

CRUISING WITH A SQUIB 'VINDEK' in 1970



For some time I had been very attracted to the West Coast of Scotland, having toured that area in a car and I was anxious to do it under sail.

I was booked to see the Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh in 1970 and I thought it might be possible to take my Squib up to Scotland and combine the two.

Having no trailer and being informed that an 1100 Traveller was not powerful enough for towing, I had to set about finding a suitable car and trailer. I approached Oliver Lee who thought he could help. A local firm was producing a new trailer for the Squibs and Oliver thought this would be a good trial run. I had several friends in the car business and one of them produced a Cortina 1500 which he kindly lent me.

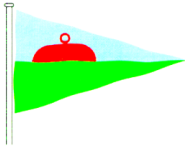
I realised that I would have to have an outboard motor to get through the Crinan Canal, but I was not keen on having an outboard bracket on my Squib so I compromised by taking a rubber dinghy with an outboard bracket, lashed alongside – we found the dinghy handy for getting ashore at various places.

I finally got everything ready and left early on the Tuesday morning, it was not a very nice day and by the time I was on the M1 it was teeming with rain. It was during this period that I had my first shock, looking in the mirror I saw Vindex laying over at a terrible angle. I stopped as soon as possible and went onto the hard shoulder. When I investigated I found the nut had come off the stay holding the leg (luckily the lashings were stopping her from going over completely) I managed to get her upright and found a temporary bolt until I got to the next service station, where I checked all the nuts and taped them.

I was in between the M1 and M6 when a police car flagged me down to tell me that a stay supporting the axle to the front was dragging on the ground. On investigation I found the weld had given way, so I tied it up and hoped for the best. A few more miles and then I heard horrible noises from the back, I stopped in the first lay by, things looked rather serious – the stub axle was coming through the channel and the wheels were at a terrible angle. I unhooked the trailer and drove to the nearest telephone box and rang Oliver Lee to see if he could send out another trailer. Eventually the makers of the trailer arrived with spares etc. and at about 7 o' clock that evening I was on my way again. After about another half hour I heard some more funny noises, by this time I was getting very jittery, but this time it was the car, the exhaust pipe dragging on the ground, and I managed to wire it up temporarily.

I had arranged to stop the night with friends at Morecambe and expected to arrive late afternoon, I had rang them and told them of my troubles, I realised that it would be very late before I arrived, but they insisted that I stayed the night with them and they were at the roundabout on the M6 to guide me to their house. After a meal and a chat we turned in at 2 a.m. – quite a long day!!

Next morning I thought I had better get the exhaust repaired or renewed – this took longer than I thought and it was midday before I left Morecambe. My destination was Helensburgh, I had a trouble free trip, the only snag was it was evening when I arrived and I did not have time to launch the boat as my friends had a special wedding anniversary dinner laid on, so we decided to wait until morning. I had arranged a mooring with the Royal Northern Yacht Club, we had left the boat on a ramp used by the Army landing craft, as we could not find the boatman to see



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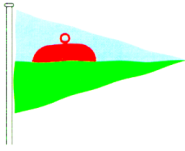


which mooring we were to use. We went back to the ramp only to find a landing craft had arrived together with a rather irate Major. Luckily my hostess tuned on her charm and after the landing craft unloaded we were able to launch the Squib. I am afraid Vindex launched rather more quickly than we anticipated and I had to swim out to her and, as some of us know, it is no easy job getting aboard a Squib. However, safely on her mooring, it was a quick change and a rush to the station to catch the train to Edinburgh for the opening ceremony of the Commonwealth Games, which I just made.

I returned to Helensburgh on the Saturday evening and was joined by John, Yvonne and small son Philip. Sunday morning dawned, a very nice day but very little wind and although we intended to make Ardrishaig our first port of call, we were rather late getting away from Helensburgh, so we decided to make for Tighnabruaich and Yvonne and Philip went off by car. After a while we realised that the wind was not coming, so we pumped our dinghy up and put the outboard on to help us along, but unfortunately the water would not circulate and we had to stop the motor. We did all we could in the very light wind, but realised we would not make Tighnabruaich and at about 8 p.m. we decided to make Port Bannatyne. We picked up a mooring and on rowing ashore managed to find a fish and chip shop open and enquired about getting somewhere to sleep as we did not fancy sleeping under the foredeck of a Squib. Unfortunately this was Glasgow holiday fortnight and everywhere was full up. Knocking on one door, a lady, whose family were keen sailing people, said she would ring her mother in law, who did not usually take lodgers, and she agreed to put us up. We had a very comfortable bed and as she had no bread she baked some and sent us off next morning with fresh rolls. Her husband took us to an engineer to have the outboard seen to. At first they said it would probably be midday before we would be able to pick it up which put us in a quandary. We did not want to lose a whole morning, yet there was not much wind and we wanted to make Ardrishaig the entrance to the Crinan Canal as we had rooms booked for the night at Crinan. However we went back at 10.30 and found the engine repaired and we were soon underway. It was a very interesting and pretty sail through the Kyles of Bute but the wind was rather fickle and once or twice we had to use the outboard. About 7 o'clock in the evening we reached Ardrishaig, we could see Yvonne and Philip waving as we came up the lock. We quickly anchored her off and made for Crinan by car. We had been invited by friends who keep their boat at Crinan to a meal at the Crinan Hotel that evening and as we were a day late on our schedule they were looking for us coming through the canal. All went well and we met up with them and after a quick change at our lodgings we finally sat down in the hotel at 9 p.m. to a very good meal.

