

“Gulfoss” and our Maiden Voyage to Scotland

Like many Seaward owners, we have come from a sailing background and it was with eyes wide open and not a little trepidation that we made the leap to motorboat ownership. We spent our early years racing dinghies and then 24 years ago bought a steel cruising yacht that has seen us safely, and steadily, to Norway, Europe and the Caribbean. Most recently, we have extensively cruised our “local” waters on the west coast of Scotland, but decided that maybe a motorboat would allow us to reach further away places in more comfort (ie. “indoors” without constant exposure to Scotland’s “sticky” rain).

In June, a Seaward 35 “Bruiser” came into our home marina at Craobh, near Oban, and Richard and Jane kindly gave us a full tour and extolled the virtues of Seaward life. Two weeks later we found Gulfoss for sale in Lymington and within 2 more weeks, a survey, sea trial and purchase had all been completed. We asked the boatyard to fit new engine seacocks and a holding tank (strangely missing) and then collected the boat at the beginning of August.

After time spent reading the manuals, victualling and exploring the (initially intimidating) engine room and rather large engines – twin 370hp Yanmars - there was nothing to further prevent us getting underway. We went out into the Solent for a couple of hours familiarisation (this being Janet’s first time onboard and my first time steering) and then the next day (11th August) slipped the lines and set off for Weymouth. We did have previous experience of this route having picked up our yacht from Southampton 24 years previously for the passage to Craobh via the west coast, but at up to 20 knots cruising speed – and in a straight line – versus 4 to 5 knots with a lot of zigzagging, it was a completely different experience and mindset.

Nevertheless, we made it out through the Needles to Weymouth in about 5 hours, cruising at what came to be our preferred speed of 12 to 15 knots on the longer passages, and squeezed into the last remaining berth on the public pontoons behind two very large gin palaces.

We had to leave the next day, because the pontoon was pre-booked, but with a forecast of SW wind of force 6 to 7, we went into Portland harbour to try out the anchor and stayed there for two nights.



A small weather window (SW winds of “only” 4 to 5) the following day allowed us to weigh anchor and head south giving the Shambles buoy a wide berth before turning to the west so as to avoid the Portland Race. However, with a 2 to 3m swell running, we soon experienced some very lively conditions and quickly found out what is meant by a “wet” boat. With spray breaking right over the boat and the windscreen wipers earning their keep, we completed the 60 mile passage to Dartmouth in just over 5 hours. We found Gulfoss to be extremely seaworthy under these conditions and it was the crew who were the limiting factor in terms of making progress into the seaway. Our dog, Scout,

had quickly found her preferred spot on the pilot saloon aft settee, after trying out various locations, including the dinette seats down below.

We found a berth on “Deep Water Pontoon 1” and enjoyed a couple of days exploring Dartmouth and seeing our niece.

By now the “Engineering Department” was getting to grips with various shake-down issues, but we had a bit of a fright when we started the engines to leave and a loud screeching sound emanated from the engine room. Fortunately, it was just a slightly loose alternator belt and we were soon on our way again. We had wanted to visit various harbours, but it seems that the south coast was full (Plymouth – International fireworks competition; Fowey – Regatta week; Falmouth – Tall Ships). After a 70 mile passage, we found a berth on the visitor’s pontoon in the river Fal and then the next morning moved to a mooring buoy just off Falmouth. We refuelled for the first time at the town quay, and although we knew it would be more than the usual 100 litres that was sufficient for a summer’s cruising in a yacht, were beginning to wonder if we had a leak and were filling Gullfoss’s bilges..... 790 litres and we were full!

A couple of days later, the forecast was for sunshine and light easterly winds before a low was due to bring strengthening SE then SW’erly winds, so we set off early and had a smooth passage past the Lizard and Land’s End before crossing the Bristol Channel to Milford Haven.



At 160 miles, it was our longest passage so far, and took 11 hours as the smooth seas allowed us to up the cruising speed until the wind and swell started to build as we approached Milford Haven.

We had called earlier to be told that there was no space available at Neyland marina, but they called back and put us in the same berth that “Bruiser” had been in a few weeks previously. We were able to stay for 4 nights and had visits from friends and family, and sheltered from the worst of Storm Betty as she passed close by.

