We are not amused!

I calculated, stuck on the M74 for about 1hr 47mins and 15 seconds, that I’d not only aged ten years with the frustration at the slow progress north but that our journey to Tavyallich was likely to take us at least 14 hours. The western coast of Scotland had never seemed so far away and my doubts were vocalised about the sense of driving quite so far just for one week’s sailing. However all my concerns vanished as we swept round the corner of the single track road leading south to Tavyallich and laid eyes on our destination. The view below is the one that greets visitors to the wonderful village of Tavyallich and it is truly stunning. We’d arrived at last.

Our destination – Tavyallich

Matt can get so grumpy and the enforced idleness of sitting in a stationary car wasn’t good. I didn’t mind so much and was glad to be at the beginning of the trip, full of anticipation. I had Matt to myself without children. We could be totally selfish and do whatever we wanted. The 14 hour car journey meant I could unwind, talk and catch up about things sometimes we’re too busy or too tired to talk about. I like talking. And, I like being with Matt.

It was with great appreciation that I had accepted the wonderful offer of hospitality to spend the first night with friends, a meal and a proper bed. It was with some relief that there was to be no unpacking, rigging and launching of the boat followed by having to cook aboard and all in a couple of hours. All that could be accomplished in the morning without the evening midges for company and the inevitable rush! Even
after 40ish years of Wayfarers I still get excited about going sailing. Octavia recognises this enthusiasm and does her best to calm me down, but I still make mistakes and go off half cocked. Important pieces of equipment have been left behind and an improperly rigged boat has set off with the inevitable result. However with Octavia’s ‘guidance’ we had a fairly leisurely rig, pack and launch. On the subject of packing, it is vital that everything is packed sensibly when carrying all the mountain of gear necessary for a week’s cruising. And Octavia likes packing. I couldn’t believe my ears the first time I took her on a cruise when she asked tentatively if she could pack the aft locker. As if I would refuse! I have to confess in the past to getting grumpy because I can’t find something in a space only a few feet square (the aft locker). Now I get told quite firmly to get out of her space and that she knows precisely where it is!
We were so lucky with the weather. It was my second visit to Scotland and already spoilt with the first year’s heat wave, I couldn’t possibly believe the forecast of a second week of light winds and sunshine. Nothing could hide Matt’s enthusiasm to get started as I was rudely awoken by my duvet being whisked off me. The curtains were hurled open and I could see that he was already dressed! I did however get the chance to see out of the window at the beautiful view of the bay, of the morning sun and clear blue skies before I was encouraged to get ready. Time to catch up and make sure we didn’t leave anything behind!

Fortified by a cup of tea in my hand, I found Matt outside checking on the boat. His meticulous attention to detail reassures any nervous feelings associated with a week of cruising in what is known as a challenging sailing area. I know the boat will be working to its best potential. The spreaders will be precisely in line and the mast rake will be well within it’s required range. I cloud over a little when these measurements and adjustments are discussed, but appreciate windward performance and pointing ability to be essential, especially when you’re meant to be relaxing and on a cruise, Matthew! I too have my own worth and I knew my skills were soon to be called for. Packing the boat for a week or more is no easy feat. It requires planning, forethought and above all patience. Weight distribution has to be balanced. On longer trips we try to keep all our heavy food and drink items as well forward as possible. We have a big water tight bucket which sits nicely just by the mast. I’d made sure nothing was forgotten, double checking the car when we had finished to be sure. I remember we once left the Trangia behind and only recently Matt had rushed off to go sailing and had forgotten to take his tiller!

In glorious sunshine with the hubub of activity around the slipway we raised the mast, clear of telegraph wires and made our decent down the ramp, only to be thwarted by stones just invisible below the water. No swearing, but a bit of heaving overcame the obstacles and Wild Lone was floated off to the pontoon. Loch Sween really was an inviting start and I couldn’t wait to get started. Matt was already nose deep in his spinnaker bag boasting that we could run with
the spinnaker all the way to our destination south. With fond farewells from the pontoon we began our epic journey, out of the entrance and with our spinnaker flying to the island of Gigha our aim. It was at this point, and only a few minutes into our sail that Matt decided that it was already worth the 14 hour drive. Lo and behold what more there was to come!

