

“Compete and Complete”

The Scottish Islands Peaks Race 2016 Log of Fearless Friend

The story of Fearless Friend in the Scottish Islands Peaks Race (SIPR) 2016 starts in late 2014 when Gordon Baird, Skipper of Obedient, suggested to Frances, a local runner, that she might want to enter the 2015 SIPR. He also suggested that she might be able to persuade Fearless Friend, a Feeling 1090 known to her crew as Fearless, to compete.

After a great deal of thought Fearless was in.

Tony, a window cleaner by trade, and a veteran of several ‘3 Peaks’ when he had crewed for Peter Foulds on ‘Clockwork’ came on board, despite his vow of the previous year that he was retiring from the SIPR.

The second recruit was Ben, an experienced sailor. Ben seldom speaks of his sailing pedigree other than to admit he is a veteran of several Transatlantic crossings and to sail trimming in the Commodores Cup. Ben was intended to be Fearless’ secret weapon!

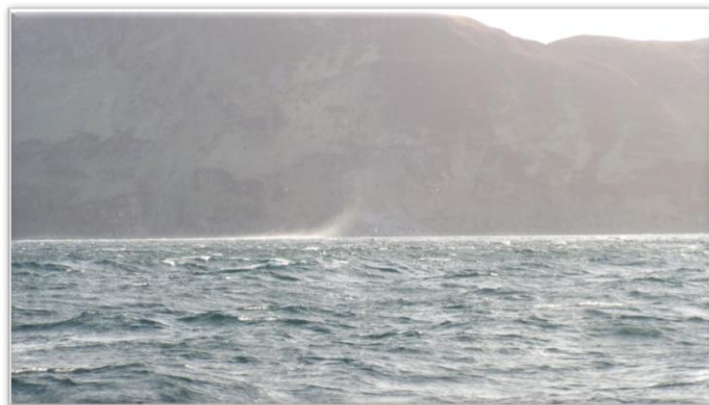
Frances’ running pal, Carrie, completed our Merry Band – once she had finished running in the Atlas Mountains!

May 2015

Monday 11 May, 2015

After months of preparing the yacht, and making sure everything was ready to go, bad weather dictated that Fearless transit the Crinan Canal rather than round the Mull of Kintyre.

Fearless left Stranraer with a strong Southwesterly driving her north towards Ardrishaig with the 70Nm taking a mere 10 hours.



Water spouts in the lee of Arran give a clue as to the sea state around the

Mull of Kintyre and into the Sound of Jura.

Tuesday 12 May 2016

Tony had never been along the 'most beautiful short-cut' and was looking forward to the stunning scenery.

However the rain gods had other ideas.



Tony enjoying the scenery on the Crinan Canal

We entered the canal first thing and made our way through, aiming to be in Crinan Basin before the last lock-in.

As Fearless passed the last bridge the keeper shouted to hurry up as it was getting late and the lock-keepers at Crinan were waiting.

Taking him at his word and, assuming the lock would be open, Fearless rounded the last bend into the top basin at a steady 4 knots expecting to coast into the open lock...to find it was still shut. A hard burst full astern and Fearless stopped short of the lock gates, only for the wind to take over and spin us, broadside, back towards the narrowing canal entrance.

There then followed a frantic session of toing and froing to turn back to the gates without hitting either the pristinely restored Nicolson 32 moored on the south bank or the gin palace, with the nice shiny rails, moored on the north bank.

After much sweating, swearing, spinning of the wheel and revving of the engine Fearless entered the lock. The last boat of the day to do so.

Wednesday 13 May 2015

A hearty breakfast, followed by a shower and Fearless was ready for the off.



Fearless Friend at Crinan Basin before disaster struck.

With Fearless ready to depart on the last leg to Oban; the crew and runners packing their bags ready to travel; and the start line just a few hours away, the engine starter button was pressed. A loud squealing noise came from the engine compartment. The 'STOP' was pulled straight away and the engine compartment opened. Clouds of oily smoke issued forth.

Hoping it was simply an exhaust problem, Tony pressed the starter again.

The dipstick immediately started bouncing up and down before shooting out of the engine block completely indicating either broken piston rings or a blown piston. Or both.

A Marine Engineer confirmed that Fearless Friend's 2015 SIPR was over before she had reached the start.

Despondent doesn't come close and the phone calls to cancel Frances, Ben and Carrie, and notify the Race Committee of our withdrawal were really hard to make.

The Bod who, on hearing our problems, asked the Skipper - 'Was it lack of preparation'?, doesn't know how close he came to finding out just how wet the water in the Crinan Basin is'.

