



# Wild Scotland



22 June – 02 July 2019 | Polar Pioneer







# About Us

Aurora Expeditions embodies the spirit of adventure, travelling to some of the most wild and remote places on our planet. With over 27 years' experience, our small group voyages allow for a truly intimate experience with nature.

Our expeditions push the boundaries with flexible and innovative itineraries, exciting wildlife experiences and fascinating lectures. You'll share your adventure with a group of like-minded souls in a relaxed, casual atmosphere while making the most of every opportunity for

adventure and discovery. Our highly experienced expedition team of naturalists, historians and destination specialists are passionate and knowledgeable – they are the secret to a fulfilling and successful voyage.

Whilst we are dedicated to providing a 'trip of a lifetime', we are also deeply committed to education and preservation of the environment. Our aim is to travel respectfully, creating lifelong ambassadors for the protection of our destinations.





DAY 1 | Saturday 22 June 2019

# Oban, Sound of Mull

<b>Position:</b>	18:00 hours	<b>Course:</b>	244.7°	<b>Wind Speed:</b>	1.5 knots	<b>Barometer:</b>	1017.3 hPa & steady
<b>Latitude:</b>	56°38'N	<b>Speed:</b>	9.6 knots	<b>Wind Direction:</b>	ENE	<b>Air Temp:</b>	14° C
<b>Longitude:</b>	6°13'W					<b>Sea Temp:</b>	13° C

*Explore. Dream. Discover.*

— Mark Twain

Charming Oban made a fitting introduction to our Wild Scotland voyage, its harbour active with ferries, fishing boats, ducks and seagulls. Thankfully, yesterday’s weather morphed from a short rain drizzle to a glorious blue-sky morning. At the Northern Lights Pier, we were greeted by the Aurora Expeditions team, who took our photographs and helped us navigate the decks to our cabins—our home-away from home for the next 11 days.

Together we total 47 passengers from Australia, UK, Canada, NZ and USA, along with 8 international Aurora Expeditions’ team, 2 Filipino Chefs and 22 crew from Russia and the Ukraine.

Once settled in, we made our way to the bar where Expedition Leader Howard introduced us to the team and spoke about the flexible style of our voyage. His safety briefing followed, then the sound of seven-short-one-long from the ship’s horn signalled us to don bulky orange lifejackets and gather at the muster station on Deck 4 behind the bar. The Polar Class life vessels, even without a full complement of Russian crew, proved quite cosy indeed.

As we cast off and pulled away from the wharf, the atmospheric afternoon continued with a mountainous vista of blues and greys and the sun still high in the sky. Many ascended to the higher reaches of the flying bridge, where we took in the sights of Oban harbour and surrounding coastline. While Captain Sasha and Second Captain Vladimir manoeuvred the ship north-west through the Sound of Mull.

Naturalist Roger was out and about with his binoculars, spying several species of birds, including herring gulls, guillemots, gannets, puffins and a mallard. With time on our side we were then called to the lecture room where Howard illustrated the ‘Zodiac three-step’ and plans for the first full day of our Scottish adventure.

The bar proved enticing with its selection of wines and local whiskies, a few of us toasting the beginning of our voyage with new shipmates. Equipped with a healthy appetite, we made our way down to the dining rooms to enjoy a delicious dinner, prepared by Head chef Al and Sous Chef Bert, and served by our lovely waitresses Uliana and Natalia. Soon after followed the gumboot swap, so now we all have a comfy pair of Wellies for the days of peat and heather ahead.

With one order of business left, Toby gathered our five paddlers in the lecture room for their fitting of kayak gear. Dry suit, booties, life jackets, the works! As the day neared an end we were captivated by the beauty of a reflecting sunset on the silky sea around us. Some even spotted a dolphin as we passed by the Ardnamurchan Lighthouse.

After the many hours of travel to reach this corner of the world, it’s time to kick back, breathe in the Scottish sea air, and enjoy the marvels of this grand and mystical land.











DAY 2 | Sunday 23 June 2019

# Iona, Staffa, Cairn na Burgh More

Position:	22:00 hours	Course:	0°	Wind Speed:	6 knots	Barometer:	1017.3 hPa & rising
Latitude:	56°35' N	Speed:	10 knots	Wind Direction:	E	Air Temp:	14° C
Longitude:	6°21' W					Sea Temp:	13° C

Iona, an island inhabited as early as 1000BC and perhaps a religious centre long before St Columba, is now home to 120 folk who share the history and sacred sites with international visitors each year. We touched down after a long Zodiac ride and a cruisy first paddle for the kayakers, (although not so cruisy on the return trip), Carol took us on an enthralling amble through the Abbey and nunnery, which were founded at the end of the 12th Century. Roger led a 5km roundtrip walk in search for the island's wild inhabitants.

A whopping 22 different species of birds were spotted, including a hooded crow, pied wagtail and even a corncrake! Well done Yvette! Back onboard, Al and Bert served up a tasty lunch, before our second landing. If we thought the morning delivered magnificent weather, the afternoon outdid itself. We were treated to breathtaking views of extraordinary geology. Perfectly-formed basalt columns rose 40 metres from the sea, the result of slow cooling that caused the lava to split into regular patterns of hexagonal and occasional pentagonal columns. In places the columns have been so contorted that the entire area resembled a magnificent sculpture garden.

The same volcanic processes created the Giant's Causeway in Ulster, Ireland. As we carefully manoeuvred our Zodiacs into the cave entrance, we felt an appreciation for the cathedral structure and the oceanic acoustics that would have inspired Mendelssohn's famous Hebrides Overture. Afterwards, we climbed up a steep staircase and ambled along to a sizable puffin colony where we were enchanted by these adorable and industrious birds.

We sat in peaceful silence, enjoying the warming sun as puffins flew out to sea or returned to their burrow-nests. We returned to Captains welcome drinks in the bar where we savoured Anne's punch and the chefs' delicious canapes. Captain Sasha wished us a successful and happy voyage, and we toasted him, his officers and crew.

During drinks, Howard announced plans for an after dinner excursion to land on the relatively untouched (in recent times) island of Cairn na Burgh More. An eager 23 geared up, ready to explore this unknown part of Western Isles. We clambered up a grassy gully to hear the creaking of another corncrake, witness puffins and black guillemots on the sea and in the air and to learn from Carol how a curtain wall was built within the cliff itself to protect a medieval church and 16th century military barracks.

What a first day in Wild Scotland!



