

# Ireland & Scotland Discovery

Aboard *Sylvia Earle* | 18 May - 02 June 2023





# Dublin

DAY 1 | Thursday 18 May 2023

Position at 2100 on May 18

Latitude: 53° 15'1 N

Longitude: 005° 46'4 W

Course: 149°

Speed: 8.4 knots

Wind Speed: 3 NW

Barometer: 1029

Air Temp: 15°C

Explore. Dream. Discover.

—Mark Twain

Charming Dublin made a fitting introduction to our Ireland & Scotland Discovery voyage with its city pubs and welcoming locals.

Our day started with a tour of Dublin's highlights, including St Stephen's Green Park, St Anne's, EPIC museum and Glasnevin cemetery, where we were guided by an enthusiastic storyteller.

At the port, we were greeted by the Aurora Expeditions team and ship's crew, who took our photographs and helped us navigate the decks to our cabins - our home away from home for the next 16 days.

A little while later, we had time to refresh and enjoy delicious embarkation refreshments before Expedition Leader John called us together to welcome us aboard the *Sylvia Earle*.

In the lecture theatre, we met our leadership team of three, our marine biologist, our naturalist, our ornithologist, our historian, our photographer, our Zodiac manager, our shop/mudroom manager, our two local guides, our ships doctor and the Hotel Director and his team.

Afterwards, we received our lifeboat and safety briefing and readied ourselves for the abandon ship drill. The sound of seven-short-one-long rings from the ship's signal system was our cue to don warm clothes, bulky orange lifejackets and gather at the muster station to sample our safety gear. Our safety officers and crew guided us to the lifeboats to familiarise us with their whereabouts.

The Polar Class life vessels can hold 136 people each, for five days!

As we cast off, we waved goodbye to Ireland's capital and set sail for the Skellig Islands.

The bar proved enticing with a few of us toasting the beginning of our voyage with new shipmates.

Equipped with a healthy appetite, we made our way to the dining room to enjoy a delicious dinner, prepared by our talented galley team and served by our welcoming waiting staff.

Soon after, it was time to exchange jackets at the Expedition desk. We are now all prepared for whatever weather may meet us on the coasts of Ireland and Scotland.

Together we total 42 Expeditioners from Australia (28), France (1), Ireland (2), UK (8), and USA (6), an international Expedition Team and 85 ships crew from around the globe.

After many hours of travel to reach this corner of the world, it's time to kick back, breathe in the Irish sea air, and enjoy the marvels of this grand and mystic land.



# At Sea (East coast of Ireland)

DAY 2 | Friday 19 May 2023

Position at 1800 on May 19

Latitude: 51° 30.502'N

Longitude: 008° 35.208'W

Course: 265°

Speed: 7.6 knots

Wind Speed: NNW

Barometer: 1030

Air Temp: 15°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

Our senses were awoken at 7.30am by the morning call of our Expedition Leader John. Great news for our first day at sea in Irish waters: 14 degrees Celsius, the smoothest sailing conditions heading southwest along the Celtic Sea at 7 knots. The outside world was an inviting monochromatic shimmering landscape ready to unleash our first feelings of exploration.

After a delightful breakfast with the surprising appearance of common dolphins and random northern gannets, we got ready for our mandatory briefings in the lecture theatre, followed by a muck boot swap session in the mudroom.

Next was a quick coffee break, before the "Seabird Extravaganza presentation" led by our bird experts, Chris and Snowy. We learnt accurate descriptions of the British birds we may encounter on the adventurous days ahead. To name a few, were the manx shearwater, northern fulmar, northern gannet, European shag, great skua, lesser black-backed gull, Arctic tern, common and black guillemot, razorbill and, of course (most people's favourite) the Atlantic puffin. Dani wrapped up the session with a Citizen Science introduction on how we can add value by collecting data through the different Citizen Science programs that will run during our trip. This was the perfect kick starter for our first Bird Survey held outside on Deck 8. With the help of our binoculars and expedition experts, we spotted a great variety of birds feeding and flying along the Celtic Sea: puffins, fulmars, razorbills, and northern gannets. What a joyful feeling! And we are helping the monitoring work of scientists with all this data!

After an "outer deck scientific afternoon" we were ready to hear from our historian Katie about Saint Columba, Thorfinn the Mighty and Grainne Ni Maile. A full room was attentive throughout gracious Katie's presentation about these inspiring historical personalities that built political, social, and archetypal influential platforms. Quite a strong and poetical representation of Ireland.

During teatime at the Tektite Bar cross-pollination conversations about diverse topics were shared. Fresh servings of edible sweetness and warm drinks were the perfect closure to a fulfilling afternoon full of activities at sea.

The evening began with a gathering in the Tektite Bar, with some distinctive smart-looking outfits for our

Captain's welcome cocktail. After raising our glasses with Captain Arsen and his senior officers, John and Katie introduced our plan to the Skellig Islands and Castletownbere.

"What a marvellous day at sea!" we thought walking ourselves out for dinner. And what a great feeling it is to know the whole trip awaits for our exploration to happen in Ireland and Scotland.



# Skellig Islands, Castletownbere/Bere Island

DAY 3 | Saturday 20 May 2023

Position at 1800 on May 20

Latitude: 51° 38.509'N

Longitude: 009° 54.487'W

Course: 180.3°

Speed: At Anchor

Wind Speed: 12 knots SW

Barometer: 1028

Air Temp: 18°C

There are no strangers here, only friends you haven't met yet

Today we started early and by 6am a small crowd was gathered on Deck 8, at the front of the ship, to watch as we reached the Skellig Islands. The captain steered us slowly around the largest island, Skellig Michael, famous for its ancient monastery. Around the ship there were many flying shapes – bright white gannets were the most obvious with their jet-black wing tips and golden-coloured heads, smaller grey and white northern fulmars flapped and glided past. On the water small dark dots could be seen, and when we approached close enough they could be identified as puffins, razorbills and common guillemots.

As we navigated around the island we could see the remains of an old grey lighthouse, as well as the newer white one. Katie, our historian, told us about the monks and their strange beehive dwellings, and she pointed out the stairs which led from the wave-smashed shoreline up to the grassy top of the island – more than 600 steps in total. We were all glad we did not have to climb those!

Next, we steered towards Little Skellig. In the distance it had a slightly frosted look to its jagged rocks and these soon resolved into small white specks which were in fact gannets. An estimated 25,000 pairs of these amazing birds live there and as we came closer, we could both see and hear them ... and smell them!! Watching as some of them dive vertically into the water like a bullet, with their wings tight against their body, was amazing.

