



# Sea Dancer

## *“Rock n Roll”*

### Around Ireland

Harry Whelehan

#### **Background to 2013 “Cruise”**

In 2011 we had set out “Gung-ho” on a mission to circumnavigate Ireland, anticlockwise, and having got to Coleraine we were held up for three weeks, with ferocious westerly gales. When the gales abated, the winds stayed in the west blowing between force 6 and 7. Suffering from cabin fever after three weeks tied up, and faced with, at least, another four or five days in Coleraine we decided to “reverse” our circumnavigation, by taking the fair westerly winds and retrace our steps clockwise to Howth, and there, to take on the crew we had intended to take on in Galway!

We then resumed our circumnavigation heading southabout. Of course once we got to Kilmore Quay the winds piped up from the south-west and we were stormbound there for several days. We continued to meet fresh head winds for the remainder of that cruise, which saw us getting only as far as Baltimore, where we ran out of crew, stamina, time and enthusiasm, abandoned our goal of sailing around Ireland and returned to Howth tired but happy, though with our tails slightly between our legs

Cruising Ireland was a wonderful companion, and a “must have” for anybody sailing on the coast of Ireland, I found it invaluable as a source, and as a friend, especially when faced with choosing “on the hoof” a destination not already on the itinerary , as happens when the weather changes dramatically, as it frequently does on our coast. It has more than fulfilled its purpose of being a “Companion to the Sailing Directions”.It is a publication of huge merit, in its own right, and one of which we, and more particularly the authors, and our publication company should, with justification be very proud.

This year, in order to avoid disappointment, and to keep expectations realistic, we conceived the idea of a cruise from Howth, sticking to the Irish coast and, allowing for four weeks at sea, with an underlying “aspiration”, of a circumnavigation!

As *Sea Dancer* is a mere 32 foot Sun Odyssey, she is ideally crewed and comfortable with three people aboard. Liz and I were lucky to sign up three flexible friends to join us for different parts of the "Odyssey". Robert Barker agreed to join us for the first week, Mark Tierney for the next week and John Kavanagh to finish the cruise with us. This year the decision on which way to go was left over until the days before departure so that we could take have the guidance of the weather forecasts!

The plan was to leave Howth on May 21st and “feel” our way around the coast as gently and as firmly as possible, without taking risks or pushing ourselves, or the boat too hard, but at the same time we were determined to keep alive our underlying "aspiration" of circumnavigating the island.

Throughout May this year the weather was extremely cold, and dominated by north/northeast marrow chilling winds .As our departure date approached none of forecasting bodies were predicting any change in this pattern. There was only one way to go ----- southabout!

### **First stop Arklow - day 1**

With Robert aboard on 21 May, and with a forecast of north-westerly winds force 5 to 6, moderating 2 to 4, we left Howth at 07.00 on the ebb with a crisp (though cold)

breeze on our starboard quarter giving us the ideal start for our voyage.....our tails were up!!!

Alas just south of the Baily, and in the lee of Howth Head we lost the wind. I started the engine to get out of the calm and into the breeze, which we could see just ahead of us in the bay. After about 10 minutes motoring the engine alarm sounded. Robert discovered that the exhaust was not getting water, so he got busy in the engine department while Liz and I kept the boat going under sail. He discovered that the water intake skin fitting was caked with a mixture of salt and corrosive metal- it appeared that copper and brass had been used together in the skin fitting and some form of galvanic action/electrolysis had caused the metals to breakdown and gel, leaving the fitting "jammed rock solid" thereby starving the cooling system. Robert dismantled the unit (having closed the seacock) and reported a replacement fitting would have to be sourced and installed.

By the time all of this was discovered we were back in the favourable wind and off Bray Head. I decided to continue to Arklow believing that when we arrived there, given the forecast, that we would be able to get up the river and berth under sail, either on the pontoon in the river, or in the old basin. If all came to all I felt we would find somebody at the harbour mouth who would give us a "pluck" up the river!

We had a delightful sail, (albeit with the underlying worry and disappointment about engine problem) and arrived at the Arklow entrance at 16.00. The reality of getting up the river without an engine had to be faced. The wind had eased to a whisper as we coaxed the boat between the pier heads and up to the first bend with great patience, working against the adverse current of the river. We were forced to abort our bid, and

take the current back to the entrance. After about 20 minutes we had enough wind to have another go, but sadly with exactly the same results.

How this dilemma was resolved, which does me no credit, but does credit to the R.N.L.I. and Wicklow Coastguard.

Once tied up, I had the great luck to encounter my old school pal, Jimmy Tyrell, one of “the Tyrells”, and he had me fixed up with a cousin who had our problem “sorted” within two hours, thereby transforming us from overwrought to joyous.

We got sorted out through great skill and generosity, and we resumed our cruise, on schedule next morning, the first days disaster having positively reinforced my belief in the goodness of human nature.

#### **Next stop-- Dunmore East - day 2**

The main purpose of a circumnavigation attempt was to get *Sea Dancer* to the west coast and to concentrate on the coast between Mizen Head and Malin Head.

When leaving Arklow we had kept an open mind as to whether to put into Kilmore Quay or Dunmore East, obviously we wanted to get as far west as possible while the wind was showing northerly and to maximise the time which we would have on the west coast. We left Arklow at 08.30 to carry the favourable tide, and took the Rusk channel and carrying a favourable breeze round Carnsore Point where we hardened sheets to sail inside the Barrels and across St Patrick's bridge at 15.00. We had a good breeze and time in hand so we decided to kick on for Dunmore East.

I had read some unfavourable comments in recent years about Dunmore East and the attitude of fishermen there to visiting yachtsmen, I telephoned the harbourmaster as we rounded the Hook and he was most helpful and assured me of a berth alongside a fishing boat ( the pontoons which were on the quayside were due to be installed the following week) We arrived at 17.50 and were offered us a choice of three berths alongside, we made our choice, the harbourmaster helped us to tie up, gave us his mobile number in case we needed anything overnight, and showed us the showers. This was a most refreshing and enthusiastic reception Things are definitely “looking up” in terms of attitude and facilities here.