# Puffin Fact File

<b>Atlantic puffin:</b>	Fratercula Arctica
<b>Non-breeding puffins:</b>	Winter out at sea
<b>Breeding pairs:</b>	Arrive at breeding grounds through April
<b>Breeding habitat:</b>	In burrows on cliff tops
<b>Eggs:</b>	Single white egg ~60 gms
<b>Chicks:</b>	Fledge in 38 – 44 days
<b>Life span:</b>	~25 years
<b>Flying speed:</b>	~80 kms/hr
<b>Flapping speed:</b>	300 – 400 beats per minute
<b>Feeding:</b>	Puffins dive into shoals of fish, usually alone They can carry a large number of fish in their serrated beak.
<b>Population:</b>	~5 million pairs worldwide





# Isle of Skye: Rubh’ an Dunain, Loch Coruisk

Position:	18:45 hours	Course:	At anchor (Loch Coruisk)	Wind Speed:	4 knots	Barometer:	1018.6 hPa & rising
Latitude:	57°10’N			Wind Direction:	NNE	Air Temp:	13° C
Longitude:	06°09’W					Sea Temp:	14° C

*To archeologists, the human past is owned by no-one. It represents the cultural heritage of everyone who has ever lived on Earth or will live on it in the future. Archaeology puts all human societies on an equal footing.*  
— Brian Fagan (1996), *Introduction to the Oxford Companion to Archaeology*

Rubh’ an Dunain, our morning landing, is on the south-western corner of the Isle of Skye. The sun sparkled and the wind ruffled the sea surface as we Zodiaced shore-wards to a landscape of rock and grassy slopes dotted with sheep. We landed beside a Viking canal.

Once settled in, Carol led us on a wonderful archaeological tour that bounced through the ages. First, the Vikings. One thousand years ago they modified a natural creek into a tidal port where long boats could come ashore at high tide. Once in place a dam was built below their long boats which allowed the creek to rise and their boats could be floated into a small Loch for winter storage. Here the Vikings could rest and plan the sorties of the following summer.

Next we climbed a coastal knoll that had sweeping views of the surrounding waters. Here, Iron Age inhabitants had a lookout with protective stone wall. We headed around the Loch visiting a ‘black house’, a stone dwelling resided in by members of the McAskill clan more than a century ago, then on to a pre-historic, chambered tomb.

A much-deserved lunch was consumed with gusto, while *Polar Pioneer* made her way a small distance around the Isle of Soay and back into the coast of Skye. After lunch, we sped ashore past mildly interested harbour seals to the base of the towering Black Cullins, an impressive mountain range.

Ashore, many exchanged gum boots for walking shoes (many did not) and we set out for a spot of ‘tramping’. Over a hill and around the corner, the spectacular Loch Coruisk opened before us. Straight, 3 km long and deep. Despite the boggy track and meandering, often criss-crossing paths, we made our way as far as we needed and enjoyed the wonderful scenery – a healthy 13 even completed a full circuit of the Loch.

Meanwhile, our eager kayakers put in a huge effort here and ported their kayaks up the creek and into Loch Coruisk. They gaily paddled its length, having a spot of encouragement from kind Toby before the return, down-stream portage and paddle back to the ship. In the evening we celebrated our wonderful day on Skye.











DAY 4 | Tuesday 25 June 2019

## St. Kilda: Boreray & Stacs, Hirtha

<b>Position:</b>	18:55 hours	<b>Course:</b>	358.9°	<b>Wind Speed:</b>	5.5 knots	<b>Barometer:</b>	1029.2 hPa & rising
<b>Latitude:</b>	57°47’N	<b>Speed:</b>	At anchor (Hirtha)	<b>Wind Direction:</b>	NW	<b>Air Temp:</b>	13° C
<b>Longitude:</b>	08°35’W					<b>Sea Temp:</b>	13° C

*When the winter came...you think you are going to have a rest, but it was as hard in the winter as it was in the summer. You were out through the day looking after your sheep and cattle, then when it come night you were sitting there in the house and you had a pair of cards to comb up the wool and then spinning it and weaving it and so forth. It was maybe two or three o'clock in the morning before you would get to your bed. Then you were up again in the morning, away back to work again. There was nothing, just work, work all the time.*  
— St Kilda, Lachlan Macdonald, of life on St Kilda during early 1900s.

Suddenly the morning air was filled with seabirds – majestic northern gannets shaped like torpedoes as they fold their wings and dive into the Atlantic waters with an explosive splash after a fish. They come here to the sea stacs of St Kilda far to the west of the Outer Hebrides to breed in vast numbers on ledges poised high above the waves. Amongst these large gorgeous white birds with black wing tips were smaller northern fulmars gliding by, groups of common guillemots, and the occasional great skua looking for the next meal.

The men of St Kilda used to visit these stacs annually to collect the birds’ eggs and their fat oily chicks before they fledged, which were a valuable resource for the people of the island. The stacs were dotted with small stone structures they used for this purpose, as well as bothies where the hunters would live for weeks at a time. We marvelled at their skill and courage as we imagined them leaping from their small boat onto the sheer rock.

After two circumnavigations by ship of Boreray, Stac an Armin and Stac Lee, we turned towards the main island of Hirta. It was too turbulent in Village Bay to drop Zodiacs, but we found shelter on the more dramatic lee side. St Kilda warden Sue came on board to give us a briefing, and then we all jumped into Zodiacs to explore the cliffs and caves of the back, seldom-seen side of St Kilda. Watched warily by common seals and grey seals, we entered a magical world of emerald green waters and hidden cathedral-like caverns, with secret spots where ranks of kittiwakes nested. Soon it was time to find a way through to Village Bay for our afternoon’s explorations. Led by Howard, our flotilla of Zodiacs bravely chicaned their way through ‘the Gap’, a narrow rocky channel between Hirta and Dun, passable only at high tide.

Then what a view came into sight. The sweeping curve of the bay rising up in dappled shades of green to the clifftops that plunge straight down to the ocean, dotted everywhere by cleits, the unique drystone huts that the St Kildans used for storage. Everywhere were the diminutive dark brown Soay sheep with their tiny lambs, living relics of more ancient times. Walking around the village, with its church and manse, the factor’s house and the iconic ‘street’ fronted by stone-built cottages interspersed with older blackhouses, evoked powerful impressions of an extraordinary way of life which came to an end when the community left the island in 1930. Today St Kilda is a nature reserve owned by the National Trust for Scotland, and a World Heritage site. .







# Isle of Lewis: Callanish Stones, Bostadh House, Pabay Mor

<b>Position:</b>	18:30 hours	<b>Course:</b>	44.1°	<b>Wind Speed:</b>	12 knots	<b>Barometer:</b>	1031.9 hPa & steady
<b>Latitude:</b>	58°13’N	<b>Speed:</b>	At anchor	<b>Wind Direction:</b>	NW	<b>Air Temp:</b>	14° C
<b>Longitude:</b>	06°.54’’W					<b>Sea Temp:</b>	13° C

The Classical historian, Diodorus Siculus, may have been describing Callanish when he wrote: *This island...is situated North and is inhabited by the Hyperboreans... And there is also on the island both a magnificent sacred precinct of Apollo and a notable temple which is adorned with many votive offerings and spherical in shape.... They say that the Moon, as viewed from this island, appears to be but a little distance from the Earth and to have upon it prominences like those of the Earth, which are visible to the eye. The account is also given that the God visits the island every nineteen years, the period in which the return of the stars to the same place in the heavens is accomplished.*

A grey day beneath glowering skies was livened significantly as a jellybean cornucopia of kayakers set off on a 22 km odyssey in the paddle strokes, but hopefully not the spirit, of marauding Vikings. The island of Lewis - Gaelic marshy or Norse clan, has a bedrock of pink or grey gneiss overlaid with clay supporting a 4000 year-old, peat moorland which has gently cocooned 5000-year-old standing stones.

