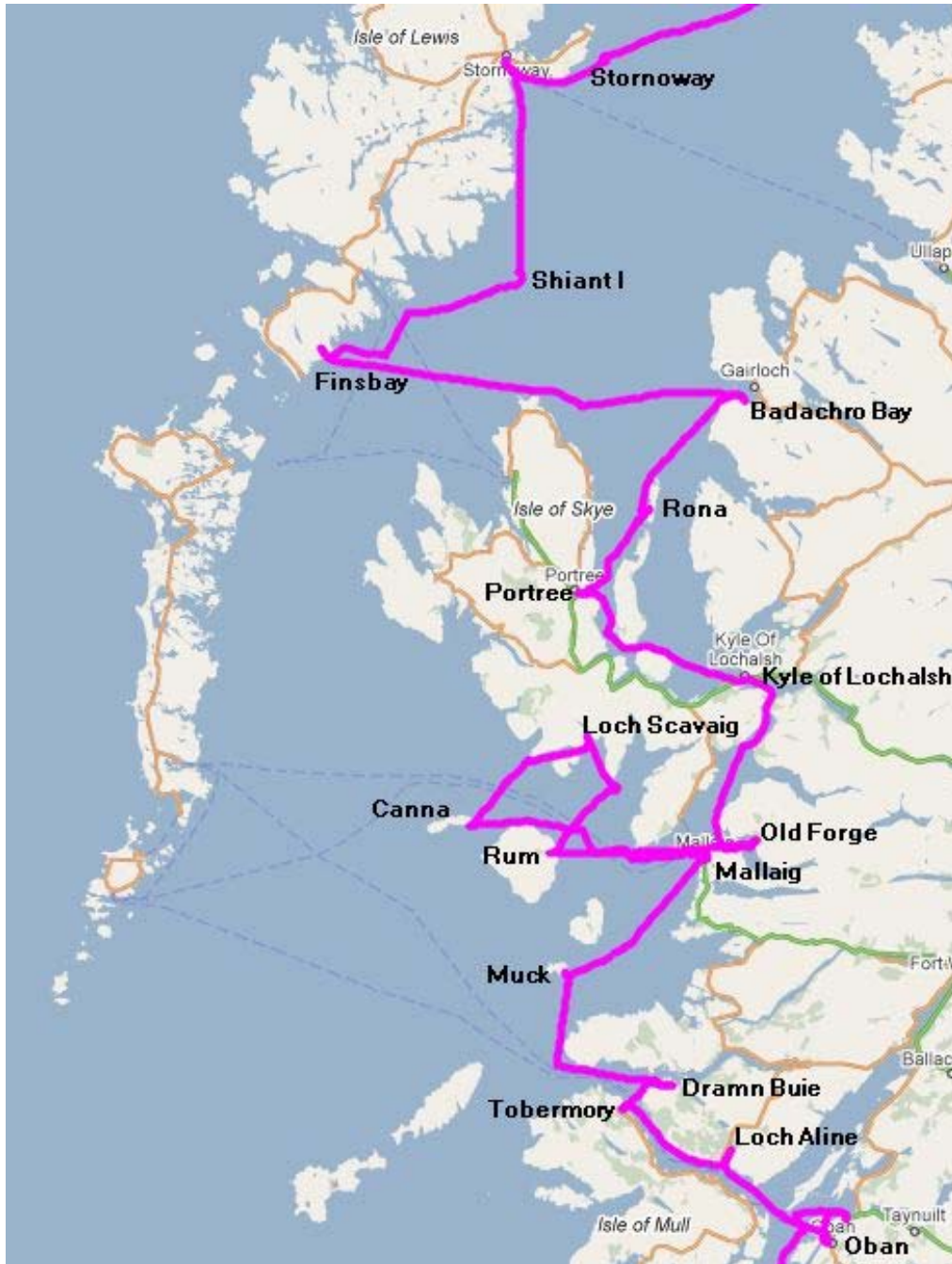


2nd Report: Stornoway 58°12'37.5"N 6°23'23.5"W
Oban 56°25'6.1N 5°29'47.3W
1 to 16 June 2010

Route Overview



Reports Silmaril 2010

Tuesday, 1 June. Back in Stornoway from the stay with the great wedding in Switzerland, *Silmaril* expected us in perfect condition. The weather was fine and our view from the boat impressive.



Wednesday, 2 June.

