



The Old Goats of Capricorn 2019



As Xmas approaches and the elation of actually completing the Scottish Islands Peaks Race at the seventh attempt begins to subside, it's time to recount our tale.....

If I go back to nearly this time last year, the decision to give it one more go, was made – late at night whilst warming cockles gently by the fire and sipping (gulping) Gordon's gin, if I remember.

SIPR 2018 runners, Vicky and Phil, after consideration, politely declined joining us again this year. OK, that's not strictly true, in fact I failed to even contact them as I seem to have been blocked on social media and their numbers have become ex-directory? I would have gone round to see them, but the court order prevents me.

So, thanks to an advert on the SIPR matchmaking website, using my creative writing skills honed on dating web sites, we secured Chris and Hannah – a youthful, skinny couple who live an outdoorsy thrill-seeking lifestyle – to join our middle aged, beer swilling sailing crew.

Gluttons for punishment, Spartacus (Phil) and Cousin Ian signed on once again to join me on the good ship Capricorn for another adventure around the rock strewn shores of the West coast.



As usual, we prepared on the Thursday evening by checking kit and stocking up with supplies (beer, gin and fags). Then a pre-race night cap that meant popping out to restock supplies on the Friday morning.

Race day started as many others had previously, slightly hungover and a full breakfast at Wetherspoons – nothing like a bit of heartburn to add to the nerves.

The Oban race went reasonably well, we picked up our runners and got out of the bay without killing anybody – a good start. Light variable winds were frustrating, but thanks to our spinnaker, we got to Salen before dark and not quite in last place – hurray 😊.

Runners away thanks to this years secret weapon and a bit of chilling by the crew.



Rather disappointingly for us, Chris and Hannah were back on board in a fraction over 5 hours, having made up 9 places on the hill – end of chilling!

Now, I've done this more than once and normally retrieval of runners after Ben More involves a bit of CPR, oxygen and massaging of thighs – was looking forward to that this year – but these two came back like they'd just popped to the shops! Hannah described catching other competitors ahead and exchanging pleasantries before skipping off to catch up the next pair for a chat?

Darkness was falling as we lifted anchor to head South.

Unusual for us was the number of other boats around so I posted Spartacus below the genoa as lookout – again I blame myself for not making clear that he was to look out for any potential obstructions as well as other boats. A close call with Eilean Glasa (Green Island) meant clean pants all round.

13 hours later having made the tidal gate at Luing and after enjoying more spinnaker work – that's right, my first SIPR the wind wasn't always on the nose – we arrived at Craighouse only one position worse than when we left Salen – result!

Significantly less than 5 hours later, we were off again, our gazelle like pair having popped up the 3 Paps and back – probably stopped at each top to do a few dozen press ups to make it more of a challenge.



On the long sail down to the Mull of Kintyre (spinnaker again), regret that I had not taken full advantage of the sleeping opportunity, partaking in a beer or two instead, was sinking the mood. To be fair, I'd never got this far before so had no experience to call on.

Darkness put in an appearance shortly before the Mull and so spinnaker away. The evidence that we had missed the tide was borne out by the chartplotter showing that not only were we heading South at 5 knots, but also heading West at the same rate – carry on like that and we would be mid Atlantic within hours.

Nothing for it but to fight our way back to the lighthouse and wait on the tide turning.

The pilot book tells us there is an ebb starts close to the shore one hour before the main tide turns, so after a couple of attempts, we rounded, watching the cliff face a few yards off by torchlight – more clean pants.

The sun came up and we had a glorious spinnaker run to the South of Arran, chased by a pack of other yachts.

South of Lamlash bay, the wind dropped. Ahead we could see some other boats drifting helplessly, going nowhere. Our moment to strike had come!

There was wind out to the East of Holy Island – it would be a lot further than heading straight to Lamlash, but a piece of strategic genius to overtake those becalmed.

In true Bligh style, I ignored the crew and headed East.

Unsurprisingly in retrospect, the wind soon disappeared in the East and when it filled in again from the West, not only had we lost out to those in front, but also to the pack of 6 behind – feck!

Still, we were in Lamlash on Sunday afternoon – still in the race and not last – time for a beer methinks.

Our springy Tiggers, bounced off in the late afternoon for the run from Lamlash, through Brodick and up Goat Fell, returning far too quickly.

That final leg the wind blew – yup, spinnaker again! We crossed to Troon in under 3 1/2 hours meaning a delighted crew finishing on Sunday evening at 22:35 in 33rd place – it's amazing what a target of getting in before the bar shuts can do 😊



Before signing off, Cousin Ian has asked if there might be a rule change preventing more than one member of any one family in a team?