The sail out of the bay and south down Loch Sween was glorious. The following wind meant that the spinnaker could be put to good use and I started getting excited all over again regaling Octavia with stories of a previous trip. Over there is where........ And over there was where - she was all ears.

Oh and one more point of explanation - the flowers on the boom in the picture below – Octavia does like her gardening and flowers, so of course I was pleased to agree to the decoration of my spar. There was probably some significant reason for them, but I can’t remember what it was and suppose I may have missed out on an opportunity to show my true romantic nature.

It was so easy. Just 17.5 miles south and we hardly had to do anything. Sitting down leaning against the transom, we slowly stripped off more and more items of clothing. I could see Matt was beginning to unwind and relax and we both took in the beauty of our surroundings. I just couldn’t get over how big it all was. Jura to our right looked quite close in the haze but in distance was probably about 10 miles away. Distance was so deceptive.

Knowing the area made life so easy, which after the stress and bother of getting wound up at work ready to be away and getting everything bought and packed was very welcome. I planned a lunch stop at Kilmory Bay just south of the Loch entrance. This beautiful sandy bay was the perfect spot to anchor even though my instincts were not to trust the wind to stay, but to use it while it was there. Lunch itself was somewhat of a mystery. I had been told to keep my nose out of that department and that the food preparations were not going to leave me disappointed. I had to agree as little pots of funny sounding stuff were spread on little crisp pieces of bread and
something called crudité were produced. We sat at anchor in the bay with it’s wonderful white sand beach in the total peace that is so much of the joy of the west coast of Scotland. It was almost too much to take in.

I was taken aback when we turned into a small bay. I didn’t expect it to be so beautiful. The water was crystal clear and to be able to approach such a remote idyllic spot by boat filled me with amazement. I felt a lucky girl. Lunch was still to be enjoyed and I didn’t think it could get any better.

Before we were far out of Kilmory, the kite was up and helping us south against the slight foul northerly flowing tide. Looking at the tidal flow charts of the area showed that apart from a few very notable exceptions the tide could be fairly well ignored. The cruising area between the islands and the mainland from Jura north to Clachan provides a superb cruising ground. It is fairly sheltered from the west where the worst weather usually comes from and has plenty of interesting places to visit. Plus there is always the opportunity to sample the sea northwest of Jura, across to Mull. This cone shaped piece of sea does however have a nastier side. The flood tide pushes north into the funnel and is squeezed out of gaps between the islands to the north producing some of the most famous tide races in the UK. Places like Corryvreckan, Dorus Mor and Cuan Sound have regular standing tide waves and when they experience strong contrary winds, can turn really nasty. I recall on a previous trip watching Corryvreckan develop it’s famous Great Race – an area of up to 5 miles of white water stretching northwest from the Gulf. However, not for us on this trip. This was to be a relaxed exploration of the lochs and islands between Ardfern and Gigha, linking up with the area to the north explored the previous year.

The spinnaker had to go up at the earliest opportunity as we left the bay. Post lunch relaxation isn’t really Matt’s thing, especially this early in a trip. Mind you it was fantastic to be sailing again and my course may have wandered a bit as I ‘spectated’ rather than concentrated.
I had been to Gigha before and planned to pull into an anchorage called Twin Beaches for the night. The natural harbour is formed where a small island just off the main island has become linked by a strip of beach so can provide shelter from the north and the south, hence the name. We later found out later that this was Queen Victoria’s favourite anchorage when visiting the area. I can’t say looking back whether there was indeed a regal ‘presence’ to the place, and ‘we are not amused’ was quite the opposite of our feelings as I waded around the shallows looking for the ideal drying out spot. It mustn’t be underestimated just how important the choice is either. The ideal slope to allow the boat to dry slightly stern up for a comfortable night has to be coupled with the need to be afloat still at a reasonable hour the following morning and the absence of rocks and shelter from the wind. I have been
accused of taking an inordinately long time making such decisions in the past. Coupled with this were demands for a campfire, which further complicated matters. A spot was found that would suit though, complete with a driftwood tree that would stand a bit of pruning.

