

A Circumnavigation of Skye

June 2017

John Taylor

RABC

Introduction

For my birthday this year my ever thoughtful wife bought me a sailing trip billed as a Hebridean Adventure. It was hosted by Melvyn Wallhead of Northumbria Sailing, who provides all my formal sailing education. It was to be on an elegant, 43 foot, Sun Odyssey deck saloon yacht.



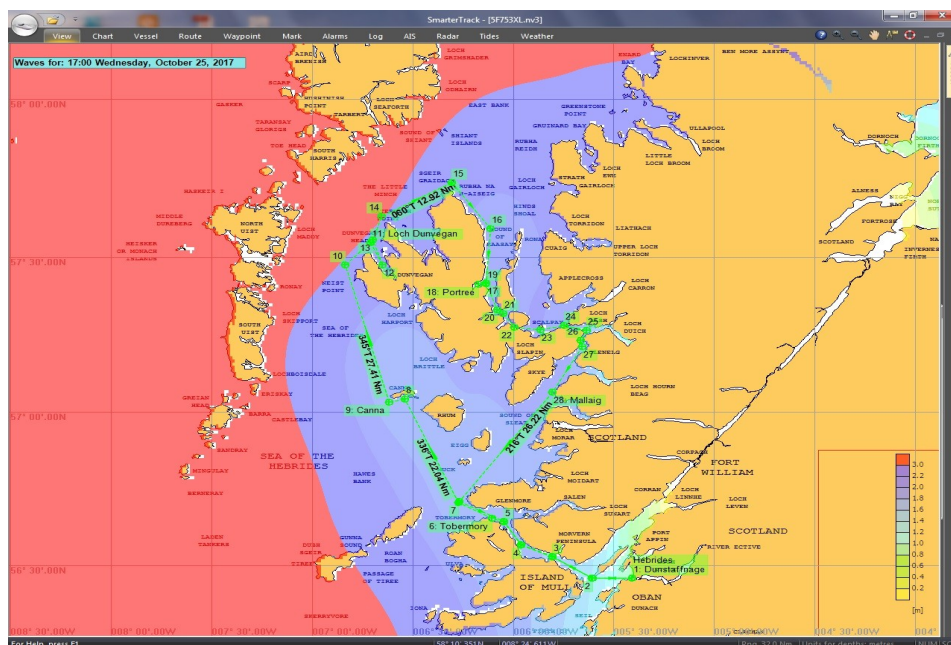
The aim was for up to 6 of us to tour the Hebrides, with Mull as a fall back, and an option of St Kilda.

Day -15. Planning

Melvyn met the crew - Tom, Oran, Bren, Mike and me - at The Tyne Bar in Newcastle's Ouseburn to plan the trip. St Kilda was thought to be a passage too far and a circumnavigation of Skye was suggested as an option and that won the vote.

Day -14 to Day -7. Preparation

Mike took on the task of planning provisions for 5 out of 7 evening meals on board. I prepared an outline passage plan in Digital Yacht's SmarterTrack. You will get some feel of the seas in the Hebrides from this snapshot showing predicted wave heights.



Day -6. Problems

Our charter company in Oban informed us that previous charterers of our boat had seriously damaged the keel, without reporting the fact. The boat was leaking and in need of major repairs .



We were offered a cancellation or a replacement - a Westerly Oceanlord 41 called Ocean Lord. This was a somewhat smaller but very solid blue water cruiser so we all agreed to that. The skipper concluded that with less space aboard we should eat ashore more often and that Skye would be as far as we should go. Mike's clever spreadsheet for catering was quickly adjusted for the amended meal numbers.

Sat 17/6. Arrival, Oban.

We all took the train to Oban, some from Newcastle, with Bren and I joining at Alnmouth. We left in glorious sunshine and 27 degrees in new money. The train overshot the platform at Berwick upon Tweed and so with the delay we missed our connections at Edinburgh and Glasgow. The usually beautiful trip up the famous West Highland Line to Oban was disappointing due to overcast weather - a theme that was to last throughout the week as England sweltered in a heatwave. When we finally got to Oban we found a peculiarly Scottish form of soft rain which doesn't feel or sound heavy but can soak you in a minute as we bought provisions and prepared the boat.

