

# Wild Scotland

Aboard *MV Greg Mortimer* | 27 May – 6 June 2022









# Troon Harbour

DAY 1 | Friday 27th May 2022

Position at 1600

Latitude: 55°33.51'N

Longitude: 004°47.14'W

Course: Docked at Troon Harbour

Speed: 0.0 knots

Wind Speed: 18 knots from W

Barometer: 1022

Air Temp: 12°C

## Scottish phrase of the day: Fàilte gu Alba! Welcome to Scotland!

Little do you know your own blessedness; for to travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive, and the true success is to labour.

—Robert Louis Stevenson, Virginibus Puerisque, 1881

Charming Troon made a fitting introduction to our Wild Scotland voyage. There was quite a swell rolling in, lashing the long, exposed beaches of Scotland's West Coast, and a fresh breeze cooling the air. But the warm and stable *Greg Mortimer* beckoned us on board. At the port, 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 12 days.

Together we total 70 passengers. (27 Americans, 20 Australians, 15 from the UK, 4 Canadians, 3 New Zealanders, and 1 Norwegian) along with 69 crew from all around the globe, and 17 Expedition Team with a huge variety of expertise.

Drinks and a buffet awaited us in the dining room – much appreciated by the hungry travellers. A quick welcome briefing from our Expedition Leaders followed, then the all-important safety drill. The sound of the ship's horn signalled us to don bulky orange lifejackets and muster in the lecture theatre and dining room. The Polar Class life vessels, we were reassuringly told by Safety Officer Andrey, can hold 136 people each, for five days!

With the safety drill completed, finally we were cleared to cast off our lines and begin our Wild Scotland adventure. It was then back to the lecture theatre for one more important briefing, about Zodiac safety. We learnt about the "Zodiac 3-step", the sailors grip, how to don our lifejackets – all things that will become second nature to us within a few days!

David introduced us to the plan for the next day. He talked a lot about his favourite colour being blue, and that green is OK too. He's not so keen on pink, and hates purple. He was referring to the "Windy" map of course, which you will become familiar with over the trip! Thankfully, a lovely green map displayed promising conditions for the next day.

Soon afterwards, it was time for the jacket and muck boot swap, so now we are all prepared for whatever weather Scotland can throw at us.

The bar proved enticing with a few of us toasting the beginning of our voyage with new shipmates, then equipped with a healthy appetite, we made our way to the dining room to enjoy a delicious dinner, prepared by our talented galley team, and served by our smiley and welcoming waiting staff .

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





# Iona, Staffa and Isle of Lunga

DAY 2 | Saturday 28th May 2022

Position at 0600

Latitude: 56°19.104'N

Longitude: 006°23.277'W

Course: Anchored at Iona

Speed: 0 knots

Wind Speed: 11.9 knots from NW

Barometer: 1022

Air Temp: 12°C

**Scottish Phrase of the Day: Slàinte Mhath! (slan-juh va) Cheers! / Good health.**

A good tale never tires in the telling

—Scottish proverb

If you, our dear expedition members, are indeed in charge of the weather, you have got our Scottish adventure off to a spectacular start!

As we pulled into the bay at Iona there were some patches of blue sky peeping through the clouds, but by the time we were cutting through the water in our Zodiacs towards the slipway, the sun was beaming across the entire island and her turquoise waters. Many of us enjoyed Iona in different ways, with some joining John for an ornithological tour of the town and shoreline, with starlings, rooks and oystercatchers in abundance.

Others walked with Carol, exploring the early Christian history of the island, starting at the 13th century ruined Nunnery before winding down the road to the magnificent Iona Abbey. The spiritual significance of the island and St Columba's presence at the abbey was renowned. Kings and noblemen as well as local island folk were buried in the graveyard around the abbey, with the hopes that this brought them closer to heaven.

While Iona certainly has a rich and diverse religious history, as we walked through the village it was also easy to get a feel for the incredibly welcoming community on the island. One local we were speaking with mentioned that it had in fact rained almost constantly for the last two weeks on Iona, which could help to explain why the island was looking so luscious and green as the plants are rather well hydrated at the moment.

After lunch we sailed about 5.5 nautical miles north to the basaltic shores of Staffa. While the sun was still shining for us, we had a little more wind and swell to contend with, which provided an alternative to an after-lunch coffee thanks to the invigorating sea-spray. Afterwards, a Zodiac cruise into Fingal's Cave where basaltic columns rise vertically out of the water to form this deep and dark cave filled with clear and turquoise waters. The sounds of the sea moving through the cave and over the columns inspired Mendelsohn to write his Hebridean Overture.

On shore, many of us climbed the steps from the jetty and along the top to be rewarded with wildflowers and puffins galore. The puffins were burrowing just along the cliff edge meaning their diminutive stature and iconic colourings with that bright orange and red beak could be enjoyed up close. Today's Puffin Post certainly lives up to its name.

Before dinner, Captain Maxim and the crew's heads of department joined us all for a Welcome Cocktail so we could toast to our Scottish adventure, which certainly wouldn't be possible without the amazing crew of the *Greg Mortimer*.

To finish off our day, the ship cruised alongside the Isle of Lunga in the golden evening light where puffins, razorbills, gannets and many more seabirds were circling and nesting in huge numbers. A beautiful end to a beautiful day.





# Rubh' An Dunain and Loch Coruisk, Isle of Skye

DAY 3 | Sunday 29th May 2022

Position at 0700			
Latitude: 57°10'57 N	Course: Anchored at Isle of Skye	Wind Speed: 9 knots from W	Air Temp: 12°C
Longitude: 006°9'2.5 W	Speed: 0 knots	Barometer: 1021	

## Scottish Phrase of the Day: Chan eil tuil air nach tig traoghadh (There isn't a flood which will not subside)

A good gulp of whisky at bedtime - it's not very scientific, but it helps.

—Sir Walter Scott

We woke up in the morning at anchor in calm and sunny conditions off the Isle of Skye, which was a pleasant surprise after David had warned us that it could be a challenging place to land. As well as this, we were surrounded by lots of dolphins in every direction. Some even came close by the ship and we could see that they were common dolphins, most likely feeding, along with Gannets and other seabirds as well.

After breakfast we took the Zodiacs to shore and landed at Rubh' An Dunain, the site of a small loch and an ancient Viking canal linking it to the sea.

The Expedition Team helped us navigate slippery rocks on the shoreline, and we looked in wonder at this ancient canal, built meticulously with dry stone wall – it was really like stepping back in time. Thankfully Carol and John were on hand to bring this fascinating history to life with their explanations.