It usually starts like this “If High Tide is at so and so hour then we will float at......” I generally like to humour Matt’s dilemma over deciding where to stop for the night. If we are drying out then there is quite a lot to weigh up. I listen attentively, nod and absorb all the various options.

We eventually choose to dry out about an hour after high tide to give us plenty of room for a difference in tide height the following morning. There’s so much to learn and I do find it fascinating. I had no idea atmospheric pressure was also a consideration. Apparently this can affect the height of the tide as well as the moon’s phase. With all options covered we settled stern up on our preferred spot and Matt let out the anchor line 12 feet or so, so we could pull ourselves into deeper water in the morning. Although, as Matt had already calculated, there should be no problem as the wind was forecast (all hail Wind Guru) to be off shore, helping us blow into deeper water anyway.

Where was the beer?! I was in the mood to celebrate; it was after all our 2 year anniversary. Surely Matt hadn’t forgotten! I was in my element,
alone on a beach with a man brandishing a grin and a saw, with a twinkle in his eye. The smell of wood smoke soon followed and our make shift kitchen and dining area was ready and set. The flowers looked beautiful. I was so happy. It was perfect.

A very useful addition to the kit list this year had been a small folding pruning saw and it was good exercise too, attacking the smaller branches of a tree washed up during some previous very high tide.

The following morning we floated and swung out on the anchor I had strategically placed the previous evening and we sat in more sunshine while Octavia produced superb bacon rolls for breakfast. I was really very satisfied with her food planning by now.

I was really surprised to be floating at 4am and was woken by Matt’s bottom in my face as he scrambled over me to pull in the anchor line. At least it made a change to the normal morning greeting! We had floated much earlier than expected. It’s still a mystery to us both as to why, but one explanation was that the tidal curve could be to blame and that the tide had plateaued at high water the night before, putting our calculations slightly out.

After a leisurely lazy wake up I decided to treat ourselves to bacon for breakfast. To Matt’s surprise I also produced 2 perfectly formed fried eggs which sat so pertly on top of the bacon. I think it’s important to eat well and never to go without or make do. As my mother says, ‘There’s no need to go hungry’ certainly rings true. I wanted to give Matt a culinary experience to measure up to our extraordinary adventure.

We left Gigha on a close reach northbound, retracing our steps from the previous day. The plan, if there indeed was such a thing, was that we should go north as far as the wind allowed us and it was a great pleasure that within an hour we again had the kite up as the wind had gone round to the southeast. I was keen to stop for lunch at the
MacCormack Islands where there was a lovely north pointing sheltered anchorage and rough quay that gave access to the island.

It was here that Mr MacCormack decided to set up base in the 1400s when he entered a hermit phase. His fellow religious people were obviously so impressed with his decision to suffer constant hardship alone that they got him promoted to Saint. Anyway they built a small church which still stands and is one of only two buildings on the island. Octavia and I spent a happy hour exploring. Well Octavia did, whilst I fretted to get away again.

