



We started the year on the New World, at Charleston in South Carolina, and ended it in the Old World at Falmouth, UK. In between, we've covered 6,281 nautical miles, made our second Atlantic crossing, and have now travelled 65,720 nm on *Dirona*.



Touring the USS Yorktown in Charleston, SC.

We arrived into [Charleston, South Carolina](#) on New Year's Day and spent a great three weeks there. We explored the city by tender, bicycle and on foot, including a tour of the aircraft carrier [USS Yorktown](#). The city lived up to its reputation for excellent food and we even managed to catch a couple of hockey games while in town.



Anchored off Castillo de San Marcos in St. Augustine, FL.

From Charleston we worked south to [Daytona](#) with stops at upscale [Hilton Head Island](#), laid-back [Brunswick](#), beautiful [Cumberland Island](#) and historic [St. Augustine](#), witnessing first-hand the devastation wreaked by Hurricane Mathew in October of 2016. During our six-week stay in Daytona we went to the [boat shows in Miami](#), enjoyed the season opener for the World of Outlaws Sprint Car racing, "[The Greatest Show on Dirt!](#)", joined the 500,000 other attendees at the 76th annual Bike Week motorcycle event, and spent four super-exciting days at Daytona International Speedway for the [Daytona 500](#) and supporting events.



Attending the Daytona 500.

Our next stop was [Newport](#), Rhode Island to stage for our Atlantic crossing to Ireland. We arrived in early April as the docks were just going back in the water after winter and had the marina pretty much to ourselves during our entire five-week stay. Newport, with its many excellent restaurants, is an awesome town to visit in the off-season with the summer crowds gone.



Moored at Newport, RI in the off-season.



Running through a North Atlantic gale.



Fastnet Rock, Ireland's most southern point.

hospitality was fantastic and highlights included two laps around the famous [Fastnet Rock](#); [Crookhaven Harbour](#) and [Mizen Head Signal Station](#); and [Valentia](#) and [Arranmore](#) islands. Among the most remarkable places we've ever visited was remote [Skellig Michael](#), a rugged and remote Irish coastal island where Christian monks built a monastery starting in the 6th-8th centuries and that was Luke Skywalker's place of exile in *The Force Awakens* and *The Last Jedi* movies. Turning the corner, we visited the spectacular [Causeway Coast](#) and [Rathlin Island](#) in Northern Ireland.



The Glenfinnan Viaduct, made famous in the Harry Potter films, on the West Highland Line.



Locking through along the Crinan Canal.

The 17-day, 2,801 nm North Atlantic crossing [from Newport to Kinsale](#), Ireland was by far our most difficult passage, with [three gales](#) and two separate [mechanical issues](#) to manage. Higher-latitude crossings are more likely to encounter storms, even at the best time of year, and we were crossing a month or two earlier to have more time to cruise the west coasts of Ireland and Scotland over the summer. [Kinsale](#), considered the gourmet capital of Ireland, was an excellent place to make landfall. In the picture at the top of this page, we are celebrating our arrival with our first pint at an Irish pub.

We left Kinsale mid-June and cruised north up the west coast of Ireland. The Irish scenery and



Centuries-old beehive huts in monastery on spectacular Skellig Michael.



Giant's Causeway, used for the cover art in *Led Zeppelin's Houses of the Holy* album.

[Greenock](#), near [Glasgow](#), was our home base for a month in July and August while we made a two-week [trip to Seattle](#). While in Greenock, we took several train trips, including the [West Highland Line](#), voted the world's best train journey, and to [Edinburgh](#) to explore the historic city and take in the world-renowned military tattoo. We also rode the [Falkirk Wheel](#), a unique rotating boat lift that connects the Union and Forth & Clyde canals.

In mid-August we started our cruise of the Scottish west coast through the [Crinan Canal](#), a 9-mile, 15-lock passage that was completed in 1801. We have transited large lock systems in *Dirona*, including the [Columbia and Snake river locks](#), but what makes the Crinan Canal special is the intimacy of the trip. The canal is barely bigger than the boat, the Scottish countryside is beautiful, and the boat crew needs to operate the locks by hand.



West Light Seabird Centre, Rathlin Island.



The Falkirk Wheel rotating boat lift.



Fingal's Cave on Staffa Island, Inner Hebrides.



Berneray I. at southern tip of Outer Hebrides.



Dramatic St. Kilda off the Outer Hebrides.



Oil rig graveyard, Cromarty Firth.

