

Nairn Dinghy Sailing – just another weekend

(Including a Triathlon and Ohms Law verified)

Saturday

Advance apologies were filed with Stuart explaining our absence from the Saturday BBQ – unfortunately many months ago we had committed to the Gelnurquart Highland Games in Drumnadrochit, sadly the same day.

My anticipated repeat appearance in the 10 mile challenge (1500ft of elevation over rough forest tracks and rugged terrain) was not to be repeated this year having picked up a knee injury which annoyingly was still hanging around. Plan B was a mountain bike entry instead but a risky strategy as my usual riding is on tarmac, the smother the better; the preferred bike having no suspension and vanishingly thin tyres.

Excavation of the garden shed found my abandoned mountain bike which had not turned a wheel in a couple of years. The chain, despite copious lashings of oil refused to run smoothly nor would the gears select. A drop off to Highland Bikes yielded a long list of faults including defective chain, cassette, brakes and suspension. As I arbitrarily set a budget of £200 it was agreed that only the gear selection and replacement would be done, the rest ignored. A quick zoom around the block on Friday night confirmed brakes OK, gears shifting and all set for the 17 mile off road bike challenge.

After a deceptively smooth and fast start (on tarmac) bike and rider struggled and the rest of the field disappeared.

It is great to have several excuses for my woeful performance but the complete lack of front-end suspension (forks locked out which made the bouldery descent sections a nightmare of with blurred vision aching wrists) would be my number one, number two being zero affinity for mountain biking!!

Meanwhile my companion rider (who requests anonymity) bailed out halfway and I was left to complete the event under the watchful eye of the sweeper upper, the latter of course on an electric bike!!

It is possible the marshals in the arena thought that after such a lapse of time the last rider had gone through however, I had not.

Willed on by the huge crowds and, remembering we had to do a finishing lap around the track, I hit the field at full speed and commenced my circuit to some very definite applause. On the back straight to our mutual surprise I met and narrowly missed the Pipers marching band coming the other way. All credit to them, I didn't hear the pipes falter although the Pipers looks varied between surprise and alarm.

Having finished my victory lap (apparently, I had gone clockwise instead of anticlockwise) Mary intercepted me and pointed out I needed still to cross the finish

line. This was confirmed a few minutes later by a friendly marshal requesting his timing chip back and pointing towards the official finishing line.

Swapping my chip for a chunky finisher medal we went in search of a beer or two.

The Loch Ness Inn provided and we had a great evening, my friends recalling their 'successful' run and frequently recounting my bizarre finishing routine – the words 'wooden' and 'spoon' also periodically recurring. An English tourist (very drunk) asked if he could have my medal and, having hardly earned it, I said yes and gave it to him. He looked happy and surprised in equal measure. He had, I should add, just lined up 5 shots on the bar (for himself) and we were pretty sure he was going to have a lively evening. Our prediction were soon enacted as we last him being encouraged off the premises by the bar staff only to make a brief reappearance with his trousers down but still proudly wearing my medal.

Mindful of our sailing commitments for Sunday we decided to beat a retreat, and we were all abed around midnight.

Sunday

Weather looked unchanged from yesterday's forecast of very light northerly winds. High tide at 1400 allowed a reasonably slovenly start from Drumnadrochit – some heads being more tender than others!!

We had my brother-in-law Antony (Laser sailor and trimaran owner) up from St Albans and Mathew from North Yorkshire (Marathon runner and, canoeist and sailor). Chris and Julie Dell were also in the frame for a sail too.

My plan was to get Chris out on the water (his first time out was Phoenix 1) in my little gunter rigged dinghy and get him going solo if possible. Antony and Mary were keen to take out Kix (the 15ft yellow trimaran) and I was happy to let them and pretty confident they would cope.

Antony, Matthew and I had spent half the morning digesting the Chinese translated instruction manual for the newly arrived 85lb thrust electric outboard.

You may recall from our earlier escapade that the last employed 20lb thrust motor could not pull the skin off a rice pudding or, more to the point, propel Kix in the river against the tide and current so I had hastily and with scant research ordered a more powerful motor.

Of the three of us I probably had a better grasp of Ohms law it seemed pretty clear to me that, if the motor was indeed 1.1hp as claimed, our cables were going to melt and/or the lithium battery would catch fire. However, Antony convinced us that, within the ambiguity of the text, we could also wire in a second battery in series which would halve the current and save the cables. However, as we did not have a second battery our fall-

back plan was only to use power 1 or 2 which might keep us within safe current limits and avoid an expensive conflagration, if not an RNLI call out....

So, I sailed Moody slowly out of the harbour in convoy with Kix. I needed a brief spell on the oars (wind died completely) and Kix was motoring gently (hooray no melted cables yet!) and after 10 minutes or so we were both out of the entrance. I headed straight over to the beach for Chris where it was agreed we would swap over. After a quick handover and I cast him off though the thankfully light surf. I suggested he head towards Ardersier initially (being nice broad reach) and then trying turning round at some point remembering to tighten the main sheet and start tacking back again.

Meanwhile, I could see Kix was now a long way off but both sails were up, and she seemed to be nicely ghosting along. All good then.

Chris seemed to be coping as well as could be expected in the very light winds and now, to my considerable relief, seemingly tacking back.

I thought it might be easier and more fun to instruct from my canoe rather than bellowing from the beach so with Mathew's help we got then canoe down to the beach. I also was keen for him to have a go in my canoe and didn't want him left out of the water borne fun. Despite my encouragement though he seemed to want to go for a another run rather than have a go, so I was left to my own devices.

As I normally launch from the slipway, I knew that beach launch through the surf was probably going to be bit more tricky. And sure enough, at first attempt I rolled straight over and filled up the middle compartment to the inevitable audience of passers-by.

Rethink needed and so the second attempt was a more conservative plan, to sit in the canoe on 'dry land' and wait for a big enough wave to float me! It worked after a fashion, and I was soon soggily paddling my way out to Chris.

He was of course fine and needed little input from me – just a bit more wind.

We discussed sailing back into the harbour (a dead run but in very little wind) and I reminded him that he had oars and rowlocks if the wind died completely.

I paddled over to Kix, they were moving nicely too and said they were going to sail back in as well. They went first and, with the taller rig, caught a bit more wind and sailed all the way until they turned out of the river and the engine started for the final run round to the pontoon.

Chris still had not appeared, so I doubled back to give him some encouragement and check he was OK.

As well I did as the wind had properly died, he couldn't find the second rowlock and was drifting back out to sea gain!

The errant rowlock had lost its bit of string (robbed a couple of weeks ago when I needed to extend the rudder downhaul on the club Wayfarer.....) but, as I had used it only an hour ago, I was pretty sure it was in the bilges somewhere!

Chris received the good news, retrieved it from underneath one of the buoyancy bags and then commenced a longish row back in.

Julie was watching the entire pantomime from the harbour wall, and I am sure felt she had made the right decision not to sail in so little wind!

So, all returned safely, Antony and Mary claimed to have had a lovely sail (and Antony made some useful suggestions about rig improvements) and Chris is now scouring the EBay and Marketplace to find his first boat!

I had tremendous fun watching them sail so close up and made a **** of myself again with a canoe capsize to an appreciative audience.

Mathew finally had a canoe whilst we were tidying up so in the end all those that wanted to get afloat did so and safely back.

For those pondering the Triathlon banner I would cite one bona fide mountain bike ride a canoe voyage plus the very brief and unexpected swim!!

Mike Barnsley

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