



**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.**

**Tue 1 Jun | Crossing to Kilda** Guests from Reading BSAC had been awaiting the forecast to see if it was going to be possible to cruise out to St Kilda. It wasn't good. Throughout last night the wind had been gusting from the SE at close to gale force. This morning, however, Hjalmar Bjorge set off from Leverburgh in company with Elizabeth G, Mark hoping that the wind would veer round to the SW on the way out to the archipelago. The passage proved to be rather bumpy with a hefty four metre swell running from the west. On arrival at Village Bay the wind was, fortunately, coming from the SW which provided some relief. A quick dive was undertaken on Dun before supper.

**Wed 2 Jun | Crossing back from Kilda!** Last night in Village Bay was rather lumpy aboard Hjalmar Bjorge with swell and winds gusting up to 35 knots to contend with. After breakfast the group decided to go ashore and guests and crew were met by a familiar face, the relief warden Bill Shaw. Bill was the permanent warden a couple of years ago and is now working in west Cumbria on project about newts. The divers returned to the boat in time for lunch and thereafter had another dive on Dun.

The weather and swell had not improved and as a consequence the entire location was undiveable save a couple of sites around Dun. The decision was taken to leave Hirta and head back towards the Sound of Harris. Another fairly lumpy ride was improved by the appearance of about 10 common dolphins bowriding the boat midway across the passage. After a long day the anchor was dropped for the night in Loch Rodel, south Harris.

**Thu 3 Jun | Basker and bottlenoses** Everyone awoke to thick fog covering the Minch but fortunately this cleared allowing our guests to dive the wreck of the Doris at Neist Point off Skye. The second dive of the day was Òigh Sgeir, west of Canna, a rocky outcrop with a lighthouse and, at one time, a three hole golf course! As the boat was nearing Ardnarmuchan Point, Lindsay was just about to serve the starters when there was a great sighting of an adult basking shark in calm and clear seas. Cue expressions of delight from the guests who then returned to the tables to eat their first course. Immediately after that a dozen bottlenose dolphins bowrode the boat for 10 minutes. It was a happy boat that berthed alongside in Tobermory this evening. Above: Elizabeth G in company with Hjalmar Bjorge at Òigh Sgeir by Mark Henrys

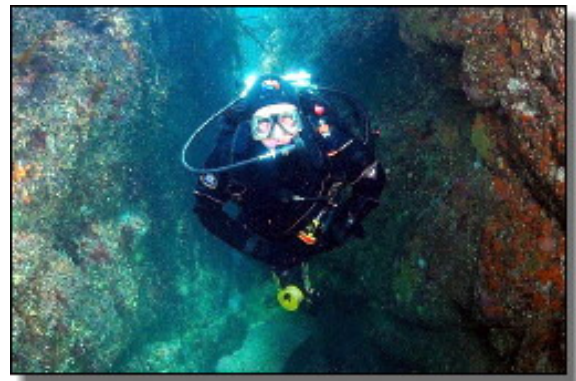


**Fri 4 Jun | Divers depart** Reading BSAC divers enjoyed a final early dive on Calve Island this morning before Hjalmar Bjorge returned to Oban and they set off for the long journey home. A quick turnaround for the crew today with another group of divers arriving tomorrow.

**Sat 5 Jun | Welcome critter snappers** Jane's dive group boarded in Oban this afternoon. Not your average wreckies or tecchies many of these guys are members of the

**Marine Conservation Society** (<http://www.mcsuk.org/>) and little colourful critters make them happy. Mark thinks they broke all records for loading the most gear aboard by a single group and that was before any of the dive equipment came onboard. That was just camera gear!!!

**Sun 6 Jun | Eagle eyes dive site** Last night was spent on the pontoons at Tobermory with the boat departing early today for Macleod's Maidens off Skye. None of the group, most of whom are regulars, had dived this site before which was unusual and it proved to be a nice shake down dive. There was a good sighting of two adult basking sharks during the dive plus a golden eagle hovering overhead. In the afternoon Mark cruised over to Renish Point on Harris and the guests had a dive on the south wall. The boat anchored in Loch Rodel this evening. Below (left) Ekstroms topknot and (right) the lesser spotted Dr Chris in a gully, both by Tony Gilbert



**Mon 7 Jun | Old friends** First dive this morning was the north face of Renish Point which the divers rated more highly than yesterday's site. Lunch was taken whilst berthed at Leverburgh and guests took the opportunity to have a short walk ashore. Below (left) light-bulb sea squirts (right) long-spined sea scorpion, both by Tony Gilbert