Next morning we went back by car to Ardrishaig, I am afraid it was rather wet, we went into the basin and locked in but found that it was the lock keepers lunch time so we had to wait another hour before we could get through into the canal. We had a very good trip through the canal with the rubber dinghy with outboard lashed alongside, Philip came with us for quite a while, Yvonne following in the car. The rain stopped and the sun came out and it was very pleasant. We put Philip ashore and Yvonne went off to Oban where we had booked rooms. We locked through into the Crinan basin ready for an early start next morning and had another night at the lodgings in Crinan.

The next leg of the trip from Crinan to Oban I realised, was going to be the trickiest, being told by quite a few people of the 6 knot tides. We had worked out our tides and it meant an 8.30 a.m. start, so we were up early and went into the lock at 8.00 a.m. In the lock were a variety of boats, all making up north, among them a T24 and a Prior 30. We looked very small in the lock



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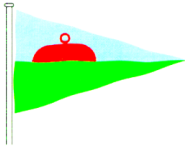


and when one of the yachts enquired where we were bound and when told Oban he turned to his companions and remarked "I suppose they know what they are doing" Our friends, Sam and Twinkle Gaydon and family were there to see us off and we were towed by the Prior 30, the owners son being very taken with the Squib. We set our sails and when all was ready we slipped our tow. It was a close haul out through the Islands to the Sound of Luing, we then tacked and were close hauled on the port tack. The wind was freshening and with the fair tide we were really tearing along, there were several tide rips between the islands but they were not as frightening as they looked. As you cannot reef a Squib I had taken along an Enterprise cruising main and I was wondering how much longer I could carry whole sail, I didn't fancy losing my mast but we sat her out and you would think we were racing and after passing Easdale we were able to slacken our sheets a little. We finally had a broad reach up to the Sound of Kerrera and final spinnaker run through the sound, the sun was shining and we had our lunch. When we arrived at Oban we had a little difficulty in finding a suitable berth near the railway pier and we moored with two anchors and proceeded ashore to try and find Yvonne and Philip. As we rowed ashore, in came the T24 and they were amazed to see us moored up – I think we beat most of the boats which had left with us at Crinan, the Prior 30 had made for Mull.

We did not find Yvonne and Philip and as the weather had changed and it was pouring with rain we made for our lodgings, they had spent the day on the beach just outside Oban and were surprised to find us comfortably installed in our rooms. That night it blew very hard and I was anxious about Vindex as Oban does not have much shelter. Yvonne sensed my anxiety and ran me in the car to the pier, we were greatly relieved to see her lying safely at anchor. As it was also pouring with rain we realised that there would be no sailing, we decided to drive down to Helensburgh to pick up my car and trailer and what a day!! It rained incessantly the whole way there and back.

The next day was an improvement but the wind was still blustery so we decided to take a steamer trip to Fort William, we had hoped to sail up there in Vindex. We were back in Oban by late afternoon and we had to get Vindex onto the trailer ready for the return on the Saturday. The most suitable ramp we could find was near the railway wharf which was rather too steep, but was the best we could find. We couldn't find anyone in charge but nobody seemed to worry so we just carried on. The plan was, I should go into the water and guide the boat into the trailer, while John pulled the trailer up the ramp with a rope attached to the car. The first attempt was unsuccessful and the boat came up at a horrible angle and I had great difficulty in getting back into the water without doing any damage. We decided it needed two in the water to get her on the trailer so Yvonne took over the car and John came in the water with me. Yvonne was not happy driving a strange car up a slippery ramp and Philip was put into the charge of some on lookers which he didn't take too kindly. Unfortunately the spot we picked appeared to be the haven for all the rubbish from gash buckets from the steamers using the wharf, we were surrounded by half grapefruit and other atrocities, not so pleasant!! However the second attempt was more successful and although she was not quite right on the trailer we decided to get her up on level ground and with the help of onlookers perhaps get her right. On the way up the ramp, one wheel went into a hole and when we looked at the boat she had jumped into the correct position.

We loaded her up, lashed her down and left next morning stopping the first night just below Scots Corner and completing the journey to Burnham the next afternoon, the journey home



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being trouble free. John and Yvonne took a different route home as they had some calls to make.

I must add that the firm making the trailers have now produced several hundred of these trailers very successfully, so I think I found all of the teething troubles.

In the summer of 1973 Sam and Twinkle Gaydon lent us their 9 ton Sloop Quartet, which is based at Crinan for another cruise up the west coast. John, Yvonne and Philip made up the crew and although the weather was not too kind, we managed to get up to Tobermoray. We would have liked to have gone further and I must say it was more comfortable than a Squib!!