Most people then went for a walk around the lake, with stops along the way where Carol showed us the remains of small stone houses and explained how they were constructed and the lives of the people who built them.

On the far side of the lake she also showed us the remains of what was a Neolithic burial chamber, now largely torn apart by later raiders, but still impressive none the less. Our walk turned into an impromptu clean-up, as sadly much plastic waste had washed ashore, including fishing nets entangled around the rocks. Wes and Ian cut a large net away from the rocks with their knives.

Many of us found the litter issue quite confronting, but it's safe to say we left Rubh' An Dunain in a cleaner state than when we arrived!

During lunch we moved north-east past the island of Soay to land near Loch Coruisk.

Howard led a large group on a walk up the valley to the loch itself. A small group who weren't up for the walk did a Zodiac cruise along the shoreline in the area instead. The weather varied between blustery and grey and calm and sunny (for brief periods) but we did manage to see a small group of common seals lying on the rocks fairly close up.

After returning to the ship we had our first regular Recap and Briefing, with Dani introducing the Citizen Science programs: E-bird, Happy Whale, Secchi Disc and microplastics (very relevant after our morning clean-up). John showed some of his best photos of Fingal's Cave, at Staffa, accompanied by Mendelssohn's Hebrides Overture and David told us about our plans for the next day, which had been completely rearranged to avoid bad weather at the location of our original plans. We'll now do St Kilda a day later than planned.





# Callanais, Isle of Lewis; Bostadh House, Great Bernera; Flannan Isles

DAY 4 | Monday 30th May

Position at 0700			
Latitude: 58°14.008' N	Course: Anchored at Callanais	Wind Speed: 17knots, from N	Air Temp: 12°C
Longitude: 006°47.601' W	Speed: 0 knots	Barometer: 1025	

## Scottish Phrase of the Day: Feasgar math (fesker ma) Good evening.

Believe me my young friend, there is nothing, absolutely nothing, half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats...simply messing.

—Water Rat to Mole from Wind in the Willows

The morning came with grey skies and a hint of rain in the air. The *Greg Mortimer* had sailed through the night, crossing the Minch, and leaving the Inner Hebrides in its wake. Anchored in Loch Roag, on the north-western edge of the outer Hebridean Island of Lewis, the expeditioners felt the first swell of the Atlantic Ocean rolling into the Loch. A quick 15 minute Zodiac ride took everyone deeper into the loch and away from the open sea. The landscape green and rolling, until on the hill a circle of tall stones became visible. The Callanais stones themselves, seen from the water in the same way that the folk arriving on Lewis by sea, throughout the ages, have seen them.

There it was only a short walk up the hill to be in amongst the ring of standing stones. Carol shared the history of the ring, its many thousands of years, the story of the people who first built them, and how changing climate is reflected in their story and use over time.

A quick run back to the ship and it was time to move anchor, and hope that the Atlantic swell would allow another outing - this time to visit Bostadh House, an archaeological site rich in history from the Iron ages, through Viking encounters and into the present. Expeditioners could enter a reconstruction of a turf roofed house, sunk below ground level to provide shelter from the prevailing westerly winds from the sea.

Five such houses were discovered after a storm exposed a piece of stone wall. Inside the reconstruction, we could sit around the fireplace, smelling the local peat, and hear stories from local guides of life in the outer Hebrides before the Vikings, as revealed by the ruins and archaeology of the bay.

The sheltered sound between Lewis and Little Bernera enabled the kayakers to get out and explore quiet nooks between the islands, the calm waters a chance to get close to rocks and into tucked away coves. The clear waters were so enticing that they beckoned some brave souls to swim off the golden sands off Bostadh beach.

With rain coming in, it was time to return to the warmth of the ship, stepping up and into the mudroom to celebrate another great day in the western most inhabited islands of the Scotland.

On suggestion of our local expert John Love, we did an impromptu ship cruise of the Flannan Isles in the evening light. John narrated as we sailed the rugged coast, and told us the story of three lighthouse keepers who disappeared without a trace. Gannets and fulmars soared past us at close range, whilst guillemots, razorbills and puffsins bobbed on the waves. What a perfect end to another fascinating day.





# St Kilda

DAY 5 | Tuesday 31st May 2022

Position at 0700

Latitude: 57°48.365'N

Longitude: 008°33.259'W

Course: Anchored at St Kilda

Speed: 0 knots

Wind Speed: 2 knots from SE

Barometer: 1024

Air Temp: 12°C

## Scottish Phrase of the Day: Tapadh leibh (tapa leev) Thank you

A first walk in any new country is one of the things which makes life on this planet worth being grateful for.

—Charles William Beebe

Out in the North Atlantic, straddling many a maritime crossroad, lies an archipelago of extreme mystery and wonder. Possibly named for a saint, but maybe not, St Kilda may have come from Dutch sailors (sant kelda – sweet wellwater), but who knows for sure? As our anchor dropped in Loch Hirta (Village Bay) after an overnight run from the Isle of Lewis, one thing was certain, few landscapes could be as enticing as the one that greeted us.

To the south, a wall of industrial grade wharf gave way to a few modern, but discreetly faded, turf-topped buildings, a stone church and school, then a main street of almost identical stone buildings (public housing of its time, according to Daniel), and beyond dry-stone fences held back an amphitheatre arcing up in a grand sweep of sheep, peat slopes and literally hundreds of exquisite domed storehouses, or cleats (1,500 or so). As early morning light peeked through swift clouds, the result was breathtaking.

At the jetty, we were greeted by Ranger Sue from the National Trust for Scotland who gave us handy hints to minimise the impact of our visit, before we split into two groups, one with John Love, the other Carol Knott as the rain began to fall. Over the next four hours an incredible amount of knowledge was shared, starting from the explosive birth of the island group thanks to a massive volcano that left behind a mountain of granite, gabbro and dolerite, only to be eroded by ice, rain and sea.

Carol and John described the island's 3,500 years of human habitation, and the archaeological work that revealed many of their stories. From Neolithic times onward, the communal life depended on a diversity of resources, from the harvesting of seabirds and eggs, the production of oil from fulmars, to the growing of grains, fishing and more recently defense facilities and tourism.

Most fascinating was the culture that developed over those years of strong, healthy folk often misconstrued by outsiders as simple and poor people. Yet to walk up to the Gap, then beyond to the 430m summit of Conachair (as some did with Daniel, Piotr and Howard) and peer down on the seabird cliffs, and think of the skill and courage it took to make ropes, then abseil down to collect eggs and chicks with the sea roaring below, one could only be astonished by it all.

