

LOG OF MV *POLAR STAR*

**ISLANDS ON THE EDGE: UK, EIRE & HEBRIDES
May 7-18 2009**



Text and map by Callum Thomson and Jane Sproull Thomson, photos by CT, JST and Mick Brown, Wildlife List by Mick Brown

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Polar Star
Islands on the Edge – UK, Eire & Hebrides
May 7th to 18th 2009

Thursday 7th May Falmouth, Cornwall

Position 50°09.2'N 005°03.4'W

“A beginning, a middle and an end is the proper way to tell a story. But I have difficulty with that method.”
Jeanette Winterson – Lighthousekeeping



We arrived at our ship in stages through the afternoon, leaving families and friends in far-flung places to carry on with their lives while we set out on this great adventure. Unexpectedly, the Polar Star was located not in Dartmouth, but in Falmouth, due to a mechanical problem, so most of us had the pleasure of a scenic tour between the two historic seaports before sighting the ship. For hundreds of years, Falmouth has had the same feel as we encountered this afternoon – sailboats tugging at their anchor lines, anxious to set sail in the moderate breeze, rigging whistling, ferries

crossing the harbour back and forth, the hill slopes dotted with cattle and picturesque homes, and 16th century Pendennis Castle and St Mawes Castle built by Henry VIII on either side of the Carrick Roads, still keeping an eye on us – an ancient seaport and estuary jutting into Cornwall’s finest agricultural land full of fat cattle and sheep and green, green fields. In recorded history, Falmouth has been visited by seafarers since the Phoenicians arrived to mine tin, followed by the Romans, who called it Valuba, and there was undoubtedly an Iron Age fort on Pendennis Headland as the name translates from the old Cornish as *Hill Fort*.

With most passengers on board, except for two pairs of lost sheep who were later picked up by zodiac, all travel weary and full of expectations of the journey ahead, we were neatly nudged away from the pier and out into the main channel by two tough little tugs and dropped anchor out in the mouth of the bay. Here we met in the Observation Lounge for introductions by Expedition Leader Hannah to Captain Slawski, Hotel Manager Natasha and the expedition staff, while gannets flew beside the ship, our constant companions for the next couple of weeks, their brilliant black and white plumage illuminated by the intermittent sunlight (see Mick’s wildlife list at the end of the log for full details on daily sightings). Dinner was a fine introduction to the culinary skills of our Head Chef Bryan and the excellent service of our hotel staff. By 2200, the ship was quiet, with most of us gratefully headed to our beds after a long day.

Friday 8th May Falmouth, Cornwall

Position 50°09.2'N 005°03.4'W

This morning we were somewhat surprised to see the same scenery from our cabin windows as yesterday and soon discovered that another gremlin had come aboard and cast a spell on our main gyro compass, without which we could not go to sea. So, while the engineers and ship’s agent worked to acquire and install a new system, we carried on in good expedition style. Hannah, Assistant Expedition Leader Megan and Milosz the Staff Captain took us through the mandatory safety briefing and zodiac briefing, followed by a lifeboat drill to acquaint everyone with the location of the lifeboats and muster stations.

After these formalities, we boarded the zodiacs and set off across the harbour to land below the beautiful Maritime Museum, which most of us toured to learn how important the sea and seafarers have been to the people of Falmouth and Cornwall through the centuries. In true maritime tradition, our very own Jane and her able-bodied assistants rescued a sailor on their way in to the jetty – the sailor had taken his boat out and got caught in a gust of wind which flattened his little craft, tipping him into the water. He had no lifejacket and was inadequately dressed for a soak so, feeling the early effects of hypothermia and shock was unable either to right his boat or clamber up on top. Jane and crew hauled him into their zodiac and brought him ashore, while a local lifeboat went out to rescue the hazardous abandoned sailboat.

Some passengers, in need of exercise after a day of travel, joined Callum, Mick and Mary on a hike up to Pendennis Castle, where advance guard Dr. Susie was waiting to show us the high points. The promontory on which the castle is situated was most likely the site of an Iron Age hill fort, more than 2000 years ago, but no traces remain today. In the mid-sixteenth century King Henry VIII built one of a series of south coast defensive castles on Pendennis Headland to guard against French invasion. This structure was soon found to be inadequate, especially to attack from land, so was reinforced in the 17th century under the leadership of Sir Walter Raleigh. Several other defensive structures around the entrance to the inlet worked in concert with Pendennis to protect the town and its harbour from attack from the sea, culminating with a string of batteries built during World War II, when the harbour was an important anchorage for naval ships.



Others among us took the opportunity to stroll through the town's narrow streets, sampling famous Cornish pasties and enjoying the friendly atmosphere. We returned to the ship for lunch and after a short nap set off again in the zodiacs for an exploratory cruise up the Fal River



towards the town of Truro. The day remained warm and breezy, with occasional glimpses of the sun through the clouds. The scenery was beautiful, with herons and egrets nesting on treetops on the wooded hill slopes, rows and rows of moored sailboats, old stone jetties, cormorants and swans. To our great surprise we came across about a dozen massive freighters anchored in the river, waiting out the economic slowdown before being loaded up with cars and quarried stone again, or heading off to be scrapped. We reached the town of Truro, with its magnificent

steeped cathedral, explored as far as we could through a system of canals, and then headed back towards the ship.