Ocean Lord was smaller than the original booking and was in need of refurbishment. How it was ever expected to serve 10 crew without a cockpit table I will never understand. My allocated berth was the top of a pair of double bunks in a passageway but I was able to move to a saloon berth. We had an onboard briefing about the boat and the unusual navigation rules in Dunstaffnage Bay which combines a marina, a ferry landing and a seaplane landing strip with its own consequent additions to the Col Regs.



Oran, whose family business makes the best pizzas in South Shields, brought along some additional supplies including a full set of Marks & Spencer cooking sauces. He had also devised and printed a menu card specially for the trip.



We ate in the Wide Mouthed Frog pub at the marina that evening where they serve a nice pint of Fyne Ales Jarl - a light session beer from Argyll.

Sun 18/6. Oban to Tobermory.

We hoisted the Northumbrian flag and motored up the Sound of Mull to Tobermory, the capital of Mull and the filming location for children's TV programme Balamory, with pretty coloured terraces, just like Alnmouth.



I was asked to helm us in. The plan was to hand over to the skipper to berth us but at the last minute I was asked to take her onto the pontoon. There was little wind and I took her in nice and slowly and got as close as I could to let Tom, the 1st Mate, step ashore with a warp. Unfortunately I took her a little too close, a fender popped up and hit a service point on the water's edge dislodging a water tap and upsetting the chap in pink trousers who was filling up at the time.



The resulting fountain meant that water pressure was dropping all over the marina. As the harbour master from the Tobermory Harbour Association disappeared to shut off the supply I deployed a wooden bung normally used to fix boat leaks. I tapped it into the remains of the fitting to block the outflow and hence service was restored to the rest of the marina.



We took a walk around the town and I made the mistake of pressing on too briskly to the top of the hill so my right knee was suffering. I got some cash at the ATM to cover my commitments to the kitty, forgetting that they would be Scottish notes which don't even carry a picture of the Queen and hence are dubious tender in my book.

Oran and I visited the Tobermory Distillery in the harbour where they make two whiskies - the unpeated Tobermory and the heavily peated Ledaig which means 'safe haven' in Gaelic – the name given to the local harbour. The Tobermory 10 year old is described as having an initial power and pungency that softens into a slightly salty, mildly spicy whisky with just a hint of smokiness. Ledaig (pronounced Led-chig or Let-chick) is well peated for a very smoky finish. I was surprised to discover that the process, the kilns and the bourbon barrels are identical for both - only the smoking of the peat makes these two whiskies totally different. Incidentally, the Tobermory 10 year is what is known as a 'good swimmer' - a whisky that is improved by the addition of water, should you require it.



We then joined the others for a pint of the Isle of Mull Brewing Company's Galleon Gold in the brewery's visitor centre - MacGochans Bar next to the distillery. That evening we had a lovely meal ashore at the Mishnish Hotel overlooking the harbour. A delightful young waitress brought the wine to the table but explained that she couldn't pour it for us as she was only 16 years old. We managed to cope with that on our own before heading back to the pontoon. All in all, a very conveniently arranged harbour.

Mon 19/6. Tobermory to Canna.

In the morning, having checked that the dislodged tap could readily be replaced by marina staff we motored out to anchor for a bite of lunch in a quiet harbour at Port Mor on Muck which we had entirely to ourselves.

Then on to Canna where anchoring proved to be a problem as the CQR anchor didn't bite in the kelp-covered bottom. It bit at the second attempt so we dug it in and settled down to our Beef Stroganoff in the cockpit under a setting sun. The peace was soon disturbed by a yacht that was piped in by bagpipes. Stirring stuff and all that and just what you need when going into battle but I have to say that the Northumbrian pipes are more mellifluous. I made a note to bring a CD of our pipes next time.



