

Jewels Of Coastal UK

Aboard *MV Greg Mortimer* | 5th to 17th May 2023



Portsmouth

DAY 1 | Friday 5th May 2023

Position at 2000 on 5th May

Latitude: 50°36.1'N

Longitude: 000°58.7'W

Course: 165°

Speed: 14 knots

Wind Speed: SSE 4

Barometer: 1027

Air Temp: 10°C

Explore. Dream. Discover.

—Mark Twain

After breakfast we embarked on our coaches to take us to Portsmouth, the departure port of our voyage. Portsmouth is mostly located on Portsea Island off the south coast of England, and therewith is the only English city not located primarily on the mainland. It has been a significant Royal Navy dockyard and base for centuries, and the first drydock ever built, constructed by Henry VII in 1496. In the open air museum of Portsmouth Dockyard we learned all about the city's impressive history and its importance for naval operations. We visited the beautiful collection of England's historic ships, including the Mary Rose and Nelson's "Victory", Lord Nelson's flagship at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805.

A city tour through Portsmouth immersed us even more into its impressive history, and full of inspiration and new information we started our transfer to the port, where the *Greg Mortimer* was awaiting our arrival. We passed the thorough port security checks and finally arrived at our beautiful vessel. After our portraits were taken by the ship photographer Jamie, we walked up the gangway onto the *Greg Mortimer*, where we were greeted by a delicious and refreshing buffet of welcome drinks and snacks.

To get us ready for sailing as soon as possible we started with our mandatory passenger briefings straight after settling into our cabins. The expedition leader David, together with the assistant expedition leader Isabelle, and the onboard expedition manager Samantha welcomed us onboard and gave us all the necessary information about safety on board, Zodiac operations and the plans for tomorrow, our first day of sea-based programme. During the practical safety drill the expedition team and ship's crew instructed us on operations in case of an emergency, and demonstrated the use of the life jackets and procedures to reach our muster stations and life boats.

The end of the safety drill brought us to the top deck just as the *Greg Mortimer* left Portsmouth, offering us beautiful views of the city and port area in the warm evening light. As dinner started, we sailed out through the narrow channel connecting the large port basin area with the open sea, passing busy marinas and lively residential areas where residents enjoyed the warm evening sun of this spring day.

After dinner we proceeded to the ship's mudroom to fit our muckboots, life jackets and outdoor jackets for the upcoming excursions of our voyage. Being now properly ready and geared up for the programme of the following days we retreated into our cabins, excited for what tomorrow would bring.



Fowey, Cornwall

DAY 2 | Saturday 6th May 2023

Position at 0600 on 6th May

Latitude: 50°17,9'N

Longitude: 004°33,3'W

Course: 285°

Speed: 0.9 knots

Wind Speed: SE 3

Barometer: 1022

Air Temp: 10° C

A first walk in any new country is one of the things which makes life on this planet worth being grateful for.

—Charles William Beebe

Industrial Portsmouth would have been very far from the minds of early risers who witnessed the Cornish dawn breaking near Fowey. As we pulled into the tight, historic port in the mouth of the River Fowey, England's final western extremity was enshrouded in a damp morning mist, the greenery along the riverbanks only just peering through the gloom.

It wasn't unreasonable to expect that the weather on the first full day of operations would be inclement – all forecasts said as much – but after an early spray, the morning cleared up heroically. This was particularly good news for the hikers who opted to take the long way round the coast from Gorran Haven to Mevagissey as the morning got drier and drier, and the conditions better and better.

Officially the path was only 7km (around 4 miles) but with significant undulations along the dramatic clifftops, it wasn't long before layers were being tactically removed and so-called emergency cookies gobbled. Much of the flora along the route was classically British: gorse, daisies, thistles, hedgerow, dandelions, wild primrose... Many of the small birds were equally familiar to British natives, but still thrilling to the keen-eyed birders who joined the hike. With only a few sheep and dog-walkers for company, the passengers of the *Greg Mortimer* largely had the path to themselves.

Meanwhile, back in Mevagissey, those who weren't interested in the hike instead explored that beautiful fishing town, being sure to sample local ice-cream and fabled Cornish pasties like professional explorers. A small but committed cohort also made sure to make it into a local pub to watch the coronation of King Charles III, the United Kingdom's first such ceremony in almost 70 years.

From the town locals typically refer to as Meva, busses took the group to the near-mythic Lost Gardens of Heligan. Before having a chance to discover its labyrinthine woods, however, most visitors – especially the hikers – were keen to snaffle lunch at the on-site café.

Post-sandwiches, everyone was free to explore as they chose. The grounds on which the now-popular gardens are found have been developed since the 16th century, but they were really only improved to something like today's recognisable configuration in the late 1800s. By the early part of the next century, 22 gardeners were



Tresco, Isles of Scilly

DAY 3 | Sunday 7th May 2023

Position at 0600 on 7th May

Latitude: 49°51,2'N

Longitude: 006°05,9'W

Course: 272°

Speed: 6.0 knots

Wind Speed: S 2

Barometer: 1029

Air Temp: 12°C

Nothing is weaker than water. Yet nothing overcomes immovable objects as water does. There is no substitute. Thus weakness overcomes strength and gentleness overcomes rigidity. No one denies it and no one tries it.

