News from Northern Light Charters OCTOBER — DECEMBER 2005

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.

Sat 1 Oct | NLC shortlisted We have been informed that Northern Light Charters is one of three businesses shortlisted for the "Green Highlands" Award, one of eleven categories in the 2005 Highland Tourism Awards. Winners are to be announced during a dinner on 18 November 2005 so we'll have to wait until then to find out more!

Thu 6 Oct | NPP NBT TNW This mouthful of letters stands for Northern Periphery Programme Nature Based Tourism Trans-National Workshop. This is a three year project in which Northern Light Charters was selected to take part. Last October Hannah, with the Scottish contingent, travelled to Bodo, Norway to meet delegates from Norway, Sweden and Iceland. This year the workshop was held in Ballachulish and people running nature based tourism projects from Norway, Sweden, Iceland and one from Canada flew over to meet with Scottish businesses. It was a fascinating few days and Hannah particularly enjoyed talking to the Icelanders about their businesses and exploring the possibility of working together for our future charters to Iceland.

Fri 14 Oct | 2 dozen dolphins Hjalmar Bjorge is on charter this weekend with divers aboard. Just south of Ardtornish Bay, on the Morvern side of the Sound of Mull, whilst heading for the wreck of the "Thesis" two dozen bottle-nosed dolphins were seen. They came and bow-rode the vessel and played by the boat for about an hour...much to everyone's delight. Oh, and Mark added later, that a golden eagle flew overhead at the same time...

Tue 18 Oct | Radio waves We got a phone call today from Radio Scotland asking if we could supply a boat upon which specific guests could be interviewed and asked their opinions about a proposed Marine National Park. It was, the enquirer insisted, of the utmost importance that the vessel motor out into Oban Harbour and the interviews take place at sea. Unfortunately it wasn't possible to help on this occasion although we recommended some alternatives. It was only later that Hannah wondered why being at sea was so important when the target audience were radio listeners rather than TV viewers...

Mon 24 Oct | Shark attack... ...but not in the UK we hasten to add. Made you look though didn't it?! Some of you will have met Sarah Barry who has worked for us on a number of occasions, usually guiding or helping out on Chalice. She's currently guiding for Dyer Island Cruises in South Africa and we received a very excited and very long email today updating us on her progress. Just a few of the highlights include: a whale, and albino calf, both breaching in front of her bedroom window; seeing giant petrels with two metre wingspans; playful seals that follow the boat ("very smelly"); seeing great white sharks and undertaking a shark cage dive ("amazing teeth") and narrowly avoiding being hit by a thrashing shark's tail as it got momentarily tangled up in a line attached to the boat. "Awesome." All that and still time for ballroom dancing to techno music...

Tue 25 Oct | Hoo-ray. Q-A Northern Light Charters has long since considered some

THINK GREEN Do you really need to print this newsletter?

kind of grading scheme is long overdue for small boats, such as ours, offering liveaboard experiences. The good news is that VisitScotland has been applying itself to this very task and today we had a visit from a Quality Assurance advisor as we had asked if we could be involved in the setting up of an accreditation scheme. It's early stages but we feel strongly that the development of this scheme can only be of benefit to customers looking to make an informed choice about operators in what is a growing marketplace.

Fri 28 Oct | Eagle altercation The intrepid divers aboard Hjalmar Bjorge this weekend spent lunchtime today sheltering from the wind in Loch Drumbuie (Loch Sunart, opposite Tobermory). They were rewarded by the sight of a pair of golden eagles and a pair of sea eagles. The guests were thrilled to see four eagles at once but the pairs seemed less happy to see each other! They were definitely squabbling over something, perhaps territory, which provided the divers with some fascinating extra-curricular lunch entertainment.

