

# Lumina through the North West Passage

## Post 2

### Ocean passage Oban to Greenland

It's been a while I hear you say and you would be right, Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> June and a fortnight tomorrow that we left slipped the lines in Oban.

I would like to say it has been an easy speedy trip across the sea but of course that wasn't to be. We left Oban on the Sunday afternoon to escape another nights mooring fees at the very well appointed and in the words of the harbourmaster "we have to be self-funded" North Pier pontoons. These were installed about 5 years ago after many years of wrangling with the harbour and planners. Oban was one of those anomalies in that there was no place to even tie up a yacht in the town, yes there were some moorings at the yacht club and Kerrera Marina a short ferry ride across the harbour, but there was no where that you could turn up and walk ashore. So, the North Pier Transit pontoons were built but one of the conditions was that yachts could not spend more than 3 nights there. This was to prevent the problem that has been common in many small marinas on the West coast of Scotland in where you build a facility to attract visiting yachts and immediately it would get filled up with local boats and there was no where for the visitor to stop. It may also have been to do with the other local marinas who didn't want to see more permanent pontoon berths taking their trade. In the event, it seems to work very well, as boats have to keep moving on there is always a space, and you don't have to book in advance - a fairly recent phenomenon in the boating world in some places.

So, the North Pier Pontoons are good but expensive and for us they have been a right of passage. Previously it has marked the end of our trek up the Irish sea from Milford Haven before onward to new adventures. This year it marked the end of our shakedown voyage with Famous Bob from Ardrossan and the last land we would touch before Greenland.

Oban is a great place, you can get pretty much anything a boater would want for a voyage. I had already rung the fuel depot to make sure that they had the right propane cylinder for us and we went with the trolley to swap our almost empty one so now we have three full cylinders, hopefully enough to get us to Alaska.

I then rang the veg wholesaler and asked if I could come and get a bag of spuds etc, only to be told that would not be possible as I had just rung the fuel depot again by mistake. So, with sister Annie and Simon back from a week in the northern Highlands they took us round to the wholesaler and I got a bag of spuds, carrots and onions just in time before they closed. We work funny hours they said, yes I know, I am a reformed tomato grower I replied. I am sure the hotel guests of Oban and the west do not appreciate that someone drives to Glasgow market to return by 6am with their fruit and veg that is then packed up and distributed during the morning.

So, with a few more trips to Tesco and Lidl for just one more thing, and the obligatory Grand Platter takeaway from the famous Green Shed seafood shop on the main pier we finally set off. True to form we found that the wind and tide would not allow us to sail up the Sound of Mull and neither could we have a straight sail down the Firth of Lorne and out to sea along the South coast of Mull. We therefore anchored for the night in Loch Don, just across from Oban and set off proper on the Sunday.



*Nice breeze and kind weather and Indie adjusting the genoa sheet.*

*Actually it's a posed photo – Whats wrong with it?*

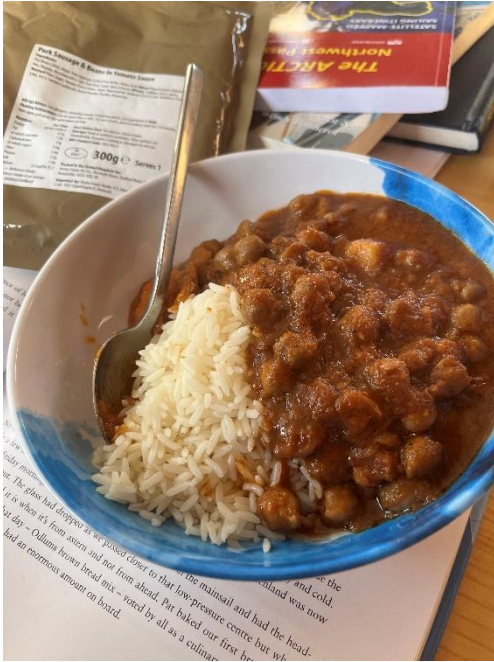
*Answers please!*

*Come on you sailors....*

With little breeze but at least the tide in our favour we motored out past Iona on the far west of Mull and onwards. The wind freshened and with full sail we passed south of Tiree and were south of the Outer Hebrides as night fell.

The one problem with crossing the Atlantic in this direction is that essentially you are going against the wind as the depressions that bring us our weather come barrelling across from the West. The other thing that seasoned sailors (Bob included) would say is that you are going a bit early. However, having promised the climbers that I would deliver them and they could have a months climbing we were already committed.

So, on we went, soon the pattern of watches where one person is sitting in the doghouse keeping an eye out became second nature. Unfortunately, the first storm was the worst and we had not yet properly got our sea legs. Luckily only two were actually sick and the boat behaved admirably. There was never a worrying moment for myself or Carol, who have been out in big seas before, but for Ben and particularly Indie it was a baptism of fire. I have to hand it to Indie, she has done incredibly well. There are not many who would sign on for such a trip having essentially never been on a boat before, but she has gone for it, picks things up really quickly and is a valuable crew member.



*We lived on British Army rations for the crossing – just heat the bag in hot water for 10 mins. They have a varied menu very good quality. We got them in Svalbard last year from a rowing boat that had just come from Norway. For a donation to their charity we got around 50 meals*

In all, I think we had 5 storms, each time it was a case of choosing the least worst tack so we could gain some westward ground and then trying to make the ride as comfortable as possible. This meant that we would tend to run with the wind and waves rather than trying to bash into them and when the swell is maybe 5 or 6 metres and the wind up to 44 kn this does seem a good choice! The result is that consequently you don't end up with a straight course but that's sailing. It wasn't all strong winds though, we had one patch where it was almost calm and several times when the wind was so light that we motored for maybe 24 hours at a time.