Carol elegantly embroidered a Calanais story, from a time of warmer climes and lower sea levels, when primitive barley was cropped. With power and prestige, ceremony and celebration, this place was known even to ancient Greeks. At 58 degrees North, and occurring only every 18.6 years, is solstice, when the moon skims low along the horizon to the south of Calanais to reappear in all its glory. Thus the theory that this site, older than the Pyramids and Stonehenge, is lunar. To our modern eyes, the hilltop takes the shape of a woman’s face – did Neolithic eyes imbue this with significance?

Later black houses and kilns, crofts and the spiritual attributions of modern groups, illustrate the continuous significance of this place. Sky, sea and stones still allowed us to experience the majesty of our own Aurora procession to the central cairn.

After a fish and chip lunch, the afternoon delight was the sheltered white sand bay of Camas Bosta on Great Bernera Island. Surging storms of 1992 laid bare a wonderful archaeological site dating from the late Iron Age, with the traces of the original site visible on the beach. This place was a paradise with ready seafood, running water and land for grazing and barley. In the reconstructed iron age house, Elizabeth, in her lovely lilting voice, created a vivid picture of the absolutely compact and practical nature of these semi subterranean houses with a sunken doorway, central peat fire, production of crockery and weaving. Later Norse mills on the stream and construction of black houses, similar in concept to the Bostadh House, demonstrate the continuing viability of a well-selected site. The hills of Harris on the horizon tempted short walks and Roger used the excuse of a trammelled anchor to discard his clothing and jump into the clear water!

Being expeditioners blessed with infinite energy (well, some of us at least), our after-dinner destination proved to be Pabay Mor – big island of the priest. Cleared for sheep in 1827, it is uninhabited, but the Crofting act of 1886 allows current grazing on this private island, owned by a vascular surgeon! A beautiful, rolling place to stroll then to experience the dramatics of the sea at the gloup – a natural stone arch which usually sucks and blows into an inland pool.











DAY 6 | Thursday 27 June 2019

## Sula Sgeir, North Rona

<b>Position:</b>	18:00 hours	<b>Course:</b>	73.5°	<b>Wind Speed:</b>	9 knots	<b>Barometer:</b>	1037.2 hPa & steady
<b>Latitude:</b>	59°08' N	<b>Speed:</b>	11.8 knots	<b>Wind Direction:</b>	NNW	<b>Air Temp:</b>	18° C
<b>Longitude:</b>	05°43' W					<b>Sea Temp:</b>	13° C

Sula Sgeir, or Gannet Rock, certainly delivered for our morning outing. After a delicious breakfast, served at a leisurely 8am, it was time to jump into Zodiacs and kayaks and explore this rarely-visited speck of rock in the North Atlantic. The Zodiacs set off first, followed shortly by the kayakers tailed by hundreds of circling gannets. High on the cliffs, silhouetted cairns stood out, a testament to the many centuries of visitation by men from Ness, on Lewis, who came to collect guga, or fledgling gannet chicks.

The tradition has continued up until today and the guga are a much-coveted delicacy for many in the Outer Hebrides and beyond. By the time the kayaks arrived, the Zodiac drivers were already busy exploring the extensive caves and practicing reversing and turning skills in tight spaces. Roger was the first to brave the natural arch and drove through to the exposed side of the island. With the all clear, we all followed suit, passing effortlessly back and forth through the cavernous arch.

Ducking and weaving amongst gulches and caves along the sheltered side of the Island, along with thousands of gannets, kittiwakes and guillemots with chicks, as well as grey seals both in the water and on the rocks. While the zodiacs stayed on the sheltered side of the Island the kayakers, too tempted by the lure of the open sea, made a dash for the outside.

The contrast between the sheltered and exposed side of the island was stark, but the kayaks, which are ideally suited to choppy conditions, handled the seas well and the paddlers quickly reached the shelter of the natural arch. After our morning outing, we quickly made our way to the lecture room to learn more about the seabirds of the North Atlantic from Roger.

No sooner had lunch finished, there was retail therapy in the bar, then the call came from Howard that the afternoon outing was a go! The Zodiac drivers found a creative site to land on the rocky shores of North Rona, a once inhabited Island named for Saint Ronan. The group made the slow but steady walk up and over the ridge, carefully avoiding the nesting skuas and fulmars to reach the main attraction - the remains that are thought to be the oldest church in Scotland surrounded by extensive cultivation lines. Meanwhile the kayakers slowly edged their way around the island, pausing in caves and gulches to quietly watch curious grey seals play in the water and swathes of birds (puffins, guillemots and shags) as they came and went from their nests and burrows.

Eventually the kayak group had edged so far around the Island it was decided that a circumnavigation must be completed. After rounding the last corner, the kayakers found a narrow ledge to pull their kayaks up out of the lazy swell. The sun broke through the clouds as the main group and kayak groups passed thus completing a brisk walk to the church before returning to the ship. What a fabulous day in the outer reaches of the Hebrides!



# Gannet Fact File

<b>Northern Gannet:</b>	<i>Sula bassana</i> (Largest north Atlantic seabird. Plunge dives from 10m above the surface)
<b>Total gannet population:</b>	263,000 breeding pairs with 60% in British waters
<b>Nesting colonies:</b>	Occupied March to August, scarce in Scottish waters between December and February
<b>Dispersal:</b>	South in winter
<b>Length:</b>	87–100cm
<b>Wingspan:</b>	165–180cm
<b>Eggs:</b>	One
<b>Incubation:</b>	45 days
<b>Fledging:</b>	90 days
<b>Life span:</b>	35 years
<b>Weight:</b>	3.5 kgs





# Shetland Islands: Jarlshof, Mousa Broch (BBQ)

Position:	18:30 hours	Course:	170°	Wind Speed:	12 knots	Barometer:	1021.3 hPa & falling
Latitude:	59°59 N	Speed:	At anchor (Mousa)	Wind Direction:	SSE	Air Temp:	14° C
Longitude:	1°11'W					Sea Temp:	13° C

***Scotland and weather:** There are two seasons in Scotland: June and winter.*  
— Billy Connolly

Overnight, we departed the Western Isles of the Hebrides and steamed north in the Atlantic to the Shetland Islands. Calm seas and a light breeze welcomed us to our anchorage just off the historical site of Jarlshof. Once occupied for thousands of years, it was abandoned in the 1600’s, consumed by dunes before being rediscovered in the 1890’s. Layer upon layer of habitation, including. Neolithic settlement, a bronze Age amithy, a broch and wheelhouses dating from the Iron Age and a sprawling farm established by Viking settlers.

Carol walked us through an archaeological timeline, making it easy to imagine the life of those who made this their home many moons ago. Roger set off with an enthusiastic group of 11 following the lovely coastal walk to the lighthouse on Sumburgh Head. Along the way they spotted nesting northern fulmars, puffins darting in and out of burrows, a hooded crow, and Arctic and common terns also making an appearance. Roger even spotted a little wren; the first he’s seen off St Kilda.

