“Gullfoss” and a Sunny, but Wet, Cruise in Scotland: July 2025

The forecast for the Seaward Scottish Rally was good: sunny, warm (if not hot), light winds and calm seas.

After victualing and filling the fuel and water tanks, we left Craobh marina (about 20 miles south of Oban on the Scottish west coast) heading for the Sound of Mull (see the last page for a map pf the voyage). In the old days (of sailing) we would have had to wait for a favourable tide to get through Cuan Sound, a narrow passage between the island of Luing and the mainland through which the tide can run at up to 6 knots. Not so in Gullfoss with her two 370hp Yanmars (and full fuel tanks….).

The southern entrance to the Sound of Mull is guarded by the imposing Duart Castle: home of the Maclean clan for over 700 years.

The plan had been to anchor in the picturesque Loch Aline on the north side of the Sound, but with calm seas and a fine evening, we decided to continue on to Tobermory, location for the rally.

Anchoring in Tobermory bay is difficult due to the steep sided bay and deep water, however, there are 38 mooring buoys and 60 berths available (for a charge) on a “first come, first served” basis.

Tobermory is a very picturesque harbour town and the main commercial centre of the Island of Mull. It has many pubs, cafes, shops, accommodation and a distillery. It is located close to the northern end of the Sound of Mull and so is very popular with boaters heading out or returning from the west.

The next day the rest of the Seaward boats arrived and we were fortunate to be able to occupy adjacent berths for pontoon parties and other gatherings. There should be a more detailed rally report available prepared by others, but a very enjoyable time was had by all, the sun shone and many a yarn told…. Thank you Derek of “Savanah” for organising a great weekend.

Sunday morning the forecast was for the good weather to break and for winds of SW 4 to 5 veering W 5 to 6 and showers. We, along with Lazy Tiger II who was heading for the far north (Orkney and the East Coast of Scotland) and Bluebell who was returning to Tiree, straight into the building weather, decided to make a break for it and head round Ardnamurchan Point before the waves built.

It was rough for a time with the waves on the beam, but soon settled as we passed Ardnamurchan light, the most westerly point of the UK mainland. We passed the island of Eigg before entering the Sound of Sleet on the east side of Skye, and anchoring in Isle Ornsay.

The next morning it was raining hard, but we headed north through the narrow Kyle Rhea between Skye and the mainland (where the tides can run at up to 9 knots) and under the Skye bridge. Unfortunately, the wind against strong current under the bridge set up a nasty sea, but Gullfoss was able to power through with only a decent salt soaking.

We continued on to the Island of Rona and the almost land-locked anchorage of Acarseid Mor on the west side. The entrance was narrow and difficult to pick out, but once inside was well sheltered and we picked one of the five visitor's mooring buoys.

We stayed there for 2 night and enjoyed walks over the island and up to the trig point. The island is formed of very hard Lewisian Gneiss and is (apparently) very old at over 4 billion years. It was also my birthday whilst we were there, but I'm not as old as that! There was an honesty box for the visitor's buoys and a small bothy with a freezer selling Rona venison. They also have their own stamps and will frank them prior to dispatch to the UK postal system via Portree on Skye.

We continued northwards in calmer weather and following seas to Badachro Bay in Loch Gairloch. It is a small, well sheltered bay with 4 visitor's buoys and many private moorings. We rowed ashore for a walk to visit the local gin distillery (unfortunately it had just closed for the evening), but had a nice pint in the pub.

The next morning brought warnings of possible gales, so we continued north and into Loch Broom. We hadn't seen much marine life up till then, but were rewarded with the sight of a large submarine about 1 mile off the port bow. We anchored in Loch Kamaird, on the east side of Isle Martin. The holding was reported as good and we were tucked inside a large fish farm, handy in case we started to drag our anchor.

The next day we went for a long walk over the island. It is run by a trust and is uninhabited, although it has several basic houses / bothies (no electricity, hot water, etc.) that are rented out to urban types wanting to "get away from it all". I also made a new rope bridle for the anchor chain - the old one was getting a bit frayed.

