

# Ireland's West Coast

Aboard *MV Greg Mortimer* | 14 – 26 May 2022









# Dún Laoghaire

DAY 1 | Saturday 14 May 2022

Position at 0600

Latitude: 53°17.701'N

Longitude: 006°07.794'W

Course: 218.5

Speed: 0.0 knots

Wind Speed: 0.9 knots, light air from SE

Barometer: 1016

Air Temp: 10°C

Explore. Dream. Discover.

—Mark Twain

Irish phrase of the day: Cead Mile Fáilte. A Hundred Thousand Welcomes.

Charming Dún Laoghaire made a fitting introduction to our Ireland's West Coast voyage, its harbour active with sailing dingies, fishing boats, gulls and guillemots. Although an atmospheric mist descended around us, we could still feel the sun managing to peek through, gently warming us.

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 14 days.

Together we total 24 passengers from Australia, UK, Canada, The Netherlands and USA, along with eight international Expedition Team, two expert Irish guides, one ornithologist, and 69 ships crew from around the globe.

Drinks and a buffet awaited us in the Elephant Island Bar – much appreciated by the hungry travellers. The safety drill followed, and the sound of the ship's horn signalled for us to don bulky orange lifejackets and muster in the Lecture Theatre. The Polar Class life vessels, we were reassuringly told by Safety Officer Andrey, can hold 136 people each, for five days!

As we cast off, there was no sign of the fog lifting, so we watched as Dún Laoghaire slowly disappeared behind a shroud of white.

It was back to the Lecture Theatre to officially meet our Expedition Team, learn about upcoming Citizen Science programmes, the 'Zodiac three-step' and, most importantly, plans for the first full day of our Irish adventure.

The bar proved enticing with a few of us toasting the beginning of our voyage with new shipmates.

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 welcoming waiting staff.

Soon after, it was time for the jacket and muck boot swap, so now we are all prepared for whatever weather may meet us on Ireland's wild West Coast.

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





# Malin Head & Tory Island

DAY 2 | Sunday 15 May 2022

Position at 0600

Latitude: 55°2034 N

Longitude: 006°9875 W

Course: At anchor

Speed: 0 knots

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

Irish phrase of the day: Sláinte! Here's to good health!

As the pilot pulled up along the side of the ship, he was not the only one escorting us into port from the North Atlantic Ocean. A couple of bottlenose dolphins made an appearance bow riding in the wake of the *Greg Mortimer*.

Soon, our first port of call at Green Castle was in sight and the anticipation of our first outing in Ireland was building steadily.

As we passed through the lush green countryside of Donegal, John McGroary (our very own local Donegal resident) provided an informative commentary on the history and character of this beautiful region.

Although Malin Head is the most northerly point of mainland Ireland, John explained that we are still in ‘Southern Ireland’ (a rather mis-leading title popularised by the media), or more accurately, the Republic of Ireland.

On reaching Malin Head, we took in the splendid panoramic views of the coast and countryside.

After hopping off the coach, we embarked on a small section of Ireland’s famous ‘Wild Atlantic Way’, a stunning scenic walk along the rugged coastline. Waves crashed against the tall cliffs as we stopped to admire beautiful wild pink orchids. European gannets could be spotted in the distance, soaring gracefully over the waves. The ultimate view-point was Hell’s Hole, an inlet with steep cliffs carved into the rocks, instilling a sense of nature and all its glory. Not a single storm-trooper in sight.

Back on the coach, John McGroary reminded us of a request he made on day one... that he likes people to sing on his tours! With none of us mustering the courage to perform, John serenaded us with a solo performance of ‘Destination Donegal’.

After lunch, our photography guide, Scott, presented some great advice on how to take great photos with your smart phone, inspiring us to embrace the technology we all carry in our pockets. No matter if you are a brand new, or a seasoned professional photographer, the best camera is the one you have with you.

Wind Speed: 5 knots, light air from SE

Barometer: 1016

Air Temp: 9°C

John Love, took to the stage to give us a captivating historic account of the King of Tory. Armed with all John’s knowledge and hoping to learn more, it was time to set foot on Tory Island. Our local guides have a plethora of knowledge and to see these places through their eyes is quite a privilege. We finished our visit to Tory Island in the local pub listening to live music, as John and John put on a show for us. The talented voice of John McGroary sharing some Irish tunes and the fiddle performance of “Rakes of Kildare” by John Love, were well worth the price of admission!

Destination Donegal -

As I stand beside the starboard bow and watch the ocean foam.

As I view each new horizon, I grow further than my home.

I’m sailing on a foreign ship that’s bound for Montreal.

I’ll view the world and make my destination Donegal.

I would make my way from Mailn, from Bundoran, to Raphoe.

Or Portsalon down to Killybegs to Creeslough or Dungloe.

I’d wander on by Barnesmore Gap on everyone I’d call.

Then beyond the Bluestack Mountains, in the town of Donegal.

Oh, Donegal, I’ll miss you and I’ll never understand.