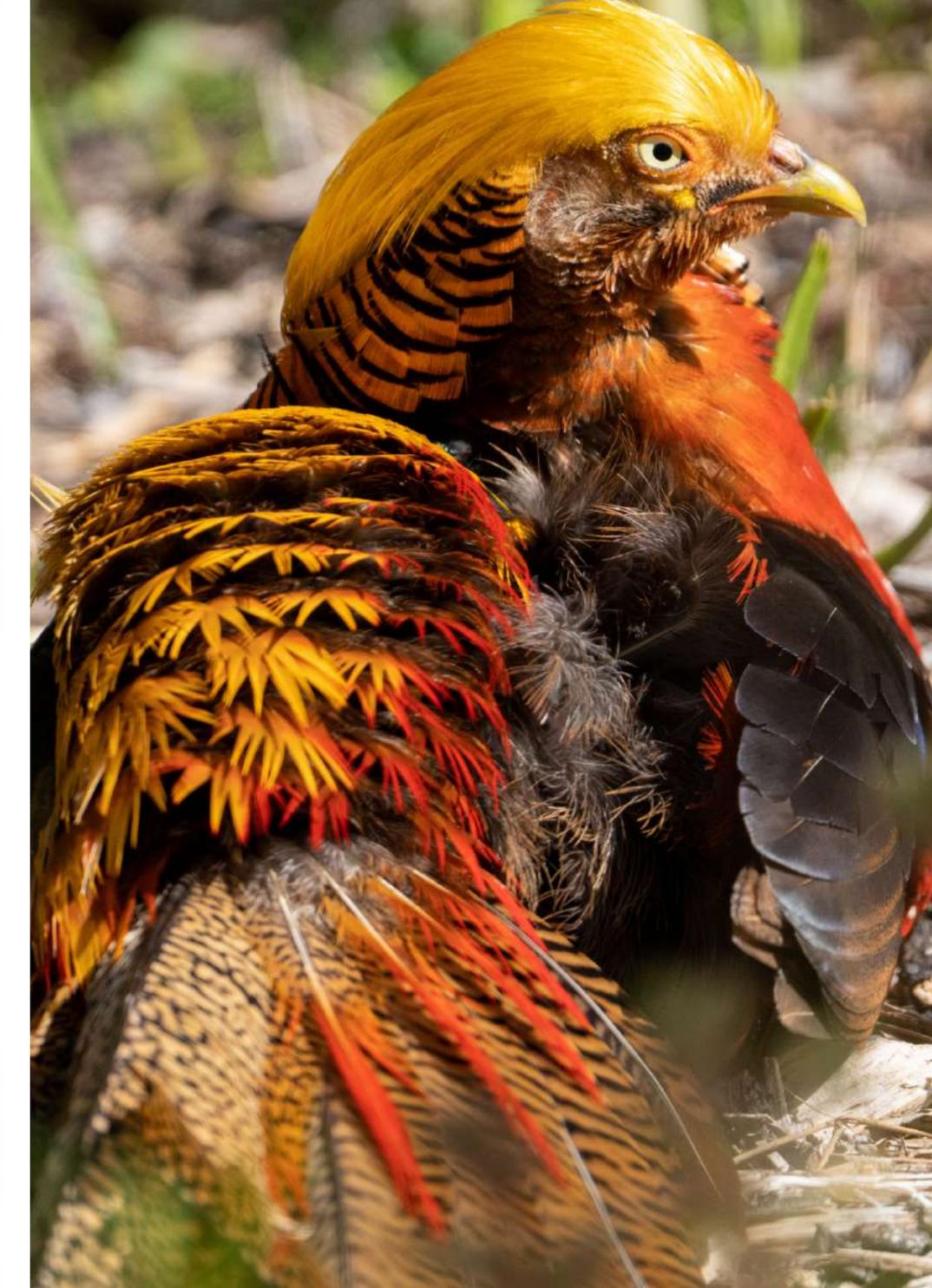
—Laotse, The Book of Tao

After leaving Fowey, the *Greg Mortimer* carried us through the night along the south coast of Cornwall. As dawn broke we found ourselves coasting in towards the Isles of Scilly. They appeared on the horizon in the half light and by the time the sun had risen out of the sea the pilot boat came alongside and we were guided into our sheltered anchorage in the lee of St. Mary's. After breakfast we were picked up by one of the local boats which was crewed by three humans and two really friendly dogs. Pretty much everybody got to stroke the dogs on the 10 minute ferry ride to the beautiful little island of Tresco where we landed at the slipway of Near Carn.

The 10-minute walk to the Abbey and it's magical gardens in the warm spring weather gave us our first chance to experience the peace of the Scillies. It truly is a wonderful place, a world apart from the bustle of mainland Cornwall. The best way to get around on Tresco is on foot as there are no cars on the island. If you insist on living life in the fast lane, then the only way to travel off the hoof is by bicycle or electric golf cart. The gardens here were remarkable, so well-manicured and with an impressive array of plantlife, as well as the occasional red squirrel and even a rare sighting of a golden pheasant. Once the gardens had been thoroughly roamed, many of us enjoyed a pot of tea and a pastry in the Abbey Gardens.

We returned to the ship for lunch which gave many of us a welcome opportunity to stroke the two ferry dogs again. In the afternoon the ferry took us into St. Mary's where some of us had the chance to follow an excellent guided walk through Hugh Town, the highlight of which was a visit to Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson's grave. Wilson lived for many years (and eventually died) on St. Mary's. The guide told us that he was a very humble and down to earth man who was well liked amongst the tiny community of St. Mary's. After roaming through town, we all ventured down to the lighthouse and stood in awe of the giant rock formations nearby. Some people chose not to come on the guided walk but spend time wandering through Hugh Town, a very charming little village.

Today was a great day with beautiful sunny weather and a chance to get a feel for the wonderful Isles of Scilly.



Penzance, Cornwall

DAY 4 | Monday 8th May 2023

Position at 0600 on 8th May

Latitude: 50°06,7'N

Longitude: 005°31,1'W

Course: At Anchor

Speed: At Anchor

Wind Speed: SSW 5

Barometer: 1031

Air Temp: 11°C

A Journey is a person in itself, no two are alike, and all plans, safeguards, policies and coercion are fruitless. We find after years of struggle that we do not take a trip; a trip takes us.

—John Steinbeck

We arrived in Penzance the night before, having sailed from the Isles of Scilly, spending the night at anchor. As we approached the dock, we got to have a look at the Scillonian III, a beautiful vessel that was built around the 1960s - 70s and is now utilised as the ferry which runs from Penzance to the Isles of Scilly between the months of March and September.

We hopped off the Zodiacs and up the steps at the quay to be greeted by our guide and also some dense fog and light rain.