Our kayakers paddled their way to a small offshore island where they were greeted by an assembly of grey seals. After a hearty lunch we enjoyed rest time, downloading photos, napping, generally making the most of a well-earned break after our many days on the go.

The kayakers kick-started our afternoon landing on Mousa with yet another circumnavigating paddle around the island. Keeping watch from the bridge, Carol and Howard noticed that we weren’t the only ones interested in the famous broch. A group arrived by local boat so we waited until the coast was clear before going ashore. Upon landing, we toddled across a grassy ridge to meet Anne who offered us a taste of Talisker whisky as we entered the best-preserved broch in Scotland (and therefore the world).

We bobbed beneath the lintel as we stepped up into a space steeped in history, approximately – 2500 years of it. Tea light candles lit up the walls as Carol guided us through lives that might have been. We stood where proud chieftains’ families grew, great loves defended and now, where storm petrels nest. We then explored the stairs and chambers that honeycombed the schistose stone eventually making our way up to the 13-metre-high viewing platform for views out across Mousa Sound.

Back onboard, we discovered that Anne, Al, Bert and the stewardesses had been busy preparing a BBQ feast for us on the back deck. Anyone for Skua? We dressed in funny hats, listened to joyful classics and danced day into night (well, what passes as night this time of year at 60° North)!





# Tursachan Chalanais by Lesley Dimmock

Gull wheels above  
Silent stones  
Standing sentinel  
Over a landscape  
Unpeopled by time

Gull cries above  
Silent stones  
A melancholy echo  
Of long ago voices  
Silenced by time







DAY 8 | Saturday 29 June 2019

# Shetland Islands: Papa Stour, Foula

Position:	19:00 hours	Course:	92.5°	Wind Speed:	9 knots	Barometer:	1007.9 hPa & falling
Latitude:	60°07 N	Speed:	11 knots	Wind Direction:	SW	Air Temp:	16° C
Longitude:	2°00'W					Sea Temp:	16° C

*O great Island, Island of my love,  
Many a night of them I fancied  
The great ocean itself restless  
Agitated with love of you  
As you lay on the sea,  
Great beautiful bird of Scotland...*  
— Sorley MacLean, *The Island*

Rising to low wind, lifting fog and the sun slowly breaking through; what a perfect day for exploring the magical little island of Papa Stour. With deep soils formed from soft ash, rich in nutrients, local fishermen are known to locate the island in summer by the ‘pungent smell of the wild flowers’. Where the ash has met the erosive force of the North Sea it has broken down, forming world-class sea caves, perfect for Zodiac and kayak exploration.

After 90 minutes of nudging our way into nooks and crannies in the cliffs, we spotted breeding shags, cormorants and gulls. We landed in the southern inlet of Hamna Voe, taking in the beautiful rural views. Carol gave us the history of an old ‘leper’ colony, talking about the hardships of a bygone era, where suspected leprosy sufferers were shipped from west Mainland to Papa Stour. We climbed to the chambered cairn dated back to Neolithic times where de-fleshed bones of community members were buried. We entered the upper level of the charming whitewash church with a colourful stained-glass window commemorating the tragedy of six of the island’s sailors lost at sea.

Whilst on the walk, the kayak team, as part of their circumnavigation, explored the ‘Hole of Bordie’, a 400m long, pitch black sea tunnel’.

Boarding the Zodiacs at Housa Voe, we had a quick, but lovely diversion to visit more sea caves, with some of our expeditioners spotting shag chicks and an otter. What a memorable experience Papa Stour gave us all! After lunch, we arrived at Foula, the most westerly Shetland Island. From the moment we arrived and split into groups, we were enchanted by the lovely village and its warm, hospitable, tightknit community. Some ventured for long walks with Robert and Sheila and others, a shorter walk along the coast.

Local residents Sheila and Penny generously imparted their knowledge of the local plants, wildlife and history. They pointed out Kings Cups, locally known as marsh marigolds, northern marsh orchids, heath spotted orchids and so many more. We tasted lady’s smock, a light pink bloom locally known as peppermint flower, nibbled by children for its delicious taste.

Back at the school, we were greeted by a huge array of local crafts and were treated to a wonderful spread of cakes and biscuits, all produced by the local community. The lemon tarts were a real hit! The wind had dropped by the time we returned to the jetty populated by locals who’d arrived for a good chin-wag and afternoon beer.

Caves, history, warmth and the generosity of our island hosts were all outstanding. What more could we wish for!







DAY 9 | Sunday 30 June 2019

# Shetlands: Fair Isle; Orkneys: Papa Westray

<b>Position:</b>	21:15 hours	<b>Course:</b>	245°	<b>Wind Speed:</b>	20 knots	<b>Barometer:</b>	998.6 hPa & falling
<b>Latitude:</b>	59°23'N	<b>Speed:</b>	7 knots	<b>Wind Direction:</b>	WSW	<b>Air Temp:</b>	13° C
<b>Longitude:</b>	02°57'W					<b>Sea Temp:</b>	13° C

*Scotland is the country above all others that I have seen, in which a man of imagination may carve out his own pleasures; there are so many inhabited solitudes.*  
— from the 1803 journal of English poet Dorothy Wordsworth (1771–1855)

Tantalising glimpses of Fair Isle’s emerald cliffs peaked through the haar (mist) yesterday morning. Through swathes of campion and thrift, our long walkers headed out on an ornithological pilgrimage to the stunning sea cliffs at the Stevenson lighthouse at Nizz. The song of wheatears and larks was intensified in the foggy air, fulmars wheeled around the gorges and a stac was white with gannets. Carol popped over to the Iron Age, earthen hill fort where cheeky puffins thought about trying to steal sand eels, glinting in the wan sunshine, from their neighbours’ beaks. Looks like a good year for puffins - Mary, especially, could not tear herself away from the spectacle.

Kayakers paddling south through a seabird soup, skirted sheer cliffs at Sheep Rock, to be greeted at their beach by Bill, the one-eyed dog! With a ready taxi service, people were whizzing up and down the road past the corn mills on the stream, to the community hall and museum. Another wonderful spread of sweet delights and tea awaited amongst a display of Fair Isle knitwear. With a unique non-repeating pattern, and often traditional colours of the island, the hand knitted garments were greatly appreciated by the Scottish Antarctic expedition led by Speirs Bruce. In the sixties, Paul and Linda McCartney popularised them in the fashion world. At the museum, on show was the practicality of Shetland chairs, with their inbuilt windbreak and a handy drawer for your pipe and tobacco!

The island surrendered to the mist again as our newly purchased knitwear returned to the ship with us for lunch!

Carol’s post-prandial talk masterfully steered us through the ages of Scotland. From the Iron Age, Picts, Celtic warriors, monasteries, the Roman threat, the Viking influence and the declaration of Arbroath paving the way for a kingdom of Scots. Finally, the union of the Crowns in 1707, Victoria’s popularisation of tartan and Scotland’s devolution in 1999, brought us to modern Scotland.