Thursday 14th May

Fearless was towed from the Basin and set off to sail south, back to Stranraer without an engine, while the other competitors, that we had met in the Basin, commiserated before heading north to Oban and the start .

Friday 15th May 2015

Nearly twelve hours after she should have been starting the SIPR at Oban, Fearless arrived back in Stranraer Marina.

A comprehensive strip down and rebuild of the engine followed, revealing a large piece of impeller blade stuck in the inlet of the heat exchanger restricting the flow and probably causing the block to overheat and the piston rings/piston to break.

SIPR 2016

Wind the clock on six months and Fearless' attempt on the 2016 race began.

The first set back was Tony's plan to sail his own yacht which rendered him unavailable.

Ben's diary showed race weekend coincided with a compulsory residential University course.

With the campaign gathering a head of steam, breaking their resistance became a priority, when double disaster struck.

In late January Tony fell off his ladder breaking his back and, only a few days later, Ben was diagnosed with Pancreatic Cancer.

Only Divine Intervention would have allowed either to take part in the race.

When that wasn't forthcoming the hunt was on for crew.

Fraser had been a Cadet at Lochryan Sailing Club, demonstrating a natural ability as a sailor racing his Laser 400 before going to Edinburgh to study music and where he had little opportunity to go sailing. He was due to sit his Final exams the week before the SIPR.

With the impetuosity of youth, and without really pausing to consider what was involved, Fraser jumped at the chance to take part, and that left Fearless one crew short.....

Enter Julie, Sailing Permissions Officer, and wife of the Skipper, who, although she had heard the telling of the trials and tribulations of Fearless' 2015 non-race a thousand times or more, stepped into the void and became, without a shadow of doubt, the most valuable member of the crew:-

Mistress of the Galley, responsible for serving up a constant stream of hot drinks, tasty meals, snacks, biscuits, cans of juice and anything else to keep the energy levels up.

A well fed crew is a Happy Crew!!!!



Jules in her domain!

Her only condition for taking part was to transit the Crinan Canal on the way to Oban. A price willingly paid!!!!

Everything was checked and double checked and all manner of safety bits and other gadgetry were fitted in a determined effort to ensure nothing would go wrong this year.

The only thing not upgraded was the Skipper's brain!

Monday, 16th May 2016

Jules and the Skipper left Stranraer and motor sailed to Ardrishaig where Fearless spent the night in the Sea Lock.



Jules helming in the canal and getting a taste of wet weather to come

Tuesday 17th May 2016

Having successfully passed through the Canal with nothing more than a drip into the Master Cabin (from the binnacle pedestal reinstalled as part of the winter refit) which The Mistress of the Galley insisted was fixed before going any further, was remedied by the judicious application of a blob of mastic,

Wednesday 18th May 2016

Fearless arrived at Oban on the Wednesday and berthed at the Marina on Kerrera.

Thursday 19th May 2016

Visits to Oban's supermarkets ensured Fearless was well provisioned with fresh food and plenty of bottled water. Tank water isn't to be trusted, especially when all five on board need to keep fit, healthy and upset-tummy-free.

Frances joined Fearless that evening .

Friday 20th May 2016

9.30 Fraser and Carrie arriving from EdinburghNothing like cutting things fine and fraying the Skipper's nerves.....

Registration and Briefing went fine. Fraser and the Skipper got the ferry back to the Marina where, with a (premature) sense of 'We're here and going racing', the race number, 15, was applied to Fearless' hull.

Carrie and Frances remained at the Yacht Club ready for the start of the race.

11.30 came and, with all the gear stowed, Fraser stood by with the shore lines while Jules was ready with the engine seacock.

The key was turned, the starter button pressed andNOTHING!!!!!!

The starter button was pressed again..... STILL NOTHING.

Surely the nightmare of 2015 wasn't about to be repeated!

Diving into the engine compartment the Skipper located two blue wires, leading to the starter motor, looking at each other with no sign of any form of connector between their 'bullet' connections. Was this the problem?

Holding them together he called to Jules to press the button.

The engine roared into life and his eyes didn't light up. RESULT!

With the offending wires reconnected Fearless left the pontoon and made her way from the Marina to join the melee of 38 other competing yachts manoeuvring off the Yacht Club, arriving amongst them, and sundry moored boats, shortly after the road race started.

Moments later the temperature alarm sounded.

Remember that forgotten brain upgrade????

The Skipper hadn't opened the engine seacock.

With no engine, Let 'Fun and Games Part One' commence.

Navigating under sail power alone amongst the rest of the fleet and moored boats, all the while calling to any competitors within hailing distance that Fearless was without engine power, the Skipper came close to discovering the colour of Adrenalin!!! .