Most of us stopped briefly to walk a few hundred yards through pretty woods to a 12th century stone church, St. Just's, with its graveyard full of Celtic crosses in the most restful and picturesque wooded setting above a secluded gravel beach, serenaded by a friendly robin. Back on board just in time for a recap and briefing on tomorrow's activities on Tresco and St. Mary's, we heard with great relief that the compass problem had been fixed while we were off having fun and that we would sail for the Isles of Scilly around midnight! Hannah also told us that the wind was howling in Scilly today and landings would have been difficult if not impossible, so our extra day in Falmouth may have been a blessing. Brief recaps by Callum, Jane, Ian and Mick provided

more information on the day's sightings, and Ian was persuaded to expound on his observation that those of us who live in the landlocked parts of North America probably see the sailboats dashing about the bay, the ordered gardens and the spring greenness of Britain in an entirely different light than residents who may take all that beauty more for granted – maybe. After dinner, Mick entertained us with an illustrated and informative talk on *The Seabirds of the North Atlantic* featuring many of the birds we are likely to see on this voyage and Ian was (easily) persuaded to provide an impromptu and delightful musical session in the Polar Bar – one of about half a dozen through the trip - for those of us with a second wind. What a great day!

Saturday 9th May Tresco and St Mary's, Isles of Scilly

*"We pray thee, Oh Lord, not that wrecks should happen, but if wrecks do happen,
Thou wilt guide them into the Isles of Scilly for the benefit of the poor inhabitants"*

Parson Troutbeck Besant

Off St Mary's 0800 (data for each day taken at 0800) Position 49°50.1'N 005°38.7'W, Conditions partly cloudy, Wind W 17 knots and 2 m swell, Temperature 15°C

We dropped anchor between the islands of St. Mary's and Tresco as Hannah woke us to a hazy grey morning, but with the promise of brighter weather to come, which indeed it did. After we



had breakfast and a chance to collect a picnic lunch, a bright white and blue tender named *The Spray* came alongside to take us to Carn Near on the island of Tresco. A short walk or buggy ride along a paved path across the moor and heliport took us to the Abbey gardens. The Abbey is owned by the Dorian-Smith family, which leases the island from the Duchy of Cornwall. The subtropical climate around Tresco Abbey enables many plants to flourish that will

not grow as well – if at all – almost anywhere else in Britain. The terraces display an amazing riot of colours, leaf forms, sizes and shapes. The layout was delightfully informal, with many self seeded specimens allowed to grow wherever they had rooted (well, for a while, anyway - we think that the gardeners take delight in the ravages of rare hurricanes and snow storms that devastate parts of the gardens, allowing them to redesign and replant where necessary). We were led around the grounds by a trio of knowledgeable guides from the permanent and student gardening staff and the Dorian-Smith family. Five full time gardeners and two students tend the almost 4,000 plants. The name and detail of every plant in sight was rattled off by our guides, who explained the planting and maintenance of the garden, the devastation caused by gales, and the history and provenance of all the splendid sculptures and water features. As part of the tour we were taken to Valhalla, with its figureheads from the hundreds of wrecks that the Isles of Scilly have claimed. The collection was begun in 1840 by Augustus Smith (the Scilly landlord) and was donated by the Dorian-Smith family to the National Maritime Museum in lieu of death duties. Most of us visited the gift shop and garden teashop before returning to the pier.

In the meantime, Callum led a small group of hiking enthusiasts to the remains of Cromwell's Castle (1651) built to defend the islands from invading Dutch fleets. The ruins of King Charles' Castle (1550) lie above on Castle Down, which is covered with a system of earthworks, fortifications and batteries surrounded by earlier entrance graves, round houses, field systems, cairns, enclosures and tin mine depressions. Together with the Blockhouse (1554) on the east

coast and a battery at Carn Near, the island was well protected during periods of strife. We all returned to the gardens in time for a quick cuppa before heading back to the jetty. Clouds gave way to sun, revealing Mediterranean colours in the shallow sea, as the tender took us across to St Mary's, the main island in the Scilly archipelago, with a population of about 1500.

When we arrived in Hugh Town, Hannah gave us several options: to follow her and Mick on a bird walk to the Garrison, to do an archaeological walk with Callum, Jane, Meagan and Ian to the Neolithic site of Bant's Carn and the Iron Age ruins of Halangy village, or just to potter. With the sun sparkling in the harbour, ferries and tenders zipping back and forth, and kids on bikes the town was full of activity - a Saturday holiday. About 25 brave souls selected the walk along the coast to the Neolithic burial site of Bant's Carn and an Iron Age village site at Halangy Down. On our way we passed the place where a fleet of gigs had recently taken part in their traditional May races; gigs are racing rowboats, which used to vie for rights to off-load and re-supply visiting ships. Now races round the island are more about rivalries, local pride and competition than commerce. Eight rowers and a coxswain make up a team. We then passed through what seemed to be an unlikely and dangerous (for us) golf course as we walked between a tee and a green! Once again, we were blessed with superb views and spectacular flora as we went.

Bant's Carn is the most famous of the 80 Scillonian entrance graves, an impressive dry stone

tomb with four enormous stone slabs forming the roof over a chamber excavated in 1900 by George Bonsor. The excavation produced four piles of cremated bone at the end of the chamber, some Bronze Age pottery in the entrance and part of a round-based Neolithic bowl. We paused to have lunch atop the tomb with a spectacular view of the bays below, the Polar Star red and white against the aquamarine sea and the ruins of Halangy



spread out downslope from us. Excavation of most of the stone house foundations in Halangy village in the 1950s revealed interesting interior features such as drains, hearths, benches, partitions and cupboards. When it was occupied it would have been on the edge of a marsh, not the edge of the shallow sea as now. We wondered what life was like for these early farmers, raising cattle, sheep and pigs and growing the crops necessary for feed and flour, creating the stone field walls still visible today, combing the shores for limpets, cockles and mussels, and venturing out to sea in frail little craft for the day's catch of fish. Did they take the time, as we did, to bask in the sunshine, listen to the calls of wrens, larks and blackbirds, and admire the view? Surely, they did.

