



This newsletter has been designed to enable you to get an idea of what kind of experience you will have should you join us on one of our cruises.

Sun 1 Aug | Not an otter spotter The anchor was lifted in Village Bay at 0730 this morning ahead of a tour of the stacs via Soay Sound. Crossing over to Boreray the boat had a magnificent encounter with 12 to 16 Risso's dolphins who, when not feeding, performed some spectacular stunts for all aboard, in rather rough sea conditions. A minke whale was also spotted.



After departing St Kilda the boat anchored in the south harbour of the Monach Islands at 1330. After a quick lunch the guests went ashore. Everyone helped to lift the not insubstantial tender clear of the beach so that the crew, as well as our guests, could enjoy a few hours on the main island. Whilst walking Seven on one of the beaches, Mark, Anna and Lindsay spotted an otter emerging from the sea onto the rocks. This was the first time Mark had seen an otter at the Monachs and luckily Seven didn't see it at all. Above (left) seals on the beach and (right) in the sea, both at the Monach Islands by Bob Morley

Mon 2 Aug | White beaks and baskers Hjalmar Bjorge weighed anchor at 0600 today. Transiting the Sound of Barra, Mark and company were disappointed to see no sign of Cyd and friends, the bottlenose dolphins spotted on virtually every trip this year. Having just exited the Sound though, the boat encountered a pod of white beaked dolphins. Mark reckoned this must be the same pod that he'd seen on an earlier trip. On this occasion they were feeding in very close proximity to one another and not ranging far from the bank where they were feeding. All aboard had some great views of them both feeding and playing with one doing some amazing tail jumps. Above: Hjalmar Bjorge at the Monach Islands by Bob Morley



Later in the day, as the boat was passing over the Hawes Bank, Mark and the guests came across dozens of basking sharks feeding. This encounter lasted virtually all the way to the Cairns of Coll. The boat anchored off Arinagour before all went ashore for a few hours,

returning aboard for dinner. Right: Lindsay aboard Hjalmar Bjorge by Bob Morley



Wed 3 Aug | Chocolate stop Hjalmar Bjorge left Coll at 0900 this morning cruising to Tobermory where the boat berthed on the pontoons for a brief contact with civilisation, chocolate and lunch. Thereafter they cruised down the Sound of Mull to Mark's chosen overnight anchorage in Loch Spelve. There were several sightings of otters even before dinner! The vessel is due back in Oban tomorrow with guests due to depart alongside after brunch.

Sat 7 Aug | First night is Mishnish night Twelve divers board Hjalmar Bjorge this afternoon on the North Pier in Oban, 10 from Glasgow and our friends Dawn and Iain. Mark delivered the traditional diver's first night aboard with a stopover in Tobermory allowing the guests to sample the delights of The Mishnish and other local watering holes.

Sun 8 Aug | Basker bonce bump? Hjalmar Bjorge left Tobermory in company with sister ship Elizabeth G. Skipper Rob also had divers onboard. The weather was good, with a fresh wind and a reasonable forecast. Off Ardnamurchan a definite bump was felt on the hull although nothing was seen and no creels were attached to the boat. Mark surmised there may be a basking shark out there with a bit of a headache! After this incident the boat passed close by a number of other basking sharks as it cruised past Muck and Rum on the way to Canna. Divers had their first dip here, on the wall east of Sanday.

Following the dive the vessel continued north making for Leverburgh. Unfortunately the wind had freshened considerably from the south east and the planned dive was abandoned in favour of an early start out to St Kilda the next morning.

Mon 9 Aug | Dun dive The wind increased a fair amount during the night, from the SE, which made for an uncomfortable night on the pier at Leverburgh.

The boat set off in fairly rough conditions for St Kilda this morning. Despite that, the crossing was one of the best to date. The poor old Glasgow contingent did rather suffer though. One diver astonished Mark by recovering from near sea-sickness death to fit for diving after he gave them a "10 minutes to dive" warning as they approached Boreray. All 12 divers did their first dive on the swim through on the east side of the island. After some recuperation on anchor in Village Bay another dive was later undertaken on the Sawcut on Dun. Below (left) Village Bay, Hirta, Dun and Levenish (right) Hjalmar Bjorge at St Kilda. Next page (left) one of many gannets (right) mist coming in over Boreray and the stacs, all by Dawn Menzies





Tue 10 Aug | Not favourable forecast The boat headed over to Boreray again this morning and all aboard dived the submarine arch at Sgarb Stac, an enjoyable experience for everyone. The vessel returned to Village Bay for lunch and the divers spent the afternoon ashore before another dive was undertaken in some caves on the east side of Dun. Below: Hjalmar Bjorge anchored off the beach in Village Bay by Dawn Menzies



