

2013 Orkney & Scottish Open Boat Championship

This competition was fished over the three days of Thursday, Friday and Saturday, 12th, 13th, & 14th September, among the 26 competitors were participants from Shetland, Caithness, the Western Isles Inverness and Argyll as well as members from the local club.

Fishing was done from the club boat, Welcome Home, skippered by Roy Anderson with crewman's duties performed by Arthur Cook and Bertie Robertson along with the Lady Rose skippered by Chris Dembach with Rosie the crewlady, and the Bright Horizon, skippered by Mervyn Sinclair.

Alongside the main competition, the annual sea angling Inter-county was fished against Shetland with Orkney's four-man team matched against Shetland's best.

On day one, with the weather reasonable but hazy, the Welcome Home headed for the far-distant Berry, the Lady Rose was at Rora and the Yellow Kist while the Bright Horizon headed out westwards to the five-mile mark. The appointed fishing skipper, who comes from among the fishers, has the choice of destination and obviously needs to have some local knowledge. All the boats fished well on this first day with mostly ling being found outshore, cod being predominant at the Berry, with the Lady Rose having a very mixed catch including whiting, gurnards, dabs, and pollock among the cod and ling. There was a stunning Red Gurnard among the mix which was eventually the best specimen fish.

Day two gave a little more wind from the west and a westerly roll coming in to break white on the shore. Two of the fishing skippers chose the deep, west mark where there was a lot of lift with the rollers but not too much breaking sea. The Lady Rose chose the inshore grounds. In spite of it being Friday and unlucky 13th, the fishing on the deep was excellent with big ling filling the fish boxes and spilling on to the decks with the heaving rolls. Fish were being taken from the first minute until the end of the day with the net-man in constant demand. With the rules allowing only three hooks, it is rarely more than one fish at a time, but there was a trio of fish in the net at one lift for one competitor on our boat and reports of similar on the other boat. Our poor net-man had no time for his daily bread that day! With many of the ling being in the 3kg and 4kg category and heavier, it was no surprise that the heaviest fish of the competition was caught out here. One competitor had the extremely unusual occurrence of taking two fish on the one hook. He managed to hook a small ling but before it got far from the bottom, it was seized over the head end by a big ling which, in turn, got caught by the hook. They both ended up in the net with the small one's tail hanging out of the big one's mouth.

With the threat of unsettled weather not too far away, day three arrived with light winds allowing all the boats to head out to the deep marks a few miles to the west. With fishing starting an hour earlier today and, of course, the tide being an hour later anyway, it was therefore two hours before we got back to the same tidal state. And what a difference that two hours made with only small ling being caught during this time. In a human context, it was like the kids all having breakfast before the adults came to eat. Eventually, presumably when the tide was right, the more senior members of the fish family started feeding and more worthwhile sizes were taken. A few cod and tusk were caught but the vast majority were ling. With the boats having patrolled over this restricted area for the two previous days it was to be expected that the supply would be depleted and this was indeed the case with the catch-rate being down.

After the results were calculated, it was found that Orkney competitors had not only landed lots of big fish but lots of the silverware as well. Congratulations to Paul Firth from Kirkwall for being the overall winner of the championship over the three days with an unassailable 300 percentage points. Paul also got the trophy for the most points scored in one day's fishing when he had 227 points on the third day. Not content with that he was paired with Jocky Robertson for the two-man team and they won that trophy too. Jocky, in his own right, fished very well too to end up third overall – a mighty performance against some terrific fishermen.

Also on the winners rostrum were the Orkney Inter-county team of Paul, his father Derek Firth along with Jocky Roberson and Gerry Wilson who beat their northern neighbours from Shetland for the third successive year – the first time that Orkney has ever won three times in a row.

Last, but by no means least on the prize list, was the win for Stromness' best, Davie Sutherland who took the multiple trophies for the heaviest fish in the competition. He will always remember Friday 13th as the best day of his fishing career – his basket was brimming full, filled with the biggest fish you ever saw and he had the biggest fish of the lot. He couldn't stop smiling about the fishing that day but in a serious tone he told me he'd lost a bigger one!! Really?

All in all, a most successful time for Orkney sea angling. Anybody can look up all the results by going on the web to www.anglingorkney.co.uk and looking for the 2013 results.

Thanks are due to lots of people and so OISAA would like to thank all the boat skippers and their crews. Also the helpers who run the show when the rest of us are rolling about the heaving ocean enjoying ourselves – those at the pier who co-ordinate things dishing up soup and whatever and distributing fish. The Stromness Hotel management and staff who tolerate our reception and dish up the most scrumptious carvery – try it sometime, my reader. And the weather man for allowing us some good weather!

Finally, thanks to all the fishers who made the effort to join us this year. Come back next year and we'll do it all again.