Meanwhile the birding party had a pleasant walk around the battery, seeing cuckoos, stonechats, swallows, martins, wagtails, wrens, finches, many other songbirds, shorebirds and gulls. In Hugh Town many took the opportunity to potter through the streets, visit Star Castle, look at the shops, take short walks on the coastal paths, drink tea, slurp ice cream or just sit on the sand or the harbour walls gazing at the fishing boats and the ferries coming and going from Penzance and the out islands.

At 1530 after a careful count, we were back aboard the tender en route to the Polar Star to set sail for Ireland. We passed by the Bishop Rock Lighthouse, built in 1850, the first landmark spotted by sailors coming across the Atlantic, and bade farewell to our St Mary's pilot. Not one to let us rest, Hannah then scheduled the recap and briefing on tomorrow's activities, and after dinner, Jane gave a lecture on *Celts and Christianity*, setting the scene for our visit to Skellig Michael tomorrow and the many other archaeological and historic sites we plan to visit over the

next week, posing the question - who were the Celts? It would be a question to be asked and answered throughout the voyage. Jane touched on the early Christian monastic movement that founded religious retreats like the one we were about to see on Skellig Michael, and spoke about the relationship of Celtic beliefs to the Christian faith, which absorbed so many of its symbols. She continued with a look at Ireland's great saints Columcille/Columba, Patrick, Brigit and Brendan, as well as King Arthur. There is some conjecture that the Scillies was once Lyonesse - part of the kingdom of King Arthur. She finished with a quick look at some Celtic symbology like the Celtic cross and the ornate and beautiful Book of Kells, and suggested that the often wealthy and undefended monasteries were easy prey to roving squads of Vikings that travelled along the coastline first raiding and then settling the Irish coast. With the sea remaining glassy calm, we headed to bed after this, our wonderful second day.

Sunday 10th May Skellig Islands and the Dingle Peninsula, Ireland

"Out of Ireland have we come/ Great hatred, little room, Maimed us from the start/

I carry from my mother's womb" A Fanatic Heart - W B Yeats

Off Mizzen Head, Ireland 51°12'N 009°22.5'W, Prolonged ocean swell 2.5 m, Overcast, Wind S 15 knots, Temperature 10°C, Barometer 1025 millibars

We woke to a beautiful morning: the seas relatively calm but with a long swell producing a pitch, visibility good under overcast skies, and the air warmish at 10°. We passed Cape Clear and the Fastnet Rock Lighthouse off to starboard as we rounded the southwest corner of Ireland and made our way towards the Skelligs. After breakfast, Mary gave a lecture on the *Vikings in the North Atlantic*, a very informative look at the Scandinavian origins of the Vikings, their colonization of the Scottish northern and western isles and Ireland and their lasting legacy in language, culture and archaeological remains. She carefully explained the difference between the "Viking" pirates and the "Norse" traders and settlers, comparing the former with reckless and obnoxious teenagers some of us may have known! Excellent questions on the effects of disease,



slavery and the Viking demise in North America opened additional avenues for thought. As we sailed, the cloud cover began to disperse and gannets flew by the ship in increasing numbers as well as puffins, northern fulmars, black backed gulls, shearwaters, herring gulls, the occasional guillemot and razorbill, a lone whimbrel on his way back to land and a great northern diver (loon).

The approach to the Skelligs from the south provided a perfect view of the monastery described last night by Jane.

As we closed with the island, the huts stood out in clear relief against the sky and Jane provided a description of the huts and the three successive sets of steps up from the different landings, allowing access to the island in different wind and sea states. Skellig Michael is named after the archangel, St. Michael, the patron saint of high places: for the Irish monks, the craggy peaks of Skellig Michael elevated them towards heaven. It is so difficult to imagine how these monks came here, how they lived on such an inhospitable piece of rock, cut stone stairs and built stone huts and places of worship on artificial terraces. How did they survive? All these questions reverberate as you gaze upward at the still standing testimony of their tenacity.



The monastery is spread over a series of narrow terraces near the eastern summit of the island, and consists of six beehive shaped corbelled stone huts, two oratories, a cemetery, several crosses, cisterns for collecting and holding water and, wherever space allowed, tiny garden plots. We recalled Jane's description of why and how these monks lived and marvelled at their dedication to their God, watching over their island eyrie. The Captain then swung the ship towards Little Skellig, where we encountered thousands of gannets wheeling

above us, carrying seaweed back to replenish their nests or setting off out to sea to fish. The 22,000 breeding pairs occupy just about every ledge and terrace from the peak of the island to near the water; one wonders why they have not begun to settle Skellig Michael – most likely because of our human presence. Several hundred razorbills share the rock, occupying little overhangs below the gannet roosts. We also saw quite a number of puffins, some grey seals, fulmars and the ever-present black backed gull looking for an easy meal.