As the day progressed, the rain stopped, then sea mist blew in, dissipated leaving behind a glorious sunny afternoon. What better way to enjoy it, than "messaging about in boats". For us this meant exploring Dùn, on Hirta's southeast corner. Aside from thousands of puffins, black guillemots, black-legged kittiwakes and a smattering of razorbills that flew above us, there were magical sea caves (think iridescent turquoise waters), shy seals slipping beneath the waves and a surging sea boiling through a giant archway. John Love tidied it off pointing out ancient stone walls high above.

And just when it seemed the day couldn't get better, Captain Maxim ordered the anchor raised, then sailed the GM around Hirta, past Soay and on to Stac Lee, Stac an Armin and Boreray, where he threaded the ship through towering cliffs to provide close-up views of tens of thousands of gannets on the nest or in the air, thousands of puffins on the sea and guillemots as well. John Love's story of the men and boys stranded on Stac Lee seemed too preposterous to be true, but it was. Our day ended with late evening sunlight, smooth seas and a rousing rendition of Happy Birthday for our super team member, Rosie.





# Sula Sgeir & North Rona

DAY 6 | Wednesday 1st June 2022

Position at 0700

Latitude: 59°05.491'N

Longitude: 006°09.085'W

Course: Anchored at Sula Sgeir

Speed: 0 knots

Wind Speed: 6 knots from NE

Barometer: 1029

Air Temp: 12°C

## Scottish Phrase of the Day: Gaidhealtachd: The areas of Scotland where people speak Gaelic

Let us not take ourselves too seriously. None of us has a monopoly on wisdom.

—Queen Elizabeth II (1991 Christmas Broadcast). Happy Platinum Jubilee!

Everybody must have led an exemplary life and prayed fervently to their god in the days before coming aboard the *Greg Mortimer* on this voyage of discovery around the coast of beautiful Scotland. How else can you account for the luck we have experienced so far on this expedition, the sea has been gentle and benign, the weather, so far, warm and largely sunny, the wildlife spectacular, abundant and approachable.

This morning's visit to Sula Sgeir (The rock of the gannets) was exceptional, very rarely will the wild Atlantic allow such a safe and close approach to this formidable rock, one of her secret places. The spectacle of a large Gannet colony at the height of the breeding season is one which hits you right between the eyes and will remain with me for the rest of my life.

As our Zodiac slipped closer to the cliffs the deep guttural gargling of gannets, the long growl of guillemots and the ecstatic ringing cries of the kittiwakes rose to meet us and drifting down to us on the breeze came the unmistakable sweet and fishy odour of a large seabird colony. Some dislike the smell, but it tells of the incredible richness of the surrounding seas.

Above our Zodiac the gannets wheeled in their thousands, some birds returning with nesting material trailing from their bills while others were leaving on fishing expeditions after having been relieved of their incubation duties by a returning mate. The gannets by and large nested on the gentler slope of the island top, covering it like a fresh fall of snow. The vertical cliffs of Sula Sgeir are home to guillemot, razorbill and kittiwake. Guillemots crammed shoulder to shoulder on the narrow ledges, many were incubating their single egg on the bare rock. The precious egg is always just a short roll from dropping into the sea and so has evolved to an unusual shape, broad at the blunt end and narrow at the pointed end which always rolls in a tight circle. When we poked our noses into the sea caves they echoed to the cries of kittiwakes, also incubating eggs in untidy guano-streaked nests, always screaming their own name, k-i-t-t-i-w-a-k-e, k-i-t-t-i-w-a-k-e.

The *Greg Mortimer* repositions to the remote island of North Rona while we enjoyed a great lunch aboard.

Once home to several families, this soft green island is now the site of a huge grey seal breeding colony from September through until late November.

Even out of the breeding season, we saw many grey seals watching us from the water as we passed in our Zodiacs with much curiosity. They rarely see boats. Many of us got great views of two Minke whales which seemed to no rush to leave, maybe they were feeding. To top it all we saw a huge white-tailed sea eagle sitting at the highest point of North Rona, a fitting perch for this most magnificent of Scottish birds.





# Jarlshof & Mousa Broch, Shetland Islands

DAY 7 | Thursday 2nd June 2022

Position at 0700

Latitude: 59°51.677'N

Longitude: 001°17.618'W

Course: Anchored at Jarlshof

Speed: 0 knots

Wind Speed: 18 knots from NW

Barometer: 1028

Air Temp: 8°C

Scottish Phrase of the Day: Madainn mhath (mateen va) Good morning

Whit's fur ye'll no go by ye! —Scottish saying

(What's destined to happen will happen.)

We have now left behind the world of Hebridean islands with its Gaelic culture, as overnight we sailed north and east to the new horizons of Shetland. Amidst continuing excellent weather, we came ashore on a sandy beach below Sumburgh Head, the southernmost tip of the main island, and at the very gates of the famous archaeological site of Jarlshof.