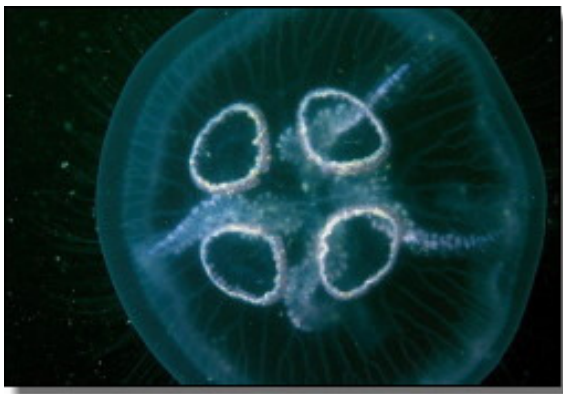
Hjalmar Bjorge later headed off to Taransay and dived a new site on the SW corner of the island. This proved to be a rewarding discovery and provided the photographers with some excellent shots. Mark anchored in the bay at Taransay and spotted old friends Norman and Gillian aboard a new boat, yacht "Curlew", anchored not far off. Norman had had to move from his preferred anchorage due to the rather malodorous emissions emanating from the rotting whale on the beach. Eurgh!

"Curlew" turned out to be a recent replacement for their ex-MFV "Barcadale". Norman and Gillian have been cruising the west coast of Scotland for over 40 years so it's always fascinating for Mark to catch up with them and hear of their latest exploits.



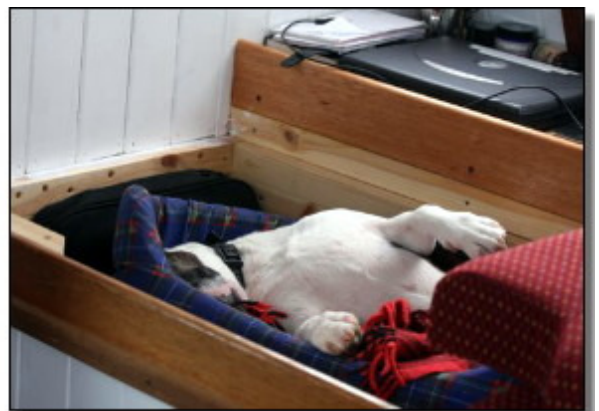
Above (left) tiny isopod (right) nudibranch, both by Tony Gilbert

**Tue 8 Jun | Whiffy whale** Most of the divers were taken ashore in the tender at 0700 today because they wanted to have a look at the decomposing whale carcass for themselves. Suppose it's not every day you get to see a sperm whale at close quarters even if it does stink to high heaven! Mark enjoyed a run round the island whilst Seven's chaperone unfortunately let her get a little too close to the putrid whale. Mmm, yummy!!!



After breakfast Mark weighed anchor and the group dived the sunken trawler in Hushinish Bay before anchoring not far off for lunch. After there it was on to Loch Tealasvay for the second dive of the day before the boat anchored for the evening in Loch Tamnavay. This location was an ideal choice from which to shelter from the strong easterly winds that are due to blow up overnight. Above: two views of a moon jellyfish by Tony Gilbert

**Wed 9 Jun | Mooching for mussels** This morning the divers went in for some exploratory dives around Hjalmar Borge whilst the boat was on anchor. In the meantime Mark and Seven went beachcombing for about 20 minutes. This proved very productive and they gathered a decent sized bucket of mussels which were devoured later in the day. Seven had a lot of fun helping, by tugging the mussels off the rocks. Right: Seven relaxing in her bed aboard Hjalmar Borge after exerting some energy on the beach, by Mark Henrys



After lunch Mark lifted the anchor and the group returned to Taransay, this time to dive the Aird Vanish gullies. Next page (left) seal (centre) "Bloody Henry" starfish (right) mating sea hares, all by Tony Gilbert



**Thu 10 Jun | Vanish and Viktor** Guests opted to revisit Aird Vanish gullies this morning for a second dive. In the afternoon they managed to dive the wreck of the "Viktor" on the west side of Shillay. Hjalmar Bjorge then headed back through the Sound of Harris to an overnight berth in Lochmaddy.