Once we had all arrived, we walked over to the coach to begin our guided bus tour to Falmouth via the quaint harbour town of St Ives. Despite the foggy weather, we were still excited to explore the beautiful scenery of this coastal town. As we journeyed along the winding roads, our knowledgeable guide shared fascinating stories and facts about Cornwall's rich history including the numerous Methodist Church Chapels dotted about the county.

We arrived in Falmouth just in time for a quick coffee and a walk around the harbour, then we returned to Penzance for a spot of lunch at The Queen's Hotel, which was a charming old building with elegant furnishings and a cozy atmosphere. We were treated with a buffet style Ploughman's lunch with lots of local cheeses and a particularly nice chutney.

After lunch, some of us set out to explore on our own, enjoying the small seaside town and moseying around the charming streets, galleries and shops.

The rest of us went on a small walking tour with Gail, our guide we previously had at Fowey, who took us to Lavant Tin Mine near Land's End where we got to see and feel the tough life the tin miners of Cornwall faced during that time. The afternoon's heavy rain, however, left us all drenched. The annual average rainfall for Penzance is 963mm per year, which we seemed to have had all in that very afternoon.

As the afternoon drew to a close, we hopped back on the Zodiacs and had an adventurously bumpy ride back to the ship in time for a relaxed evening onboard the spectacular *Greg Mortimer*.



Lundy Island

DAY 5 | Tuesday 9th May 2023

Position at 0600 on 9th May

Latitude: 51°03,4'N

Longitude: 004°46,9'W

Course: 046°

Speed: 7.6 knots

Wind Speed: W 4

Barometer: 1026

Air Temp: 10°C

Few people know how to take a walk. The qualifications... are endurance... an eye for nature, good humour, vast curiosity, good speech, good silence, and nothing too much.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Grey skies and low hanging cloud greeted the *Greg Mortimer* as it dropped anchor off the Island of Lundy. A small island, caught in the continuous tidal pull of the Bristol Channel, Lundy sat mysterious in the mist and dark grey of clouds.

With Zodiacs in the water, expeditioners were soon ashore and hiking up the long steep road to the flat plateau that is the landmass of Lundy. There, people elected to join different adventures. The photography group pausing at every glistening dew drop and attempting to shoot photos of goslings in the face of ferocious geese, the naturalist group trekking immediately towards the sea cliffs searching for elusive peregrine falcons, and the long hikers stretching their legs to maximise their time on land.

All groups had a marvellous time, the misty rain lifting just in time to show puffins and shearwaters far below on green slopes, and rays of light shining down on a surprisingly calm ocean.

Soon it was time to head home, and with a dropping tide, each expeditioner made the leap off the dock down into the Zodiac and set off, homeward bound, to get dry and refuel for the afternoon.

After a short break, the boats were out again, and the Zodiacs cruised out to see what could be seen. Two Zodiacs headed around to the west to see the exposed coastline and watch waves ripping into the hard granite shore. Despite the calmness of the sea, which had looked so smooth and gentle from above only hours before, the waves tore into the shoreline. Blowholes and waterspouts lifting dozens of metres into the air, creating an impressive spectacle. The spray and noise was tremendous and we all wondered what it could look like on a wild day if this was a day of calm.

The other two Zodiacs headed north on the east to marvel at the lighthouse rising hundreds of metres above, its sombre architecture a reminder of its serious function, and the importance of the light in a sea of mist and tides.

Each direction brought sightings of puffins, curious but timid seals, and sheer cliffs rising above a wild sea.

Returning to the ship, we all climbed back on board after a busy and full day at Lundy, content to be warm and dry, and ready for another good meal on the *Greg Mortimer*.



Pembrokeshire Islands, Wales

DAY 6 | Wednesday 10th May 2023

Position at 0600 on 10th May

Latitude: 51°25,4'N

Longitude: 005°14,2'W

Course: 321°

Speed: 12.3 knots

Wind Speed: WSW 4

Barometer: 1026

Air Temp: 10°C

Birds have it better than we do,
In many ways, and here are there,
with wings they fly by day and night,
and never have a cancelled flight,
with feathers they have clothes that always fit,
in styles that never change a bit,
and what we envy most, I'd say,
with bills they never have to pay.

—Anonymous

As we opened our curtains this morning we were greeted by thousands of puffins, guillemots and razorbills on their busy ways in and out of their nests on Skomer Island, just off the Pembrokeshire coast. These species belong to the family of the Auks or Alcidae, which are pelagic birds, spending the majority of their lives on the open ocean and going ashore only for breeding. They nest in colonies on rocky coasts and cliffs, and return to the same nesting spot and the same partner year after year. The hectically flapping wings of these relatively small seabirds indicate that they have largely sacrificed flight, and also mobility on land, in exchange for swimming ability; their wings are a compromise between the best possible design for diving and the bare minimum needed for flying. Similar to penguins, birds of the auk family catch their prey, little fish, by wing-propelled dives which can reach several meters below the ocean surface.

As swell, wind and tidal currents combined into sea conditions too rough for us to embark on a Zodiac cruise, we set off on a ship cruise along and around the beautiful coasts of the Pembrokeshire Islands. The circumnavigation of Skomer and Skokholm Island kept us in very close company of the puffins, guillemots and razorbills flying and floating all around the ship. We then set off to Grassholm, a small island further offshore, which is home to the third largest gannet colony of the UK, counting 39 000 gannet pairs and representing an estimated 16% of the world's gannet population. It was truly spectacular to approach this rocky island which appeared snow-capped by the sheer density of white gannets nesting on it. The majestic birds were flying all around the *Greg Mortimer*, sailing in the wind and often carrying large portions of seaweed to use as nesting material back to the island.

Just after lunch we reached Ramsey Island, which lies in very close proximity to the Welsh coast. Very powerful tidal currents are found in the waters around Ramsey, and thanks to the navigational skills of our captain we got

a glimpse into Ramsey Sound between the island and the Welsh mainland, with the notorious "The Bitches" rocks sticking out of the ocean like teeth, transforming this stretch of water into a tidal race of up to 13 km/h with steep standing waves and whirlpools.