Leaving Queen Victoria’s favourite anchorage was hard but intrigue gripped as I had heard so much about the MacCormack Islands and was keen to visit. We entered the bay under motor. I’ve learnt that it’s generally inadvisable to enter with full sail and have seen many a mishap as sailors round up and power up their sails when they should be stopping! Matt was pleased I was on motor duty as 3 Irish gentlemen acknowledged us and waved jovially. We had a perfect landing, just a little tweaking with fenders, well quite a lot actually and then to my relief some exploring. It was lovely to stretch our legs and follow our noses to the chapel and search out the cave. The island had a feeling about it, for me a place of mystery, beauty and calm. I’m not sure the same would be said in inclement weather. We took in the scenery over lunch sat on the grass outside the chapel and rested a while soaking up the warmth of the sunshine. It really was an idyllic spot and well worth the visit.

Back past Loch Sween, still under spinnaker, we continued north past Carsaig Bay to the east. It was close to the small islands just north of here that we saw a strange tide rip. The otherwise flat sea was broken by a line of breakers as the tide pushed north over some subterranean object. It was quite unnerving as we were swept inexorably into the waves, but we experienced nothing more than a bit of water on the foredeck.

The wind held as we continued our sail. Several possible destinations came to mind. My preferred option was an anchorage behind Island Macaskin just in the entrance
to Loch Craignish. The forecast was for stronger southerlies overnight and the northern end of the island had a nice sheltered bay. It was here that we had our only uncomfortable night. The evening was again a superb experience as we sat in the stern of the boat enjoying each others company with only the front half of the tent up for shelter from the wind. However during the night I was awoken by heavy rain and strong gusts of wind making the boat slew about on her anchor. I had re-proofed the cotton canvas tent in preparation for the trip and was glad I did so. Even so there were drips appearing along the sail where it was rolled up alongside the boom.

The morning was damp and dismal, with poor visibility so we had a lazy start waiting for things to ease off. Getting ready inside the tent is never easy, but we really were operating as a team by then. This teamwork is so important on a cruise and comes close in importance to sailing ability. I was so lucky that Octavia was not only such good company, but also very capable on the helm.

The tiny village of Crinan being only a few miles south was our chosen destination and as we set out the weather began to clear. By the time we arrived it was dry and walking from the moorings around to the cafe we soon felt overdressed compared to the other visitors. Did we resist the rather good looking cakes? One of us did anyway!

By the time we returned to Wild Lone it was sunny and warm and the pontoon we had tied to, being made up of black plastic blocks was too hot to walk on in bare feet. This solar powered drying facility was put to very good use as everything came out of the fore hatch to dry. The soaking wet tent was bone dry in about 20 minutes. Another superb Octavia lunch was had whilst I made the place untidy.
The wet night didn’t dampen my spirits but instead gave way to a lot of chit chat, mostly by me I hasten to add. I am entertained constantly by Matt’s reoccurring dilemma as to the next course of action. We um and ah over and over again as to our options. We decide and I am every bit as enthusiastic as I can be and then out of the blue it’s something different. The variables are limitless. I have learnt now to agree with the decisions and to go with the flow. Matt has never let me down in his calculations, predictions and above all perfect anchorages. Crinan seemed a short enough sail given the weather conditions and dressed in waterproofs, hats and gloves we weighed anchor and were off. No bare foot sailing today.

Leaving Crinan we encountered similar fickle winds to the previous day in the entrance to Loch Craignish on the east side. Neither of us could offer any real explanation for it as the wind was clear from the south. A lovely drift into the Loch took us eventually to Ardfern and the marina there. It was time, Octavia decided for a wash and a pub. All of the marina’s I have used in Scotland have been very accommodating and this was no exception. We were told to tie up where we liked, but with a suggestion that we move inside the visitors’ pontoon for shelter in such a small boat. This showed a nice appreciation of the difference from the other craft I thought. The ‘other craft’ were indeed somewhat different. They were all large and expensive looking, but the owners’ friendly and showing the usual interest in Wayfarer cruising. One skipper was a wealth of information, clearly having cruised the area for years.

The pub was first class and the addition of some lovely soft sofas for tender behinds was most welcome.

