

# It's Turned Out Nice Again!

## A Swift 18 in the Sound of Jura

by Charlie Hitchen

**I**T HAD BEEN TWELVE MONTHS SINCE our successful circumnavigation of Mull in, *Martinet*, our Swift 18 and, enthused by our wonderful memories of that trip, we had plans for another foray onto the Scottish West Coast in the summer of 2013. This time we planned to launch at Largs Marina and to transit the Crinan Canal before turning south to explore the Sound of Jura and the Isle of Jura itself.

We arrived at Largs after the usual six-hour drive, had a cup of tea, prepared the boat and raised the mast. Previously, we had launched the boat ourselves using the excellent Largs slipway but had discovered that the marina could launch the boat using a tractor for a small fee. We figured that the car had done enough in hauling the 900kgs of boat, motor and trailer from Wigan and so arranged for a hassle-free, clutch-friendly, tractor launch to take place the following morning.

### Day 1. Friday, 26th July. HW Dover 07:18. 5Nm

At 10:00, on an absolutely glorious morning the tractor arrived as arranged and the launch was smoothly accomplished. I began to ship the stores when a distinctly soggy Skipper poked her head up from the cabin.

'We are taking on water,' she said. (or some form of words to that effect!)

Luckily, the tractor had not departed. Out *Martinet* came and the investigation began. In the springtime, I had replaced the inspection hatch to the keel mechanism which was now leaking horribly. It was clear that the seal provided with the hatch was not the correct one. The excellent chandlers on the marina were unable to find either the correct seal or a replacement hatch. They did, however, sell small GRP repair kits. Out of one of these and a nylon cutting board I fabricated a new cover plate. Three hours and one tube of Sikaflex later, we were back in the water – dry, ship-shape and loading up. 'Fortune favours the brave!' as my old mum used to say!

By the time we were ready to sail, the sun was dipping steadily over the Hunterston Channel. In the luminous twilight, we sailed the few miles down to Millport on



the island of Great Cumbrae and were able to negotiate its tricky entrance channel and anchor before the last colour drained from the sky. It had been a fairly stressful day. There were several more to come!

### Day 2. Saturday 27th July. 32Nm. HW Dover 08:00

Millport is a lovely place and an excellent anchorage in most conditions. However, winds from the south tend to induce an uncomfortable swell into the bay. Sure enough, we were visited with a southerly breeze at around 04:00, beyond which little sleep was to be had, even by the Skipper who can sleep through pretty much anything. The consolation was that a spectacular sunrise heralded another glorious day. By 06:00, we had rounded Garrock Head, the most southerly tip of the Isle of Bute and set about the long haul up Loch Fyne to Ardrishaig and the Crinan Canal.

After trying a range of sail configurations, we settled on the spinnaker, furling the jib and dropping the main. Sailing with a spinnaker on a leg which is virtually dead downwind is a really relaxing way to tick off the miles and has the added effect of giving others the impression that you actually know what you are doing.

By 14:00, we spotted the first of the buoys which mark the approach channel to Ardrishaig. This sparked a burst of activity and we pulled the kite down and poled out the jib. This allowed time for us to put out fenders, fish out our long lines, especially spliced for the canal and to contact the sea lock on the VHF. We were the only vessel in the sea lock and as we were 'Such a wee



(Left) Ardrishaig basin, Crinan Canal (stock photograph)



(Left) The glasses disaster

tasks are best done slowly and methodically rather than rushed: we have seen some pretty harrowing incidents on the canal. In this manner, throughout a showery afternoon, we made our way up the first few locks to moor up just beyond the Oakfield Swing Bridge before canal operations closed for the day. This is a lovely spot with easy access into Lochgilphead and the promise of decent fish and chips.

### Day 3. Sunday 28th July. Crinan Canal. 4Nm

To call what happens below the lid of a Swift 18 'a cabin' is to stretch the imagination somewhat, especially if you are 6ft 1in. For a person of the Skipper's more petite stature, the cabin presented no problem, but I was always compelled to enter the sleeping space in reverse.