Regretfully leaving the Skelligs to the care of several small boats awaiting the return of their tourists ashore, we turned eastward to the mouth of Dingle Bay for a bus tour of the Dingle Peninsula, County Kerry. We were well entertained by our guides, who took us to Slea Head, the Blasket Islands Interpretation Centre and the Gallarus Oratory as well as a bonus visit to the beautiful Kilmalkedar church and graveyard. At Slea Head we had superb views over to the Blasket Islands and Dunmore Head, which the Irish oddly claim to be the most westerly point on mainland Europe. We passed many abandoned fields and croft houses dating to the horrific period of the Potato Famine, which caused millions of Irish people to die or emigrate, emptying entire villages. The Blasket Islands were finally abandoned in 1953 when the population became too low to sustain essential services; a new interpretation centre is dedicated to the people of the islands, presenting their story in photographs, artworks, artifacts, dioramas and replicas. However, one was left wondering how much money was spent on the design and construction of the interpretation centre that might better have been spent finding a way to maintain the islanders' independence.

Gallarus Oratory is one of the finest examples of early Christian churches in Ireland, built some time around the 9th century. The boat shaped sidewalls curving in towards the peak and the vertical end walls seem to represent a transition between the corbelled beehive huts of Skellig Michael and the later solid vertical and horizontal lines of the traditional Norman-inspired churches. A small graveyard outside contained a few vertical slabs marking the graves of adherents to the church. As we left, at Ian's suggestion, we stopped for a quick visit to the nearby Kilmalkedar graveyard to see some interesting grave markers and a 12th century church ruin. Our guides interpreted the significance and meaning of an Ogham stone and two stones with Celtic, possibly pre-Christian,



motifs. During our drive around Kerry we passed a Norman castle and several ring and promontory forts, tantalizing additional reminders of the wealth and depth of the 7000 year long cultural heritage in this area. Back in town, some of us took a few minutes to sample Ireland's favourite tipples in a pub near the pier, while others headed back to catch some of the antics of Dingle's dolphin Fungi in the outer harbour. This performance is clearly quite an economic boon to Dingle, as several local boats make repeated runs out to visit the dolphins, each boat loaded down with tourists – this evening, however, we had Fungi all to ourselves. After dinner, we set sail into a beautiful sunset through the narrow channel between the Blasket Islands and Dunmore Head on our way north to the Aran Islands and more excitement tomorrow. To cap the perfect day, we presented a preview of tomorrow's encounters through the old black and white movie *Man of Aran*.

Monday 11th May Cliffs of Mohar, the Aran Islands and Inishbofin, Ireland

"May the saddest day of the future be no worse than the happiest day of the past!"

Traditional Irish Toast

Approaching Inishmore, Aran Islands, 53° 04'N, 009° 28.7'W, Wind NNE 25 knots and rising, Seas 3 m and breaking, 10°C, broken cloud, 1025

Hannah woke us early this morning with the announcement that we were approaching the



dramatic Cliffs of Mohar, and many of us were up and about in time to see the two sets of ruins on the cliff top - probably situated as lookouts from which to spot marauding raiders and send word to nearby Galway Town - as we steamed by before breakfast. At their highest the cliffs tower more than 200 m above the sea and are prone to a great deal of erosion. The dull skies

allowed us perfect views of the cliff features, stacks and sea caves. Guillemots flew by in streams to their nesting ledges on the sea stacks and cliff sides, kittiwakes could be seen in large numbers in the crevices and Mick pointed out a few puffins. Under improving skies and partial sunshine but in high seas driven from the north northeast, the scout boat made a bumpy ride into Kilronan on Inishmore, the largest of the Aran Islands. As we watched Ian bouncing his way back to the ship the Captain called to say that the forecast was for even stronger winds, so Hannah aborted the landing and Ian returned to pick us up.

While alternative plans were being made for the afternoon, Callum presented a brief outline of the prehistory of the Aran Islands, focusing on *Dun Aengus*, which we sailed by as he finished talking. Ian added some information about the musical and artistic traditions, which remain strong in these islands. As we could see from the ship, Dun Aengus is an impressive fort perched on the edge of a 90 m high sheer cliff, first built in the late Bronze Age and occupied through the Iron Age and Early Medieval age. The fort is an amazing dry stone semicircular construction of four concentric enclosures, with three of the four walls ending abruptly at the cliff rim. The earliest Bronze Age occupants of the cliff top lived in small stone houses and may have built one or perhaps two of the stone walls to shelter their livestock and crops. Later, in the Celtic Iron Age and Medieval period, the immense inner walls were built, perhaps for defence but also as a statement of power and prestige, and a defensive array of *cheveaux de frises* was set in place. The fields that we could see from the ship have been laboriously constructed by clearing much of the loose limestone off the land, then transporting seaweed and sand from the shore to mix with animal (and domestic?) manure; the small pockets of earth trapped in the fractured bedrock began to form a thin layer of soil on top of the underlying rock. Here the

islanders were able to start producing potatoes to eke out the staple salt fish, and rye for the grain to grind into flour and as winter fodder for the animals. Inishmore has an astonishing 7 or so pubs for a population of 800 people, only one grocery store, three primary schools and five churches. Priorities must be considered.

After lunch, Hannah arranged for an afternoon landing at Inishbofin, a small island in the county of Galway, looking eastward to the Connemara Mountains. Inishbofin means Island of the White Cow, derived from a story about two fishermen who met an old woman on the island driving a white cow and beating it with a stick, at which she was turned to stone. The fishermen touched her and were also in turn turned to stone. The early history of the island includes the establishment of a monastery around 530 A.D. by St. Rioch and another in the seventh century by St. Colman, who arrived from Iona after a quarrel with Rome about the dating of Easter. No traces are known to remain of these buildings, but ruins of a 13th century church stand on the site of one of the monasteries, near one of the two small lakes; another early church ruin with 15th century additions is said to be located at the northeast corner of the island, surrounded by an irregular monastic wall, so possibly also one of the monastery sites. The Vikings are known to have raided the island in 922. The island was later taken over by the O'Flahertys and Grace O'Malley is reputed to have fortified the island to protect her pirate fleet. The ruins of a 16th century castle remain beside the harbour, taken and strengthened in the 17th century by Cromwell, who used this and other western islands as concentration camps for clerics.