Mon 31 Oct | Cheques? Check! You might know that Hannah and Mark decided to make a £5 donation to one of two local charities for every cruise guest who booked on any of the three boats. The decision to undertake this pretty painless fundraising procedure arose from Hannah's involvement in a three year Nature Based Tourism project focusing on Sustainable Tourism (see also 6 Oct). At a regional meeting with the other Scottish businesses we discussed the concept of "green-washing" where companies pretend to have ethical or sustainable policies. Whilst we do our very best to be as "green" as possible it occurred to Hannah that, as a business, she and Mark could do a little more to help the local community on a very basic level. We decided to donate a fiver per head for each cruise guest who signed up and gave guests the option of doubling this by paying an additional £5. The excellent news is that we have just paid £550 to **Argyll Animal Aid** and £810 to **Oban Mountain Rescue Team**.
Photo: Kirsty Dalby

Special thanks to those kind-hearted passengers this year who also paid £5 to the charities. We're continuing this fundraising for future cruises so here's hoping your name is here next year! The 2005 Hall of Fame…

Tony & Sarah Cruxton
Duncan & Beverley Ferguson
John & Kathie Fish
Gordon Galloway
Stephen Halliwell
Alwyn Lewis
Geoff & Julie Machan
Richard & Elizabeth Maddock
Desmond & Brenda Murphy
Karen Murphy
Colin C Neasham
Richard J Pearce
Chris Robb
Harry WR Shave
Hugo Shellabear
Archibald CK Smith
Ishbel & Imre Stumpf
Robert & Kendra Stumpf
John W Suckling
Caroline Taylor
Tony & Val Vile
Alexa Walker
Francis & Lyn Watts
John & Jane Ann Williams

Got any friends who like nature? Why not email this newsletter to them?

Fri 18 Nov | 2 dozen dolphins Mark and Kirsty are taking Hjalmar Bjorge from Corpach down to Oban this morning to collect guests this evening for a weekend's dive charter. They were extremely surprised, at 9.00am, to attract two dozen bow-riding common dolphin, right by Fort William. That means the pod has swum up Loch Linnhe, through the Corran narrows and almost reached the very head of the loch. Not a location where we'd normally expect to see dolphins. What a great start to a freezing cold day!

Sat 19 Nov | Awards awarded Those dolphins yesterday were certainly a good omen! Mark and Hannah whizzed up to Inverness last night to attend the first Highland Tourism Awards Dinner and were thrilled to win the "Green Highlands" Award. Sponsored by Scottish Natural Heritage this Award was open to "organisations and businesses which can demonstrate a commitment to Scotland's natural heritage. The judges are looking for evidence of how businesses raise awareness and understanding about the natural heritage, green issues and local conservation with their staff."

Amanda Bryan, north area chairwoman of SNH, Mark Henrys and Hannah Thompson of Northern Light Charters and television presenter Lorainne Kelly.

Oban's Northern Light Charters wins top award

We are delighted that this Award recognises our hard-working crews on the boats and their commitment to ensuring all our guests have the best possible experience onboard. We'd like to congratulate Fiona & Graeme Ambrose (Evergreen B&B, Inverfarigaig) who were Highly Commended in the "Green Highlands" category and also Freedom of the Glen Hotels, based just down the road in Ballachulish, who were shortlisted. And so...back to reality...we drove back home from Inverness after the main ceremony was concluded, to roll into bed at 2.30am...getting up at 6.00am so Mark could begin his charter aboard Hjalmar Bjorge this weekend. Special thanks to Chris Ireland (from Sea Otter), who babysat the boat last night, meeting and greeting our guests from Aberdeen as they arrived. Come to think of it we probably passed them on the road at some point in the 260 mile journey we undertook between the two of us yesterday (and that doesn't include boat travel from Corpach to Oban!). Photo: The Oban Times

Mon 28 Nov | Busy Lizzy (G) Rob set off for Mallaig Boatbuilding this morning aboard Elizabeth G. The vessel will be on the slip for about two weeks whilst the team at Mallaig

If you have any questions or comments please call Hannah on 01631 740595

fit her new stabilisers. They are great big Wesmar stabs - just like the ones on Hjalmar Bjorge - and anyone who has travelled on Elizabeth G and compared her with Hjalmar Bjorge or Chalice will know what a fantastic difference stabilisers make. After the stabs are fitted Elizabeth G is heading for the safety of Barcaldine where Rob and Chris Ireland will recreate the extended superstructure that now exists on Hjalmar Bjorge. So, if anyone who has been on Hjalmar Bjorge thinks we made any hideous mistakes with the conversion, please tell us NOW, so we can get it right on Elizabeth G!!!

