



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 2 Sep | Savvy seal seen Hjalmar Bjorge and Elizabeth G both boarded guests in Oban yesterday. Big John's planned itinerary for Elizabeth G passengers is a gentle cruise around the Inner Hebrides on the lookout for cetaceans. The divers aboard Hjalmar Bjorge are hoping to get out to St Kilda and with a so-so forecast it looks like at least a short visit will be possible.

After departing Tobermory Elizabeth G cruised close by Eigg and anchored at Rum where guests had three hours ashore for a walk. Some went on a tour of Kinloch Castle. Big John took the boat over to Canna for dinner.

First dive today for Hjalmar Bjorge guests was taken at Canna where one of the big fat resident seals was very interested in goings on. They are obviously used to fishermen throwing bits of dead fish off the boats because this one spent a great deal of time swimming around the dive ladder and peering up expectantly at Lindsay! A minke whale was seen near Canna and, later in the day, as the boat travelled from Benbecula up to Lochmaddy it was accompanied by a lone common dolphin which bow-rode for about 30 minutes.

Mon 3 Sep | Crossing to Kilda Mark pulled away from Lochmaddy at 0445 this morning making a very early start for St Kilda. The forecast has deteriorated and looks a bit grim so it may only be a short visit. It was very clear and starry overhead and eagle-eyed Lindsay spotted a brilliant shooting star.

A basking shark was seen in the Sound of Shillay and before long St Kilda appeared on the horizon. Passing Whale Rock, between St Kilda and the Western Isles, half a dozen white-beaked dolphins made an appearance and bow-rode the boat for a while. This particular group have only been seen infrequently so that was an enjoyable experience for those that were up and about. Photo: Lucy Rutherford



Guests on Elizabeth G had a good morning's walk on Canna in lovely weather. Some saw eagles and after lunch Big John took the vessel round the north cliffs where two sea eagles were seen perched on the cliff-tops before flying around. Next to the Cairns of Coll where, round the south side, a minke whale came very close to the boat. Alan and Catrin - who are Northern Light "frequent flyers" - reckoned it was their best ever minke whale sighting (I'm expecting a photo guys!).

Additionally a few small basking sharks (babies?) and one big one (mummy or daddy?) came close to the boat. John had intended anchoring off Coll but an updated forecast gave southerly force six so he sensibly headed south toward Mull, reaching Soriby Bay off Ulva just as the sun was setting.

Tue 4 Sep | A misty morning Big John and his guests aboard Elizabeth G awoke to

visibility of quarter of a mile this morning. They cruised around Lunga and poked the boat's nose into Fingal's Cave on Staffa before going into Gometra harbour. The plan was for all aboard to take a long walk with a packed lunch but, it was showery with bad vis, and everyone was back on board by 1500. John decided that to stay there would be a bit dull so he cruised up the Ardmeanach coast on Mull, enabling everyone to have a look at the fossil tree, and then went into Bunessan for the night.

Hjalmar Bjorge is still at St Kilda with divers aboard. Some common dolphins and minke whales were seen around Boreray today.

Wed 5 Sep | Cruise to Colonsay More mist this morning for Elizabeth G. John took the boat through the Sound of Iona (which is pretty narrow) and both shores could only just be seen. They pushed on to Colonsay and went into Kiloran Bay for a peek. The fog had cleared enough for everyone to see the beautiful sandy beach. The weather wasn't really good enough for guests to walk from this beach to the intended pick up point at Scalasaig so John motored round there instead where the boat sat on the pier and a good walk was then taken from that point. Some did head to the village of Kiloran and saw some golden eagles whilst one couple managed to blag a lift off an old boy and got a tour of the north end of the island! Drinks were taken in the hotel after dinner.

Thu 6 Sep | 3 nights @ St Kilda Hjalmar Bjorge left St Kilda at 0600 this morning for a long run back to Tobermory including a dive en route. The weather was dreadful yesterday with guests boat-bound unable to get ashore but, with three nights in Village Bay, this has been the longest stay at St Kilda for a Northern Light Charters boat this summer! The weather has been a challenge (to say the least) and some of the visits have been brief. Below left, a photo of Stac Lee as Hjalmar Bjorge approaches and, right, a diver's eye-view of the boat amongst the surface swell as he emerges from the dive. Photos (left) Lucy Rutherford (right) Mark Littlewood



The fog made way for broken clouds and sunshine for Elizabeth G guests at Colonsay this morning so Big John set off for the Corryvreckan whirlpool. It was running at full pelt when they arrived but, as the tides are neaps, there was no standing wave. However the sea was very disturbed and Elizabeth G only got up to three knots against its force. When the boat got to the worst bit Big John warned the guests on deck that they would get soaked if they stayed at the bow when he turned back. They all said that was fine and at a speed of 13 knots going with the tide they did indeed get drenched!!!