This was generally accompanied by the Skipper making a beeping noise as though I were some HGV reversing into a tight alleyway. Because of the shortness of this berth, it was necessary for me to sleep with my head in the sink. (Not for the first time, I am ashamed to admit!) This was a little more comfortable than it might seem, for the Skipper had fashioned a board on which a pillow could be placed making the arrangement tolerable. On this particular night, I had been reading and placed my glasses opposite my head, just behind the cooker. The following morning the Skipper, as usual desperate for her early morning cup of Tetley's, warmed up both the water and my specs! Being made of some new-fangled plastic material, they folded into some strange Dalían parody of glasses. Gaffer tape came to the rescue to hold the deformed pair together and I modelled the 'repaired' specs for the Skipper as she read through her book.

'What do you think? Do they make me look like a bit of a pillock?'

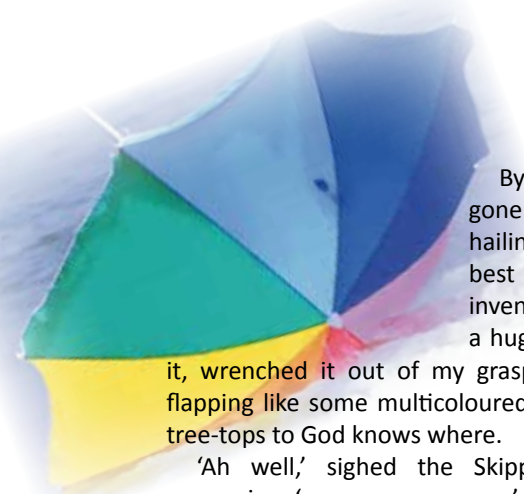
She glanced up. 'No more than usual,' she said, with an indulgent smile and returned to her reading.

It turned out to be a rotten day, too, with squalls and torrential rain. We were glad to be in the canal rather than being bashed around on the open sea. The rain induced a certain reluctance to move in the Skipper, but a brief lull meant that she had no real excuse and we pushed on.

The first order of the day was to top up on fuel. Just beyond the Oakfield Bridge is a petrol station on the road below the canal embankment. Access to the garage from the canal is by a steep, muddy slide of some 30 feet, worn smooth by generations of sailors in the eternal quest for fuel. In tipling rain, I risked the treacherous slope, feeling rather like Eddie the Eagle at the top of the 50-metre jump at Garmish Partenkirchen, bought the necessary fuel and a jauntily-coloured golfing umbrella which I thought might come in useful and fought my way back up to the canal. A quick cup of tea and we set off again in bucketing rain. The Skipper eyed the umbrella sceptically as she sheltered under the sprayhood while I took the helm cowering under my latest acquisition.

(Left) In the Crinan Canal





By the time we had gone a mile, just as I was hailing the umbrella as the best thing since someone invented the Bermudan rig, a huge gust of wind caught it, wrenched it out of my grasp and hurled it away, flapping like some multicoloured pterodactyl, over the tree-tops to God knows where.

‘Ah well,’ sighed the Skipper with a deadpan expression, ‘easy come, easy go.’

She said nothing further about the umbrella but I caught the sound of periodic, half-stifled guffawing as the afternoon wore on.

By the time we reached Cairnbaan, we were utterly drenched. We had nothing to lose and so slogged our way steadily past the road bridge and up the remaining locks to Lock 8, the highest point of the canal. Here we were met by canal staff who informed us that a decision had been taken to close the canal early, even though the rain had eased. Apparently there was too much water pouring into the canal from the nearby hills and water had to be drained away through the ‘water-wasters’ into the sea to reduce pressure on the locks. We tied *Martinet* up and squelched back to the Cairnbaan Hotel to dry off and seek liquid of another kind.

#### Day 4. Monday 29 July. HW Dover 09:42

This was a much better day and by early afternoon we were in the basin at Crinan. We made a quick visit to the canal office to book out and we were away into Loch Crinan itself. As stunningly beautiful as the Clyde is, we always have ‘a moment’ when the sea lock opens and we can sail out into Loch Crinan: as though the whole of the west coast is open before us and the possibilities for adventure are endless. It seemed though that our adventure would be somewhat delayed. The forecast suggested that we were heading for a period of stormy weather and so we determined that to push south down the Sound of Jura would not be wise and instead opted to sail north into the more sheltered waters of Loch Melfort until things calmed down again.

