

LOG OF MV *POLAR STAR*
SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS
May 18-29 2009



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Wildlife List by Mick Brown and Stuart Thomson

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Polar Star
Scottish Highlands and Islands
May 18th to 29th 2009

Tuesday 18th May Oban, Argyllshire

At anchor, Oban Harbour, 56°26'N, 005°30.5'W

*'There must be a beginning of any great matter,
but the continuing to the end until it be thoroughly finished
yields the true glory'* **Sir Francis Drake**

This afternoon we caught our first glimpse of the distinctive red and white MV *Polar Star* riding at anchor in Oban Bay, with Caledonian MacBrayne inner island ferries, fishing boats and yachts passing her by, wondering where we've come from and where we're headed. Cheerful staff members were at the jetty to greet us, show us to the zodiacs and drive us the short distance to the ship and take care of our luggage. By 1730, all were on board and we assembled in the Observation Lounge for a hot drink and a snack before being introduced by Expedition Leader Hannah to Captain Jacek Majer, who welcomed us on board and offered an elegant and enthusiastic toast to a successful voyage. Hotel Manager Natasha Hanson also welcomed us and explained the workings of the ship, especially the toilet system. The staff, from the U.K., Germany, Canada, Australia and New Zealand then introduced themselves and described their areas of expertise and interest. Staff Captain Milosz explained the safety side of the ship and the final formal part of the evening was a lifeboat drill, where we all assembled at our muster stations on Deck 4, resplendent in our bulky orange lifejackets.

After dinner and our first sampling of the culinary skills of Chef Bryan Hanson and his team and the delightful service of the hotel staff, we pulled anchor and set off around Lismore into the Sound of Lorne. Stuart entertained passengers on the stern deck with a historical account of the local clan wars as we passed by the ruins of Dunollie Castle. As we approached Lismore, Sonja spotted about a dozen porpoises in small groups as they fed in the disturbed



waters where several currents meet. Other staff members were on deck, identifying seabirds and snapping pictures of the beautiful sunset. Once the anchor was dropped in Duart Bay, most of us drifted off to our cabins for a well-earned sleep after our travels.

Tuesday 19th May Duart Castle and Tobermory, Mull

Duart Bay, 56°27.5'N, 005°39.9'W, partly cloudy, occasional showers,, clearing to sunny, wind from SW at 7 knots, temperature 12°C, flat calm seas, barometric pressure 1015 millibars (all readings taken each day at 0800)

We awoke to a grey morning with a few light showers and glimpses of blue skies promising better weather to come. Duart Castle rose imposingly to port on prominent Dubh Ard (Black Point), jutting out into the Sound of Mull where it commands the channel between Mull and Morvern, the entrances of sea lochs Linne and Etive, and the passage into the Firth of Lorne. Thus it must



have been of great strategic importance during the prehistoric period and during the period of Viking and Norse forays into the Western Isles, as well as during the later clan wars. The first walls of the castle were built by MacDougalls in the 13th century as one of a string of eight castles along the Sound, part of a loose defensive alliance of west coast chiefs. Each castle is within sight of its neighbour, so that signals could be sent from one to another. Duart came into the hands of the Maclean family in the 14th century, with successive walls and towers added through time. In 1670 the Maclean estates were lost to the family, but in 1911 the castle was purchased by Colonel Sir Fitzroy MacLean who initiated a programme of restoration that has preserved the fabric of this significant structure. The present and 28th Chief of the Clan Maclean is Sir Lachlan Maclean. After breakfast, we were given a formal introduction to our nimble little Zodiac tenders, and then headed ashore for a tour of the castle, bookshop and tearoom. June, our host, gave us an introduction to the castle and then we were free to guide ourselves through some of the public rooms. Outside, Jane had found a beautiful walk which a few of us took through a forest of oak, birch and ash, with bogs, bluebells and a cheerful little robin singing its heart out; Mick also found a few midges. Sonja had earlier seen a family of otters at the far side of the bay, but by the time we took a short zodiac cruise en route to the ship the shy creatures had vanished. In their place we had a few swifts, herring gulls, oyster catchers and a leggy blue heron, and stopped to take photos of a massive Celtic cross complete with bosses in imitation of the large metal rivets which held the arms and central circle in place on the original wooden crosses. At the bottom of the centre shaft we could see a carved interpretation of Adam and Eve and the serpent in the Garden of Eden. A fragment of an old stone wall was just visible over the rise – possibly part of an early church.

Back on board we sailed northwest up the Sound of Mull towards Tobermory, passing by the village of Lochaline in Morvern to where the St. Kildans moved in 1930 when they abandoned their village on Hirta. When we reach St. Kilda, we will see what a change this must have been for the 36 islanders: gentle forested slopes instead of steep bare hillsides and cliffs, a calm (usually) sound instead of raging Atlantic storms, the large town of Oban and all its amenities an hour's steam away instead of an intermittent mail

boat or sheltering fishing boat bringing news and supplies, indoor plumbing and stairs. We also had the thrilling sight of two golden eagles tumbling through the sky in an ecstatic courtship display (refer to the attached wildlife list for a full tally of birds and mammals sighted).

After lunch we dropped anchor again in the sheltered harbour of Tobermory (Mary's Well), and went ashore to tour the Tobermory Distillery, stroll about the attractive waterfront, hike to a waterfall and lighthouse, and enjoy the hospitality of the many art and craft shops, chocolate shop and tea rooms. The harbour was just humming with activity – fishing boats, dive boats, large yachts, a small cruise ship called the *Stockholm* on a bird islands tour, and some rescue boats here to investigate a boat accident last night. Back on board, Hannah gave us a briefing on tomorrow's planned visits to Staffa and Iona, Mick played some wonderfully clear bird



songs he recorded today, Jane gave us an abbreviated illustrated history of the Iona Christian settlement dating back to the 6th century and Ian prepared us for our after dinner excursion back to town for a session in the Mishnish Hotel bar. A couple of boatloads set off to the pub and for those of us remaining on board, the old classic movie *I Know Where I'm Going*, set on the Isle of Mull, was shown in the Observation Lounge. The following *Single Malt Impressions* were provided by Ian: There are about 99 single malt distilleries operating these days in Scotland. However, there are many more single malts available to the public because supply from a closed distillery may last for several years after closure. Also, a single malt distillery may offer several different expressions of their product: different ages, peated or unpeated, and aging in different types of casks, with sherry, port and bourbon being the most common. Scotland can be divided up into five basic single malt areas: Lowland, Highland, Speyside, Westerly and Island. There are also the Campbellton malts, which are considered to form a separate area as well. Each region is distinguished by tasting notes of the region's malts, although there are many exceptions to the rule. The Island malts are generally known for their smoky, phenolic flavour while Speyside malts are generally not peated and slightly floral in character. However, these are broad statements and it is sometimes difficult to ascertain where a malt comes from in a blind taste test. Most single malt production is dedicated to blended whiskeys often leaving as little as ten per cent for single malt consumption. With the explosion of interest in single malts worldwide it is now difficult to obtain some of the most popular brands, e.g., Lagavulin. With cask maturation times of 12-16 years or more it is difficult to predict the waxing and waning fashions of single malt production. Sadly for whisky drinkers, each year the single malt rests in casks a certain amount evaporates through the wood. The escaped vapours are poetically called the angel's share.

The Mishnish Last Night

The malt of Tobermory was wafting cross the bay
The sailboats bobbed , the houses painted bright
The moon hung perfect in a Maxfield Parrish sky
And the boys were drinking single malt
In the Mishnish last night.

Well who could really blame them they'd been nine
months at sea
From Drake the lake unto the Davis Strait
And the Captain was there with them
So you knew it was alright
And the boys were drinking single malt
At the Mishnish last night.

