



**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.**

**Wed 1 Jun | St Kilda (Scotland) to St Kilda (NZ)** Many readers will remember Heather Irvine from Mull. Heather has cooked and crewed aboard all the boats over the last few years. We waved good-bye to Heather in May when she set off for New Zealand aiming to meet up with her sister Rose. Today we were thrilled to receive an email saying, "I went on a bus to St Kilda beach (gorgeous) last Friday. It was really weird, but cool, to be on a bus with St Kilda on the front!" She told us about the Cadbury Chocolate Factory that she and Rose visited (pretty sure this was included just to make Hannah really jealous!!!) and finally said, "Please say hello to all the groups who know me."

Chalice guests saw their first basking shark of the season off Gavin Maxwell's now-defunct shark fishing station on Soay. Basking shark really are "gentle giants" who were hunted virtually to extinction because they did not try to evade their predators. Seems they haven't learnt any more sense in the intervening years!

**Fri 3 Jun | Utterly otterly** Chalice skipper Chris says, "If I had a pound for every time I've been asked, "Where are the otters?"..." He continues, "The answer is they're everywhere - the trick is seeing them." So when Chris' guests saw three together on the last full day of their Lochs & Bens cruise it was pretty thrilling. The otters were happily feeding in a tidal inlet - not the easiest place into which to manoeuvre Chalice - but with the boat quietly turned round guests were treated to an amusing display that lasted nearly half an hour. A fitting end to a splendid trip.

**Wed 8 Jun | World Oceans Day** Today is World Oceans Day and Northern Light Charters is celebrating by sharing the beautiful seas around Scotland with a full complement of 34 guests aboard all three boats. Hjalmar Bjorge and Elizabeth G are at St Kilda and Chalice is en route. Why don't you celebrate by doing something "watery" today? Go for a walk on the beach, go swimming or - okay, it's stretching the theme somewhat - have a G&T when you get in from work!

**Thu 9 Jun | Diving dolphins** Hjalmar Bjorge has been out to St Kilda with a group of divers this week. On their return they dived the wreck of the "Doris" off Neist Point on Skye. You can only imagine their surprise when they surfaced to find about two dozen common dolphin taking a keen interest in their activities. We never recommend that humans try and swim with dolphins but sometimes the dolphins are intent on swimming with the humans!

**Mon 13 Jun | Bow-riding dolphins** West of Soay, off the South of Skye, Chalice guests were treated to their first bow-riding dolphins of the year. It really is an amazing experience to get this close to a fast moving wild animal. We're not entirely sure why dolphins interact with boats in this way but they seem to derive great joy from doing so. They will often swim along the front of the boat, crossing below or leaping at the same time. Guests, who are by this stage usually hanging over the bow watching the display, frequently make eye contact with the dolphins as they look up while swimming to keep pace with the vessel.

**Tue 14 Jun | Carpets to Kilda** 13 to 15 June was the third transfer of National Trust Volunteers to/from St Kilda this summer. Elizabeth G left Mallaig on Monday evening with...12 volunteers including cook. Check! Personal luggage. Check! Food for 12 people for two weeks. Check! Carpets. Check! Carpets?! Ours is not to question why but to be as helpful as possible in transporting any kind of essential materials out to St Kilda on behalf of the National Trust for Scotland. Rob reported a "lucky break" in the weather with a south easterly wind just starting to blow in the last hour of the transfer in Village Bay. So you'll be relieved to hear that the carpet was delivered safe and sound. And dry. Oh, and all 24 volunteers were fine too!

**Thu 16 Jun | 12 white-beaks abound** Newspaper reports have recently reported decreasing numbers of white-beaked dolphins in the Minch. Tell that to the guests on Hjalmar Bjorge! They spotted a dozen white-beaked dolphins whilst cruising off the Shiant Islands and, as if that wasn't enough, two of the dolphins came to join the vessel for a spot of bow-riding! The following day a basking shark and dolphins were seen.

Three golden eagles were seen at once through a scope view on Mull. Thanks to Chris for a summary of his St Kilda cruise aboard Chalice: the goldies were just one of 97 bird species seen on this 9 night trip. Also spotted were a pair of sea eagles at Scarp and two lots of otters. A live moth trap was set up on Hirta overnight (with the warden's blessing) and this produced a number of map-winged swift moths. Frolicking on Hirta were some very cute Soay lambs (with matching earrings, right). Another trip highlight was a visit to St Clement's Church at Rodel.

**Tue 21 Jun | Flannans flit** Rob returned to Oban aboard Elizabeth G after successfully completing a very ambitious expedition. Departing late on Friday 17 June he travelled overnight to the Flannan Islands to put a small party ashore for a couple of hours. This in itself was a noteworthy achievement as the landing at the Flannan Islands is treacherous at the best of times. After a successful exploration of the main island and lighthouse the group got back aboard and went out to St Kilda where a couple of days were spent. It has to be said this frantic dash, with fingers crossed for reasonable wind and sea conditions, is not typical of the kind of cruise experience we usually offer. But, for various reasons, the two parties involved could only manage this short period aboard so we were delighted to assist. Despite an uncomfortable crossing back from St Kilda everyone was thrilled to have achieved their goal and Rob and his crew are now having a well deserved rest! For a day or two anyway.