Tue 8 Dec | Roving Rachel We got a phone call today from Rachel Owens, who worked on Hjalmar Bjorge, whilst she had a brief stopover in the UK. Some of you will know that Rachel left us to train as a Deck Officer in the Merchant Navy. So far she's been working on a supply vessel in the North Sea, a very big ship on the passage from Johannesburg to the Caribbean and now she's off to join a another very big ship working in the Gulf. In between the stints at sea she has been studying at Fleetwood Nautical College and has excelled at all her exams. Rachel says she's looking forward to getting her skipper's ticket and taking over the Hjalmar Bjorge...

Fri 9 Dec | Elizabeth G is stabbed Check out proud owner Rob Barlow (that's him in the filthy boiler suit!!!) showing off Elizabeth G's new stabilisers. These won't change the vessel's amazing ability to get out to remotes islands such as St Kilda but they will make the journey much more comfortable in lumpy seas. Any of you who have travelled aboard Hjalmar Bjorge or Chalice (both of which are stabilised) will appreciate the difference they make. Photo: Jamie Barlow

Thu 15 Dec | Diving dolphins The last few weeks haven't been terribly newsworthy although Elizabeth G is now off the slip with all her stabiliser bits in place. Today, though, divers aboard Hjalmar Bjorge were rewarded by the sight of a dozen bottle-nosed dolphins off Lochaline. As usual they did some bow-riding and a lot of excitable leaping around. We think the majority of our guests witnessed this spectacle though it has to be said at least one was in bed with a hangover!

The pre-Christmas diving weekend is always a special trip involving (if possible) more food and drink than usual, with guests contributing various bottles to the onboard bar. There were at least eight bottles of port lined up on the servery last night when Hannah left them all to it in Corpach. Whether they are all still intact is anyone's guess...

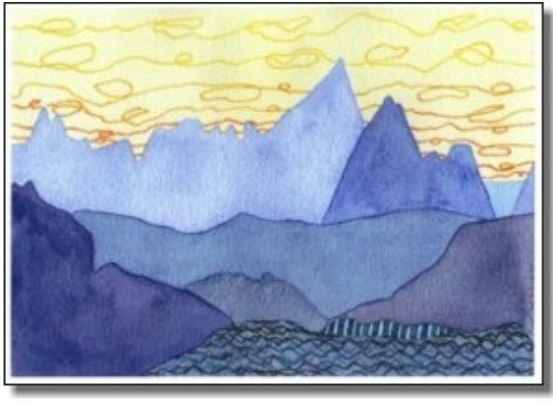
Thu 22 Dec | Phone purchase We got an email today from Oban Mountain Rescue Team telling us how they spent our donation made at the end of the cruising season (see news 31 October). It reads, "the money enabled us to purchase a satellite phone as large areas of our patch do not receive normal mobile coverage and as I'm sure you can understand from being on the boat good communications are vital for both safety and efficiency of operation." Whilst some people coming for a cruise are delighted that mobile phone coverage is patchy to say the least, and others actively welcome the break from their portable offices and "the real world", we can all appreciate there are scenarios when a lack of communication is positively life-threatening.

We're thrilled OMRT put the donation to such good use and look forward - with help from our guests - to giving another decent donation to OMRT and Argyll Animal Aid again next year.

Merry Christmas!

Sun 25 Dec | Merry Christmas We'd like to wish all our customers a Merry Christmas and a Happy & Healthy New Year. This is extended to everyone who has travelled with us before and all of you who could be future guests! Thanks to everyone who has sent us Christmas cards; they are all appreciated. One of them is shown right - a painting inspired by a view of the Cuillins from Loch Scavaig created by Rosemary who enjoyed a holiday aboard Chalice in the summer. Inside her card Rosemary noted, "The memory of our wonderful holiday is still so fresh." Will it be you enjoying such a cruise in 2006...?

Photo: Rosemary Wagner



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