**Fri 11 Jun | Masses of marine life** Guests dived Maddy Mor this morning before Hjalmar Bjorge anchored in Loch Eyport for lunch. In the afternoon they dived a wall on the entrance to the loch which proved to be a superb site. The 20 metre wall gave way to a cave which contained lots of diverse marine life. In the evening Mark berthed the boat at Lochboisdale. Below: compass jellyfish by Tony Gilbert



En route the boat was joined by about three dozen common dolphins who escorted it for around 10 minutes just south of Òigh Sgeir light. A small minke whale briefly surfaced beside the boat while it was rounding Ardnamurchan Point. Hjalmar Bjorge anchored for the evening in Loch na Droma Buidhe. Right: common dolphin by Tony Gilbert

**Mon 14 Jun | Digital divers depart** Yesterday there were dives for our guests on Risga Pinnacle and at Auliston Point before spending the last night on anchor in Ardtornish Bay. A last early dip for guests this morning at the Grey Isles en route to Oban. Brunch alongside then everyone departed for home.



This trip was particularly memorable for the amazing underwater photography captured by all the photographers aboard. Digital camera technology has totally transformed this medium. Additionally, for a group who are interested in, and knowledgeable about, underwater life, it allows them to consider and evaluate almost immediately what they have been looking

at. The crew were amazed at the resulting images, some of which are included here, all taken by Tony Gilbert. Below: nudibranchs in hues of blue by Tony Gilbert



**Sat 12 Jun | Dozens o' dolphins** Mark put the divers in on a pinnacle in the approaches to the loch which also proved to be an excellent site. They then cruised across the Sea of the Hebrides, heading for Loch Sunart, where a dive was undertaken on Slignich Mor.

**Sat 19 Jun | Breaching minke whale** 11 guests boarded Hjalmar Bjorge yesterday afternoon, the 12th unfortunately found herself in hospital a couple of days ago and we shall hope to see her on another occasion. The forecast wasn't good for last night, with strong northerly winds predicted, so the boat's first evening was unusually spent anchored in Ardtornish Bay.

This morning breakfast was served underway. Although the strong northerly wind had materialised the vessel was reasonably sheltered in the Sound of Mull. Passing Ardnamurchan there were clear blue skies with a very stiff and chilly wind. Shortly after the Point a minke whale breached three times, about a mile ahead of the boat, which was very dramatic and not that unusual in these sorts of conditions.



Hjalmar Bjorge anchored at Muck for lunch and the guests went ashore for the afternoon. They then weighed anchor and went on to Rum for the evening. Above: lenticular cloud over Rum by Mark Henrys

**Sun 20 Jun | Raptor encounters** Guests went ashore on Rum for a couple of hours. A number of shell-shocked locals were seen staggering around the place, it being the

morning after the night before of the day of the Rum Highland Games. Any old excuse for a booze up eh?!!!

Guests returned to the boat just before lunchtime and Hjalmar Bjorge cruised across to Canna. Packed lunches were stuffed into rucksacks and everyone disappeared to explore this lovely little island for the remainder of the day. Later in the afternoon Mark went for a run round Canna. Whilst on the north cliffs he stopped to watch a basking shark way down in the water, slowly working its way upstream. He then spotted a golden eagle rise from its perch just beneath him and watched it soar above his head, passing within 20 feet or so. Upon returning to the boat Mark discovered that our guests had all had close encounters with other raptors round the island.

**Mon 21 Jun | Bounteous baskers** All aboard woke to flat calm seas and sunny skies. Lunga was today's chosen destination and south of Canna a dozen common dolphins briefly bow-rode the boat. Approaching Lunga there was an encounter with about 10 basking sharks who were working the north shore. Mark stopped the boat so one particularly stunning adult could be admired, before cruising to drop anchor. Lunch was taken on anchor with guests going ashore for the afternoon. Departing Lunga another basking shark was seen before arriving at Cragard on the south of Ulva. Mark dived for a couple of dozen fresh scallops which augmented tonight's evening meal. Above: basking shark off Lunga by Mark Henrys. Below: Hjalmar Bjorge and puffin on Lunga by Mark Powlett



Above (left) "The Dutchman's Cap" (Bac Mòr) from Lunga (right) departing Staffa, both by Mark Powlett

**Tue 22 Jun | Gymnastic dolphins** After departing Cragard, a cruise by Staffa was enjoyed by all aboard, before Mark anchored at Iona where guests had a couple of hours ashore before returning for lunch aboard.

