

## Sea Bird's Home Passage

Many Seaward Squadron Members will know of Douglas MacDiarmid's epic voyage in his Seaward 23 "Morag", which took him, from his home port near Fort William, Scotland, through the canals of France to the Mediterranean Sea.

Upon his return to U.K. Douglas decided that the time had come to upgrade to a Seaward 29 and he purchased "Sea Bird", which was based at Levington, near Ipswich, Suffolk.

The following is the log of Sea Bird's passage from Suffolk to her new home.

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*Sea Bird is a Seaward 29, built in 2003, and recently purchased from Suffolk Yacht Harbour after the sale of my much-loved Seaward 23, Morag. Lightly used, but neglected in recent years, Sea Bird was in need of much mechanical, electrical and 'housekeeping' work before departing on her homeward voyage to the West of Scotland. This was completed to a standard by Saturday 16th July, when we departed Levington and the River Orwell for Lowestoft. The decision to go via the East Coast, marginally shorter than down Channel and up the West, was driven primarily by a desire to experience cruising on that coast at first hand; the West being familiar from many previous voyages.*



Sea Bird before departure from Levington, Suffolk

*It proved to be an excellent decision, greatly enhanced by almost perfect weather for the entire trip. Over the ensuing fortnight, until locking out from the Caledonian Canal into salt water at Corpach near Fort William on 2nd August, we covered 600 sea miles in winds never above F5, more often F2 to 4. An oily calm, for example, was encountered off the notorious Flamborough Head. The briskest seas were met on the long passage (103 miles) across the Wash to Grimsby, and on the run West from Whitehills (a small ex fishing-harbour on the NE of Scotland) to Inverness; but neither occasion was more than a solid spray-filled bash to windward, and normal cruising speed of 15 knots was maintained.*

## **Highlights included:**

- *sailing in waters made famous by the pens of Maurice Griffiths and Des Sleighthome, with shoal water miles offshore, something unknown to a boy raised amongst the rocks of the Western Isles*
- *listening to the local accents change as we moved up the coast from port to port*
- *seeing how different communities have adapted to post-industrial change: Whitby and Eyemouth exceptionally well, Grimsby and Peterhead with more difficulty*
- *fabulous fish and chips in Eyemouth*
- *dolphins playing and two pilot whales passing under Sea Bird at Chanonry Point, Inverness Firth*
- *squadrons of gannets, and puffin fly pasts, off the Firth of Forth near Bass Rock*
- *enjoying warm welcomes wherever we made landfall, with plenty of dry British humour thrown in for good measure.*



Eyemouth Lock, just north of Berwick upon Tweed

*Ports of call were Lowestoft, Grimsby, Whitby, Tynemouth, Eyemouth, Arbroath, Peterhead, and Whitehills, before entering the canal at Inverness. As a first complete transit of the canal, I was keen to enjoy numerous stops and a slow journey South through what is staggeringly beautiful scenery, especially at the Southern end from Fort Augustus onwards.*



Cullochy Loch, Caledonian Canal

*Navigation was essentially straightforward, but with due attention being given to shoals, offlying wind farm arrays, significant headlands such as Flamborough and Rattray, and the various port control entry and departure procedures. The most informal of the latter was Whitehills, when on my approach the HM announced over the VHF, "I can see you, in the wee speed*

*laanch (sic)!" Yacht and shipping traffic after Orfordness was light except in the mouth of the Humber and off Teeside. The greatest hazard throughout the trip was the sheer number of fishing buoys, many well marked but some virtually invisible until you were almost upon them - occasionally nerve wracking at cruising speed.*

*In summary: a memorable, wonderful cruise on a superb sea boat - well done Seaward boats, your 29 is magnificent!*



Approaching Neptune's Staircase on Caledonian Canal



Home waters, south of Island of Kerrera, near Oban



Corpach Sea Loch on on Caledonian Canal