The forecast was for rain, then SW 5 to 7, increasing 7 to 8. For most of the afternoon, there had been no wind and heavy rain. At 19:00 hours, the rain stopped and a few minutes later the wind arrived at 30+ knots. It continued at up to 40 knots for the next 30 hours. It was too windy / wavy to row ashore, but fortunately Scout, our dog, has a bladder to rival the Tardis (she won't go on the boat)…..

After 2 more nights at anchor, the wind abated and we were able to head west to the Summer Isles (the definition of "summer" is quite different in Scotland to the rest of the UK). These islands are mostly uninhabited, and very rocky, but there are a few anchorages where it just you and the local bird life.

After the first quiet night at anchor for a few days, we continued north to Lochinver. As we approached the entrance to Loch Inver, there were large gangs of Gannets plunging from a great height into the sea.

Lochinver is a busy fishing harbour, well sheltered with a large breakwater and a small yacht pontoon, mostly occupied by local boats, but there are usually a few spare berths available on a first come / first served basis. There are some nice walks in the local woods and the village is about a mile away with a basic food shop and some cafes. The harbour is run by the Highland and Islands council and a berth including shore power, water and basic toilet / shower facilities was only £36 for 2 nights. We also filled up with diesel. Not essential because we had only come 205 miles so far, but I wanted to try refuelling at the fish pier (somewhat higher than Gullfoss) and reduce the "fuel anxiety" possible on the return trip due to the shortage of alongside refuelling opportunities. We took on 450 litres, so we were consuming approximately 2.2 litres per nautical mile at our "pottering" cruising speed of 7 to 10 knots.

The forecast was once again looking windy from the SW, so it was time to head south again. The seas were relatively flat (0.5 to 1m), so we pushed on past Rubha Reidh into the Inner Sound (to the east of Rona and Rassay). We took a quick look at Broadfold Bay (supposed to be various local moorings and visitor's moorings), but it was empty so we continued back under the Skye bridge and picked up a visitor's buoy off Kyleakin. It was not clear whether these were maintained or not, and looked in a

pretty poor state, but the wind had virtually disappeared so we stayed. That evening, our favourite ship the Hebridean Princess motored past. Well, she does look a bit like a Seaward….

Strong winds and heavy rain were forecast for the next few days, so we decided to explore Loch Duich and Loch Hourn. The narrows into Loch Duich, just north of Kyle Rhea, take you past Eliean Donnan and it's dramatic castle (lots of cars and motorhomes in the car park), but the loch itself was fairly unspoilt, just the usual fish farms and a few moorings and houses. We anchored off the hamlet of Ratagan in the shadow (when the rain and mist allowed it) of the Five Sisters of Kintail.

For the next two days it rained and rained and rained. The SEPA website reported 7 inches of rain over the two weeks we were in the area. We did a lot of reading….. And knitting…..

Loch Hourn, about 5 miles south of Kyle Rhea, was far more wild and remote. The south shore is part of Knoydart which is only accessible by foot or boat. The loch continues about 10 miles inland and has four narrows with depths of about 5m and at times only 20m width. We went as far as the fourth narrows (which also dries at low tide) before returning to the third narrows to anchor for the night. No phone signal, no VHF radio, no other people. Just us, some dolphins, an otter and five deer on the shore.

After a quiet night, we motored south past the busy town of Mallaig to the island of Rum. Owned by the National Trust for Scotland, it comprises the very dramatic Rum Cullins, one of the largest colonies of manx shearwaters as well as razorbills, guillemots, fulmars, kittiwakes, shags, golden eagles, white-tailed eagles and divers, the quirky Kinloch castle and about 1000 Red deer.

The next day we motored 10 nautical miles to the island of Eigg and anchored in the small anchorage just north of the ferry pier. Eigg is well populated and has a very well stocked shop, toilet, shower, laundry facilities and cafe/bar. It is popular with day visitors who walk up the Sguir, a dramatic volcanic outflow that dominates the local skyline. There were also lots of terns and seals in the anchorage.