Why I left you for your foreign lands against my heart’s command.

Whatever fortune comes my way, whatever may befall.

I know I’ll make my final destination Donegal.

I would make my way from Mailn, from Bundoran, to Raphoe.

Or Portsalon down to Killybegs to Creeslough or Dungloe.

I’d wander on by Barnesmore Gap on everyone I’d call.

Then beyond the Bluestack Mountains, in the town of Donegal.

I know I’ll make my final destination Donegal.





# Killybegs: Slieve League Cliffs and Donegal

DAY 3 | Monday 16th May 2022

Position at 0900

Latitude: 54°37.682'N

Longitude: 008°26.285'W

Course: At anchor

Speed: 0 knots

Wind Speed: 11 knots, gentle breeze from E

Barometer: 1017

Air Temp: 12°C

In Ireland we have a very old saying. When you can see the mountains, it's going to rain, and when you can't see the mountains, it's raining.

—David Allen

Irish Phrase of the Day: Craic agus ceol. Fun and music.

Our wet morning started with a nice bus ride, full of knowledge from our tour guide John McGroary. As we drove, he explained the beauty of the southern part of the Donegal land, one of the 30 states of the Republic of Ireland. Our drive took us through very narrow roads and our bus driver managed to negotiate tight corners. The grassy landscape, was populated by many colourfully marked sheep. For today, we had two activities to choose from: a longer hike along the cliffs or a visit to the archaeology and Folk Museum.

As soon as we arrived at Slieve League Cliffs, we stopped at the visitor centre, and headed to Bone Glass Viewing Point by minibus. The non-walkers and birders stayed here, while 10 hikers trekked off into the mist. We were greeted by a beautiful view, but as soon as the hikers started to set off, down came mist and rain. Or, as the Irish say: 'soft weather'.

After the misty and wet walk, it was very welcoming for hikers to be greeted by a delicious scone and tea and the happy Irish hospitality. Our birders spotted a great variety of woodland birds, and many in song too. So far, they've reached a remarkable number of 80 different bird species for this trip already!

The second group continued in the bus, before disembarking to visit some important and ancient archeological monuments, some of them with more than 1,000 years history!

As we strolled along the roads, we also learned about the flora of Ireland. John used one as a musical instrument and another as a sugar source, opening to suck the sweet honey from the inside. A few bluebells also brought colour to our rainy walk.

We headed to the Folk Village, where we received fresh, warm scones, coffee and tea. We visited three traditional cottages from the 1600's, 1800's and 1900's and learned about improvements to the Irish people's lives over the centuries.

As our beloved Carol Knott likes to say: 'Rain before seven, fine by 11'. Well, it wasn't super accurate, but by lunch time the weather changed, and a beautiful blue sky opened up for our afternoon outing.





# Mullaghmore

DAY 4 | Tuesday 17th May 2022

Position at 0600

Latitude: 54°28.309' N

Longitude: 008°26.020' W

Course: At anchor

Speed: 0 knots

Wind Speed: 17 knots, fresh breeze from SE

Barometer: 1018

Air Temp: 12°C

There are no strangers here, only friends you haven't met yet.

—WB Yeats

Irish phrase of the day: What's the craic?

What's happening/How are you (Craic = fun, news, gossip)

Looking out from our early morning anchorage at Mullaghmore, the intriguing landscape of County Sligo with its dramatic landforms beckoned us for the day of exploration that lay ahead. The small, tidy harbour town of Mullaghmore is unused to visits from expedition or passenger ships, and the news of our arrival, not to mention wild speculation about who we might be, soon spread through the neighbourhood.

Our morning hike took us on a delightful loop around the eponymous 'big headland'. Pausing at Mullaghmore to admire the view, glimpses of Classiebawn Castle, and a monument to the deserted village that once thrived there. We happened to meet local historian Joe McGowan, who with typical Irish wit, spontaneously regaled us with stories about the area.

The castle was built as a seasonal home for Henry John Temple, Lord Palmerston, commencing at the same time as the stone-walled harbour between 1822 and 1841, which provided perfect landing conditions for us today. The walk took us through a lush green pastoral landscape with, primroses and other wild-flowers blossoming on the banks, while house martins darted overhead.

After a welcome lunch back on board and a chance to catch our breath, it was back to Mullaghmore by Zodiac for a trip to the waterfall at Glencar. Our route took us through the glaciated valleys carved by ice from the Dartry Mountains and Benbulbin, while our Irish guide John McGroary told us tales of the mythical lovers Grainne and Dermaid, and the not-so-mythical Spanish Armada ships which were wrecked nearby in 1588.

Ireland has a rich cultural and literary life, and one of its most admired poets, W.B. Yeats, was deeply attached to this area. Many of his poems feature the beauty and special character of this part of County Sligo, and on our way homeward, we had the opportunity to visit Yeats final resting place at Drumcliffe Church, and to encounter more of his poetic genius. This had also been the site of one of Colmille's monasteries from the sixth century AD. The base of a round tower is a survivor of that foundation, but most breathtaking of all is the high cross, dating probably from the 10th or 11th centuries AD, and one of the finest examples in Ireland. It is encrusted with carvings of panels of celtic interlace interspersed with high relief figural biblical scenes and animals.





