

## Here be Monsters

### Extract from CAOL ILA's Log.

Date: 18<sup>th</sup> May 2025.

Position: 55.49.984N – 5.55.999W - two cables East of the entrance to Craighouse Bay, Isle of Jura, just off Eilean nan Gabhar (Goat Island).

Depth :14metres.

Time: 01:38 hours GMT.

Sea State: Slight.

Wind NE F1-2.

The Scottish Islands Peak Race 2025.

### Narrative.

It is a starry night with light airs and we are slowly approaching the entrance to Craighouse Bay under full sail, boat speed over the ground 3.5 knots. Fixated on the 1 every 5 second flash of Goat Rock Light and our eyes peeled for the red flashing beacon on the shoal that extends from the southern shore of Jura. We are getting ready to make our turn.

Nic reports a sudden bump on the rudder and a black shape appears in the water behind us. First thought is that we have picked up a pot buoy and are dragging tackle behind us. However, there is no change to the feel of the rudder or boat speed. Looking back again, the now much larger black shape is closing on us and has its own bow wave. The crew are distracted from tasks and are all looking back. The shape disappears! All the crew are asking the Skipper "What was that?" "Did we really see that?"

The big, black shape appears again, closer this time and menacingly gains on us, closing the distance to our transom. In everyone's imagination are the stories about orcas attacking the rudders of boats near Gibraltar and the recent report of an orca rudder attack on a yacht off Shetland. Yet there is no visible large dorsal fin!



The skipper runs below and grabs a powerful torch, shining it back into the darkness. Nothing there now, just a large swirl in our wake. The skipper quickly recovers and gets everyone back to reality. We are very close to the beacon on the reef, under sail, in light airs with a cross tide. We turn our attention to the navigation and the race.... but the hairs on the back of our arms and necks are still standing on end.

Andrew, Pete and Will run the Paps of Jura and return to the boat at 10.15 hours in the morning. They have forgotten all about the incident with the excitement of dry Paps in good visibility. Adam picks them up from the pontoon in the dinghy and confesses that, last night, it took him a good while to summon up the

courage to row back into the pitch-black. His sleep deprived mind in overdrive, imagining what might be lurking in the dark waters under the dingy. Our hairs stand on end again as we reflect on what happened.

We paddle furiously to CAOL ILA and climb on board. Now with sails hoisted, we slowly sail and row out of Craighouse Bay and into the sound of Jura. Turning onto a course of 180 degrees, heading south towards the Mull of Kintyre with just a ghost of light airs. Spinnaker up.



Within one nautical mile we encounter a pod of five Minke Whales feeding near the surface. We enjoy watching them as we drift past.

Was it one of these animals that we encountered on our approach the night before? Better a rudely awakened and understandably curious Minke chasing us than “John Coe”, the orca bull and resident “top predator” frequently sighted up & down the west during April and May.



The peace was then shattered by 2 jet skiers with loudspeakers and music blasting. Sadly, they spotted the Minke Pod and raced over to circle them at noisy speeds.

Perhaps that Coastal Flare pack will come in handy after all !

### **Foot Notes.**

*Caol ila is a Sadler 34 owned by John & Andrew Harris. Members of the Royal Northumberland Yacht Club, they mostly sail on the West Coast of Scotland.*

*We carried Flares especially for the race. Why do we usually not carry pyrotechnics? Well, that's another story!*

*Minke whales are relatively small members of the baleen family. They are famous for their gentle and curious nature. They frequently approach boats and divers without posing any threat. Check out the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust for info.*

*The motley crew of Caol ila, as “Curestarters” have raised over £5k for Worldwide Cancer Research via the Just Giving site.*

*The Scottish Islands Peaks Race - [SIPR](#) - describes itself as a long weekend with a difference. Set up in 1983 — this annual adventure race is for teams of sailors and fell runners and takes place around the west coast of Scotland. Starting in Oban with a short hill run, teams sail to Salen on Mull, run up Ben More, sail to Craighouse on Jura, run the Paps of Jura, sail round the Mull of Kintyre to Arran, run up Goat Fell, then sail to the finish line in Troon. All in a long weekend.*