There was Mietrik from the engines Roman, Marcin
too
But Rudi - he was leading the parade
For he'd just discovered Ardbeg
And his eyes were all alight
The boys were drinking single malt
At the Mishnish last night.

While the locals glared in horror this bar has gone to
shite
Overrun by tourists on a tear
But the boys paid it no notice
They didn't come here for a fight
They came to drink some single malt
At the Mishnish last night.

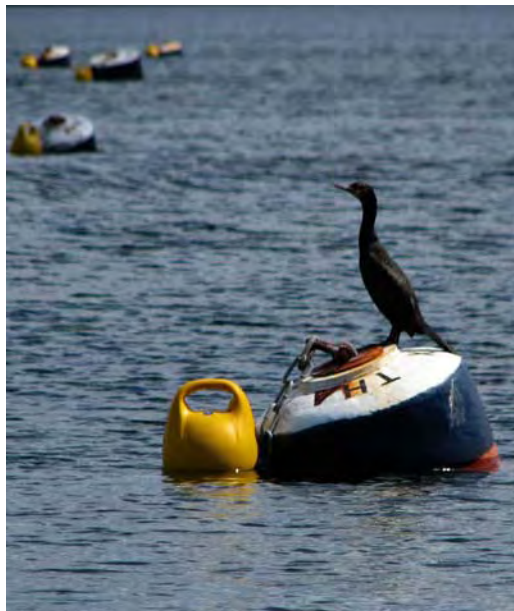
And when the night was over and they spilled out the door
For a moment the ocean slipped away
Then Piotr said to Waclav "dubra noc - it's alright "
The boys were drinking single malt
At the Mishnish last night.

Ian Tamblyn, Tobermory 2008

Wednesday 20th May Iona and Staffa, Inner Hebrides

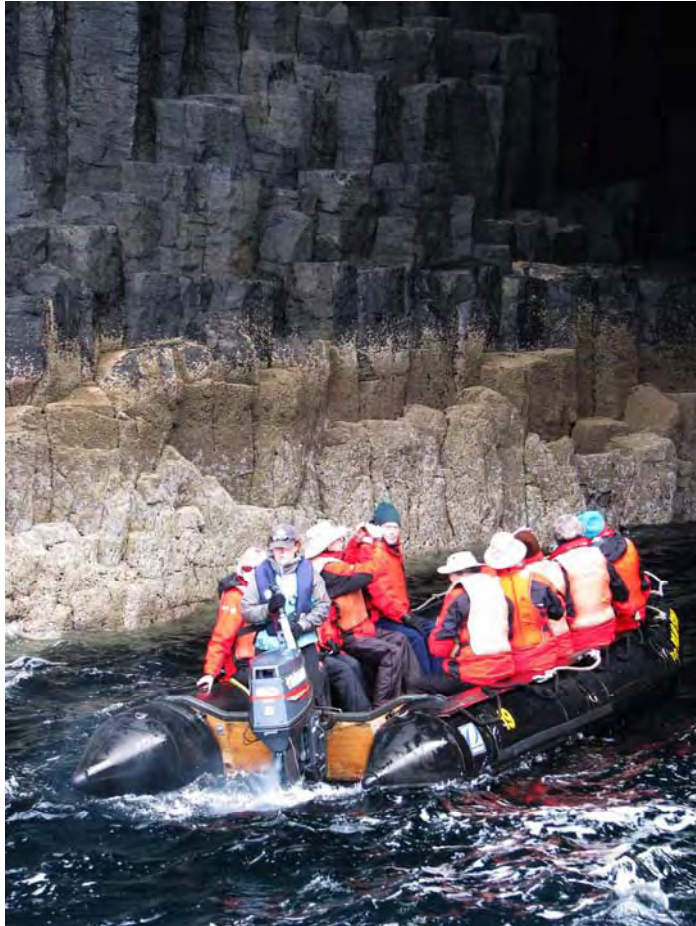
Off Staffa, 56°26.5'N, 006°19.8'W, partly cloudy, S 20 knots, 11°C, 2 m swells, 1018

Early this morning we passed out of the Sound of Mull south of Ardnamurchan Point and were met by showers, a double rainbow, Manx shearwaters and a few whitecaps. We sailed between the west side of the Isle of Mull and the Treshnish Isles, with Coll and Tiree off to the northwest becoming obscured by squalls, and headed for Staffa. By the time we reached Staffa the wind and swells were down and the Captain anchored on the lee side of the island. Hannah and staff went to check out conditions at the landing and, apart from the chance of a few splashes over the bow, we considered that a landing was possible. By 0900 several boatloads were bouncing across the waves to the sturdy concrete jetty hidden from view by several skerries. Science says that the island is part of a vein of volcanic basalt that is also found in northeast Ireland, most famously at the diminutive Giant's Causeway. The formation then oozes under the Irish Sea to re-appear on Staffa. The columnar basalt is distinguished by the process of slow cooling which allows the basalt to form a seven-sided (or five, six or eight, depending on how closely you look) column of black rock. The mythological story is that the Irish Giant Finn MacCool (Finn Gael) created the Giant's Causeway by throwing these particular rocks across the Irish Sea in some military exercise against a Scottish giant. Felix Mendelssohn was inspired by the beauty and grandeur of Fingal's Cave and composed the Hebridean



Symphony to commemorate his visit. It was appropriate then, that the Symphony was played in the Observation Lounge as we passed by the cave on our way to Iona after the landing.

Some of us decided to enjoy the rolling swells to the utmost with an extended zodiac cruise in the warm sunshine into the caves, viewing rafts of puffins on the sea or squadrons coming and going from their burrow nests, and trying to identify other birds such as kittiwakes, shags, greylag geese, merganser and guillemots. The star bird of the morning, though, was a peregrine falcon, diving and snatching up hapless puffins from the sea. Those who chose to land on the island walked along the truncated basalt columns into the cave to be serenaded by Ian, then hiked over the machair to the puffin nesting area where a very lucky few of



us had the delightful experience of the comic little birds landing at our feet, checking us out with quizzical eyes, then diving into the burrow. After we all were back on board, Captain Jacek brought the ship in very close to the cliffs so we had a beautiful view into Fingal's Cave from the sea.

We then set off round to the south end of the Sound of Iona over lunch and were soon anchored off the historic and beautiful Isle of Iona. Four boatloads lurched over the lumpy water, heading for 1400 and 1500 tours of the Abbey. By 1430, all passengers were on shore enjoying the peace and tranquillity of this holy isle where St. Columba arrived in A.D. 563 from Ireland, most likely via Islay, along with 12 companions. Over the next 34 years he founded a monastery and turned Iona into a place of pilgrimage and Christian learning which became renowned throughout Europe. He died on the island in 597, having achieved his goal of conversion of the Picts to Christianity at a time when St. Augustine had only just begun conversion of the English. In 793, the first Norse raid on Iona took place, with widespread destruction and pillaging. The monastery, made of wood, mud, wattle and thatch surrounded by an earthwork vallum and ditch to keep livestock out, was razed for the first time, and again in 798 and 802. In 806, the Norse returned, destroyed the rebuilt monastery once again and this time murdered 68 monks at Martyrs' Bay, a few hundred metres from the Abbey. In 849, the few remaining treasures, including it is thought at least part of the Book of Kells, were divided between Dunkeld in Scotland and Kells in Ireland. The Norse persisted, though, and killed another abbot and 15 monks at Traigh Bhan on the northeast corner of the island in 986.