Laundry day and preparations for our departure tomorrow.

Thursday, June 3.

We left due south, again just the two of us on board. The famous bird sanctuary on Shiant Island was to be a stopover on our way to an anchoring place somewhere on the island of Harris of the Outer Hebrides.

There was little wind and

we sailed leisurely along the coast of Lewis toward Shiant Island.

Light houses are always fascinating subjects and I can hardly resist whipping out the camera.



The visit on Shiant Island was a great success. The place really deserves its reputation. Landscape and fauna present wonderful pictures.



We already enjoyed the view from far away and entering the bay we saw hundreds of birds, a great many seals and fantastic rock formations. Unfortunately, my camera is not really successful in capturing birds or seals. They are only pinpoints in the blue of sky or water. Rocks or clouds look much better.

The hole in the hill is indeed a natural tunnel, which can be seen from both sides.

The yellow color does not stem from flowers, but from lichen or kind of algae on rocks and cliffs.



Reports Silmaril 2010



Yes, whinstone indeed. Volcanic activity from ancient times is seen on all of these islands.

We weighed anchor around 15:00 and sailed out of the bay, around the island and on south along the coast of Lewis. On the way we saw the data of the *Smiling Swiss* on our AIS instrument. She is a charter boat of the Swiss Cruising Club and was obviously in search of good anchoring ground in one of the Lochs on Lewis. We called her on the radio but did not get an answer. The crew was visibly busy deciding where to drop anchor in the very shallow Loch.

(AIS Automatic Identification System, data on identification, speed, heading, destination, etc. of commercial ships and pleasure boats sent out regularly displayed on our plotter. We do not send out our own data).

We had no intention of spending the night in the same loch, the place seemed very shallow and subject to a considerable tidal range.

A few miles further south we sailed into Finsbay and found good anchoring ground after a few unsuccessful tries.

Reports Silmaril 2010

The cute heads of seals kept emerging all around *Silmaril* like they would censoriously observe our maneuvers in their waters.

I assure you, this is one!



The evening was wonderfully quiet and colorful. There are no landing facilities in the bay except for very small boats. We enjoyed the view on the few houses from the water.



Reports Silmaril 2010

Friday, June 4. We had intended to visit the small group of isles of St. Kilda. They lie way out in the North Atlantic and offer little shelter in bad weather. It was inhabited by a small community until 1930, who had lived an incredibly tough life. We had read up on their history and were sorely tempted to risk the crossing. There was almost no wind and none announced in the weather forecast. We would have been forced to run the engine all the 70 miles out to the islands. We decided against a loud and smelly passage in relatively unstable weather and headed east toward the Scottish mainland.

We crossed the Little Minch to the north tip of the Isle of Skye, where we encountered strong currents between the many small islands of the most curious shapes.



Far away on the horizon the mountains of mainland Scotland became visible despite the misty weather.



Alex had read about "the most famous pub", the Badachro Inn, in our book on Scotland and we were very anxious to put its reputation to the test.

Reports *Silmaril* 2010

We sailed into the wide bay of Gairloch and feasted our eyes on the contrast of the dark bleak mountains and the bright gold of the vast expanses of broom.



In the tiny appendix of Gairloch, the Badachro Bay, we dropped anchor snugly placed among many buoys and a number of rocks.



As soon as *Silmaril* was ready to be left alone, we watered the dinghy and chugged through the buoy field to the pub.

Reports Silmaril 2010



On the outside of the stone pier we moored the dinghy at very low water level. The food absolutely justified the boastful advertisement; we had a finger-licking meal. We took our time over it, although we had to eat on the terrace at rather cool temperatures. There was no room inside.

After the main course we moved inside and talked to one of the guests whom we had talked to passing his beautiful 50 foot Island Packet on a buoy on our way to the pub by dinghy. He recommended a visit to the small island of Rona. With his suggestion in mind, we returned to *Silmaril* and from our box seats on deck we watched the fabulous performance of the setting sun.



Reports Silmaril 2010

Saturday, June 5. The sun was bright in the sky this morning and we felt like doing a bit of "shipwork" outside. We cleaned the windows, treated the rubber seals, scrubbed the deck and so on. Around midday, we followed yesterday's advice and headed toward Rona. In the narrow entrance to the small bay we came across a small yawl. The sailor shouted "page fifty-seven"! We had obviously chosen an unusual course around the rocks in the very entrance, not the one proposed in the book! But we did not allow him to divert us and everything worked well. Later on we understood the whole joke: it was Bill, the caretaker, who let us know that there was a "normal" straight way in. We laughed heartily about it when we drank a glass of wine with him and his wife Lorrain, her mother Diana and Sheila, a friend of hers, who were on visit..