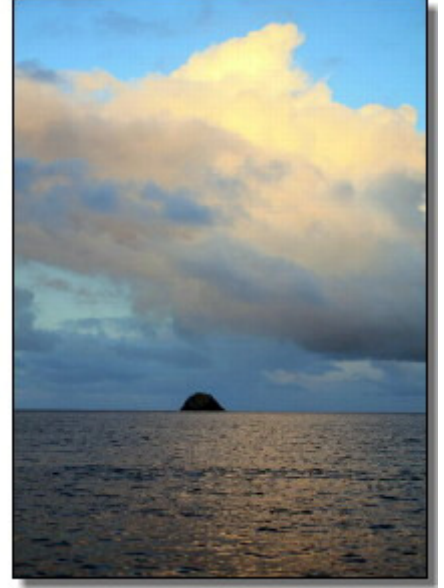
The forecast this evening was not good (NW 6 to 7) and after recent experience in similar conditions in Village Bay Mark decided it would be wise to leave St Kilda the next morning.



Above (left) early morning in Village Bay by Dawn Menzies (right) happy Dawn after diving Sgarb Stac by Iain Davis

Wed 11 Aug | Dolphin escorts After another dive on Dun this morning Hjalmar Bjorge left St Kilda bound for the Sound of Harris. It was a rough journey but half way across the boat encountered about a dozen common dolphins who bowrode for over an hour. With moderate swell and some high waves the guests leaned over the sides and could almost

touch the dolphins as they propelled themselves in front of the boat. After passing through the Sound of Harris a second dive was undertaken on the walls of Renish Point. Hjalmar Bjorge anchored overnight in Loch Rodel. Right: Last night's sunset over Levenish at St Kilda by Dawn Menzies

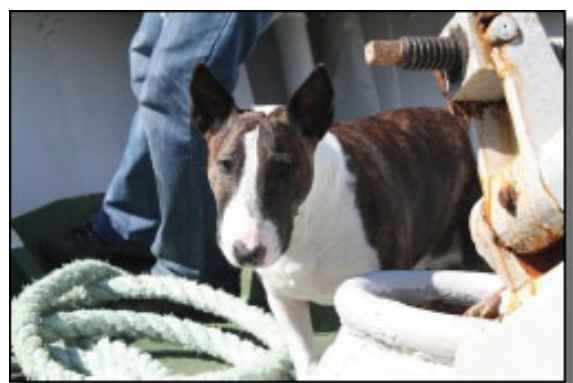


Thu 12 Aug | Happy Birthday Lindsay Mark left the anchorage in Loch Rodel this morning while guests were having breakfast, and cruised the Little Minch, heading for the wreck of the Doris at Neist Point on Skye. Iain predicted the boat would arrive at slack water and much to the surprise of some – not least Mark who has form with lack of slack – he was dead right. Mark had sceptically warned the divers that the Doris would be a hard dive, with an absence of slack water, so they were pleasantly surprised by a fairly gentle experience!

Later today there was a second dive off Muck where Iain and Dawn excelled themselves by gathering a fairly large haul of scallops which went down well at dinner. Hjalmar Bjorge berthed on the pontoons at Tobermory this evening, in time to raise a glass to Lindsay who celebrated her 26th birthday aboard. She sportingly entertained everyone with a session on her fiddle before heading out on the town to continue the celebrations. Right: some lazy gulls hitch a lift from the Outer Hebrides to the Inner Hebrides aboard Hjalmar Bjorge by Dawn Menzies



Fri 13 Aug | Lucky for some Hjalmar Bjorge left Tobermory early this morning enabling guests to dive the wreck of the Shuna before heading into Oban for brunch and disembarkation. Friday the 13th ended a good week, with a nice crowd of divers aboard. Ship's Dog Seven was a popular crew member and with a little dietary abstinence and some decent walks is now less deserving of the nickname "Fatty". Below (left) Tobermory and (right) not quite so "Fatty" aboard Hjalmar Bjorge, both by Dawn Menzies



Sat 14 Aug | Shooting star start Hjalmar Bjorge departed Oban with a full complement of 12 cruise guests aboard this afternoon. Mark's chosen anchorage for the first night was Loch na Droma Buidhe (Loch Drumbuie) in Loch Sunart. It was a bright starry evening and a number of guests stayed up late in the hope of catching the last of the Perseid meteor shower. A few shooting stars were seen which kept people entertained.



Above: evening anchorage in Loch Drumbuie by Mark Powlett

Sun 15 Aug | Basking sharks and big cliffs Mark and the crew lifted the anchor at 0600 whilst watching a beautiful dawn rising. Today's planned destination was Mingulay and all aboard enjoyed a wonderful crossing of the Sea of the Hebrides in bright conditions with very little swell. From the Cairns of Coll, seemingly all the way to Mingulay, there were countless number of basking shark sightings. Due to the very calm conditions there were some marvellous views of them feeding underwater. They are not normally an easy creature to see. Below: basking sharks by Mark Powlett



Approaching Mingulay there was the added bonus of an encounter with about two dozen white beaked dolphins who were feeding. They briefly turned their attentions to the boat in order to ride the bow wave.

