

The 2008 Scottish Islands Peaks Race

In complete contrast to last year, the weather was good for the race, the worst hazard being exposure in the early hours of Sunday morning. (But last year was exceptional with 50 knots of wind battering the fleet). On Scrabble, we got a bad twist in our asymmetric at the start and as a result left Oban as a back marker but we then had the pleasure of pulling back several places as we beat our way up the Sound of Mull in the light winds.



But it is not the good sailing which is newsworthy but the incidents; our first one was around midnight off Craignure: We only just crept past Glas Eileanan as the wind was dying and so altered course for the shallower water inshore so we could anchor as the tide was already turning against us. It was none too soon as we had to row the last half mile into Craignure bay where we dropped the hook and turned in. An hour or two later, there was the sound of a gentle wind in the rigging and we decided to carry on.

Easier said than done; the anchor was fouled on some very heavy obstruction and no amount of effort would free it. We tried lowering the kedge anchor to take the weight whilst we recovered the main anchor but it simply wrapped itself round the bar taut anchor chain. We were considering buoying the anchor when a cunning plan presented itself: We dropped back 20m and then motored in a wide circle round the anchor (engines are permitted in these circumstances if reported). As we drew level, the pull of the chain dragged the bow round and the engine was then put astern to bring the boat stern on to the wind. Then, by motoring astern, the anchor was turned until it was facing away from the obstruction. We could then winch it up easily (to our relieved surprise).

At Craighouse, there have been a lot more boulders lying about the seabed than we had ever realised but the Jura Development Trust has now charted them accurately and they were part way through moving them. Other improvements are in progress and there will shortly be more moorings and a convenient landing stage at the pier for visiting craft.

Our runners tackled the Paps of Jura in good conditions apart from some mist as this shot of Hillary Holding shows:



And our next excitement was at the Mull of Kintyre where the top swivel on the roller reefing gave up the ghost and so the jib had to be taken down, not so easy in the overfalls and gathering darkness. We then had to sail in choppy seas with no jib; not so bad across the waves but terribly slow bucking into them. However we made it to Lamlash where, after cross tacking with three other boats in the fluky lee of Holy Island we arrived at 5am to grab a few hours sleep while the weary runners tackled Goat Fell.

As we left Lamlash for Troon and crept a comfortable distance ahead of Hot `n` Tot, the leading class 3 boat, we began to relax and even regret that all the excitement was almost over until next year. But we spoke too soon; we had not been looking back (for fear of being turned into a pillar of salt), but when we did, there was Hot `n` Tot and a couple of other boats surging along under spinnakers with a new wind filling in behind. PANIC! We jumped to the oars again (rather precariously suspended over the water) whilst the crew dropped the asymmetric and hoisted the jib (free of its foil) to act as a flat kite as the very slight wind moved ahead.



As a result, we just managed to hold off this late challenge successfully and arrived Sunday afternoon just over two days after the start but with another store of memories to last until next year.

Curly Mills