### **Dunmore East to Kinsale - day 3**

The forecast was for northwest 4/5 increasing 6, locally 7 backing south southwest. We left in fresh conditions, with the main fully reefed and a tiny genoa. With this rig we were just about able to maintain our course of 245. It was a good and challenging sail, visibility was clear and all of the south coast landmarks showed themselves at their best, Mine Head as usual being hard to reach and stubborn to leave behind. When we reached the entrance to Kinsale we were happy to start the engine and drop the sails as we reached the Bullman. We had just entered the estuary when the engine alarm sounded again! This time it was the fan belt! We sailed up the river onto the Kinsale Y.C. pontoon.

I used up considerable energy to suppress my despair and anxiety with this new turn of events but hoped to meet somebody in the yacht club who would put me in touch with somebody who could help us.

We were unprepared for the fact that the Yacht Club was in the early phase of a major refurbishment and no facilities, or members were available to comfort us. It was now 19.30. I spoke to Alan who was working late in the MGM office beside the pontoon entrance and he put me in touch with George of the Kinsale Boatyard who agreed to, and did, come aboard the following morning, with a spare fan belt and he did the necessary fitting, leaving us with our own spare in our locker.

As we were waiting for George to come to us that morning we saw “*Teal*” Ian French ICC, heading for Dingle, and then onto Roundstone to join his family for the June weekend, before tackling the second part of his circumnavigation of Ireland. We wished him well as we knew that the five day forecast promised him a nasty spell of northwest 4/7 locally 8. He was on a schedule and keen to get as far as possible while the weather allowed. Having topped up our fuel we left Kinsale with confidence restored in the engine and in the “human race” and headed for Glandore, where Liz has a cousin living nearby and the idea of having a pint with her and her husband was most appealing .

#### **Kinsale to Glandore – day 4**

The forecast was northerly force 3 to 5 decreasing 2 to 4, perfect wind to get us to Glandore and ideal for lying there overnight at anchor. We departed from Kinsale at 14.30 and arrived in Glandore at 19.30 where we found a convenient visitors mooring



close enough to the harbour. We settled down to aperitifs and dinner and enjoyed a stunning sunset. Our rendezvous ashore was scheduled for 22.30.

One of the advantages of cruising this time of the year is the very long daylight hours and so we rowed ashore in daylight and we still had considerable daylight as we returned to the boat two pints later at about midnight.

### **Glandore to Crookhaven - day 5**

Since we had been to Castletownsend, Schull and Baltimore before, and we knew the “glue pot” characteristics of these anchorages we decided to bypass them and press on to Crookhaven, a strategic jump off point for rounding the Mizen. We were impatient to embark on that part of the coast which would see us covering this territory for the first time in *Sea Dancer*. With a forecast of a mild and moderate southerly airflow veering souwest we left Glandore for Crookhaven at 10.00 and had a gentle sail. Just south of Barlogue at position 5127.214N ,009 18.8 we met a minki whale which breached just two boat lengths away, and four more times as he made his way eastward!

The forecast seemed to be too good to be true, and indeed so it turned out to be!

By now we were motoring and considering whether to visit South Harbour Cape Clear or head for Crookhaven., A combination of the southerly forecast, and the fact that Leinster were playing Munster in a televised Rabo Direct rugby match brought in a decision in favour of Crookhaven, where we arrived via the Gascanane Sound, and

picked up a mooring at 14.15 just off the village slip and adjacent to O' Sullivans pub where we watched the match in considerable comfort, and the best of company.

We had a good walk around this beautiful anchorage which I think is not much visited, despite its pleasant and unique configuration, and the good facilities ashore.

We had a very pleasant dinner in the Crookhaven Inn and an early night on board as we geared up for rounding of the Mizen on the morrow. The forecast was for mild to moderate southerly airflow force 2 to 3 veering southwest, all boding well for our trip around the corner where we intended to visit Glengariff for lunch and overnight at Lawrence Cove on Bere Island.

#### **Crookhaven –Glengariff –Lawrence Cove – day 6**

On leaving Crookhaven at 08.50 and on our way to the Mizen we had an escort of five dolphins for about 20 minutes. We rounded the Mizen at 10.10 with the sun breaking through and had a very pleasant sail from Sheep Head to Glengariff, where we dropped anchor. It was very cold and cloudy. The outlook and the atmosphere however made it worth putting up with the chill of lunching in the cockpit. It was too cold to go ashore and explore Garnish Island, so we convinced ourselves, that as we were still wearing Long Johns on May 26<sup>th</sup> it was unlikely that the exotic colours of Garnish Island would have materialised in this, the coldest of Springs.

After lunch we hoisted sails and had a long cold and unrewarding beat along the north of Bantry Bay and into Lawrence Cove where we tied up, hoping to find some place to eat ashore, encouraged by the favourable comments of Paul Butler in his log last year. Sadly for us, the restaurant that he visited was not open, the pub wasn't open,

and the shop was open but had very limited supplies. We ate on board from our own resources, and as so often turns out to be the case, what was achieved in adversity proved most rewarding and delicious, and we retired happy having survived both the cold and gastronomic improvisation!

### **Lawrence Cove to Cahersiveen –day 7**

The original plan was to cross via Dursey Sound to Derrynane, and spend the night there before going on to Dingle, where we had a crew change planned. However with the forecast for a freshening south-westerly, I became concerned that, if we got into Derrynane, we might not be able to get out in sufficient time to make our way to Dingle for our crew change.

I had never been to Cahersiveen, and I was curious to investigate the new marina which has been installed there. I was also interested to see what the pilotage of the Caher River would entail. It looked most interesting on the chart and in the sailing directions.

We left Lawrence Cove at 06.00 to catch the tide at Dursey Sound. It was a fresh drizzly morning and we were on the wind from Fair Head to Crow Head but as we reached Black Head, the mist lifted and this stunning piece of coast was most impressive and colourful. It was still bitterly cold but we were pleased with progress and the tide came with us for the last hour. On entering the sound we enjoyed the full sweep of the tide through, our excitement enhanced by the fact that the cable car crossed just as we were below.

