A year or so ago I learned that one of the Civil Service Sailing Association’s (CSSA) three yachts was to be based in Mallaig over the summer. This seemed an ideal opportunity to explore the Hebrides – The isle of Skye in particular. So having tested the water with a few others, I quickly made a bid for the ex Fairview Oceanis 37 previously named Pourquoi-Pas (now renamed YNOT).

So it was that on the afternoon of Saturday 30 July, under cloudy skies YNOT left her berth at Mallaig, fully checked, briefed and provisioned, and headed for an anchorage just north of Isle Ornsay on Skye. With south westerlies in the long range forecast our plan was to head north through the Kyle leaving open the possibility of visiting the Small Isles (Rum, Eigg, Muck and Canna) later in the week. After a short delay to observe the three red lights giving precedence to the Mallaig/Armadale Ferry, we were under way and under sail!

The first evening was a celebration of Sue’s birthday in the Chart Room of the Duisdale Hotel. This offered complimentary visitor mooring and appropriate décor but slow service and midges ashore.

The next morning Loch Hourn beckoned and lived up to its reputation for its own (usually gloomy) microclimate. We had an hour of two to kill before the tide would be favourable for the Kyle to we took the opportunity to get a feel for the boat.

For our least experienced sailor, the beat back towards Skye briefly set new parameters for acceptable deck angles!
Then with the southerly wind behind us we turned north towards Glendale where we planned to anchor for lunch. This was a great opportunity to try out the cruising chute. Later while transiting the Kyle we had our first seal sightings. After that the only challenge was finding our way into Plockton where we were unable to identify a distant pale rock which was of the key transits on the approach to the harbour. Thankfully the chartplotter told us all we needed for a safe entry. There were plenty of visitor’s moorings and we had a run ashore for a cheap but very welcome shower, drinks on the sunny loch side terrace before dinner and an excellent meal. The seals, the passage under the Skye Road Bridge and the beauty of our surroundings in Plocton all made for a memorable day.

The Scottish weather was largely kind over the next two days with light wind. On the Monday morning we explored a tiny but well surveyed and documented anchorage between the Crowlin Islands while en-route for a highly recommended anchorage on the island of Rona. More seals and stunning scenery all around as the donkey made up for a lack of wind. No submarines identified.

In the afternoon, we carefully piloted ourselves into the isolated tranquillity of Acarseid Mhor (Big Harbour) on Rona.
Above is a photo of the standard Admiralty chart for the area around Acarseid Mhor. And the following is a montage of screenshots from the Antares charts that we brought with us to use along-side the excellent guidance provided within the Clyde Crusing Guide.
The only mooring, close to the pontoon looked questionable so we opted to trust our anchor instead.

We paid our landing dues and had an excellent evening walk above the anchorage followed by dinner onboard. Costco boil in the bag Italian meatballs and pasta if memory serves.

A very peaceful night at anchor.

We spent Tuesday night at Portree, Skye’s capital metropolis with a population of 2,500. Sunshine, showers and moderate winds offered good opportunities to sail. The absence of many other boats (certainly in comparison to the crowded waters of the Solent) meant our course was rarely interrupted. Short diversions to explore anchorages at North and South Fladday offered variety and additional navigational challenges on route. Seals, porpoises, dolphins and cormorants were common but still exciting sightings.

On Wednesday the forecast for rain proved correct. With little wind available, we motored much of the way back through the Kyle to Armadale on the South West of Skye. The anchorage in Armadale proved slightly disappointing although a worthwhile stop if only because it is one of the few harbours where a yacht can refuel and get water. The northerly wind and regular ferry made for an uncomfortable
mooring and the Italian restaurant that our resident food critic had researched on Trip Advisor was nowhere to be found. On local advice we took a taxi back up the road to Isle Ornsay where we had a very convivial evening and excellent food at the “El” (Eilean Iarmain Hotel). It is best to arrive early for dinner here because it is so popular.

On the Thursday morning we set sail for the Small Isles and Canna which we knew to have a safe anchorage. The wind freshened to a Force 5 with a 3 metre swell, at one point breaking over the bow and sprayhood to breach the cockpit. These conditions were quickly forgotten as the sun came out on the approach to Loch Scresort on Rum and the turreted red Kinloch Castle but probably the highlight of the week was the sight of a white tailed Sea Eagle soaring majestically overhead.

After a brief lunch stop and visit ashore we set course for Canna with its sheltered harbour. The wind had dropped so whilst under engine we put out a mackerel line and within a few minutes we had ourselves a beautiful mackerel. We also encountered Shearwaters which ducked under the water to escape as we approached.

There were plenty of moorings available as we arrived in Canna Harbour. We had difficulty identifying the transits involving a cottage and farm described in the cruising guide but took the opportunity to try
out a reverse mooring pick up technique we had observed at Portree. This would have worked better with a little wind.

Canna was beautiful in summer sunshine. It has a population of 25. It boasts three churches and a licensed café which opens March to September. The shop operates on an honesty box. The only shower is at the farm way beyond the café and operates on a coin slot but it was well worth the walk. We had not booked ahead for a table for dinner so had to eat outside but it was the most beautiful evening in a wonderfully isolated spot. Talk at the café was full of the storm expected at the weekend but an excellent meal was had nevertheless.

**Friday** was our last day but there was one more suprise in store – Loch Skavaig. The Cuillins of skye looked incredibly gloomy at first but as we approached via the isle of Soay but it cleared. Gannets plummeted into the sea all around the boat and as we entered the craggy loch we were rewarded by the sight of many dozens of seals lolling on exposed rocks. We anchored south of some charted rocks that were only visible as a slightly differing patch of water. By the time a visit ashore to the freshwater Loch Coruisk was complete, the layout of the rocks defending the inner anchorage was much clearer. Photos cannot do justice to this rather special place.

Our final passage was a cracking beat to the Point of Sleat and a final leg to Mallaig which provided a perfect opportunity to fly the Cruising Chute for the last time.
Mallaig was busy with boats seeking shelter from the anticipated Force 9 storm but a suitable stern-to-berth was eventually negotiated next to a friendly yacht from Brittany. After preparing the boat for handover, we adjourned to the Cornerstone Restaurant to reflect on a week well spent and 192nm Logged.

**Summary**

YNOT was a delight to sail; we were really impressed with her and the sailing area around Mallaig. We purchased additional electronic charts from Antares to help with safe pilotage to many of the anchorages we visited. These charts were remarkably accurate. The dinghy and a reliable outboard was invaluable. The cruising chute was a distinct bonus. We were remarkably unaffected by midges although we still took precautions. We will certainly return to Scottish waters another year. For spectacular scenery, fantastic sea life and uncrowded waters, YNOT?

Jane Davis

James Savage