After a delicious crepe suzette afternoon tea, we listened to the fascinating stories of BBC presenter Miranda Krestovnikoff about her underwater adventures around the UK coast. What an amazing place we are cruising along! Just after dinner we were treated with another close island passage – Bardsey Island just off the Welsh coast on our way northwards. Ian McCarthy's documentary about Cornwall was the perfect ending to the day and gave us deep insights into the nature, wildlife and character of this beautiful part of the UK that we had passed just a few days ago.



Holyhead, Holy Island (Wales)

DAY 7 | Thursday 11th May 2023

Position at 0600 on 11th May

Latitude: 53°19,7'N

Longitude: 004°42,3'W

Course: 034°

Speed: 4.6 knots

Wind Speed: SW 3

Barometer: 1027

Air Temp: 10°C

Let us probe the silent places, let us see what luck betide us; let us journey to a land I know. There's a whisper on the night wind, there's a star a gleam to guide us, and the wild is calling calling...let us go.

—Robert Service

Docking at Holyhead, keen-eared passengers may have been shocked at the accents meeting them ashore. Since leaving rain-lashed Cornwall a few days earlier, we hadn't heard any accent beyond the eclectic but increasingly familiar mix on board. Now, in North Wales, something very new was in the air.

The Welsh language has existed for hundreds of years but having been suppressed almost fatally during the 19th and 20th centuries, it has enjoyed a resurgence since the formation of the Welsh Assembly in the late 1990s. Today Welsh is taught in schools across the country, but this northern part of the nation has long been its stronghold. While the language is proudly displayed around Wales (it's also a legal requirement), it's so widely spoken around these parts that it has inevitably left its mark on the English language, too. The sing-song accent of Southern Wales is the one that is often imitated, but the brogue up here can sound almost Scandinavian at times.

These subtleties and complications were of course impossibly irrelevant to the thousands of seabirds waiting for us at the South Stack Lighthouse on Holy Island (Ynys Gybi) just off of Anglesey (Ynys Môn). The titular lighthouse has stood here for over 200 years, though it's safe to assume that the legions of guillemots (gwylog) cormorants (morfran) razorbills (aderyn brith) and herring gulls (hucan) which nest here have been around much longer.

Puffins (pâl) were also once a mainstay of the dramatic cliffs above the lighthouse, but they have seen their numbers plummet as their as their main food course, the sand eel, has declined in recent years. Nonetheless, those who made the effort to climb down the 400-or-so steps to the lighthouse did find one of the iconic little birds on a cliff face.

Just as rare, though arguably not quite so charming, was the unfortunately named fleawort, a sunny little flower that exists only on the windswept coastal slopes of this remote part of Wales. Among the dozen or so types of beautiful blooming wildflowers in this unlikely postcode, it somehow stood out to anyone lucky enough to find one.

The afternoon saw us head south, just off the island of Anglesey to Caernarfon in the county of Gwynedd. Fair weather initially seemed to be waiting for us in this gorgeous mediaeval town, especially within the walls of its

recently refurbished castle. It was easy to believe that the sunshine ricocheting off its near 750-year-old interior might last all day, but after some exploration, dramatic clouds rolled inexorably towards the ramparts.

Some visitors took shelter in the on-site tearoom, while others ducked inside the ancient walls. The majority of the stonework still standing today was built on the orders of King Edward I of England following his bloody conquest of Wales, but the castle's more dramatic conflicts came later, during Welsh rebellions, then later during the English Civil War. That was followed by decades of peace, then neglect, but today thanks today diligent restorations and expert care, the place looks, if not homely, then at least statesmanlike once more.



Douglas Head, Isle of Man

DAY 8 | Friday 12th May 2023

Position at 0600 on 12th May

Latitude: 54°05,3'N

Longitude: 004°27,1'W

Course: 354°

Speed: 4.1 knots

Wind Speed: N 5

Barometer: 1036

Air Temp: 10°C

The grand show is eternal. There is always a sunrise somewhere. The dew is never dried at once. A shower is forever falling. Vapour is ever rising. Eternal sunrise, eternal sunset. Eternal dawn and glowing, on sea and continents and islands, each in its turn as the earth rolls. And for this I am forever grateful to be alive.

—John Muir

The good ship *Greg Mortimer* slid into Douglas, on the Isle of Man, in the early morning sun. The harbour was surprisingly small, crammed to bursting with the two ferries which connect this little island with both Ireland and Great Britain.

The town of Douglas is surprisingly large with a real look of affluence about it. The Isle of Man has for many years been a low tax economy with insurance, online gambling operators, information, communications technology and offshore banking forming key sectors. As an offshore financial centre, it holds a weird place as an autonomous part of the British Isles and has never been part of the European Union. The islanders are very proud of their Viking past and have a strong sense of independence. Agriculture, fishing and tourism only account for a tiny percentage of the island's economy, so it has a very different feel to anywhere else we've visited on our 'Jewels of the Coastal UK' adventure. Certainly, the Isle of Man has more millionaires and billionaires living there than anywhere else we have seen.

The day split into two organised groups with people also being able to look at the island under their own steam if they so desired. The birding group got off to a flying start with a visit to the seaside town of Peel. In the small fishing port we watched many black guillemots fishing and courting. It was such a treat to be able to get so close to these beautiful little seabirds.

Our group then strolled along the harbour up to a 13th century ruined castle on St Patricks Island. On the way, we watched small groups of eider duck, a chunky sea duck, resting on the weed covered rocks or swimming and diving. The male eiders looked really stunning in their black and white breeding plumage.

After a great lunch at a swanky golf course with a car park full of shiny Range Rovers, Mercedes and Volvos, we headed out to the Calf of Man, a small island separated from the main island by a narrow sound through which rips a powerful tidal current. While watching the seabirds, the birding group were visited by three chough,



beautiful red billed sea crows that came very close to us and gave everybody great views. The sun shone all day creating a golden day for us all.

The 'Vikings and Volcano' tour in the morning was fascinating. Our guide, Andrew, explained the Viking history of this island while we toured the ancient ruins. The afternoon brought a visit to Cregneash, and a journey into the life of Manx people in the rural past.