Soon it was time for breakfast, after which we left the Skelligs behind and headed towards our afternoon stop at Castletownbere. A briefing from Expedition Leader John was followed by an early lunch before our first experience of travel in a Zodiac, which went very smoothly, depositing us all on the quayside ready for a welcome from the town. Local people crowded the quay and a special Irish dancing display was performed for us by some delightful local children. As the first cruise ship to arrive at the town, we were also treated to speeches from dignitaries, and the town mayor visited the ship to present the captain with a special plaque.

We then boarded the local ferry to Bere Island where there was a choice of short and long walks. The history of the island was fascinating and local guides showed us around. With the sun shining and mild temperatures everyone had a marvelous time learning about its place in Napoleonic wars as well as more recent ones. All too soon it was time to return and weary but happy travellers boarded the Zodiacs once again to return to the ship for dinner and bed.



# Kilronan: Inishmore Island, Aran islands; County Galway

DAY 4 | Sunday 21 May 2023

Position at 1900 on May 21

Latitude: 53° 07.2'N

Longitude: 009° 38.7'W

Course: 296°

Speed: 8.9

Wind Speed: 15 knots NW

Barometer: 1024

Air Temp: 18°C

Wherever you go and whatever you do, may the luck of the Irish be there with you.

Our 6.30am wake-up call from John was well worth it as we made an early landfall in Kilronan on Inis Mór, the largest of the Aran Islands.

After breakfast, we embarked on the Zodiacs for a slightly choppy crossing into the harbour near the centre of town. Around half of us picked up bikes and helmets and set off to traverse the island's winding single-track roads to the west of the island, cycling past fields of cows (including some very cute young calves gambolling in the fields), a seal colony, and an inquisitive donkey or two. The other half of us took a similar route by bus.

We all benefited from being accompanied by local guides: gifted storytellers who entertained us with stories about the history and culture of the island. The conversations ranged from the influence of early Christianity in Ireland, how the land is cleared and cultivated, to the significance and structure of the drystone walls (over 2414 kilometres of them on the Aran Islands), historic burial practices, how people on the island make a living, and much more besides. They also told us about the recent filming of *The Banshees of Inisherin* on the island- a donkey belonging to the bike guide Cyril plays a starring role. This film is on the TV screens in our cabins and is much recommended - it has a dark sense of humour and showcases the iconic Aran landscapes.

Both groups had the same ultimate destination - the Bronze Age fort of Dun Aonghasa. This is an imposing structure and there was a sense of ceremony as we approached its immense stone walls up a rocky hill road and entered through its small stone entrance. Dun Aonghasa is one of many forts from this period on the Aran islands but is notable for its size and level of preservation.

The keen birders were delighted to see six red-legged choughs which are rather uncommon, as well as seeing and hearing cuckoos.

Some of us also took the opportunity to buy an Aran sweater in the local shops. This is a traditional garment that is beautifully soft and warm and has attained international renown. Dot filled us in on its fascinating history later that night.

The day had become gradually brighter and warmer and the journey back to town took place under blue skies.



# Connemara National Park

DAY 5 | Monday 22 May 2023

Position at 1800 on May 22

Latitude: 53° 37.310'N

Longitude: 009° 51.114'W

Course: 242°

Speed: 0.4 knots

May the road rise to meet you, may the wind always be at your back. May the sunshine upon your face, the rains fall soft upon your fields, until we meet again.

—An old Irish blessing

The day started with fine conditions as we entered Killary Fjord and dropped anchor close to the small wharf at Rosroe where we would start our various hiking adventures for the day. Once everyone was ashore not long after breakfast, we boarded our buses and headed off for the short drive to the visitor centre at the entrance of Connemara National Park where we all headed off on the hiking loops.

At the back of the pack was a small group with Chris and Snowy who went looking for birds around the shortest, Sruffaunboy loop. Being early in the day there was plenty to see in the small trees and low scrubby undergrowth and with numerous stops along the way, it was a leisurely way to take in the scenery of the National Park and enjoy some mild weather. After a bite of lunch, they continued on to do the lower part of the longer, blue walking loop, in total racking up 28 different species sighted for the day.

Meanwhile, up ahead, the other groups made short work of the lower track and headed up the rocky steps at the start of the moderate, blue loop to a higher ridgeline. A short but steady and steep(ish) climb up the well-made rocky steps was a good sample of what was to come for those who were considering doing the longest walk. After a bit more distance along the boardwalk and a few more steps it was decision time, so after a rest and some time to enjoy the spectacular all-round views, one group headed off along the lower path with Nacho, Dot, and Katie to complete the Lower Diamond Hill loop, while the remainder headed for the top.

Led by our local guide, Michael, along with Pia, Dani, John and Justine, the group made their way up the open ground and steps in the increasingly warm conditions to the point where things really got steep. On seeing this, a couple of people decided enough was enough and preferred to return to the lower path with John and Justine, while 18 hardy souls persevered over the next hour or so to scale the full 442 metre peak of Diamond Hill. It was a perfect place for lunch, enjoying 360-degree views over the entire area on a not-so-common clear day. In fact, it was clear enough that we could see as far as Clare Island!

Eventually, everyone met up back down at the visitor centre for the bus ride back to the ship, with a brief stop along the way to inspect some freshly cut peat which was stacked in the field to dry, to eventually be burnt to heat local houses, as has been done in the area for hundreds of years.

Wind Speed: 18.4 knots NW

Barometer: 1030

Air Temp: 14°C

Back on the ship, following afternoon tea, Pia gave a great photography presentation on how to get the most out of your smartphone when taking pictures. With these really useful tips, hopefully, from now on everyone will be able to take even better shots to remember their trip by.



# Kylemore Abbey, Clare Island

DAY 6 | Tuesday 23 May 2023

Position at 0630 on May 23

Latitude: 53° 37.315'N

Longitude: 009° 51.135'W

Course: 269.4°

Speed: At Anchor

Wind Speed: 9.4 knots NW

Barometer: 1031

Air Temp: 11°C

Alcohol!

Because no great story started with a salad.

—(Sign outside Bayview Restaurant, Kilonan)

Our home away from home the *Sylvia Earle* remained overnight at anchor in Killary Harbour as our tours today both started at Rosroe Pier.

Twenty intrepid expeditioners along with four Expedition Team members set out early this morning to complete part of the Famine Road. Starting along the road from the Rosroe Pier we turned onto a grass pathway which led us to a stone wall. The wall followed the coast of the fjord and defined the road built during the devastating potato famine of the 1860s. The terrain varied along the way from uneven, rocky sections, grassy areas, bog and mud finally ending on a paved road. We covered eight kilometres finishing at the intersection of the main road where we met the bus to take us to Kylemore Abbey.

Later in the morning, those remaining expeditioners came ashore by Zodiac and boarded buses to take us to Kylemore Abbey. Stopping along the way to pick up the walkers.

