podcasts. Paul and I saunter upstream. Locks 5,6,7 & 8 are in quick succession, so we settle down to watch the yacht coming through in the opposite direction. What a sight – an aged couple, the man helming the boat and the woman operating the locks. She was clearly knackered. Leaning on the gate with the expression of ‘if it doesn’t open I don’t care’, so we offered to give her a hand. We then had an hour or so of chat as we worked our way down through the gates. They had entered the canal this morning and she had done all 10 gates on her own. That is hard work. Later, a quiet wet evening is spent doing the usual; cards and games and generally messing about.

Tuesday 22nd August – Day 9 – Lock 5 – Ardfarn

We wake up to a very wet and grey day with mist hanging low over the tree line. Nothing for it but to get going. We have decided to make our way out of the canal today and spend the night somewhere random as yet to be decided. We are all thoroughly enjoying the lack of planning - just go with the flow and take whatever comes.

Once we have tidied the boat, now a finely tuned operation, we head into the first lock of the day. Patrick and Paul on land duties and Ben and I on the boat. As we are still climbing up the through the lock system its back to the land team accusing the boat team of being useless at holding the boat steady in the turbulence. We, the boat team, listen to their abuse until we are through gates 5,6, 7 and 8. By this stage we have had enough of their smart comments and decide to swap duties. As we have a long trip to the next set of gates we put on the kettle and prepare a bodum of coffee to restore our energy levels. Coffee is poured, rations doled out. But as we round the corner we see another gate. Coffee put down, back to action. We have arrived at Dunardry which according the the map is a series of 5 locks at the beginning of our downward section. By this stage of our journey we had been joined by another yacht. Seems rude not to start chatting

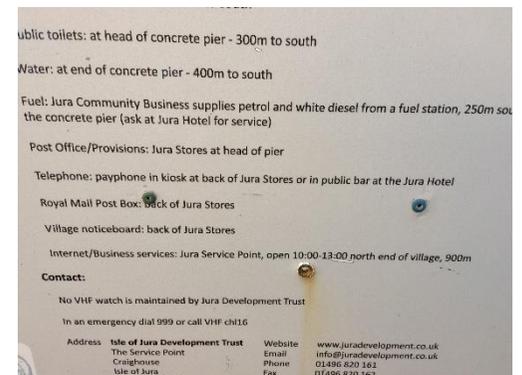


and ask them what their plans are. Older grumpy man at the front doesn't seem too keen to do much other than grunt. But we do extract the fact that they are also leaving the canal today. Going through the locks now becomes a competition, for us at least. Ben and I on the left-hand bank are not going to be beaten by the 3 Scotsmen on the right-hand bank in getting the gates closed, sluices closed and opened and then through the gates. As we progress through the quick succession of gates the banter between the boats starts with both boats seeing who could work the gates the fastest. Sad to say we shamelessly beat them every time and let them know it too! Once through gate 13 we have another break until Bellanoch Bridge. Time to put the coffee back on to heat and eat those biscuits. Everyone is starving and getting tetchy. From here on in it is a gentle motor towards Crinan and the sea just watching the scenery and spotting the quirky, hippy cottages that are hidden along the way. And then rounding a corner we are back into the hustle of life. The automated gate at Lock 14 takes you into the Crinan basin which is buzzing with loads of yachts and their international crews. We wonder is there a race on as each yacht is displaying a banner of some description. The sea lock is only operating in one direction; yachts are being brought in 4 at a time, with the outgoing yachts like us and the Scots happy to wait and watch. Eventually we are given the nod and we are put into the lock. We have decided that our destination is Ardfern Marina in Loch Craignish as only a short trip northward. The scenery sailing down the narrow loch is stunning with safe anchorages tucked in to hidden corners. A not too shabby landing is achieved with Paul at the wheel and Ben performing the leap of faith to pull us in to the pontoon. As the boat is filthy from the canal trip we start scrubbing the boat from bow to stern. As is the norm, Patrick and Ben perform their disappearing act and high tail it off down the pontoon at the first opportunity only to come back later requesting money as the local shop is about to close. Dinner is in the local bar where we meet up once again with our Scottish lock buddies for a few drinks before dinner. By now the grumpy one is not so grumpy with a few whiskeys loosening his tongue and unleashing his sense of humour.



