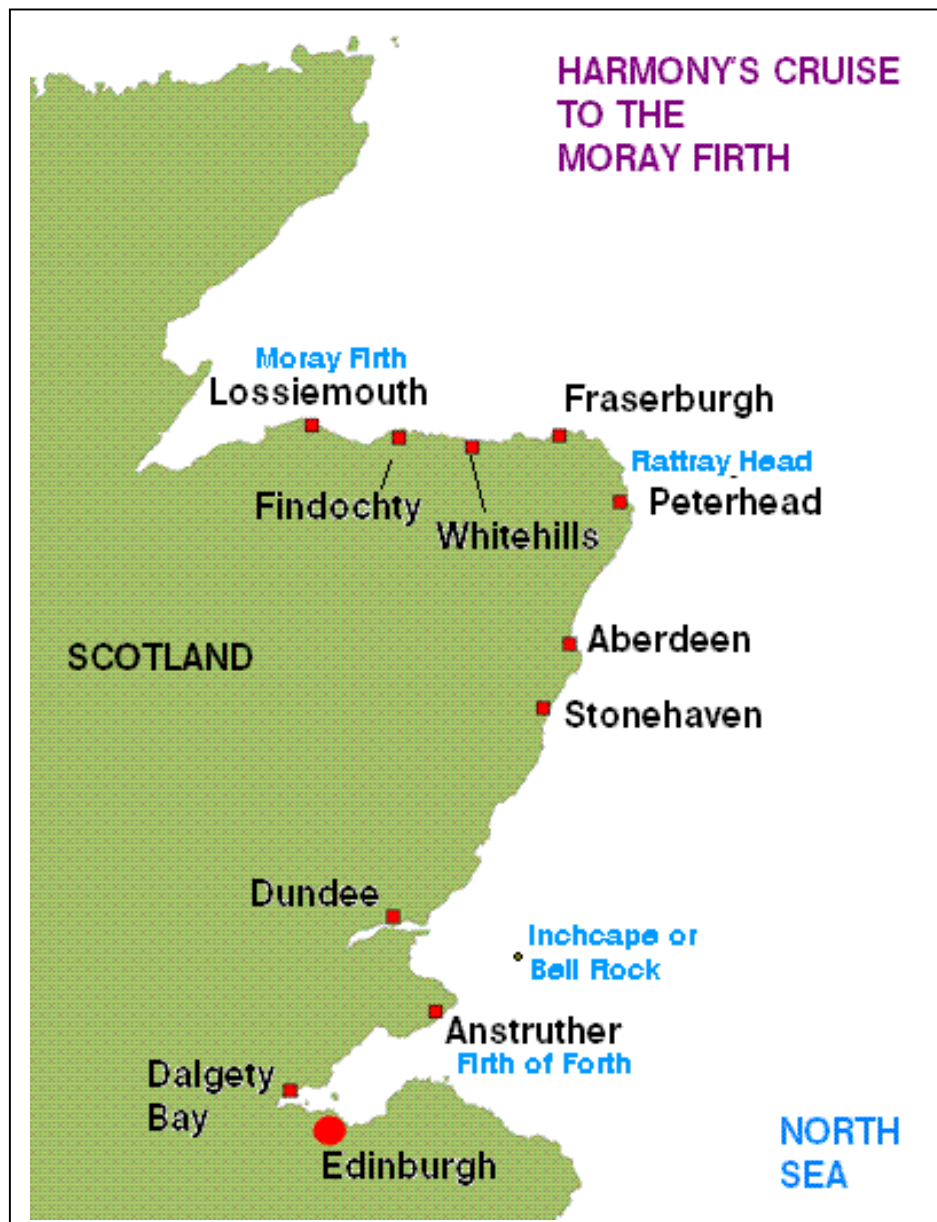


HARMONY'S SUMMER CRUISE 2003



Summer Cruise of 'Harmony' **27th July – 12th August 2003**

After long months of planning and dreaming, Sunday 27th July finally arrived. In glorious sunshine Heloise and I motored our Trident24 'Harmony' off her mooring to the raised slipway at Dalgety Bay, where we loaded all our gear and provisions and stowed our inflatable on the deck before casting off at 1300hrs and heading east for Anstruther under full sail.

As we sailed slowly by Inchcolm Island we could see the large contingent from Dalgety Bay Sailing club preparing for the annual picnic. They couldn't have asked for a better day for it.

I had planned to depart at 1300hrs, which was about 90 minutes before high water so that we could enjoy the full ebb tide all the way to Anstruther. According to both the charts and the pilot book we ought to have enough water to enter Anstruther at almost any state of the tide.

We had a pleasant run in a gentle F2 – 3 all the way along the Forth and at our average cruising speed of 4 knots the 25miles took just over 6 hours. As we approached the harbour I could see that the tide gauge was reading 6 feet at the entrance. I wasn't sure what the implications of this were for the inner harbour but I knew it was enough for us and so we made fast alongside the pier in the outer harbour. As we did so our sounder read zero but we remained afloat for a time as I had deliberately put in a 50cm offset to allow for waves, we took the ground a few minutes later.