We then returned past Ardnamurchan light and into the Sound of Mull to the anchorage in Loch na Doma Buidhe, across the sound from Tobermory and at the entrance to Loch Sunart.

Onwards back south again to Loch Spelve the next day, with its narrow entrance and strong currents and to our preferred anchorage at the south west end of the loch. We encountered thick fog, but the water is deep enough to creep along the coast (about 100m off) so as not to miss the entrance.

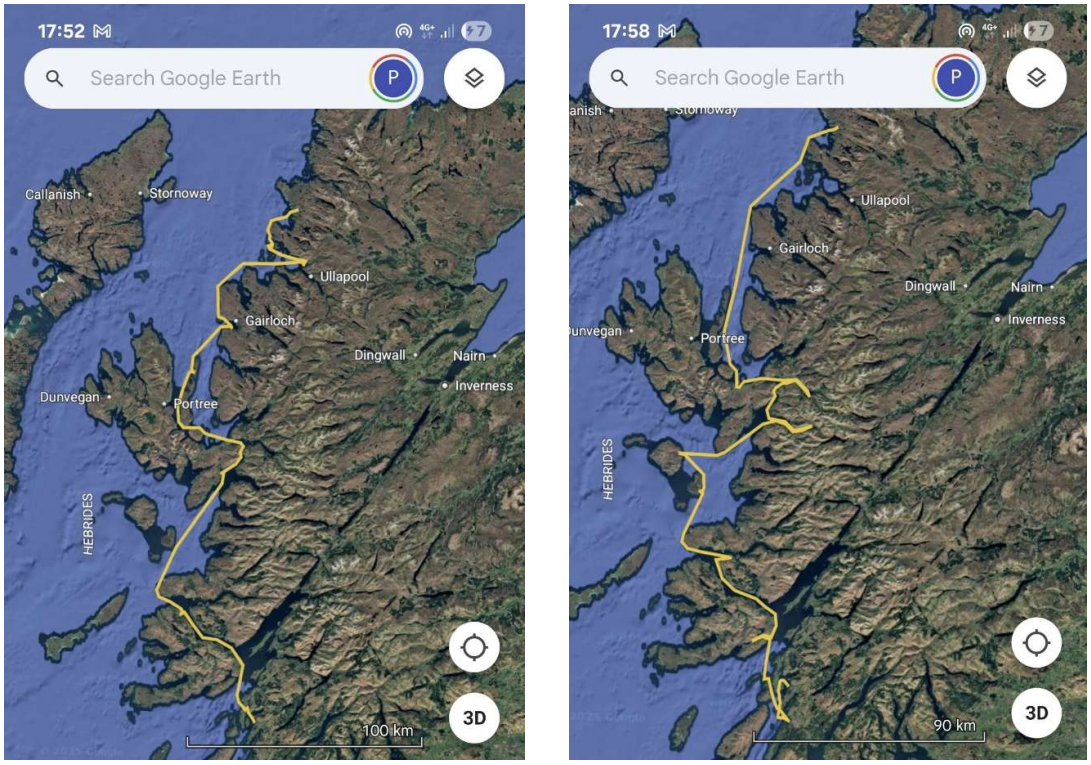
The views are dramatic, but you wouldn't want to go for a swim - the loch was full of jellyfish – probably a remnant of the, now abandoned, fish farms.

After Loch Spelve, the forecast was for the (English) heat wave to finally reach Scotland, so instead of returning to Craobh marina, we anchored for one final night off Crinan at the north end of the Sound of Jura and watched a fine sunset.

The technical stuff: Voyage distance: 473 nautical miles over 22 days. Approximately 1000 litres of fuel, 500 litres of water and several (!) boxes of wine.

Paul & Janet Caldwell and Scout the dog.

July 2025



Outbound (left) and return (right) voyages courtesy of Google Maps