The day was cloudy but dry with a brisk SW breeze and this pushed us easily through the Dorus Mor into Loch Melfort. We knew this loch well, having cruised here in our Wayfarer. It is such a great small boat cruising

area that we have been surprised to see so few other dinghies on our many visits here in recent years. We spent the night at anchor in the lovely bay at the north end of Shuna which we know as Lime Kiln Bay. An otter was playing on the shore in the evening sunshine. It seemed impossible that the weather would change as suddenly as the forecast suggested it would, but the glass was falling and there is no arguing with that.

#### Days 5-9. Tuesday 30th July – Saturday 3rd August. Craobh Marina

When we woke, the wind was rising. By 10:00, we were double-reefed and reaching eastward into the shelter of Craobh Haven. Sailing in summer in Scotland is pretty unpredictable really! In a small boat, you need to be prepared to sit out prolonged spells of poor weather. This is just what we had to do for the next four days. Our enforced stay at Craobh at least meant that I managed to get replacement specs posted to me but it was frustrating.

We sat in Craobh and watched 45ft yachts bash in and out, their crews traumatised to lesser or greater degrees. Yet everything in our experience of sailing in this area told us that it would be ridiculous for us to venture forth in an 18ft boat. So we walked in the driving rain, caught buses to Oban, viewed the awe-inspiring, neolithic monuments at Kilmartin, ate well, drank very well and waited for things to calm down....and sure enough, they did.



Squall on its way



One glorious afternoon, four days after entering Craobh, the dark clouds dissolved, the winds moderated and we were able to slip away to enter the lovely anchorage of Ardinamir on the western shore of Loch Melfort. We negotiated the tricky entrance and anchored amongst a number of other boats we recognised as fellow escapees from Craobh. Somewhere a fiddle was being played. People were swimming from their boats in the brilliant evening sunlight. The forecast now predicted four days of decent weather at least. We still intended to make for Jura even though we now had less time available to us and pored over charts and tide-

(Left) Craobh Haven marina (stock photograph)

tables to plan our journey south. Once more, Jura was in our sights.

**Day 10. Sunday 4th August. HW Dover 11:11. 7Nm**

As predicted, the day dawned clear: a perfect, blue-sky, Scottish West Coast day. But there was little wind and we resorted to the motor to make progress south while the tide was in our favour. We were away by 07:00 heading for the anchorage of Carsaig, some 5Nm south of Crinan. It was, however, touch and go as to whether we could reach there on one tide. It took two hours of motoring before we were through the Dorus Mor and by the time we reached Ardnòe Point, just south of Crinan, we had the strange sensation of the whole of the Sound of Jura slowing.

It was clear that we would struggle to make Carsaig and so, at 10:30, we put into An Salien to anchor and wait for the tide to change. This is an excellent and secluded anchorage, well sheltered from wind or tide coming from the south but exposed to the north. We had a leisurely lunch, dozed, fished, read and sunbathed. The Skipper sketched and time passed. Right on cue, at 17:00, the Sound shivered, stopped and reversed its course. By now, a fresh westerly breeze had picked up and we sailed on genny only in a healthy chop down to Carsaig Bay. This is a delightful place with a variety of anchorages dotted around the lovely pink granite islands scattered here. The pick of the anchorages is the wonderful nook to the north of Carsaig Bay, protected from the Sound of Jura by Carsaig Island. We raised the keel and anchored in two metres above clean white sand just west of the so-called Seal Rock. We enjoyed a tranquil evening seal-watching as the day faded.



Carsaig Bay, looking towards Jura (Trip Advisor)

**Day 11. Monday 5th August. HW Dover 11:55. 11Nm**

Jura day! Once again we awoke to excellent weather. There was a nice ENE breeze, perfect for our crossing. After filling our water tank at the old jetty in Carsaig Bay, we hoisted sail and reached west across the Sound. The tide was still pouring southward and only by aiming uptide some 20 degrees were we able to make our intended landfall on Jura at Ardlussa Bay. This shallow bay seemed too open to wind and currents and so we rode the tide 1.5 Nm south to the excellent anchorage of Lussa Bay. This felt much more secure and we rowed ashore for a walk around.

(Right) Lagg pier, 1970s. 'A beautifully built drystone rubble pier, curved on plan, with a stair inset at the head.'[canmore.org.uk](http://canmore.org.uk)

We had read a great deal about Ardlussa. It has been identified as a Stone Age tool factory and massive numbers of flint tools have been discovered on the beach or washed up by the mouth of the river. For an hour or so, we walked around the beach, eyes glued to the sand, but were disappointed. Later, we strolled up to the cemetery at Kilchianaig, just half a mile north of the bay to visit the famous grave of Mary McCrain, who it is claimed was 128 years old when she passed away in 1856. It would seem that stunning views and fresh sea air are good for the health. No arguments here.