Founded on the grounds of Kylemore Castle, the Abbey was the first Benedictine monastery established in Ireland since the 1600s. It is located on a beautiful 1000-acre estate which includes the castle, abbey, gothic church and a six-acre walled garden. Several rooms within the castle display the history of the abbey whilst other rooms are furnished as they would have been when the original owners were in residence in the 1870s. Wandering through these rooms we were able to get an understanding of the life of the nuns.

A shuttle bus ride from the abbey took us to the walled garden, six acres of manicured gardens growing flowers, vegetables, carefully manicured trees and lush green lawns.

Lunch was back onboard as we repositioned to Clare Island.

What a fun afternoon we had on Clare Island. Our guide Carl O'Grady was a true delight. His passion for the island, his knowledge of the history and his and his father's storytelling ability kept us all enthralled. We visited the remains of Grace O'Malley's Castle, the cemetery surrounding the 12th-century abbey. Then it was off to the



# Mullaghmore; Strandhill

DAY 7 | Wednesday 24 May 2023

Position at 0630 on May 24

Latitude: 54° 28.166'N

Longitude: 008° 26.120'W

Course: 325.2°

Speed: At Anchor

Wind Speed: 12 knots N

Barometer: 1029

Air Temp: 14°C

May today be better than yesterday but not as good as tomorrow.

—Irish proverb

We continued our journey around the Emerald Isle today with a visit to the pretty little town of Mullaghmore and the surrounding countryside, villages and wild places. Mullaghmore proved to be a charming village, with the local people being pleased to host a rather extraordinary ship visiting their small village from the other side of the planet.

This day included activities that ranged from a gentle stroll to a vigorous hike, a round of golf to a seaweed bath, or a quiet coffee in an Irish country pub to a jaunty Zodiac ride across the waves. Getting off the ship itself was probably the only real challenge of the day, until we had to get back on again at the end of the day. Disembarking the ship took some courage, but most of us surprised ourselves with our own ability to step confidently from a stable ship to a bouncing Zodiac. This appeared challenging at first but proved to be quite achievable. Not only did nobody come to any grief, but we all boarded the Zodiacs successfully without embarrassing ourselves too much. The worst that the Expedition Team would admit to was that it was “a bit sporty”.

Once ashore we split into two groups, with the larger party heading off to explore the forests around the table-top mountain of Benbulbin, while a smaller group opted for a walk around Mullaghmore headland. The Benbulbin forest walk proved to be an enjoyable hike through the forest, with some lovely views across the surrounding countryside and Donegal Bay to the north.

The Mullaghmore headland walk was equally delightful and was also thought-provoking; with a delightful village, some wonderful bird sightings and an invigorating coastal cliff walk. Birdy highlights included foraging rock pipits, nesting northern fulmars, singing European stone chats and a solitary skylark hovering way up high. Stewart read some short poems that reflected the pride that local people have for their homes and evoked the wild far-away feeling of this remote coastline. A small cross memorialised the victims of the murder of Lord Louis Mountbatten by the IRA, with the lives of two teenage boys and an elderly lady being collateral damage.

In the afternoon, we visited the nearby beachfront village of Strandhill, where kelp is harvested to produce many things; including the ice cream that many of us love so well. The kelp harvesting also led to the establishment of seaweed baths, where many of our group enjoyed a rejuvenating soaking. Others amongst us enjoyed a visit to the local golf course, relaxed by the seashore or explored the tiny village.



# Malin Head (Greencastle), Giant's Causeway

DAY 8 | Thursday 25 May 2023

Position at 1840 on May 25

Latitude: 55° 11.770'N

Longitude: 006° 59.125'W

Course: 072.0°

Speed: At Anchor

Wind Speed: 10.7 knots S

Barometer: 1032

Air Temp: 15°C

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.

—T. S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding'

Our morning started with a very special wake-up call at 6.30 am from Stewart. He recited (called in his own words) the "Old Van Delivery" poem with such enthusiasm it set the mood. A day filled with folktale stories from Irish mythology and impressive scenic views of two different countries: Ireland and the UK.

After a delicious breakfast, we boarded Zodiacs and made our way to Greencastle Port. Under a cloudy sky with some timid rays of light, the immediate thought was WOW, blessed with another great day of weather.

We saw the most unimaginable hues of green landscape and the ruins of Greencastle, which was built in 1304. Wonderful additions to our 45-minute bus ride to one of our most "expected to experience" destinations: Malin Head. Malin Head is Ireland's most Northerly point in the Inishowen Peninsula and was chosen as the set for the Star Wars movie, *The Last Jedi*.

This dramatic place offered us a 1.8-kilometre trail along the cliff tops led by Michael, our trusty Irish local guide.

We enjoyed the stunning coastal views embedded with invigorating Atlantic waves crashing ferociously into metamorphic and igneous rocks formed 400 million years ago. Spirited common eiders, northern gannets and rock pipits could be spotted along the coast with the naked eye. Once back from our trail trek, we gathered quickly for a group photo with a "must-photograph" magnificent beach backdrop.

Back on the buses we arrived at Greencastle port for a quick Zodiac to the ship for lunch.

By 2pm it was time to head back out and continue our exploration of the territorial and cultural area, of Northern Ireland, UK.

The 20-minute scenic bus journey took us past ruins, prisons, Union Jacks, bars and elegant stores before we reached Giant's Causeway. Once in the visitor centre, we were given "guided tour devices" to listen to as we walked along the outstanding natural wonder formed by 40,000 basalt columns. The hexagonal stepping stones

of the columns led us from the top of the cliff to the edge of the water where panoramic views left us breathless. We could see the thick solidified lava up in the cliffs. Northern gannets, rock pipits and common ravens were spotted during our visit while the audio-guided tour threw us imaginary depictions of the legendary story built by the Giant Finn McCool who was challenged to fight by the Scottish giant Benandonner and was believed to have built the causeway for them to meet. The McCool character is part of many folk tales and constitutes a crucial part of Celtic cultural heritage.

On our way out of the visitor's centre, we were able to buy souvenirs and some enjoyed a warm take-away coffee.

During our ride back on the bus toward Magilligan Pier, we stopped at Dunluce Castle, known to be one of the most romantic of all Irish Castles. The Castle's ruins date from the 16th and 17th century and it has recently been in the spotlight as it is featured in the popular show *Game of Thrones*. After arriving at the port, we had a smooth ride back to the ship for cocktails and canapes in the Tektite Bar, followed by a briefing for our next stop, Scotland.

During dinner, we were accompanied by the vibrant moves of risso dolphins who were bathed by the golden light of sunset. What an extraordinary way to call it a day.



# Argyll Coast, Lunga

DAY 9 | Friday 26 May 2023

Position at 1840 on May 26

Latitude: 56° 29.7'N

Longitude: 006° 26.2'W

Course: 038°

Speed: At Anchor

Wind Speed: 3 knots S

Barometer: 1033

Air Temp: 13°C

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.