In 1203, Ragnald of Islay founded a new monastery and abbey for the Benedictines on the site of the earlier monastery and also an Augustinian convent or nunnery, whose pink granite walls still remain. The greatest part of the present abbey was built in the 13th century on the foundations of an earlier church. Among the experiences we had were a visit to the 13th century nunnery and its lovely gardens, a tour of the Abbey, a successful search for the wily corncrake, a hike to the sandy beach at the north end of the island or the top of a prominent 100 m high hill to look for a signposted dun or fort. From here on a clear day one can see the Hebrides from Skye to Tiree to Islay, making the effort worthwhile. Most of us celebrated the day with tea or coffee at one of several

restaurants, a bit of shopping, and beachcombing for the beautiful green Iona marble - which is actually only Lewisian gneiss with a large limestone content. Others were content to soak in the slow island pace of life amidst fertile fields, springy lambs and sandstone or whitewashed houses. New bird sightings for the day included whimbrel,



great skua, two species of tern, rock pigeon, meadow pipit, wheatear, rook, raven and goldfinch.

The run back to the ship was a wild roller coaster ride, with 2 m swells sweeping up down the sound. By 1800 we were all back on board in time for a briefing by Hannah on our excursions to Skye and Rum tomorrow and Mick's recap, which featured a sad tale of several soundings of the corncrake but no sightings, a scientific explanation by Stuart of the origins of Staffa's hexagonal basalt columns (we all know they were tossed there by Finn MacCool) and a preview of Sonja's talk tonight on seals. Over dinner we sailed through the rest of the Treshnish Isles towards Skye, with the magnificent backdrop of the mountains of Mull to the east and the Hebrides to the west. Sonja presented a talk on *Scottish Seal Stories and Science* identifying the two main seal species that we will see on this trip – grey and harbour, and described her role at St. Andrews University in public education on seal habits and habitats and how their behaviours affect and are affected by human activities. She showed us a range of tracking devices that can be attached to the seals to monitor their individual and by extension group range. Ian followed up with the first of – we hope - several impromptu sessions in the bar featuring many of his own songs and a few covers by request. We dropped anchor around midnight in Loch Sresort and passed yet another peaceful night.

<p>Iona have Eyes for Ewe It's been Rathlin around in my mind dear Uist the reason I come on this cruise Lewis and Harris may want you but Iona have eyes for Ewe. Chorus Iona have eyes for Ewe dear You Canna ask half the Staffa it's true Lewis and Harris may want you but Iona have eyes for Ewe. I know it's the Rhum's got me talking But oh I how I Lunga for you Tir Nan Og it's a bog that I walk through sweetheart But I only have I for Ewe. Cho. I have Mull'd an entire Kintyre my dear But I Hirta with ahurt that is true I been Foula round all my life my sweet plum But Iona have eyes for Ewe. Cho. Oban hopin' I ain't Kilda my chances my love With the malt that makes me a fool Ard'beg on my knees if you'd only say please For Iona have eyes for Ewe. Ian Tamblyn</p>	<p>Contemplation on Iona The evening light was soft, the time- Everything was still As though this place so filled with prayers Was answered in one will A nightjar questioned from somewhere Beyond the Abbey wall Pulling for the silence That beckons to us all.</p> <p>Pulling forth the silence I long for in my life Wandering through these ancient stones As evening gathers night The Celtic cross soft and grey In pattern and design Bespeaks a faith I can't embrace But spirit crosses time Spirit crosses time.</p> <p>I close my eyes and the waves Rock me on a gentle sea Voices rise up from the church And take a part of me What is this yearning The heart needs a home So I ask you St. Columba How long must I roam How long must I roam. Ian Tamblyn, Iona</p>
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Thursday 21st May Loch Scavaig, Skye and Loch Scresort, Rum

'Sailing over a calm sea we may be wafted to a land surpassing in wonder and in beauty every region hitherto discovered on a habitable globe' **Mary Shelley**

Loch Scavaig, Isle of Skye, 57°11'N 006°08.8'W, SW 14 knots, seas 1 m, overcast, light showers, 11°C, 1000 mb

We lay at anchor overnight in a gentle and soothing swell deep in Loch Scavaig on the rugged coastline of Skye, with The Cuillins towering over us partially cloaked in cloud. After breakfast we headed ashore for a hike, stroll and look at this rocky landscape. On the way, we noted a few common seals for future cruising opportunities as well as Arctic terns, sandpipers, shelduck and herons.



were scattered in the valley, some granite, some pock marked sandstone, others perhaps

The mountains surrounding the loch were absolutely stunning: craggy peaks, glacially scoured granite and erratic boulders at impossible angles, unmoved since the end of the last ice age. At the landing site there was a small white bothy used by hikers who frequent this area and three classic wooden sailboats moored together. The intrepid troop scattered in all directions to the valley, hilltops, stream and Loch Coruisk in behind the sea loch. The walk around the lake is a lesson in geology: Erratics

mysterious travellers from far away. At various points, intrusive dykes marked lines through the granite glittering with quartzite. Callum led a group of about a twenty all the way to the west end of the loch, squelching through the mud, streams and bog as showers and squalls swept through the valley. Seven extra intrepid hikers continued around the north end of the loch with Sonja and were rewarded with a close encounter with a friendly young male red deer. Others took a more leisurely pace along the shore of the loch with Stuart, Susie, Gary and Ian as shepherds. Terns nesting on an islet rose and fell in consternation at our presence. The other staff – Megan, Jane and Mick - took returning hikers on a cruise to see the seals and banged their way back to the ship in a big swell. Once we were all back on board we sailed by the narrow inlet on the Isle of Soay where Gavin Maxwell started a basking shark hunting operation in 1946. Little remains of the operation other than the house ruin and some boilers; Maxwell was unable to make a go of it, insisting on the labour intensive use of all parts of the shark instead of focusing only on the valuable liver oil. Leaving Skye, we steamed towards the Isle of Rum and Kinloch Castle and dropped anchor in the uncharacteristically quiet bay with just one sailboat for company.

The woods along the road to the castle were lush and verdant in contrast to the rough features of the morning's hike. Moss grew on the trees, ferns and rushes were plentiful by the stream, and birds and bluebells were everywhere in the woods and fields. The castle, built in 1902, is a mishmash of several styles, not a true castle, but closer to a dream built by its creator George Bullough. It seemed in the same moment



fanciful, somewhat absurd and extremely excessive. After the tour some strolled back to the landing site while others set off in different directions to explore with Mick, Ian and Stuart or independently.

Rum is a square-shaped mountain of sandstone rising to over 800 m. The island has one of the longest histories of human settlement in Scotland, with people arriving as early as the Mesolithic period, possibly to obtain the rare bloodstone, a variant of flint, and pitchstone. Today, the people of Rum are attracting a wide variety of tourists interested in wildlife and the peace offered by this isolated isle. Among the new birds seen today were pink-footed geese, golden plover, a few species of tit and the Eurasian siskin; a lucky few saw a cuckoo and a golden eagle. After dinner, we sailed south around Rum past Dubh Artach lighthouse and out through the Outer Hebrides towards St. Kilda. Hannah prepared us for some possible rolling as we leave the shelter of the outer isles and gave us some information about St. Kilda. Ian sang his brand new hit song *Callum in the Cuillins*.

Mick ended this very busy and enjoyable day with a lecture on his favourite bird, *The Gannet*. This beautiful bird is perfectly aerodynamic, folding its wings and plunging like an arrow into the water to a depth of as much as 5 m to spear fish, from sand eels to mackerel. They incubate their eggs using their large webbed feet instead of a brood patch and measure as much as 2.5 m wingtip to wingtip. The males rebuild the nests each year and often in late spring we will see them carrying material to the nest where the male will try to attract a female. Gannet colonies around the Atlantic are thriving and expanding, a success story all too rare today.