We returned to the boat in the evening intending to stay there overnight but an uncomfortable swell had set in and so we rode the tide a further 5Nm south to anchor at Lagg Bay, arriving there just as night fell. Deer were picking their way along the shoreline, unconcerned by our arrival. The sky had clouded over, the breeze had faded away and a light drizzle had set in. Lagg Bay felt open and exposed but the barometer was steady and the coastguard forecast predicted a calm night. Despite this, we put out two anchors and turned in.

**Day 12. Tuesday 6th August. HW Dover 12:32**

We enjoyed a peaceful night and woke to find a dull but flat calm morning. Dense mist hung low over the Sound. A low thrumming sound announced the appearance through the mist of a small fishing dory. Its sole occupant – a young woman – gave us a cheery wave before vanishing again into the gloom. Unfamiliar with the area, we were reluctant to sail in such poor visibility and so enjoyed a leisurely breakfast.

Lagg Bay was a place we had also read about and we paddled ashore to explore its antique harbour, jetty and slipway. Construction of this was completed in 1810 and it became the main drovers' port for travel between Jura and the mainland, a similar jetty being built at Keills – on the Tainish peninsula. Despite the years, it is still a very beautiful and impressive structure, curving out its enclosing arm into the bay, seemingly a natural extension of the landscape rather than some artificial intrusion into it. The folk who constructed it certainly knew how to use stone. I always find it hard to stay in the present in such places. What scenes must have been enacted here over the years as Jura folk left the island some willingly, some forced – tears, laughter, farewell and welcome? The very stuff of life. These moments of



reflection on time and people, change and landscape are a large part of why we seek out these places.

The mist was lifting rapidly and we made use of the last of the tide to continue southward along the Jura Coast. Ahead of us, the Small Isles, the impressive fangs of rock guarding the entrance to Loch Na Mile appeared out of the gloom and as the freshening breeze stripped away the clouds, the Paps of Jura were revealed, high away to starboard. Slipping inside the Ninefoot Rock Mark, we entered the strange crater-like inlet of Lowlandman's Bay. Frank Cowper found this to be 'a capital resting place' but we thought it a little exposed and 'kelpy' and opted instead for the lovely little bay of Drum an Dunan, just to the south, where in excellent shelter we were able to anchor over clean white sand.

Enclosed by cliffs to the west, with a beautiful, white sandy beach, this anchorage proved to be the perfect place to spend an afternoon sunbathing and exploring as we waited for the tide. It was late evening before we were able to continue south on genny only. To starboard the Small Isles loomed dark in the twilight and ahead the light of the infamous Goat Rock winked its warning. Clearing this buoy, we dropped our sails and motored through the narrow channel into Loch na Mile. The lights of Craighouse appeared ahead and we threaded through several moored yachts to anchor off the old stone harbour. By any standard, this is an impressive and beautiful place with the Paps of Jura as background. The sky was a faultless vault of deep blue and we sat out to watch the darkness deepen and the stars appear, the vivid end of a day packed with extraordinary beauty and interest. We had been a long time in finally crossing to Jura. It had not disappointed us.



Entering Loch na Mille, late evening

#### **Day 13. Wednesday 7th August. HW Dover 13:04**

A windless and scorching day. We sunbathed, cleaned the boat and filled up with water. Once ashore, we walked up to Loch A Mhuilinn behind Craighouse and back down to the shore at Crackaig. I felt the need to embark on what has become known in our family as



an 'Apache Route' (no real track / hopelessly dense vegetation / wading through bogs / swimming/fording rivers / etc, etc: delete as appropriate) by leading us on a sea level bushwack along the shore back to Craighouse. As the Skipper, understated and laconic as always, later wrote in the Log: 'A relatively pleasant walk/Apache route. In the end, only a little actual rock climbing was involved.' And since she was always a more graceful climber than I, no harm came to us. After this exertion, we indulged ourselves with the luxury of a meal in the excellent Jura Hotel where we were able to obtain a forecast. It suggested that windier days were on the way. Over a dram or two, we considered our options.