John then took the boat up to the Garvellachs. This group of islands are known as the "Isles of the Sea" although John says the literal translation from Gaelic is "Rough Islands"

which is less romantic but more accurately descriptive no doubt! There was swell in the anchorage and a forecast of 5 to 6 so the guests just had a look at the beehive house from the boat. They then cruised round to the north end of the main island for a spot of fishing which they have been enjoying while the boat has been on anchor throughout the week. Some small mackerel were caught and put back. Next a cruise north, past Insh Island, and on to Loch Spelve. Guests vetoed a lengthy walk so John anchored at the north end where nine went ashore for an amble. They will be disembarking in Oban tomorrow, along with guests from Hjalmar Bjorge. Photo: John Maughan



Fri 7 Sep | Corryvreckan II Elizabeth G was at the whirlpool yesterday. Today it was the turn of Chalice with Chris having boarded 12 guests in Oban yesterday. After their visit to Corryvreckan Chalice guests saw sea eagles on Mull.

Hjalmar Bjorge and Elizabeth G both finished trips today and waved good-bye to their guests in Oban. We had a surprise visit in the afternoon whilst tied up, preparing for tomorrow's passengers. Rachel, who crewed for us a few years ago, called in for a cuppa. She is now powering her way through her Deck Officer exams in the Merchant Navy and it won't be long before she is better qualified than all our skippers...put together!

On the right is a little fella, identified as a rock pipit, who hitched a lift on Hjalmar Bjorge, joining the boat at St Kilda and staying onboard for an energy-saving trip back toward the mainland. Bird brained? Sounds like a good idea to me! Photo: Gary Davis



Sat 8 Sep | Northern lights Chris' guests aboard Chalice saw a rare sighting of the Northern Lights last night from their anchorage on the Isle of Mull. This morning it was basking sharks all round. Meanwhile in Oban our old friends Craven Marine Salvage Club joined Hjalmar Bjorge for a week's charter.

Sun 9 Sep | Bounteous birds In the space of about an hour today Hjalmar Bjorge guests saw storm petrels, Leach's petrels, long-tailed skuas, great skuas and Arctic skuas as well as more "bog standard" birds out at sea. Some are migrating, some are just whizzing about, many were seen feeding. Cetaceans were seen too - a couple of common dolphins bow-rode the boat for about 10 minutes near Oigh Sgeir (Hyskeir) near the Small Isles (right) and later, in the Sound of Harris, a large minke whale was seen. Mark set off from the Sound of Harris, headed for St Kilda, but it was extremely rough so they turned back and tied up in Leverburgh ready for another go tomorrow. Photo: Sam Ackroyd



Mon 10 Sep | A rough ride Hjalmar Bjorge is having another go at reaching St Kilda today. Mark reports big seas and rough conditions although the wind has dropped.

Wed 12 Sep | Kilda collision Not for any of the boats we hasten to add. Hjalmar Bjorge

made it out to St Kilda on Monday and spent two nights there departing at 0530 this morning. Yesterday a Leach's petrel crashed into the boat, falling to the deck and stunning itself. Petrel patrol swung into action with Mark taking it ashore in the inflatable and handing it over to the warden. She put it into a box to recover and was of the opinion it would soon be well enough to be released.

This morning, about 20 minutes after leaving Village Bay, around nine common dolphin bow-rode the boat. Later on, between St Kilda and North Uist, in big swell with bad weather due in, Mark thinks he saw a couple of Great Shearwaters. These aren't seen very often but are migrating at the moment. Hjalmar Bjorge headed for Canna where half a dozen Risso's dolphins were seen west of the island. These was another rare sighting so definitely a highlight.

Chris finished his Late Summer Cetaceans cruise in Oban today. It was a good trip with a variety of marine life and birds seen. The boat spent the best part of a whole day around Coll which rewarded with nine basking sharks and three minke whales plus an assortment of seabirds including four storm petrels. There were rumours of orca somewhere in the vicinity but we don't know anyone who has actually seen them... Chalice guests had a walk through Aros park, a beach assault on Loch Aline, saw sea eagles, hen harriers and porpoise before anchoring in Loch Spelve last night, near Inverlussa mussel farm. This being the week of Mull Food Festival staff at the mussel farm were delighted to show off their facility. Guests got a bonus ride on boat "Margaret Sinclair" and a tour of the mussel beds and shore base. The Wilsons laid on a fabulous spread of fish food (that's seafood for humans, not food for fish) and Chris was even tempted to try oysters!