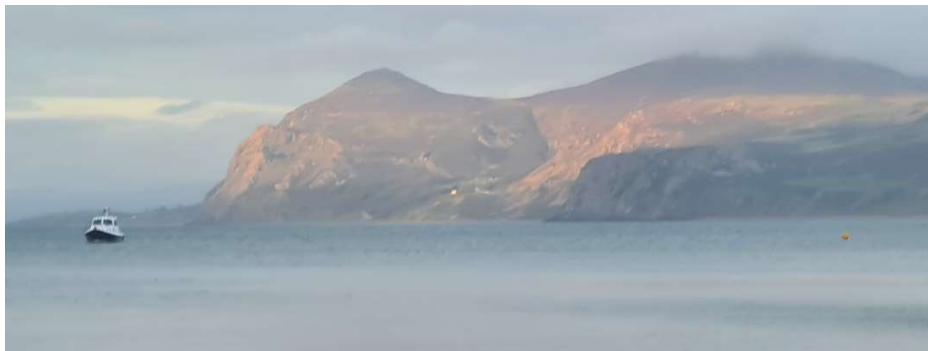


We refuelled again, this time able to calculate our fuel consumption more accurately, and were achieving about 3 to 3.5 litres per nautical mile at 12 to 15 knots.

We left Neyland marina with a SW 3 to 4 forecast, but knew there would still be a bit of swell running. At the westerly entrance, the tide was running out of Milford Haven at about 2 to 3 knots, creating large standing waves. We had to slow right down, but even so, some lap belts might have

been useful! Once again, Gullfoss handled everything that was thrown at her and soon we were able to increase the pace, turning down wind and wave and pass through the narrow Jack and Ramsay Sounds as we rounded Saint David's Head. We passed Strumble Head and anchored off Fishguard for a peaceful night.

The next day we headed off across Cardigan Bay to the north side of the Llyn Peninsula to an anchorage in Porth Dinllaen. The winds were from the SW again and we enjoyed some gentle surfing with the autohelm proving far more adept than manual steering. We had logged 44nm the previous day and 63nm today, averaging about 3.3 litre per nm. Porth Dinlleaen provided a secure anchorage on sand (although it would be untenable in NW through SE winds) and there were plenty of holidaymakers out in kayaks, dinghies and motorboats, as well as a fine long sandy beach for Scout to run on.



At this time, we noticed that our AIS signal was becoming temperamental – it would either transmit our position or we could receive data from other AIS sources, not both. The Engineering Department didn't have a software engineer, but after an extensive search for the AIS Transceiver unit (only found aft we had arrived in Scotland), concluded that it was an interface issue with the main chart plotter. We left it on transmit as we could look out of the window for nearby vessels!

The following day we crossed the Irish Sea for Ardglass, but diverted to Strangford Lough when we couldn't raise the harbour or marina on the VHF. We logged 100 miles that day and with a beam wind and slight sea averaged about 3.0 litres per nm. The entrance to Strangford Lough required careful pilotage, with strong tides and various rocks, shallows and whirlpools to watch out for, but we found a good anchorage close to the shore and out of the current in Ballyhenry Bay, just north of Portaferry. We had a couple of days rest with walks ashore and a gentle cruise around Strangford Lough dodging the low-lying Pladdies. The Engineering Department were called into action again when the generator tripped, however, once found, the trip was quickly reset and cooking resumed.

The next morning (26th August) we had a short passage of 35 nm "round the corner" to Bangor marina and a long stop at the fuel berth to take on about 800 litres of fuel from a pump that only dispensed 100 litres at a time. Bangor was a busy town full of friendly locals enjoying the bank holiday weekend and a funfair by the marina. A good excuse for us to stay in the marina whilst some strong NW'erly winds blew themselves out.

We left on 30th August heading for Scottish waters. Initially we stayed close to the Northern Irish shore to keep out of the NW swell that was still running, but at Runabay Head, we turned right to cross the North Channel towards the Mull of Kintyre and Gigha. The wind picked up from ahead (of

course) and soon we were bashing our way into 2m seas with spray covering the boat. For the second or third time on this voyage, the aft cockpit bilge alarm went off due to the amount of spray going over the topsides and into the cockpit (we don't have a cockpit cover, but we are not sure what state any such cover might have been in after the dousing it would have received). After 70nm and just over 5 hours we picked up a mooring at Ardmish Bay, Gigha, and at last felt that we were back in "home" waters.

A couple of days later we were enjoying some flat water and were able to give the engines full reign (25 knots) when we heard someone on the VHF "Calling the Seaward approaching the MacCormaig Islands". We answered and it turned out to be a previous owner of Gullfoss! A small world. We were able to go close by their current motorboat and have a chat.

Finally, we arrived at Craobh marina (about 20 miles south of Oban) where we will be based. In all, a total of 800nm over 20 days (with 10 days at sea).

We had set off not know what to expect and, apart from a few niggles, most of which were due to our unfamiliarity with the boat, were thoroughly impressed with the Seaward 35's capabilities. At no time were we concerned, despite some pretty rough conditions, and the ability to plan a passage with a far greater degree of certainty than a yacht was reassuring.

We had been concerned that in an enclosed motorboat, we would feel cut off from nature, but most days we saw dolphins and a variety of sea birds.

And Scout likes her new boat too.



Paul & Janet Caldwell
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