

A Trip with Ocean Youth Trust

The Ocean Youth Trust is a sail training organization with several boats in different regions of Great Britain. They take groups of kids ages 13-18 on short training trips exploring all around the UK, using the Royal Yachting Association's Competent Crew standards as curriculum and certification for the kids to earn.

Though I had never heard of the organization before this year, and I live in North America, I had the privilege of sailing for two weeks on an exchange program. The first week on the ketch James Cook I spent as a deckhand/watch leader with an 11th year school group.



From Inverness on the east coast of Scotland we motored down the Caledonian Canal which slices diagonally down the country and locks out into the southern Hebrides. Loch Ness is part of the canal, and I kept my eyes open for monsters, but must have blinked at all the wrong moments because I missed seeing Nessie. Some of the locks moved us almost twenty feet (vertically) and we walked the ship through series of them with lines from the top of the wall. Two-and-a-quarter days later, (not traveling at night) and about 30 locks, we reached the Celtic Sea. It was pouring rain, but I happened to be on breakfast duty, and was nice and dry making people tea and toast in the galley, and handing it out to the sopping sailors on deck!

Then we spent a day and a half sailing in among the little islands, including Kerreror, and visited the port of Oban. We went to an island called Gigha on a glassy-calm sea, and took our dinghy ashore for a picnic one evening. It was very hot, and some of us were glad to swim or wade near shore where the big Lion's Mane Jellyfish could be avoided. After sunset, the wind picked up, and by 4am we were dragging anchor. While the kids slept, we picked up and reset our anchor and went back to bed. But perhaps an hour and a half later, the growling sound of chain and plough scraping the seabed had us jumping up from sleep again just as our GPS alarm went off. Skipper decided it was time to rouse the whole crew and get underway for the day. Yes, forget the anchor and make use of the wind!

We had a marvelous sail away from the Hebrides, although a lot of us were seasick, and we had to lower sail when it began gusting up into force 10. I am still blessed to say I have never been seasick. The first-mate did his best to try and break me: I was sent below on errands into the close and smelly bosun's locker, into the pitching forepeak, and to cook in the hot galley, but even though he in hopes labeled a puke-

bucket with my name, I kept it clean. The fun and good humour which many sailors make of seasickness and during seasickness has always inspired me, and someday I'll probably have to join them!

We visited Bangor, Northern Ireland, and had a night sail to Whitehaven, England. There was brilliant bioluminescence that lit up our wake through the night, and the watch officer introduced me to the amusing idea of pumping the head with the lights out to see how many sparkles would gather in the bowl. (Please don't laugh too hard. You might try it too :)



In Whitehaven we finished up teaching Competent Crew, said farewell to the school group, refueled, provisioned, had some time off, and Skipper asked me if I would like to be their bosun for the following week, which was a proposition I was elated to accept.

Our next group of kids were 12-14 yr. old sea cadets. At the beginning of the week they hardly spoke when

spoken to, and mostly whispered among their various cliques if they had anything to say. But through the week, as they had to work together and were able to conquer the adventures of living on a sailboat (and after some pep talks from Skipper), they made efforts to respond, and by the fifth day most of them were asking questions, chatting, and even singing together on watch. I expect that some of the change among them will continue for more than just the week they were onboard.

In Peel, Isle of Man, we went ashore to played beach games, had some free time, and I took lots of photos. I like the Isle of Man for its black clifly shores and its far-away-island feel. The next day we sailed into Holyhead, Wales, which was my first time in that pretty country. Then the following day we went back to the Isle of Man and moored in Port St. Mary.

Sailing back to Whitehaven, I spent a happy afternoon sanding and oiling the 70-or-so feet of James Cook's starboard caprail. It was a highlight of my travels to get to know the ship as her bosun and learn the inner workings to keep her happy. The crew taught me things concerning the engine and bilge systems, how to service the winches, and tips on rope-work, among other things.



At the end of the week the other Canadian who had come on the exchange, and I were picked up by the OYT coordinator, and were blessed by their hospitality for the night before parting ways.

As sailing is something I think everyone should try at least once, and OYT provides that opportunity for all sorts of youth, I was very pleased to be able to spend some time in hands-on experience with them. I hope to share with other sail training programs the things I have learned from spending time on the James Cook, and hope to possibly be involved again with OYT in the future.

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