Our yachting language lessons started in earnest. The rotas were called watches, the beds were called berths or bunks, the toilets were the heads, the kitchen was the galley and the corridor was a passageway. We were to be keel hauled if the wrong terms were used.

The skipper was still concerned that our anchor might drag and that the boat to windward might do the same. He determined that we should have an anchor watch of 2 hrs each throughout the night. His theory was that we would sleep more soundly between watches if we knew it was safe. I subsequently managed to get the chart plotter's anchor alarm to work and I think he became a little less concerned. Then he made one of those leaps of intuition that I am sure will be of benefit to sailors for decades to come. He invented the Old Man's Anchor Watch. His analysis was that we had enough men of a certain age on board that about every hour through the night at least one of us would be visiting the heads. If, while we were out of our berth, we took the trouble to take a look out and check our position then the watch rota was satisfied without unnecessary loss of sleep. I am sure that this invention will be widely welcomed the world over.

Tue 20/6. Canna to Dunvegan.

Today I was paired with Oran for our first turn on catering watch. Naturally, Oran started to take something of a lead with the catering, so I could put my feet up. His style may have been a bit Mediterranean for some tastes but the plates were always cleared.

It was a glorious afternoon as we sailed up Loch Dunvegan past Dunvegan Castle, home to Clan MacLeod. There was a fine view of the Cuillins at the head of the loch.



The moorings at Dunvegan were of the 'Alnmouth Style' with a pick-up buoy which made the task a bit easier in the stiff breeze up the loch. I took the crew ashore with a couple of runs in the tender. We visited the hotel where the overstressed manageress was unable to accommodate our requests for meals and showers. So, we sat outside and had a bottle or two of Skye Gold beer from The Isle Of Skye Brewing Co Ltd, Skye's only brewery. It was to be our sunniest evening but this was a Scottish summer and so the midges started to bite. Oran gets badly affected and so he bought a head net (worn only after drinking).



We met a single handed sailor in a very nicely presented Vancouver 28. He said that the weather had been so bad for the last two weeks that he was about to pack it in but that the evening's sunshine had restored his faith. We replenished our stores at the local shop, gave Oran a dose of antihistamine and ate a fine chicken curry aboard.

Wed 21/6. Dunvegan to Portree.

The next morning we motored out of the loch and headed for Vaternish Point where we were fascinated to be (very slowly) overtaken by a submarine - a hunter/killer type, my mate Bren assures me, but it doesn't match online pictures of our Astute class to me. Oran regaled us with tales of his time as a submarine commander in the Iranian navy.



We also spotted a large cetacean which apparently was a pilot whale. Off to port we could see the Outer Hebrides - surprisingly low lying compared to Skye.



As we rounded Rubha Hunish on Trotternish, the most northerly point on Skye, and approached Staffin Island, we were suddenly surrounded by porpoises and myriad sea birds. There were also some parallel streaks on the water, no doubt the wake of earlier boats, and I managed to convince at least one of the crew that this was a Traffic Separation Scheme marked on the surface.

We finally made Portree, capital of Skye - more pretty coloured terraces. I wonder when that tradition started. Perhaps it appears where render is used. The bay was too rough to go ashore so we stayed on our mooring and ate M&S Linguine Carbonara. Now I know from my role as galley kitchen slave on an earlier Greek odyssey that this can be made from fresh ingredients in a single pan and hence is ideal for sailing cuisine so I have to question the ship's cook on the need for a bought sauce but it certainly tasted well enough, as does most food on board a boat, hunger being the best sauce and all that.

We were employing a variety of navigation aids including paper chart, traditional onboard chart plotter, Tom's XC weather app. My Digital Yacht SmarterTrack with Navionics charts and Theyr weather GRIB files plus Bren's Google Maps app. However, the star of the show was Melvyn's Samsung tablet with high resolution display, Navionics charts and chart plotter app from (I think) Navionics. It was a great success in the shallows as we could see it clearly at the helm, even if the tablet's own sat nav did not seem to be quite as accurate as might be required in close quarters.

