

Many of the crew were not impressed by this magnificent moment, but they were happier at the prospect of easing the sheets and running north away from the Cape, and this tempestuous stretch of ocean.

When the Cape finally bore about North East the sheets were eased and we headed northwards. Our rate of progress increased and the motion steadied.

St. Kilda

By J. CAMPBELL

Approaching the island group from the south east the bulk appeared on the horizon about 25 miles away. The visibility was good and it was only after another four hours sailing that we began to close the islands and appreciate their size and grandeur. The wind was blowing north east force 3-4 and there was quite a swell running. We decided to sail round the St. Kilda group of islands to get a proper idea of them.

We sailed into the lee of Hirta and along the west coast. The west coast is a major breeding ground for the Manx Shearwaters and the rarer Leach's Petrels. The birds were like the first snowflakes of winter swirling along the cliff face.

As we reached the north west corner of the island, Soay appeared to split away from the mainland to frame Boreray away to the north east.

The wind veered a little making a dead beat along the north coast of the group, and the full Atlantic swell was breaking onto the most rugged cliffs imaginable. Already we could sense the atmosphere of the group, with the highest cliff face in Europe under our lee with quite a large swell breaking onto it. The cliff face rose straight out of the water almost 1400 feet, the top being lost in the clouds.

Everybody shivered a little and seemed glad when we tacked a little further out to sea.

Looking across to the north east we could clearly see Boreray and Stack Lee, the latter being almost completely white with gannets. There are said to be 50,000 pairs of gannets nesting there — the largest concentration of gannets in the world.

As we closed the cliffs of Oisevar, several of the crew seemed more than ready for us to round up into Village Bay, which despite the swell seemed very snug after the North coast.

The crew began to cheer up and appeared like gannets when some newly baked bread appeared. Maybe life was not all bad. At least we had rounded the Cape and were headed North to friendly waters at a tremendous pace. Only a little over twenty four hours would see us safely in harbour, and Duet's Easter delivery trip from Hamble to Holyhead would be over.

There is an army camp in the north east part of the bay and we picked up a mooring off their jetty. Only once we had stopped and looked around did the atmosphere of the place begin to really sink in. Mountains on all sides, except for the vulnerable south east sector, rising up to 1,400 feet, rows of ruined stone cottages and dry stone walls, together with the incongruity of the modern white painted flat roofed army camp.

Hammond Innes' "Atlantic Fury", became all too real and everybody made a mental note to be sure not to miss a weather forecast. The mental picture of a boat being caught up in this bay in a south easterly gale was truly frightening.

We were still stood on deck trying to assimilate everything when the camp's Officer Commanding, came out in a rubber dinghy to offer us the use of their bar — the offer being gratefully accepted.

After a quick meal, most of the crew were eager to get ashore, leaving only our chief mal-de-mer sufferers on board. We walked up to the ruined village and were fascinated by the various types of stone houses and igloo shaped stone buildings, and after a quick exploration adjourned to the bar determined to find out about the village and the island.

In the bar we were advised to visit the warden who could give us the information we wanted, so after a couple of quick drinks, we returned on board to sleep, and would see the Warden in the morning. After a night disturbed only by weather forecasts, listening for the ever dreaded south east gales. We awoke to find a rather different day. The clouds were down to less than 500 feet and viscious squalls were crashing down on us from the mountains.

There were very mixed feelings about the island among the crew. People seemed to either love or hate the island. To me it was quite simply the most

beautiful place I have seen and the atmosphere left by the people who had lived and died here was very strong. Yet some of the others found the place frightening or depressing.

So it was with various feelings that four of the crew went ashore to seek out the Warden. The Warden lives in the "Factors House" behind the army camp, from March until September. He is in control of the island for the Nature Conservancy and represents the National Trust for Scotland.

When we met him, and were invited into his house the first thing he told us was that anybody wishing to visit the island must first obtain permission. Anybody considering a visit to St. Kilda is advised to write to the Regional Officer, Nature Conservancy, 12 Hope Terrace, Edinburgh, and ask for permission. This permission is almost certain to be granted and will assure visitors of a warm welcome from the Warden — Donald Stewart.

He then began to tell us a little about the island, explaining first that the island is owned by the National Trust for Scotland and is managed by the Nature Conservancy. As he talked, the island became alive, and he continued his story as we walked up through the village.

The island has been inhabited almost continuously from Viking times until 1930 when the islanders were evacuated.

As we walked through the ruined village we saw a herd of the unique Soay sheep, looking more like goats than sheep. These sheep have been known on Soay island since Viking times and indeed Soay is Norse for sheep. 120 were introduced to Hirta in 1931 when the St. Kildans evacuated and these have multiplied now to over 1,500. The islanders themselves reared ordinary black faced sheep and these are still found on Boreray.

There have been three different villages on the island. The oldest dating back to the time of Christ. These houses are underground and are found mostly in the north west corner of the island of Hirta. They are known as Amazon Houses. There is also one of these houses, almost intact on the outskirts of the newest village. All across the island are traces of Viking habitation and Viking graves — shaped like boats. At the moment, no real archaeological work has been done, as the whole island has been declared an ancient monument, and permission has yet to be granted for a dig to take place.

Running through the latest village is a stream which it is thought the Vikings used for supplying their long ships. Kilda is Norse for well or watering place and the Vikings often named places after commodities found there.