At the northern end of the sound the sea became very turbulent and angry, and as we emerged into the Kenmare River we hoped that the mild south westerly forecast would greet us. Alas, we found the wind coming in from the north-west and kicking up the most uncomfortable and disturbed sea. I expected this to settle down as we got away from the land and the influence of the tide and as we fetched out into the Kenmare River, I also expected that the wind was at its worst, from our point of view, and that it would go into the west and better still back to the southwest as had been forecast. I still ruled out Derrynane on the basis of the freshening south-westerly winds predicted for the next 24 hours.

We therefore decided to crack on for Cahersiveen hoping the wind would follow the forecast and the seas would settle down! Our course for Bolus Head was 325, the wind continued from the north north-west 25 knots, right on the nose, and gusting between 31 and 33 knots regularly.

The sea built up as the wind increased and we needed to motor sail to give a wide berth to Bolus Head and Puffin Island, being on a lee shore in heavy seas. We had to carry a tiny "handkerchief" jib to stabilise the boat against the seas and to assist in the handling of the boat. I was so preoccupied with this unexpected set of conditions that I hadn't focussed very much on the problems with which we would be faced when we came to enter Valencia harbour on our way to the Caher River. I was so busy and relieved at having rounded Bray Head and eased sheets for the northern entrance to Valencia harbour, surfing now with the wind on the beam under a tiny jib at 7 to 8 knots.

When I did go below to look at the details of the entrance I saw the options that are available, one is to the north of Begenish, and the other is to the south directly into the harbour and then an easterly course to the entrance of the river. As we got close in both options looked very unattractive, a rolling sea had built up behind us, and ahead sea was breaking dramatically on Begenish: the passage to the north could not be identified, there was white water breaking all the way across that entrance.

The entrance to the south, which is very narrow, was also awash with white water and foam stretching out to sea towards us, and foam was also visible deep within, and no sign of blue water beyond the harbour entrance.

### **Bald man's hair stands on end!**

This was a very dangerous situation, as options for getting into port, and out of the north-westerly 7 was visibly hazardous and challenging. The idea of returning to sea was also bleak, given the forecast and the steady build up of the sea. We had come 45 miles and taken a considerable bashing, we knew we had a safe haven a few miles up the river in Cahersiveen, if we could get there. The only alternative was to proceed 15 miles across the bay to Dingle where we would have a soft landing after two or three hours more at sea. I didn't really consider this, the only safe course, in hindsight ----- I don't quite understand why.

I decided to go for Valencia harbour south of Begenish, because there we had the benefit of the leading lights (which are "tight" in this harbour and even tighter in the

very difficult sea conditions prevailing). With the sailing directions in the cockpit, the GPS zoomed in and the leading lights in line, one hand on the wheel, one hand on the throttle and our hearts in our mouths we went “coolly” at our task.

It was difficult keeping the leading lights in line with the sea conditions; it was also disconcerting that we were at all stages for about a cable and a half in white water or foam. Thankfully we made our way into the harbour and finally turned east along the southern shore of Begeenish, in the lee of the island, to find the entrance to the river, but we still had the challenge of contending with the very shallow bar at the rivermouth.

This is well described in the ICC sailing directions but is nonetheless an “interesting” stretch of water. For me it was now pleasure to have this challenge, in calm and sheltered waters, after a very difficult day at sea, now the worst that could happen would be the touching of a sandy bottom!

We tied up in the marina at 16.00 all calm and tranquil with loads of space to select a berth, a friendly marina manager to greet us (“how long will yiz stay?”), showers on the quayside and a very typical Irish provincial town as a backdrop, nicely removed from the coast. We had a few pints in the perfect pub, and went to another pub where we had a very pleasant meal.

We were very happy with this stop and I would recommend it to anybody to put on their itinerary, because of its “difference”, and the rather quirky access from seaward. However I would not just caution, but warn, against attempting it if there is any build

up of sea at the entrance to Valencia Harbour or in strong west or north-westerly winds!

Of course our tails were up now, we were on the south-west coast, we were on track for our crew change at Dingle, this crew change, eight days out of Howth, had been an ambitious objective, so having seen Cahersiveen, there was nothing to delay us in getting to Dingle.

### **Cahersiveen to Dingle - Red beard goes White! –day 8**

While Dingle was only a short hop, I was conscious that we could not judge the conditions at sea from our well protected position in the marina upriver. I got the 06.00 forecast from RTE where there was a small craft and warning for the Irish Sea, but in our area the forecast was for south southwest 4 to 6 possibly 7 later!

Having taken a leisurely stroll ashore in the town, we departed at 10.00 and took the boat gently down the river hoping to take the alternative route out to the north of Beginish Island. As we approached the entrance to that channel it was still angry from the previous day and could not be attempted as the seas were still breaking in through that entrance.

We proceeded towards the harbour on the reciprocal course to that which we had taken on entering. I was surprised that the seas did not seem to have settled down and there was still a great deal of white water and foam both within the harbour and at the harbour mouth, not quite as bad as it had been when we made our entry. I was not

happy about attempting to face again conditions at the harbour mouth, as I had ruminated overnight about the decision we made the previous day to come in, and I felt we had used up a lot of good luck in successfully making our entry.

However the leading lights had seen us in, they were still operating, and Robert and Liz would be able to call them out to me as I focused on the road ahead. Most important was the fact that on the chart plotter, the track of our entry was recorded and showing on the monitor in the cockpit so I had the precise line we had taken in on making our entry. This course had seen us safely in so if I could keep the boat on that track and Liz and Robert could keep me advised about the leading lights astern we would be sure to make a safe exit.

This we duly accomplished, but to our horror, once we got clear of the harbour, and climbed out past Boulus Head, the seas became mountainous. We were thrown about so much that the engine alarm sounded more than once from overheating, due to the water intake spending so much time out of the water. In this extreme turbulence Liz, while clinging on in the cockpit had her hand in the hatch, the hatch cover closed violently on the ring finger of her left hand causing a fracture and serious laceration to one of the bones of her left ring finger.