It was clear that we were not going to be blessed with the three weeks of continuous sunshine that we had enjoyed on our Mull circumnavigation. We thought that perhaps we should make for more sheltered waters. In addition, we needed to be back in Wigan by the 16th of August to celebrate our youngest daughter's birthday. After prolonged deliberation, over several further drinks, we decided that the following day, we would head back northwest to the mainland, perhaps visiting the MacCormaig Islands on the way. This would give us access to the sheltered waters of Loch Sween if things turned rough. And as it happened, they did!

#### **Day 14. Thursday 8th August. HW Dover 13:41. 12Nm**

We were away by 12:00, motoring out of Craighouse Bay in calm conditions and heading for the MacCormaig Islands and the mouth of Loch Sween. By leaving an hour before slack low water, we planned to make the most of the 10Nm crossing of the Sound without the complication of strong tides. (Those familiar with sailing on the Sound of Jura will laugh out loud at the naivety of such a plan!) We could see our destination clearly as we left Loch na Mile. Surely not so far away?

But, as predicted, the glass was falling and the first delicate wisps of cirrus cloud had begun to stream eastward over the Paps of Jura. Our route passed close to the impressive Skervuile Light built by David and Thomas Stevenson in 1865 and as we rolled over the uncomfortable tidal race at Beloe Rock, the reef on which the lighthouse stands, the sun had disappeared into a gathering gloom, the wind had risen to give a brisk southwesterly and the sea had taken on an unfriendly grey cast. The middle of the Sound of Jura is a worrying



(Left) Eilean Mor anchorage, MacCormaig Isles

place to be at any time in an 18ft boat, even more so when conditions are clearly deteriorating. In the distance, the MacCormaig Islands became indistinguishable from the shore and only by careful attention to compass, chart and GPS, were we able to fashion a course towards the channel between them and the southern end of the Taynish peninsula.

Maintaining this path was far from easy as the tide in the Sound was now streaming northward and this, combined with currents jetting north-westward from the channel north of the MacCormaigs, was edging us towards the vicious-looking teeth of Dubh Sgeir and Rubha na Cille. A worrying tidal race was developing to the north of the MacCormaigs, directly on our proposed course. We were starting to experience what the Skipper calls the 'wrong time – wrong place' feeling and so decided to make for an anchorage on Eilean Mor in the MacCormaigs rather than risk the developing chaos at the mouth of Loch Sween.

It became obvious from our cross-track calculations that we would struggle to make the anchorage on sail alone and so we fired up the motor to ferry glide *Martinet* into a welcome eddy north of Eilean Mor and so to the sanctuary of its concealed anchorage. This well-sheltered bight is a popular spot with yachts sailing north or south on the Sound but that afternoon we found it empty. The pilot guide contains dire warnings about uncharted rocks on the seabed in the anchorage so we approached cautiously with the keel half-raised. I had fitted a Hummingbird depth sounder to *Martinet* during the winter. This proved to be pretty effective but it needed to be used with care. The sensor was hung

from the transom and if I walked to the bow of the boat to deploy the anchor, the resultant tilt of the boat caused the apparent depth to increase dramatically! A bit of simple trigonometry suggested that this might well be up to 30%! We had thus devised a system of preparing the anchor well before arriving at the designated spot so as to have an accurate estimate of depth before hurrying forward to let the anchor go. The Skipper, who is an old-fashioned sort of girl, always checks anchorage depths with her hand-line anyway. We supplemented the anchor with a line attached to shore rings usefully provided by Clyde Cruising Club, which helped to prevent *Martinet* swinging in the increasing southerly breeze.