Mick, Meagan and Stefan led the keen hikers off to the northwest end of the island, hoping to see a reputed seal colony and a variety of birds. The seals did not show up as billed, but the birds were varied and plentiful, including the elusive corncrake, the weather was superb and the scenery magnificent. Meanwhile, Jane, Callum and Mary led a shorter walk eastward to explore the site of St. Colman's monastery and the 13th century church ruins still standing in the graveyard. The church is beautiful, with an arched window, an old stone font and lovely stonework; outside we found several very early Christian crosses, small slabs of stone with attenuated arms, in amongst old stone slab graves with a traditional sprinkling of beach cobbles and very recently inscribed stones indicating the cemetery's continuing use. From here we walked around a wide sandy beach and back over the hill to the harbour. Boat tours back to the ship took in Cromwell's Castle, nesting geese and gulls and a bright little oystercatcher.

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Due to the late return just before dinner, recap was cancelled. Hannah presented her briefing on our visit to Killybegs tomorrow and was followed by a concert by Ian, featuring his newly penned song about *The Gannet* and the perennial favourites *The Angel's Share* and *The Bluebells of Gigha*. A guest performance of the *The Mountains of Mourne* by Mick provided us with another facet of this multi-talented man. We sailed on northward through the sunset, with the mountains of Ireland and occasional glimpses of white painted houses to starboard.

Yesterday... I saw some ruins...I thought again about them, and about the dead whom I had never known and on whom my feet trampled. I love above all the sight of vegetation resting upon old ruins; this

embrace of nature, coming swiftly to bury the work of man the moment his hand is no longer there to defend it, fills me with deep and ample joy. **Gustave Flaubert, 1846, in The Burren and the Aran Islands by Carleton Jones, 2006**

Tuesday 12th May Killybegs, County Donegal, Ireland

"Work is the curse of the drinking class" - Oscar Wilde

Donegal Bay, tied up at Killybegs, 54°35'N 008°30'W, ENE 8 knots, 11°C, clear, calm seas, 1026

A tug was called in to help us berth at Killybegs dock, which was piled with sections of brightly coloured casings, possibly for windmills which, when the programme is finished, will provide an admirable 20% of electricity requirements in Ireland, or for the new offshore oil and gas exploration programme now underway. By 0830 we were on the bus leaving the wharf en route to the reconstruction of a historic village at Glen Columbcille. As we passed the dozens of trawlers and draggers tied up at the wharf, our guide said the fleet used to be at sea seven months of the year but quota restrictions now limit their sea time to less than one month. Currently, only the "white fleet" is out, small boats that catch haddock and whiting. We left the town and once again encountered evidence of the new Ireland amidst road construction, laying of new watermains and housing starts.

We continued our journey into the dramatically beautiful countryside of Donegal - past cut peat, the clamps stacked by the bog, yellow iris by the streams and fields, sheep dotting the green landscape and roadside – the "long acre". At various points we could see crescent sand beaches far below, a few Iron Age hill forts and 19th century watch towers, reforestation plots containing Sitka spruce, which grow to maturity in only 25 years, and the highest sea cliffs in Europe, Sliebh Liegh, at 595 m. Eventually we came to Glen Columbcille and began our tour of the past, followed by a welcome cup of tea and a deliciously fresh scone and jam. We toured three reconstructed homes dating from 1700, 1850 and 1900 as well as an early 20th century school and a building dedicated to the work of Father James McDyer, who was a key figure in the reconstruction site and the recent village life of Glen Columbcille. All the houses had thatched roofs and were appointed with spartan furnishings, reflecting the times in which they were built. In each dwelling, including the school, we were struck by the presence of faith in their lives: crosses and Virgin Marys adorned every room. After a quick walk on the beach at Glen Columbcille, we headed back to town via a tweed shop, where several of us were happy to contribute to the local economy with our purchases. While the bus guide continued to talk, for many of us our attention was out the window as we passed by beautiful valleys, tannin coloured streams and old villages reflecting an older Ireland. As much as we may appreciate the new Ireland, and the blessed peace that has come at last to the republic and Ulster, we selfishly offered up the hope that the quietude and pastoral nature of Ireland is not all swept away by progress.



After lunch aboard the ship emptied for a tour around Killybegs. The tourist centre arranged a music session at the Harbour Bar; there were also visits to a carpet factory and the Maritime & Heritage Centre. Many attended the pub session, where a local banjo player and guitarist were joined by our Ian. A grand time was had, several gallons of Guinness and Smithwicks were drunk and there was a good deal of *craic* with the musicians and regulars at the bar. Others among us took advantage of the beautiful day to hike outside the town centre

and enjoy the gradually warming temperature (which we were told had plummeted to 4°C last week). On our return to the ship, Hannah briefed us on tomorrow's plans. During recap, Jane picked up on Hannah's mention of superstitions by suggesting that many such superstitions and Christian observances – and indeed Christian sites – have their origins in the Celtic and earlier

periods; Jane was followed by Mick who kindly shared with us some of the comical postcards he likes to pick up in his travels around the world. The Captain allowed the ship to dawdle its way out of Killybegs so that after dinner we were able to view from below the mighty cliffs of Sliebh Liegh and then joined Stefan in the observation lounge for his lecture *Fins, Flippers and Flukes*, a description of the lives of the whales and dolphins that we hope to encounter more of during the next few days.