I had been assured on several occasions that the harbour master at Anstruther was an 'excellent chap' and decided I better at least do him the courtesy of trying to seek him out and paying any necessary dues. I wasn't entirely sure he would still be about at 730pm on a Sunday but just then a gentleman with a distinctly Geordie accent and a purposeful walk approached us and asked if we would prefer a pontoon berth for the night. I explained that we would be leaving early and were ok where we were. I asked him if he was the harbour master and he quickly changed the subject and walked away. At this point I noticed that several rivets appeared to have snapped in the fitting which attaches the forestay to the mast. I wasn't unduly concerned however as the whole thing is secured by a large stainless steel bolt which had no intention of coming out.

Heloise and I then settled down to our first night on board. Our logbook for the season has recorded 24-day sails but because of work or weather we hadn't yet had an opportunity to do an overnigher. As a result every sound of a fender shifting against the harbour wall was strange to us and neither of us slept too well.

Monday 28th July

We departed Anstruther a couple of hours after high water (0500) with enough of the ebb to carry us safely out of the Forth and up towards the Bell Rock. Having almost 50miles to go to Stonehaven we would have to endure 6 hours of adverse tide in any case before it turned back in our favour for the last couple of hours.

As we left Anstruther the sun was rising and we were again running with a gentle F2 behind us. Heloise sent a TR message to Forth Coastguard and was pleasantly surprised at how friendly the voice on the other end seemed. We had breakfast and enjoyed that kind of 'everything is right with the world' feeling that sailing in idyllic conditions gives you.

It wasn't long before we had the Bell Rock lighthouse in our sights and knew we were making good progress. The tide then turned against us and whenever our speed dropped below 3 knots over the ground we fired up our trusty old diesel donkey (Volvo MD1) to render some assistance.

It was about 0800hrs that Heloise spotted our first whale of the trip, a Minke. Within an hour or so another (or possibly the same one) surfaced some 40 meters to port, it then treated us to the most excellent view by raising it's enormous head out of the water and rolling over as it dived.

Sailing up the East Coast of Scotland can be described in much the same way as Hill walking. Just when you think your destination is around the next headland, there is another.... and another..... and another. Some of the headlands however contain sheer cliffs, caves, castles and many thousands of seabirds. Most of the time we were too far off to really appreciate the spectacle but I for one have never seen so many gannets as on this cruise and I wonder if perhaps the Chinese have a 'year of the Gannet'.

One can always tell when Stonehaven is getting closer as for perhaps 6 or 7 miles both North and South of there the swell is tremendously uncomfortable, even in settled conditions. Despite this we enjoyed some surfing at up to 6.5knots in the swell.

We motored cautiously into Stonehaven harbour at 1815hrs and found that there was very little in the way of available space, to be more specific there was space but very few ladders. We cautiously entered the inner harbour and sighted a vacant ladder along side a nice clean harbour wall. The sounder again said zero but allowing for my off set I ignored its advice at my peril and continued towards my star prize.

Harmony grounded in soft mud about 10 yards short of the wall.

Heloise made lines available whilst I quickly inflated the dinghy and paddled ashore. There then followed several comical attempts by Heloise to throw the lines to me, most of the time the rope ended up in the water but sometimes it didn't even leave the boat and just landed on top of her. To her eternal credit Heloise is able to see the funny side of her own inability to throw a line and she just laughed at the situation.

I paddled back to the boat and collected the lines and then paddled back to my ladder, which was becoming harder to reach by the minute as the tide receded further. Rather clumsily I climbed ashore and made the lines fast before returning to the boat to collect Heloise. As I did so I noticed some rather large barnacles had attached themselves to the underside of her bottom (Harmony not Heloise) and set about bashing them off with my paddle.



– Stonehaven – Our sounder read zero!

More worryingly I noticed that one of the bolts in the stemhead fitting had snapped and the entire fitting had pivoted upwards on the remaining two. As a result the rig was slack and potentially unsafe. We made the decision there and then that this warranted closer inspection and the mast would have to come down the next day.

Heloise and I hid in a restaurant for a time incase anyone had witnessed the spectacle, before returning to Harmony when she was afloat again and taking up the slack in her lines. I rigged a short length of rope around the cap shroud to keep Harmony into the wall and at 2230hrs we turned in.

Tuesday 29th July

We were both awakened at 0715 hrs by the gentle clattering of something in the cockpit and thought that perhaps a gull had accidentally dropped some prize morsel. When we eventually checked we discovered that the harbour master had kindly dropped us a shower key which he had placed inside a paper bag to deaden the sound.

When we finally got organised enough to check things we discovered to our horror that the mud in this part of the inner harbour was so soft that Harmony had settled at an alarmingly awkward angle and we now had a broken spreader to add to our problems.

Soon after we sought out the shower and noticed a group of half a dozen or so men clad in boiler suits standing chatting near to the harbour office. As we approached, one of the group stepped forward and said good morning. I asked him if he was the harbourmaster, he changed the subject. That said he was friendly, courteous and considerate. He also took our money but at no time did he confess to being the harbourmaster and I began to wonder why people seemed reluctant to do so.

I know two other harbour masters, these being Andrew Marshall at Dalgety Bay and Pete Drum at Aberdour. Doubtless their responsibilities are not as frequently exercised as would be the case at the bigger, busier harbours but neither of them is reluctant to identify themselves and Pete Drum is positively itching for an opportunity to use a little exercised Power of Arrest that harbour masters have in certain circumstances



The broken spreader – Stonehaven

Later that morning we went shopping and armed ourselves with a little egg whisk drill, clothesline pole and a broom handle. We moved Harmony along side a Sadler 34 where she would dry out on nice firm sand.