# Kilcummin: Céide Fields

DAY 5 | Wednesday 18th May 2022

Position at 0600			
Latitude: 54°16.876'N	Course: 225°	Wind Speed: 12 knots from S	Air Temp: 8°C
Longitude: 009°10.381'W	Speed: 4.4 knots	Barometer: 1020	

It seems to me we all look at nature too much and live with her too little.

—Oscar Wilde

Irish phrase of the day: Go raibh maith agat

Thank you with a literal meaning of may you have goodness!

David had forewarned us at last night’s briefing about weather changes to come, so we were pleasantly surprised to wake up to blue skies, which remained with us for most of the morning at least. After breakfast, we all boarded the Zodiacs for the little fishing village of Kilcummin in County Mayo. John McGroary had been panicking a little about leaving the ship as he was to meet with Liam Neeson in a few days, who was filming in the area! We were to enjoy John’s company for a few more hours. Jutta was then our coach guide for our destination of the day – the world-renowned (archaeological world at least) Céide Fields.

It was an exceedingly pleasant run through rural Ireland up into the peatland hills, with stunning views to the sedimentary cliff coastline of Downpatrick Head to the south, and the dramatic Stags of Broadhaven on the northern horizon. We saw enough of the glass pyramid of the new Visitor Centre, blending into the landscape, to know we had arrived. The spacious car park indicated that they had already been dealing with healthy visitor numbers and were anticipating many more after the new, upgraded Centre opens in a few weeks. Greta, archaeologist and manager, had kindly opened up the Visitor Centre to give us a wonderfully exclusive preview. All they had left to do was sort out the complicated technology behind the immersive, audio-visual facility.

Andy, a geologist, introduced us to the imaginative interpretation indoors, leading up to the small glass viewing area before heading out for a tour of the site along a well-constructed boardwalk. This is the most extensive Stone Age monument and the most ancient field system on Earth. It is older than the pyramids of Egypt and even Stonehenge in England. Over several thousand years, much came to be buried in peat and only started coming to light as the turf was cut for domestic fuel. The Irish government has applied to UNESCO for it to be listed as the country’s third World Heritage Site but it may take some months before a decision is made.

We were fortunate the weather held out for us but the wind, and a low tide at the pier, meant that few escaped a splashing on the way back. But the exceptional skill and experience of our Team drivers and ship’s crew, saw us all back in time for lunch. However, with no drop in the wind, it was decided to spend the rest of the afternoon on

board – although several local villagers had offered their services to take us on guided walks ashore. Instead Carol gave a splendid talk on prehistoric Ireland, putting the whole morning in context, followed by afternoon tea, and a talk on seabirds by John.

So, we ended our first successful ‘Expedition afternoon’, but in a more relaxed fashion perhaps than we had intended.





# Killary Harbour: Connemara National Park

DAY 6 | Thursday 19th May 2022

Position at 0700

Latitude: 54°28.309'N

Longitude: 08°26.020'W

Course: At anchor

Speed: 0 knots

Wind Speed: 17 knots, fresh breeze from E

Barometer: 1020

Air Temp: 12°C

Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.

—W B Yeats

Irish Phrase of the Day: Dobhar Chu.

Water Hound (Also known as the Irish crocodile, a terrifying creature of Irish folklore!)

Killary Bay proved a safe-haven from the storm overnight and provided a textbook, flat calm landing at the local slipway. It was one of the finest of Ireland's fjords, with very steep sides and sufficient depth to accommodate fleets of ship in times of war. Our ship had to navigate past numerous cages for farmed salmon, and ropes for mussel.

The coach had arrived safely and it was on our drive to the Connemara National Park Visitor Centre, that we really appreciated what the driver had to contend with, in his full size bus on such a narrow twisted road – a remarkable feat which he would repeat four times before the day was out!

The landscape was in stark contrast to the 'green fields of Erin' that we had encountered so far. Connemara was so much more reminiscent of the rugged, more mountainous parts of Wales, the Scottish Highlands or the English Lake District. There were impressive mature oaks and pines sheltered in the scenic wee glens and coves before we broke out into more open mountainous terrain. The visitor centre sat in woodland with some manicured garden feature offering a variety of species for our keen birders (six new ones to their growing list including nice views of a treecreeper feeding its young). They also saw a stoat (a member of the marten family; the Irish ones rarely turn white in winter when their fur was much prized as ermine). Jutta led the others on the trail to the top of Diamond Mountain, with opportunities to break off on a shorter route for the less energetic walkers. The wind got stronger as they gained height until the aspiring 'summiters' had to abandon the top altogether.

But they enjoyed their hike and back at the Visitor Centre, there were some interesting exhibits to browse. But the tea-room proved an attractive proposition first, despite the ship's packed lunch with which we had been provided.