Wednesday 23rd August – Day 10 – Ardfern – Jura

The noisiest night yet with thunder and lightning and howling winds whistling through the rigging as a storm blasted through overnight blowing all the electrics at the marina. Fender noise can only be compared to a fat lady (or man) squeezing into a tight set of leathers! As usual we have vague information about the weather with winds looking like they are to drop off but still from the South. We had hoped to travel further North but time is against us and we decide that we need to head southward and begin our slow journey home. But not before we have checked out the yachts and sent Conor some photos of the James Bond style speed boat in matt black and some of the fanciest yachts we could find. While out on our pontoon tour I was accosted by a man tinkering on his boat. He had watched our near miss in Campeltown from the pub and was greatly impressed with Ben and Conor doing their scuba diving. He then asked us had we seen Princess Anne yet? Lucky we had cleaned Annie C as one can't have a scuffy boat when royalty might pop in for tea! Naturally we had to do more prowling about to establish which yacht she was on. We never worked that out, but the temptation to take the security rib for a spin was high as the keys were left in the ignition and it would have made for a great story. Eventually we gather ourselves together and set sail for Jura. We beat our way southwards, but after making very little headway and meeting the same rock for the third time we decided to put on the engine and give ourselves a fighting chance of arriving in Craighouse at a reasonable hour of the day. With the sun out we stop for a while so that Ben can do a bit of fishing and hopefully catch our tea. Unfortunately not a nibble. So, engine on and we motor on down the Sound admiring the bleakness of the Jura landscape with its 3 peaks that look like a mountain goat would be hard pushed to stay on. The moorings at Craighouse are the cheapest yet at the grand price of £10 for the night. After a very nice dinner in the hotel we potter about the village for a look see. Other than the hotel and the distillery there isn't much else to see. The sign at the pontoon amuses us no end; internet services are available between the hours of 10am and 1pm in a building 900m away. From what we have seen so far on our trip the Scots are seriously under connected with respect to mobile phone coverage. Although ironically there are plenty of BT Openreach vans; we have seen at least one every day. As the midges are formidable we head back to the boat for the rest of the evening. Paul and I hide below decks while Ben and Patrick head out in the tender in the hope of catching an elusive fish. Biggest success was catching a rock! I do fear Ben may have inherited his



mothers talent for scaring away the fishes.

Thursday 24th August – Day 11 – Jura – Islay

Boys not impressed by me topping up the diesel at 8am. Apparently it sounded like I had brought a herd baby rhino on board. As the facilities in Craighouse are Donegal circa 1970's in both colour and finish (flaky green) everyone is pretty quick at getting ready; no leisurely showers this morning. In fact, no showers of any sort. Next destination on our homewards journey is Port Ellen in Islay. Still with the southerly wind we beat our way down in about 15-20 knots of wind and lots of rain. I drew the short straw today and was put on the wheel while everyone else hid below decks, only popping their heads up now and then to check I hadn't done something daft and passing me hot drinks and food so I didn't freeze to death. Too kind! Once landed in not too disastrous a fashion and tied up I head up to find a shower as drenched to the skin. The marina is a community based enterprise with showers and toilets some distance away behind a local B&B with towels are supplied for a small donation. As our provisions are running low we head for the shops. The nearest shop isn't exactly inspiring and we shuffle out of it as quickly as is polite. Further down the street is a Co-op. Happy days; a section of fresh fruit and tasty snacks are now on the menu. Patrick is caught salivating in the dessert fridge. We have decided that sailing holidays revolve around life in the marina with not much sightseeing being done and promise that tomorrow we will try and see a little of Islay before we make the jump back to N. Ireland on Saturday.

Friday 25th August – Day 12 – Port Ellen

Another grey and wet day, and also our next mechanical disaster. Paul now thinks I have the mechanical equivalent of Munchausen by Proxy and spend the night sabotaging the boat just to have something to tinker at during the day. The water pump seems to be running all the time even though no taps are on. All I can think is that Laurence is going to be lucky to get his boat back in one piece. Having poked about for a bit I give Whale a call and am advised it could be a failed microswitch. As that is outside my skill-set we just switch the pump on and off as required. With a break in the weather I take the opportunity to confirm Pauls diagnosis and go on deck with a selection of bits and pieces to fix the guard rail stay broken



on minute one of day one. Several chopped up cable ties act as a rawl plug, a couple of squares of plastic from a plastic container act as a shim, and hey presto, job done. In the middle of my repair job one of the local sea tour boats pulls in. On seeing the large tub of fish that must have been caught by his paying customers I make a random comment to the captain about Ben's lack of success at catching a fish. He laughs and tells me to send the boys up for some free fish. Once persuaded to go and get some mackerel Ben and Patrick disappear for some time, eventually reappearing with four gutted fish for lunch. Cooking the fish was another farce. No sooner had the fish hit the pan, that the torrential rain came on. Every hatch that had been opened had to be closed and the smell of fish is now trapped. So now we have a boat that stinks of fish and has a broken water pump. Not a good way to hand back the boat to our benefactor! The Donegal type afternoon is spent inside playing cards and drinking copious cups of tea. Eventually there is a break in the weather and we make a break for land and a walk around the headland. The midges are a rare breed here, truly awful. The only way to survive them is to go for full body cover. A burka would be a delight right now.