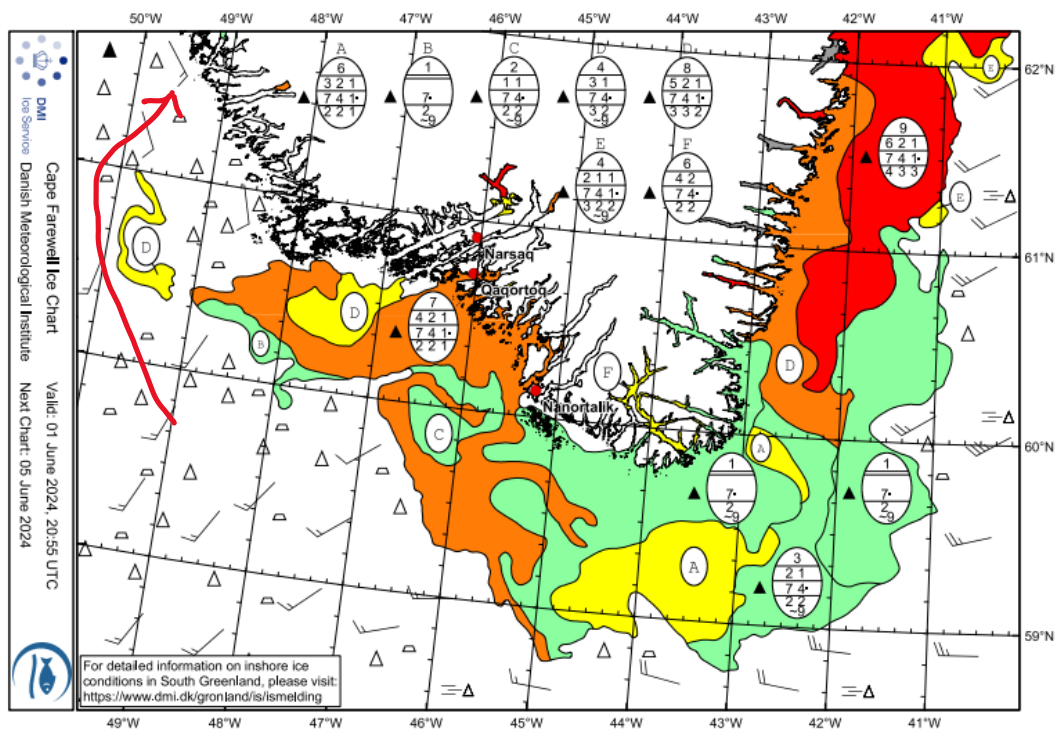


*Running downwind in heavy weather. We had winds up to 44kn at times.*

Then as we closed on Greenland the wind was incessantly on the nose and we spent 4 days tacking towards and away. One afternoon the wind almost dropped completely and we motored close to where the ice charts told us the sea ice was, and indeed we found it and headed away.

The southern tip of Greenland, Cape Farewell is renowned for its constant storms rounding the headland. The wind typically heads down the West side and up the East side. Conversely there is a current that goes in the opposite direction. This brings ice down the East of Greenland and around the tip and sometimes several hundred miles up the east coast as well. This is sea ice from the North and, by the time it gets to the area we are in, is well smashed up by the storms and is definitely a no-go area for yachts. There have been several cases of boats getting “nipped” by this brash ice although mangled would probably be a better term!

It was as we approached this area that we saw only the 3<sup>rd</sup> ship on the AIS since leaving Scotland. It was Cape Race, she had been on the pontoon in Oban and I had a conversation on the radio with them. They are a steel trawler built in the 1960s and now converted into a luxury expedition ship for 12 passengers. They had in fact left a day earlier than us and had gone straight there meaning that despite our zig zag passage we had caught them up, but I think they were not pushing it as had no guests on board and just relocating to Greenland for the season. We had seen them in Svalbard last year and maybe we will cross paths again. Later, we actually saw a Danish naval vessel the HDMS Triton, she was heading in the opposite direction to us and was skirting the icefield as well.



*An ice chart – showing the southern tip of Greenland. We needed to go around the ice tongue and couldn't risk trying to find the gap in the dark and fog, particularly as the chart was now 2 days old*



The wind then increased to a point that motoring towards our destination was not tenable so we sailed as close to the wind as possible, but this still meant a tack that would head us towards the Labrador coast rather than Greenland, as in that direction was the icefield. 24 hours later and with the wind direction changing a bit in our favour we were able to tack back towards the coast, hopefully our last before landfall.

As the wind gradually turned to help us track up the coast, the sun came out and a large pod of pilot whales stayed with us for maybe a couple of hours. We had not had much sailing like this the whole trip, relatively calm sea, sunny weather and the right wind.

Alas ice charts downloaded by starlink are not so upbeat, the band of ice we have been watching has also been moving north with the current and was looking like it would preclude us from making an early landfall. As night fell the engine was started and the wind gradually decreased. With gloom of a dusky night the fog came down and we headed out a bit away from where the ice charts said it was a couple of days ago.



A couple of hours later the gloom turned into morning but the fog was now down to about 50m. Some targets on the radar, maybe icebergs slipped by unseen and then at about noon we came out of the fog into a clear blue sky with a flat blue sea. In the far distance was a large iceberg and behind that some 60 miles away a snowclad mountain peak was visible above the haze. After 15 days at sea we had almost made landfall.

*Hoisting the Greenland courtesy flag*



*Our first proper iceberg*

Here is the [tracker link](#) so you can see where we are