The staff put on an excellent colour audio-visual presentation about the National Park before we departed. Rather than return to the ship immediately, Jutta guided us to a couple of impressive viewpoints, even catching a glimpse of our ship at anchor. At the head of the fjord however, it had shallowed sufficiently for oyster cages

and the river, with its impressive Aasleagh Falls now offering angling for wild salmon. One fisherman was wielding his fly rod and a few of us were lucky enough to catch a glimpse of another keen fisherman – an elusive river otter, also of the marten family. Here in the west of Ireland they are quite common on the coast, where their daily activities are dictated more by the tides so there is a better chance of seeing them by day.

Back at the pier, our trusty Zodiac crew were there to meet us, and we were soon back on the ship. At 5pm we had a bar chat, hosted by Dani, Carol, John and Jutta before our recap and briefing – and dinner.





# Killary Harbour, Kylemore Abbey and Leenane

DAY 7 | Friday 20th May 2022

Position at 0700

Latitude: 54°28.309'N

Longitude: 08°26.020'W

Course: At anchor

Speed: 0 knots

Wind Speed: 15 knots from E

Barometer: 1022

Air Temp: 12°C

Travel is the only thing you buy that makes you richer

—Anonymous

Irish Phrase of the Day: Mawsh ay duh hull ay.

Please (direct translation: If it is your will)

I have never watched the TV series Downton Abbey, but visiting Kylemore Abbey was what I expected this might be. This dramatic castle overlooking a beautiful lake was a beautiful sight. You can just imagine the people, their stories and the history that encompasses this impressive piece of architecture.

The walled gardens had so many examples of flora, and the exceptionally groomed landscape educated us at each turn, as huge bumble bees flitted between the flowers. Glasshouses cultivated vegetables and fresh fruit, and even bananas were being grown, who would have thought possible in the middle of Ireland.

The sounds were ever present as various birds rustled in the trees and glided across the outer walls of the garden. The bird watchers explored the surrounding wilderness in search of local species such as blackbirds, song thrush and hooded crows to name just a few.

The afternoon saw many of us walking the famine road, an eight kilometre walk offering us stunning views of Killary Harbour – Ireland's only Fjord. The hike began on the 19th century famine relief road – a poignant reminder of the devastation suffered in this region during the potato famine. Nature and weather are slowly reclaiming this old road - it is now blanketed in green, with the stones that once paved the way scattered and up-ended. Navigating the terrace cut into the side of the steeply descending slope, we were careful not to trip on rocks or slip in the mud.

We passed the ruined famine village of Foher, as well as cascading waterfalls which descend under the track, all set against the steep craggy backdrop.

Slowly we re-entered the present day as the track turned to firm gravel, then tarmac, and finally killary sheep farm, where we cooed over the gorgeous lambs.

The weather held until the final stretch of our hike, when the clouds delivered a light smattering of rain, and then the most vivid of rainbows which perfectly framed the steep, green fjord lands.

We were pleased to find our warm coach ready and waiting, to whisk us back to the *Greg Mortimer* for a well-deserved dinner.

Whilst 10 expeditioners and a few of the E-Team were hiking, the rest of us explored the village. Is it even an Irish village tour if you don't end up in the pub? So we did just that of course, providing a great opportunity to have a chat with David & JP, and share our adventures from all over the world.

The time in Mayo went by so quickly but experiencing the local towns and the fascinating history gave us even more insight to life in Ireland.





# Clare Island, Inishbofin and Inishark

DAY 8 | Saturday 21st May 2022

Position at 0700  
Latitude: 53°47.750'N  
Longitude: 009°56.132255'W  
Course: 040.8°  
Speed: 2.5 knots

Quote of the Day: May today be better that yesterday, but not as good as tomorrow.

—Irish Proverb

Irish Phrase of the Day: Gaeltacht

Refers to a predominantly Irish speaking region

It was a blustery morning with 15-20 knots blowing from the South-West. Captain Maxim skilfully held the *Greg Mortimer* in position like a giant wind-break, allowing us to do our '3-step' Zodiac dance in the lee of the ship, and soon we were on our way to Clare Island. This is the largest of Mayo's Islands, home to 150 residents (children leave the island to attend secondary school).

Our town tour began at Grace (or Grainne in Irish, pronounced "Gron-ya") O'Malley's Castle. Grace's story was inspiring! Having proved to be ruthless and a natural leader from a young age, she came to rule large swathes of land across Connacht.

She was their Pirate Queen, ruling fearlessly, letting no attack against her or her family go un-punished. She died in 1603 and was buried at the Abbey of Clare Island.

Our next stop was the 12th Abbey itself. Inside were remarkable ancient paintings, depicting mythical human and animal figures. As we walked the grounds of the Abbey, it was quite possible that the warrior, and Expedition Leader extraordinaire, Grace O'Malley, was just beneath our feet.

