

Report on SOB 2011

On Thursday 1st September 2011, 3 boats carrying a total of 29 sea anglers set off from Stromness to contest the Scottish Open Boat Championship and the Orkney Open Boat Championship along with the annual inter-county competition against Shetland. Three of the local anglers who were given the onerous task of “fishing skipper” for the day had totally diverging ideas of where the best fishing was to be had, because one boat went south, one boat went north and the other went straight out to the west – they said they saw Greenland but fishermen’s tales you can’t believe. After dodging round the ocean for a while, they found a spot and caught a lot of fish – mostly ling and cod.

The boat which decided to go north started at the castle north of Mouseland and progressed up to Skail bay without much luck, but “Howe on the knowe” saved the day and nearly all the twelve anglers on that boat managed a respectable score from the north side of Skail up to Marwick. Most of the catch were ling and cod, but a variety of specimen fish which gave a small score were also taken. Grey and red gurnards, whiting, dabs, along with an exquisitely patterned blonde Ray were among the unusual specimens and an octopus which didn’t score any points. On this day, Gerry Wilson scored well among the heaviest fish, having the 1st and 2nd places with ling but he had to share his 2nd place with a cod of exactly the same weight from Alistair Forsythe.

The south boat, however was the most unfortunate, suffering total engine failure after an hour of fishing and having to be towed back to Stromness, there to lie for the rest of the competition. With no replacement boats available among the diving fraternity or renewable sector, the decision was taken to give each angler 2 days of competition on the two boats available.

With a new boat draw made and some having an enforced break, the second day saw both boats heading south along the face of Hoy. Long drifts were the order of the day from St. John’s Head right down past the Old Man. This time, the pollack were available and many were caught in this area along with the usual cod and ling. Good scores were recorded, with the top score for a single day being recorded here and also the biggest fish of the competition coming from here, caught by bottom specialist Alan Davies – not for him this mid-water trawling for pollack. His persistence paid off with a monstrous 5.5 kg ling, which gave him the top prize.

On day three, with an early start, both boats went south again but the faster ‘Charles Ann’ with its roving skipper determined to try at the Yellow Kist, while the other stayed north of Rora. The wild rover found his prize with good quality cod and ling to be had all day and later when the tide slackened, pollack were plentiful right off the Snook where the shallower ridge projects out. Being a committed bottom fisher and having no luck on the ocean floor, old rover thought that he would have to try this pollack fishing too. With true beginners luck, on his second cast, he landed a real beautiful specimen, which was the heaviest fish that day and the second heaviest overall. So much for old dogs and new tricks! An average of 20 fish per angler was recorded at this site, five better than the overall average over the contest.

The boat staying up at the Hoy end picked up fish here and there without much consistency, recording that a second drift over an area was generally non-productive. That boat did, however, have the second-best fish of the day, with a ling of 3.55 kg from Shetland angler, Kenny Laurenson.

Overall Results were:

1st and Scottish Open Boat Champion – Scott Gibson

2nd – Gus McKenzie

3rd – Howard Foster

Overall Heaviest fish:

1st – Alan Davies with a 5.5 kg Ling

2nd – Gerry Wilson with a 4.70 kg Pollack

3rd – Alan Davies with a 3.75 kg Ling

The highest placed local angler was Derek Firth lying in 11th place. The best senior was R. Graham Forbes who has been attending this event for 42 years.

The best individual score for one day was recorded by Gus McKenzie and the best boat was rated to be the 'Charles Ann'.

The third day of the competition was followed by a very successful reception at the Stromness Hotel when the competitors could relax and relate their fishy tales. By the way, and i-phone is a terrible invention `cos with the spread of your fingers it can make a fish look absolutely huge. When the computer had done its best with the figures fed in over the 3 days, awards were given and photographs taken. The best award was the inter-county trophy presented to the Orkney team of Jocky Robertson, Paul Firth, Derek Firth and Gerry Wilson, who had beaten their Shetland rivals for the first time in 16 years.

Thanks are due to the boat owners and skippers, without whom nothing works. Thanks to Ronald Tait, skipper of our club boat, the 'Welcome Home', and his crew of Arthur Cook and Bertie Robertson. Thanks to Harvey Groat with his boat, the Charles Ann, and thanks to Steve Vile and his young crewman on their boat, the 'Ocean Explorer'.

Our visitors always enjoy our reception and this is due to the diligent work of the management and staff of the Stromness Hotel. We thank you all sincerely for your good work, in organising your carvery for us and for soup down the pier. Thanks to Orkney Fishermens Society for the use of their store for 2 hours at the end of each day, and thanks to the Scottish Co-op for their continuing generosity in giving us prizes.

Computers, like boats, are fickle creatures and get sore insides too. Thank you Dave Guthrie for fixing our one when it was unwell and unable to digest our scores.

And, finally, thanks to the boys of the club who kept the show running when it looked like the whole thing was going to be derailed, and to the members of the public who made donations to our club. Come back again next year and we'll do it all again.