Anchor was dropped at Mingulay just before lunch, after which the guests spent the afternoon ashore returning to the boat for supper and a peaceful night aboard. Right: Lindsay being very brave on the cliffs at Mingulay by Mark Powlett



Mon 16 Aug | Wet weather out west The anchor was lifted with the hope of making a landing on Barra Head this morning. However the swell had come up and Mark's recommended anchorage was untenable. Despite this, the boat cruised through the Sound of Berneray and then round the south side giving our guests some close views of the dramatic cliffs at the southernmost tip of the outer isles. Robert and Fay (who are both keen climbers) were eager to see the cliffs on the west side of Pabbay, in particular the big arch. This clearly is a very challenging, and now infamous, climb and it's easy to see why. Robert also amazed everyone by recounting how he had climbed the Old Man of Hoy for his birthday. His 70th birthday!!!

The boat continued north after seeing Pabbay, all the way up the west side of the Outer Isles, to the Monachs. Unfortunately the weather had rather deteriorated and a wet afternoon was spent ashore. Guests returned to the boat, however, cheerful and happy with their visit.

Tue 17 Aug | Early start for St Kilda The winds increased overnight, coming round to the NW, which made the anchorage rather uncomfortable. Everyone was rather relieved when the crew weighed anchor and set off for St Kilda at 0600. Hjalmar Bjorge arrived in Village Bay just after 1000. The weather had cleared to reveal bright sunshine and good visibility. After an early lunch the guests went ashore. From the top of Connachair (1400 feet) there were amazing views of the Flannan Islands to the north and virtually the whole of the Hebrides to the south. Right: sunset over Levenish at St Kilda by Anna White

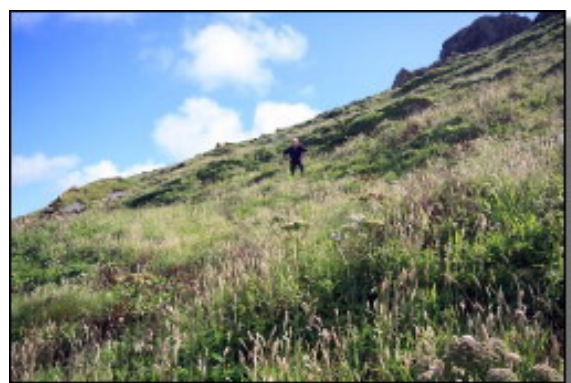
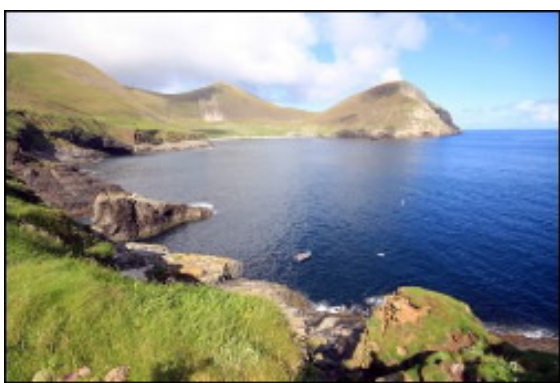


Wed 18 Aug | Conquering Dun After breakfast this morning the crew lifted the anchor and Hjalmar Bjorge cruised round the stacs and Hirta. There was plenty of time to round Soay and Am Plastair before heading toward Stac Lee, Stac an Armin and Boreray. Mark stopped the boat under the eastern cliffs of Boreray so everyone could watch the gannets and seals at close quarters. They returned to Village Bay for lunch and most of the guests went ashore for the afternoon again. Right: approaching Boreray and the stacs by Mark Powlett



Mark, Anna, Lindsay, Marky Mark and Robert instead headed for Dun this afternoon. Mark had checked with the warden that a landing attempt was acceptable and was given permission to go ahead. He landed on Dun at Giasgeir and headed up the rocks to discover an old pin and eye to which he attached a rope, enabling the rest of the party, bar Marky Mark who stood off in the tender, to climb ashore.

The climb up the rocks was comparatively easy. Getting beyond them was another story. The grassy bank at the top of the rocks is very steep and was still occupied by a number of fulmars whom the party avoided disturbing. Once above this, and onto the more gentle slopes of Dun, the contrast in vegetation, between Dun and Hirta, was startling. The most glaringly obvious difference is the lack of sheep of course and hence there was a luxuriant growth of vegetation on the island, in contrast to Hirta. The wild sorrel, sea campion and angelica was all prolific. The turf was also very deep and dotted with burrows. Apart from the seabirds several St Kildan wrens were seen. Below (left) Village Bay unusually seen from Dun (right) Robert on Dun, both by Mark Henrys



After their short visit the four explorers returned to the landing to allow Marky Mark a brief jump on the island to claim it on behalf of the Powlett clan!