Callum in the Cuillins

I saw bold Braveheart in the Cuillin Hills
He was standing in his kilt and looking down
He was looking very Celtic in an Ozzy kind of way
Says, you seen bold Callum comin' round.

So I says Mel Gibson! – look on down the loch
You'll see bonny Callum in full stride
With a bonny bunch of red coats draggin' up behind
Slippin' through the bog up to their eyes.

Auch eye! – I see 'em! Mel he says to me
Them red coats, they're Jimmy up me nose!
So I says don't worry, they're leaving with the tide
But his kilt was in a knot I suppose.

Auch eye! – it's time for battle, Mel he did declare
His face turning red through blue tattoos
Who is this Callum, I thought he was a Scot
I thought he was a plaid through and through.

I said he is Scot proud and from Tiree
And them red coats ain't who you think they are
They are just some fools in the wind and the rain
Having fun - they're from the Polar Star!

Then bold Braveheart took a sigh of relief
To know brave Callum was a friend
Then he flashed me with his kilt as if to say goodbye
As the pipes come a risin' up the glen!

Behold Brave Callum in the Cuillin Hills
And a bonny bunch of redcoats in behind
Try as they might, they cannot match his stride
Slippin' through the bog up to their eyes.

Ian Tamblyn, Rum 2009



Friday 15th May St. Kilda

*'Sailing over a calm sea we may be wafted to a land surpassing in wonder and in beauty
every region hitherto discovered on a habitable globe'* **Mary Shelley**

**Approaching Hirta, 57°39'N 008°22.1'W, E 25-30 knots, seas 4 m, clear skies,
11°C, 997**

The conditions were almost perfect as we approached St. Kilda, with a gentle southwest breeze leaving Village Bay in a flat calm. The islands' warden Ian joined us on board for a briefing on island protocol and then we were off in the zodiacs and landed at the sturdy



concrete jetty. We were met by four guides, including Ian, an archaeologist, one of the many volunteers who come to the island to help with restoration,

and a doctoral student. They led us on a tour of the abandoned settlement with its

feather house on the shore, the gun which was installed in November 1918 - just a bit late to repel U-boats during World War I, the numerous black houses, the street of “improved” housing built by the landlord in 1860-61 and the village cemetery behind its high stone wall. On the terraces above the later village are traces of earlier occupations, including chapels attributed to St. Columba and St. Brendan and a *southern*, an underground cellar probably used for storage, dating to the Iron Age, about 2000 years ago.



Archaeological investigations have confirmed that the island was occupied since the Bronze Age, at least 3500 years ago; there may well have been continuous occupation since that time. Recent finds of Neolithic pottery along the eroding shoreline bank suggests that people have landed on St. Kilda for more than 4000 years. St. Kildans lived by crofting - using all the resources around them. In addition to agriculture –

raising sheep, growing rye and hay for fodder, and planting potatoes and other hardy vegetables in lazybeds and sheltered walled gardens, they harvested the seabirds for feathers, oil and meat. In the winter the houses would have been cosy and fragrant, with the peat fire burning, the bird oil lamp smoking and the cow at one end of the room contributing both warmth and fragrance.

We had encounters with the scruffy native Soay sheep and their lambs; several St. Kilda wrens were spotted (larger and paler than mainland birds) along with arctic skuas and a swift, and fulmars were billing and cooing on the grassy rooftops. Some of us climbed the hills with Mick and Ian to The Gap behind Village Bay for a view of the other islands and a panoramic shot of Village Bay, the houses and *cleitan*. Mary, Jane and Callum also

led a walk in the opposite direction, through the assumed location of the chapel named for St. Columba, beneath a prominent fault where valuable stone tool-making supplies were gathered and on up to a cliff top terrace where St. Brendan is said to have lived. Mary pointed out an old saddle quern used for grinding seeds, now incorporated in a stone wall, some pits dug into the scree slope where residents hid from potential raiders, and a sheep corral beneath which archaeologists discovered some pottery and other remains from the Iron Age.



After a visit to the church and school room, we all returned to the jetty by lunchtime. After lunch we put the zodiacs back in the water and set off on a cruise around the island of Dun, finding rafts of puffins (looking rather like bathtub toys) and a few razorbills on the water, kittiwakes and guillemots nesting on the sheer cliffs or in overhangs, puffins and fulmars on the grassy

slopes (where they would have been easy targets for the Hirta bird men) and a few marauding skuas.

The biggest excitement was evenly divided between running through a large sea tunnel under the island on Dun, and getting hung up on a rock in the fast running current between Hirta and Dun in Callum's boat. By 1600 we had lifted anchor and set sail again to view other islands in the St Kildan archipelago – Soay, Boreray, Stac An Armin and Stac Lee. These are home to the world's largest north Atlantic gannet population - 65,000 breeding pairs. It was a marvellous sight, with the islands erupting dramatically out of the sea and the gyre of birds pyramiding around their summits. In the quiet lee of some of the islands we could imagine the men of Hirta clambering on ropes set on the cliff faces to gather the gannet and fulmar eggs and young from the nests, valuable commodities for payment of rent, for food and for oil.



Meanwhile the gannets came and went, gliding by the ship, bringing nest material back to the stack. The gannet is a remarkably beautiful bird, with its arrow-like body, great wing length, yellow head and piercing eyes, flying powerfully through the air with grace and purpose. After circumnavigations of the stacks at very close range, Hannah considered that the conditions were so perfect that we should do a zodiac cruise around Boreray, which we did, loading about 25 people in three boats. What an experience – we

split up and each group had close encounters with the gannets, great views of the stacks, and a sense of what the birds must feel in the freedom of the open ocean. After an hour that seemed only minutes long, we bade farewell to the birds and a scene that will remain indelibly in our minds.

<p>Can it be a Gannet Can it be a gannet in the blue A great northern gannet if it's true White, black-tipped, head yellow This bird's one handsome fellow A steady eye that's looking right through you Can it be a gannet – yes it's true.</p> <p>Can it be a gannet in the blue A great northern plunger passing through Over monks at prayer Little Michael waiting there Homeward to the nest with something new Can it be a gannet – yes it's true!</p> <p>High o'er the Skelligs Out here where the swell's big That's where you'll see the gannet soar They come here by the thousands To nest on cliffs and rocks While down below you'll hear the ocean roar Ian Tamblyn, May 2009</p>	<p>Cloud Sailing - St. Kilda Cloud sailing bird shadows Flying green hills From and down valleys Lost to ocean swell</p> <p>Cloud shadows birds sailing Across the green hills The valley- a village Deserted and still</p> <p>Bird shadows sailing Down to the sea Light shadows playing The hill above me</p> <p>Clouds sailing bird shadows Long afternoon Watching I give in And come back to you Ian Tamblyn, St Kilda</p>
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After dinner, Hannah told us about tomorrow's bus ride around some of the most prominent historic sites on Lewis, Stuart described the geology of the St. Kilda archipelago and noted the fairly shallow water depths, Callum showed a few slides of a quartz quarry site that he and Jane had found near the Black House interpretation centre, and Megan reminded us that this is International Biodiversity Day. Mary treated us to a talk on *Crofting Past and Present*, a personal and historic discussion of the joys and tribulations of the small farmer in the Hebrides.

