

Gandy Goose log 18th-20th August 2012

The concept was simple. Sail our Wayfarer, Gandy Goose, from Findhorn to Fortrose where we would put her on a mooring along from Caireen's Corribee, Tiare on which we would spend the night. Sail Gandy Goose in the Ness Cup on the Sunday. Another night on Tiare, followed by the return trip to Findhorn. Essentially this is a round trip from Findhorn to Kilmuir, just east of the Kessock bridge, and back of about 90 kilometres or 55 miles. This would of course rely upon favourable winds and tides.

The forecast was looking good for the weekend and the tides were workable. This had not been the case for the previous two or three years when we had also thought about the trip. The forecast for the Friday was winds from the east quadrant of 8-10 mph gusting 15mph - ideal if we set off about 3.00pm, early enough to avoid the mud at the bottom of the slipway, catch the ebb tide out of Findhorn bay and then have wind and tide behind us for most of the trip. We should make it comfortably to Fortrose (20 miles) by 9.00pm with a favourable tide through the narrows at Chanonry Point. This would give us the Saturday as a day of rest basking in idyllic sunshine, eating good food and chilling out with a good book!

Alas at 2.00pm on the Friday and time to rig it was chucking it down and the forecast wind was non-existent. We were reluctant to risk having to motor all the way to make it by 9.00pm and arrive soaked into the bargain.

Plan B: the forecast for Saturday was light southerly winds in the morning turning to the SW in the afternoon (12mph gusting 17mph) and easing off again in the evening and a much sunnier day. The tides were such that leaving in the afternoon was not going to give us enough time to get to Fortrose by dusk with a head wind.

We plumped for a mid morning start (11.00am) motoring out of Findhorn Bay against a strong spring tide and no wind to be greeted by a heavy shower (where did that come from?). Once out of the bay a gentle breeze picked up from the east and we turned west. We were able to hoist the sails and set the spinnaker and doing 3-4mph over the ground (mainly due to a favourable tide) we were happy in the now pleasant sunshine. One's mind can drift off in these conditions to all the voyages that are possible even in a small boat like the wayfarer. With sandy beaches to the south and mountains to the north one is reminded how much like the west coast the Moray Firth can feel at times.

An hour later the wind had gone completely, the spinnaker was away, the genoa neatly furled and the mainsail lowered and gathered in the lazy jacks and the boom hoisted on the topping lift. This kept the mainsail out of the way and gave us room to man the oars. Caireen's turn first. She could manage 2-3 mph comfortably and 5mph when going red in the face! I also had a turn but after a while it was clear that this was not going to give us sufficient speed to complete our journey for the day on time, especially as we would soon have an adverse tide. The engine (3.3hp Mercury two stroke) was started. This gave us between 4 and 5 mph at quite low revs. As we approached the gut we enjoyed a relaxed lunch of Caireen's freshly baked cheese and leek 'sausage' rolls so that if it got windier we would be able to sail without the distractions of eating.



Shortly after we had finished eating, as we passed the gut, a gentle wind emerged from the south west as forecast. Up went the main, the genoa was unfurled and the engine was kept on for the present to see if the wind would strengthen sufficiently to enable us to progress with sail alone. Five minutes later the engine was switched off. Almost immediately I asked Caireen to reef the mainsail, to keep things comfortable, as we were now skipping along in a Force 4. Moments later we were reefing the genoa by partially furling it. This was more than the 12mph they had forecast – there were white caps everywhere and some of the waves were suddenly quite large! There was also more west in the wind and we were not getting any shelter from the Nairn shore that we might have expected in the forecast south westerly.

Gandy Goose was behaving well with her sails reefed. She was light on the helm and was riding the waves comfortably most of the time, just occasionally slamming a little or taking in some water over the bow but nothing too concerning. Even in the gusts she handled well. They were unlike the vicious gusts that we experience sometimes in Findhorn Bay. We decided to press on for a while, although aware that it was going to be a very hard sail against wind and tide. An hour later we were approaching Nairn. It was decision time. The options were:

To press on along the Nairn coast and eventually get shelter from Chanonry Point and Fort George. This would involve going along the narrow South Channel and shallow water which might give rougher water than we were currently experiencing.

To head into Nairn Harbour for shelter. However the entrance would be quite exciting in these conditions.

To drop the mainsail, turn around and run back to Findhorn under the genoa.

To bear away onto a beam reach on port tack and head across the Firth for Cromarty where we would be able to find shelter or continue on along the North Channel if conditions improved.