The plan had been to head via the Skye Bridge and the Kyle of Lochalsh for a night in Mallaig and then have a longish run back to Oban on the last day. However, we were concerned about heavy weather approaching from the west. The skipper wanted us to get around Ardnamurchan Point before it closed in. The problem was that Kyle Rhea constituted a 'tidal gate' with a narrow window twice a day to get through. If not then we might face an 8 kn tide against us in a 7 kn boat. Kyle Rhea is the only area in Reed's Almanac tidal stream maps for NW Scotland that has its own inset map so we knew we had to take it seriously. The skipper did his calculations (which we were asked to check) before announcing that we were to have an early start.

Thu 22/6. Portree to Tobermory.

We got up at 02:00 in pitch dark on the summer solstice and as we left the harbour and turned into the Sound of Raasay in the first light of dawn we could just make out a pair of dolphins 5 yards alongside escorting us out. We got to the Skye Bridge for 06:00.



We hit the overfalls at Kyle Rhea at their gentlest time of the day with the skipper on the helm so all went well despite an SOG of 10.8kn.

For much of the way we were motor sailing with the main up – the skipper maintaining that it added stability and visibility. With a bit of a chop we were inclined to agree.

I was on catering watch so I served hot Aberdeen Butteries, a sort of heavy duty Scottish croissant with extra butter and less mess - ideal for passing up to the cockpit on a cool morning. Lunch was a pasta bake, using some of yesterday's leftover food..

We discussed the best cars made in each country, inspired by Oran's experiences as a vintage car collector but we soon ran out of countries that can make decent cars so Oran told us tales of his time in Iranian Army Intelligence.

We made good time to Mallaig and some of the crew were rather taken by my description of the Knoydart peninsular just opposite which has the most remote pub in mainland Britain (with real ale, live music and a Belgian chef!) but the forecast wasn't looking good and so we didn't call. As it turned out, we rounded Ardnamurchan Point in brisk but fine weather and we had a good view of one of the best Stevenson lighthouses, the only UK lighthouse built in the Egyptian style.



We headed straight for Tobermory where another boat decided to race us to the pontoon but we exerted our ColRegs rights and tied up.

We were all relieved to have access to proper showers and facilities. I checked that the harbour master was happy that the 'tap incident' had been resolved (at a cost to me of only £15, to my pleasant surprise). I met a man with a yacht, an Avon RIB and a pair of very well behaved Salukis (Persian Greyhounds). He explained that he needed a dinghy that could get them ashore in all weathers and then I came to understand the difficulties of combining the toilet arrangements of large dogs with overnight stays on boats. I forgot to tell him that Oran probably bred Salukis in his youth in Persia.

We went ashore for another pint of Galleon Gold and found the place heaving with lots of strangely dressed Americans in kilts. It seems that a MacLean clan gathering was in progress in the town. We ate ashore (Mishnish again) and had an early night to catch up on our beauty sleep.

Fri 23/6. Tobermory to Oban.

We departed Tobermory in the morning, heading back down the Sound of Mull for Oban with me back on the helm. We were happy to be sailing rather than motoring but a couple of vicious katabatic gusts off the hills caused us to round up despite 'opposite lock' on the wheel and so we took in a reef in the main.

We saw the Clan Maclean gathering's marquee at Duart Castle - a very impressive location.



As we approached Eilean Musdile we hit more overfalls with me still on the helm. We made slow progress and I felt a sensation similar to driving a car on sheet ice. The helm responded, but very slowly, and gentle actions always worked the best.

We finally made Dunstaffnage and moored just along from the £5m Nautor Swan's Song of the Sea (does that make it a swansong?).



We spent the afternoon cleaning our boat and packing and then ate in the Wide Mouthed Frog again - lovely scallops, bacon and black pudding washed down with more Jarl. We all agreed that Ocean Lord had been the best boat for the weather in the circumstances.

Sat 24/6. Heading Home.