We have lost something when we cease to interact; when we cease to come together in groups to enrich each other's lives; to rely upon our wit and our spirit; to inspire and support each other - Father James McDyer, died 1987

Wednesday 13th May Dunluce Castle, Giant's Causeway, Bushmills and Rathlin Island, Ulster

Off Portrush, 55°12.5'N 006°40'W, E 17-21 knots, partly cloudy, 2 m swells, 1023, 14°C

After breakfast, we rode smoothly downwind into the sheltered harbour at Portrush where our buses awaited us. The town of Portrush and the adjoining coastline are the premiere ocean playground in Ulster, with keen surfers, sailors, divers and sandcastle architects young and old flocking to the area in summer. Today the town reverberated with the throaty roar of dozens of motorcycles arriving for a big weekend road race. In the past, however, because of its strategic location south of the Scottish isles, many forts and castles were built to protect the seaways, coast and hinterland.

We visited one such castle, 13th century Dunluce, described as a bastion of Norman power until the advent of guns and gunpowder. The castle stands on the cliff edge, flushing), and a drawbridge to the main house, all surrounded on the landward side by a high wall. From here we drove through the town of Bushmills, set on the Bushmill River, still a fine salmon stream and former home to several mills, and on to the most



significant tourist site on this coast – The Giant's Causeway. More than half a million people visit this magnificent geological phenomenon, where lava from volcanic eruptions about 60,000,000 years ago into a river valley gradually cooled and cracked to produce hexagonal columns of basalt. About 15,000 years ago the basalt layer was exposed by erosion, producing the columnar "pavement" we are able to walk on today. Before the arrival of scientists and their theories, native people who had lived in the area since 9,000 years ago developed their own explanations for the causeway, culminating in the popular story about Giant Finn MacCool who did battle with a rival in Scotland. The Scot, through sneaky subterfuge by MacCool's wife, fled home in fear, ripping up the rest of the causeway behind him, leaving only the twin exposures at the Giant's Causeway and Staffa for us to see today. Many of us took pleasure in the abundant vegetation along the shore, with bright splashes of primroses, orchids,

sea pinks or thrift, heather, daisies and gorse. Our next destination was the Bushmills Distillery where several Irish Whiskeys are made. Many of us took the tour of the plant and sampled a wee dram, while others preferred to wander through the town or took another bus on a short tour of the countryside. Bushmills has had a licence to produce whiskey since 1608, but the

length of this tradition has no doubt been eclipsed by many older families who quietly produce their own supplies. Our return to the *Polar Star* was a bit of a trial until the Captain turned the ship to provide a lee at the gangway. After a very late lunch, the Elderhostellers and penny whistlers met to conduct their business while the rest of us enjoyed a well-earned nap.

In late afternoon we entered the shelter of the inverted L-shaped Rathlin Island. Groups split up to walk with Mary in search of archaeological and historic sites and seals, and by minibus with Hannah, Stefan, Megan and Ian to visit the bird cliff and observatory on the west end of the island. Callum and Jane, after a quick jaunt to see the seals, ran boat shuttles back to the ship.



Mary's group was well entertained with her descriptions of island life present and past, and visited a Bronze Age cist, the museum and the kelp store before spending time with the 30-40 seals basking in the shallows. The birds were neatly stratified on the western cliffs, with puffins, guillemots, razorbills and gulls occupying different levels. The island is extremely rich in historic and archaeological resources, including a cave where Robert the Bruce is reputed to have taken refuge and

built up his courage to return to Scotland and rout the English army at Bannockburn after watching the determination of a spider in his cave, a Viking burial mound, a large hill fort and the porcellenite quarry which supplied stone for axes, adzes, knives and hammers.

After dinner, Hannah gave a briefing on our plans for Gigha and Islay tomorrow, Mary presented an interesting account of archaeological excavations of prehistoric promontory and stack forts and Ian pleaded with us to enjoy the family atmosphere of tiny Ardbeg distillery (as opposed to the industrial feel of Bushmills). Callum wrapped up the day's formal activities with a story of his *Life as a crofter* during his misspent youth on the Hebridean Isle of Tiree. He began his talk with a look at the beginning of farming on the Orkneys at Skara Brae and then described the way of life of the small farmer on these rugged and isolated western isles that we are visiting during this week.

Thursday 14th May Gigha and Islay, Inner Hebrides, Scotland

Off Ardminish, Gigha, 55°40.4'N 005°42.8'W, E 16 knots, overcast, 2 m swells, 1001, 11°C

We awoke this morning to overcast skies and moderate winds but a glimpse of the sun's rays through the clouds gave us hope that the day would clear. We anchored off the quiet village of Ardminish, the main cluster of dwellings on the Isle of Gigha, between the long peninsula of Kintyre and Islay. The landing was a bit squally but we managed to get everyone ashore on the long wooden jetty and Jane led off a walk down the main road to Achamore Gardens while Mary took a group up to Kilchattan (St. Catan's Chapel). Here we found the ruins of an attractive red and yellow sandstone church built in the 13th century, surrounded by contemporary grave stones and carved grave slabs. St. Catan was a 6th century Irish missionary who settled in Bute in the Clyde estuary and travelled widely about the west coast. The ogham stone above the church ruins is the only example of its kind in the west of Scotland; a few horizontal and vertical lines carved into the four sided slab are still visible. Achamore House was built in 1865 by Captain William Scarlett, who bought Gigha for £49,000. In later years the island changed hands for several million pounds but was recently bought by the islanders themselves, with a bit of help from the national lottery fund, and the new owners – numbering about 100, now have enviable stability and security of tenure. We enjoyed a walk through the beautiful gardens, ablaze with blossoms from azalea, rhododendron and many other plants. This perked our appetite for a cup

of tea and cake at the House before we straggled back up the bluebell lined lane to the main jetty where we boarded the zodiacs for a choppy ride back to the ship for lunch.