About 12.45, Fraser rowed the girls out from the shore and that was when 'Fun and Games Part Deux' started.

Whenever Fraser reached for the stern of Fearless the sails would fill and he was left behind to row frantically to catch up. After four or five attempts a near-exhausted Fraser and Fearless became one and our race was underway.

Leaving Oban Bay behind and with Fraser at the helm, the Skipper set about making sure the engine didn't suffer the fate of the previous year and changed the water pump impeller.

Even that wasn't without its moment. Every cut cable tie, jubilee clip or wire end that touched the Skipper's hands resulted in tiny cuts which bled like amputations, possibly due to new Blood Pressure pills. When two blood covered hands emerged into the cockpit there were collective gasps of horror from the ladies!

The sail to Salen was fairly straightforward until the engine was started. No water from the exhaust!

16.30 The dinghy was launched and despatched, Fearless staying under sail until Fraser returned and the anchor was dropped. Much valuable rest time was devoted to working out why the pump wasn't circulating water. The solution, without finding the cause, was to prime the pump through the raw water filter and start the engine before opening the seacock.

The crew eventually settled down for a hot meal and the long wait for the girls.

They had taken the Yellow Brick with them and watching their progress to the summit of Ben More was reassuring..... until 'Fearless Friend' stopped on the descent.

After what seemed a lifetime, Fraser went ashore to find out if there was any way to establish if the signal was genuine or the unit was faulty.

Not long after that the VHF crackled into life and he reported 'They're here'.

While waiting for Fraser to return with the girls Fearless Friend played the game of sailing round Salen Bay, in the dark, without hitting any of the other competing yachts, or the yacht lying at anchor without showing lights of any description.

23.55 hrs Everybody back on board and Fearless set off back down the Sound of Mull.

Saturday 24th May 2016

Daylight came in rain that had been torrential since 0115hrs.

It was still pouring down when Fearless met the tide short of Duart Point, the battle lasting for some 3 hours before making onward progress.

Tidal gate No 1 missed!

6am Skipper soaked to the skin, everybody tired, and Fearless was less than 4, yes FOUR, miles from the mouth of Oban Bay. The temptation to jack it was strong but the mantra '**Compete and Complete**' surfaced and Fearless pressed on.

Early afternoon and Fearless was becalmed, along with two other yachts just off Insh Island, and remained so for hours.

The answer to the question 'Why didn't you row to the wind'? was "What wind"? The sea was glassy as far as the eye could see.

The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner came to mind. The only thing missing was a dead albatross!

There was an upside however. The crew of Fearless were able to indulge in slabs of Frances' outstanding home-made fruit loaf; the Skipper's slab covered in thick butter and strawberry jam!

With the tidal gate at the Sound of Luing getting closer to slamming shut, a breeze filled in and Fearless crept slowly through getting to the Dorus Mor before she tacked three times towards Jura and back to the Dorus Mor.

The tide had turned and she was going nowhere.

Tidal Gate No 2 missed!

A change of tactics was needed. A series of rapid short tacks through the dead water next to the island in the middle of the Sound might just see us through the tide.

Just short of the island Fearless turned to starboard for less than 100m and was about to tack to port when a glance behind found another yacht a boat length astern off the port quarter. Both were heeled to port and he probably wasn't aware of Fearless and certainly not of the intended change of tack.

Fearless feathered in the tide and the other yacht went past before Fearless changed tack to port passing his stern as soon as it was clear. Several short tacks later and Fearless was south of the island with its white tower mark, and in manageable tide.

Meanwhile the other yacht, having continued on his Jura-bound course, had caught the full tide run and was hurtling, broadside, back towards the Sound of Luing.

About 9.30 pm Fearless entered Craighouse Bay where she was captured on camera by the crew of a cruising yacht, ghosting into the bay with very little breeze filling her sails..



Fearless ghosting into Craighouse Bay

The girls set off for their second night run, up and down the Paps, telling us not to expect them back before 7.30.