After a week of sleep deprivation some of the crew decided to get up early for the 05:21 train to Glasgow. The more civilised amongst us went for the 08:57. Armed with newspapers, bacon butties and the first decent coffee of the week we settled in for the 6 hour trip back. Bren got his revenge (for what I can no longer remember) by paying me for his train ticket in Scottish notes. We arrived back in Alnmouth to warm sunshine which they apparently had had all week. It felt as if we had been living on another planet and so to reacclimatise myself and to ease my aches and pains I had to retire to The Red Lion. Now I just need to wait for my knee operation (for a torn cartilage) before I can go sailing again.

- 2nd -

Date <u>18th June 2017</u>		Log of Yacht <u>Oceanvolt</u>3		Days run <u>104</u> nautical miles	
Port of <u>Tokelau</u>		Part of		Time underway hours mins	
HW <u>1047</u>	HW	HW	HW	Average speed knots	
LW	LW	LW	LW		
Variation <u>23°</u>		Time zone GMT <u>+1</u>			

Time	Course	Dev	Error	True course	Log	Dist	Power	Wind Dir	Force	Leeway	Baro	Sea state	Cloud	Weather/visibility
0945					P24						1026			
1025	320	-	3°	317	32	M/S	✓	1			6 S	8	Mud	
1200	310	-	3°	317	36	M/S N	1-				1026 S	8	Mud	
1300	292	-	3°	289	43	M SW		3			1026 S	8	Gund	
1400	315	-	3°	318	50	M SW	26				1027 S	8	Gund	
1455				52										
1100											1025			
1200	285		1°	282	59	M W		3			1027 S	6	Gund	
1300	010		3°	090	65	M NW		3			1024 S	5	Gund	
1310						S								
1355														
1425														
1505	320			317	72	M/S NW	1				1028 S	8	Foul	
1600	322			319	78	M/S NW	3				1026 S	4	Foul	
1700	001			358	85	M/S NW	3				1026 S	5	Gund	
1805					90	M/S NW	3				1025 S	5	Gund	
0920											1028			
1000	332	-	5'	329	94	M/S NW	1				1028 S	8	Cool	
1100	340	-	3	337	100	M NW	1				1029 Gdn	8	Cool	
1200	340	3	337	107	7 M	NW	1				1027 Gdn	8	Gund	
1315	320	3	323	116	9 M/S	NW	1				1027 Gdn	7	Good	
1400	157	3	160	162	5 M/S	NW	3				1027 Gdn	6	Fair	
1515					160									

From/At <u>Dunstaffnage</u>	Towards <u>Koch Dunstaffnage Skye</u>
Noon position:	<u>In Tokelau Channel</u>
Latitude	Longitude
Crew <u>T.M., M.L., C.R., J.C., S.P.</u>	

Sailing	Hours underway
Motor sailing	
Motoring	
Engine hours	<u>16 1/2</u>
Fuel consumption	

NOTES AND REMARKS

Left Dunstaffnage
 56° 27' 6N 005° 32' 4W
 56° 31' N 005° 45' 7W
 56° 32' N 005° 54' 0W.
 Entering Tokelau Bay 054° 35' 005° 59' 4W
 Arrived Tokelau Bay struck water top on buoy mark 1 (28 miles)
 Left bay
 N 55° 40' N 005° 12' 2 W
 N 56° 45' 2 005° 12' 3 W
 Engine Off
 At anchor Port Mor. Muck.- sandy Sb + 9Bn 6' 13' off W
 Departed Muck.
 57° 01' N 6° 27.8' W
 57° 03' 22N Anchored in 5m of water using 70m chain
 006° 28' 7 W
 45m
 Leaving Canal hiked around
 57° 12' 3N 006° 39' 3W
 59° 20' 3N 006° 50' 4W 1200UTC via E 3/4 SE 5/6 later
 57° 27' 5N 006° 47' 3W 1246 SLSE 4/5 W/SW 3/4 bolt
 57° 30' 1N 006° 41' 8W 1256 Thunder
 Arrive Duwanan 005° 32' 4W 00 At An on Monday
 57° 27' 20 N 49