Having cleared the land on the south side of Dingle Bay we had very strong winds from the north-west of 25 knots gusting regularly to 34, yet again we were using a tiny amount of Jib and the engine to get the boat to look up to our course.



We were very happy and relieved “campers” when we arrived in Dingle and we had our morale seriously restored as we rounded Reenbeg Point to be greeted by very light-hearted and active Fungi who was performing for three tourist boats which were in attendance! We tied up in the marina at 13.15 after a very exhausting three hours at sea and with a crewmember who needed medical attention.

Once we tidied up the ship, and stepped ashore our spirits were lifted, for while the wind was still very brisk the clouds had gone, there was bright sunshine, and the first sign of warmth since we left home nine days earlier. There was a lovely pleasant wholesome tourist buzz in the in the town. Robert who was leaving the ship decided to stay overnight and have dinner with us, and while he set about finding a suitable restaurant for dinner, Liz and I took a taxi to Tralee General Hospital, where the suspected fracture was confirmed, and her laceration stitched. We arrived back in Dingle for dinner with Robert, who was in “great form” having been entertained aboard *Teal* by Ian French and his crew, who after their difficult passage from Kinsale to Dingle, had sat out the previous few days in Dingle and were about to head for Kilronan on Inishmore. It was an easy decision for us to spend an extra day in Dingle, to refuel gather ourselves together and await the arrival of Mark Tierney. Liz quite heroically decided to stay with the ship despite injury, and the strong warnings from the medical staff in the hospital "don't get your finger wet whatever happens".

We enjoyed our two days in Dingle, visited many special traditional and owner- run pubs, art galleries, and some good craft shops. Not to be missed is the Presentation Convent and its internal church where there are stunning Harry Clark stained-glass

windows to be enjoyed. There are also some magnificent tapestries on the life of the founder of the Order.

### **Dingle to Kilronan (Inismore ) - day 10**

This was to be one of the longer hops, and it called for an early start at 05.00. There was a sister ship of ours, *Liberty Solent*, leaving Dingle at the same time heading for Kilrush. This boat belonged to a retired gentleman whose mission was to circumnavigate the UK and Ireland over a three-month period, his way of celebrating his retirement!

As our twin boats motored out of Dingle in the pre dawn, the sleep still in our eyes, we were treated to the most extravagant display of acrobatics by Fungi who stayed with us for at least ten minutes jumping alongside and almost aboard *Sea Dancer*. It was amazing to see his size in relation to our boat, he is enormous. Later in the day we were able to compare his size with many other dolphins that came to visit us. The passage to Sleah Head was very scenic, but uneventful, in the breaking dawn.

While we had got the tide right, we still had to contend with a northwest 3 to 4 wind, this combination of wind and tide had turned the waters in the Blasket Sound into a turbulent unruly and unpredictable seaway, which had built up over the previous three or four days of north-westerly wind. It was a most uncomfortable sail, as far as Sybil Point, but the discomfort aboard was well compensated by the clear visibility and the very stark beauty of the Blasket Islands astern and all of the beautiful and varied features of the Dingle Peninsula on our starboard hand. We came through this earlier

part of the passage motor sailing on half the jib and just holding a course to clear Sybil Point.

The wind speed varied between 20 and 30 knots, but gradually freed us and allowed us to carry a full jib. This turned out to be by far our most enjoyable day so far, though still cold, the temperature had risen considerably, the wind had freed us and we had dolphins in constant attendance from Loop Head right up to the Aran Islands. They were in groups from 5 to 15, and I estimate that in size they were about one fifth the size of the massive 30 to 40-year-old Fungi!

After 14 hours at sea we tied up alongside a small fishing boat in Kilronan, where the two brothers who worked her gave us a friendly reception, assured us that we were welcome to stay alongside, once we didn't mind them leaving in the morning at 06.00. They gave us a large saucepan of crab claws for dinner. Liz cooked dinner aboard, while Mark and I went ashore for a pint, after dinner we all collapsed to our bunks knowing that we would have a challenging day walking the island starting early in the morning.

The next morning was warm, bright and sunny, ideal for walking and cycling. Mark hired a bike while Liz and I walked to Dun Aengus taking the coast road, which is very scenic and was flourishing with wildflowers which were only just emerging after the very cold and late start to the spring. The Fort was showing itself at its best, and it was heartening to see so many people of all ages and many nationalities cycling, walking, in mini vans and in horse drawn traps making their way to this extraordinary monument. To a mixture of relief and embarrassment we were offered,

and willingly took, a lift back to Kilronan with an American couple in their Jarvy driven pony and trap!

I wanted to top up with diesel but there was no fuel available at the quayside, despite it having been recently extended and upgraded. I was told to enquire at the Farmers Co-op which is nearby the harbour. It transpired that the depot where the fuel is stored is in the middle of the island and is a cash free facility----- i.e. members of the island community maintain a card which they keep in credit, they then help themselves to fuel which is in a depot in the middle of the island (beyond the reach of visiting sailors). The staff in the office was most helpful and one of them drove me with my jerry cans to the depot, used her card to supply the fuel, for which I reimbursed her, she then very kindly drove me to the harbour.

We were also able to take showers in the hostel before returning to the boat

The weather forecasts were still showing quite a lot of north and strength, but we had to keep moving. In order to have a favourable tide around Slyne Head we needed to leave Kilronan at 06.00.

#### **KILRONAN TO INISBOFIN - day 11**

Thankfully the early morning forecast was now predicting west southwest force 4 to 5 decreasing 3 to 4, visibility was to be poor on the Atlantic coast but to clear as the winds freshened from the southwest. We had a slow lumpy slog against the last of the

foul tide as far as the Skerdmore but then we caught the north going tide which took us past Slyne Head at 12.35.

