

I took the helm and the mainsheet from Andy. Now in control of the boat, I could feel she was almost steering herself. I had wondered if the large mainsail would make her difficult to steer, but not at all. Just light, constant pressure to windward was all that was needed to hold a straight course.

As Scrabster harbour receded astern the wind was freshening, and *The Aegre* was speeding along, spray from the bow flying high.

'Let's reduce sail, tuck in a reef,' Andy called. He lowered the mainsail to the deck, and we quickly tied in the reef and reset the sail. Now under her reduced rig, *The Aegre* was sailing just as fast as before but feeling much less pressed. Andy told me that beneath the floor, he had ten cwt (508kg) of cut Caithness slate, which he thought gave her stability, and the weight didn't seem to slow her down at all.

'She's built of half-inch overlapping mahogany planks with copper fastenings. Sawn Oregon frames added later,' he explained. 'All the strength is in the planking.'

And where did her name, *The Aegre*, come from, I asked? Andy explained that he had wanted a Norse word to reflect the boat's heritage. The only one he knew was 'ægre', a name given to a tidal bore in a river. Andy possibly didn't know the word's origin, which is believed to be Aegir, the Norse god of the sea, a river's tidal bore enabling a Norse ship to travel far upstream, being a gift from their god. It was a more fitting choice for his boat than he may have imagined. He had registered her as a fishing boat in Lerwick, Shetland, where she was assigned the register number LK92, now prominently displayed on each side of her bow.

The more we sailed, the more I liked her. I imagined extending the decking aft to give somewhere sheltered to sleep. She was big enough but small enough. The rig? Well, I would have to think about that, but it certainly worked well. I could see she was meticulously maintained, too, without the fussiness of a showboat.

'How much will you take for her?' I yelled above the wind.

'Three hundred pounds, that's what I paid to have her built and rigged. You can have her for that.'

Three hundred! It was 1972, I was just 22, Julie 18, and that was all the money we had. But she seemed just what we wanted. I thought we would never find a more suitable boat for less, and we agreed to buy her.