We then fashioned an 'A' frame from our fender plank, a pair of oars, some duck tape and a length of string and we set about lowering the mast. This is quite an easy task on a Trident thanks to the design and we were joined by a couple of local yachties who provided extra hands, which although not strictly speaking necessary, were welcomed none the less.

Heloise observed that our aluminum boat hook was made of the same diameter tubing as the broken spreader and set about fashioning a new spreader from that. We later discovered that the broken spreader had originally been about an inch and a half longer than the other and so we were able to cut it down and re-use it with the minimum of effort. The net result was that we now have a spare spreader and the broom handle we bought became the new boat hook.

I drilled ten holes with the little egg whisk drill!



I put a new bolt in the stemhead fitting and re-seated the whole affair with silicon sealant, which seemed to do the trick. Ten holes were drilled with the egg whisk drill to enlarge the damaged ones and the forestay fitting was then bedded in chemical metal for good measure and oversized rivets were put in to complete the job. All in all we were very satisfied with our repairs and Heloise and I put the mast back up easily and connected up the rigging screws and the wiring.

Wednesday 30th July

The 0536hrs shipping forecast on radio 4 promised a northerly 3 or 4 occasionally 5, becoming southerly 3 or 4 later. With 36 miles to go to Peterhead the prospect of a beat was not welcome, however on motoring out of Stonehaven at 0545hrs we had no wind to speak of, just drizzle and that awful swell.

We continued motoring all morning and with the assistance of the tide we were soon off Aberdeen and making good progress. The visibility came and went in the drizzle but it was never too bad and as the sun came out we received our first of many visits from Dolphins.



Dolphins!

I don't know if Alan Hill had dolphins in mind when he designed the Trident, but they do seem attracted to the hull shape in preference to some other boats. Maybe because the Trident is a little nearer their size than the large 42 footers that were nearby on occasions and didn't appear to receive their attentions.

These were common dolphins, which are very large and appear black and white when viewed beneath the water. It doesn't seem to matter how many times you see these enchanting creatures; the magic remains the same on each occasion. Typically they were in groups of half a dozen or so and would play around the boat for about 20 – 30 minutes before giving you a final fly past and returning to their patch to await the next lucky customer.

For me making eye contact, from a distance of about 5 feet, with such a beautiful wild creature which has complete mastery of its environment is a most touching experience and tends to invoke feelings of calm and goodwill to all living things. I wondered if 'Dolphin Therapy' could become a realistic proposition for anger management classes or as a youth diversion scheme. It's difficult to imagine how anyone could resort to aggression or vandalising their environment after an experience like that.

We were both completely captivated by the dolphins and we took turns at sitting on the bow from where you could almost touch them. I tended to let Heloise sit on the bow for longer because I took particular pleasure in watching her face light up with delight whenever the dolphins came to visit.



A truly captivating experience

By noon we had only about 8 miles to go to Peterhead but the tide had turned and was running at almost 2 knots against us. Our trusty old engine began sounding very unwell at this point with sucking and spluttering noises coming from the exhaust.

My initial thought was that there was a problem with the impeller and therefore the cooling. Needless to say when you look over the stern to check the cooling water it submerges the outlet and you can't tell if it is functioning correctly.

We turned the engine off and strapped our little 4hp Johnson on the bracket just in case. We had enough fuel for about 5 miles with this little fellow which being a short shaft model was never a realistic proposition for motoring the remaining distance but should get us into a harbour if we both perched as far aft as possible and there was no appreciable sea running. We had a F2 on the nose and set about a relentless beat where we made good no more than a mile or so each hour.

When the engine had cooled sufficiently I reached in awkwardly behind it and rather cautiously removed the screws on the impeller housing and then the impeller itself. I didn't dare to imagine the consequences of dropping a screw into the void beneath the engine from where it is virtually impossible to retrieve anything, especially at sea. I had previously dropped various tools down there and couldn't so much as see them far less recover them, so what chance a tiny screw?

The impeller seemed in fine shape and so I fitted a new gasket and replaced the screws. I then hit on the much simpler and frankly safer idea of simply removing a section of hose from the cooling system to ensure that water was flowing round the engine. I restarted the engine and was reassuringly squirted in the face by a jet of warm water.

By that time I was baffled. My knowledge of engines is fairly basic to say the least but I reasoned that since the engine ran ok and was cooling it was safe to use. Decision made we pressed on and with the assistance of the engine arrived at Peterhead harbour at 1800hrs.

Heloise contacted the harbour control on channel 14 and requested permission to enter and was again pleasantly surprised at how helpful and understandable the controller was. We were told to pass port to port

with a large oilrig maintenance vessel that was leaving and as we did so I noticed that the top of our VHF antenna almost reached the bottom of his anchor as it hung menacingly from his bow.

We were amazed at the large amount of Grey seals that casually reclined about the harbour despite all the shipping movements. As we entered the Marina we were pleasantly surprised by the facility. Modern pontoon berths and plenty of them available. Most of the other visiting yachts were foreign, Dutch, German and Scandinavian and none were below 36feet. The Marina manager was there to greet us and we were made most welcome.

We took a walk into Peterhead itself which is not inspiring on a Wednesday (early closing) evening and rather resembled a Wild West ghost town. The only people we saw were a few drunks on a town center bench and a few more staggering awkwardly through the otherwise deserted streets and falling out of pub doorways. We did see a service bus stopped at a bus stop, the engine was running and a quick glance around revealed the driver to be in the nearby bookies!