—Charles William Beebe

The day started in a pleasurable way ... with a late breakfast, served from 8am! After breakfast, we were treated to a wonderful talk from Dani on 'Cetaceans of the British Isles' looking in detail at whales and dolphins with special focus on the ones we hope to see during our trip.

Next, it was time for an Atlantic Plunge and several plucky guests (some might say foolhardy) leapt into the ocean ... for fun! Cheered on by spectators, they soon surfaced and were helped back on board for a hot drink. Then came news that the afternoon had an added and unexpected attraction ... a visit to the island of Lunga. Originally it was to have been a Zodiac cruise, but thanks to behind-the-scenes wangling by our Expedition Leader, John, assisted by Dot, we managed to get permission to land on the island.

So after an excellent lunchtime repast, we boarded the Zodiacs and headed towards the shore of Lunga. We soon encountered large numbers of auks on the water. These black-and-white seabirds comprised common guillemots, razorbills and Atlantic puffins, which were a little skittish, not letting us get very close before they dived or flew off. When we got closer to the shore we could see ledges on the cliffs, with white droppings beneath them, indicating the presence of large numbers of breeding seabirds.

Common guillemots and razorbills clustered on the ledges together with some black-legged kittiwakes, and European shags on the rocks below.

Two large dark birds appeared at the top of the cliffs ... these were great skuas, which delight in grabbing eggs and chicks or chasing other birds to get them to drop their food. This pair started flying after a couple of hooded crows which clearly had something they wanted but were ultimately unable to get.

After our cruise, we landed on Lunga, and after a difficult walk across the rocks and up an uneven path, we reached the top of the cliffs. The grass-covered soft earth here is the perfect place for Atlantic Puffins to nest and we were greeted by hundreds of the lovely creatures standing by their burrows just a few feet away from us.

Seabird heaven!! We stood transfixed by the sight, and as we crouched down, the birds showed no fear.

Just watching them is pure entertainment. Some just stand while others waddle to their burrows to greet their mates. Some were remodelling their homes by digging out dirt with their powerful claws, which sprays out of the burrows. Each bird had its partner deep inside the burrow, incubating their single egg. Some changed over as we watched and there was a bustling exchange of birds all along the clifftop. Soon Justine's tones (firm but sexy) reminded staff that we had to get back to the ship, and we bid farewell to the puffins. A quick recap and briefing about tomorrow's visit to Iona finished off the day and we headed to dinner.



# Polar Plunge

DAY 9 | Friday 26 May 2023



# Iona, Staffa (Inner Hebrides)

DAY 10 | Saturday 27 May 2023

Position at 0900 on May 27

Latitude: 56° 18.553' N

Longitude: 006° 23.989' W

Course: 340.3°

Speed: At Anchor

Wind Speed: 6.9 knots NE

Barometer: 1026

Air Temp: 14°C

There are two seasons in Scotland June and winter

—Billy Connolly

We had entered a new country, the land of bagpipes, Harris Tweed, and Billy Connolly. Ireland will forever be with us as we take home memories of wild coastlines met with enchanting folklore and cosy Aran sweaters. Although our wake-up call today was a bit earlier than yesterday, we didn't mind it at all, thanks to John, as it was well worth it.

Our second stop in Scotland was Iona, a small island in the Inner Hebrides, just off the Isle of Mull, on the West Coast of Scotland. Iona is renowned for its historic Iona Abbey and significance as a pilgrimage destination, considered the birthplace of Christianity in Scotland.

After disembarking Zodiacs, we had some free time before heading to the abbey for our morning tour. Some of us were drawn to the beach, captivated by the sight of its crystal-clear blue water. In fact, James was brave enough to take a dip. I don't blame him, as the beach looked like it belonged in the Caribbean!

The local Iona larder managed to benefit from our visit, and we were thrilled that they were open. They had an impressive selection of Scottish foods and crafts, along with the exquisite St. Columba 12-year-old whisky. Moreover, they had their own range of preserves that used ingredients from the St. Columba Hotel Garden and honey harvested from hives right there on Iona.

At 9:30 am we began our tour and admired the abbey church. Its architecture spanned from the 13th to the 16th centuries, now restored to serve as an active place of worship. In addition, we visited Iona's Abbey Museum, which proudly displays Scotland's finest collection of early medieval carved stones and crosses.

After a delightful morning spent on the holy isle of Iona, it was time to head back to the ship for lunch.

At 2:45 pm we were called back down to the mudroom for our afternoon on the Isle of Staffa.

The first three Zodiacs went directly to the island, where we were dropped off and led by the Expedition Team on foot deep inside to explore the cave. After returning to the ship to collect the rest of us, John, Snowy, and Nacho took us to the entrance of the cave, where they carefully manoeuvred each Zodiac inside to listen to the magical sounds that create the music of Fingal's Cave.

What makes this sea cave so visually impressive are the hexagonal columns of basalt that form neat, six-sided pillars comprising its interior walls. It's no wonder that it boasts a history and geology that are unlike any other cave in the world.

Just as Katie had mentioned in Ireland, the legend which connects the two structures is in effect geologically correct. Both the Giant's Causeway and Fingal's Cave were indeed created by the same ancient lava flow, which may have at one time formed a "bridge" between the two sites. How lucky are we to have visited these two very sites on this trip!

After admiring the caves, it was time to admire the birds. The Isle of Staffa is equally known for its abundance of birdlife due to its cliffs and grassy slopes that create ideal nesting sites for birds, such as puffins, razorbills and guillemots.

Back onboard we enjoyed each other's company for our daily recap, briefing and dinner. Thank you, Scotland, for an introduction we will never forget.



# Callanish, Papay Mor/Pabaigh Mór (Outer Hebrides)

DAY 11 | Sunday 28 May 2023

Position at 2130 on May 28

Latitude: 58° 36:38.9"N

Longitude: 006° 5'19.3"W

Course: 53.9°

Speed: 12.6 knots

Wind Speed: 9 knots N

Barometer: 1029

Air Temp: 7°C

To photograph the coast of Scotland is to be humbled and inspired; the elusive weather frequently mocked my plans and sent me away empty-handed. Yet when conditions were fine it was impossible to believe life could be better

—Joe Cornish

It was a long and slightly bumpy transit overnight to sail the 209 kilometres (130 miles) from Staffa in the Inner Hebrides up to Lewis, the largest and most northern of the Outer Hebrides. As we woke up and looked out of our cabin windows this morning we could see the stark moorlands of the island, dotted with stone fields, sheep and the occasional house and stone wall.

After breakfast, we donned wet weather gear for the Zodiac journey to a landing site just below the iconic Callanish Stones. These date from Neolithic times- 5000 years ago- and consists of upright stones set in a circle with two avenues to create a cross shape. We got some stunning photographs of the impressive high stones and had fun speculating about the many mysteries surrounding them. Why were they built and how were they used? How were the stones moved and how were they erected? Did they have a religious or symbolic significance? On the walk back we saw our first common ringed plovers of the ship, and at the landing site, some lucky people saw an otter swimming offshore- very endearing and a far cry from the Irish 'dobhar-chú' otter legend Dani told us at the recap.