Sunday 25th May 2016

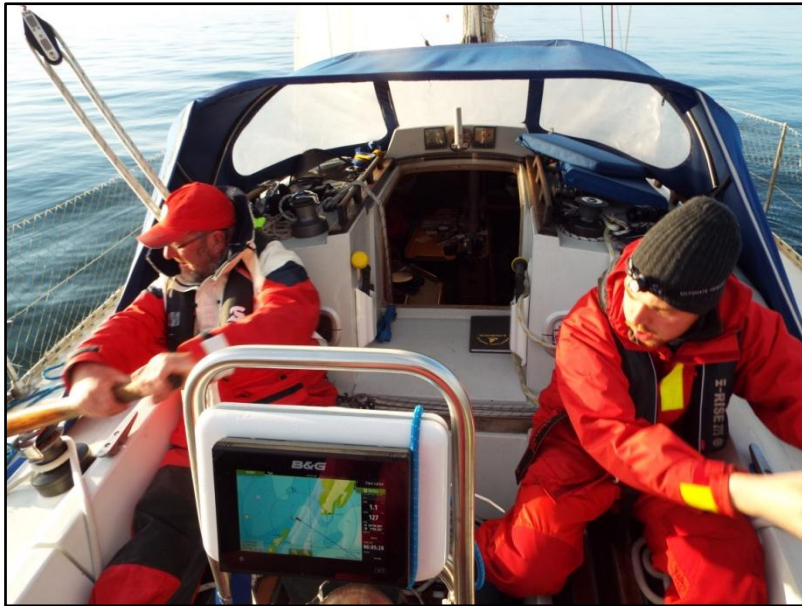
The alarm went off at 7 and, armed with a mug of fresh coffee, the Skipper went on deck at 7.15 to hear screams of 'TREVVORRR – WEEEE AAAARE HEEEEERR'.



A windless Craighouse Bay at sunrise

Fraser was despatched PDQ (and before he'd even had chance to smell the coffee, never mind drink it). While he was getting the girls it didn't take Einstein to work out the rowlocks had to come out of the locker!

By 7.45 Fearless was leaving Craighouse, under two manpower, towards ripples on the Sound of Jura that showed there was a very light breeze blowing offshore.



Leaving Craighouse

After the girls running the Paps in the dark and the boys rowing Fearless out of Craighouse, Carrie uttered the "Quote of the Race":-

"Not normal. Totally bonkers"

Yet again the wind dropped to almost nothing on the way to the Mull of Kintyre and with the tide on the nose, the crew had to work hard to make any way at all.

Tidal Gate No 3 missed!



Looking back at Jura and wondering where the wind was

12 hours later Fearless took the inner channel round the Mull of Kintyre, just ahead of Celima, flying its cruising chute. Fearless stuck with the Genoa and unreefed main.

With the wind freshening the race was on across Kilbrannan Sound, neck and neck, and with Celima framed under a sky filled with fire, until they had to drop the chute and Fearless edged in front.



Celima in Kilbrannan Sound

Great progress was made until Pladda and the wind died again before picking up, driving Fearless towards the entrance at what, in the pitch dark night, seemed like a furiously more than sensible rate of knots.

No sooner had Fearless entered the Bay at midnight than the wind died yet again. To further slow Fearless' progress, finding the 'flashing yellow lights' at the landing point proved impossible until contact was made with the shore marshall.

Fraser put the girls ashore at 01.45, once the lights had been located, for their third, and last, night run.

Monday 26th May 2016

7.15 – Having witnessed a magnificent sunrise from the top of Goat Fell, the girls were back on board but they forgot to bring the wind with them. Fraser and the Skipper found themselves rowing out of Lamlash Bay, seeking the 'wind'. Once clear of Holy Island there was just enough breeze to fill the cruising chute and Fearless drifted towards the finish at Troon.



Frances and Carrie relax, their race run!

With about a mile to go the wind decided to fill in while Fraser was below leaving the crew a bit shorthanded to get the Chute down. Just another stressful minute or two to deal with!

Fraser emerged onto the deck in time to hoist the genoa. Fearless picked up her skirts and sailed full tilt towards the outer entrance to Troon Harbour, which didn't seem to be wide enough, causing a few anxious, panicky, glances among the crew.

Once inside the moles Fraser and the girls clambered into the dinghy for the last time, only for the painter to jam on the cleat. They were being towed along at better than 4 knots until the problem was sorted out with a sharp knife while the only thought going through the Skipper's head was 'PLEASE GOD', don't let the bow eye rip out of the dinghy. PLEASE!!!!'.



Last drop - eventually!

Once they were cut loose Jules hauled the sails down for the last time and Fearless was secured in the allotted berth.

Seventy two and a half hours after leaving Oban we had **Competed and Completed** the 2016 Scottish Islands Peaks Race.



‘Competed and Completed’

Trevor the Skipper, Frances, Head cook and bottle washer Julie, Carrie and Fraser

And what of Tony and Ben?

Tony continues to make progress but has definitely retired from Scottish Islands Peaks Race.

Ben has undergone major surgery and chemotherapy and is making such good progress he has been making noises about the 2017 Race although he might just have to fight for his place in the crew!!!!

Fearless Friend will be back in 2017 with a new mantra

‘Compete and Complete...But Faster’!