The thatched cottages were very quaint, and it was lovely to see real Manx cats and the native Loaghtan sheep. A real window into the past.

Islay

DAY 9 | Saturday 13th May 2023

Position at 0600 on 13th May

Latitude: 55°31,4'N

Longitude: 006°07,6'W

Course: 334°

Speed: 6.8 knots

Wind Speed: E 2

Barometer: 1040

Air Temp: 7°C

Often I feel I go to some distant region of the world to be reminded of who I really am. There is no mystery about why this should be so. Stripped of your daily routines ... you are forced into direct experience. Such direct experience inevitably makes you aware of who it is that is having the experience.

—Michael Crichton, 1988

Through the fog, we approached slowly and carefully towards the Isle of Islay on the *Greg Mortimer*, heading towards our first stop for the day, Port Ellen. As we disembarked the ship onto the Zodiacs we drove across the bay into the lovely harbour of the town. There, we were greeted by our guides, Donald McFee and Dougie McTaggart. We split into two groups and walked through the mist towards our first visit of the day. Our guides took us along the path towards the infamous distillery of Laphroaig whiskey. As we got close, we managed to spot some nesting ravens, fresh in our minds after Ian's recap the night prior. We then entered the visitors centre to taste the smoky whiskey and enjoy the experience of being able to sample it in its own home.

Once back in Port Ellen, we hopped on a bus with our fantastic guide, Donald, and made our way to lunch at the Gaelic Club, where we were treated to a range of different sandwiches made with local ingredients. Some of us particularly enjoyed the branston pickle and cheese, others preferring the coronation chicken. The sandwiches were followed by a choice of pea and ham soup or tomato and roasted red pepper soup. For dessert, we sampled a selection of different sweets and treats such as millionaire's shortbread and rocky road.

We continued on to the RSPB Loch Gruinart Nature Reserve. This place of outstanding beauty had some real treats in store for us like getting to hear the elusive corncrake and meeting their friendly dog called Freddy.

On our way back to Port Ellen we made a detour into the middle of the island to the Islay Woollen Mill. The bus parked up next to some big suffolk sheep, and we walked over a beautiful stone bridge to look around the mill. A highlight for many was the picturesque stream flowing behind the mill. By this point the sun had been shining all afternoon, and we made our grand finale a stop in the capital town of Bowmore. There, we found a brilliant gift shop that had a great selection of books and other goodies.



After a long day discovering the Queen of the Hebrides, Islay, we were picked up in the Zodiacs and returned to the *Greg Mortimer*. As always, we had our briefing for tomorrow's plan with David who was eager, as always, to show us the work he had done with his animations on the map.

There was only one way to wrap up such a great day and that was with an outdoor barbecue on Deck 8.

Iona & Staffa

DAY 10 | Sunday 14th May 2023

Position at 0600 on 14th May

Latitude: 55°14'5"N

Longitude: 006°32'3"W

Course: 330°

Speed: 5.6 knots

Wind Speed: SSW 4

Barometer: 1030

Air Temp: 9°C

I must go down to the seas again, to the lovely sea and the sky...for the call of the running tide is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied.

—John Mansfield

Another misty morning greeted the *Greg Mortimer*.

Anchored in the sound of Iona, the low hills of Mull shimmered in the haze to the East, and the golden beaches of Iona could barely be seen to the west. As Zodiacs cruised towards the shore, the outline of the Abbey came into view and the iconic skyline of this ancient island began to take shape.

Landing at the village pier, where ferries and fishing boats gather, the expeditioners congregated near lobster pots and fishing dinghies, the steep ramp giving clues to the rise and fall of the tides in the nearby sound. Small boats anchored in the cove, each a tender to larger, absent, vessels, indicated a community still living in a life associated with the sea.

Soon the group was walking up through the village, exploring the medieval nunnery, and enjoying the ancient architecture and stones of the Island. The medieval crosses, the design of the nunnery, all texts which could be read in understanding the importance of this remote island.

Shortly after, the walkers had arrived at the abbey gates. There they could enter the abbey proper. First built in 563 AD, the abbey of St. Columba had been built and burnt, built and burnt so many times in its life, that its presence here is something of a miracle in itself. Witness to the arrival of the first Irish Christians in the Scottish Isles, Iona is also the location of the first Norse raids on the Western coast of the now United Kingdom, and is still a place where rulers and leaders of Scotland come to legitimise their standing.

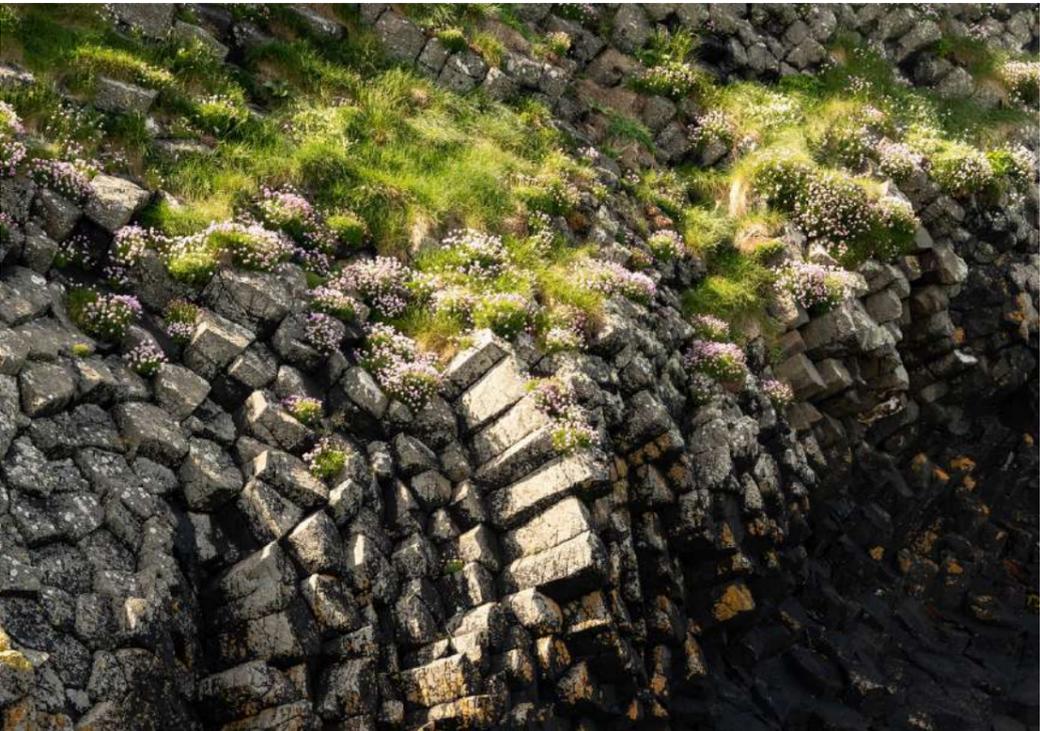
From there, the expeditioners wandered through the abbey, and explored the fantastic museum beyond, before walking back towards the village, marvelling at the glorious sunshine that had suddenly appeared.

