



Anchor Watch

It's a hard call to ask for an anchor watch, but well worth it.

It was 11pm as the boat lurched over on her side once again in the gust. It was the second time in as many minutes and the graunch of the anchor chain pulling her back head-to-wind resonated through me and the rest of the crew.

Crawling out of my bunk it was clear that we were going to have to run an anchor watch.

It had been a very windy day's cruising on the Clyde and the gusts fell like cannonballs down the hills keeping us on our toes. At sunset we sought refuge up the top of the Kyles of Bute just inside Loch Riddon and the Burnt Isles.

The anchor was dropped and 60m of scope paid out allowing a 6:1 ratio for the extreme conditions.

Shelter was good and for a time only the occasional 30 knot gust raised our eyebrows. But the rising tide lifted us out of full shelter and the forecasted Force 4-5 wind rose in strength once again blasting at 40-50 knots in the gusts.

Setting up the watch system

For the crew to sleep that night they'd have to have confidence that we were staying put. An anchor watch was the best way to achieve this. We split the night up between the five on board giving 1½ hour watches.

The most experienced crew went on watch during the rising tide and turn of the tide, when there was the greatest chance of dragging. The less experienced crew went on watch on the ebb, as the anchorage became more sheltered and the ratio of scope increased.

We dropped an extra 10m of chain, leaving 10m in the anchor locker and re-established transits. Luckily our transits were clearly visible from inside the cabin, so that no one had to venture on deck.

The chart plotter was fired up, the screen dimmed and an anchor alarm set to a couple of cables in area.

The area had to be quite large as the boat was veering about in the wind shifts and the occasional erroneous fix from the GPS would not set it off. We also checked the paper chart to ensure that there really wasn't anything lurking around that was not portrayed on the chart plotter.

Establish clear standing orders

The standing orders were; that if the plot on the chart plotter or the depth on the sounder moved over the 20m one way or the 5m the other way, the skipper should be woken. If anyone had to go on deck they would wear a life jacket and stay inside the cockpit.

We survived the night and woke to a fabulous morning and many stories to tell. By and large a good nights' sleep was had by all, if not without the occasional hour and half interruption.

It's a hard call to ask for an anchor watch, but well worth it to keep the boat safe and for the crew to get some rest.

Anchor watch notes:

- Update the forecast to check that it has not changed significantly.
- Work out the tide times and heights. Dragging is more common at the turn of the tide and High Water. Low water offers more shelter and more chain on the seabed.
- Make a flask for hot drinks as repeated kettle boiling will wake the crew.
- Prepare snacks, preferably those in 'quiet' wrappers. Fumbling around with crisp wrappers may produce a mutinous crew. Keep people below deck if possible and ensure a life jacket is worn if they are in the cockpit.
- Detail when to call the skipper.
- If you think you may need to quickly ditch your anchor in the night, thread a long line attached to a fender through the last link, so that the anchor can be later retrieved.

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