It was a bit colder than we have become used to, given our incredibly good luck with the weather, and back onboard many of us returned to our cabins to heat up. Katie gave a pre-lunch lecture about the history of the western Highlands, covering claniship and why so many Highlanders left and emigrated elsewhere.

In the afternoon some of us stayed onboard the ship enjoying the luxurious facilities of the *Sylvia Earle*. The rest of us went ashore to Pabay Mor (Pabay- priest island, Mor- big) to explore the island. Spotting a grey seal on the journey in, we did our first Zodiac beach landing onto a beautiful sandy strand. We then embarked on a rocky scramble along a hill to see some lobster traps from the late 1800s and a dramatic natural arch with large surf crashing underneath. Beyond the lobster ponds, we could see Pabay Beag (Beag- small) which has a ruined chapel. Other archaeological highlights included the remains of a church dedicated to St Peter and a 'shieling' hut, a structure in which crofters would live during the summer while grazing their stock nearby. Back at the beach, Dani led a beach clean-up. We picked up plastic debris and disintegrated, old lobster creel, and collected 64 kilograms in total.



# Papa Westray (Orkney), Fair Isle (Shetland)

DAY 12 | Monday 29 May 2023

Position at 0830 on May 29

Latitude: 59° 20.528' N

Longitude: 002° 52.108' W

Course: 110.9°

Speed: At Anchor

Wind Speed: 22 knots E

Barometer: 1027

Air Temp: 11°C

The weather is good, if you like a temperate climate. Thermometer and barometer measure our seasons capriciously: the Orkney year should be seen rather as a stark drama of light and darkness... In the course of a single day you can see, in that immensity of sky, the dance of sun, cloud, sea-mist, thunder, run: the endless ballet of the weather.

—George Mackay Brown, *An Orkney Tapestry*, 1969

We were welcomed to Papa Westray, in the Orkney Islands, by a handful of harbour seals on a blustery, grey morning to start our explorations for the day. The first group headed across to the island with local guide Tim, towards Holland Farm and on to the Knap of Howar on the shores of the western side. Everyone gathered in the Neolithic farmstead to shelter from the wind and listen to Tim tell of how it was used when occupied around 3500 B.C. Now buried on all sides by the surrounding grass-covered dunes, it was amazing to think of how families lived in these stone-walled rooms over 5000 years ago.

Most of the group then walked a little further up the coast with Katie to see St Boniface Kirk, the restored stone church building and graveyard dating back to the 8th century. Between them, these two sites represent a truly amazing span of history for this remote part of Scotland and are preserved in equally incredible condition.

Meanwhile, a smaller group of around 10 headed to the northern end of Papay, as the locals call it, where we met the local RSPB warden, James, who took us on a nature walk. There were many small and delicate yet hardy flowers, such as the tiny bright purple Scottish primrose found on the windswept field as well as plenty of less commonly seen birds for this voyage, such as curlew, Arctic skuas and common snipe, as well as common guillemots, razorbills and Atlantic puffins, along the clifftops.

One notable feature was the monument at Fowl Craig where the last known breeding pair of the now-extinct great auk were seen in 1813 - a sad reminder of a tragic story.

In the afternoon we moved about 40 nautical miles northeast to Fair Isle where we visited two quite different parts of the island. Just along the cliffs above the pier we landed on we had another chance to see puffins up close as they flew in and out or just stood around the entrances to their burrows. We also heard how the local great skua population has declined by around 90% over the past year due to Avian Flu, but it's hoped their numbers will eventually recover.



# Lerwick, Mousa

DAY 13 | Tuesday 30 May 2023

Position at 1300 on May 30

Latitude: 60° 1553'N

Longitude: 001° 1431'W

Course: Alongside at Lerwick pier

Speed: Alongside at Lerwick pier

Wind Speed: 12 knots NW

Barometer: 1030

Air Temp: 15°C

One of Scotland's most important cultural exports: stories.

Our morning onboard *Sylvia Earle* started with another informative wake-up call from John, telling us about the plans for our day in Lerwick. It was an easy walk off the ship since we were finally alongside the pier.

We met our tour guides and set off on a walking tour of the town - one of the guides, Helen, had come from the Isle of Yell that morning, which was almost a three-hour ferry ride away.

We walked around the town of Lerwick, which was founded in 880, almost 1200 years ago, when the Vikings arrived and the language spoken in the Shetlands was Old Norse. That language evolved into the current dialect, which is a mixture of Norn and old Scots (old English).

We visited St Magnus Church, he was the Earl of Orkney in the 1100s, and he had a nice soul. The small yellow strawberries the artist made on the glass windows were his signature. A garden full of bluebells and 150-year-old trees was colouring the streets of Lerwick. We also visited St Columba's Church, (which the timbers to build came from Canada) he was also responsible for bringing Christianity to Scotland, as we learned in Katie's lectures and recaps. Our guide Helen mentioned how ironic the Shetland series is with all the crimes and murders since this is a very safe place to live. She doesn't remember the last time she locked her door at home.

We visited Fort Charlotte, the biggest defence of the town for over 350 years. The original pentagon shape is still preserved, but never a gun was used in anger, it was more a threat than anything else. The fort was named after Queen Charlotte, the wife of King George III.

We finished our visit perusing around the main street of Lerwick, shopping for souvenirs and nice items to remember this nice town.

In the afternoon, we repositioned to the Island of Mousa to visit the most intact, tallest and biggest broch in the world. Brochs can only be found in Scotland. It was built during the iron age, around 2500 years ago. Katie gave us a passionate and informative explanation of all the aspects of the broch. But as she said, "the archaeologists don't know what it was used for".

After we came back onboard, we had a very entertaining and fun recap with Chris talking about "What is a Birder?". We had a delicious dinner with a view of the Island of Mousa and suddenly we spotted golden light shining over the broch, a stunning end to an amazing day.



# Kirkwall

DAY 14 | Wednesday 31 May 2023

Position at 1200 on May 31

Latitude: 58° .59.309'N

Longitude: 002° 57.628'W

Course: 353.5°

Speed: Alongside at Kirkwall

Wind Speed: 12 knots SW

Barometer: 1031

Air Temp: 17°C

To archeologists, the human past is owned by no one. It represents the cultural heritage of everyone who has ever lived on Earth or will live on it in the future. Archaeology puts all human societies on an equal footing.

—Brian Fagan 1996, Introduction to the Oxford Companion to Archaeology

A cool but fine day greeted us at the North Pier in Kirkwall, our second visit to the Orkney Islands. Today was our opportunity to visit the archaeological highlights of these islands.

