

# WILD SCOTLAND and FAROE ISLANDS

## 12 - 25 JUNE 2010

### KAYAK EXPEDITION NOTES AND ITINERARY

The Scottish summer provides long days, long twilights, short nights and wonderful paddling opportunities. Tremendous birdlife, dramatic scenery, protected sea lochs, huge cliffs, sea stacks and remarkable history and culture make this a very special trip. We will voyage among the hundreds of remote and unspoiled islands that fringe the north and west coasts of the Scottish mainland plus the 18 islands of the Faroe archipelago on board our sturdy mother ship, *Polar Pioneer*. These notes will give you an overview of what you may experience and discover on this fascinating journey.

From Skye in the west, to the Hebrides, St Kilda, the Orkneys, Shetlands and Faroes, we'll explore the intriguing diversity of these wild islands before finishing in Bergen. The mysterious Faroes are located in the heart of the Gulf Stream half way between Scotland and Iceland. Self governed but under Danish jurisdiction the Viking culture is strong with Faroese as the main language stemming from old Norse.

We stress that this is an expedition style voyage and our adventures will be influenced by the North Atlantic weather and sea conditions. We'll delight in taking advantage of spontaneous opportunities and there is always an element of the unexpected. We plan to take in Neolithic sites scarcely changed in 5000 years and ponder the mystery of huge monoliths that mark seasonal change. We'll visit remote crofting communities, picturesque villages and castles that were once strongholds of Scottish clans. We hope to see some of the world's largest seabird colonies, raucous places filled with gannets, fulmars, arctic terns and delightful puffins. Sitting quietly in our kayaks we may be privileged to watch seals, whales and dolphins.

#### SEA KAYAKING

We intend to use the ship as a comfortable floating base camp, paddling at every opportunity and returning for the comfort of meals and our cosy cabins. Zodiacs will be available for extended shore excursions for those who do not wish to paddle on any given day.

We hope to paddle one to two times a day, (except when at sea), spending as much time on the water as possible. Landing ashore by kayak, we can stretch our legs and enjoy walks on the heaths and in the summer flowers. Most paddles range from two and a half to four hours. We aim to have at least one extended paddle where we will be away from the ship for most of the day and generally meet the ship at a different location. The flexibility of kayaking with a small private group ensures our own unique experiences, the quiet dip of your paddle perfectly suited to our awe-inspiring surroundings.

Kayakers should be of an intermediate standard and have paddled before on outings up to 12 km in length. You do not have to be an expert or know how to roll but should have an adventurous spirit and recognise that the weather will influence greatly what we can and can't do. This is cool water kayaking and should not be your first paddling experience. For additional experience, rent a kayak locally before leaving home and seek out a local operator for some paddling tuition. We try to have our first familiarisation paddle start from shore and after that, launch directly from the ship. However, you should be comfortable on Day 1 to paddle in some swell and wind if we encounter it. DO practice paddling in a variety of conditions prior to the trip. Generally the water surface ranges from glassy calm to a small wind chop

***We'd be happy to talk to you about your level of experience and may be able to advise you how to obtain the necessary skills before your trip.***

***Please Note: Along with your voyage booking form we require all participants to complete our "Sea Kayak Booking and Experience Form" and return it to us immediately to secure your spot in the sea kayak group.***

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### ITINERARY

#### Day 1: Oban, Northeast Scotland

We board Polar Pioneer in Oban in the mid-afternoon and set sail in the evening for Scotland's northwest coast.

#### Days 2-3: Western Isles and Highlands

Sailing north along the west coast, we may visit the wildlife-rich Isle of Rhum, a nature reserve that's home to red deer, white-tailed sea eagles, golden eagles and Manx shearwaters. Walking along the powdered quartz beach known as the Singing Sands we can look for otters, seals and guillemots. The adjacent Isle of Eigg is dominated by a 393 metre basalt peak, Sgurr of Eigg, and is home to otters, seals, eagles and other birds. We may also have the chance to visit Iona, the birthplace of Christianity in Britain, sample single malt whisky at a distillery on the Isle of Mull, or marvel at Fingal's Cave, where the sound of waves crashing against towering basalt pillars inspired Mendelssohn's Hebridean Overture.