Gandy was coping well with the conditions and we wanted to do the Ness Cup. We decided to head the 5 miles across the Firth to Cromarty as this left us with most options. We freed off about 30°. Immediately Gandy responded, she flattened off, picked up her skirts and flew over the waves. She was starting to enjoy herself and we felt the sail was much more comfortable. Five minutes later, despite the rough water, we spotted a couple of dolphins crossing our course a hundred yards ahead. Our spirits lifted as we passed them and saw them astern a few moments later, glad to have just a brief sighting. How wrong we were – a few minutes later they were back with their mates, no longer crossing our course but swimming alongside in twos and threes, now curving through the

wave crests like Hokusai's 'Great Wave' and then twisting under the bow flashing their pale bellies. We could almost reach out and touch them. They stayed with us most of the forty five minutes it took us to cross the five miles of the Firth. It was almost as if they were guiding and taking care of us but I expect they were just enjoying themselves and the challenge of a fast moving boat that was also enjoying herself.

Once close to the cliffs of the South Sutors the sea was much calmer although the wind was still strong. As we approached the entrance into Cromarty the wind seemed to head us, probably funnelling through the entrance. The decision was made, although we would still have to tack along the north coast of the Firth to Rosemarkie this seemed preferable to tacking through the Cromarty channel against a stronger tide and still having the logistical problem of where to put the boat safely and find a bed for the night. We headed up the Firth with Gandy making much better progress on the flatter sea compared our slow slamming progress through the much larger waves that we had been experiencing just an hour ago off Nairn.



It was now about 4.00pm. We tacked just inside the Green Navity Bank buoy and ticked off the red channel buoys as we passed to the North of them. A couple of cruisers passed us they ran down towards Cromarty – perhaps participants from the Cruiser Regatta at Chanonry. Two hours later we were off Rosemarkie. The tide was now turning in our favour and the race was on to get to Chanonry and get Gandy safe before the Fish and Chip Shop closed! As we rounded the point the wind began to ease. No sign of dolphins here but the usual crowds on the point. A final fetch to the clubhouse in the dying evening breeze required us to use the engine for the final 100m. We beached about 7.45 so had been sailing for nearly 9 hours. The GPS showed we had sailed about 54km or 34 miles! A long day but it was not over yet. We decided that Caireen should go for the fish and chips after visiting the clubhouse! Meanwhile I would put the anchor down off the slipway for Gandy, tidy her up ready for the mooring and get the new Bombard dinghy, Tiare's tender.

By 8.45pm, sitting on the harbour bench, we were fed and watered. All we had to do now was motor Gandy out to Tiare while towing the tender, unload the bedding and food onto Tiare and then take Gandy onto the mooring just to the east of Tiare. Now row back to shore for a welcome and well deserved shower and finally row back to Tiare. The phosphorescence in the water as we made our way out in the darkness was amazing. Aboard Tiare a welcome nightcap thoughtfully left from our aborted West Coast trip and then a well deserved and peaceful night's sleep. Well that was the plan – after all it was now flat calm with not a breath of wind and a clear starry night. However for some reason there was a gentle but not insignificant cross swell causing Tiare to roll first one way, then the other and its occupants to roll first to starboard and then to port. Thankfully by 3.00am Tiare was behaving herself and lying quietly on her mooring so that we could enjoy the remainder of the night's slumbers.



Sunday morning was bright ideal conditions for a board Tiare before getting Ness Cup is a long distance cruisers. The course would buoy off Chanonry Point, up to round the red Petty Bank buoy laid off Kilmuir and Club. For the last couple of years has been reduced to a race the original concept was understanding that it was that boats would be self cover could be provided over such long distances. A safety cover, was set for less competing for the Nessie Trophy.



and clear and no wind – breakfast of pancakes on ready for the race. The race for dinghies and go to the outer red channel towards the Kessock Bridge buoy, across the Firth to a then back to the Sailing years for safety reasons it round the buoys. This year resurrected on the not an official event and sufficient as no safety with the fleet spread out much shorter course, with experienced sailors

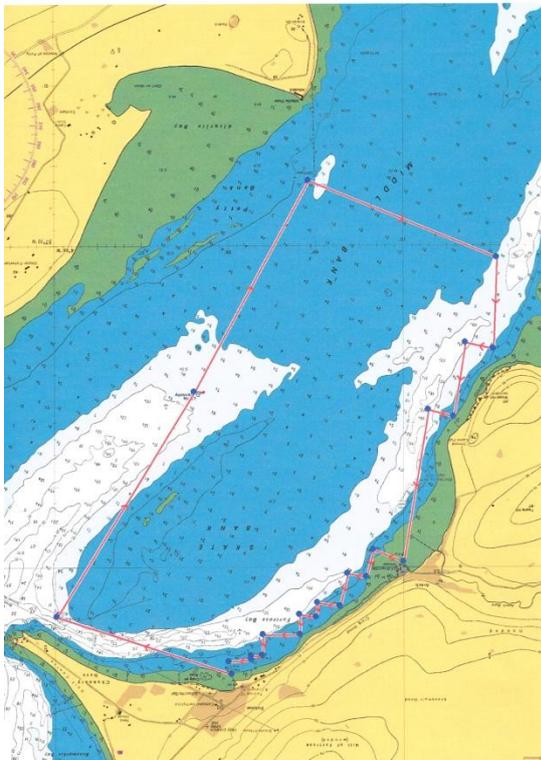
We decided that we should remove the outboard from Gandy (unfair advantage if we used that!) but would leave aboard the oars and anchor as there was no wind at present and I have a fear of drifting helplessly on an outgoing tide! As we had lost one of the rowlocks the previous evening because of a non functioning screw on our new tender this took a little longer sculling backwards and forwards between Tiare and Gandy than might have been anticipated. In a pleasant breeze that had filled in we made the start line just in time and decided to start towards the starting box end as