Date 21 June 2017
Log of Yacht Oceanbird

Port of

HW LW
Variation 3.4m

HW LW

HW LW
Time zone GMT +1

Day's run
Time underway
Average speed

nautical miles
hours mins
knots

From/At Lark Dunlop
Towards

Noon position:
Latitude
Longitude
Crew

Hours underway
Sailing
Motor sailing
Motoring
Engine hours
Fuel consumption

Time
Course
Dev
Error
True course
Log
Dist
Power
Wind Dir
Wind Force
Leeway
Baro
Sea state
Cloud
Weather/visibility

0615				100.9	M	V1		1017	S	7	Good	
0800	355°	3°	352	40	M/S	SE	4	16	SL	7	Good	
0900	050	3	047	47	M/S	SE	7	16	S	7	Good	
1000	070°	3	067	54	M/S	E	2/3	16	SL	3	Good	
1100	090	3	077	61	M/S	SE	4	10.4	SL	6	Good	
1200	145	3	142	8	M/S	SE	4.5	15	SL	8	Good	
1300						S	5/6	14				
1400				100.8	M			1014				
0400	120°	3	123	075	8	M/S	W	2	1015	S	8	Good
0500	127	3	130	100	5	M/S	SW	3	1015	S	5	Good
0610	089°	3	090	108	8	M/S	SW	3	1015	S	7	Good
0700	210°	3	207	114	6	M/S	SW	3	1017	S	8	Good
0800	210	3	207	121	7	M/S	SW	2	4	SL	7	Good
0900	220°	3	217	128	7	M/S	SW	2	14	SL	6	Good
1000	228°	3	219	137	6	M/S	SW	2	15	S	8	Good
1100	220	3	217	143	6	M/S	SW	2	10.16	Mod	8	Good
1200	230	3	221	150	7	M/S	SW	3	5	Mod	8	Good
1410												
0930	130	3	107	163		M/S	W	4	1011	S	7	Good
1000						S			10.2			
11.00	120	3	117	172	9	S	SW	5	10.12	S	8	Mod
12.00	125	3	122	178	6	S	SW	4	10.2	S	7	11
1400												
1405	120	3	117	191	13	M/S	SW	4	10.12	SL	6	Mod
1600	-	-	-	198	7	M	W	9	10.14	SL	8	Good

Leave Dunlop
57°55.3'N 006°39.4'W
57°40'N 006°29.9'W
57°43'N 006°21'W
57°42'N 006°12'W

Shannon Island
Portage to G. km
Manning
57°48'N 0°11.0'W

Leave Portree
Night Report - EIS start
02:40

57°17'N 0°51'W
57°17'N 0°46.0'W
57°16'N 5°41'W
57°15'N 5°36.6'W
57°07'N 005°45.3'W
56°44'N 006°15.1'W
56°42'N 005°21.2'W
56°49'W 006°09'W

Rounding Adamnan
behind O. Laboratory
19 uhrs

Leave Tabernacl

Rain. 56°31.3'N 54°19'W

Engine on due to overfalls SW of Lismore
56°27'N 05°37'W
Motoring to Dunstaffnage after passing Lismore
Refueled + berthed Dunstaffnage

50

51

57 3 21

~~6 29 35~~

3

22nd June

17.3 to Bridge

17.3

Chart

5616.5

+2

4 miles from Bridge ✓
to overfalls

5616.3

14 to Malloig 16.5

Use 5616.18A for E of Bridge

38 miles (42) 44.8

Arrived Bridge 0630 - 1130 BST

Malloig good in SW open in N.

21 11/10/04 - 72/6. HW 0504 + 17.33 UT = 0604 BST 4.9

06.30 → 11.30. Backing 1900 BST →

23m trans/falls @ 5.5 = 4hrs.

Tgt 08.30. Leave 04.30. Falls 08.30.

Malloig ETA 11.20.

5270A