We arrived at Ardfern just as Princess Ann had departed. I could see how easily she must have fitted in as most of the yachts were 40ft plus and immaculately kept. I wondered how much time was spent ‘keeping up appearances’ rather than sailing as I passed a lady scrubbing an already clean carpet on the pontoon and a gentleman polishing his brass fairleads. The people were all so friendly and helpful and we were quite the centre of attention. Everyone knew we had arrived and were interested to hear about our travels and offer us helpful local knowledge.
Ardfern presented us with a bit of luxury and time to regain control of one’s appearance again. I certainly didn’t want to let the side down. Groomed and fragrant I was overly excited to be going to the pub which didn’t disappoint. I had venison which melted in my mouth accompanied with a chocolate sauce and big fat crunchy chips. We looked out over the loch and chatted and chatted, our faces gradually getting redder and redder.

Leaving Ardfern was a wrench as a great walk through to Croabh over the hills gave us an appetite for the shore (almost). It was Octavia’s turn on the helm and she made a very seamanlike exit from the pontoons. Beating south out of the Loch was pleasant and gave rise to some humorous moments. Octavia decided to display her essential gear, the likes of which Wild Lone and I suspect Wayfarer cruising generally has probably never before seen. I bemoaned the extra weight! She also decided to sing and made up a silly song about me and Wild Lone.

I’ve noticed that with Matt, appearances are quite important. Leaving and arriving at a harbour is always done with close scrutiny. It must be done with grace, precision and above all perfection. I was relieved and very proud therefore to be allowed to sail out of Ardfern. I had to perform well, as the imaginary crowd of people were watching us sail out. Effortlessly we sailed off our pontoon and out into the loch without tacking. I was hard on the wind, pinching all I could and a little gust just took us out of the entrance and into clear water. We’d made it without tacking. These little tests do make me giggle.

Not one for being quiet for very long I forced Matt into playing games with me. We were to come up with limericks, songs and all sorts to entertain us on our longer sails. I still chuckle to myself with this one that began something like…

‘I sailed with Wayne, John Wayne of the sea, r rum titty bum titty bum titty bum, I sailed with Wayne, John Wayne of the sea, in his little boatie number 773 r rum...’ well it kept me going anyway and we did laugh some. When conditions are calm and tranquil you can afford to relax and be silly. Equally without warning things can change and you’ve got a detached tiller in your hand. This is the time to put theory into practice and start leaning and distributing your weight to turn the boat. I seem to remember running away from the tiller and screaming ‘Matt’! That annoying Michael Winner ad comes to mind, don’t make a crisis out of a drama. Matt is good like that, I’ve never seen him with ruffled feathers.

Towards the entrance to Loch Craignish we encountered a strange wind effect. The western half of the Loch gave us a nice single board south towards Carsaig, but as soon as we tacked towards the east the wind was so different that we would have been on a direct beat to our destination. Mind you no great distances were planned, in fact very little was planned at all in the way of destinations. The wind went off light
as we slowly headed south, but freed us as we approached Carsaig again. One of those opportunities for a bit of exploration came on us as I was studying the OS map. It showed a tiny passage inside an islet north of Carsaig Bay so of course we had to sail through it. This slight detour proved fortuitous though as we drifted through watching the sandy bottom about ten feet below us. In the channel were two mooring buoys, only one of which was occupied and forays into the Bay didn’t produce a better alternative. What a wonderful experience it was, sipping wine in the beautiful evening sunshine and surrounded by such superb scenery. The sea surface was glassy smooth and there wasn’t another human sound to break the stillness. That long drive north was by now completely forgotten.