The lodge is their home. They live here all year round, all alone in winter. They look after the herd of Highland cattle, cut the grass and the bushes and prepare the new tourist season. They are employed by the Danish owners of Rona and rent out the small holiday homes.

Long ago, the island was inhabited by farmers. It is full of ruins. A few of them still in passably good condition were refurbished to attract tourists other than boat owners. A small ferry commutes between Portree on the east coast of the Isle of Skye and Rona in the summer months.



After a short walk we decided to stay at least another day.

Reports Silmaril 2010

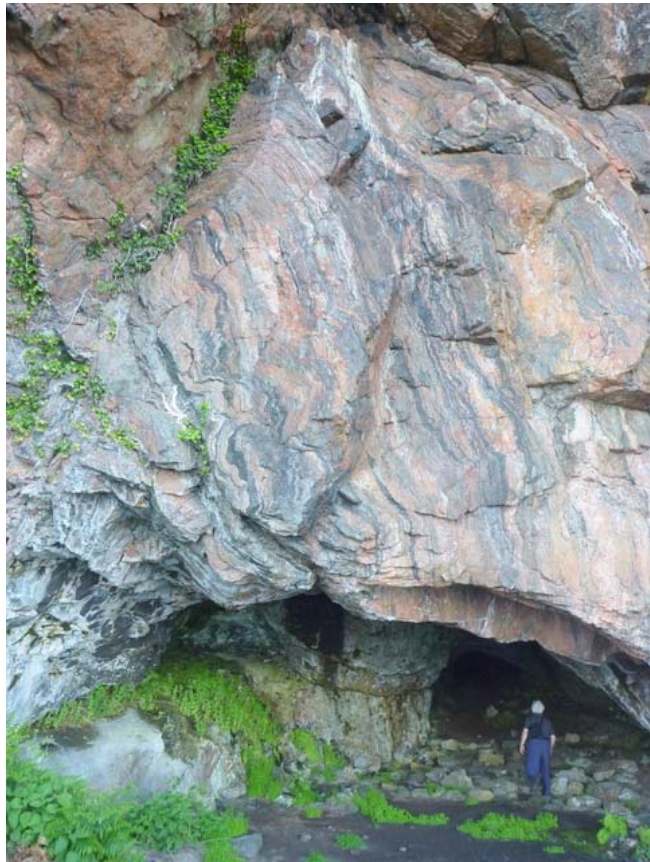
Sunday, June 6. The weather really spoiled us. We tackled the steep ascent behind the lodge in glorious sunshine.

The so-called Church Cave was our destination. The path leads uphill and through a swamp, where Alex nearly lost a shoe,



and down again to a truly magical place.

The cave reaches deep into the colorful rock of the cliff and arches high up above its floor. It is really used as a church. We found a bible wrapped in plastic and stowed in a wooden crate.



Looking down into the water we had the feeling of hovering between heaven above and hell below, even with a perfectly peaceful sea. With a shudder we thought about the scenery in violent storm. No wonder the place inspires awe.



Reports Silmaril 2010

We returned to the main path and followed it to the interior of the island.

We came across many flowers and curious objects: the only broom bush on the island - probably imported with a bale of hay for the cattle brought from Sky, according to Bill –



a number of orchids,



pretty blue bells almost hidden by tall fern,



and leftovers from former farm life.



Reports Silmaril 2010

The trail marked by wooden stakes led us through enchanted forests and large fern fields. Bill will have to spend quite a few hours mowing and cutting wood this summer, if his guests should find the markers!



We spent a merry evening with Lorraine, Bill, Diana, and Sheila in the cozy kitchen of the lodge. Lorraine had prepared a great meal, salads from her garden, home-made bread, chutney and preserves of her own production. Bill offered a good bottle of wine. It was really hard to leave Rona. The island is a real gem, full of untamed nature and looked after by very special caretakers.



Reports Silmaril 2010

Monday, June 7. Once again we visited the lodge, paid our dues and left a contribution to the fund for Lorraine's second glasshouse, hopefully to be built in the fall. With a final cup of tea we celebrated our happy acquaintance and said goodbye with a sad heart.