At 14.30 we entered the anchorage at Inishbofin, and as elsewhere we were surprised at how few boats had been launched locally, and by the absence of visiting boats. The good anchorage here is a long way off the shore; this also applies to the visitors' moorings. I'm also aware that the dredging of the channel to the old pier in recent years has made the holding less secure in the vicinity of the channel.

We edged our way to the old pier beside the hotel and found a fishing boat tied up there for the weekend. The owner was aboard and invited us to tie alongside him as he did not intend moving. Since I don't carry an outboard for the dinghy, this offer was most attractive and was accepted. We planned to stay two nights. I can't think of a better place to escape from the hysteria of a June bank holiday on the mainland!

However the weekend was not to be free of excitement or challenges.

Shortly after we tied up, our friend inside changed his mind and decided to move his boat so we made ready to let him out- this we were going to do on the warps but I decided to have the engine on stand-by, as a precaution, it was not needed, but just as I was about to stop the engine, a most obnoxious plastic burning smell manifested itself, the engine alarm sounded and smoke was coming from below. I stopped the engine promptly.

Further investigation by me, and later by experts, established that the starting motor was "banjaxed". I immediately telephoned Sean Walshe, the Yanmar agent in Dublin who said he had a replacement starter motor in stock. Now I had just two problems remaining (a) the delivery of the component and (b) to find somebody competent to fit it!

Here we were, bank holiday weekend, on Innisbofin, as far away from suppliers as it was possible to be! I decided not to worry about it that night so we went out to dinner trying not to wonder about how the next week would unfold, or how or when we would resume our odyssey. We duly retired, well anaestatised and not having discussed "the elephant in the room".

Whatever happened to me in my sleep, I woke at 05.30 with an inspired plan that had developed while I was asleep (perhaps inspired by having heard the corncrake the night before). The plan was to go to the hotel, find out what guests were expected there from Dublin over the weekend, prevail on the receptionist to let me have telephone details, and see if one of them would agree to carry the necessary spare part to Inishbofin for me (my Guardian Angel had assured me that the Data Protection legislation did not apply in Inishbofin, especially on a bank holiday weekend).

I was supplied with three names and three telephone numbers. One of the numbers yielded a response and a most obliging and willing person agreed to take the new starter with him to Inishbofin on the Monday!

Meanwhile I had visited my old and dear friend Margaret Day, one of the most distinguished persons living on the Island. She assured me that Augustine Coyne would be the man to fit the new starter motor. I phoned Augustine and he came to make his own assessment of the problem, confirmed that the starter motor was the problem and agreed that he would fit it once the component arrived.

At midday on the Monday my new best friend arrived on the ferry from Cleggan and delivered the component. Augustine was already on board the boat and he suggested I take “my courier” for a drink and some lunch in the hotel while he fitted the new starter motor. As I was finishing lunch with my hero, Augustine arrived to confirm that the engine was running and all was in order. We had a drink with Augustine, I assembled my crew and we departed from at 14.15 for Clare Island on schedule. Our time on Inishbofin was most enjoyable in every respect, notwithstanding the uncertainty which overhung our odyssey while the engine business was in the balance.

As we left this charming island we were imbued with great faith in the generosity of the hotel staff who gave us every assistance in our communications, allowed us to use all of the facilities of the hotel, the efficiency of Sean Walshe and the generosity of Augustine Coyne for fitting the new starter, but especially Rodney Betsy, who when contacted out of the blue by a complete stranger agreed to carry the mysterious component from one side of the country to the other without a moment's hesitation (more particularly since he was travelling by train and bus with just a knapsack). We also had the privilege of a cuckoo serenade each evening.

## **Inishbofin to Clare Island – days 12 and 13**

Intoxicated with relief we headed to sea and had a very beautiful passage with “high definition” visibility, as we passed Inishturk, the smaller islands on our course as well as the entrance to Killary harbour, Croagh Patrick, and Achill Head, all taking on the wonderful colours reflected and portrayed in the paintings of Paul Henry, colours changing and varying gently across a huge spectrum from smoky blue to intense gold rust and bracken.

We had taken the inside passage on the last three hours of favourable tide leaving Inishurk and Caher islands to port. We picked up a visitors moorings at 17.30 at Clare Island in the shadow of Granuaile’s Castle. We had motored all the way in calm conditions, and reflected how fortunate it had been that our starting motor problem had occurred when and where it did, otherwise it could have spoiled the wonderful passage which we had on that glorious Monday.

### **Warming up at last**

The weather forecast was predicting high pressure and light variable winds which, with a healthy engine, and in the light of the cold we had endured to date, was music to our ears.

We went ashore and walked about a mile to the hotel where we had an early dinner as we admired the coastline across the water as the colours hypnotised us changing tone rapidly as the sun began to slowly drop and bring an ever changing and deepening



pink/copper/gold hew to the sea and to the land. We returned to the boat to observe this magic from the cockpit until the sun had gone well below the horizon.

We were now “warming” to our task, literally and metaphorically . . . it was day 13 of our cruise..... and our first day without thermal vests and long john's!

The next morning was a glorious sunny morning we went ashore and walked to the Cistercian Abbey, which is beside the shop/post office (approximately 3 km from the anchorage). The postmaster arranged for the caretaker of this beautifully restored building to open it for us. It was well worth the walk and the visit and it was wonderful to see the ancient frescoes (which are under restoration) that adorn the reputed tomb of Granuaile, which is in the style of a shrine within the church. The Abbey was built in the 14th century and is in an excellent state of conservation.

On the way back to the boat we visited the community centre which has a bar, showers and laundry facilities which are available for yachtsmen. I should add that the moorings here are reasonably close to the shore.

#### **Clare Ireland to Frenchport – day 14**

The overall plan of the cruise didn't include Sligo Bay or Donegal Bay, but both Liz and I had a long-standing wish to visit Inishmurray and its ancient sixth century settlement. If conditions seemed at all favourable for such a visit we would make the necessary detour. Because of our progress, and the moderation in conditions such a visit looked "on". It also happened to be the eve of our wedding anniversary, Liz

coming from Sligo, was keen to sail into Sligo and come at the city from the Atlantic up through Rosses Point to the pontoons in the middle of the city.