Hjalmar Bjorge left the Sound of Iona at about 1400. Passing Ardalanish Point on the Ross of Mull the boat encountered a group of bottlenose dolphins feeding between the vessel and the shore. Mark switched the engine off so the activity could be watched without disturbance and was rewarded with the dolphins coming over to investigate the boat. Some were very excitable and showed off a great deal, one in particular doing some exuberant back flips!!! Right and below:

bottlenose dolphin showing off near the Ross of Mull by Mark Henrys



After a sedate cruise the boat anchored at Scalasaig on Colonsay for the evening with guests enjoying a walk ashore and a quick visit to the pub.

**Wed 23 Jun | Otter eating alongside** Today's plan had been to visit the Corryvreckan whirlpool but the tides weren't right so it was decided to go to the Garvellachs instead. The boat arrived there at 1100 and an early lunch was taken whilst waiting for the tide to rise and provide an easier, more comfortable landing. Guests went ashore for an exploration and then Hjalmar Bjorge headed for tonight's overnight anchorage in Loch Spelve. At the entrance to Spelve there was a brief glimpse of a golden eagle and then some good views of an otter feeding near the anchorage. After dinner our friends John and Cathy joined everyone onboard and Cathy was persuaded to play a wee tune on Lindsay's fiddle.

**Thu 24 Jun | Obliging eagle** Leaving Loch Spelve for Oban this morning, a golden eagle obligingly flew close by the boat and then perched on a tree branch providing everyone with some great views, a nice way to finish this Inner Hebridean Cruise. Guests departed after brunch in Oban. Below: golden eagle(s) seen in Loch Spelve by Mark Henrys



**Sun 27 Jun | Dolphins, whales and sharks** 12 guests joined Hjalmar Bjorge yesterday afternoon. The first night was spent on our mooring in Tobermory harbour.

Mark left Tobermory at 0700 today. The forecast was not good and he was unsure what to do, balancing a desire to reach St Kilda with a journey that was not overly unpleasant. Heading north the vessel encountered four basking sharks to the west of Muck and everyone also saw a minke whale feeding. Forecasts updated throughout the day indicated there might be a brief window of opportunity to get out to St Kilda tomorrow before further high winds developed. Therefore Mark pushed on north heading for Leverburgh. Midway across the Minch about 20 or so common dolphins were encountered and they bow-rode the boat for a while. Hjalmar Bjorge berthed at Leverburgh and everyone had a brief walk before dinner. Above: common dolphin bow-riding by Mark Henrys



**Mon 28 Jun | Rough crossing to Kilda** The boat departed Leverburgh at 0600 this morning. The forecast was for strong south westerly winds and was certainly accurate! There was also a big, rough swell to contend with. Not the most comfortable run out to St Kilda. On arrival at 1300 Mark wasn't surprised to find that Hjalmar Bjorge was the only boat there. The guests all looked pretty relieved to get ashore enjoying their afternoon on Hirta all the more for the suffering involved in getting there.

**Tue 29 Jun | Swell cruise through Soay Sound** Another yacht arrived in Village Bay this morning, its lovingly varnished hull being much admired by all aboard Hjalmar Bjorge. The finished yacht turned out to be the end product of many years of painstaking restoration and was testament to the owners' dedication.

Mark weighed anchor after a light breakfast and set off for a tour of the stacs. The swell had died down but there was enough remaining to provide quite a thrill as the boat ploughed through Soay Sound, around Hirta and then onto Boreray and the other stacs. Arriving back in Village Bay late morning, the guests were again despatched ashore with packed lunches for a second afternoon's exploration of Hirta.

This evening, over supper, there was an unexpected treat in the form of a juvenile minke whale circling the boat briefly before heading out toward Levenish. Right: minke whale in Village Bay by Mark Henrys



**Wed 30 Jun | Kilda to Canna** As expected this morning saw the arrival of more south easterly winds which continued to freshen throughout the day. Having paid heed to the forecast Mark had pointed Hjalmar Bjorge out of Village Bay at 0530 and the ensuing run back to the Sound of Harris was far more pleasant than the outward journey.

Further on, about six miles from Canna the vessel encountered a huge pod of feeding common dolphin which seemed to take turns, in groups of 10 to 12, to bow-ride the boat. It's fair to say Ship's Dog was somewhat fascinated with this activity.

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Having berthed at Canna there was time for the guests to have a walk ashore before dinner. Right: ship's dog watches dolphins bow-riding by Mark Henrys

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