Four hours travel to the North, but the shortest flight in the world from the neighbouring island, our next destination Papa Westray, a very important centre of Christianity in Orkney. Two stone buildings at Knap of Howar dated from 3700 BC, and the oldest domestic dwellings in Europe, were delivered up from the sand after a storm. Across the bay, Holm of Papay, possibly once with a tidal bridge, was the place of the dead. Encouraged by Carol, and clambering down a dark stairwell like mountain goats, we gained the sense of this 20-metre cairn. Crawling into the small cells we noted the “eyebrow” Neolithic art that decorated this final resting place of residents of the Knap of Howar. A fairly choppy, wet trip back to the ship reminded us of the constant power of the wind and sea in revealing, and hiding, relics of the past.

Today we visit Kirkwall, the Neolithic village of Skara Brae, learn the wartime secrets of Scarpa Flow and magnificent St Magnus cathedral.









# Orkney Islands: Kirkwall, Ring of Brodgar, Skara Brae, Scapa Flow

<b>Position:</b>	23:50 hours	<b>Course:</b>	153.9°	<b>Wind Speed:</b>	21 knots	<b>Barometer:</b>	1017.3 hPa & steady
<b>Latitude:</b>	58°10'N	<b>Speed:</b>	13.6 knots	<b>Wind Direction:</b>	WNW	<b>Air Temp:</b>	11° C
<b>Longitude:</b>	01°56'W					<b>Sea Temp:</b>	13° C

Wind and rain, rain and wind. This is what greeted us on the morning of our arrival at Kirkwall, capitol of the Orkneys. Skillfull planning by Howard had us disembarking during a dry spell, though, and we bustled onto buses for our next grand adventure – a unique one (again) for the trip – a bus tour.

Buses headed in different directions, to see the same sites but not in the same order. We settled in and were entertained by our experienced guides. First on my bus's agenda was a fly-by of Scapa Flow, the large, natural harbour to the south of Main Island. This was where, at the end of WW1, the entire German navy was interned, 74 ships!! On 21 June, a secret signal was passed between them and all were simultaneously sunk. This was to avoid having the ships divvied-up between the victors.

Most ships were salvaged for scrap metal but 7 remain as 'attractive' dive sites. Scapa Flow is also where the HMS Royal Oak was sunk by German U-boat, U47, in October 1939, early on in WW2, with the loss of 833 crew. So much drama for this place, it looked pleasant enough to us as we bused on.

We passed the house of Captain John Rae, who famously uncovered the mystery behind the lost Franklin Expedition, which disappeared trying to traverse the North-West Passage. Rae revealed that local Inuit had seen signs of cannibalism by the lost sailors. This was not liked by the British establishment. They were critical of Rae, the messenger. These days, though, Orkney is very proud of its great mariner.

Onward we journeyed. And far back in time. 5000 years in fact. We passed Maes Howe, a well-preserved stone-age tomb. We paused at the Standing stones of Stenness, imposing 5-6 m tall, and wafer-thin stones. How did they get them there?

Across a narrow neck of land we ventured on to pass the Ness of Brodgar, where archaeologists were gathering for their annual dig. This site was recently discovered and so has not been ravaged by previous 'explorations'. Much is being learned about stone-age life from the digs at this site. It seems this was a place of much ceremonial festivity. Then we stopped at the Ring of Brodgar. Here, up to 60 5m stones had been erected in a large circle – about 21 remain standing. The wind whistled around them.

Skara Brae was our next destination, an extraordinary stone-age village that had been hidden for thousands of years until being uncovered by a storm in 1850. Here we caught a glimpse of stone-age life, complete with stone furniture. The site was likely abandoned when sea level rise made the site sandier and saltier – 5000 years ago.

Our buses dropped us beside St Magnus' Cathedral. Built by Vikings in the early 1100's (with on-going construction for the next 300 years), out of local red sandstone – this magnificent building is steeped in history. This is Kirkwall's centrepiece.

We then had several hours to explore Kirkwall before returning to *Polar Pioneer*. In the evening we were joined by the Kirkjuvagr Ceilidh Band, who entertained us with traditional Orkney music. The bar was humming. Captain's farewell, farewell to the band then farewell to Kirkwall – we pulled away from the wharf at 7 pm. And 30 minutes later we had our farewell dinner, followed by our slide show. What a day!! Rain and wind, wind and rain.











DAY 11 | Tuesday 02 July 2019

# Aberdeen

<b>Position:</b>	08:00 hours	<b>Course:</b>	At anchor outside of Blaikie’s Quay, Aberdeen
<b>Latitude:</b>	57°08 N		
<b>Longitude:</b>	02°05 W		

<b>Wind Speed:</b>	Calm	<b>Barometer:</b>	1019.9 hPa & steady
		<b>Air Temp:</b>	13° C
		<b>Sea Temp:</b>	13° C

Overnight we bid farewell to the Islands of Scotland and sailed southwards into the North Sea, passing along the east coast of Scotland towards Aberdeen, our port of departure. In the morning we took on a pilot to guide us through the busy shipping lanes of this principal commercial port for North-east Scotland. *Polar Pioneer* glided past the Girdleness Lighthouse, another Stevenson landmark first lit in 1833, and the state-of-the-art Marine Operations Centre tower, and into the haven of Blaikies Quay in the centre of the city.

We enjoyed a bright and early breakfast before collecting our passports from Justine and Lesley for disembarkation. A truly memorable voyage it has been since leaving Oban ten days ago. We have experienced for ourselves the wonders that Wild Scotland has to offer in all its hues;the deep sense of centuries-old tranquillity on Iona, the grandeur of Staffa’s Fingal’s Cave, followed by a close-up experience of puffins—a highlight for us all. A visit to an ancient Viking canal at Rubh’an Dunain, a spot of tramping (and a paddle) around beautiful Loch Coruisk, the black Cuillin mountains towering over us in mist-clad Skye; golden shell-sand beaches and ultramarine waters and so it continued.

Wild Scotland lived up to its name with big seas and a bouncing gangway—thankfully there were always strong sets of hands, Russian and otherwise, to help us on and off the ship. From the extraordinary bygone way of life at St Kilda to the awesome gannet populations at Stac Lee and Sula Sgeir, to the archaeological wonders brought alive by Carol, to kayaking and paddling through Britain’s finest sea caves at Papa Stour, we were given not just a taste but a feast of the lesser-known parts of this beautiful magical country and its witchy seas.

We have met local people who shared their love of their ancestral lands with us, we have sampled their crafts and textiles, savoured the peat smoke and the whisky, we reached the farthest-flung islands, delighted at the puffins, gazed at legions of nesting sea-birds on cliff and sea-stack, stroked the sheep, dodged the skuas, smelled the wild flowers in their abundance, glimpsed the marine mammals, and pondered the great Stone Age monuments. We were spoilt with warm sunny days, a light drizzle here and there and just the right amount of wind to remind us where we were.

These interwoven strands of environment, history and people come together to make the unique story of the Scottish Islands.