Of course, like all great Irish town tours, we ended up in the pub, Guinness in hand. What amazing hospitality we received there! The Islanders at the Sailor's Bar served us canapes made from their famous organic smoked salmon, and we were treated to fantastic performances. Guitarist Joe Ford, banjo and mandolin player Coleman, had crossed the sea from Louisburgh just to play for us, and the bar owner recited the poem "Pirate Queen".

Our ornithologist, John Love, revealed yet another hidden skill - mandolin playing, and two young girls performed an Irish dance and accordion performances. The young accordion player seemed nervous, and we were told this was her first performance in front of an audience. What a privilege to see, and we hope it is the first of many to come for her.

Wind Speed: 15 knots from SW  
Barometer: 1027  
Air Temp: 11°C

Before the birders joined us in the pub, they had a nice 1.6 kilometre walk along the coast and inland towards an ancient tomb, where they spotted a few passerine species.

Even after all the canapes, we still managed to have a great lunch on board whilst heading to Inishbofin island for our afternoon activities.

After lunch, our expedition team boarded the Zodiacs to try out the landing, even though the forecast was showing 30 knots steady.

The team encountered rough seas and big waves on the way to the pier and our own fearless Expedition Leader, David, decided to keep us in the comfort and safety of the *Greg Mortimer* for the afternoon.

So we finished the afternoon with a ship cruise of Inishbofin and Inishark Islands, watching through the binoculars as guillemots and shags bobbed on the water's surface, and fulmars gracefully soared over the waves.



"Pirate Queen"

Wind whines through battlements  
A churning swell at the headland  
Water spouts near Cahir, became you.  
Salt and smoke your perfume  
Sea shells and bones your jewellery  
Skulls and anchors your trophies.

What flung you onto the merciless waves  
To plunder and destroy with rampant galleys,  
No ropes or chains could tie you down.  
For you a fresh southerly in the rigging a signal,  
Mares tails over Mweelrea an omen,  
Storms lurking beyond Turk the backdrop

For another cattle raid far from home  
The bounty celebrated around fires on Clare Island.  
I see your toothless laugh looking up at me  
Throwing beheaded enemies overboard  
Until Bingham was dispatched to quell your ways  
Your son's body crab-clawed on a desolate shore at dawn.





# Kilronan (Inishmore Island) and the Cliffs of Moher

DAY 9 | Sunday 22nd May 2022

Position at 0700

Latitude: 53°07.249'N

Longitude: 009°38.707'W

Course: 294.9°

Speed: 0.7 knots

Wind Speed: 21 knots from SW

Barometer: 1021

Air Temp: 12°C

Alcohol! Because no great story started with a salad.

—Sign outside Bayview Restaurant, Kilronan

Irish Phrase of the Day: Is fearr Gaeilge briste, ná Béarla clíste.

Broken Irish is better than clever English.

Out of the mist in early morning appeared the legendary Aran Islands and our first destination, Inishmore, the 'large island'. A Zodiac cruise brought us to the pier at Kilronan, where we went our separate ways, some to explore the island with a local guide in a minibus, and others mounted bicycles and pedal off to see the sights. On the southern shore a group of seals basked lazily in the shallow water.

At the far end lies the 'seven churches' an ancient Christian site dedicated to its founder St Brecan, and later occupied by the Dominican order - a perfect place to wander peacefully among the curious gravestones and abandoned medieval archways. Soon, however, we reunited at the approach to the great prehistoric fortress of Dun Aonghasa, perched precipitously on the edge of a sheer 100 metre high cliff. Strolling through woodland full of wild-flowers, and listening to the song of numerous goldfinches and robins, the landscape soon turned to open, windswept limestone pavement. Excavations have shown that the D-shaped monument, protected by numerous concentric stone walls and a dramatic chevaux de frise, was occupied over a period of two thousand years, and was the seat of a powerful ruler and doubtless also of huge symbolic and spiritual significance. Back at the main village of Kilronan, many of us took advantage of the opportunity to take home an original Aran sweater or other knitwear.

Under brightening skies we made our way over lunch to the coastline of the Irish mainland, where we cruised along the 14 kilometre length of the Cliffs of Moher. Towering above us, these sedimentary rock faces of shale and sandstones reach up to 214 metres in height, and date back to the Carboniferous period up to 326 million years ago. Their jointed structure provides excellent breeding sites for some 30,000 pairs of seabirds, and we were able to spot puffins, guillemots, razorbills, gannets, fulmars and kittiwakes amongst the birdlife busily flying over the waves between the sea cliffs and our ship. Two distant clifftop towers caught our attention: one built as a lookout tower against invading French ships in 1808; and another built in 1835 by the local Member of Parliament, in which to entertain his friends while enjoying the spectacular views. Our last treat for the day was an evening visit from a group of common dolphins, bow-riding exuberantly alongside our ship.





