

# Peaks and Troughs for “The Old Goats” on Capricorn

Our tale of the Scottish Islands Peaks Race of 2015 both starts and finishes early. We begin on the transit from Ardfern to Oban for the start of the race and finish about 80 miles and one mountain short on Jura – again!



The race transit crew of Pretty Boy Pete, Auld Bob, Cousin Ian and I arrived at Ardfern early in the evening of Wed 13 May, Ian having started in Leicester that morning. We had stopped to stock up on perishables at Lochgilphead, mainly red wine, beer and gin, none of which seem to last on board?



Our attempt to bring Capricorn alongside from her mooring was fraught as some fool kicked a warp over the side as we slipped the buoy. That less than reassuring thud from underneath followed by the engine stalling set me into a frenzy of flailing arms interspersed with obscenities until I discovered the culprit was actually me. On this occasion I chose to be lenient on myself, restricting retribution to a damn good talking to with a bit of name calling.

On a positive, we got to try out the oars whilst drifting through the rest of the anchored yachts.

Once alongside, courtesy of a bit of fine seamanship involving a rafted dinghy and outboard, it was time for Cousin Ian and I to don our finest underpants and armed with only a Swiss Army Knife, submerge ourselves in the North Atlantic. We worked hard to free 20m of tangled mess for nearly two minutes before conceding defeat.



Apparently cold, wet, overweight, middle aged men in their underwear are no match for a professional diver. Fortunately, one of the many crews enjoying the spectacle knew a local diver who, for the cost of a fish supper and a case of lager, cut us free.

Dinner in the Galley of Lorne, some red wine, a few beers and far too much gin.

Thursday 14 May, a relatively uneventful motor in light winds through the Dorus Mor, the Sound of Luing and past Seil Island en route to Oban marina on Kerrera. An increasing light breeze encouraged us to pull the main halyard up, would have been better had it been attached to the mainsail.



At Kerrera we were joined by the missing race crew, first mate Rheumatoid Richard and those skinny running types, Paul and Marcus.



Dinner in the Steakhouse Restaurant, some red wine, a few beers and far too much gin.

Friday 15 May 1200, Auld Bob and Cousin Ian now relegated to groupies joined the throng at the race start line. Richard and I prepared our craft whilst sucking on performance enhancing mints (to remove the taste of the gin) and Peter, wearing every bit of clothing he brought (?), prepared to sprint-row the sweaty team members aboard.



Fully expecting a leisurely hour or so watching the entire fleet sail out of Oban Bay, our runners surprised us (and themselves), by reappearing in the pack (albeit towards the back)!

The first dinghy pick up is the most exciting/exhilarating/terrifying (delete as appropriate) part of the race as the water is being churned by far too many large yachts careering in amongst moored boats and rubber dinghies containing poor souls with flailing arms – like a scene from Dunkirk!



Soon underway, the adrenaline starts to settle and the race becomes real. Capricorn is a big heavy Moody who likes a good blow. The wind was steady from the West making for a fast passage to Lismore light – gaining several places along the way. Then as if the gods noticed we were doing well, the wind dropped allowing the lighter boats to regain their position – damn.

After a frustrating hour or so, back came a strong North Westerly all the way up to Salen.

As we approached the drop off surrounded by many other members of the fleet, whilst still under the illusion that every second counts, we tossed our dinghy overboard, while still sailing at 8 knots. It nose-dived, ripping the painter and its bracket from the bow of itself. Remembering my man overboard drill (practised what seemed like several thousand times during my recent Coastal Skipper Course), I took four attempts and about twenty minutes to retrieve it – concerned looks from my crew as they checked their safety lines were correctly secured.

Friday 15 May 1600, runners away, we made a light snack and settled down to a few z's – the last for far too long.



Saturday 16 May 0015, our two athletes decide to put in an appearance, cold, wet and in second to last place. I don't want to belittle their efforts, but really! It's not as if they have the hard bit to do?

A relaxing blether, something to eat and off in light winds into the Sound of Mull.

The wind blew in proper strong as we approached the Firth of Lorne resulting in a single, double reefed, 10 hour close hauled starboard tack to Craighouse. Gusts of 35 knots and hail made beating into the bay both exhilarating and sore!

From my position at the wheel, a position I hadn't left for nearly half a day (not even to go to the loo – perhaps I should see my doctor), I could see our whippet like duo getting prepared to going running. Perhaps it was the long night being bounced around a bunk slightly too small, the prospect that we weren't yet halfway or simply their deep desire to roll over and die peacefully, but I detected a certain lack of

enthusiasm – similar to that I see in my wife's eyes as she heads out to work a nightshift after watching me pour myself a large gin.

Saturday 16 May 1130, we waved them off on their trip and headed off for a sleep. Not thirty minutes later, a call on the VHF informed us our running team had retired – ***intimate chafing!***

Once back on board, Marcus was left to lick his own wounds, so to speak – no-one else offered to assist with the tube of savlon and sterile gauze!

Nothing for it but a trip to the Isle of Jura Hotel for Dinner, some red wine, a few beers and far too much gin!