The Mainland of the Orkney Islands contains the Heart of Neolithic Orkney. The name was adopted by UNESCO when it proclaimed Maeshowe, the Standing Stones of Stenness, Ring of Brodgar and Skara Brae as World Heritage sites in December 1999.

We would see each of these sites on our Orkney Treasures Tour. Once the gangway was in place we were on the wharf and boarded the buses. First stop was the Standing Stones of Stenness, possibly the oldest henge site in the British Isles. Today only four of the original twelve stones remain, but still, an impressive sight to begin our tour. Next, it was onto Skara Brae, located on the Bay of Skail. It was first discovered in the winter of 1850 when a severe storm ripped the earth from a large knoll known as Skara Brae exposing this ancient site for the first time in several thousand years.

Onto the Ring of Brodgar, the site where Dot had challenged us to repeat Billy Connolly's folly and do a 'nudie run' around the stones. No one took up the challenge and as Katie later mentioned we would then have to pick you up from the police station in Stromness!!

A quick lunch on board and it was time to be back on the buses for our South Isles Panorama. Heading south we skirted the coast of Scapa Flow, famous for the incursion of a German U-Boat entering the flow during WWII and bombing the HMS Royal Oak with the loss of 833 officers and men. We then crossed Churchill Barrier No.1 and visited the Italian Chapel. Built by Italian prisoners of war on the small island of Lamb Holm. The chapel consists of two Nissen Huts transformed into a beautiful chapel by Domenico Chiochetti and his colleagues.

Our drive back into Kirkwall took us via beautiful farmland with fields full of lambs and 'coos', as our guide Helen pronounced cows in her lovely Scottish accent.



# At Sea, Bass Rock

DAY 15 | Sunday 01 June 2023

Position at 1200 on Jun 01

Latitude: 56° .19.9'N

Longitude: 002° 19.5'W

Course: 210°

Speed: 10.7 knots

Wind Speed: 5 knots NNE

Barometer: 1030

Air Temp: 19°C

Our ability to perceive quality in nature begins, as in art, with the pretty. It expands through successive stages of the beautiful to values as yet uncaptured by language.

—Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*

The last full day of the trip was spent on board but still full of activities. There were clear blue skies as we sailed down the east coast of Scotland towards the Bass Rock, having crossed the Pentland Firth (meaning Pict-land Firth) from Orkney overnight.

After a relaxed 'sea day' breakfast, Justine led a disembarkation briefing before John's presentation about the impact of climate change in the North Atlantic and worldwide. John has a professional background in marine science and he clearly explained the complex causes and processes involved. It is a challenging but important subject and the session ended with a discussion on the most important question of all: what can we do about it? It is clear we need to change our behaviour fast.

This was followed by a couple of other ship activities. The ship's officers led some bridge tours- there have been daily opening hours on the bridge throughout the voyage but we have been so busy that many of us had not been able to take advantage of these yet. The rest of the team gathered in the Tektite bar to discuss other *Aurora* trips with anyone interested in future travels on the beautiful *Sylvia Earle* or her sister ship, the *Greg Mortimer*.

Soon after lunch, we reached today's landmark, the Bass Rock. This is a small but dramatic rocky island around a mile off the coastline, near the entrance to the Firth of Forth. The captain had negotiated with the port authorities to allow us to approach within three cables (one cable is a tenth of a nautical mile- this system of measurement is still used by seafarers as one nautical mile is equivalent to a minute of latitude- useful when navigating using charts and maps).

As we approached there were gannets in the water and wheeling overhead, the Bass Rock is home to the world's largest gannet colony as well as other visiting seabirds. Chris told us about them over the PA system as we watched, and we looked out for the tell-tale signs around their eyes that they had recovered from Avian flu. Katie told a story about a group of Jacobites who had taken over the island prison while being held captive there after the 1689 uprising, raiding nearby settlements and shipping, before negotiating a favourable settlement for themselves and their conspirators.

Katie continued the Jacobite theme in her afternoon lecture. It is a complicated but important history that is well known for stories such as Charles Edward Stuart's daring escape after the failed 1745 uprising and features in the hit show *Outlander*.

We gathered for a final evening of reflection and celebration with Captain's drinks and dinner, which was a chance to thank the crew that have piloted the *Sylvia Earle* so skilfully and helped us feel so at home. Pia's wonderful slideshow, featuring her own as well as your photos, was a lovely and emotional look back at all we have done and achieved over the last 16 days.



# Aberdeen, UK

DAY 16 | Monday 02 June 2023

Position at 0500 on Jun 02  
Latitude: 57° 08.7' N  
Longitude: 002° 05.3' W

Course: 320°  
Speed: 5.4 knots

Wind Speed: 4 knots N  
Barometer: 1030

Air Temp: 12°C

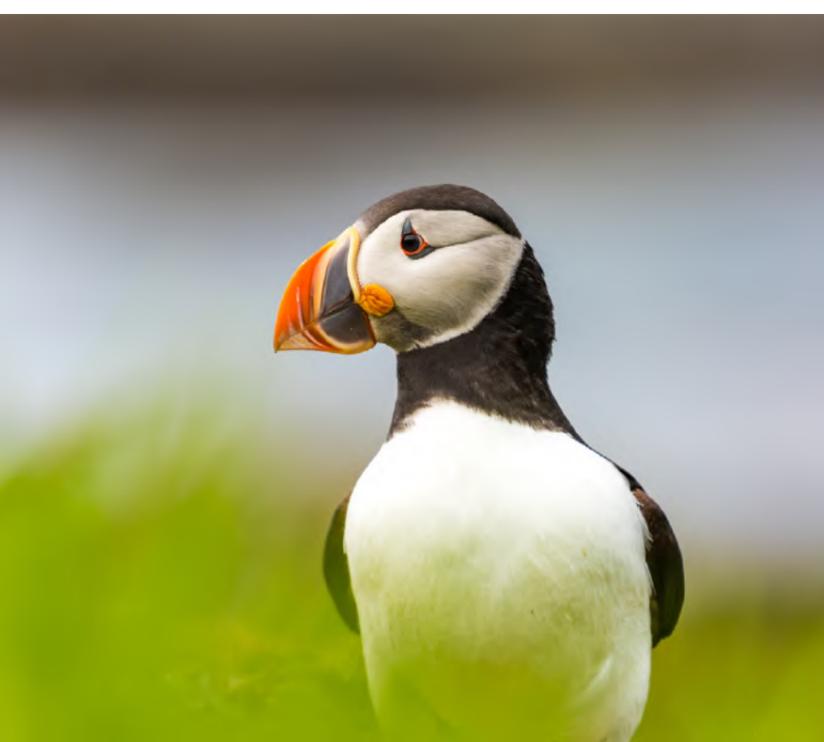
Aurora Expeditions send out a big thank you to you all for your great humour, infectious enthusiasm and smiling faces. It was a pleasure having you all on board and being able to share some of the pleasures that Ireland and Scotland had to offer. May your memories live long and bright.