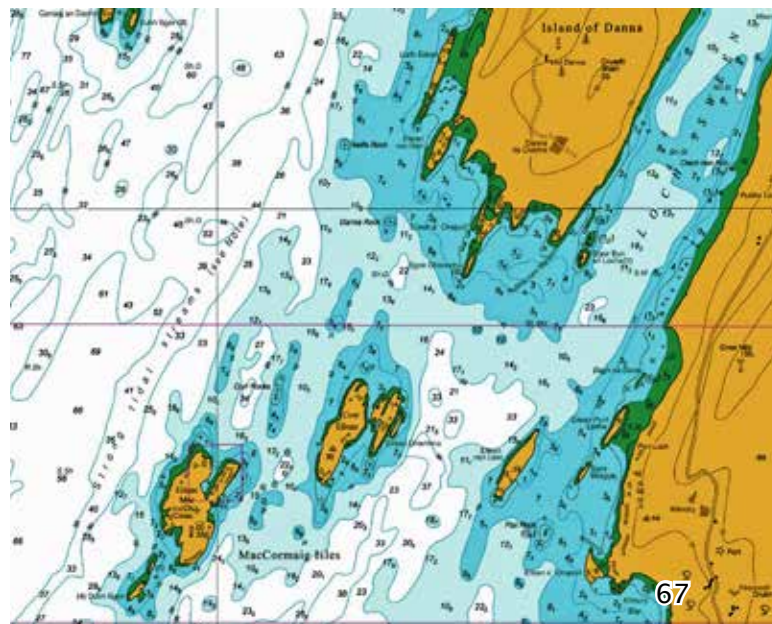
After a quick bite to eat, we paddled ashore and explored the island and its ancient remains. The story goes that the island was once the home of Abbán moccu Cormaig or St Cormac, a 7th Century disciple of Columba. The chapel, at various times a sanctuary, a prison, a rebel base and an illicit still, has a superb location, only bettered by the Celtic cross which stands at the highest point of the island. Sheltered in the lee of the cross we spent some time spellbound by the impressive sight of the Sound sweeping around the island, glad enough to be on dry land. Later, we sought out the 'old chapel' and the hermit's cave. The latter took me back to our old days of scraping around in Yorkshire potholes. It is an easy thing to descend but a pretty awkward cleft from which to extract oneself, especially wearing sailing boots as I discovered much to the Skipper's delight. She stood safely at the top reading our guidebook:

'Oh! It says here,' she announced gleefully, 'that if you enter this cave, you are magically rendered infertile.' I could think of no decent reply appropriate to such hallowed surroundings and so remained stoically silent.

By the time we had finished exploring the island it was late evening; the wind strength was increasing still further and rain was beginning to fall. A yacht joined us in the anchorage, a lovely Victoria 24. The crew of the yacht were also wisely availing themselves of the mooring rings. We were concerned about the gustiness of the increasing winds and so rowed out our second



(Above) MacCormaig's Cross  
(Right) chart location of the MacCormaig Isles



anchor. This settled things down. Time for grub, wine and chat after another unforgettable day's sailing.

**Day 15. Friday 9th August. HW Dover 14:23. 11Nm**

The wind and rain continued overnight and the dawn revealed an uninviting prospect. The coast of the mainland only two miles away was shrouded in mist and grey and lumpy seas raced around the MacCormaigs. We had no mobile phone signal and seemed to be in a VHF blind-spot but I managed to obtain a weather forecast standing by the Celtic cross using my ancient 2g Kindle of all things, a miracle of which St Cormac might have been justifiably proud!

The Met Office was predicting unsettled weather in the days ahead and westerly gales for the following night and day. We decided it would be best to clear out and cut across into Loch Sween where more shelter would be available should the need arise. The entrance to the loch was no more than 2.5 Nm away, but making that short passage was a whole other matter. By the time slack water arrived, the SW wind had eased and the visibility had improved so we nosed out of the anchorage but found that a considerable set of overfalls had developed around Corr Rocks, a reef between the MacCormaigs and the entrance to Loch Sween. So much for slack water!

Reluctant to commit ourselves to this washing machine, we retreated back to the shelter of the anchorage, climbed the little rise behind the chapel and sprawled down in the heather with a brew to study the currents, races and overfalls through binoculars. At 16:00, things seemed slightly improved and we pushed out again. This time, we doglegged to a point north of the anchorage before turning for Loch Sween. This avoided the worst of the turbulence generated by the Corr Rocks. It was still uncomfortably rough but *Martinet* coped well and soon carried us into the more sheltered waters at the mouth of Loch Sween. In this relative calm, with the strong westerly breeze providing a steady broadish reach, the boat was in her element. It was perhaps the sail of the cruise: a constant five knots past Tayvallich to the Fairy Isles at the head of the loch. These islands provided another superb anchorage comfortably placed in the midst of a group of vividly green, wooded islands; such a contrast from the beauty of the stark, windswept crags of the MacCormaigs. After toasting our escape with a small dram, we launched the tender and rowed through the islands in the evening light marvelling at the wildlife. We watched an otter with a pup foraging on the shore and an Osprey circling overhead. Knapdale with its rough wooded hills and lonely lochans is one of the locations chosen to re-introduce Beaver into the wild in the UK. Although we explored carefully until dusk fell, we were unable to find any signs of this most welcome experiment so we rowed back to the boat accompanied by the sound of owls calling deep in the forests. It had been a full and eventful day; we slept well.