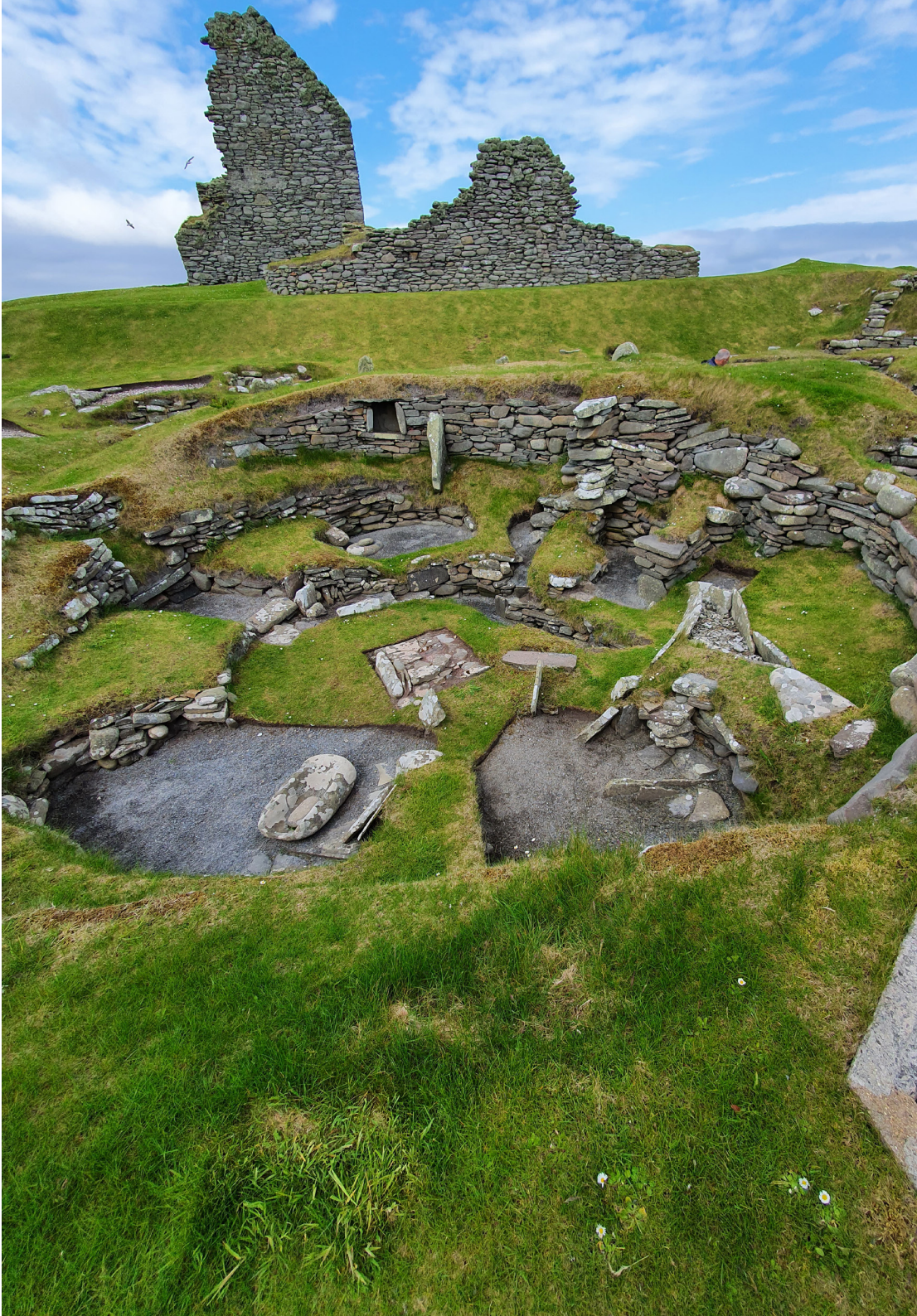
This sandy corner of Shetland had been occupied for 4,000 years, from the earliest neolithic farmers who grew wheat and barley and kept sheep and cattle, to the 17th century lairds of Sumburgh whose ruined manor house still dominates the skyline, but was unknown until the 1890s when a storm revealed the secrets hidden beneath the kempt Shetland turf, exposing an incredible series of near-intact prehistoric and Viking buildings.

With fascination, we explored the narrow passageways and interconnecting chambers of prehistoric wheelhouses and roundhouses, and gazed on the remains of contrasting longhouses built by the Viking invaders who had taken over Shetland in the 9th century AD and their Norse descendants. For centuries Shetland and Orkney remained an integral part of the Norse world and a possession of the Kingdom of Norway, and were not ceded to the Kingdom of Scotland until 1469.

A delightful coastal walk leads up to the cliffs at Sumburgh Head. A lighthouse was built here in 1820 by Robert Stevenson on the site of an Iron Age promontory fort, towering over precipitous sea cliffs that provide nesting sites for colonies of puffins, guillemots, razorbills, kittiwakes and gannets.

Repositioning over lunch to the Sound of Mousa, we then went ashore to explore the island of Mousa, a nature reserve now uninhabited except for seasonal seabird rangers. Here Arctic terns nest along the stony shorelines, along with other birds such as black guillemots and great skuas which abound on the island. A shy red-throated diver was also spotted. But of greatest interest perhaps, are the thousands of storm petrels that breed here, many in the walls of the ancient broch which guards the shoreline. A drystone tower of more than 13 metres in height, it was built sometime in the later first millennium BC by an unknown Celtic Iron Age chieftain as a mark of his

strength and status. Standing inside its awe-inspiring circular walls, or climbing up the intramural stone staircase to the wall-top walkway, we marvelled at the skill of the builders of this monumental drystone structure which has survived to its full height for over two thousand years.





# Foula and Papa Stour

DAY 8 | Friday 3rd June 2022

Position at 0700			
Latitude: 60°07.999'N	Course: 095.8°	Wind Speed: 9 knots from NW	Air Temp: 8°C
Longitude: 002°02.314'W	Speed: 2.5 knots	Barometer: 1029	

## Scottish Phrase of the Day: Ciamar a tha sibh? (Pronounced: Kimmer a ha shiv?) How are you?

Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds that you plant.

—Robert Louis Stevenson

This morning we woke hoping for another day of good weather. A large swell at breakfast had us questioning whether a landing would be possible, but thankfully, it gradually subsided and we enjoyed a smooth Zodiac ride to the small Island of Foula. We discovered we were the first cruise ship to land on Foula this year! On average, only three ships manage to land per year, due to rough conditions.

We were immediately greeted by playful common seals splashing in the shallows around the pier of Foula. There are about 28 – 32 people living on the island right now, and we were lucky enough to have 2 of them as our local guides. Sheila, who proved to have an endless wealth of knowledge, guided some of us along the steep, windswept cliffs to the WWI memorial, and talked about the unique fauna and flora of Foula. We were on a mission to find puffins, with no luck, but we enjoyed dramatic coastal vistas, quaint countryside scenery, and even spotted a family of authentic Shetland ponies. Sheila showed us the local school (currently searching for a new teacher!) and traditional peat cutting area in the neighbourhood.

Robert, Sheila's grandson, took our hikers for a longer walk to the Sneck o'da Smallie, a wonderful rock formation in the South-West of the island. The hikers had more luck with puffins, spotting a couple on the cliffs. They saw a lot of skuas, a nesting curlew, courting lapwing and redshank and a beautiful snipe roding – a very unusual drum-like noise that the bird makes with its tail feathers.

Robert interpreted the abundant local flora for us as we walked. We discovered crowberries, common orchids, marsh marigolds, edible silverweed and sundew, a carnivorous plant. The hikers were curious about what's called plantigrubs: stone structures that are used as seedling gardens, netted to protect them from birds.

After waving goodbye to the local families who came to see us off, we sailed to our next destination: the nearby island of Papa Stour. This name probably relates to the 'fathers', or early Christian monks, that were found here by the Norsemen who settled in the area.

After lunch, a now well-established group of keen hikers set off for a discovery walk led by our expert guides, Carol and Ian. The rest of us got comfortable in the Zodiacs, ready for what proved to be the most jaw-dropping

Zodiac cruise so far! The conditions were perfect, and for 2 hours, we cruised the coast of Papa Stour, admiring some of the finest sea caves in Britain.