Saturday 26th August – Day 13 – Port Ellen – Glenarm

With reasonable weather forecast we have planned to sail to Glenarm and then down to Ardglass on Sunday. The wind is forecast at about 10 knots coming from the west i.e. gennaker weather with tides looking good for an 8am start. Unfortunately, the wind is in its ever-predictable direction from the south. The gennaker does get hoisted but is quickly dropped as the wind is too tight and we have the threat of a squall looming on the horizon. Initially we make good speed passing the Mull of Kintyre at about 11.30am. By lunchtime we are approaching Tornamoney Point so Glenarm isn't far away. By popular demand we decide to continue onwards, and as it is our last day we decide to do a night sail and aim for Ardglass. Little known to me was the fact that Ben and Patrick were cooking up a scheme to watch the McGregor - Mayweather match. As the day progresses the winds drop off and the engine is switched back on. As we pass the Maidens we are once again treated to a display from the local dolphins. With a turn in the tide and the wind against us we make very slow progress towards the ever-distant Copeland Islands passing them sometime after 7pm. As we are puttering along just chatting the day away Patrick suddenly tunes



into the noise of running water at the back of the boat. A quick inspection has us laughing. Who knew there was a shower off the back of the boat. The switch must have been knocked on at some point in Jura or Islay. No wonder the water pump wasn't turning off and we were using a lot of water. Not much to do but chat as we trundle our way southwards in the ever-increasing darkness towards Ardglass using each light buoy as a guide. By this stage we all love Navionics; makes life very easy. At some point of the proceedings Paul and I decide that we would aim for Strangford instead of Ardglass. The logic being that we would then ask my Dad if he would like to sail down to Ardglass with us in the morning. We easily navigated our way up the Narrows enjoying the flat calm evening and arrived up at the club at midnight. Mooring up at the club was a different story. I knew where the mooring was so aimed to where I thought it was. Not easy in the pitch black. Patrick and Ben grabbed the mooring, pulled it up, and had to check it said McVeigh. All thoughts were that a lot of the moorings are un-serviced and not to be used. A call back of negative to the name being on the buoy had me cursing about some other boat being on Annie C's mooring. We were gently reversed back off the mooring to relocate ourselves when Patrick said we had stopped. My worst nightmare, the instruments said we had water under the keel but we were stuck. The engine was thrown into forward but no joy. We were still stuck! At this point the people on board the yacht in question scarpered below decks at a splendid rate pretending they weren't there. Visions of an inglorious end in the one place that everyone knew us! Patrick wisely pointed out that the tide was now rising and we would be off in 5 minutes which of course we were. The night was then spent on Gerry's mooring as at least I knew it was sound. Certain irony in the fact that the place we know best had me wide awake worrying about the mooring. Unlike the rest of the crew, sleeping like the dead.

Sunday 27th August – Day 14 – Strangford - Ardglass

At dawn I crawled out of bed to have a look about and could have screamed; we had picked up the right mooring originally. At about 7.00am I gave Dad a text to see if he fancied an early morning sail down to Ardglass. Yes to that came back the message. He just needed to haul his driver out of her bed and would meet us at the pontoon at 8am. Once we had scooped Dad, we had a wet and grey sail down the Narrows. And for once the wind behaved itself and we were able to sail the whole way with the weather



slowly brightening the nearer we got to Ardglass. By the time we arrived at the marina the sun was spitting the trees and it was positively continental. Paul was once again in charge for our last marina landing. And once again Laurence just happened to be down fishing and was witness to a nearly textbook landing; by our standards at least. Sighs of relief from everyone! All that was left to do was make everything shipshape; empty and clean up the boat, restock some of the cupboards for the McVeigh's next trip and top up the fuel. Our holiday was over. A great two weeks.

A massive thanks to Laurence and Annie for not only lending us Annie C but also Conor. Fingers crossed Laurence is feeling equally as insane next year...