In perfect weather and excellent sailing conditions we crossed over to Portree on the Isle of Skye.



There is only a tiny pontoon in the harbor of Portree for dinghies and the Rescue Ship. All other boats, fishing vessels included, are moored on buoys. After several discussions with the harbor master over the radio and two changes of buoys, we finally made fast at a guest buoy adorned with greenery of which the harbor master approved and went shopping

by dinghy. There was wind and current, *Silmaril* tugged and swayed gently at the buoy. She lay safely moored, though and we left her to go shopping by dinghy.



The town of Portree is well known for its rows of colorful houses along the wide bay.



Its interior is less attractive. Many stores in the vicinity of the harbor offer products specifically for tourists and we were looking for food and not in the mood to search for the cozy corners that could probably have been found.

We returned to *Silmaril*, hoisted the dinghy on board and enjoyed a peaceful evening with good food and a glass of wine.



Reports Silmaril 2010

Tuesday, March 8.

A marvelous day of sailing expected us. Winds were perfect, water and sky a new portrait every minute.

We sailed with great pleasure through the sound of Raasay, along the east coast of the isle of Scalpay and across the wide expanse toward Kyle of Lochalsh.

The narrow entrance to Loch Alsh is spanned by an elegant bridge and watched over by a dazzling white lighthouse.



We decided to go to the east harbor. The book recommends the other side, but we did not feel like a crammed marina and opted for more surge, but less people.

It was a good choice, although the pontoon is very small and subject to constant movement. We met nice people, a young couple with two small children and four brothers in a motor

boat from the Faroe Islands.

They have the same type of boat as our Swiss friends Ruedi and Claudia Büchi. At first sight we thought it was them! In pouring rain the four brothers (the youngest is 65) stood on the pontoon, talked to Alex, drank beer and offered him air-dried mutton of their own production. We tasted it both, chewed and swallowed with little enthusiasm, despite their obvious pride in "the best and healthiest meet on earth".

After a stroll through the village, where we bought some things for the kids and got a new bailer – the old one had disappeared in the sea (we should know that the bowline holds only conditionally if not under constant tug after we almost lost our dinghy in the Tysfjord last summer) – we visited the Scottish luxury train that had just arrived here at the terminal station. We wondered what kind of people would indulge in such swanky traveling.



We settled for marveling, shooting pictures and waving to a nice passenger once in a while.



A third neighbor at the pontoon had arrived by sailboat in order to give a violin concert in the lounge of the Royal Scotsman.

Reports Silmaril 2010

And *Silmaril* rocked us to sleep in the company of our three nice neighbors on the tiny pontoon, the young couple with the kids, the violinist with his girlfriend and the four brothers on the motor boat.

The ferry also lies at the pontoon during the night and visitors always have to make room for it.



Wednesday, June 9. We woke up to the sound of a stiff breeze in the rig. The calm waters of last night had changed into a field of galloping white horses as far as we could see. We prepared to leave for a choppy ride through the narrow passage at Kyclerhea and on through the sound of Sleat into Loch Inverie. Alex had calculated the direction of the current at Kyle Rhea and we left in good time to go with the current at the narrowest place. We left shortly after the violinist and his girl friend battling close-hauled against strong winds and rather tall waves. Their small boat had much more difficulties to keep course on the rough



waters and we admired them to be out here at all. As soon as we reached the narrow passage, the waves disappeared and the wind became gustier and unpredictable falling from the surrounding mountains. But the current flushed us swiftly through the strait at Kyle Rhea with 4 knots above the pretty good 7 knots boat speed.

The speeding clouds let occasional sun rays illuminate the coast in patches . . .

. . . , or shrouded the land around us in murky gloom.

We sped on out into the wider part of the sound and through a large number of seals that let the strong current brush their fur.



The passage into Loch Nevis to Inverie and to The Old Forge exacted strength and full attention. The wind increased and became squally, the waves taller and steeper. We tacked umpteen times close-hauled under reef 1 in the narrow water way from coast to coast,



every tack on the 10m depth contour often forbiddingly close to the rocks. We put up a good fight and enjoyed the speedy ride. In the evening, we left *Silmaril* at a guest buoy of The Old Forge and went ashore in the dinghy for a good dinner in the pub. The place can only be reached by boat or over a long and rough foot path. It

is an old settlement now resettled by sixty people after everybody had left in hard times long ago. The pub is famous, advertised in many books and brochures. A small ferry brings supplies and visitors from Mallaig. A few houses offer accommodation.

