

The Liver Building - Liverpool

Sailing with CSSC

I started dinghy sailing as a child and through HASSRA took part in the IDOR Regatta in 2012. From that moment, I was obsessed with big yacht sailing, but there was no prospect of me affording the time or costs involved in keeping a big yacht. So I carried on applying for IDOR annually and started gaining some RYA qualifications to build my knowledge of navigating and sea safety. Most skippers seemed to be men, I didn't ever get my hands on the wheel to steer the yachts, but was really active as a crew member joining in with heavy tasks with enthusiasm. Discovering that technique is just as good as brute strength, but I still didn't see myself as a skipper in charge of a yacht and crew. Then I delivered motivational training to work coaches and did the exercises myself. (WOOP Theory) it changed my views. I started by taking RYA First Aid to be more useful on board, I went on to take Day Skipper Theory and Practical with CSSC on their Suffolk yacht. Mooring was a challenge – like parking a car on a moving road whilst the wind blows you away and passing boats that are unable to stop have to be avoided! I have met some lovely people on the way, who I consider lifelong friends.



Chartwork on board

This year a fantastic group of women based in Liverpool at another of CSSC sailing yachts – Five Kingdoms, organised a training programme so that a few of us can achieve the ultimate goal of becoming a Yachtmaster. This involves building up many hours of sailing, skippering and night hours. All possible without owning a yacht!

I committed to a challenging schedule – a week building miles starting from Liverpool, sailing to Conwy in North Wales, then the big one – sailing across the Irish Sea to the Isle of Man and onto Bangor, Northern Ireland then eventually Scotland.

Liverpool to Conwy was quiet with little wind so the engine had to be used for a while. We left at 1530 with the tide to arrive in Conwy around midnight. Sailing in the dark, using charts and lights to safely pass graceful wind farms stretching for miles, and on our starboard side a huge gas platform lit up like a Christmas tree belching a huge plume of fire, visible for miles – what a contrast!



Conwy castle and bridges.



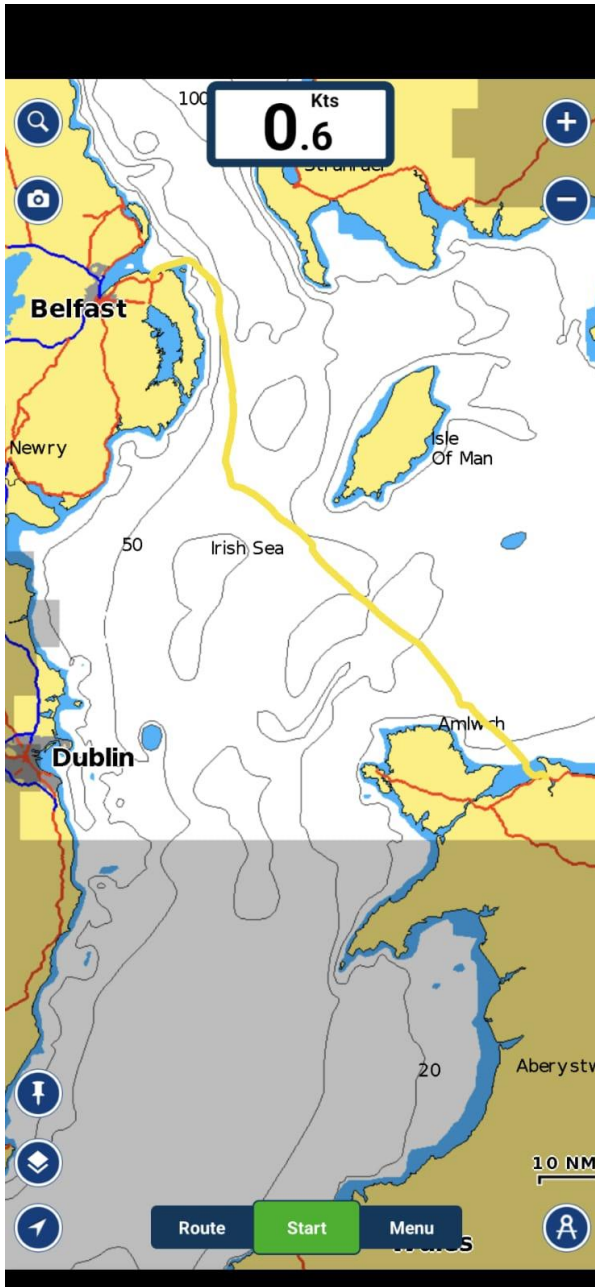
Conwy was sunny calm and beautiful. The marina facilities like an expensive hotel. But we had to press on and get our 60 nautical mile trips in overnight so we left, getting delayed by engine troubles.

Llandudno RNLi were literally passing so we flagged them down and got a lift back into the marina half a mile away, paying via a homemade fruit cake donation, which we had shedloads of!

Safe and sound, we fixed the engine (ourselves) following many steps and testing it. A mechanic assured us what to do if it happened again and said it was good to go.

A storm was forecast for the next morning, so we left again, a bit late, we had to outrun the storm. The edges of it looked like they might catch up with us so efficient sailing was important. As a racer the 'trim' of the sails is all important and it was a fabulous sail up to the Isle of Man with the wind and tide behind us most of the way.

We paused for dinner and a change of shift, I slept at weird times, but woke up feeling very ill and realised the storm had arrived early. The other watch had steered us steadily toward Northern Ireland whilst my watch had slept.