Thu 19 Aug | 100% Kilda success rate Last night was another lovely one under the stars. The boat bade farewell to St Kilda this morning, it being the last trip of the season out to the archipelago. There's been some weather, to say the least, so it was a relief to Mark and all aboard to be leaving for the last time in reasonably calm seas. We are proud to report a 100% success rate in reaching St Kilda this season, no mean feat given some of the weather conditions that have been experienced. Well done to Mark and his crews for their dedication and hard work this year.

The anchor was dropped in the Sound of Scarp shortly after midday and a quick lunch was taken before everyone ventured ashore, in two groups, for the afternoon. One group landed on Scarp whilst the other smaller group landed on the beach on the Hushinish side of the Sound. After a wonderfully sunny afternoon ashore the boat departed Scarp bound for Mark's overnight anchorage at Borve Bay and the beach at Scarista. This destination was chosen mindful of the day's weather forecasts; warnings of gales in all areas and, by the evening, the severity of the gales had increased to a violent storm. Photos below: Hushinish Bay by Mark Powlett



Fri 20 Aug | Ferocious forecast This morning Mark made an early start, leaving Scarista, the priority being to find good shelter. By the time the boat had crossed the Little Minch the winds had increased to gale force again and all aboard were relieved when the boat finally reached the shelter of Carbost in Loch Bracadale. The forecast at this stage, even for inshore waters, was not good: SW 9 to 11 (being "severe gale" to "violent storm").

Mark and the crew tied Hjalmar Bjorge firmly to the old distillery pier at Carbost and all the guests went ashore for a good leg stretch. It was a well chosen berth with everyone

enjoying a pleasant overnight stay, sheltered from the storm, which could be seen and heard raging overhead.

Sat 21 Aug | Carbost to Canna The winds this morning had not abated so everyone decided it would be a good idea to remain in Carbost until after lunch. The boat left at 1330 after which there was a fairly exciting run south to Canna in a 3 to 4 metre swell with SW winds gusting gale force. It was an exciting journey, enjoyed by all aboard, although a short walk ashore on Canna before dinner, was also welcomed upon arrival.

Sun 22 Aug | Double birthdays onboard After a quick breakfast this morning the guests took a longer walk on Canna before the boat departed and headed south for the final overnight anchorage of the trip, at Ardtornish Bay in the Sound of Mull. This choice of anchorage was, in part, an early birthday present for our regular guest Joyce who had been given a delightful watercolour painting of the cottage in the bay, by another passenger, on a previous trip. He had named his painting "Joyce's cottage" as she was so taken with the location.

Marky Mark made a splendid cake for Joyce, whose birthday is tomorrow, shared by Mark the skipper. A significant one at that and, no, he didn't manage to keep it a secret. So the joint birthday cake went down well and Lindsay entertained the troops with her fiddle after dinner and celebratory toasts.

Mon 23 Aug | Last Kilda trip, 100% success rate Hjalmar Bjorge left Ardtornish Bay for a gentle cruise south into Oban and brunch alongside before a fond farewell to all aboard. A few days off for the crew before the next trip starting on Saturday.

Sat 28 Aug | Wild winds Hjalmar Bjorge departed from Oban, beginning an Inner Hebridean cruise today, in very strong northerly winds bound for Tobermory. The boat sat on the mooring overnight.

Sun 29 Aug | Wild winds continue By early today the wind had still not abated so Mark just moved from the mooring, in Tobermory harbour, to the pontoons enabling all the guests to go ashore this morning. After lunch, in continual strong winds, guests had another short walk ashore. By 3pm the wind had moderated and Hjalmar Bjorge ventured out past Ardnamurchan Point and on to Muck. They anchored just off the island and guests went ashore for another walk before returning to the boat for dinner this evening.

Mon 30 Aug | Calm and castles Monday morning heralded the start of a lovely week, dawning bright and clear with virtually no wind. Our guests went ashore on Muck again before returning to the boat for lunch. Afterwards a short cruise was taken before Hjalmar Bjorge anchored in Loch Scresort on Rum. Guests went ashore, some of whom tagged onto another cruise party who were having a late afternoon tour of the island's fascinating Kinloch Castle. The boat stayed in Loch Scresort for the evening.

Tue 31 Aug | Small Isles eagles Hjalmar Bjorge departed Rum for Canna this morning, berthing alongside upon arrival. The guests went ashore for the afternoon and some good sightings of both golden and sea eagles were seen. After everyone returned aboard the boat moved from the pier onto anchor in the bay ahead of a very quiet night.