Thursday 31st July

The forecast was for a South Westerly 3 or 4, occasionally 5 or 6.

We departed Peterhead at 0720hrs in order to make use of the strong tide around Rattray Head and the wind was about force 5 with the occasional savage gust and the sky was menacingly grey. Despite the direction of both the wind and tide, the sea outside the harbour was decidedly lumpy and I noticed at that point that the engine was lacking power and struggling to make way. Heloise put two reefs in the main and we then turned and ran down the coast towards Rattray Head. We rounded the head at 0845hrs doing 6.8knots and quite glad of our reefs.

As we gybed and headed towards Fraserburgh the wind began whistling in the rigging, we were reaching fast and making excellent progress. Harmony was comfortable and easy to manage with her two reefs and a couple of rolls in the genoa and averaging over 5 knots even against the tide. We kept fairly close to the coast for smoother water as the wind was off the land and shook out a reef for a time but reversed this as we neared Troup head.

We were then hit by a savage squall and although my estimate at the time was that it was a force 6 we were hard pressed with two reefs and about two thirds genoa. Despite keeping within a mile of the coast we were experiencing some large waves and I was later informed that the winds were in the Force 7 range. This didn't surprise me but instills a renewed confidence in both our own abilities and the boat.

By 1500hrs we had reached McDuff and after passing the entrance to the harbour we furled the genoa and were still making 5.5knots with just the double reefed main. We hugged the coastline looking for the entrance to Whitehills Harbour and after rounding a small rocky headland we saw masts over the harbour wall. We fired up the donkey and spluttered into the delightful Whitehills Marina at 1530hrs to be greeted by the harbour master.

David Findlay not only introduced himself as the harbour master; he even wore a boiler suit and a badge with his name and occupation on it. This made the correct impression on me and I told him so. Here was a man who was proud to say he was the harbour master. He informed us where all the local amenities were (in addition to those provided at the Marina), provided regular weather forecasts, made a booking at local restaurant and later even gave us a lift into the metropolis of McDuff and Banff. Most of the locals viewed David as a man who lives for his harbour, what better endorsement for any harbour master.

Heloise and I later went to the 'Seafield Arms' which is known locally as 'Maitlands' after the owners. We had a drink and a chat with a regular named Tom who said he had been in there for 60 years since he was 3, presumably he'd been home at some point. The manager was also very friendly and gave us an Admiralty chart of the area, which was very handy as we only had the much larger scale Imray chart.

Whilst at Whitehills we both made phone calls including one to my trusty friend and diesel donkey consultant, John Heslop. I described the symptoms of our engine problem and he was of the opinion that although he couldn't be sure without seeing the engine for himself it sounded as if the problem may be one of the valves sticking or a broken spring. That would account for the lack of compression and possibly the sucking noise from the exhaust. If that were the case it wouldn't make matters much worse running the engine. I was greatly relieved but the lack of performance did now rule out a trip to Orkney.

Our plan now was to head along the Moray Firth coast and tuck in to the sheltered and tranquil 'Old Bar' which is situated between Findhorn and Nairn for a couple of days. The bar has a tricky entrance but once inside affords almost total shelter and has sand dunes to the North and the Culbin Forrest to the South.

My father had assembled a few of the boats from Nairn Sailing Club who were going to attend at the Old Bar that weekend to join us. Family friend Robert Gordon was aware of my engine troubles and having been a mechanic at one time agreed to come and take a look.

Friday 1st August

We left Whitehills at 0840hrs with the sun shining brightly.



Heloise on the helm. Leaving Whitehills.

The wind was offshore and the sea deceptively flat. The forecast was again for a force 3–4 and we cautiously put one reef in the mainsail. No sooner had we done this than we were flattened again by winds of force 5 plus.

We then had to endure a 22mile beat with the winds ranging throughout the day from force 3 – 6. We made good only 3.5knots but with our sick engine we had to content ourselves with that. I later estimated that we made at least 8 changes to our sail plan that day. On a brighter note we saw several porpoises in both Strathbeg Bay and Aberdour Bay, however they are not as friendly as the dolphins and tend to keep their distance.

About 8 miles short of Lossiemouth we tucked in close to the sandy shoreline to get calmer seas. That worked a treat but the tide was flooding against us at over a knot and made progress painfully slow. As if that wasn't problem enough we had to negotiate a virtual minefield of lobster pot floats. Most it's fair to

say were well marked with buoys and flags but some defy common sense and must surely be against the Geneva Convention.

We spluttered into Lossiemouth Harbour at 1845hrs and approached an empty pontoon berth. Heloise prepared warps and fenders and stepped off the boat. Regrettably she had misjudged her step and failed to properly ensure that there was something more substantial than air beneath her. She missed the edge of the pontoon with her feet but unfortunately not with her thigh and upper body resulting in her falling in the sea from the waist down and sustaining a rather nasty bruise for her troubles. My immediate concern was that I may crush her with the boat as I came alongside, there was little I could have done to prevent it so I called to Heloise to get out of the water. She turned and gave me one of those looks, which simply says 'exactly what is it you think I'm trying to do?' I knew when to shut up.

The crew of the yacht in the next berth aptly named 'So What?' came out to render assistance and provide medication in the form of alcohol. Heloise went on board Harmony to get changed and have a rest. Experience has taught me that when incidents like that happen it's usually best to give her a little space and time to recover on her own and so I went for the medication!

