



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.

Mon 4 Jul | Plentiful porpoise Porpoise are generally very solitary creatures and are, more often than not, seen alone. Chalice guests have seen lots of porpoise and usually in groups of four or five. They have also been venturing quite close the boat which is unusual as porpoise tend to be very shy and wary of vessels. Lots of basking shark have also been seen as well as a large number of seals in Loch Scavaig at the base of the Cuillins on Skye. Dave, who hadn't visited the Cuillins since 1976, declared it to be the "best day" of his whole holiday. "Steady on," said skipper Chris, "it's only the second day!"

Tue 5 Jul | Au revoir HBj Hjalmar Bjorge set sail this afternoon for a month long expedition to the Faroes and Iceland and back again. Mark the skipper is accompanied by Heather, our cook for the season, and Kirsty, crew; plus Martin, second skipper, who ran Chalice for the summer a few years ago. We are taking 10 wildlife-watching guests outward who will fly home from Isafjordur on 18 July. On 20 July we meet 10 divers in Isafjordur who will travel back arriving in Oban on 2 August. We hope to have regular updates from the ship so watch this space for further information.

Wed 6 Jul | Steep 'n' deep After Chalice ploughed her way through a thick carpet of jellyfish in Loch Nevis (why were they there? who knows???) Chris landed his cruise guests at Tarbet on the south side of the loch. From here they walked to the shores of Loch Morar, the deepest freshwater loch in the UK.

Okay, who was paying attention when Balamory was on this morning? The observant amongst you will have spotted Chalice swinging on a mooring in Tobermory Bay. Chris swears a friend rang to tell him his boat was on TV and that it wasn't he who was engrossed in the program. I believe him; thousands wouldn't...

Heading north from Stornoway to the Butt of Lewis Hjalmar Bjorge came across three pods of dolphin. Two groups of Risso's dolphin, one of whom was feeding, and one group of white-beaked dolphin. An exciting start to the Iceland adventure. The vessel is now heading for Sula Sgeir and onto the Faroe Islands where they expect to arrive at Tvøroyri on Suduroy, the southernmost of the islands, at about midday tomorrow.

Thu 7 Jul | Faroes a go go! A text arrived to say Hjalmar Bjorge had arrived safely at the Faroe Islands and had cleared Customs by 12.30pm - right on schedule. Mark phoned in the evening to say they had all observed how clean and unspoilt the islands were. Everyone they had met so far had been really friendly and there was a lot of interest in the boat since her arrival. No local cetacean activity but lots of good bird sightings. All the guests are currently ensconced in the pub which conveniently is only 50 yards away! They will travel to Torshavn, the capital of the Faroe Islands, tomorrow.

Fri 8 Jul | Puff Inn? Puff out! Rob returned from St Kilda aboard Elizabeth G to confirm that, for reasons which aren't entirely clear, Qinetiq are refusing to permit charter boat visitors to Hirta entry to the Puff Inn. They say they can't get liability insurance but we aren't sure this is the whole story. Investigations will be made and updates posted!

Sun 10 Jul | All at sea We got confirmation in the evening that Hjalmar Bjorge has left Faroese waters and is heading for Iceland. Guests had two nights and one whole day at Torshavn; most chose to go out on day boat trips which were thoroughly enjoyed by all. The vessel expects to reach Seydisfjordur about lunch-time tomorrow.

Mon 11 Jul | Ice-land-ing Hjalmar Bjorge did indeed arrive at Seydisfjordur, E Iceland, about 1.00 this afternoon. The calm weather and gently rolling sea gave way to Force 7 and 8 winds, blowing up around 4.00 am. The boat didn't get into sheltered waters until about midday so the second half of the journey was fairly lively but everyone coped and, from what I can gather, no-one was sick! The landscapes are of course very striking and there's lots of snow on the mountains. Seydisfjordur itself seems fairly quiet; someone turned up at the boat especially to ask all onboard to a "cultural evening" in the town hall though I'm not sure if anyone was tempted by this invitation...

Tue 12 Jul | Humpback pack Just received a text from Hjalmar Bjorge which is off Vopnafjordur, NE Iceland in clear blue skies. There are a dozen humpback whales in sight with seven right by the boat!!! At one point two were lunge feeding beside the vessel. I think the txt msg "everyone delirious" was probably justified. Further texts revealed they had put the dinghy in the water and got some good photos of the boat with the whales in the foreground and Iceland - looking picturesque - in the background. After the humpbacks the vessel attracted some white-beaked dolphins who decided to indulge in a spot of bow-riding and the day had actually started off with a few porpoise. The final txt msg "everyone ecstatic" was probably fair enough!

Wed 13 Jul | Almost Arctic Hjalmar Bjorge is berthed at Raufarhofn, the northernmost village in Iceland, and only 3 miles from the Arctic Circle (66° 27' if you want to get technical). The sun was blazing at 10.30pm and it hasn't got dark for the last couple of nights onboard. Today's sightings included more humpback whales, more minkes and more white-beaked dolphin. They are going to be sooo bored of cetaceans soon! One of our guests, Andy, casually threw a fishing line over the side and caught a 20lb cod. Being a non fish-catching, non fish-eating vegetarian this doesn't mean much to me but apparently it's quite big. For a fish. Photo: Alan Lester



Fri 15 Jul | Aloha from NZ A postcard from our cook Heather from Mull, who is out in New Zealand, allegedly looking for work... The card said "amazing," "lots of fun," "skiing," and "the people are ace," but, strangely, nothing about work. Last year we had a special visitor from NZ aboard the boat: Helen, who was the Government's Environmental Officer for the South Island. Heather writes on her card that who else should she meet on a chairlift but Helen!