*I believe Matt when he says there’s an islet even when I can’t see one. The shoreline seems to merge and blend in together making it hard to distinguish inlets from the continued coastline. On approaching I could see the narrow opening and was slightly concerned that we wouldn’t fit through. What’s more there were rocks either side. I was given the nod from Matt and leapt on foredeck duty with my paddle in hand to ward off any rogue rock. In the stillness the water was clear right down to the sandy bottom. We saw many jelly fish, hundreds of star shaped spider things and much more. The long strands of seaweed getting quite dense in places reminded me of giant ribbons of pasta good enough to eat. This turned out yet again to be a beautiful find and with not a soul in sight it would make for an excellent anchorage.*

A few words on domestic
arrangements – I have stuck to my Mk 1 tent over the years and don’t regret it. I get the front half of the tent up (in about 3 minutes) and then we live in the back of the boat in the open air. Cooking is done on a Trangia on the afterdeck where all the food is easily available in the locker. On longer trips I do take a large watertight bucket into which all the heavier food items go and store it beside the mast where the weight is best kept. It is surprising over a few days how space starts to appear in the after hatch. Note the presence of the wine box – essential gear I think and no empty bottle storage problems.

Whilst on the subject of domesticity, Matt and I are very relaxed about our toileting necessities. My main concern is, can anyone see? When the answer is no then I really don’t mind what needs to be done. Matt and I tease our family, who surely don’t really want to know but can’t help themselves ask anyway, “What do you do about the toilet?” Oh we say, “We do it together of course! It’s important to adhere to the five essentials in keeping the boat balanced at all times”! I think it’s better to just get on with it and leave any embarrassment at home. Although, I do get very cross with Matthew when he waves and cheerily shouts “morning”! to someone behind me! I always fall for that one. So when Matt proposes a remote, quiet anchorage I have to say at the back of my mind I’m a little relieved.

The following morning there was little wind and we ghosted south through narrow channels with me on the foredeck on rock watch. We slid silently past a small colony of seals. They look so disdainful when their tranquillity is disturbed.

Eventually the wind gave up altogether and I was forced to start the engine. I carry a Honda 2.3 and have always found it to be ample for my needs. It performed superbly on low revs, taking us south for about five miles on less than a tank full of petrol.
I had an idea for a lunch stop – on the south shore of the Isle of Danna that forms the end of Loch Sween the map showed a small sandy beach. It turned out to be an excellent choice as the boat gently dried out over low tide on clean sand. I got bitten by a small crab, obviously disgruntled by the invasion. The only other company there were a few sheep and we dozed in the sunshine having eaten well again. I really was enjoying myself.

I must give Matt a house point for our lunch stop on Danna Beach. It looked like a picture out of a Mediterranean holiday brochure. The white sandy beach with sparkling crystal waters was perfection. This was one of my favourite spots and I joined Matt in dozing in the sunshine laid out on the foredeck. It was a luxury not to be racing off and I do believe Matt was beginning to slow down and relax a little.

Having shown Octavia the delights of the uninhabited MacCormaig Islands on the way north, it was decided that a night camped there was on the cards. The forecast was for light south-easterly winds so the anchorage on Ilean Mor would be sheltered and we were likely to have the place to ourselves. On arriving there we tied up to the stone jetty and went off exploring and collecting driftwood. I had been told in the strongest of terms that here was to be the perfect evening and no evening was complete without a campfire. During our explorations of the island we found there was another visitor. Visions of the mysterious ‘Squashy Hat’ of Swallows and Amazons fame came to mind as he did seem to be exhibiting some odd behaviour. Detective Octavia (or nosy woman) was off and the mystery turned out to be something to do with the birdlife as the man was marking the eggs
of ground nesting sea birds. Octavia (nosy) managed to find one of the nests and get a picture, shown above. No gold prospecting then!

We explored the part ruined church, the Celtic Cross on the highest point and I climbed down into Cormaig’s cave where he spent much of his solitary confinement. I rather thought that our stay on the island was likely to be more convivial than his, which when you look at just what the weather can throw at you in Scotland, must have been more than miserable. Just goes to show what some people will do for a belief.

Anyway, our ‘perfect evening’ preparations continued with establishing a base, complete with kitchenette and sitting room. No effort was spared in creating the required ambience. The last of the wine box assisted!

