

On Monday 11th I arrived at Greenock after travelling for 6 hours, where we found the boat that would be our home for the next two weeks; the John Laing. On this first day we were given safety briefings and were educated on the basic workings of the boat and boat life. For the rest of the day, we went out to enjoy the festivities put on by Greenock.

The next day was the start of what we came for; the sailing. This began with the parade of sail out of Greenock, which was amazing as we could see the large square-riggers up close and we also got the chance to demonstrate our own dancing skills! From here we headed down around Arran and around the Mull of Kintyre, as we approached the Sound of Jura, Kat, a girl in my watch, and I made a pilotage plan so that when it came to it we could navigate through the Sound of Jura in the dark that night. Our pilotage was successful and so the next day we arrived at our first stop, Oban.

At Oban we were joined by Auno, Provident, Esprit, Black Diamond and St Iv. Here we had the opportunity to use the local facilities, including the swimming pool and sauna, which we were very grateful for! In the evening we went to a Ceilidh at the local Ceilidh House, which was a new experience for many and also gave us the chance to meet some other crews. It was a 4.30 start the next day for my watch and we left Oban to a spectacular sunrise. Due to popular demand we stopped off at Tobermory, where the children's TV show Balmory is filmed, for a mid-morning snack and a look around. At this stage we were planning to anchor off the Isle of Skye for the night, but the weather wasn't looking ideal so it was decided to plough through up to Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis.

When we arrived on Stornoway the day was spent showering, shopping and seeing the local sights. However the weather was still against us and the decision was made to leave that night to avoid the worst of the bad weather coming in. So at 10.0'clock we set off along with Black Diamond and Provident for Stromness on the Orkneys, the sea was rough and so Black Diamond became indecisive and turned back although they soon changed their minds and came back out to join us, Provident however had an engine problem so were forced to sail back into Stornoway. The journey out was rough until we got to Cape Wrath where the winds dropped and the sea calmed leaving us with a relaxed journey to Stromness, on which we saw the Old Man of Hoy in the distance through the binoculars.

We spent two days at Stromness, in which we visited Skara Brae and the Ring of Brodgar, with the crew of Black Diamond, which was incredible to see a village that had been preserved so well after 5000 years, and went to an outdoor Ceilidh. Due to the weather still being against us we decided to take a day sail through Scapa Flow and tie up on Scapa Pier. On this warm evening we had a barbeque on the pier with the crews of Tecla, Maybe, Jolie Brise and Black Diamond and got the opportunity to look around their boats. During the next day we had a crew swap with six of our crew members swapping with six Black Diamond crew members, allowing some to try sailing a new boat and the rest of us to teach the Black Diamond crew members how to sail John Laing. This was followed by a squashed lunch, with both crews

around the table on John Laing, before us all walking over the hill into Kirkwall. For some of us this was the perfect opportunity to see the new Harry Potter film, and for others to have a meal off the boat.

At 4.am the next morning we left Scapa for the final leg of the journey and to our destination of Lerwick as the weather was finally working with us. In the early hours of the morning the sea was a bit rough and so many crew members weren't feeling great, however the morale improved along with the sea state as the day went on. At about mid-day disaster struck as our main sail ripped along a seam, meaning we had to put three reefs in to be able to use the main, which slowed us down, but . We finally made it into Lerwick in the early hours of Thursday morning. We had made it!

Thursday afternoon was the Crew Parade around the town of Lerwick, which meant our crew running around wildly with a sail cover, this was a great experience as all the crews from so many nations were coming together to put on a display for the Shetlanders. We then congregated in front of the main stage for the welcome ceremony and the awards to be presented. Thursday also brought the Crew Party held at Fort Charlotte, which was the perfect opportunity to spend time with the crews we had met, and the friends we had made throughout our journey.

On Friday we spent a couple of hours cleaning the boat and preparing it for the next leg of the race before going off to enjoy the festival. During the day we received many party invites and so we went to a civilised Pimms Party on Provident, followed by a party on the Columbian square-rigger Gloria before heading off to the main stage to see the Levellers performing. Saturday morning was the de-brief where we discussed the 603 mile voyage we had undertaken in the past two weeks. It was also the day for goodbyes with the many friends I had made throughout the long voyage.

I have found this a greatly rewarding process as I have stretched my boundaries and left my comfort zone many times in the two weeks on board. I have visited places I never thought I would, and have experienced many new things. Being a part of Tall Ships has been an experience I will not forget as it has taught me so much, I would like to thank you very much for helping me to do all this and achieve things I never thought I would at my age.

Alida