In mid-afternoon we arrived at the Isle of Islay, home to eight thriving distilleries, about 3000 people, and in the winter 20,000 barnacle geese, 6000 Greenland white-fronted geese and more than 180 other recorded species of birds. The island's peat deposits and rich fields of barley growing in the fertile soil on top of sandstone and gneiss bedrock, the high sun rate and the abundant peaty water all contribute to the success of the distilleries. We visited only one of the

eight, Ardbeg, on the island's southeast corner, though we drove tantalizingly close to giants Laphroaig and Lagavullin en route. The captain placed the ship about a mile from Ardbeg in the lee of the isle of Texa, behind which we had a sheltered run into Ardbeg. Passengers were split into groups to tour the works of the distillery: the maltings, mashings and stills, and finally the moment many were waiting for - the tastings! The Islay malts are not to everyone's taste, being quite peaty and smoky and strong, but those who like it, like it a lot. A boatload



of other passengers declined the invitation to tour this second distillery and instead took a cruise past 12th century Dunbeag castle opposite Lagavullin and on into the Ardmore Islands where we had about 20 curious seals bobbing in a shallow bay all around the boat, a few cormorants, oystercatchers, black guillemots and eiders enjoying the peace surrounding this ancient capital of the western isles. Back on the ship, we had an hour "off" before Happy Hour, during which we sailed through the narrow Sound of Islay, followed by dinner, a briefing by Hannah and Recap, and a delightful presentation by Elderhostel group leader Geoff Morgan on the history and natural history of St. Kilda, where he has had the good fortune to work as a naturalist, and the recitation by Ian of a newly penned lament for Mick, who had damaged his big toe in an encounter between his zodiac and a lurking rock.

Mick Brown's Toe

The wind was blowing from the east the weather only fair

Mick Brown was steady at the helm Ardbeg over there.

Laphroaig and Lagavulin were past him off to port
When Mick eased the throttle back and turned north.
Mick knew the rocks and shoals he'd seen these isles before

He'd been at sea for forty years from Gerlache to the Mohr

He knew these rocks like sirens offering a malt
He's seen his roommate fall so hard and teased him for his faults

But why he wore those sandals few can understand
They don't belong in Scotland and never on a man!

So when Mick's prop found that rock inertia broke you know

Mick continued forward but not Mick's toe!

Mick's toe found a shackle and hit it with such force
His toe nail left its moorings and sailed right off – of course

Mick let go a whimper not so much from pain
The bosses mother was aboard he'd never sail again.

Mick put his best foot forward there was but only one
And hastened to the pier and Doctor Suzy's attention.

Now I have fallen on these rocks as some you well know
But there's now a rock that bears his name on Islay

- Mick Brown's Toe !

Ian Tamblyn, Islay, May 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 not the best as we approached St. Kilda, with the persistent east wind blowing at 30 knots directly into the mouth of Village Bay, our planned anchorage. The Captain declared that the currents were running too strongly for a safe anchorage so did a quick pass into the bay for a close up view of the rich built heritage and then did a masterful job of steering us around the back side of Hirta and Dun, and around Soay, Boreray, Stac Lee and Stac an Armin. As we sailed, Mary described the archaeology and life on Hirta to those of us who preferred to be inside,

under cover, while the rest braved the bridge wings for magnificent views.

From the ship, we could see the bright coloured jackets of some of the National Trust volunteers working on the restoration, research and archaeological investigations on Hirta; 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 souterrain 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. St. Kildans lived by crofting - using all the resources around them. In addition to agriculture, 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 and the cow at one end of the room. We could see large numbers of the scruffy native Soay sheep and their lambs on Hirta and Soay and some domestic Blackface sheep in impossible locations on the steep slopes of Boreray. These islands are home to the world’s largest – and growing - north Atlantic gannet population - 65,000 breeding pairs. Our circumnavigations provided marvellous views of 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. Against the wind when we were plunging through the seas out of the islands’ lee, the gannets arced through the air with grace, speed and purpose. After two circumnavigations of the stacks at very close range we bade farewell to the birds and a scene that will remain indelibly in our minds. After lunch, the Captain anchored in tiny Glen Bay

off Gleann Mor, another pre-Viking village site on the north side of Hirta so we could attempt a zodiac cruise. Unfortunately, the swells at the gangway and all around us were too high, too short in interval and too confused for a safe or enjoyable cruise, so instead we took advantage of the shelter and watched *Local Hero* and attended a lecture by Mick on *The Gannet*, our ever present companion on this voyage; the Elderhostellers also met with leader Geoff. Dinner – a spectacular buffet prepared on the open aft deck by Chef Paul and his staff - was perfectly

situated in this lovely bay. Ian concluded the evening with another concert in the Observation Lounge, featuring a couple of songs written right here in St. Kilda.

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.

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!