Aurora Expeditions thanks you for joining us aboard MV *Polar Pioneer* for it’s final season in Wild Scotland. We hope to see you on the high seas again some day. We close this voyage log with

Sara Sheridan’s words: *One of Scotland’s most important cultural exports: stories*



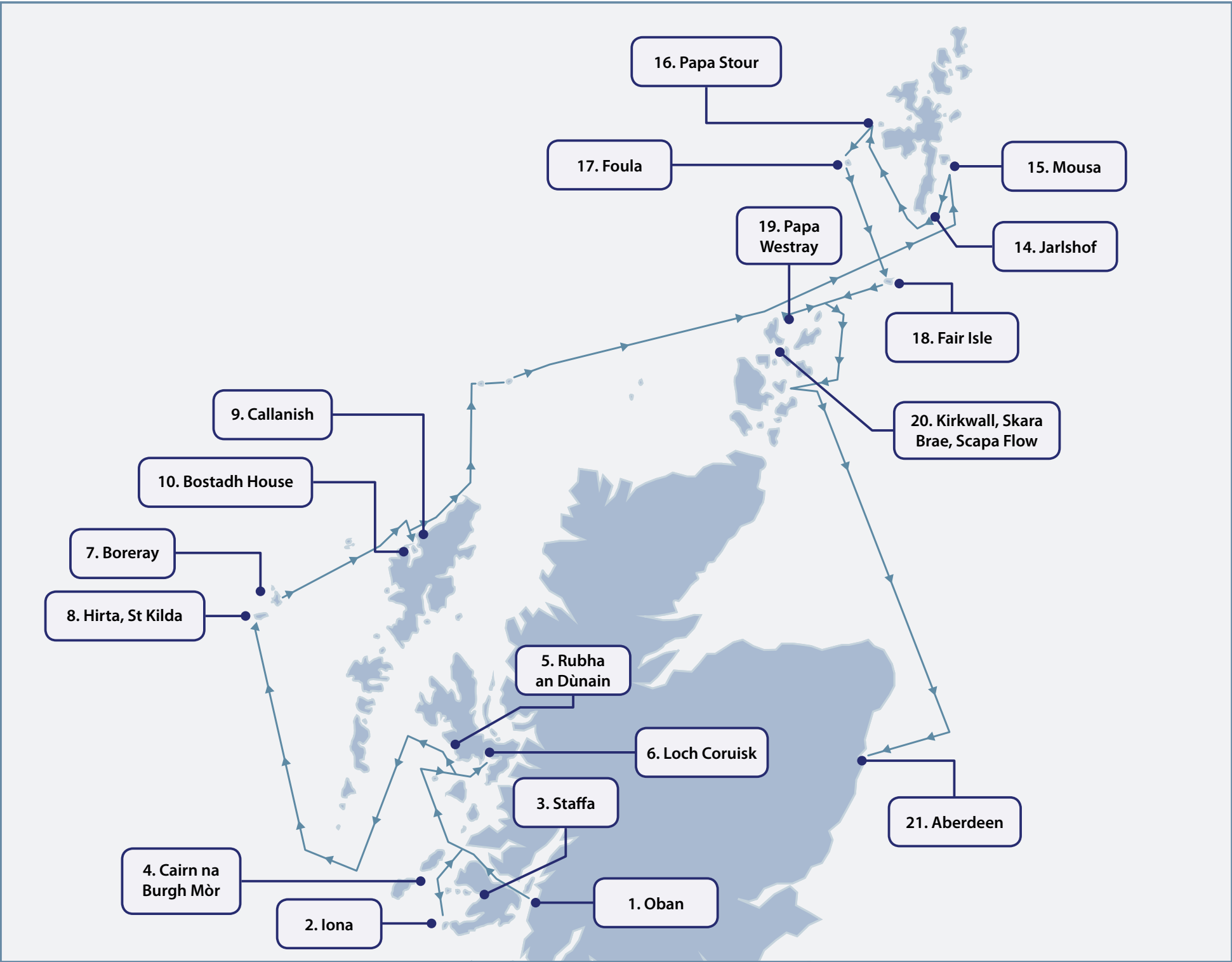




# Wild Scotland

22 JUNE – 02 July 2019 | Distance Travelled: 933.9 nautical miles

Southernmost point of voyage: 60 20'N; 01 39'W



## Destinations

- |                        |                    |                |                                      |
|------------------------|--------------------|----------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Oban                | 7. Boreray         | 13. North Rona | 19. Papa Westray                     |
| 2. Iona                | 8. Hirta, St Kilda | 14. Jarlshof   | 20. Kirkwall, Skara Brae, Scapa Flow |
| 3. Staffa              | 9. Callanish       | 15. Mousa      | 21. Aberdeen                         |
| 4. Cairn na Burgh More | 10. Bostadh House  | 16. Papa Stour |                                      |
| 5. Rubh' an Dunain     | 11. Pabay Mor      | 17. Foula      |                                      |
| 6. Loch Coruisk        | 12. Sula Sgeir     | 18. Fair Isle  |                                      |







# Kayaking Log

By Toby Story

**Kayaking Master:** Toby Story

**Kayakers:**

Pip Buckton	Andrew Gramp	James Williamson
Shantha David	Verity Gramp	

**DAY 2: (AM) Iona** – Distance: 8 km

For our inaugural outing we launched directly from the ship. Shanta took the lead through the skerries before a lazy paddle along the low rocky coast. We made a landing on a white sand beach and set off to walk to Iona Abby. After a tour of the abbey and surrounds, a small group chose to hike on to a high point while others lingered at the abbey and the shore. It was a stiff paddle back to the ship with a touch of wind and current against us but a satisfying and successful first outing!

**(PM) Staffa** – Distance: 6.5 km

It was near glassy conditions as we launched into the ocean beside Staffa Isle, the home of a large puffin colony and the infamous Fingal’s sea cave. Making a quick circumnavigation of the island, we paddled past rafts of puffins and through gaps in the rocks while marvelling at the basalt formations. We paddled into the mouth of Fingal’s cave one by one until all our boats were inside. After landing on a cobbled beach we walked to the puffin cliffs and sat and watched the puffins come and go before making our way back to the ship.

**(After Dinner) Cairn na Burgh** – Distance: 3.5 km

There was a swift tide running along the side of the ship that whisked the kayaks towards the shores of Cairn na Burgh. Literally going with the flow, we drifted around the back side of the island, exploring arches and gulches until we were stopped by a group of curious grey seals. After watching the seals watching us for a few minutes we landed and began to scale the steep grassy slope to the ancient ruins atop this well defended rock. Our dry suits were a welcome defence against the midges and nettles as well as being suitably smooth to help us slip back down the grass and back to the ship.

**DAY 3: (AM) Rubn’an Dunain** – Distance: 7 km

With the sea smooth it was an easy launch and a pleasant paddle along the shores beside Rubn’an Dunain. We paddled slowly along the rocks, gliding through the gaps and watching a selection of birds nesting on the cliff edges. Back at the landing site, we parked our kayaks where many, many boats would have been moored in the past. We took a walk around the multi-layered historic site passing an iron age fort, the remains of bronze age burial sites, Viking era canals and a collection of Black houses, the most recent occupants to vacate this fascinating site. While the winds had increased slightly it was an easy paddle back to the comfort of the ship.