Saturday 23rd May Isle of Lewis

"Travel is fatal to Prejudice, bigotry and narrow mindedness." Mark Twain

Stornoway, 58°12.3'N 006°23.2' SE 14 knots, seas calm, rain and overcast, 10°C, 1016 mb

As we breakfasted this morning Polar Star tied up alongside the pier at Stornoway on the east coast of the Isle of Lewis. After breakfast, we boarded our buses, met our drivers and guides for the day and set off across the island from the east side to the west, through moorland rich with traces of previous peat working. Our guides explained that even though most people now have gas or oil fired heating, with the high price of fuel peat cutting in traditional family plots to fuel open fires and stoves is coming back into favour. As we passed a peat bank in the process of being cut, we could see that three layers are generally taken, the blocks being air dried on the banks and losing a third of their volume before being taken home. The morning's tour was done in opposite order on each bus, but included the same stops.

Our first stop was at Callanish to see the magnificent standing stones arrayed on a high point of land overlooking a sea loch (today: in prehistoric times it may have been a freshwater loch with an outlet to the sea) and the surrounding countryside. There are almost 50 stones, among the largest and also the tallest of any of Britain's megalithic sites. The stones are set in a Celtic cross-like arrangement, with a north-south long avenue of two parallel rows leading to a central circle around a chambered cairn grave, and continuing in another, shorter double row; two single rows of five stones each run off from the centre to the east and west. The stones are all of Lewisian gneiss, so probably came from a nearby source. The ring at the centre and the grave probably date to about 5000 years ago, while the north-south avenues may be a bit later. The alignment suggests that they were set to coincide with the position of the moon at the winter and summer solstices. We completed the visit with a tour of the interpretation centre and bookstore at the bottom of the hill and, as we left the site, could see two smaller stone rings, also with magnificent views over the sea lochs and hills of northwestern Lewis.



We proceeded on to the village of Gearrannan. Here we found a whole village of restored black houses, built in the 18th and 19th centuries and only abandoned by the elderly occupants in 1974 when it became too difficult to keep up the fabric of these stone-walled straw-thatched buildings and the surrounding croft fields. The black house resembles the traditional longhouse that existed in Scandinavia for a thousand years.

Entering through the attached barn, we went into the main room that was partitioned with stalls for the cows at one end and the family accommodation at the other. We sat down on the low furniture beneath a pall of smoke from the peat fire and listened as our guide related stories of the lives of the people who had lived there until so recently. Callum and Stuart led a walk across the storm beach at the head of Gearrannan Bay to a prehistoric site high on the hillside on the opposite side of the bay. The site consists of several scatters of quartz flakes and cores and a some deep quartz veins and outcrops, forming a huge quarry and workshop area where quartz was reduced from large blocks to smaller cores and finally into tools such as knives, scrapers and arrowheads.

Our next stop was at 2000-year old Dun Carloway broch, a partially-collapsed but



nonetheless awe-inspiring double-walled drystone tower commanding an outstanding view of the bays and inlets on the west side of the island, north of Calanish. In times of trouble, when raiding parties approached, the broch may have been used as a safe refuge for local families. It also certainly stood as a statement of local power and prestige, and would have served as a lookout. However, the

spaced out location of these structures throughout the Western Isles suggests that they may have been built primarily by individual families as permanent residences, with two living floors set over a basement level in which animals could be housed, perhaps evolving in place from the earlier round houses or wheel houses. The double wall and inset gaps allowed for the passage of warm air in winter and cooling drafts in summer and lightened the weight of the massive construction. We had time to scramble up the staircase between the walls and then take a few photos of the ruined croft buildings nestled around the foot of the hill.

We arrived back in Stornoway in time for lunch and then most of us donned our rain gear again and set off into town for a few hours of sightseeing and shopping. A few wandered over to Lews Castle, built by Sir James Matheson in 1856-63 and now housing a technical college, and the castle grounds overlooking the river and harbour. Stornoway reached prominence in the 17th-19th centuries as a major fishing port, landing and processing thousands of tons of herring annually. Hannah briefed us on the proposed visits to Dunvegan Castle and the Isle of Isay tomorrow and then at Recap, Jane presented a mini-lecture on the famous *Lewis Chessmen*, found at Uig on the west coast of Lewis near Calanish, and Ian sang a couple more songs about puffins and St. Kilda. After dinner, the Captain brought the ship in close to the cliffs on the scatter of isles and islets known as the Shiant Islands, whose name translates as the enchanted islands, five miles east of Lewis. Two of the larger islands are known as Eilean an Tigh (House Island), although earlier it was called Eilean na Cille (Church Island), and Eilean Mhuire (The Virgin Mary's Island). Sir Compton Mackenzie, famous Scottish author best known for his irreverent novel *Whisky Galore*, bought the islands at auction in 1925 for £500 and renovated the derelict shepherd's cottage as a retreat where he could write in peace. The Nicholson publishing family now owns them. Geologically, the islands are outliers of Skye, although closer geographically to Lewis. The rock formations are similar to though

much taller than those we saw on Staffa, with massive columnar basalt cliffs rising spectacularly to over 120 m (Staffa's are about 20 m high). About 120,000 pairs of puffins nest in the turf on top of the sea cliffs, about 2 per cent of the world's population, and thousands of kittiwakes, guillemots, razorbills and fulmars nest on the fluted basalt columns. It is likely that there was an early Christian period settlement on the islands as the remains of a church and ancient graveyard as well as old lazybeds and



turf-covered mounds covered in nettles – a sure sign of a former human occupation – are present. We set off in a fleet of five zodiacs to explore the islands, finding caves to poke into, rafts and swirls of puffins, razorbills and guillemots resting on the water, sheep and lambs grazing unconcernedly on steep grassy slopes, basalt columns rising out of the water to the height of a 40 storey skyscraper but clad with sea pinks and hundreds of nesting birds instead of pigeons, concrete and glass, big nosed grey seals and dog-like harbour seals bobbing in the surf, in caves and in fast tidal races. On the quiet side of the main island we found few nesting birds,

as the lee side provides no lift for them as they come and go, but we came close to sleek arrow-like green shags drying themselves, oystercatchers piping and black backed gulls waiting. We passed the old Mackenzie cottage and those with stories buried deep inside us yearned for such creative solitude. We were all back on board, tired, cold and exhilarated by 2200 and a few celebrated their adventures in the Polar Bar before collapsing in bed. New birds spotted today included great northern diver, whinchat and red-billed chough.

(The basalt columns of the Shiant Islands) exceed them (those on Staffa) in simplicity, in grandeur, in depth of shadow, and in that repose which is essential to the great style in landscape...(the columns) form one of the most magnificent colonnades to be found among the Western Islands

(J. McCullough, *The Highlands and Western Isles of Scotland*, 1824)

Sunday 24th May Dunvegan Bay, Skye

Dunvegan Bay 57°31.1'N 006°37.6'W S 30-40 knots, 2-3 m swells, overcast, 10°C, 1017 mb

Hannah allowed us to lie in this morning to the unheard of hour of 0800, while the Captain tried to find a safe holding ground in Dunvegan Bay on the northwest coast of the Isle of Skye. After two unsuccessful attempts in 30-40 knot winds, he tucked us into the shelter of the Isle of Isay, further out in the bay, and there we sat for the morning waiting for the forecasted drop in wind speed. In the meantime, we were entertained by Stuart and then by Jane, with a much needed practice session for the penny whistlers in between. Stuart used the *Boswell and Johnson Journal of a Tour of the Hebrides* to illustrate several themes: the disparity between landowners and tenants, the breakdown of the traditional clan system after Prince Charles Edward Stuart's abortive attempt to claim the English throne just 20 years earlier, the difficulty of travel in the late 18th century and a very nice reprise of our visit to the crofting community and the age-old architecture of St. Kilda. He noted that coincidentally Johnson had been urged by the local MacLeod

landowner to buy the Isle of Isay, adjacent to which we were then anchored. He mulled this over for a few days but in the end the comfort of the coffee houses of Edinburgh and London beckoned. Jane continued with a colourful lecture on the *Art of the Celts*, the mysterious people who invaded Britain, evaded the steamrolling Romans and brought their culture, language, shamanic religion, art and no doubt bloodlines to the indigenous and other incoming people like the Norse. They tended to adopt existing sacred sites like Calanish, incorporating their own belief systems and produced abstract art on their jewellery, armour, weapons, coins and utensils, an art style that resonates so well with us today, 2000 years later.