Fri 14 Sep | Finish with a bang Mark disembarked Craven Marine Salvage Club in Oban today. We were particularly pleased to unload David (fondly known as "HRH") in one piece after an exciting medical mini-crisis at St Kilda earlier in the week! A successful holiday with a modest amount of diving plus some clay pigeon shooting off the top deck (the Coastguard were warned in advance!). Hjalmar Bjorge now heads up to Corpach until next Thursday morning. The crew will be glad of a rest, not least wee Canna Kathryn who stood in for Lindsay this week.

Elizabeth G greeted divers last night for the first of two weekends before the boat finishes for the season. Skipper/owner Rob is then heading to Norway to do some diving.

Thu 20 Sep | The end of summer It's starting to feel quite wintery up here and that "the end is nigh" in a manner of speaking. Hjalmar Bjorge has finished her last week long trip which signals the end of the "summer" season. Mark, Ylva and Lindsay welcomed our first "winter weekend" divers onboard today. Chris aboard Chalice began his last cruise of the season today too. Optimistically called "The Last Days of Summer" all guests were advised to bring lots of warm layers as the temperature has dropped in the last few days. It may not be hot but Chris and his team will no doubt deliver some lovely destinations and hopefully a few good wildlife sightings to boot.

Mon 24 Sep | End of an era Hjalmar Bjorge and Chalice both said good-bye to guests today. The weather wasn't great over the weekend but Neil, who organised his Essex dive club's trip on Hjalmar Bjorge wrote, "HB is certainly an excellent vessel and we were thoroughly well looked after by Mark, Ylva and Lindsay." Despite the weather they didn't miss any dives so the long journey was worth it.

Chalice had an unusual last trip...a sulky engine meant Chris spent more time in Tobermory harbour than he might otherwise have planned. That said it wasn't ideal

conditions for further exploration anyway. As well as taking his guests to Loch Spelve, Loch Aline, Loch Sunart and, of course, Tobermory, Chris also arranged, and paid for, a day trip on Sunday with Island Encounters. Richard - the man with the van - usually sees a wide variety of birds on these trips and often otters as well. Six of Chris' guests spent the day with Island Encounters and came back enthusing about it. The other six guests made their own entertainment for the day including one who went off to play golf on the Tobermory course which must have some of the best views from any golf course anywhere! On Monday morning Chalice's guests transferred to Elizabeth G, also berthed in Tobermory harbour after finishing a dive charter yesterday. Food, crew and cook went too and Rob took Chris' guests down to Oban while Jane made lunch aboard. The weather didn't provide many boat-based wildlife sightings over the weekend but a white-tailed sea eagle was seen.

So, that's it then! End of a season. End of an era. Chalice was our first boat, with us from the start when Mark and Hannah first got involved in the boat charter business way back in 1995. We sold Chalice to Chris late in 2002 and, as discussed at that time, Chris has worked five seasons with the boat from 2003 to 2007. He has now decided to put her up for sale. Mark and Hannah, with Chris and Judi, would like to thank all the guests who have sailed on Chalice over the past 12 years and we do hope to see some of you again (in fact, looking at next year's bookings I know we will be seeing some of you again!). Northern Light Charters will soon be uploading a brand new website - more photos, less words - and all information about boats and future cruises will be brought up to date then.

Thu 27 Sep | A brighter bet Chalice and Elizabeth G have finished charters now but Hjalmar Bjorge has bookings into November (not including our traditional pre-Christmas trip). We welcomed Piranha Divers onboard this evening, a group who have been holidaying with us since 1999 and who are also booked in for Easter next year. A nice day, fairly warm and sunny with no rain and a good forecast for the weekend. Fingers crossed!

Fri 28 Sep | Splash and dash Hjalmar Bjorge had to head back into Oban today after two of the diver's dry suits came apart at the seams...brrr! After repairs were made they ended up on Craignure Pier for the night and after dinner all aboard went for a pint in the Craignure Inn. Walking down the pier toward Hjalmar Bjorge later in the evening Mark heard a loud splash beside the boat and, thinking someone might have fallen over the side, ran to see what was happening. More splashing was heard as he approached the boat. Thankfully it wasn't a human being in the water but four large bottle-nosed dolphins! They were jumping out of the water, crashing back down and spent a good half an hour amusing themselves around the boat before swimming away.

Sun 30 Sep | Audacious otter Hjalmar Bjorge guests had a sighting of a large minke whale today as they headed back to Mull from Coll after diving the wreck of the "Aurania". The boat was back in Tobermory by the evening and after dinner everyone headed to The Mishnish for a drink. Imagine their surprise when, upon leaving the pub, an otter ran up the nearby steps from the sea, and sat on the side of the road glaring at them all. Obviously nobody had a camera...