**Day 16. Saturday 10th August. HW Dover 15:03. 6Nm**

We woke to an unexpectedly calm morning and quickly

came up with the plan of sailing back up to the mouth of the loch and around to Carsaig before more predicted gales arrived. We beat back up to Tayvallich in light winds to find the local sailing club fun-day in full swing. Seduced by all of this, we anchored and went ashore to visit the local cafe. Two hours later, stuffed with tea and buns, we set off, beating toward the mouth of the loch. The wind was rising all of the time and after two hours, a heavy chop was crashing cold and green over the bow of the boat. Ahead, at the mouth of the loch, the dark mass of Castle Sween lay stubbornly distant.

'We are flogging a dead cat,' stated the Skipper flatly, never one for a cliché. As usual, she was right. Beating into such a sea was the least favourable point of sailing for the Swift and conditions meant that the sea state at the mouth of the loch would have been distinctly unappealing and so 'Discretion being the better part..' and a' that, we dropped the main, turned tail and headed back to Tayvallich. We had missed our opportunity and would have to wait out the forecast gales to make the passage back to Crinan. Making it home in time for the 16th seemed a remote possibility. Somewhat down-hearted, we anchored, went ashore and trudged across the narrow neck of land which divides Loch Sween from Carsaig and the Sound of Jura. This gave us a clear view of conditions out on the Sound. The wind had increased further and it looked very lively indeed, boiling with white water, certainly no place for an 18ft boat.

'Better to be in, wishing you were out, rather than out, wishing you were in!' pronounced the Skipper. There were no arguments from me. We returned to Tayvallich to drown our sorrows in the pub.

**Day 17. Sunday 11th of August. HW Dover 15:42**

The winds increased overnight as predicted and we congratulated ourselves on the wisdom of our decision of the day before. We were well and truly storm-bound but what a great place in which to be stranded! It was a blustery day though dry in the main and since Tayvallich is one of the most sheltered of all Scottish anchorages, we felt confident to leave the boat and walk through the Taynish National Nature Reserve. This was a glorious ten-mile stroll through ancient oak woodlands. We were rewarded by the sound of song thrushes and the distant cry of eagles. A day well spent.

**Day 18 Monday 12th of August. HW Dover 16:18**

The day dawned calm and fine and we set about our plan to return to Crinan. We were away by 09:00, in order to give ourselves sufficient time to be at the mouth of the loch when the tide turned north in the sound of Jura. We made good progress and had time to spare and so anchored for lunch behind the Isle of Danna. We took the tender and explored Ceann an t-Sailien, the sheltered and shallow inlet which at certain states of tide separates the island from the mainland.

This remarkable, tranquil place echoed to the call of sandpiper and curlew. We pushed on through the inlet to the causeway which links the Isle of Danna to the mainland, almost reaching Loch Na Cille but the

tide was on the ebb and so we had to turn tail to avoid being stranded. We returned to *Martinet* and made our way to Sgeir Bun an Locha, the rocky spur which guards the entrance to Loch Sween, dropped anchor and waited. Despite the calm conditions inside the loch, the strong winds of the last few days had kicked up enough swell to create a rough sea here as the currents swept through the passage between the mainland and the MacCormaigs. It was not until 18:30 that we noted a slight calming in the sea state and a reduction in wind strength.