During my 'medicinal phase' I was surprised to hear that the Harbour master at Lossiemouth had resigned the previous Thursday and that he had not yet been replaced. This meant that we didn't pay any dues, but also that we didn't have assured access to all the facilities provided by the Marina. It also meant that if the security gate were locked I would have to get all gymnastic and climb round to open it for Heloise and her limp. Fortunately there are at least a dozen crab fishing boats operating from Lossie and the fishermen don't seem to bother with locking the gate so we were able to come and go as we pleased.

Saturday 2nd August

The sun was shining brightly and I looked over the harbour wall to seaward and convinced myself that things looked promising. The wind was slightly off shore and typically on the nose but judging by all the indicators I could see both ashore and at sea it looked to be a nice force 3. The forecast had promised a 3 – 4 easing later. We set out from Lossiemouth at 0950hrs and it quickly became apparent that the two reefs we already had in the mainsail from the previous day would have to stay in. We made good early progress and with the assistance of the tide were soon approaching Burghead.

The wind continued to strengthen throughout the day and before long we had several rolls in the genoa reducing it to almost half size. As we neared Burghead the waves had begun breaking over the harbour walls which wasn't encouraging. I noticed that we were also making considerable leeway and I'd estimate that we weren't managing any better than about 65° to the wind. My father had set off from Nairn by this time and was making his way downwind towards the Old Bar. I tried to raise him on the VHF but couldn't. I called him on the mobile phone and told him I was having doubts about continuing to the Old Bar as the entrance would be too difficult, particularly with a faulty engine. To my amazement he told me that there were no appreciable waves where he was and persuaded me to continue for a time.

In an attempt to make some headway we fired up the donkey which for a few minutes gave us over 3knots to windward. The poor thing was really in agony by this time but it chugged and spluttered away through the large waves fulfilling it's obligation with a loyal sense of duty like a wounded soldier. Finally, it stalled, exhausted from 35 years of toil and no doubt neglect.

We continued sailing for a time but we were hard pressed and taking a hammering from the large waves. I saw a monster wave coming some distance off, it was breaking down itself and roaring as it gathered momentum. Heloise was down below at that point and I warned her about that this wave had serious attitude. As it approached I did my best to ensure Harmony would take it bows on, she rose on the previous wave and then plunged into the trough before the troublesome brute smashed over the deck. Fortunately Tridents are very strong boats and our recently fitted spray hood has proved to be an absolute Godsend on such occasions. The only thing the wave succeeded in doing was dislodging our dinghy slightly and convincing me to call it a day.

We took the mainsail down and proceeded under the reefed genoa alone for a time whilst I called my father again and informed him I was returning to Lossiemouth. We were both surprised at how well Harmony appeared to sail under just the foresail. I've no idea how well she was pointing, not very well I suspect but I was beyond caring and we turned and ran back to Lossiemouth at about 7knots.

We knew that the entrance to Lossiemouth was in the lee of the weather and the water would be relatively flat at the entrance. There was no possibility of sailing upwind into the narrow harbour entrance and I was concerned that should we not get our approach right and get in first time to the harbour we would blow down wind and have to continue the struggle or worse we might come to grief against the harbour wall.

Heloise put fenders out on both sides of the boat and prepared lines. When we were about 400 yards from the harbour I started our little outboard. We were still going downwind at warp speed as we neared the entrance, and so we were able to use the momentum to assist the little outboard, which at full throttle performed it's auxiliary duties to perfection and managed to make almost 2knots to windward. Once we got in the shelter of the harbour it began showing off and increased the boat speed to 4.5knots.

Once safely alongside we both breathed a sigh of relief and I had a paracetamol and a cup of tea. I considered that in the interests of good seamanship turning back had been the only sensible thing to do but I then questioned my own judgement for setting out in the first place. The wind had risen considerably throughout the day which had not been forecast so I suppose it was just another of those learning experiences I seem to keep having. I wished the Met Office would do the same.

My father later informed me that the entrance to the Old Bar had been impossible to make out and the waves there would have made it dangerous to attempt in any case. The wind had also been blowing 30knots which was never going to be very comfortable sailing in a small yacht. We now realised that we would be in Lossiemouth for a couple of days pending a thorough examination of the engine so we set about trying to obtain a key for the marina. This was not difficult provided you knew who to ask and the correct person turned out to be the lady who runs the harbour tearooms. She made a phone call and within ten minutes a member of the Harbour Committee arrived, gave us a key and collected the inevitable dues. He explained that in the absence of a Harbourmaster the committee members were doing their best to run the place.

Sunday 3rd August

Heloise and I spent the morning walking along the magnificent sandy stretch of coastline to the east of Lossiemouth. We were able to watch the many waders in the river and we also saw a red deer stag. We then stuffed our faces with ice cream before returning to the boat where we were joined by Robert Gordon, his nephew and my father.

Robert had brought along his tools and T- shirts for rags with the word 'Next' on the label! These were better than the one I was wearing but unfortunately his rags don't come in my size. Robert and I then set about stripping down first the valve cover and then when we found the valves to be operating normally, the cylinderhead. It was apparent that the oil was sludgy and we wondered if the head gasket could be the culprit, which was clearly not a good thing, but beyond that everything seemed to be ok. We cleaned everything up and reassembled the head but not before Robert's 10mm spanner was lost in the tool-eating void beneath the engine. We changed the fuel filters and I decided to change the oil which I found floating on top of two gallons of seawater in the sump. We had identified the problem but not the cause.

