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Girvan Youth Trust
Faramir Sailing Trip 2014

My sleeping pattern was all over the place. My stomach was churning around my body, causing violent outbursts of sickness in the boat's toilets. My hands looked like they were ripped apart by lions due to the never ending rope burn which struck my palms. My legs caused me to walk around like a drunk on a Saturday night, as the adjusted to the 'calm' waves. Overall this is the story of one the best experiences of my life, the week I went sailing.

The story started in Oban, spits of ice cold rain polluted the sky along with the pitch black unhealthy smoke of the local ferries. I stood like shivering wreck, this isn't what I expected. The boat itself was parked about 10 minutes away - 10 minutes on a boat. So we threw our gear on this petite, unhealthy looking ferry and left the safety of Oban harbour to a pontoon on an almost deserted Island. Our gear was shifted onto this old looking vessel with a modern white cockpit on it looking out of place - It was grand, it was clean, It was our new home until Friday morning.

As we waddled up a set of rusty and wet metal stairs: we were met by this man: He had murky blonde hair and a sailors beard, this is Paul our skipper for the voyage; Another crew member peered her head in a shy manner, by the look of her she was Scottish, but when she spoke she was the most English person I have ever met in my life; her name was Jess and her name suited her shy persona. There was another calling himself Vince.

We crammed ourselves in the galley table like Sardines in a tin, it was good character building; crammed next to people you don't know at all. Paul, Jess and Vince told us to prepare to sail at 7pm where we will reach a cove by 11pm; everyone's faces dropped, it didn't help we were all up at least by 7 am this morning and travelling all day. So as per the Skippers orders we left the shelter of Oban's scenic bay and into conditions which would make Popeye the sailorman want to go back to port.

Wind battered the boat swapping sides every 10 minutes. Coming from someone who the worst he has been on is the Rothsey ferry at 11am in the morning; it was a culture shock. Then came the sickness; thankfully this time I wasn't involved instead it was people downstairs who couldn't stomach the never ending waves battering their bolognese; some were up feeling unwell, some were down feeling unwell. We arrived at Cull bay around 11pm and we were ready for bed - Some people never got downstairs to around 12:30 due to them doing work upstairs. Worst thing is we were on breakfast the next day - quarter to six here I come.

Yvonne our leader from the Trust, woke me up and I sat up in a state of trance; My eyes were going as I buttered bread on the Table. I certainly wasn't looking pretty this morning. Paul came through and ordered his scrambled egg, I wasn't in the mood to listen to him today. After a successful first breakfast, we set sail for the Caledonian Canal at Fort William.

On our way there the sun was shining against the water, the scenery was breathtaking as we motor sailed our way up Loch Linnhe, at that time we were in according to myself; the most beautiful place on Earth. After a near encounter with a commercial ferry we approached Fort William with ease.

Fort William itself was quite disappointing, we only saw it from the sea and it looked very plain and industrial with the smoke of a steam train covering the sky allowing Ben Nevis to creep up alongside. Once we were in the Canal, we went up the infamous Neptunes Staircase which led us up into the Canal towards Gairloch.



We sailed until about half four in the afternoon, and we docked in a little hamlet called Gairloch at the foot of Lochloch. It consisted of one lock, toilets, showers and a pontoon which we berthed at for the night. Paul told us about the fairy woods his friend visited at first we thought it was just some fancy trees with some spooky moss. No we were in for a surprise - instead it was teddy bears hanging from the trees, Clocks ticked against the desolate ground – miniature dinosaurs scattered across the moss – resembling a dinosaur apocalypse. Most chickened out and went to cook chicken wraps, while the rest of us ventured into the fairytale woods.



After being creeped out to the maximum by some rather devilish teddy bears hanging from devilish trees. We got treated to a great dinner of Chicken wraps. After that we went a walk then to bed where I got a much deserved and needed rest. But the day I have been dreading is upon us - the day I have to cook dinner for the group - I told them to prepare for illness.

I woke up treated to a great breakfast and we set sail for Fort Augustus a small town about half way between Inverness and Fort William. Firstly we had to travel through Loch Lochy and Loch Oich where we learned how to operate canal locks - an important skill for any sailor. Then we arrived at the tranquil little town of Fort Augustus where we set up base and where our group had to cook dinner! After a stroll around the town including a diversion to the shop for an ice cream, we headed back and started to cook dinner; and by the end of it, no one was sick and it was a success! It was now time for a chat and bed (something I had been looking forward to).



The next day I woke up nice and early ready for our final canal journey to Inverness. On our way we saw the legendary Urquhart castle, but no Nessie (She must have been sleeping); and after a selfie at the Castle we headed through Loch Ness to the final part of the Canal.

The Final part of Canal was a leisurely motor sail, pass the rolling hills and the

never ending plague of trees which surrounded us - it was at this point I feared what was coming, it would not be a nice leisurely sail this time tomorrow - It would be stormy and rocky and any other bad sailing words I could think of.

After docking at Inverness, the final mile of the Canal it was time for dinghy practice, a small rubber boat and a paddle was not sounding like a good idea; not at all: But I managed it - somehow and managed to tick that off my checklist, This was also a point I was dreading: My exam results but they weren't as bad as I thought and that weight was lifted off my mind; now time to eat!

It was almost like every night was the same routine, eat, talk, game, repeat. I'm not complaining - I got a lot of sleep which is needed for tomorrow because guess who is on nightshift! The Next Day we left Inverness (Which is just like everywhere else) and we left the Canal into the open sea where I saw Dolphins! They were amazing and we called ours Dan - they were show off's if you ask me but it was lovely to see.



The next 48 hours were to test me and I was sick upstairs, downstairs (Not on the stairs though) the sea didn't agree with me and it showed as we were rocking forwards and backwards and left and right all at the same time; we also learned some valuable skills such as knots! which were demonstrated by Paul . Then the nightshift came which was beautiful seeing all the stars and the tiny towns dotted across the flat landscape - it was a nicer version of Blackpool Illuminations.

I was sleeping the rest of the time after that so we arrived at Aberdeen which is called the Granite city but I still didn't see a curling stone, then we docked at the quayside marking the end of our amazing voyage onboard Faramir.

The experience as a whole has been amazing, I loved every second of it, it was challenging yet rewarding in more ways than one - I've never been so tired in my life, but I've met new people and seen some amazing places. The group we went with was a mixture of people from Girvan, Berwickshire and one person from Oban and although it was awkward at first, we all got to know this group and by the end I couldn't imagine not knowing them.

I wouldn't change much about the trip as it was the perfect blend of Canal and Sea although my stomach might say it preferred the Canal - I quite liked both. Overall it has been the best experience ever although I don't think I'll ever do it again - I think every young person should have their week's sailing on a boat.

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