I was so excited to be revisiting the MaCormaig islands once again. The promise of a camp fire, dry land and exploring was another highlight. Like children, alone on a deserted island we ran off and played hide and seek. We scouted around gathering firewood, we ventured down by the cliffs and scrambled over the rocks. Matt found some anchor rings and was hanging and swinging precariously trying to find the most dangerous crossing point. He’s so annoying! I was happy to find and picture some seagull eggs which I’ve never seen before and would show the children on my return. I was mindful that I was disturbing the gulls and made haste before my head was successfully dive bombed by the low flying birds screeching an almighty din!

Maybe this was my best spot. There’s something really special about the island. We had a banquet of food deliberately planned and saved for the occasion. At home I’d made a tart au
pomme (which keeps well) and I had gently warmed it on the fire so that the puff pastry base was hot and crunchy. We heated readymade custard and pudding was devoured in seconds. After dinner Matt and I talked about this and that and we both commented on how important it is to talk. We made many resolutions and expressed burning desires of things we’d like to do, together and apart. Serious chat over with I disappeared with giggles over the hill with Matt counting 1, 2 missed a few to a 100 chasing after me. On reflection I think we may have been a little tipsy, as shortly after I was rugby tackled and we both fell, rolling down the grassy bank into the chapel wall.

In all fairness it was a wonderful evening yet again. The perfect anchorage in the perfect conditions – the light south easterly meant the quay was a lee shore, but with a forecast of more light south easterlies to follow it was fine…..but perhaps I wasn’t quite happy… I know I am really fussy about wild Lone….. Anyway, bedtime saw us anchored off the quay safely away from the rocks. Four hours later in the pitch dark I awoke to the sound of wind and waves! Peering out of the back of the tent I could just make out the rocks, inches away from the transom as the boat slewed back and forth on the strong northerly! There followed half an hour of manoeuvring and resetting of the anchor with me on the foredeck shouting encouraging instructions to Octavia on the engine. More
lessons learned – one of which was make sure the centreboard is down when under power as I watched the boat slowly, ever so slowly, turning to avoid hitting a large rock.

Encouraging instructions they were not. I was woken abruptly to find that I had a job to do, one that involved getting out of my sleeping bag, starting the engine and steering clear of the impending danger of the rocks behind. Not dressed for the occasion and slightly unsure of my course of action I proceeded with caution. It was very difficult to hear the ‘encouraging instructions’ from the foredeck with the noise of the engine ringing in my ears. I’d pushed the tiller as far over as it would go and I couldn’t understand why we weren’t turning. A huge rock, not unlike a whale in appearance, appeared from nowhere to our starboard and seemed to be getting closer and closer. In the nick of time I remembered to push the centreboard down. With Matt leaning out hanging off the shroud we turned, just in time and dropped anchor shortly after. More lessons learnt and a bit of fun, just what we need in the small hours of the morning!

The last day of a trip is always sad. Our last day was to be brightened though by arranging to meet John Mellor in Loch Sween. There was a nice northerly blowing still in the morning and with plenty of time available, I decided on a bit of a tour of the MacCormacks. We zigzagged through the passages between the islands, some worryingly narrow, eyes glued to the surface of the sea for signs of undersea rocks, before heading off north to Sween. It was a sparkling day, just right for full sail as we beat into the entrance and saw a white sail in the distance. As it got nearer I was surprised to see two reefs in the main. Surely this was caution taken too far. There was of course a story – much stronger winds a few miles further north had caused a near capsize, hence the reefs.
Encouraged by the apparent wind I looked forward to our sail back down Loch Sween. It was a memorable sail as the conditions were perfect for hiking out and going fast. I love watching Matt with his long legs, toes curled under the toe straps leaning right out, obviously in his element. He sails effortlessly well. When he helms you know the boat is pointing and sailing to maximum efficiency. Still very much a novice, I sometimes rebel when I’m sailing, allowing my gaze to drift off the tell tales and onto the scenery. It’s not long before my lack of concentration is commented upon and I in turn remind him we are meant to be ‘cruising’.