## Bird Sightings

Bird Species	May - June															
	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2
Red-throated Diver												•		•		
Great Northern Diver												•				
Northern Fulmar		•	•			•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	
Manx Shearwater	•	•	•	•		•	•			•						
European Storm-petrel		•											•			
Northern Gannet	•	•	•	•	•	•	•			•	•	•	•	•	•	
European Shag						•	•		•	•		•	•	•	•	
Great Cormorant	•		•	•	•	•		•	•	•				•		
Grey Heron			•	•				•			•					
Greylag Goose										•	•	•	•			
Mute Swan				•	•									•		
Common Eider								•	•	•	•	•	•	•		
Common Shelduck				•			•							•		
Mallard			•	•	•								•	•		
Tufted Duck													•	•		
Eurasian Wigeon				•												
Red-breasted Merganser											•		•	•		
Eurasian Coot				•												
Common Moorhen				•												
Little Grebe				•												
Ring-necked Pheasant			•	•										•		
White-tailed Eagle										•						
Common Ringed Plover											•	•	•	•		
European Golden Plover																
Northern Lapwing				•						•	•	•		•		
Common Redshank											•		•	•		
Common Snipe												•	•	•		



Bird Species	May - June															
	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2
Eurasian Oystercatcher	•		•	•		•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•		
Ruddy Turnstone		•										•	•			
Whimbrel								•								
Curlew												•	•	•		
Common Sandpiper												•	•			
Arctic Skua												•				
Great Skua								•		•	•	•	•	•		
Herring Gull	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Great Black-backed Gull	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	
Lesser Black-backed Gull	•		•	•		•					•		•	•	•	
Black-headed Gull	•			•								•		•		•
Common Gull								•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Mediterranean Gull	•															
Glaucus Gull														•		
Black-legged Kittiwake	•		•			•	•	•	•	•			•	•	•	
Common Tern	•			•						•						
Arctic Tern		•										•	•	•	•	
Sandwich Tern							•	•								
Common Guillemot	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Black Guillemot	•		•			•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•		
Razorbill		•	•			•			•	•		•				
Atlantic Puffin		•	•						•	•	•	•				
Rock Dove								•			•	•	•	•	•	
Eurasian Collared Dove			•	•	•		•									
Common Wood Pigeon									•				•	•		
House Martin			•	•	•		•									
Barn Swallow		•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•		•		





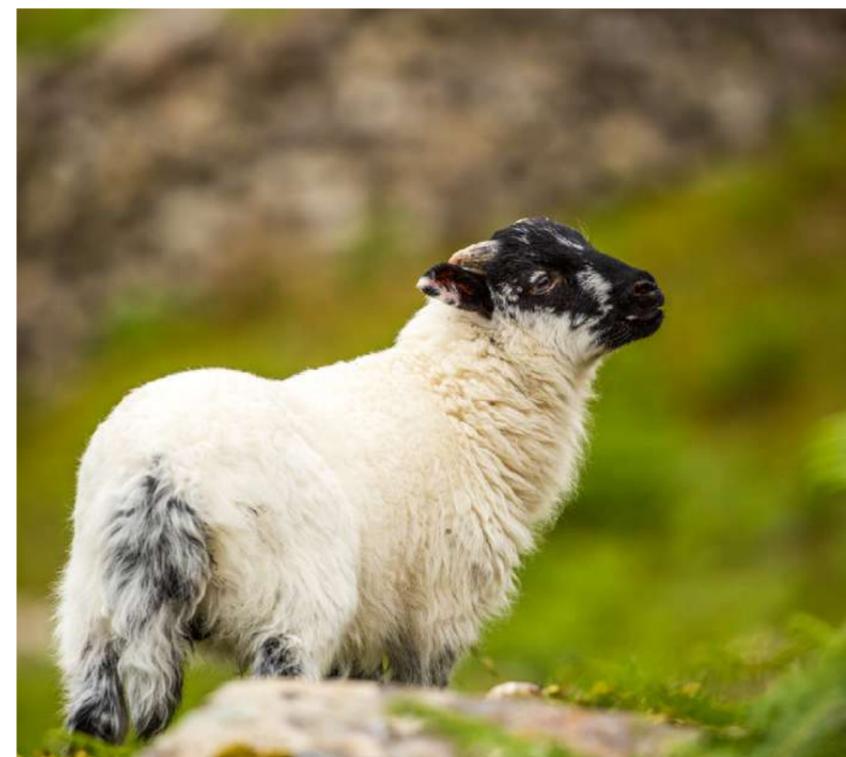
## Bird Sightings

Bird Species	May - June															
	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2
European Wren			•	•	•	•	•	•		•		•	•			
Northern Wheatear				•	•	•	•			•	•	•		•		
Meadow Pipit			•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•		
Rock Pipit			•	•			•	•	•	•	•		•			
Dunnock			•	•	•	•	•			•						
Eurasian Linnet				•		•	•					•				
European Starling			•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•		
House Sparrow			•	•		•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•		
Twite									•	•			•			
Eurasian Skylark					•		•			•	•	•	•	•		
Lesser Redpoll					•					•						
Common Chaffinch			•		•	•	•	•			•					
European Greenfinch										•	•					
European Goldfinch				•	•		•			•	•			•		
Great Tit			•		•		•									
Blue Tit			•		•	•										
Coal Tit					•	•	•	•								
Song Thrush			•		•	•	•			•						
Mistle Thrush					•	•	•									
Eurasian Blackbird			•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•			
Hooded Crow			•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•		•	•		•
Eurasian Jackdaw				•	•		•	•		•	•		•			
Rook			•				•			•	•			•		
Common Raven						•	•	•						•		
Common Cuckoo				•	•	•										
Willow Warbler			•	•	•		•									
Sedge Warbler				•						•				•		

## Bird and Mammal Sightings

Bird Species	May - June															
	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2
Eurasian Magpie					•		•	•	•	•						•
Red-billed Cough					•		•									
Goldcrest					•		•	•								
White Wagtail					•		•	•	•	•		•	•	•		•
Grey Wagtail							•	•								
Eurasian Treecreeper							•	•								
Eurasian Blackcap							•	•								
European Stonechat							•			•						

Mammal Species	May - June															
	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2
Eurasian Otter																•
Common Seal					•	•										•
Grey Seal																•
Common Minke Whale			•		•											
Common Dolphin			•	•	•			•	•							
Harbour Porpoise								•								
Risso's Dolphin																•
Common Bottlenose Dolphin																•
European Rabbit							•		•					•		•
European Hare																•
Pygmy Shrew																•
Orca			•													