The hikers took it at a leisurely pace, as Carol skillfully interpreted the archaeological sites: an early bronze age cairn marking a burial site from circa 2000 BC, and remains of a 'leper colony'. Papa Stour is now a scarcely populated island with no more than 15-20 inhabitants, so we were surprised to find out that in the XIII c., Duke Haakon (future King of Norway) has his summer residence here, and that during the golden age of the Hanza transatlantic union, the island was an important fish trading hub. On their way back to the ship, the hikers were treated to a short cruise through the breathtaking seacaves along the coast.





# Fair Isle and Papa Westray

DAY 9 | Saturday 4th June 2022

Position at 0700

Latitude: 53°10.195'S

Longitude: 070°54.415'W

Course: Anchored at Fair Isle

Speed: 0.0 knots

Wind Speed: 10 knots from S

Barometer: 1037

Air Temp: 10°C

Scottish Phrase of the Day: Haste ye back! Come back soon!

Life is not measured by the breaths we take. But by the moments that take our breath away.

—Author unknown

Another calm and beautiful morning. We are making our way out towards Orkneys. We have landed on Fair Isle, a small island between Orkneys and Shetland. We managed to land on a floating pier in a sheltered bay and make our way to the cliffs full of puffins, and some Arctic skuas. With lots of pictures taken of those beautiful birds, we took a nice stroll to the village where a welcoming Fair Island community awaited us.

On a way to the village, we met Rachael - a local craftswoman, who creates wonderful handknitted beanies from yarn, coming from her own sheep's wool. She told us stories from the island and pointed us to places worth visiting. One story was an example of islanders' true hospitality. In 1941 a German Heinkel plane was shot down and crash landed on Fair Isle. The three surviving German POWs were rescued from the steep cliff and were taken care of. One of the crew members, Lieutenant Karl Heinz Thurz, had just turned 21 and had his birthday celebrated. He returned to the island in the 80s and met with his rescuers, he kept close ties to the island until he passed away in 2006.

When we reached the town hall, we could taste the true hospitality ourselves. A hospitable community greeted us with nice refreshments and coffee while the local artists presented their crafts. After catching a breath and meeting the locals, the road took us further to the chapel and a museum filled with history and artefacts. Thanks to our drivers, some of us got safely transported back to the pier where we hopped on our Zodiacs and headed back to the ship for yet another delicious lunch.

The good weather prevailed, and we reached Papa Westray of the Orkney Islands in the afternoon. The northern island of the Orkneys is a home for some 90 people. Upon landing, some of us were taken by a minibus towards historic sites while some had a chance to walk through the village, meeting another hospitable and happy community.

A highlight of the landing was Knap of Howar – the oldest preserved stone dwelling in northern Europe. This neolithic farmstead, dating as far as around 3500 BC, consists of two rectangular buildings with a low entrance facing the sea. A lot of amazing artefacts have been found at the site, which can help us understand how the people used to live here. They grew barley and wheat, raised cattle and sheep, they fished and gathered shellfish.





# Kirkwall, Orkney Islands

DAY 10 | Sunday 5th June 2022

Position at 0700

Latitude: 53°10.195'N

Longitude: 070°54.415'W

Course: Docked at Kirkwall

Speed: 0.0 knots

Wind Speed: 9 knots from S

Barometer: 1035

Air Temp: 10°C

Early Sunday morning, the *Greg Mortimer* arrived the capital of the Orkney Islands, Kirkwall. We started by exploring the Mainland of Orkney by bus with local guides. Passing by Scapa Flow, where the Royal Oak was torpedoed during the Second World War and now lies on the seafloor as a designated war grave, we continued to the ancient archaeological site of Skara Brae. Here we walked through 5,000 years of human history and saw the incredibly well-preserved remains of the Neolithic stone houses which were uncovered by a huge storm, with their box beds, saddle querns (used to grind barley) and the large stone dressers. Nearby Skail House on the other hand brought us from the 17th century through to the 1950s with many interesting objects inside, such as a wardrobe from a Spanish Armada ship, Captain Cook's crockery and a Neolithic necklace.

From here we travelled to the Ring of Brodgar which was constructed around the same time as Skara Brae. Of the original 66 standing stones, just under half are still standing tall after all those thousands of years. The ditch surrounding the stones was dug to around 10m depth and 6m width using only deer antler tools, with estimates suggesting it took around 80,000 man-hours to dig!

On our travels, we spotted ravens, a grey heron, curlews, brown hares grazing in paddocks, and skylarks alerted us to their presence by sing loudly overhead. Our guides pointed out the local flora including purple orchids, moonwort, and birds foot trefoil.

After we were all back on board, it was time to bid farewell to Kirkwall and set sail for the Granite City of Aberdeen. Carol Knott, in her wonderful enthusiastic style that we have all come to love, gave a lecture on "The Pre-history of Scotland", and then we had a less exciting, but equally important disembarkation briefing! A special pink afternoon tea was served, to mark the occasion of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, and we had group photos taken out on deck. The afternoon was filled with packing, returning borrowed gear, nipping down to the mudroom for one last check, and then finally, a toast with our Captain and the entire team to a wonderful expedition. We have definitely been blessed with not only the weather, but the wildlife, scenery, and each other's company on this wonderful journey.

Aurora Expeditions thanks you for joining us aboard MV *Greg Mortimer* to Scotland. We hope to see you on the high seas again someday!





# Kayaking Log

By Daniel Stavert & Wesley McNeil

**Kayak Masters: Daniel Stavert & Wesley McNeil**

Number of Paddlers: 4                      Total Paddle Outings: 10                      Total Distance Paddled: 42.5 km

Paddlers:

Paul Hart	Pat Shopher
Kathleen Hart	George Wong

## 28th May, AM: Iona - 3km

The first morning dawned with clear weather and glorious sunshine over the island of Iona. Home to Iona Abbey, and the beginning of so much of the story of celtic Scotland. It was a fitting place to begin the journey as the paddlers prepared for their first outing. After sizing the kayaks and learning a little more about the vessels, the team jumped in a Zodiac for a quick ride towards the shore, out of the northerly wind, and then gracefully entered their kayaks. There they were able explore the calm shelter of the eastern shore off the island. Crystal clear waters, gently moving kelp forests, golden sand beaches were all there for them to explore. The kayak team enjoyed moving amongst the slowly surging rocks and skerries, before entering the wide anchorage of Martyrs Bay. Here in 795 AD the first Viking raids on Scottish soil took place, the wild history in stark contrast to the beautiful blue sky and peaceful landscape. Soon the paddlers rounded the ferry slipway and landed on the sand. A quick transformation from paddling kit to shore walking gear and they were ready to explore the Island itself, from the ancient Abbey to the beautiful seafront. A beautiful day, and a great start to the trip.