Reports Silmaril 2010

The place impressed us. The people are unconventional, work assiduously and with enthusiasm at the project and attract a special crowd. Those who come here love good food, simple accommodation and long hikes.



The church in the background hidden behind bushes is now also a private residence.



Thursday, June 10. Passage to the island of Rum. We were less lucky with the wind today, first there was little and then none at all. But the day still held a true adventure for us. When we reached the entrance to the bay where we planned to anchor, we suddenly saw triangular fins moving slowly in the water.



These must be sharks' fins!
We carefully drew nearer and saw to our immense surprise huge bodies with wide open mouths leisurely swimming in wide circles. The monster is called basking shark and is found in several places in Scotland.

With wide open mouths they slowly move through the water and filtrate their nourishment, plankton, from the water. They have no teeth, only baleen plates like whales. They were not at all disturbed by *Silmaril*.



We engaged the motor only briefly once in a while to keep moving in slow motion. They drew their rounds calmly and approached the boat time and again. there were four, all of them about 7 meters long.

Reports Silmaril 2010

After a long time and many pictures we broke away from those giants and stated to look for suitable anchoring ground. Some other sailboats already lay at anchor, but in the wide arch of the bay we found a good place not too close to any neighbor.

As soon as the dinghy was ready, we headed for the landing place to explore the island and its castle. The building is impressive, but unfortunately pretty run down. Part of it is still museum with no money, therefore somewhat dilapidated. The other part was converted into a youth hostel. We met a group of belated hippies and a few young drop-outs, as they seemed to be.

The atmosphere was a bit depressive, pretty shabby and even adverse. The park around the castle, however, is a paradise full of flowers, bushes in full bloom and gigantic trees, all in wild disorder without being neglected.



Friday, June 11. This is our wedding anniversary and we planned to celebrate with a trip to the whiskey distillery Talisker and a stop over in "the most beautiful bay on earth", Loch Scavaig. We started in good time and crossed over to Skye in cloudy weather. The bay



itself is indeed beautiful, but very forbiddingly so. Dark steep cliffs surround it and the further in we advanced the more claustrophobic and threatening the bare rocks rose up around us. It is a special place, many seals lay on the many tiny islands and birds circled above us. But we did not dare go all the way in to the suggested anchoring place hidden behind a small island. I doubted

that there was enough room to turn around, especially since we saw a tall mast and expected a large sailboat occupying most of the minute bay. The passage in is also very narrow and curved. Moreover, the wind increased steadily and our book talks of gusts falling on the water from the top the surrounding mountains so strong that sheep loose their



footing! An uncanny place, indeed. We left in two minds, relieved to reach more open waters and disappointed that we had not seen the very sanctuary of the place. It turned out to have been a good decision. As we sailed west between the coast of Skye and the Isle of Soay, the weather became nasty. Turning north along the coast of Skye toward Talisker we had the wind on the nose

Reports Silmaril 2010

and the tall waves from the Sea of the Hebrides head on, so no chance of reaching it in a few hours. We turned southwest toward the Isle of Canna. The strong but favorable winds abeam let us plough through the agitated sea with good speed and only little pitching. The anchorage area on Canna is full of seaweed and exposed to the prevailing northwesterly winds. We had some trouble finding good anchoring ground. Since we expected the wind to die down and to back somewhat during the night, the rather short distance to the rocky shoreline did not worry us. However, we did not dare go ashore, the wind was too strong and the grip of the anchor too little tested.



We enjoyed the view of the grand church that stands alone close to the rocky shore like a fortress in the grim weather of that evening.

The night, our wedding anniversary night, was to become a sleepless trial of our patience. The wind increased to a steady 30 knots and instead of backing it veered. *Silmaril* swung in wide circles gradually moving closer to the rocks. So, we took turns keeping watch, one sitting in front of the plotter observing the trace of *Silmaril's* dance on the display, the other trying to get some sleep curled up on the sofa nearby. The wind howling and tearing in the rig helped the watch somewhat to keep awake, but prevented the other one from restorative sleep. Around 04:00 the wind died down, *Silmaril* had never come threateningly close to the rocks, the anchor had held, only the swinging circle had changed. So, we both slept a little.