What we now needed was an anchorage that would not take us too far off our rhum line, and would give us a good stepping off point to round Erris Head and enjoy the coast of North Mayo and West Sligo across Kilalla Bay. We chose Frenchport and hoped to stop for lunch at the south Iniskea Island..

We left Clare Island at 12.10, and motored, with no wind, but with the tide under us, rounding Achill head at 15.00. As we approached Black Rock the aftermath of the winds of the earlier days had left an uncomfortable swell and this increased as we turned north to enter the sound between the Iniskeas and the Mullet peninsula. We set a course for South Inniskea but it became clear that the sea was far too disturbed to permit anchoring, much less landing on either of the islands. We did however sail close along shore of the south island and we were well able to see the deserted village and the magnificent beach beneath. I had landed there in 1995 when we visited in *Witchcraft of Howth*, and I had been very moved by the history of the islands and by the stark nature of the deserted homes and the village.

As we sailed on I was becoming concerned about the breaking seas along the Mullet peninsula, and wondered whether we would be able to make the entrance of Frenchport as it is exposed to westerlies. This underlying worry did not take from the magnificent spectacle provided by the land and seascape between Achill and the Iniskea-Mullet sound through to Corraun Point, and on to Annagh Head. When we did get to Frenchport, the entrance was very frothy with breakers on both the south and north shores of the entrance. We had good look at it, and as I trying to make up

my mind, a local boat came out, thus giving us reassurance for our line to the entrance, so in we went!

Once inside we had absolute tranquillity and remoteness, a spectacular mill pond with virtually no buildings visible on the shore. We dropped anchor in 5 metres, and holding was instant. We had a pleasant night aboard turning in early as we were going to have a long day on the morrow rising a 04.00.

### **Frenchport to Sligo –day 15**

We lifted the anchor a 04.45, and again I used the track on the chart plotter to retrace my steps through the entrance, as the seas were still breaking on both sides of the entrance. We passed inside Eagle Island and had Erris Head abeam at 05.45. Our course was almost due east, into the rising sun, which was showing us Broadhaven Bay, the Stags, the Buddagh and Downpatrick Head.

It was heartening, as we made our way past this exceptionally beautiful stretch of coastline, to catch the 06.00 forecast predicting high-pressure for the next two days, with light and variable winds east-northeast. Unfortunately we had to motor most of the day though we did get sails on for about one hour as we approached the leading marks for Sligo. The north Mayo coast was truly spectacular, showing itself to us to starboard while straight ahead we had the imposing spectacle of Sligo's Benbulbin and Knocknarea.

While for Liz the trip from Rosses Point to downtown Sligo was quite emotional, for me it was an "interesting" piece of pilotage. The channel is marked but in places we had very little water under the keel, I resolved to make our exit the following day well before low-water. We tied up at 15.45 after 11 hours under way exhilarated, as we marvelled at the sharp contrast between the downtown pontoon in mid-Sligo, and the remote anchorage at Frenchport the previous night!

Our berth here provided us with shore power and water, we tidied the boat, refilled the fuel tanks (jerry cans from a filling station), availed of shore facilities provided by Liz's family and celebrated our wedding anniversary with an excellent dinner in Donaghy's restaurant, before returning to the boat to host a drinks party for the members of Liz's family who were available.

It was a memorable day, a memorable night and a detour I was very happy I had been lovingly bullied into making.

The Inishmurray visit was very definitely "on", this was confirmed to me by local yachtsman Seamus Maye, who reassured me that sea conditions would be perfect for a landing the following day. Good fortune shone further on us because Mark Tierney decided he would stay on for a few more days, and Liz's brother Brian said he would come with us to Inishmurray.

### **Sligo---Inishmurray--- Teelin - day 16**

We left Sligo at 10.30, alas with only two hours of the ebb to run, which was cutting it very fine. Even with Brian's knowledge of the channel, I noted one spell of 5 minutes

when we had less than 1 foot under the keel! However our pride remained intact, as we reached the deepwater without even kissing the bottom! At the west end of Ardmore Island we met our first pod of dolphins since just south of the Aran Islands.

At 13.15 we dropped anchor in the natural harbour Clashmore, Inismurray. I couldn't go right into the harbour as there were some lobster pots there. Unfortunately there was a mild but worrying swell in the anchorage so I decided that we should go ashore in pairs, leaving the boat with two people on anchor watch, just to be sure to be sure! I had been fearful that my expectations of this ancient settlement were too high. I am delighted to report I had greatly underestimated the emotional and visual impact that this beautiful place, and its history, would have on me. I believe the same is true for each of the four of us who set foot on that island that day. I cannot begin to describe, nor can the many excellent photographs that were taken demonstrate the impact, on us, of the place and its aura. I will just urge you, should you ever have the same good fortune as me, to pass that way, when conditions permit a landing, to make whatever detour or sacrifices that are necessary to visit .My guarantee is that you will not be disappointed. In all we spent about three hours on the island which was, of course, not long enough, but sufficient to inhale and enjoy an amazing "moment" to be taken away and enjoyed as an indelible memory of the spiritual foreground and the dramatic background of Benbulbin and Knocknarea.

We had lunch under way, all disrupted by rising wind and a building sea from the north-west of course. We motored as far as the Bowmore rocks before bearing off for Teelin, and setting the genoa.

The harbour here has been upgraded and visitors' moorings have been laid a long way off the shore. Since the wind had piped up significantly we ventured into the small harbour where we found a berth alongside a sea angling boat, the owner of which came to take our lines and make us snug alongside. Brian was leaving the ship in search of a lift from this very remote outpost yet to our surprise he was home in Sligo in jig time due to a series of extraordinary coincidences and acts of kindness.

The weather forecast was for light to moderate north-east winds and fair weather! We turned in early after dinner aboard.