During lunch, the ship repositioned itself to the wonderful island of Staffa; its columnar basalt famous for being the inspiration to Mendelson's Hebridean Overture. There, the expedition team looked for a gap in the swell and managed to get a brave and intrepid few ashore. With waves sweeping across the stone and concrete landing, and Zodiac drivers timed their approaches to find calm sets in the sea. It was an exciting approach for many.



On land, we were rewarded with fantastic puffin encounters and glorious light. Soon, however, the changing conditions drew us back to the Zodiacs and we made a quick run back to the ship.

As a final magnificent ending to the day, Captain Maxim and helmsman Goncales took the ship on an incredible cruise around Staffa first, then Lunga, and then finally Dutchman's Cap. An incredible end to a memorable day in the Scottish Isles.



St Kilda, Boreray & The Stacs

DAY 11 | Monday 15th May 2023

Position at 0600 on 15th May

Latitude: 57°38'4"N

Longitude: 008°22'2"W

Course: 337°

Speed: 11.3 knots

Wind Speed: W 6/7

Barometer: 1031

Air Temp: 9°C

The land was gone, all but a little streak, away off on the edge of the water, and down under us was just ocean, ocean, ocean – millions of miles of it, heaving and pitching and squirming, and white sprays blowing from the wave-tops,and we had the sky and the ocean to ourselves, and the roomiest place I ever did see and the lonest.

—Mark Twain, Tom Sawyer Abroad

In the morning we noticed a change in ship movement from open ocean swell to sudden calm. We had arrived in the protected bay of Hirta Island and were greeted by its picturesque combination of green slopes and dramatic cliffs. Hirta belongs to the isolated archipelago of St. Kilda as part of the Outer Hebrides, which represents the westernmost UK territory outpost far out in the Atlantic Ocean.

Thousands of seabirds – puffins, fulmars, guillemots, razorbills – were flying around the ship and accompanied us during our Zodiac ride to the landing site. Kayakers enjoyed a magnificent paddle along the sea cliffs of the bay, exploring caves and marvelling at the seabirds all around them in the air and on the water. As we stepped on land, we were immediately enchanted by the spectacular history of the island. Permanent habitation on the island may extend back two millenia, but the population never exceeded 180 inhabitants.

We walked on the old main road of the settlement between small stone houses, some of which are still in use for the island warden, scientists and summer volunteers for the National Trust for Scotland. The small but excellent museum in one of the original houses gave insights into the human history, culture, geology and biology of the archipelago. The St. Kilda archipelago is one of Scotland's six World Heritage Sites and is also one of the few in the world to hold joint status for both its natural and cultural heritage. A small group of us hiked up one of the hills and enjoyed spectacular views over the island and some steep cliff edges.

After coming back onboard, our captain and his crew took us on a ship cruise around and between the islands and rocks rising out from the ocean all around us. During the circumnavigation of Hirta, we admired the steep cliffs on the outside of our morning anchorage bay - these are the highest cliffs in the UK! After a short navigation we arrived at Boreray Island, where tens of thousands of gannets breed on the steep cliffs and "The Stacs" rock needles rising steeply from the ocean. What appeared like snow caps on the rocks from a distance turned out to be a dense population of gannets inhabiting every possible inch on the cliffs. Rough seas and narrow passages didn't stop our skilled captain from bringing us as close as possible to the rocks and we watched in amazement as we slowly sailed past the dramatic scenery.



Papa Westray & Fair Isle

DAY 12 | Tuesday 16th May 2023

Position at 0600 on 16th May

Latitude: 59°23'2"N

Longitude: 002°56'6"W

Course: 070°

Speed: 12.0 knots

Wind Speed: NW 6

Barometer: 1029

Air Temp: 8°C

The three great elemental sounds in nature are the sound of rain, the sound of wind in a primeval wood, and the sound of outer ocean on a beach. I have heard them all, and of the three elemental voices, that of the ocean is the most awesome, beautiful and varied.

—Henry Beston

This morning was pretty wild and wet and there was a fair swell running as the *Greg Mortimer* approached Papa Westray. Luckily our landing site was on the east side of the island which gave us some shelter. It was just as well we had some practice at getting off the ship and into the Zodiacs as they were bouncing around a bit in the swell. Even so most of us got pretty wet as we crouched in the Zodiacs with our backs to the wind, rain and spray of the run into the jetty on the island. We split into two groups, the birders had a great walk through North Hill RSPB Nature Reserve which is breeding ground for seabirds such as Arctic and great skua which gave us great views. We also saw waders such as curlew, snipe, ringed plover and oystercatcher.. The highlight was a female eider duck with her two newly hatched chicks in tow, tiny balls of brown fluff with legs sticking out the bottom.