We discussed the possibilities. Ideally, we wanted to make our way to Crinan. Failing that, we had a couple of possible bolt holes in mind: we could return to the anchorage in the MacCormaigs or we could run for shelter in Loch na Cille. There was also the option of simply turning around and heading back into Loch Sween. With these potential escape routes in mind, we decided to test the water. Under genoa and double-reefed main, we rounded Sgeir Bun an Locha and headed west. Soon the tide had us in its grip and turning back now would not be easy. Soon we were bashing through the overfalls north of the MacCormaigs and after a roller-coaster ride of some twenty minutes, we could bear away to round Rhuba na Cille. The sea was calmer here and we broad-reached into a short chop but no sooner had we rounded the point and committed ourselves to the passage to Crinan than a series of squalls, both wild and beautiful, swept down on us from Jura. The arrival of each squall was heralded by a sinister haziness over the Paps of the Jura. Within minutes, the hills had vanished into cloud and the sea around us turned white as the winds found us. There followed five minutes of bedlam when the whole boat seemed to shudder and rattle, baffled by the fierce gusts. Then, slowly, away into the teeth of the wind, the hills reappeared as we emerged from the squall. Rapidly the wind moderated, the sun fought its way through the ragged clouds and a wonderfully vivid rainbow developed to leeward as the squall passed. I was worried but the Skipper revels in such conditions. In the midst of one of these squalls, with the rigging rattling and water sluicing from the sails, perhaps sensing my anxiety, she turned to me with a broad grin and yelled across that great Wigan motto, 'Well, Lad. It's turned out nice again!' It was a great morale booster and that, I guess, is why she is the Skipper.

In such a heavy chop, even broad-reaching, *Martinet* made significant leeway, disconcerting enough, given that we were creeping northward along a rocky lee shore and so we were forced to tack back out twice into the Sound to win ourselves more sea-room. Time was moving on and we decided to put into the anchorage at Carsaig rather than to press on to Crinan. Even so, the passage to Carsaig seemed interminable. The pilot guide warned sailors against confusing one of several similar-looking bays for Carsaig and putting into them at their peril. Carsaig is the only one of these bays with houses at its head and after rejecting a series of inviting inlets it was with some relief that buildings appeared. It seemed that what had been a white-knuckle ride was over but there was one further obstacle. At the mouth of Carsaig

Bay, where water crowding in from the Sound of Jura piled up against the calm water in the bay, a series of impressive standing waves had developed. Yikes! As usual, the Skipper had a plan. There was no turning back now! We sailed beyond the worst of the waves, almost to Carsaig Island before gybing and running in behind them into calmer water. Phew! We anchored behind Carsaig Island, broke open the whisky and celebrated our escape!

#### **Day 19. Tuesday 13th August HW Dover 16: 58**

We were up early to catch the north-going tide. The Sound was flat calm – mirror-like almost. It was hard to believe it was the same piece of water that had given us such anxiety the evening before. I was in a de-mob happy frame of mind and I stood on the foredeck and gave the Skipper an acappella rendition of the 'It's the Crinan Canal for Me'.

'Very nice. Who sings that then?' enquired the Skipper archly.

'Well, there is a classic version by the actor, John Greive.' I replied.

'I'd be inclined to leave it to him then.'

Somewhat deflated, I set about sorting out the canal ropes and fenders.

We were back in the Crinan Sea Lock by 08:30. As usual, we were placed at the back of several larger yachts. The usual chat ensued: Where have you come from? Where have you been?

We told them. 'Oh really? In that boat?' they asked.

Two days later we were back at Largs.

This was the last trip we made in *Martinet* and it had been the most challenging by far. She had been a wonderful boat for us. Her build quality was truly excellent and we had tweaked her into a fair sailer over the years we had her. She was best on a reach in flattish water or long swells. In shorter chop and confused seas – exactly the sort of conditions which prevailed in those tense hours around the MacCormaigs – she lacked a bit of 'go forward' and needed a touch of motor to keep her from falling off waves. I suppose this is inevitable in a boat only 18ft long and with the accommodation she offered. We sold her to a good friend who, after using her for a couple of years, passed her on to a sailor from Glasgow. Maybe we will see her again on our travels on the Clyde. I hope so. Godspeed, *Martinet*. **CH**

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**Pilot guide:** Kintyre to Ardnamurchan, Clyde Cruising Club.

**Charts:** BA2131 Firth of Clyde and Loch Fyne; BA2397 Sound of Jura, Northern Part; BA2396 Sound of Jura Southern Part; BA2326 Loch Crinan to Firth of Lorn.

**OS Maps:** OS Explorer - 358 - Lochgilphead & Knapdale North; 355 - Jura & Scarba.

**Reading:**

The Scottish Islands, Hamish Haswell-Smith.

Jura, Island of Deer, Peter Youngson.

Sailing Tours Part 5. The West Coasts of Scotland, Frank Cowper.

Flint tools from the present tidal zone, Lussa Bay, Isle of Jura, Argyll, John Mercer.