**(PM) Loch Coruisk** – Distance: 8 km

The kayakers took advantage of the zodiacs to run the kayaks to shore before a somewhat slippery portage into the Loch. Of course, once we were in the Loch the kayakers were the envy of the walking group, with a kayak seat reportedly reaching an offering price of \$1000.00 on the open market. The waters on Loch Coruisk were smooth and we completed the paddle to the far end in time for a quick cuppa under the towering mountains. It was a relaxing paddle back to the portage site and the return portage was much easier with the gravity assist. We even had to use the ropes to lower the kayaks and ourselves off the tidal ledge and into the ocean before paddling back to the ship.

**DAY 4: St Kilda and Boreray Stacks** – No paddle due to 35 knot winds

**DAY 5: (AM/PM) Callanish Stones to Bostah House** – Distance: 23 km

In the still overcast morning the kayakers slipped quietly over the side of the ship and paddled away just in time to hear Howards wake up call. With both the wind and tide with us, we set off at a comfortable pace towards the standing stones of Callanish.

After a short and private explore of the stones the chilly winds sent us back to the kayaks just in time to help direct a stray zodiac. We formed a kayaker’s peloton and fought our way into the wind until we found a little bay for a quick cuppa and much needed break from the constraints of the dry suits. As the minutes elapsed, we passed the point of no return, it now being too late to paddle back to the ship before she began to reposition- we were committed. Back in the water we were surprised by a glimpse of an otter and took an impromptu chocolate break in a gulch before arriving at Bostah Beach somewhat earlier than expected by all. . . We were treated to a peaty welcome and a private tour of the lovely reconstruction of an iron-age house before a leisurely return to the ship!

**DAY 6: (AM) Sula Segir** – Distance: 4.5 km

Sula Sgeir or Gannet Rock, certainly delivered for our morning outing. After a delicious breakfast, served at a leisurely 8am, it was time to jump into kayaks and explore this rarely visited Island. We gathered a large crowd of hundreds of Gannets who circled above as we paddled towards the craggy rocks. Looking high onto the cliffs, silhouetted cairns could be seen, a testament to the many centuries of visitation by men from the Isle of Ness who come to collect guga, or fledgling gannet chicks. After Roger gave the all clear, the kayakers followed on through the natural Arch, passing effortlessly back and forth through the Island.

Ducking and weaving through gulches and caves along the sheltered side of the Island, there were sightings of kittiwakes and guillemots with chicks as well as grey seals both in the water and on the rocks. While the zodiacs stayed on the sheltered side of the Island the kayakers, too tempted by the lure of the open sea, made a dash for the outside. The contrast between the sheltered and exposed side of the island was stark, but the kayaks, which are ideally suited to choppy conditions, handled the seas well and we quickly reached the shelter of the natural arch and returned through the Island to the Eastern side before heading for home.

**(Pm) North Rona** – Distance: 8 km

While the main group walked on shore, we slowly edged our way around the island, pausing in caves and gulches to watch curious grey seals and sit quietly as a swath of birds, puffins, guillemots and shags came and went from their nests and burrows. Eventually we had edged so far around the Island that it was decided to just complete the circumnavigation.

The rugged seas made for an exhilarating paddle around the exposed side of the Island to our rocky landing. Barely missing a beat, the kayakers made quick work of the hill and out to the abandoned village and ruins of what is thought to be the remains of the oldest church in Scotland. While the view across open ocean conveyed the remoteness of this Island, the extensive raised cultivation lines were a reminder of the centuries of human habitation. A fabulous outing!







# Kayaking Log

By Toby Story

## DAY 7: (AM) Jarlshof – Distance: 7 km

Wary of the swift currents reported in the bay by the captain of the *Polar Pioneer*, we made our way tentatively towards the point. After some obligatory paddling through gaps, we found our way out to a small offshore island and paused to watch the numerous grey seals swimming timidly near our boats. On our way to our landing site, we watched terns feeding in the azure waters before making land and taking the scenic route up to the site. At Jarlshof, Carol regaled us with stories and brought the ruins to life before our swift paddle back to the ship.

## (PM) Mousa Broch – Distance: 10 km

Making quick work of the circumnavigation, the kayakers made it to their landing site and enjoyed some chocolate while we waited for their fellow expeditioners. We all made the short walk over the rise to the Broch where we were greeted by a nip of whisky as we entered the 2500-year-old structure. Carol interpreted the site for us under hundreds of flickering candles and we explored the various rooms and some even walked to the parapet before making our way back to the ship.

## DAY 8: (AM) Papa Stour – Distance: 15 km

Within minutes of leaving the ship we were greeted with a vast sea cave that cut through the cliffs. It certainly set the tone for the rest of the paddle. As we made our way around the Western side of Papa Stour the caves only seemed to get bigger and bigger! Passing the outer stacks and Islands we watched the staff “reposition” the zodiacs with only a few minor detours through every cave they could find. Still we managed to beat them through the Arch of Bordie head, a cave that required a torch to pass the full 400m through to the other side of the headland. As well as being spectacular it was a useful shortcut back to the ship after our longest single outing yet!

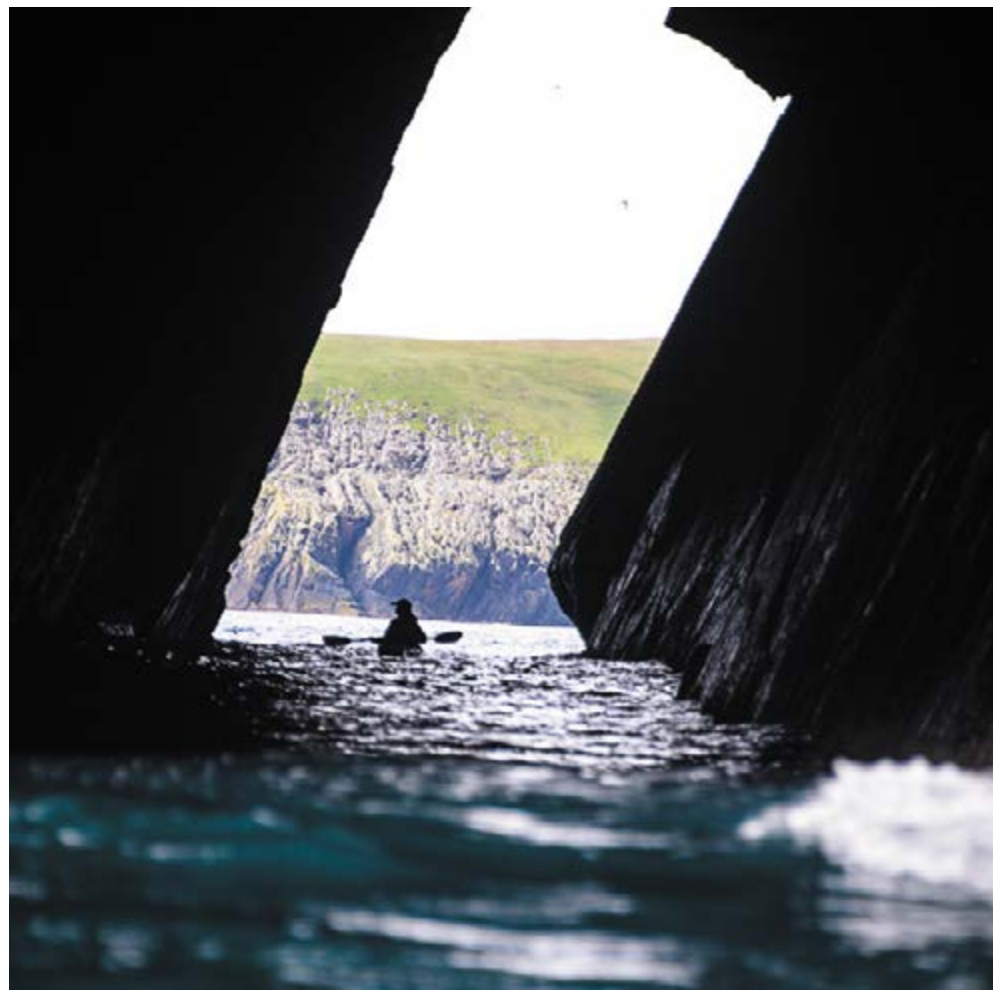
## (PM) Foula – No Paddle due to windy conditions.