Robert, having been born and bred in Nairn then called another of his contacts who is a marine mechanic and would be able to come and have a look the next day.

We spent the evening watching around 20 local youths repeatedly hurtling themselves off the pier into the sea, somewhat in the style of lemmings but with wetsuits on.

Monday 4th August

David Davidson arrived and came aboard Harmony shortly after 10 am. He had already been briefed as to the problem and didn't sound too hopeful. I started the donkey for the last time which proved unusually difficult to do and the poor beast was clearly in it's death throws. David then explained that even if the head gasket was faulty, it wouldn't be that desperate so long as it remained intact, which it was. The most likely cause of the problem was either a cracked block or a corroded water channel, either of which was terminal in an engine this old. Life was pronounced extinct at 1040hrs, I think the technical term he used was 'Goosed'.

We now needed to acquire an engine for the journey home and David was able to sell us an 8hp Yamaha 4 stroke with a long shaft, which would do the job admirably. I wasn't entirely happy with the sighting of this on the little wobbly bracket but needs must I suppose.

We spent that evening with my father at the Nairn Jazz Festival watching the saxophonist 'Ken Peplowski'. I wondered if anyone else had sailed 175 miles uphill to see him?

Tuesday 5th August

Our couple of days enforced stay in Lossiemouth had provided us with a much needed rest from struggling to windward for several days in succession and we decided on a couple of short hops for the return journey.

We decided to travel just ten miles along to the pretty harbour at Findochty or Finechty as it is pronounced locally. We set off from Lossie at 1245hrs with the sun shining brightly and a gentle force 2 behind us. We were travelling very slowly and after an hour or so the wind vanished. I started our new outboard, which purred obediently and propelled us easily at 4.5knots at just above its idle speed.

Throughout the afternoon we watched an RAF rescue helicopter maintaining a hover for over two hours above a pilot vessel in what we presumed was an exercise. The wind came and went and the outboard was on and off accordingly. With about two miles to go the wind switched 180° and filled in at a nice force 3 on the nose again. We continued under engine and purred into Findochty harbour at 1645hrs where some more human lemmings were hurtling themselves into the sea.



Findochty pronounced Finechty!

Findochty is a very attractive harbour and we were impressed with the sign on the pier directing the yachts to berth there and also the space available. The harbour wall was in need of repair however and we used our fender plank to great effect for the first time. The village has one general store, a fish and chip shop, a chemist and a post office. There is also a pub near to the harbour, which we were later informed is a fairly recent addition to the village and not without it's opponents. We enjoyed some nice walks in the sunshine and found several local cats to be particularly friendly.

Wednesday 6th August

We went for a pleasant early morning cliff walk to the west of the village in the bright sunshine before setting off at 0900hrs. There was little or no wind so we motored along the coast within about half a mile of the shore. Shorts were the order of the day for both of us despite Heloise having a spectacular bruise on her leg.

We have often seen bees landing aboard for a short rest, but a queen wasp in transit was not such a welcome guest and I flicked it away with a length of non-slip matting normally used for steadying my teacup in the cockpit.

We motored gently into Whitehills Marina at 1150hrs and made fast in the same berth as before. David, the harbourmaster was having a rare day off and had posted details of who visitors should contact in his absence. We were made welcome on this occasion by Charles Findlay who is the owner of the nearby gift shop and had been deputised by David.

That evening we had a small bonfire on the beach near the harbour and cooked a barbecue. The forecast for the following day was a variable force 3 or 4 with some coastal fog patches and we planned to leave at noon.



A quiet moment at Whitehills

Thursday 7th August

We woke up to thick fog. Throughout the day the visibility was never greater than about half a mile. We had a fairly specific time frame to leave Whitehills and have favourable tide between Fraserburgh and Peterhead and when this passed with no improvement in visibility we decided to stay put. David drove us to McDuff and pointed out the sights along the way and from there we walked to Banff and then the 3 miles back along the coastal route. We later had a meal at 'Fagins' Restaurant after David kindly reserved us a table and that was followed by the obligatory pint at the Seafield Arms.

Friday 8th August

I woke at 0230hrs, peered outside and wondered where the rest of the world had gone, the fog was so thick you could slice it. By 1115hrs the fog had thinned to mist and the sun was shining brightly so we decided to leave for Peterhead. As long as we got to Fraserburgh for 1800hrs we would have ample favourable tide to assist us round Rattray head and onwards to Peterhead.

There then followed our most unsuccessful example of maneuvering in a restricted space to date. We pushed Harmony back out of her pontoon berth and I engaged forward gear, I had to turn her sharply left with about a boats length in which to do it. Harmony went straight ahead (albeit slowly) and collided with the harbour wall. I engaged reverse gear and pushed the helm over thinking I would save further embarrassment by executing a rather clumsy 3-point turn. Her bow swung a few degrees in the desired direction and when I could reverse no further I engaged forward gear again. This time Harmony struck the wall a glancing blow, which was successfully fended off by Heloise. I now had to execute a 90° right turn. I foolishly thought that due to the location of the engine on the port side this would be easier. Wrong again. Harmony again went straight-ahead and collided with another section of the wall. This particular disaster was much to the amusement of half a dozen locals who had assembled on the pier to pass the time of day discussing crabs. After that the route out of the harbour is more straightforward and passed without incident.