Canna, northwest of Rhum, is a working farm and unofficial bird sanctuary, where 157 bird species have been recorded. Rare orchids grow at the cliff edge and there are remains of a 7<sup>th</sup> century chapel and a jail dating from the Middle Ages.

The Cuillin Hills (spiritual heart of Skye) have earned a reputation as Britain's most untamed and challenging mountains. The rocky jagged Black Cuillins attract rock climbers, while the smoother conical granite peaks of the Red Cuillins are crowned with heather. We may land at Loch Scavaig in the heart of the Cuillins and take a short hike, perhaps to Loch Coruisk, for spectacular views and a taste of the range's grandeur. Keener hikers may be able to venture further afield, weather permitting, while the kayakers may paddle around Loch Scavaig, into Loch Coruisk, or explore the island of Soay and an abandoned shark fishing station - all against the backdrop of classic views of the Cuillins.

*There is a plethora of options on other smaller islands to the west of Scotland.*

Barra, the most southerly island of the Outer Hebrides, typifies the Western Isles with peat-covered hills, remote crofting communities and Neolithic remains. Barra was once home to the MacNeil clan. On an islet lying off Castlebay, Barra's largest village is Kisimul Castle.

Mingulay, Berneray and Pabbay are a cluster of islands to the south of Barra. Now National Trust properties, these deserted former crofting communities have beautiful beaches and dramatic sea cliffs. Caves and arches are home to colonies of puffins and other seabirds. From water level, seas and tides permitting, kayakers will wonder at the sheer raw beauty, immense cliffs and feeling of solitude.

Tobermory, on the Isle of Mull, was planned as a herring port in the 1700s. Today, yachts are more common than trawlers in this peaceful sheltered harbour, fringed with brightly painted houses.

#### Days 4-6 St Kilda and Lewis

We hope to land at St Kilda, a World Heritage Site, where abandoned crofts bear testament to the fortitude of hardy islanders who once dried seabirds for winter food. Exposed to the full ferocity of Atlantic gales, the inhospitable volcanic stacks of St Kilda boast Britain's highest sea cliff (430 metres tall). The settlement's last 36 residents were evacuated to the Scottish mainland in 1930, when the Scottish Office ceased to subsidise the community. The islanders had eaten seabird eggs, dried gannets and fulmars for winter food and used their feathers, oil, bones and skins for fuel, tools and shoes. In favourable sea conditions it's possible to paddle in the bay on Hirta, the largest island (2 miles by 1 mile), and on shore visit derelict crofts and the ancient chapel.

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One of Europe's most significant seabird breeding colonies, with over 200,000 breeding pairs of all species, St Kilda is home to Britain's largest colonies of gannets, fulmars and puffins. It remains home to Soay sheep, perhaps brought there by Stone Age man over 5000 years ago.

On Lewis, we will paddle to a mini Stonehenge at Callanais. The Callanais Standing Stones, constructed around 3000 BC, perch on an exposed hill overlooking East Loch Roag on Lewis' northwest coast. The 54 tall stones are arranged in the shape of a crude Celtic cross, and many of the stones are aligned with the rising and setting moon. Nearby is the preserved Carloway Broch, inhabited till around 1870.

Island hopping northeast, we aim to visit tiny specks of land that rarely see visitors. Home to breeding seals and some of Europe's largest seabird colonies, these islands boast spectacular cliffs, fantastic rock stacks, hidden beaches and luxuriant heaths.

### **Days 7-8 Fair Isle and the Orkneys**

Mid way between Orkney and Shetland, Fair Isle houses a major European ornithological research station and is also famous for knitwear and historic shipwrecks. The 70 or so islanders mostly live in traditional crofts on the more fertile low-lying southern part of the island. A bird watchers' paradise, Fair Isle lies on the intersection of major bird flight-paths from Scandinavia, Iceland and Faroe. It attracts common species and also eastern rarities such as the lanceolated warbler. In summer, the cliffs teem with breeding fulmars, kittiwakes, guillemots, gannets, shags and puffins. It is an excellent place to view seabirds at close range, especially puffins. The island has over 250 species of flowering plants, including wetland flowers, rare orchids, alpine species and common wildflowers. We'll be welcomed by the hospitable villagers and may paddle, take a hike or visit the museum. Grey and common seals inhabit these waters, while sharp eyes may spot harbour porpoises, white-beaked dolphins, Atlantic white-sided dolphins, killer whales (orcas) and minke whales.