# Blasket Islands and Dingle

DAY 10 | Monday 23rd May 2022

Position at 0700

Latitude: 52°04.957'N

Longitude: 010°32.778'W

Course: 229.2°

Speed: 0.2 knots

Wind Speed: 17 knots from SW

Barometer: 1021

Air Temp: 12°C

Wherever you go and whatever you do, may the luck of the Irish be there with you.

—Unknown

Irish Phrase of the Day: Ceili (pronounced cay-li)

An Irish or Scottish dance party, with live music and group dances.

We woke to a beautiful morning at the Blasket Islands, passing between Inishtuighcart and Great Blasket to anchor below the cliff face of the main island. After breakfast, three Zodiacs were launched to take us on a cruise onshore.

The rock faces and grassy slopes were populated by fulmars on broad ledges, and shags amongst the boulders and crevices below. There were some herring and great black-backed gulls, with a few lesser black-backs and ravens also in view. But the highlight for everyone were the grey seals, nearly all of them attractively dappled females with a few yearlings and the odd young darker brown bulls with their pronounced roman nose.

Unlike the common or harbour seals, grey seals do not pup until September, the silky-coated newborns are unable to swim much until they moult. After an hour and a half, we returned to the ship. The swell was awkward but the drivers and crew handled it safely, so we were all back on board for morning coffee. It proved to be an exciting start to the day.

As we repositioned to Dingle further south, the weather continued to improve. Unable to enter the bay, the ship anchored 20 mins out, which made for a long ride to the pier to begin our coach tour of the Dingle Peninsula.

Our first stop was to see some ancient beehive dwellings, some still in use at a farm, and offering us the chance to view some adorable young lambs.

As we rounded Slea Head we were greeted with stunning views, out over the Blasket Islands with the Skellig Islands (tomorrow morning's ship's cruise) on the south-western horizon.

Another brief stop along the narrow cliff road gave an excellent viewpoint, with a flute player and a lady selling ogham stones providing a nice experience.

Isobel, our coach guide, continued to point out places of interest, including the set of the 1960s David Lean film 'Ryan's Daughter' now superceded by one of the more modern 'Star Wars' trilogy. We turned up a bushy sideroad to disembark for a walk up to the well-preserved early Christian Gallarus Oratory.

Isobel also pointed out some ring forts and other prehistoric monuments near the road, where we paid a brief visit to the 12th century Kilmalkedar Chapel. It seemed a prosperous farming landscape, but perhaps as much for the thriving tourist industry, thankfully recovering after the Covid pandemic.

The busy fishing harbour of Dingle was bustling with visitors, we ended our afternoon with a drink in one of the pretty little pubs along the waterfront.

There were a few rain showers before we made our way back to the Zodiacs, to find the wind had dropped for the ride back.

There was still a residual atlantic swell at the ship, but by now we had all become experts at boarding. Just in time for a briefing about tomorrow before dinner.





# Skellig Islands and Bere Island

DAY 11 | Tuesday 24th May 2022

Position at 0700

Latitude: 51°51.477'N

Longitude: 010°28.949'W

Course: 207.3°

Speed: 0.7 knots

Wind Speed: 18 knots from NW

Barometer: 1021

Air Temp: 11°C

May the road rise to meet you, may the wind always be at your back. May the sun shine upon your face, the rains fall soft upon your fields, until we meet again.

—An old Irish blessing

Irish Phrase of the Day: Slán go fóill!

Bye for now!

The elusive Irish sun finally found its way to the *Greg Mortimer*, as we sailed towards the impressive Skellig Islands with their jagged pinnacles rising prominently ahead of us on the horizon. As we cruised Skellig Michael (or Great Skellig), which is a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site, we heard about the challenges of monastic life for those who would live their entire lives on the island. We could see the vertiginous paths and stairs that wound their way up the steep slopes to the monastery with its churches and clocháns (domed accommodation for the monks), and to the hermitage where monks could find some additional isolation if their island in the middle of the sea wasn't secluded enough already. Unlike us, the monks of the 9th and 10th centuries might in fact have looked forward to stormy weather, as it meant they didn't have to worry about Viking raids that day! We then looped across to Little Skellig where we had incredible views of the huge gannet colony on the island, which from a distance can give the impression of snow-covered rocks due to the density of birds and guano. There was a hive of birding activity around the island with puffins, guillemots and razorbills circling the colony.

Leaving the Skellig Islands the ship turned south for Bere Island, where we met with three local guides at the pier in Rerrin who would take us around the island in three groups. Sharing the fascinating history and nature of the island with us. One walking group took a longer route around the east end of the island to the Lonehort Battery which was a WWII defensive outpost, with six-inch artillery guns so powerful that the reverberations would shatter the windows in nearby homes and shock the chickens into not laying eggs for weeks! The second walking group headed uphill to some beautiful views and the Martello Towers, which were built in the 1790s to defend against the French. The third group headed out in the minibus to the Bere Island Heritage Centre, making a full tour of the island on the way.