Our troubles weren't quite over as no sooner were we successfully out of the harbour than we got a wretched lobster pot line wrapped round our keel. Luckily this was easily untangled and we settled down to a long beat up the coast. Fortunately the wind was a steady force 3 and we were able to stay on starboard tack for about 15miles.

I later realised that my troubles were due in the main to the fact that Harmony's rudder was now well in front of the propeller. Unfortunately the outboard tiller was too awkward to reach to aid the steering and until I am able to rig something more permanent she would always be difficult to maneuver with an outboard. That said the engine pushed her easily at 5knots and gave good fuel economy so I would just have to be more aware of the difficulties and find ways around them.

By 1700hrs we had Fraserburgh in our sights. Unfortunately the tide was still ebbing strongly and the wind increased to a steady force 5. It also decided to swing round just enough to halt our good progress. We reefed the main and for a time the genoa and endured one of those frustrating sessions of going very fast but actually getting hardly anywhere. We went in close to the shore to get some calmer water and that made a significant difference. We started making progress again. As we neared Kinnaird Head I started the engine. We furled away the genoa and thumped along at 5knots straight into the wind. Shortly after we passed Fraserburgh the tide turned and we were making 7knots. It was still blowing about 20knots on the nose so we simply kept motoring. During this time I noticed another Queen wasp had taken rather a fancy to one of our stanchions so I armed myself with the Press and Journal and quickly dispatched it.

The tide was doing all sorts of funny things and we bounced about all over the place but made good excellent speed and we were again joined by dolphins. This time they were the bottlenosed variety and they gave us the standard 20 minutes of absolute delight before disappearing as quickly as they'd come.

As we neared Rattray Head light the sea was relatively calm close in to the shore and we passed the lighthouse about 150 meters off. I wondered how often it was possible to do that. We were still doing 7 knots when we entered an area of tidal overfalls. Heloise thought they were perhaps speed bumps, they didn't have the same effect though and simply carried us along towards Peterhead.



Rounding Rattray Head

We soon realised that we would arrive at Peterhead around 2115hrs and so we called the Marina manager to let him know as he finishes his day at 2100. As we approached we could hear the harbour controller conversing with a ship, he then mentioned he could 'see a wee yachtie wi' a white hull' and we realised he must mean us. The light and the visibility were both beginning to abandon the day so I decided we should be all proper and switch on our masthead light. We then called up for permission to enter the harbour, which was duly granted.

When we got ashore I walked along the pontoon a short distance to check that the masthead lights were actually working and discovered to my astonishment that they were not working correctly due in the main to them not actually being there. Somehow we'd lost our masthead light along the way!!

We were immediately invited aboard a Dutch registered boat 'Vrijbouter' (Halberg Rasse 42) by its very pleasant owners for some more medicine. This was a beautiful boat with jumping headroom in the main saloon. We were soon joined by the Marina manager and his family, who also partook of the medicine on offer. This kind of camaraderie is what makes cruising so special, although Heloise remarked that the kind of uphill cruising we'd been doing made her appreciate work!

Saturday 9th August

More fog! You couldn't see the harbour walls for the stuff so we spent the day shopping in Peterhead. Being a Saturday morning the Town was bustling with people and we found it a whole lot more acceptable than on our previous visit. That said the inspiration does become exhausted fairly quickly and we spent most of the day doing little chores around the boat and listening to a fascinating programme on radio 4 concerning the importance of regular bowel movements and a high fibre diet. I've always said that was important.

Sunday 10th August

The wind was a NW force 3. At last a favourable wind strength and direction. We carefully planned our exit from the Marina so as not to have a repetition of the fiasco at Whitehills. This was perfectly executed and we motored out at 0840hrs. It was misty but the visibility was the best part of a mile, so if that was the best that Peterhead could do it would suffice.

We had a strong flood tide with us and were making good about 5.5knots. Throughout the day the visibility improved, the sun came out and so did the dolphins. No fewer than 6 separate groups of dolphins came to visit us during our trip down to Stonehaven. The world seemed a good place to be on this day and we were both captivated once again for around half of our journey by the magic of the dolphins. One calf in particular was so confident that it raised its tail out of the water and splashed water at Heloise as she sat on the bow with her limp and an 8 inch smile.

Heloise began quoting her new phrase for sailors, '*may the tide be with you, may the wind be at your back and may the dolphins come to greet you*'. What more could a sailor ask for?

Unfortunately the wind all but disappeared after a couple of hours so our outboard went back on and remained on all the way to Stonehaven. Happily our trip had gone exactly to plan and we had favourable tide virtually all the way. We arrived at Stonehaven at 1515hrs in bright sunshine. The harbour was like a scene from a Giles cartoon. It was a hive of activity with raft races, music, beer, hotdogs, ice creams and locals being tipped into the sea by the lorry load. There were also quite a number of large visiting yachts there rafted up 3 deep. We knew the problems this could bring with our restricted maneuverability so we sensibly found the one small yacht that was in need of a friend and went along side in textbook fashion.

No sooner had we secured than we had to fend off an out of control Sadler 34 which had attempted to come along side a fishing boat just in front of us. The skipper seemed to know what he was doing, but had failed to brief his crew member who at first threw a line onto the empty fishing boat but didn't see the need to attach it to anything. On the second attempt he boarded the fishing boat but didn't remember the line, or for that matter to hold onto some part of the boat which then spun round in the tide and came our way. I successfully fended her off and the skipper got things right on the third attempt after shouting and swearing at his crewmember. Both of them hurried off to join the crowds and get drunk.