## DAY 9: (AM) Fair Aisle – Distance: 6 km

We were greeted with calm and misty conditions for our paddle along the coast of Fair Isle. Winding along the shore we found many small caves and gaps to paddle through, as well as some much larger ones. We paused and watched puffins, guillemots and gulls feeding in the water and soaring along the cliffs before finding a secluded beach to make landfall on. After a short scramble, we found our way through the fields and over to the museum. While the kayakers enjoyed browsing the museum and shops, guide Toby hitched a ride and collected a zodiac to pick up the kayaks making for a relaxed return to the ship by zodiac, as well as time for retail therapy. Our final outing after a fabulous trip!

**Total paddle outings:** 12

**Total distance paddled:** 106.5 km









# Bird Species Log

SPECIES	JUNE - JULY										
	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2
Herring Gull	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Great Black-backed Gull						X	X	X	X	X	X
Lesser Black-backed Gull		X	X	X	X	X	X			X	
Black-headed Gull									X	X	
Common Gull		X								X	
Kittiwake	X	X				X					
Arctic Skua									X		
Great Skua		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	
Common Guillemot	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Black Guillemot	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Razorbill				X		X	X	X			
Atlantic Puffin	X	X		X		X	X	X	X		
Gannet	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Shag		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Cormorant		X									
Northern Fulmar		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	
Manx Shearwater	X		X								
Storm Petrel											
Common Tern					X		X				
Arctic Tern							X	X	X	X	
Ringed Plover					X			X			
Oystercatcher		X			X	X	X	X	X	X	
Snipe								X			
Curlew							X		X		
Common Sandpiper			X								
Mute Swan										X	
Common Eider				X		X		X	X		
Mallard	X							X			
Grey Heron											
Water Rail		X									
Corncrake		X									
Collared Dove		X		X							
Pigeon (Rock Dove)	X	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	
Swallow		X			X			X			



Atlantic Puffin



Grey Seal



Gannet



# Bird Species Log (cont.)

SPECIES	JUNE - JULY											
	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	
Wren				X								
Wheatear				X								
Rock Pipit							X					
Meadow Pipit							X					
Water Pipit									X			
Pied Wagtail				X								
Starling				X								
House Sparrow							X					
Skylark			X		X					X		
Blackbird				X	X					X		
Song Thrush						X	X					
Goldfinch						X	X					
Twite					X							
Hooded Crow										X		
Raven						X				X		



# Mammal Species Log

SPECIES	JUNE - JULY											
	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	
Harbour Seal			X	X	X		X	X		X		
Grey Seal		X		X		X		X	X			
Otter								X				
Minke Whale			X	X		X						
Common Dolphin			X									
Orca						X						
Rabbit							X	X	X	X		
Brown Hare										X		















# Expeditioners

Haydee Adel	Pip Buckton	Carol Drew	Gaye Gibbs	Mari Hirano	Judy Russell
Steve Allworth	Jeremy Butterfield	Bea Duncan	Bob Gingold	Bob Inns	Troy Smith
Barbara Bailey	Sue Casson	Alan Duncan	Jean Golding	Helen Luke	Michael Smith
Yvette Baker	Pam Cohen	Malcolm Edwards	Tonia Gordon	Dan Miller	Ian Williams
Arthur Beer	Christine Curry	Elizabeth Evans	Andrew Gramp	Carmel Mischlewski	Jean Williams
Allan Braun	Richard Curry	John Evans	Verity Gramp	Gill Peck	James Williamson
Laraine Brindle	Shantha David	Mary Furness	Leslie Grattan	Graeme Peck	Jane Wright
Ann Brown	Lesley Dimmock	Philip Gibbs	Lorraine Griffiths	Jill Rossiter	





Expedition Team

Polar Pioneer Crew

Photo Credits

Expedition Leader: Howard Whelan  
Assistant Expedition Leader: Justine Bornholdt  
Archaeologist/Historian: Carol Knott  
Naturalist & Lecturer: Roger Kirkwood  
Kayaking Master: Toby Story  
Expedition Guide: Richard Dakin  
Doctor: Lesley Cadzow  
Head Chef: Allan Estoque  
Sous Chef: Herbert Cruz  
Hotel Manager: Anne Oyasaeter

Master: Aleksandr ‘Sasha’ Evgenov  
Chief Mate: Vladimir Zimin  
Second Mate: Evgenii Aleksandrov  
Third Mate: Aleksandr Kiselev  
Radio Operator: Ilia Liamzin  
Chief Engineer: Evgeny Petukhov  
Second Engineer: Pavel Voronov  
Third Engineer: Aleksei Moiseev  
Fourth Engineer: Yurii Horobets  
Electrical Engineer: Valentin Lomachenko  
Boatswain: Aleksandr Agafonov  
Able Seaman: Rashit Ganiev

Able Seaman: Igor Popp  
Able Seaman: Vasilii Berlizev  
Motorman: Vladimir Zhukov  
Head Stewardess: Svetlana Fedorova  
Stewardess: Aleksandra ‘Sasha’ Belusova  
Stewardess: Uliana Koval  
Stewardess: Ekaterina Rumiantseva  
Stewardess: Natalia Trofimova  
Stewardess: Natalia Trofimova  
Stewardess: Elena Liukshina  
Russian Crew Chef: Denis Zhenchevski

Yvette Baker  
Justine Bornholdt  
Lesley Dimmock  
Richard Dakin  
Elizabeth Evans  
Philip Gibbs  
Gaye Gibbs  
Jean Golding  
Andrew Gramp  
Carmel Mischlewski  
Roger Kirkwood  
Judy Russell  
Toby Story







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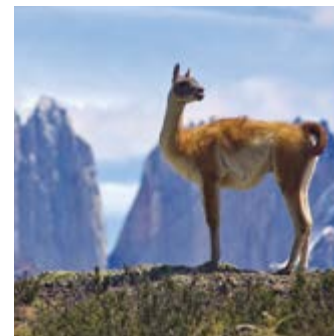
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