



Gairloch Boat Club
Pier Road
Gairloch
Ross-shire
IV21 2BQ

GBC Adult Level 1 dinghy training, 20-21 April 2024

So, there we all were. Five eager students, the shore and safety boat crew (the same people actually), the boats, the instructor – hang on, where’s the instructor? Ori could not make it on Saturday, although he would manage Sunday’s session. We had to wait until Roger – a busy man, but fresh from his exploits with the young sailors in the second taster session on Friday – cleared his desk and came down to help in the afternoon. What else were we missing? The tide! That explains the 11:00 start – we would not be able to launch until about 15:30, so a session of theory only was dictated. Was there anything else? Yes... Oh dear! We had forgotten to order some wind for the weekend and had to hope some would turn up.

So, there we all were, wondering what to do. Thinking about sailing theory, the excitement was only just contained, but barely palpable. However, a secret weapon was on hand. If you want to talk about how to rig a Topper for a few hours, there is only one person ready, willing and able, and he was on hand. Duncan duly led the class outside and confronted them with our smallest sailboat. *“Why’s it called a Topper?” “Because it is designed to fit on top of your car...”*



Fiona and Harvie – *“... No, I thought you were going to tie up the boat...”*

So, Fiona, Harvie, Rachel, Sarah and Chris were thus initiated into the secrets and jargon of sailboats, although in truth, not all were complete beginners. Nor would they be sailing Toppers this weekend – Roger would cover preparing and launching a Wayfarer (a much bigger boat) when he arrived. There is a lot to learn: names of parts of the boat; why there are so many ropes; the point of the tiller extension (if there is one); where you sit; how you move without tripping over the side; ducking under the boom; how to fasten the seatbelt (only joking); and so much more... And knots, of course! Unconstrained by the statutory RYA teaching methods, Duncan was able to give insights into some of the tricks and techniques that most sailors only learn after years of coaching. Hopefully, everyone would have a bit of working knowledge when Roger and Ori took over. Wow, lunch already – where does the time go?

Roger soon got the class kitted out and prepared to launch the two Wayfarers when the tide was high enough. The second Wayfarer was paddled to the pontoon so that both would be ready when Ori arrived on Sunday. A gentle breeze





was brewing, maybe an ideal wind for novices trying to get their heads round the difference between centre- and aft-sheeting. Roger is happy to leave the theory to Ori, and is perfect at explaining what is happening in the boat on the water, and why. We started with three in the Wayfarer and the two paddlers in the safety boat, and then swapped. After a couple of hours practice, Roger jumped into the safety boat and left the new sailors to it – no problem. They sailed as if the instructor was useless ballast (not true, I believe). An interesting point to bystanders was the number and diversity of seabirds that we encountered – I have rarely seen so many different species in that part of Loch Gairloch at this time of year. At the end of the session, the Wayfarer was towed to the pontoon and tied up for the night.



“Where’s the instructor?” – “He jumped out ages ago...”

On Sunday, Ori got things organised quickly and did the theoretical bits properly, according to the RYA teaching methods. Points of sailing, i.e., where are you going and where’s the wind? The five essentials, i.e., what do I change if I am going the wrong way... And a refresher on the bits of a Topper and how to tack or gybe. The class was divided into two and Roger and Ori took the groups out to learn the actual difference between centre-sheeting and aft-sheeting. (One has more room in the back, the other has more rope to get tangled up in.) On Sunday, the wind was good and we managed sailing before and after lunch. Everyone got lots of time helming and crewing time and the Wayfarers were both sailed triumphantly back to the slipway just as the regular Sunday sailors were gathering for the normal GBC weekly session.





As is his wont, Ori finished the lessons with a demonstration of capsizing recovery, fortunately in a Topper and not a Wayfarer. As we have seen from our regattas, he just likes getting wet. It was a definite anti-climax when everything had to be put away, but the new sailors were all pleased to receive their GBC Level 1 certificates.

A good weekend with just enough wind to let everyone handle all the controls in a relaxed frame of mind. Due to timing, some will not manage the Level 2 course in May, but all were keen to continue sailing, nonetheless. At the moment, there are quite a few adults interested in sailing at Gairloch, but like everything else it goes in cycles. We hope that the depleted ranks of juniors will start to fill over the next few years, too.

Duncan MacLean