## 29th May, AM: Rubh' An'Dunain - 4km

Clear skies and choppy waters greeted the kayakers at Rubh'an Dùnain; a rocky peninsula at the mouth of Loch Scavaig. Set against the looming black Cuillins of the isle of Skye, the shoreline is a jumble of rocky cliffs and shallow tidal channels. In this garden of rocks, the kayakers set out exploring, first heading west into the wind before finding calm waters in the shelter of land. There they came ashore, beaching their kayaks in the ancient canal system, built by viking raiders over a thousand years ago. This canal gave access to the Loch, hidden behind the hills. The kayakers took the chance to walk around the loch, and up to the hill fort above.

Returning to the water, the team paddled out with the wind behind them to follow common dolphins leaping in the water. A final turn into shore, and a grey seal pup watching curiously and it was time to return to the warmth and comfort of the *Greg Mortimer*.

## 29th May, PM: Loch Coruisk - 3km

Today, our afternoon paddle gliding along what used to be the bottom of an ancient glacier. We were surrounded by steep cliffs that rose up to a small range of peaks of 800 to 1,000 meters. Above us, a hanging lake called a

Cirque let its waters slowly out in a narrow cascading waterfall. The small bay we paddled was nicely sheltered from the wind that was racing up the Soay Sound. We meandered along the western cliffs and observed some very shy grey seals. Most of the other expeditioners were hiking above us to the next level of this glacial basin, up to Loch Coruisk. We decided to join them, and made a landing below a smooth-slabbed waterfall slide, but not before playing a bit by sticking the noses of our kayaks into the outflow of the water slide, an action very similar to surfing. We had a very nice short hike to see the Loch above us and posed for some group pictures. Our paddle commenced with a circumnavigation of some skerries, looking for the elusive seals and exploring a little more shoreline.

## May 30th, PM: Bostadh House & Kyles of Little Bernera - 5km

Following a gorgeous morning visiting the Callanish stones, the ship deposited us approximately four to five nautical miles Northwest to a nicely sheltered bay, blocked from the North wind and swells by the island of Little Bernera. Dan used the Zodiac to take our kayaks to a nice little private sandy beach cove. Once there, we proceeded to explore a mysterious structure on the horizon. It turned out to be a small graveyard purposed for the Clan McCleod.

With our break from the wind and the sun peering through the clouds, we were pretty warm from our little walk up to the graveyard. Patricia proceeded to demonstrate how one can remove, to our amazement, an extra layer of clothing from beneath a drysuit without actually taking of the drysuit – quite a Houdini bit of magic. As we were launching our kayaks, Wes then decided to demonstrate how you should not put your kayak too close to the water before you are ready to launch, less the kayak be swept away by the rising tide and occasional big swell. Wes, then, always wanting to lead by example, turned his back for a moment, a swell came up, and his kayak was immediately swept away and into the cove.

We had a nice paddle in calm waters, heading west, towards the Bostadh House site. The sound eventually narrowed down to quite a small sluice between the cliffs then out into Camas Bosta (or Bay), where the winds and swell picked up again, coming straight in from the Atlantic. We then circled back around to a small cove and sandy beach to do a small surf landing and go visit Bostadh House.

## 31st May, PM: St. Kilda - 4km

With a beautiful morning on shore at St Kilda, the kayakers were keen to get out and explore the incredible coastline that wrapped around Village Bay, the shelter of the huge cliffs keeping the bay still and calm, despite the island's position fifty miles into the Atlantic Ocean.

The team launched from the ship in brilliant sunshine and were soon approaching the sheer cliffs of Dùn. There they experienced their first sea caves. Entering in backwards to keep an eye on rogue waves of swell, the paddlers got to experience the rise and fall of the waves, and the echo and boom of the deep caverns that ran right through the island. From these caves the paddlers continued on, paused by surging channels and the whitewater of archways. Pushing around past the point, they soon found calm waters and curious seals. The return to the ship was marked by huge rafts of thousands of puffins, razorbills, and guillemots. These small auks, flocked in huge numbers, flew constantly over the team's heads. The clouds of small birds in the air and floating all around the kayaks made for a wonderful escort home to the welcome calm of the ship.

## 1st June, AM : Sula Sgier - 4km

Today was our first deep cave exploration day. Scotland's caves are considered the topping on the cake in the kayak world. Daniel and Paul paddled together today. Paul thought he would get to take it easy on this day, with Daniel doing most of the paddling. Dan was not going to let him off so easily. George and Patricia paddled the other double kayak as their usual enthusiastic team. We stepped up our skills another level by practicing tighter maneuvering in the caves, then went on to explore a number of long channels which would emerge on opposite sides of a point. As the swell was a bit heavy in spots, we were able to swing around and basically figure-eight our way through these long corridors. As we would look up to see the high roofs of the caverns, we would also see large numbers of gannets nesting or in flight. There are some 9,000 nesting pairs of gannets on Sula Sgier. The colour contrasts were particularly vibrant today as we had sunshine on the dark basaltic cliffs, set off by the green mosses and occasional intrusions of rose red feldspar and white quartz. Just a gem of an experience.

## 1st June, AM: North Rona - 5km

After a short voyage, we arrived at North Rona to continue our cave exploration theme. Kathleen re-joined the group to enjoy this beautiful day on the water. The caves just kept on getting better. In one cave, we came upon a female grey seal just hanging on to a ledge. We held fast for a bit as to try not to disturb her. She lingered for a bit, then being as shy as they are, slid away into the water. Again, we were inundated by puffins, gannets and even had the opportunity to see a sea eagle being bullied away from the nest sites.

## June 2nd: Mousa Broch - 5km

Arriving at Mousa Broch in the afternoon, the paddlers were struck immediately by the looming presence of the broch. Towering over the landscape, the structure is a striking landmark to any seafarer, whether they be sailor or kayaker. Paddling quickly into the calm nook behind the headland, the team let the wind blow them gently down onto the sticky bedrock where they could land. A quick scramble up the hills and they were standing beneath the broch itself. There they could enter through the low lintel and into the heart of the ancient building. Following the internal spiral staircase, the team soon were standing on the top level, looking down through thousands of years of history and out over the bay.

