

Hi Shipmates from Fort William

Just arrived at The Lochaber Yacht Club (just south of Ft W) where Jim Shearer, Vice Commodore, came out to greet us in the club rescue rib to offer full hospitality and hot showers, but sadly no bar! Whoever heard of yacht club with no bar, but to be fair, their old club had recently been burnt down (cause unknown) and this sparkling new building that resembled a mountain/ski lodge, has only just re-opened. To cap it all, Jim threw me the club keys so we could grab a shower in the morning/have breakfast (standing up!) and then gave us a lift into town for grub, beers, and blogging - how kind is that? Many thanks to LYC and I was delighted to donate my Bosham Sailing Club burgee (red bell on white background) to join their embryonic collection of 3 having lost all their treasured historical ones in the fire. Any like minded souls passing this way en route to/from the Caledonian Canal is assured of an equally warm Scottish welcome.

Blog 6 begins at Port Patrick with the safe arrival of Rob Goodall in the pouring rain! I heard his dulcet tones from the quayside, and within minutes his kit and he were safely aboard the good ship Theo's Future. Saturday night was spent in the good company of David and Diana at The Crown Hotel. With their local support and terrific enthusiasm including laying on a female piper, a staggering sum of £180 was raised in a jolly evening of fun, frolics, and very special Scottish hospitality. We were joined by freelance photographer Glenn, who managed to capture the mood and high spirits of the evening - thank you Glenn for e-mailing your photographs to Pippa.

The following morning, on advice from Eric, Douglas IoM Harbour Master, we set off under heavy skies for Carnlochan (just North of Glenarm) in Northern Ireland, a crossing of some 30 nautical miles in deteriorating conditions. This unscheduled leg was due to the fact that the Crinan Canal was closed due to a sudden and totally unexpected collapse of the cill under the last lock, thereby causing us negotiate the dreaded Mull of Kintyre. No sooner had we left the harbour, than David spotted a miserable semi-submerged pallet, which he avoided due to his quick thinking reactions on the helm! (well done, David, and congratulations on passing your RYA Competent Crew!). Such obstacles could have damaged the hull, or at the very least broken the obm propeller shear pin - not something we would want during our attempts to leave a lee shore in bumpy seas. The miles soon ticked off, enlivened by the sighting of two pairs of harbour porpoises, and before long our destination hove into view. We swung around the harbour wall, and secured against a fishing boat in the tiniest of harbours. The port was built in 1883 by the Marquis of Antrim, to export locally mined coal. High Tea was taken in The Londonderry Hotel, which was once owned by Sir Winston Churchill. The following morning we set off for Islay. It was a very stormy exit from the harbour due to a local weather effect, however, once out in the main channel conditions improved. On route we saw more harbour porpoises, a solitary puffin, and a basking shark. After 42 nm, and eight hours, we arrived at Port Ellen to be welcomed by a delightful seal who was busy snacking tit-bits from a local fishing boat! The pontoon had a collection of German, Norwegian, and Dutch yachts tied up. Despite the incessant pouring rain, the evening was spent in the local Indian curry house having acquired a bottle of red from the Co-op down the road!

Up early next morning and another tricky escape from a lee shore with a scrap of staysail and obm in a rough onshore chop. We were pretty relieved to leave the last set of jagged rocks behind us! Then it was a long slog up to Crinan where Dick

Pratt's daughter in law's sister, Kate came to meet us with her 2 delightful kids, Finley and Imogen. Back to her place which she and Richard are restoring for showers and a mega breakfast..... thank you soooooooooo much!! They live virtually on the canal in a magical setting. Finley showed me for the tracking system for the first time on his computer – wow, it's superb. But please be patient for a day or two whilst I wait for Pippa since I'm parked here at the start of the Crinan Canal and need to conserve my loyal battery!

Next Oban, and finally up Loch Fine past the hugely impressive Castle of the McLean Clan to Fort William where Theo's Future is now nestling under Ben Nevis – I'm quite tempted to tackle it but deck shoes are not quite appropriate, so it will have to wait for another time. Farewell David and Robert. Loved having you both onboard and we had a few laughs amongst the at times pretty testing sailing.

Leg 7 up the Caledonian Canal to Inverness starts as soon as Pip can make it. I shall probably edge my way up a few locks to get ahead of the game as well as a total halfway clean out.....

Fair winds and VMT to one and all, over £25k raised (!) with donations coming in all the time....

Skipper Mike