



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

GBC sailing taster session, 5 April 2024

We have been looking to attract young sailors to the club, and who better than Roger Ward to introduce them to the challenge and fun of dinghy sailing. As a RYA Senior Instructor, he has been doing just this most of his working life. However, a strong Easterly wind on the day, and with storm Kathleen approaching, the success of this first taster session was on a knife-edge.

GBC sailors generally face two problems: the tide at the slipway and the swirling wind in the harbour area. We have largely solved the first problem by adjusting our sailing times to coincide with the tides. But the second is in the lap of the gods – our regattas over the last few years have verged on the wild side with broken boats to prove it. Thankfully, Roger had considered the tricky conditions and had come up with a “*cunning plan*”. No point in taster sessions if you scare off the customers.

A campaign in the local schools resulted in five likely sailors (in the eight to nine years-old range) turning up with an air of great expectations, so Roger’s plan was duly put into practice. A Wayfarer was rigged with the smallest jib we could find in the club, and the mainsail was cast aside as a liability. The boat would not be overpowered, but would only be able to run downwind. The safety boat collected the first three prospective sailors – Charlie 1, Bobby and Finlay – at the pontoon, then towed the Wayfarer towards Kerry Bay against the wind and the waves. There was much excitement and enthusiasm, not to mention singing and shouting, in the Safety boat and we learned some new sea shanties such as “*Who let the dogs out?*” – the shore assistants must have mixed up the hot chocolate.



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At a suitable point, the Wayfarer was pulled alongside and the sailors transferred from the safety boat. Roger then turned the Wayfarer downwind and the serious business of the afternoon began. He was able to demonstrate the use of the tiller and the jib so that the youngsters could try their hand at controlling the sailboat. On reaching the harbour, the towrope was again attached and the Wayfarer made two more trips upwind to Kerry to allow each sailor a turn at the two controls on the downwind leg. The fun at an end for this group, the Wayfarer was towed to the pontoon to disembark our new sailors and await the second crew.

In the second group we had two sailors – Ashleigh and Charlie 2. So, with the same plan, the Wayfarer was towed towards Kerry and they were able to try controlling it on the downwind leg. Two trips up to Kerry and back gave them a shot at each control before being towed to the slipway to get the Wayfarer back on shore. As safety boat crew, we had to be careful because wet sailors and cold winds are not a good combination. Slightly too much speed on tow and the Wayfarer crew were in danger of getting drenched. As it happens, all of the youngsters indicated willingness to have another go and perhaps continue their sail training.



So, a successful day, big smiles all round and the promise of the excitement being carried over into the next taster session in two weeks' time. A comment by one local tour operator put the conditions and the achievement into perspective: "I've cancelled all my bookings for today due to the weather, and here are nine year-olds out sailing!" The next generation is coming through...

Duncan MacLean