Re-entering their kayaks from the rocks, the team were soon moving with the wind at their backs and searching for pockets of calm in amongst the cliffline. Archways and caves, still pools with surf-rounded pebbles, and long tunnels with glowing blue waters, all presented themselves. A few curious seals visiting to investigate rounded out another fantastic day on the water.

## June 3rd, PM: Papa Stour - 5.5km

At first we thought this paddle might not be possible because of big swells, but Daniel was able to tow us to the more protected end of the island. It was another special shore line, cliff line with lots of caves and some adjacent to small white sandy beach alcoves. We started small and got bigger and deeper. The kayakers led the way on this one as their kayak caving skills are becoming well-honed. We agreed to test the acoustics of certain caves by singing Amazing Grace. It seemed caves with two open ends were poor and the best one was more dome-shaped with one narrow entrance. We also came across one bay with huge open-mouthed caves and a very notable arch.

We took time in these calm waters to get some pictures of the team. We continued to paddle around the point and explore and were able to paddle back to the ship in the relative calm. The perfect conditions on this trip just do not give up.

## June 4th, PM: Papa Holm - 4km

Blustery conditions greeted the *Greg Mortimer* as it approached Papa Westray. A brisk 18 knots blowing across the island and whipping up white caps. Undeterred, the kayakers set out for the shore. In the lea of the island, a calm stretch of water awaited. Exploring the rocky shores was a delight, the kelp beds drifting in the swell and the rocky intertidal zone glowing the crystal clear waters.

Hugging the coastline, the team kept moving up and further into the channel before crossing across to Papa Holm. There they were greeted by six curious seals, following close behind the kayaks until they were safely out of sight. Soon the team had arrived at the golden sandy beach of the southern point, and after landing were able to stroll up onto the green hillside. The golden sunshine of the afternoon, the ship rolling in the lazy swell, and the many gulls and fulmars soaring on the breeze all adding to sense of wonder. This was only increased as the paddlers were able to approach the neolithic burial cairn up on the hillside, lifting the trapdoor and clambering down a ladder to go back in time 5,000 years.

Soon it was time to return to the ship to paddle the last 100 metres, and to appreciate an amazing kayak trip in the Scottish Isles.









Bird Sightings

Bird Species	27th May to 06 Jun									
	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5
Red-throated Diver							●	●		
Northern Fulmar	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Manx Shearwater										
Storm Petrel							●			
Gannet	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Shag		●	●	●	●	●	●	●		
Cormorant		●	●							
Grey Heron			●	●						
Greylag Goose		●	●					●	●	
Brent Goose										
Pink Footed Goose									●	
Mute Swan									●	
Common Eider	●	●		●	●	●	●		●	
Shelduck				●						
Mallard								●		●
Coot										
Moorhen										
Pheasant										
Short-eared Owl										●
Peregrine		●			●					
Hen Harrier										
Golden Eagle										
White-tail Eagle						●				
Ringed Plover					●				●	
Golden Plover			●							
Lapwing									●	
Redshank		●						●	●	

Bird Species	27th May to 06 Jun									
	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5
Snipe			●		●			●	●	
Oystercatcher		●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●
Turnstone					●	●	●		●	●
Whimbrel						●				
Curlew				●				●	●	●
Purple Sandpiper										
Common Sandpiper										
Sanderling									●	
Dunlin					●					
European Stonechat				●						
Arctic Skua		●					●	●	●	
Long-Tailed Skua										
Great Skua		●			●	●	●	●	●	●
Herring Gull			●	●		●	●		●	
Great Black-backed Gull		●	●	●		●	●	●	●	
Lesser Black-backed Gull						●				
Black-Headed Gull				●					●	●
Common Gull		●	●	●	●			●	●	
Kittiwake		●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Arctic Tern			●	●		●	●	●	●	●
Common Tern										
Sandwich Tern									●	
Common Guillemot				●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Black Guillemot		●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Razorbill				●	●	●	●		●	
Atlantic Puffin		●		●	●	●	●	●	●	
Corncrake										

Bird Species	27th May to 06 Jun									
	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5
Pigeon (Rock Dove)		●		●	●	●		●	●	●
House Martin		●								
Sand Martin										
Barn Swallow		●		●		●		●	●	●
Wren		●		●				●	●	●
St Kilda Wren					●					
Shetland Wren							●	●		
Wheatear		●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●
Meadow Pipit		●	●	●			●	●	●	●
Rock Pipit		●	●			●	●	●	●	
Dunnock										
Linnet									●	
Starling		●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●
House Sparrow		●					●	●	●	●
Eurasian Tree Sparrow										
Skylark		●						●	●	●
Redpoll					●					
Chaffinch										
Greenfinch										
Goldfinch		●								
Robin		●								
Coal Tit										
Great Tit										
Blue Tit		●								
Song Thrush		●								
Blackbird		●								
Twite							●			

Bird Species	27th May to 06 Jun									
	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5
Carrian Crow										
Hooded Crow		●	●	●	●	●	●			
Rook		●								
Raven			●							
Jackdaw		●								●
Chough										
Cuckoo			●	●						
Willow Warbler		●						●		
Whitethroat		●								
Eurasian Siskin				●						
Eurasian Collared-Dove						●				
Long-taild Duck									●	