this would give us a more comfortable fetch to the first buoy. We found plenty of space to start on port tack and managed to sail clear and upwind of the fleet except for the two skiffs. The remainder of the dinghies managed to lay the mark despite starting at the downwind end of the line and thus we gained no real advantage off the start. Round the channel buoy gybing onto a dead run and time for the spinnaker. Up she went, thankfully no tangles after yesterday's events and the prospect of a good long spinnaker run. Time for a brew up on the Trangia and a picnic! However, looking behind us the cruisers with spinnakers set and the other slower dinghies made a pretty sight so Caireen was detailed to be the photographer while I managed the spinnaker sheets.



It then became apparent that although we were sailing a straight line to the Petty Bank buoy we were not in the main channel and taking full advantage of the incoming tide. There followed a quick gybe of the spinnaker. Caireen is getting a real expert at this now. The wind began to increase and the idea of a picnic was shelved as the buoy fast approached.

The next leg would be marginal for the spinnaker. We decided to keep the spinnaker up round the buoy with another gybe. It quickly became apparent that we were sailing far too close to the wind still with a flooding tide to keep the spinnaker up as the wind continued to increase. Down it came on the wrong side, but it didn't matter as we were only doing one lap and would not need the spinnaker again. Apart from the Skiffs and the RS100 we were ahead of all other boats with a healthy lead over Richard in the Solo and Mike in his Folksong, and probably doing enough on handicap to at least be in with a shout against them both. As we approached the Kilmuir buoy we could see Richard planeing away, rapidly narrowing the gap and a three minute cushion between us all but disappeared to not much more than a minute.



The final leg was a good healthy beat into the last hour of the flood tide so we decided to tack up close inshore out of the channel to avoid as much of the tide as possible. Gradually we overhauled the RS100 who was finding it a struggle into the wind and waves. We also managed to re-establish a healthy margin between us and Richard in his Solo – but would it be enough? Whatever the outcome, the sail had been a glorious one in sunshine and wind. Enough wind to make it interesting but not as interesting as the previous day! In the end we came second behind the Skiff sailed by Ian Morton by the narrowest of margins – just 9 seconds.

Sunday evening was a pleasant social evening as Mike and Helen invited us round for supper, but not before we had to help re-launch the club safety boat to go to the aid of a becalmed dinghy rapidly disappearing on the ebb tide despite brave attempts to row. Helen went in the safety boat with Malcolm and his dad leaving Mike and Helen's mum to cook the meal! Another late night search in the dinghy for Tiare.

After a good night's sleep on a well behaved Tiare it was an early start to transfer essentials, including the outboard back onto Gandy and deliver the dinghy back to the dinghy park in order to catch the last of the ebb tide to carry us round the point. The wind was very light so we had to motor to the point before we were able to get some sails up and make reasonable progress against the flood tide.



It was good wildlife spotting conditions. An otter was seen just beyond Fort George. Porpoises a little further along and then off the sands at Whiteness there were plenty of seals as well as the usual sea birds including guillemots, terns and gannets. It is always a delight to see the latter diving for fish. Momentary excitement as we spotted something dome-shaped in the distance which reminded us of a turtle sighting off Eigg we made a few years back. Closer examination however revealed it to be the bloated carcass of dead seal minus its head.



The wind was now dropping and the tide strengthening. If we were to have any hope of making Findhorn before the top of the tide we would have to motor. The two-stroke Mercury willingly obliged as we headed off across the Nairn bay to the mouth of the Findhorn. Two fill ups of the tank were required as we made a steady 5 mph over the ground. Soon after a 2.00pm, well before high water, we were approaching the entrance to Findhorn. By three we had the boat away and were licking ice creams outside the Captain's Table, having reported to Simon our safe return as scheduled.



We had completed a successful and enjoyable three days of cruising and racing in conditions that were challenging on the Saturday, perfection on the Sunday and perhaps a little too benign on the Monday. However we had covered some 66 miles, had always found something of interest be it the wildlife, the scenery, the cut and thrust of the racing or the logistics of working out and implementing a plan of action according to the varied conditions that we encountered.



David Bell and Caireen Gourlay