Sun 17 Jul | Isafjordur iceberg! A call at 1.00am to say Hjalmar Bjorge had arrived safely at Isafjordur, a little ahead of schedule, as gales were forecast. All onboard agreed they'd prefer to get into the shelter of a harbour sooner rather than later. I asked Mark if he'd had any interesting sightings between there and Husavik, their last port of call. "A humpback whale breaching beside the boat," he said, "lots of white-beaked dolphins and an iceberg." Whoa! An iceberg?! I suppose it makes the whole Iceland experience all the more authentic...

Wed 20 Jul | All change Our adventurous wildlife guests, who had travelled all the way from Oban to Isafjordur waved good-bye to Hjalmar Bjorge on Monday 18 July with a new

group arriving today. These passengers are divers and are planning to explore the clear (not to mention cold) seas around the coasts of Iceland and the Faroe Islands. Chalice also left Oban today with a group of wildlife enthusiasts in the company of painter Bruce Pearson who is the specialist guide onboard for the duration of this 10 day cruise. Chalice is heading for St Kilda.

Thu 21 Jul | Out of the fog... Hjalmar Bjorge covered a lot of miles today, leaving Isafjordur early and arriving late in Siglufjordur, with a dive on the way. Visibility was pretty poor out at sea due to a thick bank of fog but the town of Siglufjordur appeared as if by magic once the boat got close. Tomorrow the guests are hoping to dive in a hot water geyser out at sea and then spend the night at Husavik.

Fri 22 Jul | Baa baa black faced sheep Rob returned today from a St Kilda Expedition with a full complement of guests including Niall, an expert on all things sheep. Niall owns some Boreray sheep and explained the difference between those and Soay sheep (we always thought they were the same thing!). Boreray sheep are, in fact, a unique breed, the original black faced sheep, but are bigger than the bog standard black faced hill sheep you see all over Scotland. Those onboard not particularly enamoured of sheep will have enjoyed the three lots of basking shark. Venturing to St Kilda on Elizabeth G were two guests from Australia who had booked independently of each other; we welcomed back Marion for her second cruise but Scott was a new guest to Northern Light Charters.

Chalice's Hebridean / St Kilda cruise got off to a flying start with three sea eagles seen at Canna during a rewarding afternoon walk. Two basking sharks were also spotted.

Sat 23 Jul | Iceland images! Huge thanks to Roger and Ann from Cumbria who emailed me some photos from their Iceland adventure pretty much as soon as they set foot back inside their house. Top left: Hjalmar Bjorge with humpback whale in the foreground and Iceland in the background (how perfect is that?!). Top right: humpback whale lunge feeding beside vessel. Middle left: guests and crew in the midnight sun. Middle right: Roger & Ann in the midnight sun. Bottom row (next page): two photos from a day trip to Dettifoss, in the Myvatn region, the largest and most powerful waterfall in Europe.





Photos: Roger Hiley

Tue 26 Jul | Hark! A shark Chris from Chalice had a close encounter of the shark kind today. He had dropped anchor off Mingulay and was going ashore in the tender to suss out the best place to land. Seeing rocks in the water he stopped...but the rocks moved! They turned out to be a small (3 metre) basking shark who seemed to be love struck by the grey inflatable boat. Chris motored very slowly toward the shore for 10 minutes with the shark following very closely his every twist and turn in his effort to avoid it. At one point it swam right under the tender forcing Chris to stop the outboard engine in case it got caught in the prop. Bruce, the wildlife artist guiding on this trip, was also in the tender and, ever prepared, whipped out his sketch pad and began drawing frantically. Although the guests weren't in the tender to experience the shark antics they were later rewarded by the sight of 40+ dolphins around Chalice in the South Minch.

Fri 29 Jul | Poorly puffins Chris returned Chalice to Oban today after a successful 10 day cruise which visited St Kilda. Vast numbers of deaths amongst puffin chicks (pufflings) at St Kilda is causing concern to the NTS volunteers who spend the summer out there. Puffins - who don't breed until they are five and only lay one egg per year - usually eat fish such as herring and sand eels. It's no secret that numbers of sand eels are at an all time low and the adult puffins are coping by eating pipefish instead. However the regurgitated fish in this altered diet does not seem to be sustaining the pufflings and they are simply not surviving.

Sat 30 Jul | Awesome orcas Hjalmar Bjarne is back in UK waters with a dive off Sula Sgeir early this morning. Heading south toward the Butt of Lewis the vessel came across a group of five orca (killer whale) comprising two adults and three playful calves. The orca bow-rode the vessel - which is highly unusual behaviour for this species - and needless to say the guests were thrilled and many photos taken. The last time Mark experienced orca bow-riding was about eight years ago off Coll. Photo: Dawn Menzies