#### **Teelin--- Arranmore---- Burtonport - day 17**

Yet another early start was indicated for this trip so having breakfasted we left Teelin at 06.00, under a calm clear blue sky and flat sea and we motored all the way passing Rathlin O'Birne at 07.00 and picked up if visitors mooring at Arranmore at 12.30.

Liz and I went ashore for a walk, and by the time we returned, the wind had freshened and the mooring was no longer comfortable. I decided that it would be more agreeable, and possibly more sociable to move to Burtonport. This harbour has also been significantly redeveloped since I was last here. We found, yet again, a safe and quiet berth alongside a fishing boat, and the harbourmaster confirmed that we would be safe and welcome to remain there overnight. We went ashore and had a very pleasant meal in the Lobster Pot. We hoped that the gods would favour us with conditions to land on Tory Island. The forecasts were not altogether clear, nor had we any information about the swell conditions at Tory. However we resolved to "give it a go" and settle down for an early night with a view to another early start!

## **Burtonport--- Tory-----Downings - day 18**

We left Burtonport at 0600 for Tory Island under engine in very calm conditions, at 09.45 we met a yacht *Manana*, clearly coming from Tory, and made radio contact with them, they confirmed that they had been comfortable overnight alongside another yacht in the harbour. This was very good news indeed. As we approached Camousmore Bay we saw four basking sharks lazing about nonchalantly quite close to the mouth of the harbour, their dorsal fins and tails clearly visible, and their bodies breaking the surface.

In the harbour we tied up alongside *Calimbo* (out of Rush) owned by Jonathan Mason who, with this crew, was making a TV documentary retracing the footsteps of his grandfather, who had visited and photographed remote islands in the 1930s and published a book on the subject at that time, this film could be worth looking out for! We went ashore, but didn't get very far before we received a royal welcome from the King of Tory himself, and he set the tone for the visit, giving us the necessary information to enjoy and explore the points of greatest interest on the island. We had the good fortune to have the island almost to ourselves, as the ferry had not yet arrived. Before departing we had a pleasant and quiet lunch in the restaurant which was preparing for the arrival of the ferry.

At 13.30 we left for Downings in calm conditions and a light northerly breeze. On our way we met a fleet of boats racing from Lough Swilly to Tory-----we had been invited by the King to stay over for the Hooley that he was to host that night for the

yachtsmen! For once my guardian angel intervened and guided me to the safety of another port!

This sail from Tory was idyllic, a close reach in smooth waters with sunshine galore. Downings was as beautiful as ever, though since my last visit is somewhat overburdened with new holiday homes and, alas, it being a fine weekend, speedboats, jet skis and waters skiers creating a lot of noise pollution and turbulence.

We took a visitors mooring and after a late lunch Liz and I went ashore for a walk and to check shore facilities. It was a very happy seaside atmosphere, and, though we didn't need any, we established that fuel would not be available here. We decided to dine on board and had a blissful evening in the cockpit in shorts and T-shirts enjoying the long awaited rise in temperature..

### **Downings to Rathmullan - day 19**

At 09.50 we left for Rathmullan in a southerly force 2 which later pepped up to southeast force three. We had a lovely sail to the entrance of Lough Swilly and tied up at the pontoon at Rathmullan, to allow Mark to depart for Dublin, and to await the arrival of John Kavanagh. We were happy to contemplate spending two nights at this pontoon and enjoy a couple of lazy days!

Unfortunately the weather forecasts were indicating the break up of the high-pressure which we had been enjoying, unsettled weather was forecast. We settled down and had a very leisurely evening and a wonderful dinner "a deux" at the Gatehouse



restaurant. While the forecast was bad the weather looked very settled and we expected to enjoy another night at the pontoon despite the weather forecast

Next morning the forecast was more pessimistic, south southeast force 4 to 5 possibly 6. John Kavanagh arrived in the early afternoon and went ashore for a walk with Liz while I pottered about on the boat. As I was below the wind began to pipe up, and the boat was being blown onto and working very hard against the pontoon, I readjusted the fenders several times but they were finding difficulty staying between the pontoon and the boat. Along the pontoon another boat carried away one of its cleats and was lying askew. With difficulty I made my way along the pontoon to secure this boat, it was very unstable underfoot and the pontoon was articulating violently. I managed to secure the distressed boat, and returned to *Sea Dancer*. As I tentatively picked my steps along the unstable pontoon a decision was easily made to "get out of Dodge city" as quickly as possible.

### **Rathmullan to Fahn - day 20**

We had a choice of refuge within the Lough, either the marina at Fahn or the sheltered anchorage at Macamish a few miles north. We chose Fahn to the east across the Lough. With the help of two other boat owners who came to our assistance we managed to "spring" *Sea Dancer* off the pontoon and headed across to Fahn, we took our time, and a circuitous route, to allow the tide to fill the channel. I was relieved to be off the pontoon and at sea and even more relieved when we tied up.

This marina proved well sheltered and, though it is very much a work in progress ((having had litigation difficulties with the government in the course of its

development). It also seems to be beset by silting, which one hopes will be sorted out by dredging, and perhaps some reconfiguration of the breakwaters. The shore facilities are rudimentary, though there are showers and toilets in temporary buildings.

We were consoled to find a delightful pub with excellent dining facilities just on the edge of the marina site so we settled in snug “as bugs” and had a very pleasant night.

Next morning we had to wait for the tide, but we were not fazed by the continuing forecast for strong southeasterly winds, since our next port of call was Portrush.

### **Fahn to Portrush - day 21**

We left Fahn at 16.20 and had a delightfully calm and colourful passage down the Lough, and of course the wind managed to back to the north-west just as we passed Dunaff Head at 1800 and, as a mist came in, we were able to make out the sinister looking shape of one of our Irish naval vessels lurking off Portsalon. We started the engine as we needed to catch the tide at Malin Head in order to get to Portrush for a nights sleep before collecting Liz’s nephew Aidan the following morning at 08.00 on the quayside there.