**Sat 25 Jun | Seal squeal** You see wildlife in the strangest of places. Whilst waiting for guests to join Hjalmar Bjorge for a Western Isles Odyssey Kirsty and Hannah spotted a van in the ferry terminal car-park with "Oban Sea Life Centre" on the side. Being nosey, I mean inquisitive, types they went to investigate. Inside was a noisy baby seal, in a fishbox, who has been rescued from the Isle of Coll. His attendant guessed the pup was a couple of months old and, apart from being very young to be separated from his mum, was thought to be in good health. He certainly had a fine pair of lungs! He was awaiting the imminent arrival of another abandoned pup on the ferry from Mull before both were to join the other seals at the Sea Life Centre. He was really cute (the seal, not the attendant).

**Mon 27 Jun | Island escapades** Chris, skipper of Chalice, updated us with tales of a few days spent at St Kilda. You all know about St Kilda, right? Remote. Deserted. Peaceful. Idyllic. Well, it is usually. The arrival of German cruise ship "Hanseatic" was to challenge the quiet just a little. The chatty radio officer called up Chalice to introduce themselves as, "a small cruise ship with 184 passengers..." "I think," said Chris, "you'll find WE are a small

cruise ship with 12 passengers.." He was obviously greatly amused by this display of British humour as he invited Chris onboard for coffee!

Neil, the St Kilda ranger, had the task of organising the mini-invasion who swarmed over Hirta before disappearing as quickly as they had arrived. Peace and tranquillity reigned once again. Chalice guests then enjoyed an atmospheric early-evening walk through the ruins of the old settlement accompanied by "drumming" snipe and St Kilda wrens flitting around the cleits.

Photographer Chris Gomersall, who is guiding on this trip, lost his much-travelled and most-beloved trademark green cap over the side at St Kilda. As you can imagine this left him huffin' and puffin' as it bobbed into the distance. Refusing to practice a "man overboard" (cap overboard?!) drill, the crew eventually did take pity on Chris with Karen supplying him with fetching new headgear, right. Photo: Chris Jackson



Boreray was the scene of a huge 'hurry' of airborne gannets, who were being hassled by an even more active gang of bonxie, which were singling out and mobbing unfortunate birds. Several gannets were brought down into the water and killed - quite a disturbing sight - but illustrating perfectly that nature is often red in tooth (beak) and claw. During the return journey to the Outer Hebrides guests were cheered by the presence of three white-beaked dolphins that joined Chalice for some bow-riding just south of Whale Rock. Later a white-tailed sea eagle was seen to the east of Scarp.

Hjalmar Bjorge guests, en route to St Kilda, were accompanied through the Sound of Barra by about a dozen bottle-nosed dolphins, bow-riding and blowing noisily. It's still fairly early for good sightings so this was a great bonus enjoyed by all.

**Tue 28 Jun | Super-size shark** This afternoon Chalice guests spent time in the company of a huge basking shark. Chris reckons it was the biggest he'd ever seen (although you know what men are like with fish..."it was t-h-i-s big...").

**Wed 29 Jun | Whale flail** Chalice spent last night at Laig Bay on the NW of Eigg. This anchorage can only be used in perfect conditions as it is very exposed to the elements. Upon departing guests were treated to the sight of minke whale feeding with one of the whales breaching.

**Thu 30 Jun | Beached bones** A visit to the remote Monach Islands, west of North Uist, is always a delight but this stop was extra special. Mark, skipper of Hjalmar Bjorge, was walking on a beach when he came across these vertebrae and disks from a whale skeleton. It was unclear whether the whale had expired on the beach or if the bones had been washed ashore at some stage. They had lain there a long time as there was lichen growing on them. Mark hailed the only person he could see, one of our cruise guests, and he and David staggered back to the group with as many pieces as they could carry. That wasn't an awful lot as the bones were pretty big and heavy. That's a six inch (15cm) ruler in the photo for scale.

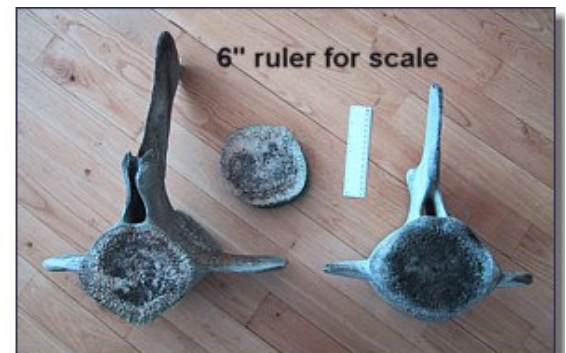


Photo: Hannah Thompson **Footnote:** Enjoy that photo because one of our dogs decided to have a good old chew of two of the bones not long afterwards...

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