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

Sunday 16th May, Barra, Outer Hebrides

Castlebay, 56°56.6'N 0078°30'W, E 17 knots, seas 1 m, partly cloudy, 11°C, 1008

Early this morning we cut through the Sound of Mingulay between the island of the same name and Pabbay to the south and headed north up the long chain of the Outer Hebrides to drop anchor in Castlebay, Barra. As with most of the Western Isles, human occupation of Barra goes back at least five or six thousand years, beginning in the Neolithic period. More recently, it has been in the hands of the MacNeill family, the Chief of which is currently a law professor from Chicago, Ian MacNeill. We made our first landing at Kisimul Castle, the hereditary seat of the MacNeills, an impressive stone castle of three stories and rooms in the interior courtyard built on a small islet just offshore from the present town of Castlebay. Old movie aficionados might recognize the castle during shots of the harbour and MacBraynes steamers coming and going in *Whisky Galore*. The original castle was built on an earlier Bronze Age structure in the 11th century, was replaced in the fifteenth century and once again in 1937 when the 45th MacNeill chief restored it after the castle had lain abandoned since an eighteenth century fire. Many of us set off along the shore road to Dualchas, the Barra Heritage Centre, where we were able to see some of the early prehistoric artifacts collected on the island as well as a superb collection of old photographs of life on Barra, and completed our visit with a delicious cup of tea and Victoria sponge cake.



After lunch on board, we set off in the zodiacs again, splitting into three groups at the causeway between Barra and Vatersay. Mick and Callum led the long walkers up a valley on the south side of Beinn Tangabhal through a wealth of prehistoric archaeological features including the remains of a blackhouse and outbuildings, a Neolithic site from 6000 years ago called Allt Chrisal where communal cooking, pottery making, stone tool making and skin processing took place, two small circular stone huts from 2500 years

ago, a 2000 year old stone wheelhouse, and a four thousand year old burial cairn. From here we carried on up the hill to the 332 m high summit of the hill where our view of Castlebay and Watersay was intermittent at best due to the low cloud that enveloped us. Mick led us safely off in the right direction with his GPS and soon we were down below the cloud in familiar territory and headed back to the causeway. Meanwhile, the medium walkers set off with Mary, Stephan and Jane on a lovely walk through machair, fields full of sheep and sandy beaches to an Iron Age fort on Watersay, and returned to the ship long after the supposed long walkers! The indefatigable Elderhostellers were welcomed back on board by Geoff, who put on a reception for his charges and kindly also invited the Captain and Chief Engineer, Natasha and expedition staff. At Recap, Hannah briefed us on the plans for our exciting visits to Iona, Staffa and Tobermory tomorrow, Ian talked about Felix Mendelssohn's visit to Fingal's Cave as the beginnings of tourism on Staffa, and Mick gave us a very learned discourse on the bog. After another wonderful dinner by Bryan and his galley staff we joined Mary in the Observation Lounge for a talk on the *Archaeology of the Western Isles*. Mary covered the time period from Mesolithic to Iron Age, approximately 9000-1000 years ago in a series of images depicting the types of sites, elevations and locations where people from these periods chose to live. The Mesolithic dates have come as something of a surprise to some archaeologists, but these first people exploring from the mainland of Scotland to islands at the edge of their visible world were following a longstanding hunter-gatherer tradition and would have delighted in the numbers and different species of wildlife available to them and may even, as Mary suggested, have brought a few red deer young to help start a population on the islands.

Monday Thursday 15th May Iona, Staffa and Tobermory, Mull

Off Staffa, 56°26.4'N, 006°21.2'W, partly cloudy, ESE 7 knots, 12°C, 2 m swells, 1011

Early this morning we pitched through steep waves driven across The Minch from the east by Force 6 (22-27 knots) easterly winds but 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 Room as we passed by the cave on our way to Iona after the landing. Some of us decided to enjoy the calm conditions 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. 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.

As we sailed towards the mouth of the Sound of Iona we were called to the office to joyfully pay our shipboard accounts and then anchored off the historic and beautiful Isle of Iona. After lunch, four boatloads were speeding across the calm water, heading for 1400 and 1500 tours of the Abbey. Half an hour later, 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 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 Augustinean convent or nunnery, whose pink granite walls still remain. The greatest part of the present abbey was built in the 16th century on the foundations of the Benedictine abbey.

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 top of a prominent 100 m high hill at the north end of the island to look for a signposted dun or fort that may not actually exist but from where on a clear day one can see the Hebrides from Skye to Tiree to Islay, making the effort worthwhile, 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.

At 1700 we were all back on board and sailed through the rest of the Treshnish Isles towards Tobermory on the northwest corner of the Isle of Mull. As we sailed, with the magnificent backdrop of the mountains of Mull to the east and the Hebrides to the west, we met in the Observation Lounge for the Captain's Farewell toast and a viewing of the trip photo CD put together by Megan, with contributions by staff. After our final dinner on board – a superb climax to a veritable feast of meals by Bryan and his staff, we anchored off the village of Tobermory and went ashore to stroll about the attractive waterfront and enjoy the hospitality of the Mishnish Hotel bar.

<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 Mulled 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>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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</p>
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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**

Early this morning we passed through the Sound of Lorne past mighty Duart Castle, the seat of the Clan MacLean, into the busy fishing and ferry port of Oban. After breakfast, we bid 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 Leszek Slawski, 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 1194 nautical miles on our voyage from Falmouth to Oban. You have been sailing with:

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

Grateful thanks from staff to Susie's husband, Gary Minell for ever-ready help and a smile on boats and on shore.