After all the glorious sunshine of the morning, Ireland was keen to remind us of why her shores are a luscious emerald green and then brought on an impressive downpour just in time for our BBQ. It certainly didn't dampen any spirits however, with a few risking the full outdoor Irish BBQ experience, and others opting for a drier dinner indoors. A huge thank you to the restaurant crew for providing us with such a feast!

Afterwards the Irish party commenced with hats aplenty and some jigs providing a great atmosphere. Altogether a fantastic final day of excursions in this beautiful country, with some festive spirit to top off what has been an incredible journey along the shores of the Emerald Isle.





# At Sea

DAY 12 | Wednesday 25th May 2022

Position at 0700

Latitude: 51°51.477'N

Longitude: 010°28.949'W

Course: 207.3°

Speed: 0.7 knots

Wind Speed: 18 knots from NW

Barometer: 1021

Air Temp: 11°C

The heart of man is very much like the sea, it has its storms, it has its tides and in its depths it has its pearls too

—Vincent van Gogh, from The Letters of Vincent van Gogh

The final day – we had a luxurious lie-in and a slightly later breakfast, to begin our relaxing day at sea. In between the fantastic lectures from ornithologist John Love, and historian Carol Knott, we slowly packed our bags. Many different pods of common dolphins joined us as we cruised, riding our bow wave, escorting us home. We ran outside onto the deck to take photos of them, the water glittering on their backs in the golden sunshine.



In the afternoon, Dani presented a lecture on seals, which brought back memories of our wonderful grey seal encounters earlier in the week.

Amid the flurry of departing rituals (accounts, passport collection), we are concerned about the immediate plans, tests, flights and goodbyes. We think - must get down to the mudroom for one last check.

But what a trip, what days - and so much packed into those landings and cruises. We were reminded of just how much we'd seen in the evening slide show put together by Scott Portelli, our on board photographer.

Happy in the knowledge that despite the changes and challenges of weather and covid travel, we'd made it all the way around Ireland, and seen a lot of what it had to offer, within the comforts of the *Greg Mortimer*.

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





Bird Sightings

Bird Species	14th to 26th May 2022												
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
Red-throated Diver		●											
Northern Fulmar	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	
Manx Shearwater		●			●				●	●			
Storm Petrel													
Gannet	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	
Shag		●	●	●				●	●		●		●
Cormorant	●	●		●	●		●						●
Grey Heron	●	●			●			●	●			●	
Brent Goose	●												
Mute Swan	●	●	●	●			●						
Common Eider		●											
Shelduck	●												
Mallard	●	●	●	●			●						
Coot	●												
Moorhen	●												
Pheasant		●							●				
Peregrine		●									●		
Ringed Plover	●												●
Golden Plover		●											
Lapwing		●		●									
Redshank		●											
Oystercatcher	●	●	●						●		●		●
Turnstone		●											
Whimbrel	●												
Curlew	●	●											
Common Sandpiper							●						
Dunlin	●												

Bird Species	14th to 26th May 2022												
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
Great Skua										●			
Herring Gull		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Great Black-backed Gull		●	●	●	●				●	●			
Lesser Black-backed Gull		●	●	●	●	●							
Black-Headed Gull		●				●							
Common Gull		●	●					●	●				●
Kittiwake			●		●				●	●			
Common Tern		●	●	●									
Sandwich Tern				●					●				
Common Guillemot		●	●		●	●				●			
Black Guillemot		●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●		
Razorbill			●						●				
Atlantic Puffin			●						●				
Corncrake			●										
Pigeon (Rock Dove)		●	●	●	●	●	●		●				●
House Martin		●	●	●	●	●							
Sand Martin		●	●	●	●		●						
Barn Swallow		●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●			●
Wren		●	●	●	●		●	●	●				
Wheatear		●	●	●	●		●	●					
Meadow Pipit		●	●	●	●	●		●					
Rock Pipit			●		●			●					
Dunnock				●	●		●						
Linnet		●		●	●	●							
Starling		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●				
House Sparrow		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●				
Eurasian Tree Sparrow			●										

Bird Species	14th to 26th May 2022												
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
Skylark	●	●	●	●				●	●				
Chaffinch	●	●	●	●		●	●						
Coal Tit	●					●							
Great Tit	●		●			●	●						
Song Thrush		●		●		●	●						●
Blackbird	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●			●
Carriion Crow	●												
Hooded Crow	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●			●
Rook	●	●	●	●	●	●	●						
Raven		●				●	●		●			●	
Jackdaw	●	●	●	●	●	●	●				●	●	
Chough		●		●					●			●	
Cuckoo		●	●						●				
Willow Warbler			●	●		●	●					●	
Stonechat				●									