After lunch, we watched the Old Ealing Studios black and white classic *Whisky Galore*, based on Compton Mackenzie's novel of the same name and filmed in part in the Outer Hebrides. By the end, it was clear that the weather was not abating so Hannah decided to up anchor and sail while it was light enough to see the some of the Highland scenery (which remained shrouded in cloud) to our planned stop in the morning, Loch Ewe. We began the first of the engine room tours for enthusiasts of noisy environments and at 1715 met in the Observation Lounge for a lecture on *Animal Recognition Techniques* by Sonja followed by an instructive game of *Seal Bingo* to bring home the main points. By late afternoon we entered Loch Ewe, sailed past Ewe Island, and dropped anchor beside another cruise ship, the *Spirit of Adventure*. Hannah, as usual, presented the planned programme for tomorrow, which includes a walk through the incredibly beautiful Inverewe Gardens and then a landing, we hope, at remote Handa Island before rounding Cape Wrath en route to Kirkwall. Recap included a telling by Mary of the Uig version of the story of the discovery of the Lewis Chessmen, involving a cow who fell into the chamber where the chessmen had been concealed. This was followed by Callum and Jane reciting a few pages of collected vintage questions from the polar regions. As the cloud dissipated and the temperature rose to a balmy 15, the planned barbecue dinner on deck was switched inside to the Observation Lounge, with the option of sitting outside on the steps which few took advantage of! After dinner, Ian presented a concert of some favourite songs including *The Bluebells of Gigha*, *The Angel's Share* and *Iona Have Eyes for Ewe* (dedicated to Alastair) and encouraged us to join him in the bar for the next set, which many did.

**Monday 25th May Inverewe Gardens, Loch Ewe and
Loch Ewe 57°47.7'N 005°37.2' SW 20 knots, 1 m swells, overcast and light rain,
11°C, 1020 mb**

After a beautifully peaceful night at anchor in Loch Ewe, surrounded by the coastal hills of Wester Ross, we went ashore in low cloud and light rain to explore Inverewe Gardens. The gardens were inspired by Osgood MacKenzie, who inherited the 12,000 acre estate around the gardens from his stepfather, the laird of Gairloch in 1862. The local environment is heavily influenced by the Gulf Stream and, perhaps, the bowl



effect of the surrounding hills. MacKenzie collected plants from all over the world for his walled garden, which still forms the heart of the complex, protected from the salty

winds off Loch Ewe by a barrier of Scots pine, rowan, oak, beach and birch. Fertile Irish soil was brought in as ships' ballast to overlay the existing beach gravel and sea grass. By the time of MacKenzie's death in 1922, his garden spread over the whole peninsula, surrounded by a hundred acres of woodland. Today, the National Trust for Scotland maintains the Gardens along the lines envisaged by their founder. We had the pleasure of walking the labyrinth of walkways and paths through a dozen or more individual gardens featuring plants imported from China, Chile, Japan, Tasmania, South Africa and the Himalayas, interspersed with ponds. The rhododendrons and azaleas were in riotous bloom, casting their scent over us. The walled garden today is a kitchen gardener's dream, with neat rows of chives and other herbs, cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, beans, peas and many other vegetables, and rows of berry canes. Two new bird species – a European greenfinch and a bullfinch – were spotted in the gardens. Unfortunately for most of us, the restaurant did not open until 1100, by which time many had left, but most of us found bargains, presents and long-sought reference books in the excellent giftshop.

Over lunch and the early afternoon we sailed another 40 miles to the northeast to the Isle of Handa, a machair covered slab of Torridonian sandstone off the coast of Sutherland. Handa (meaning either dog island or sand island) is owned by Dr. Jean Balfour of nearby Scourie. She leases the island to the Scottish Wildlife Trust, who maintain a warden's bothy near the southeast corner. In early times Handa was used as a burial ground for



people on the neighbouring mainland so that wolves would be unable to scavenge the corpses. Later, seven families settled and began to cultivate the rough pastureland. They became self-sufficient, living off a staple diet of oats, potatoes, fish and seabirds. Like St. Kilda, the men held a daily parliament to

decide the daily allocation of work. In 1848, the potato famine struck and the 60-odd islanders abandoned their home and emigrated to North America. The old lazybeds, house ruins, grave markers and an undated chapel ruin remain as evidence of their presence. Handa is renowned for its birdlife. Over 170 species have been recorded and the island is alive with nesting sea birds from May to July. One hundred thousand guillemots (the largest population in Britain) and many razorbills, fulmars and kittiwakes nest on the cliffs, stacks and steep slopes. About 30 of us joined Mick, Mary, Stuart and Jane on shore for a 5-6 km walk over the moor to the stacks and cliffs on the west side of the island and two more boat loads with Ian and Callum at the helm attempted to come in close to the cliffs from the sea but were repelled by a confusion of backwash and opposing currents so instead circumnavigated the island from a distance, spotting many rafts of guillemots and razorbills. As we returned to the ship, two sleek black-throated divers flew over the boats.

After Hannah's brief briefing on Orkney, Callum described in a mini-lecture the significance of the sites we will be visiting tomorrow, including Scara Brae, Ring of Brodgar, Scapa Flow and the Italian Chapel, and St Magnus Cathedral, with a fleeting glimpse as we pass of the Maes Howe burial mound and the Stones of Stennes and an opportunity to visit two historic sites near the Cathedral: the Bishop's Palace and the Earl's Palace. As we passed the northwest corner of the Scottish mainland, the Captain brought us in close to Cape Wrath and its prominent Stevenson lighthouse. We encountered the often-vicious Pentland Firth in a benign mood, with the setting sun casting a golden glow on the long swells and a few dolphins coursing their way south – a fittingly colourful end to a beautiful day.

Wednesday 27th May Kirkwall, Orkney Isles

*The lords of the Tith and Loch are quarrying we hear/ slate stones to make a stone circle
In the last of the snow a great one died. He lies in a stone hollow in the east. A winter sunset will touch
his mouth. He carries a cairngan on his cold finger to the country of the dead.*

George MacKay Brown, Skara Brae

Hatston Pier, Kirkwall, 58°59.9'N 002°58.3'W, Variable 10 knots, seas calm, partly cloudy, 12°C, 1015 mb

After we picked up the Kirkwall pilot we continued into the Sound of Kirkwall and moored at the Hatston Pier a mile from the centre of Kirkwall. We walked or were picked up by shuttle buses for a visit to town, meeting Jane, Mary and Callum for a tour of St Magnus Cathedral. This Medieval cathedral is truly magnificent, hewn out of ancient red and yellow sandstone in the 12th century by master masons of the same school as those who built Durham Cathedral. Jane told us the story of St. Magnus outside before leading us into the church to show us the stained glass window and mural that tell the same story and pointing out the pillar within which the remains of Magnus were placed after having his head split open on the orders of his cousin Hakon. Callum then described



the life of the Orkney explorer and doctor John Rae, who discovered the fate of the 1845 Franklin expedition, is buried in the graveyard adjacent to this kirk and has a magnificent memorial inside. Mary and Jane discussed the architecture and history of the cathedral and then some visited the shops and walked around town admiring the stone architecture before returning to the ship for lunch. In the afternoon we set off by coach in the able hands of our guides and drivers to visit some of the most important of Orkney's prehistoric archaeological sites. As we passed by fields of Aberdeen Angus and Limousin cattle and Cheviot sheep grazing on lush emerald fields we could see why it is said that Orkney islanders are farmers with boats whereas Shetlanders are fishermen with crofts. Both buses did the same tour but in different order. The Ring of Brodgar is a stone circle that originally would have had 60 standing stones in a circle 103 metres in diameter, dating from about 5200 years ago. The ring is surrounded by a henge (ditch) that is a very impressive 10 m across and up to 3.5 m deep, bridged by two opposing causeways.