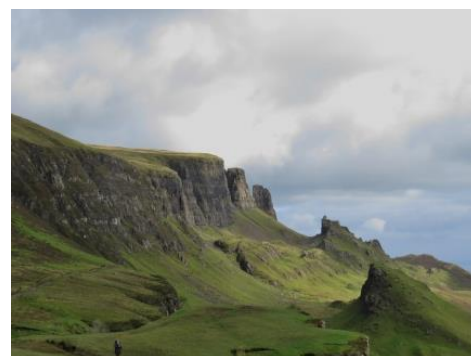
We'd been hearing a lot about the dramatic Scottish coastal scenery and didn't think it could possibly compete with Ireland, but we were wrong. We spent a fabulous month cruising the [Inner](#) and [Outer Hebrides](#), including a trip to remote and beautiful [St. Kilda](#). The scenery truly was incredible with many opportunities for view hikes. The [Isle of Skye](#) was particularly impressive.

Passing along the north coast of Scotland, we stopped in the Orkney Islands and toured the [Heart of Neolithic Orkney](#), a UNESCO World Heritage Site consisting of four prehistoric monuments dating to some 5,000 years ago. And in more recent history, [Scapa Flow](#) there was the base for the British Fleet during the two World Wars.

We anchored off the oil rig graveyard in [Cromarty Firth](#), along the northeast coast of Scotland en route to [Inverness](#), the capital of the Scottish Highlands. Over the course of a week, we later returned to southwest Scotland via the 50-mile [Caledonian Canal](#), passing through the famous [Neptune's Staircase](#). This is the longest staircase lock in Britain, where a series of eight locks carry boats up or down 64 feet over a distance of 180 feet. Only 19 miles of the Caledonian Canal are man-made and the rest extends through four natural freshwater lochs, including the famous [Loch Ness](#). We kept a sharp lookout, but didn't spot Nessie.

We returned to Northern Ireland and moored in downtown [Belfast](#), near where the ill-fated [Titanic](#) was built. While there, we visited

several excellent *Titanic*-related attractions, watched an impressive [Hallowe'en fireworks](#) display right off the marina, and caught a live performance at the renowned Limelight club featuring one of our favourite bands, the [Black Rebel Motorcycle Club](#). Being in Belfast, it's impossible not to reflect on years of violence covered in the news, even though those years are actually distant memories now. In some ways it makes Belfast a more exciting place to be. There's no question it's now a world-class city and is



The Quiraing, Isle of Skye.



Standing Stones of Stenness, Orkney Islands.



At Urquhart Castle, Loch Ness (Neil White photo).



Black Rebel Motorcycle Club at the Limelight in Belfast.



Celebrating Jennifer's birthday in Manchester, where she was born.



Long Room, Trinity College Library, Dublin.

well-worth visiting. Every place we went the Irish were warm and friendly, and we always felt safe. The only reminders we saw of "The Troubles" was on a [Belfast Murals tour](#), where we saw [Sinn Fein headquarters](#) and passed through the "[Peace Line](#)," a wall that still separates Catholic and Protestant in sections of West Belfast.

From Belfast we crossed the Irish Sea and ran up the [River Mersey to Liverpool](#), famous as the home of the Beatles. With a 32.8ft (10m) range on spring tides, the Mersey has the second highest tidal range in Britain. Most commercial and recreational moorage is behind locks because the river banks dry at low tide. The [Liverpool waterfront](#) is a beautiful mix of restored 18th-century structures with more modern buildings all around. We had a great time exploring the waterfront, where on [Bonfire Night](#) we watched one



York Minster.



Guinness Brewery, Dublin.

of the best fireworks display we've ever seen. We also visited [Liverpool Cathedral](#), the largest church in Britain and the fifth largest in the world, and took advantage of Liverpool's great train service to make two overnight trips. The first was to [Manchester](#) where we celebrated Jennifer's birthday in her birthplace and the second was to York where we visited the exceptional [York Minster](#), among the most beautiful Gothic buildings in the world, and the superb [National Railway Museum](#).

We re-crossed the Irish Sea in mid-November to spend a month in [Dun Laoghaire](#) near Dublin, where we made another return trip to the US for the annual Amazon Web Services re:Invent conference in Las Vegas. We also explored the fabulous city of [Dublin](#) and the surrounding area, including visits to the massive [Guinness Brewery](#) downtown, [Trinity College](#) to see the Book of Kells, one of the oldest books in the world, and [Howth](#) to hike along the cliffs.

We will spend Christmas and New Year's in [Falmouth](#), a laid-back-in-the-winter town with many good pubs and restaurants. After Falmouth, we plan to stop in Southampton for some regular boat maintenance and continue on to moor at St. Katherine Docks in central London during February and March. From there we'll cross to the Netherlands and continue north to spend the summer exploring Norway's fjords. You can always see where we are at [mvdirona.com](#).

Click below to view previous annual highlights:

- [2016](#)
- [2015](#)
- [2014](#)
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Bonfire Night fireworks display, Liverpool.