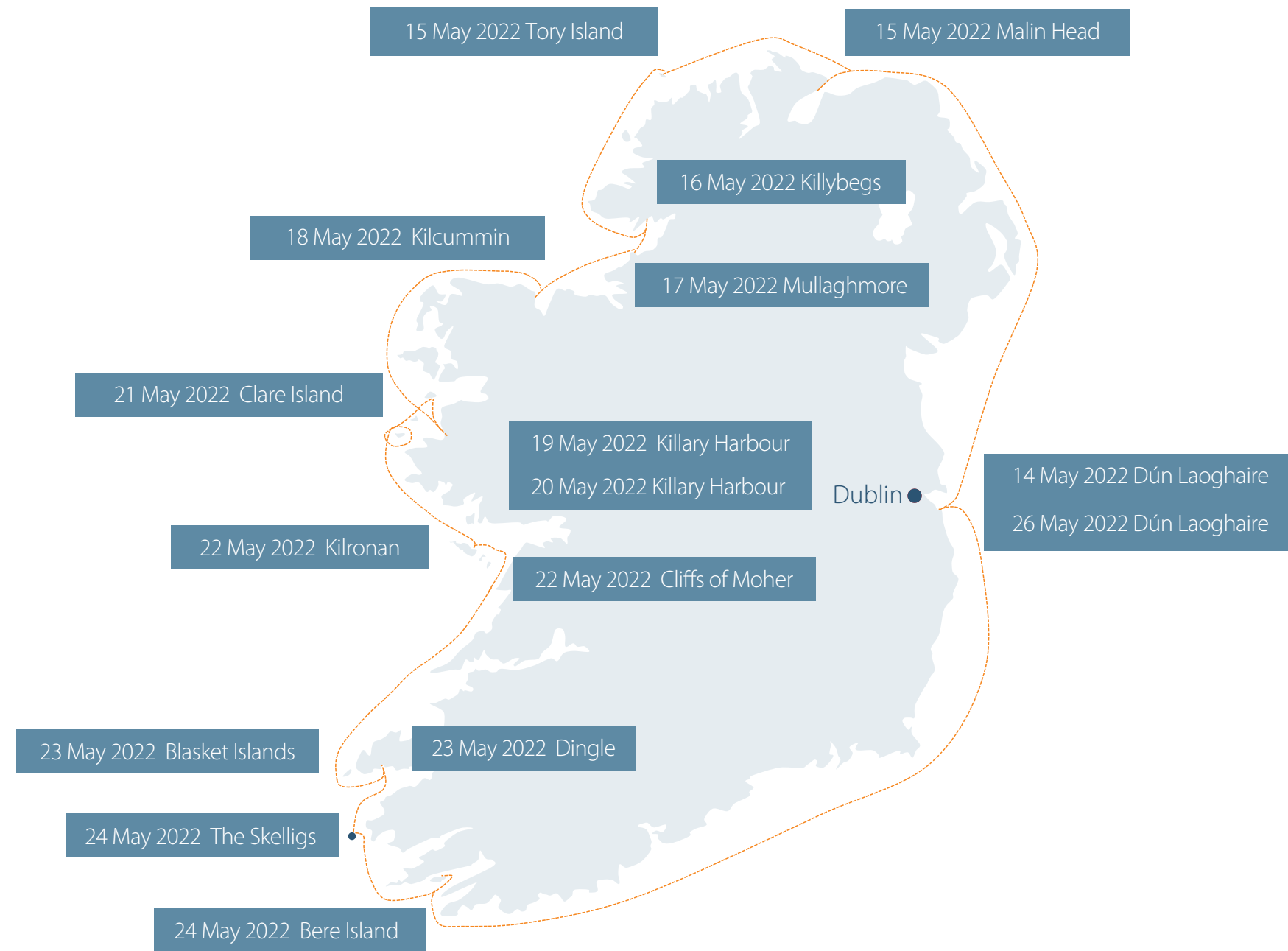


# Mammal Sightings

Mammals Species	14th to 26th May 2022												
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
Common Seal		•											
Grey Seal										•			
Atlantic White-sided Dolphin													
Bottlenose Dolphin		•											
Common Dolphin										•	•	•	
Rabbit								•					
Laigh Hare											•		











## Expeditioners:

Margaret Barr  
Darrell Beninger  
Lee-Ann Beninger  
John Crighton  
Marion Crighton  
Susan Fletcher  
Bill Fletcher  
Glen Gould  
Leonie Gray  
Calvin Harfst  
Linda Harfst  
Pat Hubbard  
Scott Hubbard  
Peter Kirkels  
Bunny Laden  
Bill Legg  
Bruce Propert  
Dorelle Propert  
Kurt Rusterholz  
Lesley Rusterholz  
Nyssa Rusterholz  
Liz Schaffer  
Antonia Van Steen  
Rick Wright

## Expedition Team:

Expedition Leader: David Berg  
Assistant Expedition Leader: JP Els  
Onboard Expedition Manager: Rosie Leaney  
Historian: Carol Knott  
Ornithologist: John Love  
Marine Biologist: Dani Abras  
Expedition Guide: Kirsty Dick  
Photography Guide: Scott Portelli  
Irish Guide: John McGroary  
Irish Guide: Jutta Shannon  
Mudroom/Shopkeeper: Reza Rusooly

## Senior Officers & Heads of Department:

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