The whole ceremonial site may have taken as much as 10,000 person-days to construct. Around the ring we could also see many additional mounds, undoubtedly containing tombs. Skylarks sang in fields surrounding the ring, the call of oystercatchers and curlew filled the air and tufted ducks and swans swam serenely in the loch.



Across the loch from Brodgar at Stenness is another set of standing stones, where we were able to persuade the driver to stop for a few minutes; our attention was divided between the stones and a pair of swans guarding their cygnets on the Loch. These sites, along with Maes Howe, the 4800 burial mound, are all part of an important Neolithic ceremonial

landscape; with Skara Brae added, they are also part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Skara Brae is an impressive collection of stone dwellings that pre-date the pyramids. Severe storms in 1850 exposed the perfectly preserved dwellings that had been protected for 5,000 years by their blanket of sand. Along the shore of Skaill Bay below the village we could also see some of the curiously angled stone slabs present at the standing stone sites, suggesting that they detach from the bedrock in that manner.

Walking around the Ring of Brodgar and Skara Brae is a walk back through time. It is a glimpse at a group of people whose spiritual expression was as appropriate and profound as at St Magnus Cathedral, 4000 years later. That we cannot fully understand the significance of these sites does not diminish them for their mystery still holds considerable power. We can almost feel the energy or the power of the leadership or community cohesion that was necessary for the effort of building a site like the Ring of Brodgar. Skara Brae is perhaps a little easier to understand as it differs little from our own home villages and towns: a collection of houses built close together, sharing party walls and laneways, built with a beautiful view, close to the resources necessary for life. The village and surrounding fields must have rung with the shouts of children playing, the calls of mothers at meal time, the smells of meat and seafood cooking, the sounds of men gathered in a workshop area hammering away at chunks of stone to fashion beautiful but functional tools in the fashion of the day, and discussing the changing weather patterns.

Back on the bus we headed towards Kirkwall again, passing by Scapa Flow where the captured German fleet was scuttled by German officers after the First World War. Further down the bay the guides pointed out a buoy in the bay where the *Royal Oak* sank with the loss of over 800 men after being struck by Captain Gunther Primm's U-boat in the early days of the Second World War. Oil still creates a slick on the bay, bleeding from the *Royal Oak*, now protected as a marine gravesite. A new stop for most of us was at the Italian Chapel, overlooking the channel where Primm's U-boat made its daring foray into Scapa Flow, a channel subsequently blocked at Churchill's order to prevent such a disaster from happening again. The Chapel was built, designed and decorated in the shell of a Nissen hut by Italian prisoners of war and has become a major tourist attraction as well as an immensely moving reminder of our ability to make the most of a bad situation.

Continuing on, we passed the distinctive pagodas of Highland Park - Scotland's most northerly distillery and referred to by Michael Jackson, the whisky critic, as "the great all rounder".



All too soon it was time to re-board the Polar Star, but the busy day's activities were not over. We were welcomed to the Observation Lounge by a charming group of Kirkwall school children involved in a project to keep local music alive. The fifteen youngsters played fast reels, jigs and two-steps in a style Ian suggested was more Scandinavian than Scottish. Chef Bryan served up beautifully cooked and presented Scottish haggis for one of the dinner options and a lovely young piper played us away from the quay as the Captain and his crew smartly let go the lines. Callum presented a lecture on *Jarlshof* as a preview of our visit to Shetland tomorrow, introducing us through the archaeology to the Bronze Age and Iron Age periods at Jarlshof and Old Scatness, and Vikings at Jarlshof and the soapstone quarry at Catpund. Once again, Ian played out the rest of the night in the Polar Bar.

It was then that a Roman fleet for the first time circumnavigated this coast of the remotest sea, and established that Britain is in fact an island. Then too it discovered the islands, which are called the Orkney, and subjugated them. A close examination of Thule (Shetland) also was made, because they had been instructed to go this far.

Tacitus, ca. A.D. 83. Shetland Museum

Wednesday 27th May Lerwick, Jarlshof and Mousa, Shetland Isles

'When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world' John Muir
Lerwick, 60°09.3'N 001°08.4W, SW 10 knots, seas calm, overcast, light showers, 10°C, 1013 mb

The morning began with clouds, showers, rainbows and glimpses of sunshine on a choppy sea as we passed Fair Isle to starboard and the lighthouse on Sumburgh Head glinting to port. We are now north of 60°, the same latitude as the entrance to Hudson Strait on the other side of the Atlantic, still choked with sea ice at this time of year. We passed by two moored tankers awaiting their share of North Sea oil, and steamed in company through the busy stretch of coastal waterway with a supply vessel towing a chunk of an oil rig, the ferry from Aberdeen and another small red and white cruise ship.

Once tied up at the pier in Lerwick, the capital and only town of Shetland, we met our guides for a day of exploration of Mainland, the biggest of the Shetland Isles. We passed through Lerwick, which has a population of 8,000, about one third of the total in Shetland, and drove by the 2000 year old remains of Clickimin Broch on the shores of Clickimin Loch, then proceeded on to photo opportunities at Bigton, a walk across the tombolo beach to St. Ninian's Isle where Jane and Mary provided a fascinating account of recent excavations and analyses in the 12th century chapel cemetery showing severe malnutrition in the female and infant skeletons, indicating that the Norse were not treating their female slaves and their offspring with much care and respect.



In 1958, a dig in the church uncovered the remains of an earlier (pre-Norse) 8th century church and a young schoolboy assistant uncovered a hoard of 8th century Pictish silver under a stone slab, possibly hidden before a Viking raid. Replicas of this beautiful collection are now on display at the new Shetland Museum in Lerwick. We continued on for a walk through history at Jarlshof, lunch at the Sumburgh Hotel, a tour of the Old Scatness archaeological dig, still in progress by Bradford University and local assistants, and a walk up to the Sumburgh Head lighthouse for a splendid view of the bird cliffs – all in different order according to which bus we were on.



Old Scatness is a multi-occupation site that was discovered just nine years ago during construction of a new road to the airport. A team of archaeologists from Bradford University with local assistance excavated the site and simultaneously built replicas of some of the structures found so that visitors, who are strongly encouraged to tour the site, can gain an appreciation of how people lived there over several thousand years. At the centre of the house is the remains of a broch, which is surrounded by several wheelhouses and roundhouses. The guide told us that radiocarbon dating of peat trapped beneath the bottom layer of the broch and a fortuitous find of a sheep bone in the wall has allowed a revision of the date of construction, pushing it back to 2400 years ago. Our guides were quite wonderful and you could see their obvious enthusiasm for the work they were doing. One guide in a replica wheelhouse described how every resource available to these people was utilized. A small peat fire glowed in the hearth, the smoke finding its way to a hole in the roof, while two fish oil lamps burned in the corner. Another guide

demonstrated the use of soapstone spindle whorls and loom weights in the manufacture of tweed clothing. With the guides' help, for a few moments time fell away and we began to slip back to another age. After a quick jump back to reality, we travelled over to Sumburgh Head, the lighthouse and zenith of the journey for many, for we had reached the holy grail of our travels – the northernmost colony of puffins that we'll see on this voyage! Many passengers went into raptures over the little bird, while the more prosaic wandered around the lighthouse and admired the clear views of sandy crescent beaches, the Jarlshof site, green rolling hills and headlands. However, staff declared that this had been the best puffin encounter for many years, with the comical little birds manoeuvring in the strong wind to land in reverse at their burrows.