The other group caught a coach out to the Knap of Howar, the ruins of a neolithic farmstead. It was incredible to think that this is the oldest preserved house in northern Europe, dating from around 3,500 BC. The homestead, which is simply two stone rooms side by side is partially subterranean. The island is tiny, only 2,270 acres with a population of just over 90 people. Thank heavens when we returned to the ship the wind had dropped and the sun was out which made for a much more pleasant Zodiac ride. As we ate our lunch the ship repositioned towards Fair Isle. We arrived at about 3.30pm and slipped into the tight little bay of South Haven where we dropped anchor. Fair Isle is a small island which lays roughly midway between Shetland and Orkney and is sometimes called "Britain's most remote inhabited island". After a landing on a slippery boulder beach some headed into the centre of the island where the majority of the homesteads are. A couple of taxis ferried people in to take a chance to look at the local crafts. Fair isle is famous for its intricate style of knitting and there were many beautiful jumpers, hats and gloves to see and buy plus refreshments and cakes made by the islanders especially for our visit. Most people made a visit to a puffin colony on a headland just a short walk from the landing beach. We all got to see puffins on the cliffs, some were excavating their burrows before laying eggs and others were courting. I think we all felt very privileged to spend time with them. This was the last day of this adventure; in the evening we had the captains farewell and then a fabulous slide show from Jamie which truly captured the spirit of this wonderful expedition cruise.



Aberdeen, Scotland

DAY 13 | Wednesday 17th May 2023

Position at 0500 on 17th May

Latitude: 57°12'5" N

Longitude: 001°54'9" W

Course: 211°

Speed: 10.5 knots

Wind Speed: SSW 3

Barometer: 1036

Air Temp: 5°C

Ralph Waldo Emerson

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Our day started with a classic morning wake up call beginning with the all so familiar "good morning my dear friends" from our beloved expedition leader, David. After breakfast we all gathered together on deck 4 to say goodbye or, rather, "see you later" to our fellow expeditioners, many of whom had transformed unwittingly from acquaintances to good friends. It was a strange feeling to bid farewell to our expedition family after almost 2 weeks onboard our faithful steed, the *Greg Mortimer*. Many a hug were given and received, and more than a few promises of future catch ups could be heard amongst our crowd that buzzed with the enthusiasm that only those who had shared such an experience as we had could emit.

The entire Aurora Expeditions Team and the ship's crew would like to thank you for joining us on our adventurous explorations around coastal UK. We hope to see you on the high seas again someday in the near future!



Kayaking Log

Kayak Masters: Teal Morgan

Number of Paddlers: 2

Total Paddle Outings: 3

Total Distance Paddled: 7.97km

Paddlers:

Priscilla Adey

Peter Radcliffe

09/05/2023 - Lundy Island (Eastern Coast). Distance: 2.68km

We started our morning by towing the kayaks out towards Tibbett's Point. We began our paddle southwards and were immediately greeted by a curious grey seal who pretty much followed us the whole journey. The cliffs were jagged and broken with lots of little caves and coves for us to peek our heads into. The razorbills and guillemots were constantly flying over our heads. We got the chance to have a go at some rock hopping on the way quickly followed by getting to explore a cave with our friendly seal companions. We finished up landing on the jetty to allow us to explore the island.

14/05/2023 - Iona. Distance: 3.98km

The paddle of the day began at Quarry beach where the famous Iona marble is from. From there we continued our way northwards weaving or way around the small cliffs of the southeast coast of Iona trying to see what interesting features we could find, we managed to find a narrow crag/cave that we could back into. Shortly after we found a set of 3 rocks that we were able to paddle between to try out some rock gardening. We started heading towards the pier looking at the fascinating intertidal life. We landed ashore to go look at the famous Iona Abbey.

15/05/2023 - St Kilda. Distance: 1.31km

A windy morning but we managed to get out paddling along the island of Dun, we started our paddle by the first of a set of 2 sea arches on Dun. We continued paddling towards Village Bay following the coastline closely to try and avoid the wind. Lots of different seabirds were flying overhead in a spectacular way. The wind started gusting strongly, so we took shelter in a particularly square bay with cliffs on all sides and guillemots and razorbills nesting on them. With no sign of the wind dropping back down to a more enjoyable level we got back in the Zodiac with the help of Annette and cruised along the rest of the coast where we saw many seals and their pups. We finished at the jetty in St Kilda and got ashore to see the historic and amazing island.





Bird Sightings

| Bird Species | May | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|-----|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 |
| Northern Fulmar | | | | • | | | | • | | | • | • | |
| Manx Shearwater | | | | | • | | | • | | | | | |
| Gannet | | | | • | • | | | • | • | • | • | • | |
| Shag | | | • | | • | | | • | • | • | • | • | |
| Cormorant | • | • | | • | • | | | • | | | • | | |
| Grey Heron | | | | | | | | • | • | | | | |
| Greylag Goose | | | | | • | | | • | • | | | | |
| Mute Swan | • | • | | | | | | | | • | | • | |
| Common Eider | | | | | | | | • | • | | | | |
| Shelduck | | | | | | | | • | • | | | | |
| Mallard | | | | • | | | | • | • | | | | |
| Coot | | | | • | | | | | | | | | |
| Pheasant | • | • | • | | | | | • | • | | | | |
| Hen Harrier | | | | | | | | • | • | | | | |
| Golden Eagle | | | | | | | | | • | | | | |
| Ringed Plover | | | | | | | | • | | | | | |
| Lapwing | | | | | | | | | | • | | | |
| Redshank | | | | | | | | | | • | | | |
| Oystercatcher | • | • | • | | • | | | • | • | • | • | • | |
| Turnstone | | | | | | | | | | | • | | |
| Great Skua | | | | | | | | • | | • | • | | |
| Herring Gull | | • | • | • | | | | • | • | • | • | • | |
| Great Black-backed Gull | | • | • | | | | | • | • | | | | |
| Lesser Black-backed Gull | | | | | | | | • | • | | • | | |
| Black-Headed Gull | | | | | | | | | • | | • | | |
| Common Gull | | • | | • | | | | | | | • | | |
| Kittiwake | | | | | | | | • | | | | | |



