

DOWNIZING

Goodbye to *Witchcraft*

After 34 years of first joint and then sole ownership of *Witchcraft of Howth*, my much-loved Contessa 35, it was time to move on. First of all, I was getting a little old and creaky to manage the substantial rig on my own. Secondly, the old boat was in serious need of a remake and deserved younger, fitter owners to give her the care she deserved. All this was made more urgent by two gales in succession. The first one collapsed the borrowed trailer she was sitting on in Copelands Marina in Donaghadee, causing the boat to fall over against her near neighbour, a Nicholson 31. There was little damage to the Nicholson but *Witchcraft* sustained a puncture wound in her bottom from a broken Acrow prop. After lifting her off the wrecked trailer and putting her on a cradle securely lashed down, two weeks later another named storm with sustained winds of over 60kt did exactly the same to the Nicholson, toppling her over against *Witchcraft*. I had already decided to downsize and at this point a couple from Galway, potential buyers, arrived to view the boat. Despite the hole, the sale went through. I had the damage professionally repaired and some months later the yacht and her new owners departed southwards, equipped with a lengthy list of what I considered to be essential work. Thus ended a long ownership, the first 16 years of which were in partnership with Winkie Nixon and Harry Whelehan and featured much competitive racing as well as varied cruises. Since 2006, I have been sole owner and cruising has been the main focus. Without going into detailed calculations, I think I must have covered over 25,000 miles in her. Parting with her after such a long time and so many shared experiences turned out to be quite emotional.



Witchcraft, Caravela

Compass Rose

My ideal downsizing boat would be a lifting keel or bilge craft for exploring places where I couldn't reasonably go in the Contessa 35. I liked the idea of gunkholing in drying harbours and creeks and I reckoned that long offshore passages were now for me in the past tense (probably). She also had to have good sailing qualities and she must not be ugly. I liked what I had seen and heard about the Sadler 26 and found one for sale in Poole. A quick sortie over there confirmed that she would do, so I bought her without wasting any time. I also recruited my nephew Keith Gadd as co-owner. We decided to name her *Compass Rose*. The previous owner had a young family and hadn't been able to do any serious cruising in her. She was very well equipped and in first-rate condition.



Portland Bill

Delivery from Poole

Keith and I flew over and picked her up the day she was launched, 25th April. A quick shopping expedition courtesy of Hilary Keatinge and her car and we were away by 15.30 in a light southerly. The little Beta 10 diesel helped us into Lulworth cove and we were anchored there by 21.00. It was as pretty a spot as I'd imagined, with only a slight swell getting in. Rounding Portland Bill the next morning, we had a moderate SE breeze and I followed the text-book, keeping the Bill close aboard to avoid the worst of the race. At this point, the first item on the snagging list made itself known. I was cooking a badly-timed fry-up for breakfast and ended up wearing it, as the cooker gimbals jammed, ejecting the breakfast smartly over my trousers. Turned out that the brand-new cooker had never been used at sea and the gimbals had too little clearance, causing the unit to jam at about 30 degrees. The tiller pilot mounting also failed and the fresh water pump wasn't working. The wind freshened to an ESE 4 to 5 and the little ship romped along. We rounded Start Point at 18.15 and made our way into Salcombe in a dying breeze, taking a visitor's mooring at 20.15. I thought the charge for this was very reasonable for the South coast of England at £10. The next day, Saturday 26th June, we motor-sailed to Plymouth, taking a berth at Queen Anne's Battery. We were met there by my old friend and RUYC member Pete Adams who, with his wife Gillie, made us very welcome and extended both hospitality and transport for us to fix the teething problems, all of which were satisfactorily sorted.



Compass Rose in Arklow

Keith had to return home for work reasons and my son James joined me on Monday 28th, arriving early afternoon. We set off without delay in a light to moderate easterly breeze and got into Fowey in the gloaming. I had hoped to make a cruise of this delivery trip, but the forecast was now for a couple of days of favourable weather followed by persistent fresh to strong northerly winds, so I decided to make the best of it and head directly for the Irish coast. It gradually freshened from the east and by 17.30 we had the Longships abeam and two reefs in the main. There was a bit of drama here, as we experienced some strong gusts off the land and were somewhat out of control, so I tried to part-roll the genoa. Unfortunately, the roller furler jammed and the sail flogged hard and threatened to pull the mast out of her. Entirely my fault, as I'd failed to notice that a spare halliard had got wound up in the sail. A few hectic minutes and it was brought to order. By 23.15 we had the Smalls abeam and took our departure for Arklow. The weather was fair but light all day on Wednesday 30th April. We carried our tide up the Irish Sea and only had to push a couple of hours of foul tide, arriving at Arklow at 03.15 on Thursday 1st May. Arklow marina was packed and we were lucky to find a rafted space where a finger was missing.