We then visit the Orkney Islands, home to 5000 year old archaeological wonders like Skara Brae, a Neolithic village excavated less than 100 years ago to reveal Stone Age life. We'll view relics of Viking occupation and WWII curiosities like the famous Churchill Barriers and the exquisite Italian Chapel.

### **Days 10- 11 Faroe Islands**

The Faroe Islands are comprised of accumulated layers of volcanic basalt and, as a rule, are tilted with the eastern shores sloping into the sea and the western coasts rising up in soaring cliffs. This layer effect is most pronounced along the more peaceful and protected fjords and sounds where we hope to paddle. Along the shores lie the towns and villages of the Faroes surrounded by cultivated pastures. Above rise mountains with green sloping fells bounded by dark stony crags. The long summer days teem with seabirds flocking to the soaring cliffs. The collision of cold Arctic currents with the warm Gulf Stream has created an especially nutrient rich environment for the many birds breeding here. Ornithologists have identified around 300 bird species in the Faroe Islands. Colonies of puffins inhabit the ledges and grassy swathes at the top of the cliffs. Their breeding grounds are conspicuous because of the deep, blue green colour of the grass, a byproduct of years of active fertilisation.

### **Days 12- 13 Foula and Shetland Islands**

Britain's most northerly islands lie almost 100 miles north of the Scottish mainland, at a similar latitude to the southern tip of Greenland, or Bergen in Norway. Kept relatively warm by the Gulf Stream, Shetland's 100 islands experience almost 24 hours of daylight in summer. They abound with nature reserves and archaeological sites and offer a taste of traditional island life.

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Conditions permitting, we'll land on isolated Foula Island, an internationally recognized seabird station. Exploring the Shetland Islands, we hope to paddle among the sea caves of Papa Stour and walk among the cliff tops and moors of Hermaness.

We may land at Mousa, home to the worlds' best-preserved broch, a 13 metre tall stone refuge built more than 2000 years ago. Mousa Broch is one of Scotland's 500 brochs, or fortified Iron Age towers. It is the only broch to have survived almost complete for more than 2000 years when it was built as a refuge against raiders. Storm petrels nest among its stones at night. In daylight, a large colony of common and grey seals basks on its shores and you may even spot an otter (Dratsi, in Shetland dialect).

Hermaness National Nature Reserve, close to Britain's most northerly point, is a place of bird cries and sea smells, of myth and mist. The cliffs rise 170 meters above the Atlantic and during summer they are alive with the raucous cacophony and raw guano smell of over 100,000 breeding seabirds. In 1992, winds of 194 miles per hour reportedly blew away a hut with two birdwatchers. Hermaness is home to one of the world's largest colonies of flying pirates - the great skuas. During summer some 25,000 pairs of puffins breed in burrows on cliff edges, as well as fulmars and guillemots. The reserve is also home to kittiwakes, shags, snipe, dunlin, golden plover and arctic skua, making this one of Europe's most diverse colonies. The grasslands, moors and cliff tops are a tapestry of colourful wildflowers – gentians, heather, orchids and thrift are a few of the species here.

With its mile-long seabird cliffs, the island of Noss is a National Nature Reserve. Millions of years of wind and ice have honeycombed thousands of nesting ledges in sandstone cliffs almost 200 metres high. Resident seals and visiting otters feed in dense kelp around the shores. Wonderful paddling.

Lerwick, Shetland's capital and only town, is a bustling seaport of around 7500 people. The old waterfront is filled with pleasure boats, visiting yachts, historic craft and working fishing boats and fringed with lively bars. Founded as an unofficial marketplace to service 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch herring fleets, Lerwick perches on a hillside, its twisting narrow lanes retain the charm of centuries past.