| Bird Species | May | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|-----|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 |
| Common Tern | | | | | | | | | | | | • | |
| Common Guillemot | | | | • | • | | | | | • | • | • | • |
| Black Guillemot | | | | | | | | • | • | • | | | |
| Razorbill (ib) | | | | | • | | | | | • | • | • | |
| Atlantic Puffin | | | | | • | | | | | • | • | • | |
| Corncrake | | | | | | | | | | • | | | |
| House Martin | | • | | | | | | | • | • | | | |
| Barn Swallow | | • | • | | | | | • | • | • | | | |
| Wren | | • | • | • | | | | | | • | • | | • |
| Wheatear (ib) | | | | | • | | | • | | | | • | |
| Meadow Pipit | | | | | • | | | | • | • | | • | |
| Rock Pipit | | • | • | | | | | | | • | | • | |
| Dunnock | | • | | | | | | • | • | | | | |
| Linnet | | • | • | • | • | | | | • | | | | |
| Starling (ib) | | | | • | | | | | • | • | | | • |
| House Sparrow | | • | • | | | | | | • | • | | | |
| Skylark | | • | • | | • | | | | | • | | | |
| Redpoll | | | | | | | | | | • | | | |
| Chaffinch | | • | • | | | | | | • | • | | | |
| Greenfinch | | • | | | | | | | | • | | | |
| Coal Tit | | • | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Song Thrush | | • | • | | | | | | | • | | | |
| Blackbird | | • | • | | | | | | | • | | | |
| Carrion Crow | | • | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Rook | | • | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Raven | | | • | | • | | | | • | • | | | |
| Cuckoo | | | | | | | | | | | • | | |



Bird and Mammal Sightings

Bird Species

May

5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|--|---|---|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|---|---|---|--|--|---|---|
| Willow Warbler | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Robin | | • | • | | | | | | | | | • | | | | | |
| Pied Wagtail | | • | | • | | | | | | | • | | | | | | |
| Hooded Crow | | | | • | | | | | | | • | • | | | | | |
| Goldfinch | | | • | | | | | | | | • | • | • | | | | |
| Stone Chat | | | • | | | | | | | | | • | | | | | |
| Blackcap | | | • | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Lady Amherst Pheasant | | | • | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Canada Goose | | | | • | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Kestrel | | | | | | | | | | | | • | | | | | |
| Sandwich Tern | | | | | | | | | | | | • | | | | | |
| Dunlin | | | | | | | | | | | | • | | | | • | |
| Common Whitethroat | | | | | | | | | | | | • | | | | | |
| Grey Wagtail | | | | | | | | | | | | • | • | | | | |
| Siskin | | | | | | | | | | | | | • | | | | |
| Jackdan | | | | | | | | | | | • | • | • | | | | |
| St Kilda Wren | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | • |
| White-tailed Eagle | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | • |

Mammal Species

May

5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|--|---|---|--|---|---|--|--|--|--|---|---|---|--|--|---|---|
| Grey Seal | | • | • | | • | • | | | | | • | | | | | • | • |
| Harbour Porpoise | | | | | • | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Risso's Dolphin | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | • | |
| Deer | | | | | | | | | | | | | • | | | | |
| Hare | | | | | | | | | | | | • | • | | | | |
| Jellyfish | | | | | | | | | | | • | | | | | | |





- 1 – Portsmouth
- 2 – Fowey
- 3 - Isles of Scilly
- 4 – Penzance
- 5 – Lundy Island
- 6 – Pembrokeshire Isles
- 7 – Holyhead, Holy Island
- 8 – Douglas, Isle of Man
- 9 – Port Ellen, Islay
- 10 – Iona and Staffa
- 11 – St Kilda
- 12– Papa Westray and Fair Isle
- 13 - Aberdeen





Expeditioners:

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| Priscilla Adey | Jessie Maciver |
| Ross Avenell | Carmel Mischlewski |
| Theresa Brown | Jennifer Northey |
| Johanna Churchill | Donald Northey |
| Simon Dalgarno | Barb O'Brien |
| Bob Dalgarno | Ruth Payne |
| Kaye Dalgarno | Peter Ratcliffe |
| Joslin Dewing | Maxine Renfrey |
| Lesley Dimmock | Ruth Rowles |
| Kay Forte | Kirsten Scott |
| Max Howland | Nanning van der Klis |
| Maureen Howland | Caecile Veltman |
| Miranda Krestovnikoff | Vince Walters |
| Nicholas Krestovnikoff | Pam Walters |
| Spencer Krueger | Adrian Williams |
| Mary Lefevre | Cori Williams |
| Antonia Lenstra | Rick Wright |

Expedition Team:

Expedition Leader: David Berg

Assistant Expedition Leader: Isabelle Howells

Onboard Expedition Manager: Samantha Deer

Naturalist: Ian McCarthy

Marine Biologist: Annette Scheffer

Historian: Daniel Stavert

Sea Kayak Guide: Teal Morgan

Onboard Expedition Assistant: Ana Prado

E-Team Photography Guide: Jamie Lafferty

Zodiac Master: Sergei Andronov

Photography thanks to:

Jamie Lafferty

Senior Officers & Heads of Department:

Master: Maxim Makarovskiy

Chief Officer: Andrey Zakalashnyuk

3rd Officer: Andrii Mezentsev

Safety Officer: Sergii Voina

Bosun: Giovanni Dela Torre

Deck Cadet: Goncalo Alexandra Saraiva Aniceto Costa

Deck Cadet: Miguel Saraiva Delgado

Ship Doctor: Andres Felipe Peralta Cuervo

Ship Doctor: Anzor Chomakhidze

Chief Engineer: Dimitar Vasilev

Hotel Director: Pascal Joubin

Chief Purser: Stanislava Golub

Executive Chef: Edgar Mangliano

Head Waiter: Allan Liscaro

IT Officer: Ihor Yesmieniev

Receptionist: Sean Akbar

Receptionist: Ana Gabriela Fernandez Araujo

Head Stateroom: Roniel Garcia

Able Seaman: Bobby Payumo

Able Seaman: Hardik Dipakbhai Rao

Able Seaman: Tim Kitson

Able Seaman: Joel Noble

Able Seaman: Ajay Kumar FNU







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