As predicted, the northerlies set in and I had to leave her in Arklow for the next week. Robin McKelvey joined me a week later and we left Arklow on Friday 9th May, calling overnight at Howth and with an entirely uneventful but almost windless passage home to Strangford Lough, arriving at our home port, Ballydorn, at 21.00 on Saturday 10th May. We were pleased with the little boat. She sails very well, so long as one doesn't try to do too much windward work and everything on her worked, an unusual state of affairs for me. She is of course quite small and the motion is very jerky compared to the Contessa, resulting in me taking flying lessons around the cabin on one occasion at sea. The heads is an open-plan layout, which can entail the non-user taking a short walk on deck from time to time.

SCOTLAND

The cruise plan was to head for Donegal. I had earmarked some places I'd always fancied visiting, where the little bilge-keeler would be ideal. I set out from Ballydorn on Thursday 19th June at 11.00, having arranged to meet my crew Robin McKelvey in Rathlin. There wasn't much wind and I had to motor-sail most of the day. For passage north from Strangford, the ideal plan is to leave on the late ebb. Because the tide changes in the lough two hours earlier than outside,

this means you only have to push four hours of foul tide until it changes, and it isn't very strong until you get up towards Skulmartin. You then have a fair tide through Donaghadee Sound, where it matters. This all worked well and I anchored in Ballyholme Bay at 19.45. An early start next day, still in light winds, got me to Glenarm by 10.45. Similar conditions next day saw me reaching Rathlin by 12.45. Robin arrived on the ferry on Sunday afternoon. Bad weather now set in and we had to stay in Rathlin through Monday. It got so jumpy alongside the pontoon that we took her into the inner harbour, an option which I now had with our draft of 4 feet. The rain beat down and the boats outside on the pontoons tossed about but we were as snug as bugs.



The next morning it was blowing fresh from the WNW and raining, so that was the end of Plan A. Plan B was to go to Scotland, so we left at 09.20 with

Basin at Rathlin

no main and half the genoa, heading for Islay. The rain stopped and the wind gradually eased, so we hoisted the mainsail and had a pleasant passage to Port Ellen. The following day was overcast with a light easterly breeze but the forecast put paid to my original idea of going north round Mull. Instead, we went through the Ardmore Islands and sailed the short distance to Craighouse on Jura. We blew up the dinghy and went ashore for a couple of pints in the hotel.

It was magic the next morning ghosting slowly up Loch Mile inside the Small Isles. Then when we rounded Eileann Bhride and sailed out into the Sound of Jura the wind piped up from south west and we had a boisterous sail up into Loch Craignish and took a marina berth in Ardfern in the early afternoon. It then blew hard and rained all day Friday and most of Saturday. We managed a damp walk but mostly wallowed in the fleshpots of the Galley of Lorne. This spell of weather and the forecast for the following week put paid to any idea of going farther north. We reviewed our options and decided that the Crinan Canal beckoned. Against the trend, Sunday 29th June was a glorious day and we sailed gently down Loch Craignish again, sighting a sea eagle overhead, wings like a feathered barn door. Our berth in the basin at Crinan was right alongside the coffee shop and pleasantly nigh to the excellent little bar in the hotel. Walking past the boatyard, we noticed the puffer *Auld Reekie* hauled out on the slip but with steam up, strangely. Going through the canal next day was made easier since my last transit by the students now employed in the summer to work the locks. We had intended to stop overnight at Cairnbaan but the pub is closed and it was raining, so we decided to go on to Lochgilphead. There is a pontoon above the town there and it is a half mile or so walk down to the centre. It didn't look its best, grey and gloomy in the driving rain, but we found a little Indian restaurant which was packed and very good and the curry-fuelled central heating worked a treat.



Auld Reekie on Crinan Slip



Crinan Basin

Emerging from the canal at Ardrishaig on Tuesday 1st July, my 83rd birthday, we were again faced with a forecast of contrary winds from Thursday. The only thing to do was to make another overnight passage of it, so we motored down Loch Fyne in a light northwesterly air, which freshened in Kilbrannan Sound to a very pleasant moderate favourable wind. This lasted all night and the tides were right as far as Burial Island. We anchored at 08.00 in Knockinelder Bay to wait for the tide in Strangford Narrows and were back on our mooring at Ballydoran by mid afternoon. While not the cruise as intended, it was enjoyable enough in spite of the weather. Total mileage for the delivery trip and cruise was about 725 miles.



Birthday gin, Kilbrannan Sound