Then we were back on the bus where our guide and driver took us over to the Sumburgh Hotel for lunch of soup and sandwiches, after which we walked over to the impressive site of Jarlshof that displays the remains of continuous human habitation over a 4,000 year period. Unlike most of Skara Brae, the original settlement was successively built over. These layers of history have now been exposed by archaeologists. Structures dating from the Bronze Age to the Medieval Period included a broch and walled garth, round houses and wheel houses, two souterrains, a large expanse of Norse longhouses and the farm house named by Walter Scott as Jarlshof. Recent discoveries by archaeologists at Old Scatness suggest that the Jarlshof Bronze Age buildings, once thought to have been roofed with wood or whalebone and turf, may have had stone roofs, and the broch is likely to be contemporaneous with that at Old Scatness.

We returned to Lerwick in time to catch the shops, library and, for some, the brand new Shetland Museum on the waterfront, where we were able to see some of the artifacts from St Ninian's Isle. The museum is magnificent – full of boats and boat equipment, prehistoric tools, crofting materials, interactive screens, dioramas and much much more, all beautifully displayed, identified and interpreted. As we returned to the ship enjoying the late afternoon sunshine, many of us wandered through the lanes and found the "lodberries"; built right into the sea, these combinations of house, store, jetty and small yard were perfect for the smuggling trade that used to be rife in Shetland.

Back on board, we had a chance to relax before Recap and Briefing and dinner then the Captain steamed towards Mousa and the broch that stands there and our last zodiac ride for the trip. Once ashore, we entered the 2000-year old broch, where tea-lights lit the way

up to the top and Mary explained how and why such a magnificent structure had been built. Hannah led a walk across the island to see hundreds of nesting terns, some red-throated divers and seals. A few stalwarts stayed ashore as darkness fell, hoping to see the diminutive storm petrels as they returned to their nests in tiny chinks in the broch wall, but alas they did not show up.



Thursday 28th May Fair Isle, Shetland Isles

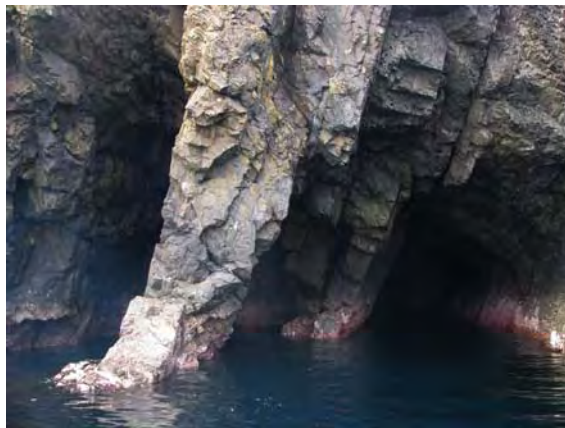
Fair Isle, 59°32.6'N 001°35.8'W, Variable 5 knots, seas calm, partly cloudy, 15°C

Fair Isle lies midway between Orkney and Shetland, a small green sandstone bump of land less than 2000 acres in size. It was purchased by the National Trust for Scotland in 1954 from ornithologist George Waterston. The current population is now less than 70 but at its height almost 400 people lived on the island, of whom 134 emigrated to Nova Scotia in 1862. Fair Isle, possibly derived from Old Norse *feoer-øya*, meaning far off isle. However, the presence of several burnt mounds and at least one promontory fort indicate occupation during the Iron Age or earlier. More than 345 species of birds have been recorded on the island, more than any other location in Britain, including many rare migrants blown in on storms. The inhabitants live in the southern part of the island where there is a limited amount of land suitable for cultivation; a substantial dyke separates the northern hill-grazing land from the southern fields. We ran ashore on flat calm seas after an early breakfast and were met by a fleet of local cars; though the morning, drivers ran shuttles between the community hall, bird cliffs and the jetty.



Mary led a leisurely walk to a promontory fort, some early house ruins and some burnt mounds while bird enthusiasts followed Mick, Stuart and Hannah to the bird cliffs for some wonderful experiences with puffins flying into their burrows and landing at our feet, completely unconcerned by our presence. Zodiac drivers Jane, Ian and Hannah took us back to the ship via some of the deep caves in the soft sandstone and a few ledges of nesting razorbills and guillemots and our last rafts of puffins. The gangway presented a bit of a challenge as we disembarked the zodiacs for the last time, so Captain Jacek turned the ship to provide us with a lee.

By 1230 we had pulled anchor and were off towards Dundee where our journey will end. The afternoon was taken up with the sad jobs of packing and paying our bar bills, and attending a couple of last lectures.



Stuart and Alison West combined their slides to present *Geology of Scotland*, and Mary pulled together many of our experiences of the last 10 days with a talk on *Viking Migrations*. At a final meeting in the Observation Lounge before dinner, we joined Captain Jacek in a toast to an exciting voyage, Hannah who provided plans for tomorrow's disembarkation, and a showing of the trip's best photos taken by staff and compiled by Megan and Sonja. In the evening Ian gave a concert featuring some of the songs he had written on this and other voyages and the penny whistle class performed, to much acclaim.

Friday 29th May Dundee

Dundee, 59°N 002°49'W, SE 8 knots, seas calm, partly cloudy, 12°C

Early this morning we steamed into the historic harbour of Dundee, an old whaling town and the home of Captain Robert Falcon Scott's ship *Discovery*, which was built here and launched in March 1901. More than a hundred years later, the ship has returned and sits proudly at Discovery Point. After breakfast, we bade farewell to all the new and old friends with whom we have shared so much on this marvellous trip. We travelled on seas sometimes unbelievably calm and seas not so calm, under brilliant sunshine for most of the voyage, achieving things we thought we might not ever do, seeing things we thought we might never see and through this process we bore witness to some absolutely incredible historical and natural sights. Judging by the tone in the dining room at night, it is clear that this experience has enlivened our spirits. Safe travels all - and when your mind returns to this trip a few weeks hence, laugh and marvel at the experience and know that we, the staff, will be sharing those same



memories. In conclusion, it has been a pleasure travelling you. We would particularly like to thank on your behalf, the wonderful officers, Captain Jacek Majer, the crew, our hotel and kitchen staff and the gangway boys, our Expedition Leader Hannah who worked tirelessly to make it all work, and with special mention to Bryan Hanson and his team who fed us soooo well (see you at the gym!).

We have travelled 979 nautical miles on our voyage from Oban to Dundee. You have been sailing with:

Captain	Jacek Majer	EL	Hannah Lawson
Staff Captain	Milosz Lubkowski	AEL	Megan Tierney
2 nd Officer	Roberto Sainz	Staff	Mick Brown
3 rd Officer	Jerry Malapad		Sonja Heinrich
Chief Eng.	Waclaw Kedziora		Mary MacLeod
Bosun	Gregorio Delawampu		Ian Tamblyn
Repairman	Alex Pinque		Jane Sproull Thomson
Hotel Mgr.	Natasha Hanson		Callum Thomson
Head Chef	Bryan Hanson		Stuart Thomson
Bartenders	Bart Orculio	Doctor	Susie Newton
	Ruel Merquita		

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