We rounded Malin Head at 20.15, and we seemed to get the tide just right as our speed jumped from 6 to 8.5 knots, visibility was closing in all the time as we trundled along, but we did see the light on Inishowen Head as we crossed the entrance to Lough Foyle. We arrived at Portrush, before midnight with a freshening westerly breeze; we tied up at the pontoon, just east of the lifeboat mooring, had a night cap

and went to bed. Next morning we had the full "Ulster" breakfast in one of the hotels before meeting Aidan and his mother and hijacking him en route for Glenarm.

### **Portrush to Glenarm - day 22**

With an east going tide, a sea mist and no wind we left at 09.00. The sea was bumpy off Portrush and it appeared that the westerly winds overnight had caused a sea to build while meeting the west going tide during the previous six hours. I decided to go outside the Skerries. There was no wind until Fair Head, and by then the mist had lifted, and there was a light air off the land. We were able to sail close by the Giants Causeway and Carrick-a-Rede Bridge. I have never enjoyed Rathlin sound so much, with both the Antrim Glens and Rathlin in high colour, clearly visible, calm seas and a rising breeze off the land. Having a 2 knot tide under us, we were happy to carry just the genoa, and enjoy the coast in its splendour and, linger over it, without a mainsail and the extra knots it might have given us!

The tide went foul for us at 14:00, our own fault for indulging in the "Ulster fry" and leaving an hour later than we should have and not setting the mainsail, but the wind did pipe up to help us against this tide for the last few hours into Glenarm. At 14.10 Belfast coastguard gave a warning of a northwest gale for the Irish Sea with a complex low developing.

A special day was capped by the warm reception, to which we have become accustomed, in Glenarm. Liz decided to cook a chicken surprise aboard while Aidan John and myself went ashore for a pint.

## **Glenarm to Bangor - days 23 – 24 - 25**

The weather was emphatically changing, small craft warnings were in the forecasts and talk of strong southerly winds over the next few days. We decided to dash for Bangor to sit it out there, and left Glenarm at 10.15, strong winds from the south gusting 8 being forecast for later in the day. We got into Bangor at 13.15 ahead of the forecast, Aidan, who had been with us from Portrush left us for his home in Coleraine. We “hunkered down” in a visitors berth, surrounded by a small flotilla of large boats from the Royal Yacht Squadron also hiding from the weather, which actually didn’t materialise until the following day. I was happy to have a few days to tidy and look over the ship, as, by now we had been continually at sea and on the “go” for over three weeks. We dined ashore but had an early night and planned a long lunch for “the men” on the morrow, while Liz planned to go in to Hollywood to shop.

By the time lunch ended, on day 24, a gale was howling, and it was lashing rain. The men returned to the boat for a “snooze” and despite the whistling in the rigging, and the torrential rain above deck found oblivion!! We received a warm invitation, for that night, to a Barbeque, for berth holders in the marina, but really we couldn’t face it, as the conditions on the marina were appalling for such an event, wind, rain and a serious chill. \later as we skulked, in full oilskins, past the flapping marquee we had to admire the fortitude of the revellers within .....but we passed on .....after all we had endured a lot of cold and hardship in the recent past! Fair play to them all they were still at it when we were returning to the boat, after a enjoying a really good, and appropriately “hot” Indian meal in the Ganges!

The weather kept us in Bangor for a third day, but we did get to watch the Lions playing Australia over an early Irish coffee in a shore side pub. Unfortunately the enforced and prolonged stay in Bangor, put paid to the possibility of spending a few days in Strangford Lough on our way home to Howth

### **Bangor to Howth - day 26**

With a forecast of west southwest force 2 to 4, backing to southeast and then backing further to settle in the northeast, we left Bangor at 08.00 with a clear sky, calm sea and a good tide under us, our ETA Howth was 23.00 to complete our circumnavigation.

With that forecast we were looking forward to a pleasant final passage to our home port, a hearty lunch aboard, perhaps, accompanied with a bottle (or two) of wine to help us to reflect on what we were beginning to regard as “our achievement”

As the wind filled in it was dead ahead at Skulmartin, and, of course, when we got to South Rock and bore off 50 degrees ----- the wind was still “on the nose” and so it happened that this became yet another cruise with a nasty sting in the tail !!!!!

We carried the genoa as far as Ardglass, and having decided we were now passage making (not cruising), we started the engine to help us to carry the tide past St. Johns Point, in the hope that this we would prevent our cruise slipping into a 27<sup>th</sup> day.

Throughout a long and miserable slog, during which we experienced all sorts of weather, adverse winds, rain and lumpy seas, our only joy, was a VHI contact with my old friend Freddie Moran on *Artic Fern*. He and Hilary were on their way home to

the Clyde having cruised our east coast. Interestingly, this contact was due to him identifying us via the AIS system, as visibility was at that point very poor!

We tied up in Howth at 23.50, having sailed 894 miles in 26 days, visited 25 anchorages (including 7 islands), our “aspiration” achieved !

### **Reflections on a May – June circumnavigation**

#### POSITIVE:

- (a) Long days and little darkness, facilitating daylight sailing, for up to 20 hours.
- (b) No problems with crowding, in anchorages or marinas, and no issues with fishermen, when seeking a berth alongside.
- (c) Clear, and high definition visibility, by which to enjoy the sea and landscape particularly on the west coast, which later in the season can be lost by heat haze

#### NEGATIVE:

- (a) The likelihood, of greater periods of high winds and low temperatures.
- (b) The absence of other boats, with whom to fraternise (mixed blessing??)
- (c) The greater risk of having the weather, rather than you, decide where you will visit.
- (d) The greater likelihood of general forecasts not being relevant to where you happen to be!

#### **An additional friend on board!**

Cruising Ireland was a wonderful companion, and a “must have” for anybody sailing on the coast of Ireland, I found it invaluable as a source, and as a friend, especially when faced with choosing “on the hoof” a destination not already on the itinerary , as happens when the weather changes dramatically, as it frequently does on our coast. It has more than fulfilled its purpose of being a “Companion to the Sailing Directions”. It is a publication of huge merit, in its own right, and one of which we, and more particularly the authors, and our publication company should, with justification be very proud.