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About five hundred years ago the underground village was left and a medieval village was established above the present village. A road runs down from this village almost to the present jetty. The houses in this village are all of dry stone and large dry stone enclosures have been built to keep sheep away from the crops. Many of the stones must weigh up to half a ton, and it must have been an enormous undertaking to move them and build walls.

At this stage the population was in the region of one thousand people, who came mainly from the north and south Uist and Harris.

Around the turn of the nineteenth century the present village was established. The first houses are known as "Black Houses" and are dry stone built. The last of these was built around 1830, most of these houses are still standing, except for the roofs which were timber covered with turf. All the houses are of the same design, having a door and a single window. They have only one room and all have been heated by a turf fire in the centre. All the walls are at least five feet thick and draughts will have been kept out by packing the gaps between the stones with mud.

Around 1860 the style of houses suddenly changed. They became bigger, mortar was used between the stones and they were all built facing the bay. The old Black houses became byres for the animals. Again all these houses are identical, having a door and two windows. They all have two fire places and a built in cupboard. They used to be divided into three rooms, one for weaving, a living room, and a small bedroom for the children. It was in these houses the St. Kildans lived until they were evacuated in 1930. These houses are mainly intact, again apart from the roofs. The National Trust has restored and re-roofed three of these houses, and working parties now spend the summer months in these houses.

At this time the island belonged to the MacLeods of Dunvegan, and a house was built for Dame Flora MacLeods Factor who came to St. Kilda to collect the rents. This house is now occupied by the Warden. At this time a church and schoolroom were also built.

The St. Kildans lived mainly off the birds which inhabit the island. Fulmars on the north east coast, Petrels on the west coast, Puffins on Dun and Gannets on Boreray. They would scale the cliffs to collect eggs and birds. These birds would be dried and stored in the cleits of which there were

over 900 on Hirta alone. These cleits are built like igloos out of stone, the roof being covered in turf. They were used for storing produce, ropes and turf as well as the birds. Some were used to give shelter for the sheep in the winter, and indeed the sheep still use them now.

A dry stone wall was being built around the village during the summer, while crops were being grown. In winter they would be allowed into the shelter of the village. Each house has a walled enclosure behind it for growing food. The walls are to give shelter from the wind, which is the main agent of erosion on the islands.

Because of the wind there are no proper trees on the island, but there is a species of creeping willow adapted to the environment.

In the village the circular graveyard is still intact and in front of the site of the old post office is a mound where the St. Kilda "parliament" met every day for the men to discuss the work for the women to do! The women did the every day work while the men scaled the cliffs to collect the birds and eggs.

Around 1920 the younger men began to hear of the new way of life on the mainland. They began to leave the island to get work ashore and enjoy the modern way of life. This left a male population which was either too young or too old to scale the cliffs and in 1930 the islanders asked to be evacuated. The island remained uninhabited until 1957 when the army camp was established.

As we walked along the village street all the stories and legends we heard seemed to come alive. You seemed to sense the ghost of Lady Grange who was kept prisoner on the island for seven years at the time of the 1745 rebellion.

Then from the medieval village you could look down into the bay to picture the Viking long ships coming into the bay to fill their water casks from their "kilda".

By the time evening came the clouds were low on the mountains, the squalls were vicious and many of the crew were anxious to leave the island, but not anxious to sail across the forty-five miles of Atlantic to the Hebrides.

Three of the braver members walked over the Glen behind the bay to come to a sheer six hundred foot drop to the sea on the north east coast. We were

looking down through the clouds and could only hear the sea out of sight below. The fulmars were wheeling around and vanishing into the mist below. We did not linger long but quickly returned to the apparent safety of the boat.

As darkness gathered and the clouds came still lower, the islands and the surrounding ocean took on a more evil presence. The crew were extra thorough making the yacht ready for sea and it was still with very mixed feelings among the crew that we dropped the moorings, and sailed out of the

squalls into the gathering gloom of the impending Atlantic night.

Duet is a 22 ton gaff yawl built in 1912, and she is on loan to the Ocean Youth Club. The Ocean Youth Club operates a number of yachts around the British Isles for taking people aged 15-21 to sea. Anybody interested in joining the Club is invited to write to, The Secretary, Ocean Youth Club, 1 Oak Street, Gosport, Hants.

The Folkboat

"She'll move in a zephyr" — "No need for a motor" — "Just look at that shape, like a wineglass" — Tom and Phil Husbands talking about their Folkboat which had just been brought ashore at the end of last season.

Tom Husband past committee man of the Folkboat Association has sailed folkboats for years, he and his four brothers each built their own and they sail them regularly in the Solent, taking part in the racing as well as day sailing.

Their enthusiastic remarks probably sums up the reasons that has brought about the rapid growth of this design.

In 1939 some members of the Royal Gothenburg Yacht Club considered that there was a place among the Dragons, 6, 7 and 8 metre class of yachts for a new keel boat, equally well suited to cruising and racing, and of a construction which would be inexpensive and even simple enough for an amateur to carry out.

These views were discussed in 1940 at the General Assembly in Helsinki of the Scandinavian Yacht Union, and it was decided to hold a competition for the best design. All drawings and descriptions were to be submitted by 15th May 1941.

The remarkable number of 58 entries was received. None, however was considered ideal and the judges decided to divide the prize between the four best entries. A committee was then formed con-