It was with a great sense of excitement after so long spent alone to see what we thought was another Wayfarer in the distance. Meeting up with John and Sam was fortunate timing and to continue sailing with them such fun. We sailed to a beautiful remote spot and stopped off at Castle Sween, gosh the wind was picking up.

We landed together on a small pontoon off Castle Sween and explored in the sunshine before heading off again. Then there was one of those moments. I had changed one of the reef pennants whilst sat on the pontoon and on setting off, found the mainsheet was tangled in it,
meaning I couldn’t sheet out. A hasty heave to and a proper job followed!

It was with Matt’s quick thinking and light fingerwork that prevented our near capsize in Loch Sween. John and Sam must have wondered what an earth was going on. It’s an awful feeling not being able to sheet out when the wind takes. I just can’t believe how these things happen and the old saying of “If it can, it will” comes to mind. It was time to settle down and gather oneself again. We were invited to join John in one of his favourite lunch spots in the Fairy Isles. It couldn’t have been better really and as if by magic we were treated by an unusual sight.

Sam and John had seen an Osprey’s nest earlier in the week and wanted to show us. We beat past Tavyallich and were shown the nest high in a dead pine, but were then superbly lucky enough to see the bird itself circling overhead. Wow.

Octavia treated all to a hot lunch tied up to the rocks in the Fairy Isles. Life really couldn’t get any better. Well, perhaps that last mile back to Tavyallich – fast reaching, boat beautifully balanced and weather just perfect. The Scottish west coast in warm sunshine from inside a Wayfarer really is hard to beat.

I savoured every minute sailing back into Tavyallich harbour. With fickle winds it was difficult choosing the right course back in. I really love the planning side to sailing and with Matt’s help and guidance I know what to look out for. It’s wonderful putting my knowledge into practice and I can’t begin to express how well I want to sail. Compared to Matt’s 40 years of experience I remind myself that time on the water is what is important and will improve me. And with making silly mistakes
comes understanding. It’s hard for Matt to let me make mistakes but I’m glad he does. I’ll not make them again and one day I hope to make him proud.

A few thoughts on equipment and clothes.

I have been cruising Wayfarers ever since I was a boy and the improvement in gear and clothing since then has been huge. Modern cold weather gear is better and more comfortable to wear for long periods of time and other kit has seen similar improvements. There are a few particular bits and pieces that really have justified their purchase and I thought as a postscript I would add some thoughts on a few of mine.

I bought one of the last Helly Hanson zip crew neck base layer tops before they changed the design and it is brilliant. As soon as it is on it feels warm, it wicks sweat away efficiently and has nice features like a material flap to protect the top of the zip from rubbing skin.

Years of damp sleeping bags eventually left me to buy bivvy bags. Made from Goretx breathable material they stop the bags becoming salty and damp by being in contact with the boat. Also they allow evaporation and damp clothing can even feel drier by the morning. Night time comfort is worth much.

Our Trangia stove is light, packs away neatly and is an efficient cooker. It is easy to light and a bottle of meths lasts about a week.

Boil in the bag meals. We have graduated from those specifically marketed for camping to meals branded ‘Now look what we’ve found’. There is a fair range of gourmet quality main meals to be had including Herdwick Mutton Stew, Gloucester Old Spot Pork Meatballs and many more.

Storage is always a problem on a long cruise and I don’t like too much heavy gear in the aft tank. Some years ago though I bought a large waterproof bucket with a very wide opening that stores neatly under the foredeck by the mast. The weight is just where I want it and it is easily accessible.

All in all I think that between us we have really got things sorted and Wayfarer cruising has become nothing but a pleasure.

Mat and Octavia in Wild Lone.