### Day 14 Bergen, Norway

We arrive in the picturesque seaside town of Bergen in the early morning. At the end of the voyage, it's time to bid farewell to our new found friends and travelling companions.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### This Tour Includes

- Transfers to the ship from the group hotel in Oban.
- Ship's accommodation. All public areas are open to all passengers.
- All meals on board ship.
- The use of Zodiacs for shore excursions, but excludes entry fees and other optional expenses at historic sites, towns and villages.
- Lectures, videos, slide and film shows and guide services.
- Medical services. There is a resident medical officer and well equipped clinic on board.
- Port taxes, port charges and landing fees imposed by government authorities.
- Kayak guide, kayaks, paddling and rescue equipment. Drysuits if required.



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### **This Tour Does Not Include**

- Air transport to and from the ship.
- Excess baggage on any air flights.
- Visa, passport and vaccination charges and airport departure taxes.
- Hotels and meals not included in cruise itinerary.
- Tips on board for crew and service personnel.
- Optional tours, entry fees, shore transport and other expenses during shore excursions.
- Laundry, postage, personal clothing, medical expenses, personal travel insurance and items of a personal nature such as bar charges and phone calls.
- Emergency evacuation charges.



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### SHIP DETAILS

#### Polar Pioneer

Polar Pioneer was built in Finland in 1985 as an ice-strengthened research vessel. In 2001 she was refurbished in St Petersburg to provide comfortable accommodation for 54 passengers.

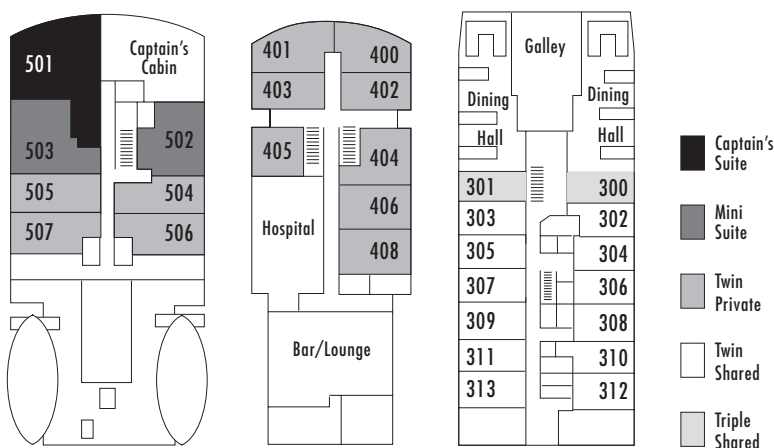
Polar Pioneer is not a luxury ship but is homely and strong. The accommodation is simple yet comfortable and the meals are wholesome and uncomplicated. The mood on board is definitely casual. A small fleet of Zodiacs, (rubber inflatable boats), with outboard motors enable us to travel from ship to shore.

Length - 71.6 metres, Beam - 12.8 metres, Draft - 4.5 metres, Displacement - 2140 tonnes, Cruise speed - 11-12 knots, Powered by - 2 x 1560 HP diesel engines, Chef - European or Australian, Captain & Crew – Russian.

General Facilities:- Bar/lounge/library area, Sauna, Laundry Service, Medical Clinic staffed by a doctor, Dining area, TV/Video (NTSC & PAL systems), Lecture room.

There are five classes of cabins on board the Polar Pioneer

- **Triple Cabins** have two lower bunks and one upper bunk, porthole, wash basin, desk and storage. Shower and toilet facilities located conveniently just outside the cabins.
- **Twin Share Cabins** have two lower bunks, porthole, wash basin, desk and storage. Shower and toilet facilities located conveniently just outside the cabins.
- **Twin Private Cabins** have two lower berths, two have upper & lower berths. All cabins have private bathroom (shower and toilet), window, desk and ample storage.
- **Mini-Suites** have one double bed and one fold down couch in separate sleeping areas, private bathroom, (shower & toilet), windows, desk, sitting area, refrigerator, TV and video facilities, electric jug. Two only.
- **Captain's Suite** features a double bed in separate sleeping area, private bathroom (shower & toilet) forward and port windows, desk, large lounge and table area, refrigerator, TV and video facilities, electric jug. One only.



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