RYA Safetrax record of our route

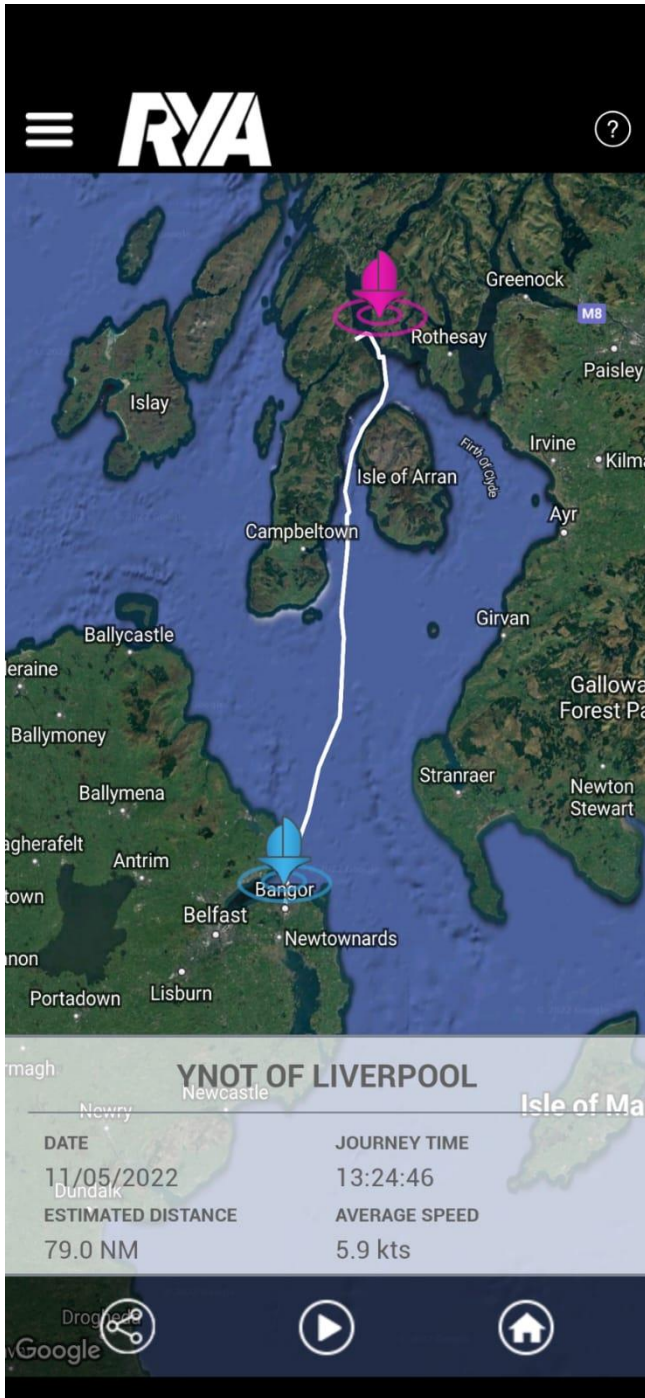
Through the night a few of us were seasick, the waves and swell were enormous but as it was pitch dark so there was mainly a sense of being in a washing machine rolling about, staying quite dry if somewhat cold. I had thermals on and a further three layers plus waterproof dungarees and a big coat! Hat and gloves of course. The sea is certainly much colder than on land and even more so at night. At no point was I scared, having been a sailor all of my life albeit in dinghies!

As we approached Bangor in Northern Ireland, of course the engine over heated again so we rang the coast guard giving them plenty of notice that we would need a tow into Bangor marina.

The ever reliable RNLI came out to us and shadowed us while we sailed in, in heavy seas until we reached the calmer waters of Belfast Lough. They towed us the last bit of the way and we were greeted at the marina by 6 members of the coastguard team. More cake was donated as a thank you to the RNLI. We all agreed the people of Northern Ireland were incredibly welcoming and friendly. We saw them again in The Salty Dog that evening after we had rested for the day and used the marina facilities for showers.

This time we got a mechanic out, again who changed the pump on the engine to fix it and ensure it was cooled whilst running. No smoke came out, just water so all was well.

The next leg of our journey – another over 60 nautical miles was in daylight for a change! By now we had all achieved the required number of night hours and two out of five 60 milers for the yachtmaster qualification.



RYA Safetrax record of our route

We worked out a leaving time so that at a speed of 6 knots average we would arrive at our destination when the tide would be sufficient to get into Tarbert Harbour. This involves tidal calculations, tidal stream and wind offset calculations, bearings to take on the compass taking into account magnetic north that moves, it's all very clever and complicated.

We set off at 0715am after a shower and breakfast and went very fast until just off The Mull of Kintyre off our port side.

Deciding on a route to the west of Arran due to the wind direction, tidal streams and strength we passed the mountains and glens marvelling at how stunning Scotland is.

It really was a happy revelation sailing during the day at this point! We sailed into Loch Fyne where the waters were so clear and the many fish farms and lobster pots were not too hazardous.

Tacking into Tarbert at 2000 hours was perfect timing, the water was deep enough for us to get in the tiny cute harbour and have some well earned dinner on board and more cake!

Our last journey from Tarbert to Largs where the yacht was being delivered to for the summer training and cruising programme followed the next day. More stunning Scottish islands, Bute and wild life – dolphins, black guillemots, seals, puffins.



Video.MOV

From Largs by far the most difficult journey was back to Liverpool (just before the FA cup) to collect cars and complete onward journeys

home after **an amazing week.**

If anyone is interested in sailing via CSSC / HASSRA please contact me / look at the link below. They do run taster days for complete novices as well as training and cruises around our lovely island. There are bases in Liverpool, Southampton, Shotley in Suffolk.

[Civil Service Sailing Association – The sailing community of the Civil Service Sports Council \(cs-sailing.org.uk\)](http://www.cs-sailing.org.uk)