Saturday, 12 June. We woke up early and delighted in the changed atmosphere around us.



The sky was overcast, but the sun warmed our tired limbs and the water was almost calm. A few boats had already left the bay and we started to weigh anchor.



Reports Silmaril 2010

The maneuver turned out to be a bit complicated, however. The anchor came up heavily laden with a ton of seaweed. Alex was occupied quite some time liberating the anchor from thick roots with large leathery leaves



Finally we were free and went on our way. We caught up with *Black Jack* that had left the bay a little ahead of us. She is a beautiful wooden boat, all black and sporting rear windows a little like a mini caravel of the 15th century. We would meet the crew, Paddy and Jill O'Connor, later on.

In glorious sunshine and wind from abaft we reached the harbor of Mallaig. One can only make fast at buoys there and since the harbor master was on vacation, no one could indicate the guest buoys. We chose one to our liking and naturally had to move, since it belonged to a resident. The old (both at least 80) and a bit neglected looking couple in the green boat that we had seen in Inverie, called to us and showed us in an incredibly friendly manner a guest buoy and waited patiently until we had freed their buoy.

We took the dinghy to shore and made up for the postponed anniversary dinner. the Scottish cuisine is by no means as bad as its reputation. Time and again we were served excellent seafood.

Reports Silmaril 2010

Sunday, 13 June. We are still in Mallaig. There is no Diesel available until Monday. It is raining. Jill and Paddy from *Black Jack* invited us for coffee. The boat is really great. The interior is built according to old-times design and material and very well cared for. The two live in Holyhead at the northern tip of Wales. Paddy showed Alex an indestructible computer and offered him a CD with all the charts of the world, a pirated copy from somewhere and it works. Meanwhile Jill served coffee and a special cake. She showed me the book on the Scottish Islands by Hamish Haswell-Smith. We purchased it later on and still read in it when ever our thoughts return with melancholy to our great time in Scotland.

Monday, 14 June. Great weather, but no wind, as we left the port of Mallaig. We had to run the engine over Oberon Bank in the direction of the small island of Muck. Jill and Paddy had told us to steer this course because often minke whales are seen on the bank.



And sure enough, suddenly one such monster came up right beside us and enveloped us in an enormous cloud of terribly bad breath.

Reports Silmaril 2010



He eyed us a while, dived, came up and looked at us again,



turned, swam slowly away from us and finally disappeared.
What an experience. The huge mammal actually paid us a ten-minute visit.

Reports Silmaril 2010

We tugged on into the tiny bay of Muck, anchored in the vicinity of the ferry pier and ate lunch in bright sunshine. We rowed the dinghy to shore and hiked across the small island. Only 38 people live here all year round. Most of them live off their land and sell produce from their gardens or handcrafts for the tourists made from wool of the island's sheep, from leather or wood. A few are farmers or fishermen or both. A young woman sells very pretty baby shoes. We bought a pair for little Henri, the new-born son of Noemi and Tobias.



The dinghy lay high and dry when we returned from our hike. We carried it to the waterfront with little effort. But the two men with the motor boat had to wait for several hours for the rising water to get their heavy vehicle afloat again.

And on we sailed south with good wind now, rounding the famous light house of Ardnamurchan east into Loch Sunart and the bay of Dramn Buie. We anchored among a few other boats and spent a lovely evening and a quiet night.



Reports Silmaril 2010

Tuesday, 15 June. In hazy weather we started toward Tobermory, made fast at a guest buoy in the large buoy field and rowed to the pontoon for the dinghies.



The little town sports a line of very colorful houses all along the bay. We liked the place a lot with its many small shops and the whiskey distillery right at the water front. In the Café Fish on the upper floor we enjoyed a very good lunch with a view over the entire harbor bay.

Around 15:00 we left again and sailed south through the Sound of Mull and let the strong current wash us into Loch Aline to our anchorage.

Wednesday, 16 June. The remaining leg from Loch Aline to Oban was only a short distance, only 16 miles. But dense fog, invisible ferries blowing their fog horns and a very narrow passage provided a few exciting hours on the water. Thanks to Radar and AIS we reached the marina on the island of Kerrera opposite Oban without any problems. *Silmaril* would now wait for us. We returned to Switzerland for the hundredth birthday of Renzo, Sylvia, Johanna and Ronja on 19 June.