Throughout the afternoon we were treated to several similar displays by frustrated crews on large, expensive yachts who were obviously used to the convenience of an empty marina berth with large fenders all round. Like lambs to the slaughter they kept coming and on finding the harbour so busy appeared to lack the faintest idea of what to do next. This became even more interesting with the intervention of well meaning bystanders and moreover when a fishing boat on the inside of 3 large yachts decided to leave the

harbour. There was then a scene like a kitten with a ball of wool for several minutes before it finally settled down to simply mild confusion.

It was a glorious evening and still the locals were being tipped into the North Sea by the trailer load. This is apparently some quaint annual custom. Heloise and I decided to walk the 2 or 3 miles along a spectacular cliff top path to Dunnotter Castle. The view of the sheer cliffs and the many thousands of seabirds is quite something and we were amazed at how many Kestrels mingled with the gulls in this particular environment where sea meets agricultural land and very few people tread.

On approaching the castle it looks very similar to something from Monty Pythons Holy Grail and so I set about attempting to storm it in true Monty Python fashion. This failed miserably as the door was padlocked and there was nobody in. The only sound from within was that of the pigeons that had made it their home. As I walked away from the front door I counted that there are 37 descending steps which is great news for the weary. Unfortunately there are the 180 ascending steps back up to the coastal path!

Monday 11th August

We left Stonehaven at 0900hrs and our departure was executed with Military precision. Having watched the previous days calamities and with our own fiasco at Whitehills still fresh in our minds we talked through exactly what we planned to do and were suitably reassured when it worked perfectly.

The sun was shining and the visibility was good. There was very little wind though and we motor sailed at almost 5knts throughout most of the day. We saw two separate groups of Dolphins between Stonehaven and Johnshaven and one of them was even cheeky enough to splash Heloise in the face by slapping the water with it's tail as she sat mesmerized on the bow. There were another three yachts headed in the same direction as us and the dolphins didn't seem at all interested in them, they must be fascinated by the triple keel arrangement.

As we got gradually nearer to Fife Ness I remarked to Heloise that this was near the spot where we our first whale of the trip. Moments later a large Minke whale arched its body out of the water just a boat length in front of us. It was on the port tack and we were on starboard so I yelled at it and fortunately it altered course and a collision was avoided. It's always difficult to estimate the size of these with any certainty but my guess was that it was about 8 meters long.

The tide had turned against us just prior to us rounding the Ness and the sea was decidedly lumpy. Never the less our new mechanical friend purred away and thrust us onwards at 4.5 knots over the ground. As we neared Anstruther the wind disappeared completely so we took the mainsail down and motored a little faster. The depth on the tide gauge at the harbour entrance was showing 5 feet and we made fast near to the outermost ladder with only a few centimeters to spare beneath our keels.

That evening we enjoyed a pleasant walk around Anstruther in an unsuccessful attempt to buy petrol. This unnerved me slightly as I had visions of running out of petrol with about 2 miles to go, that would have been par for the course with this cruise. We then settled down to a game of dominoes and a peaceful night. We both slept more and more soundly as we became accustomed to life aboard and as we gradually became increasingly exhausted.

Tuesday 12th August

We left Anstruther at 0715hrs and reversed all the way out of the harbour. I made this look deliberate should anyone happen to be watching but in actual fact I quickly realised that there was insufficient room to turn 'Harmony' round and the strong ebb tide made the decision an easy one and we shot out of the harbour into the mist. The sea was as flat calm as it ever gets and we had no choice but to motor. I really hoped we had enough fuel.

The visibility was only a couple of miles but we were on the homeward leg and we were somehow lulled in to that false sense of security one gets from recognising all the landmarks. When the visibility closes in a

little more it makes little difference how familiar the area normally is and needless to say that's exactly what it did. This was the first time on our trip we actually had to navigate properly and it was good practise. After we had left Elie astern we maintained a course of 250° which would take us straight across Largo Bay towards Kinghorn. It wasn't long before we couldn't see anything other than mist and a couple of porpoises and so we plotted our position every 15 minutes.

About 0850hrs the distant shape of an oilrig began to emerge and we knew we were off Methil. Soon after we could see a ship, which we worked out, was anchored in one of the Kirkcaldy anchorages and gradually we closed on it and passed it. As we did so we took a fix which when plotted put us right in the middle of another anchorage. A couple of minutes later I looked astern and was horrified to see that a large gas tanker had crept up on us in the mist and had dropped it's anchors right on the spot where we had just been. I doubt if they even saw us and I learned another lesson all about large ship anchorage's and the need to avoid them in poor visibility.

We passed Kinghorn about 1130hrs and the visibility began to improve. The sun was warm and our familiar playground of the West Forth was a welcome sight. We shot up Mortimers deep with the assistance of the tide and were back safely on our mooring by 1230hrs. The fuel had lasted and I calculated we had motored about 75miles on five gallons, which was quite acceptable.

We had numerous adventures and misadventures on this trip but we both enjoyed the experience and have total confidence in the seaworthiness of 'Harmony'. We know our own limitations and the only shortcomings in the ability of the boat we noticed were to windward in heavy weather which is typical of most small boats. We both agreed that East Coast sailing is all about passage making due to the distances between suitable harbours and that made for some long, hard days. The dolphins compensate for this with their captivating presence.

We plan to go to the West Coast next season for a more leisurely cruise with no particular destination in mind.