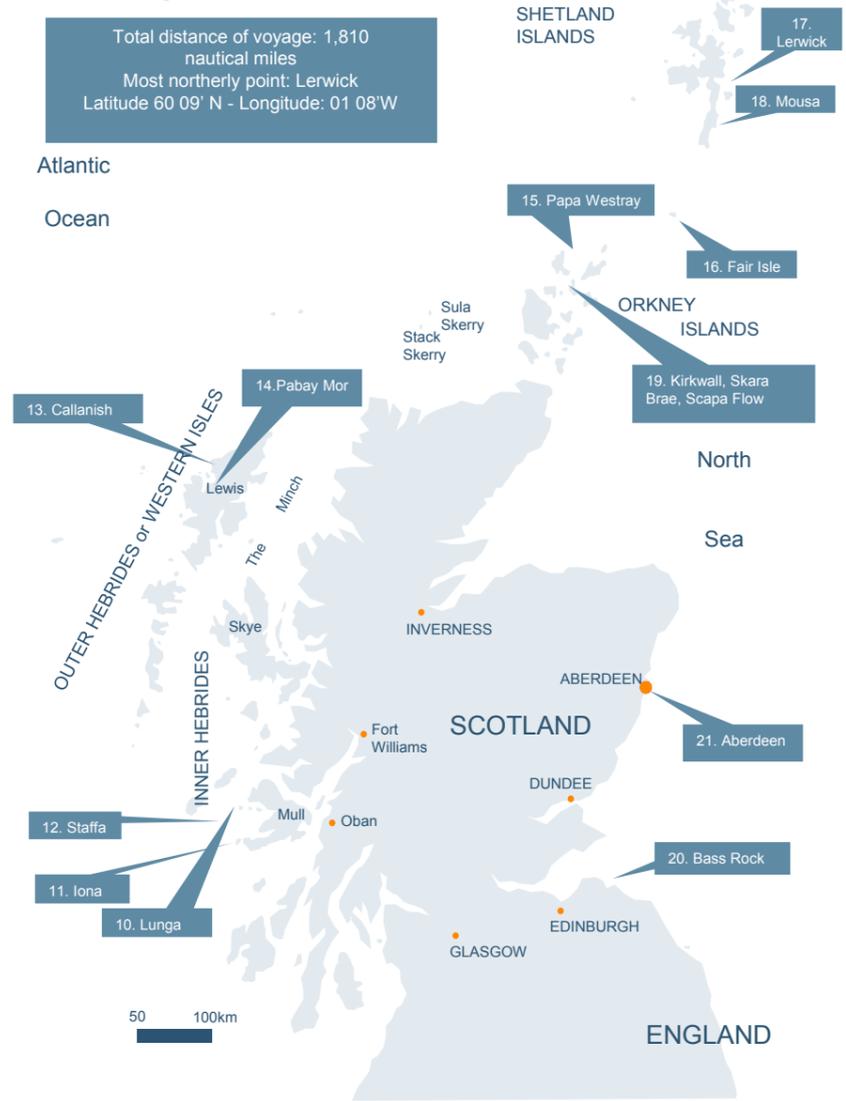
**IRELAND**  
18 – 26 May 2023



Sites visited: Ireland & Scotland  
18 May – 02 June 2023

1. Dublin
2. At Sea
3. Skellig Islands & Bere Island (Castletownbere)
4. Kiltonan (Inishmore Island - Aran Islands)
5. Connemara NP \*Killary Harbour
6. Kylemore Abbey \*Killary Harbour
7. Clare Island
8. Mullaghmore & Strandhill
9. Greencastle (Malins Head) & Magilligan (Giant's Causeway)
10. Lunga
11. Iona
12. Staffa
13. Callinish Standing Stones
14. Pabay Mor
15. Papa Westray
16. Fair Isle
17. Lerwick
18. Mousa (Broch)
19. Kirkwall
20. Bass Rock
21. Aberdeen

**SCOTLAND**  
26 May – 02 June 2023





# Expeditioners:

Lynne Cafferky  
Lindsay Thorpe  
Marie-Claude Roussel  
Graeme Pettigrew  
Penelope Pettigrew  
Chris Makris  
Maria Makris  
Gail Stewart  
David Stewart  
Loong Wu  
James Townshend  
Wendy Blackburn  
Peter Wilson  
Jenine Threlfall  
Alice George

Constantin George  
Mike Parry  
Robyn Parry  
Margot Knispel  
Jan Coleman  
Stephen Coleman  
Elizabeth Braman  
Michael Griffith  
Dianne Griffith  
Jocelyn Fitzhardinge  
Ros Greenwood  
George Jensen  
Eileen Jensen  
Ned Scott  
Kathy Scott

Marina Watts  
Steve Shelton  
Muriel Howe  
Gerith Eden  
Clive Eden  
Frances Du Pont  
Margaret Brambles  
Barry Brambles  
Jim Beebe  
Patty Siemion  
Jane Armstrong  
Carolyn Wiseman

## Expedition Team:

Expedition Leader: John Kirkwood

Assistant Expedition Leader: Dot Robertson

Onboard Expedition Manager: Justine Bornholdt

Naturalist: Graeme (Snowy) Snow

Marine Biologist: Dani Abras

Ornithologist: Chris Harbard

Historian: Katie Murray

Photography Guide: Pia Harboure

Zodiac Master: Ignacio (Nacho) Marino

Onboard Expedition Assistant: Ari Benz Ciria

Local Guide: Michael Mc Garrigle

Local Guide: Stewart Morris

Port Agent: Liam Madden

## Senior Officers & Heads of Department:

Master: Arsen Prostov

Chief Officer: Gabriel Eduardo Centella Molina

Second Officer: Fernandes Raymer Rosario

Safety Officer: Clyde James Houston

Ship Doctor: Gino Tiraboschi

Chief Engineer: Praveen Kumar Kaushal

First Engineer: Adrian Trasca

IT Officer: Yury Kovyrshin

Hotel Director: Balvant Singh

Head Bartender: Restlie Dimasaka Baldemor

Head Waiter: Naif Khan

Chief Purser: Liza Merillo

Executive Chef: Suresh Pai Karkala

Sous Chef: I Gusti Ketut Purnawirawan

Hotel Controller: Rey Satuito Nolasco

Receptionist: Jonalyn Rivera Ecija

Receptionist: Jaypee Alota Abonitalla

Head Stateroom Attendant: Anil Kumar Kashyap

Bosun: Leo Francis Magnaye Marzan

Able Seaman: Anthony John Narvaez Brosas

Able Seaman: Eduardo Caranoo Aloyan

Able Seaman: Nestor Fernandez Arangorin

Able Seaman: Nurul Huda

Able Seaman: Luis Fernando Alvarez Santos

Able Seaman: Ferdy Noel Diaz Roque

## Photography thanks to:

Pia Harboure