# Mammal and Fish Sightings

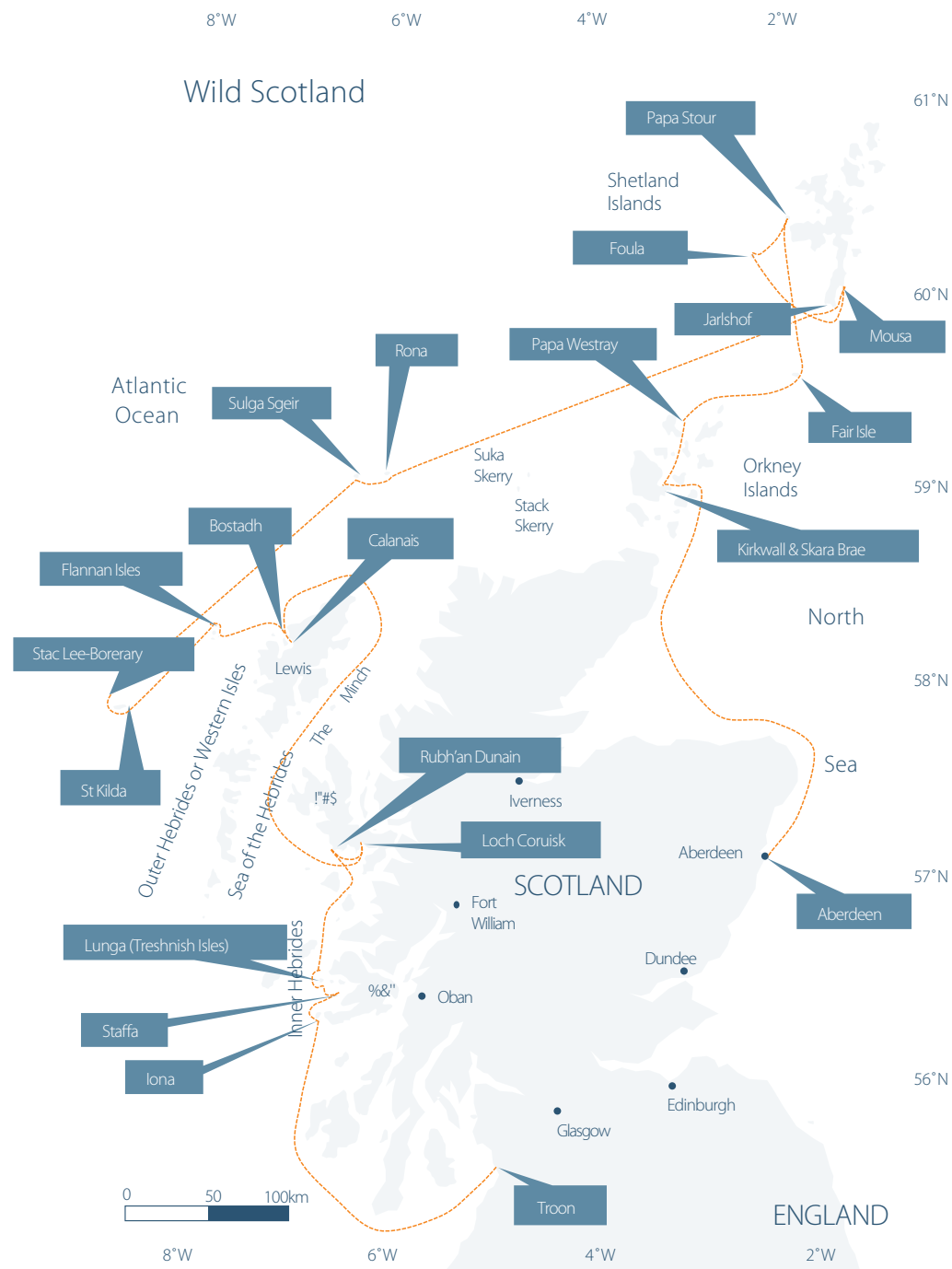
Mammal and Fish Species

27th May to 06 Jun

	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5
Basking Shark										
Common Seal					•			•	•	
Grey Seal			•		•	•	•	•		
Eurasian Otter			•							
Minke Whale						•				
Atlantic White-sided Dolphin										
Bottlenose Dolphin										
Common Dolphin			•							
White-sided Dolphin										
Harbour Porpoise			•							
Risso's Dolphin						•				
Red Deer										
St Kilda Mouse										
American Mink			•							
Orkney Vole									•	











# Expeditioners:

Dave Apps	Linda Harfst	Edie O'Brien
Mary Apps	Stephanie Harper	Peter O'Brien
Stella Bain	Kerry Harper	Allan Ockenden
Brett Barclay	Kathleen Hart	Janet Ockenden
Margaret Barr	Paul Hart	Mike O'Hagan
Darrell Beninger	Barbara Hickl	Joy Pullman
Lee-Ann Beninger	Ed Hickl Jr	Rick Roche
John Berman	September Holstad	Les Russell
Bob Bird	Tor Holstad	Brian Russell
Linda Bird	Diana Huntress	Hardy Schneider
David Butler	Malcolm Hyslop	Pat Shopher
Maria De Las Cuevas	Lesley Kernaghan	Lisa Stotter
Jane Eastburn	Stephen Knott	Vitali Vitaliev
Wade Eastburn	Thea Knott	Jenny White
Andy Elton	Chris Lyons	Lizzie Williams
Kathy Elton	Flick Malcolm	Megan Williams
Tom Farrell	John Markham	Chez Williams
Alison Farrell	Deb Markham	Richard Williams
Martha Flanders	Steve McLaughlin	Roxanna Wolfe
John Fomous	Vista Michael	George Wong
Cathy Fomous	Chris Moyle	
Christine Gibbons	Nella Moyle	
Brian Gibbons	Bonnie Newman	
Louise Goldsbury	Leona Nock	
Calvin Harfst	Bill O'Brien	

# Expedition Team:

- Expedition Leader: David Berg
- Assistant Expedition Leader: Isabelle Howells
- Expedition Guide Trainer: Howard Whelan
- Onboard Expedition Manager: Rosie Leaney
- Marine Biologist: Dani Abras
- Ornithologist: John Love
- Naturalist: Ian McCarthy
- Historian: Carol Knott
- Expedition Guide/Trainee Historian: Kirsty Dick
- Expedition Guide/Naturalist: Graeme Snow
- Expedition Guide Trainee: Ania Baranek
- Kayaking Guide: Daniel Stavert
- Kayaking Guide: Wes McNeil
- Photography Guide: Scott Portelli
- Medic: Piotr Damski
- Zodiac Master: Sergei Hincu
- Mudroom/Shopkeeper: Reza Rusooly

# Senior Officers & Heads of Department:

- Master: Maxim Makarovskiy
- Chief Officer: Ivan Romanov
- Safety Officer: Andrey Zakalashnyuk
- Second Officer: Edgar Castro
- Bosun: Oscar Antonio Castejon Torres
- Deck Cadet: Vlad Nicolescu
- Ship Doctor: Maria Suarez
- Chief Engineer: Dimitar Vasilev
- First Engineer: Ion Toma
- Hotel Director: Patrice Degron
- F&B Manager: Miguel Cabanillas Alvarez
- Chief Purser: Liza Merillo
- Executive Chef: Nellan Lewars
- Head Waiter: Diogenes Encinares
- Hotel Controller: Richard Cayeta
- IT Officer: Nataniel Vibares
- Receptionist: Kateryna Tauzhnianska
- Receptionist: Marie Annecy Reynoird
- Head Stateroom: Elieser Nunez Almendarez
- Able Seaman: Muhammad Karier
- Able Seaman: Bobby Penuliar Payumo
- Able Seaman: Hardik Rao
- Able Seaman: Ajay Fnu
- Able Seaman: Joel Valdevieso Noble
- Able Seaman: Giovanni Dela Torre







