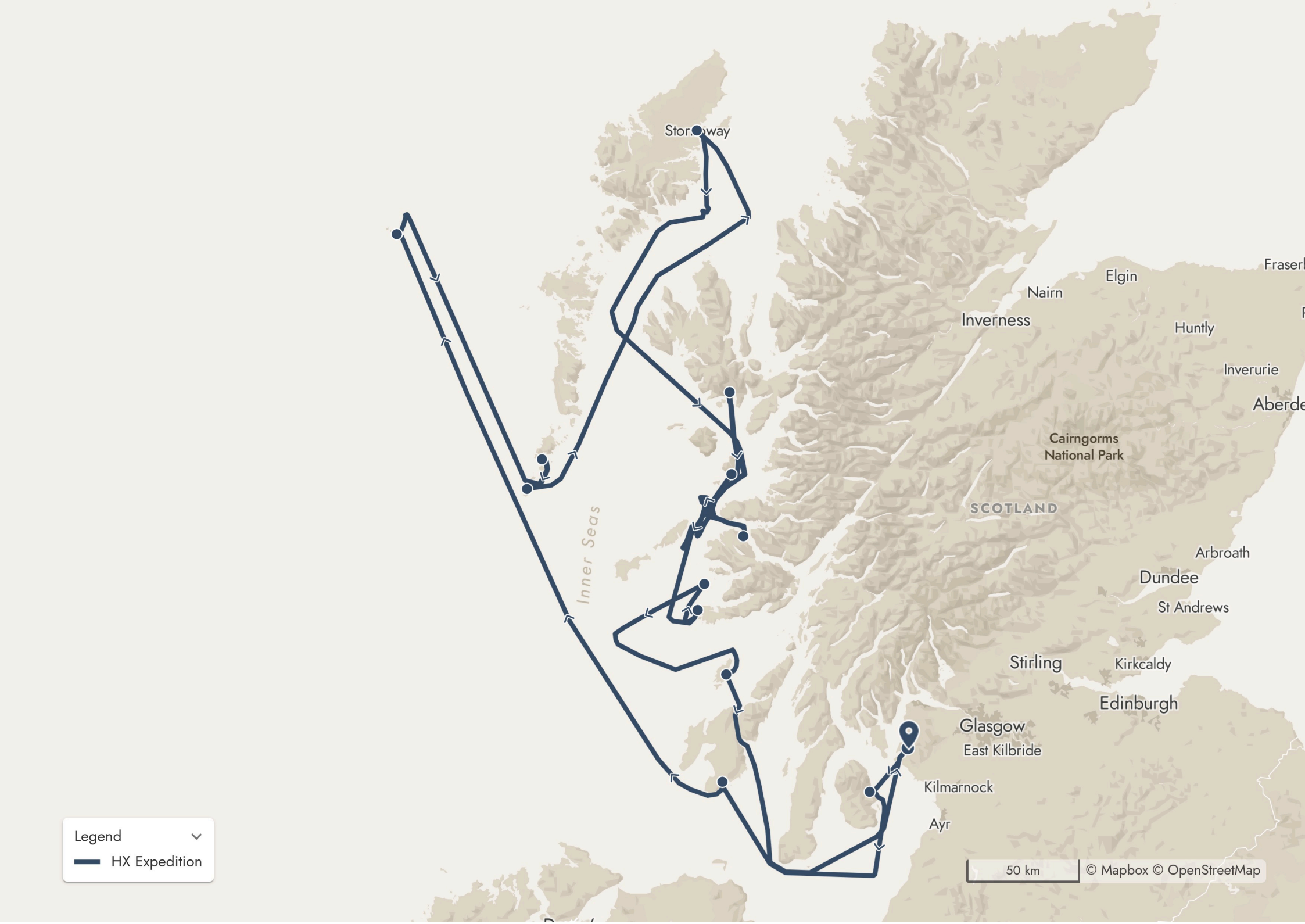




The Scottish Isles: Island Hopping in the Hebrides

MS Spitsbergen, 07 May – 17 May 2026



Legend

— HX Expedition

50 km

© Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

Stornoway

Inverness

SCOTLAND

Glasgow

Edinburgh

Inner Seas

Cairngorms National Park

Dundee

Stirling

Kirkcaldy

Kilmarnock

Ayr

St Andrews

Inverurie

Aberde

Fraser

Elgin

Nairn

Huntly

Arbroath

Day 1 - Embarkation in Fairlie

Our journey began in Fairlie, where our guests arrived with some true Scottish breezes as they made our way towards their home for the next 10 days.

Throughout the afternoon, guests boarded MS Spitsbergen, settling into their cabins and getting their first glimpse of life on board. There was time to explore the ship and enjoy the views of the Scottish coastline before they gathered for the mandatory safety drill, an important step before departure.

Later, guests met with the Expedition Leader and Hotel Manager, who introduced the voyage and what to expect in the days ahead. Our ship departed accompanied by the sound of local bagpipers playing from the quay. Guests stepped outside to witness a memorable farewell; it was an atmospheric and distinctly Scottish send-off.

With the coastline slowly receding behind us, our journey around the Scottish Isles was underway.





Legend

— HX Expedition

Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park
Largs
Fairlie
Fairlie
Newton Mearns
Kilwinning
Irvine
Kilmarnock
Galston
Darvel
Campbeltown
Brodick Bay
Isle of Arran
Lamlash
Firth of Clyde
Prestwick
Ayr
Alloway
Coylton
Maybole
Bellsbank
Girvan

Day 2 - Brodick Bay, Arran

This morning we arrived in the beautiful surroundings of Brodick Bay on the Isle of Arran, greeted by calm seas and peaceful conditions. Guests headed ashore throughout the day to enjoy a variety of expedition experiences, with many taking the opportunity to visit the impressive Brodick Castle and its scenic gardens. Others explored the island's charming landscapes and coastline at a relaxed pace on our Fisherman's Loop hike, or via a 'Forest Safari'.

After departing Arran, we spent the afternoon enjoying excellent

wildlife sightings from the ship. Seabirds accompanied us along the way, while common dolphins and harbour porpoises were spotted in the mirror-calm waters. We were also fortunate to spot a grey seal and even a basking shark, adding excitement to our sailing!

In the evening, we passed the striking island of Ailsa Craig under a beautiful sunset. Gannets soared gracefully around the cliffs as the wind gradually strengthened, creating a dramatic atmosphere to close our first memorable day exploring the Scottish Isles.







Bowmore Islay

Loch Indaal

Port Ellen Port Ellen

Legend

 HX Expedition

3 km

© Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

Day 3 - Port Ellen, Islay

We awoke to a stunning morning on Islay, with brilliant sunshine and clear skies greeting us as we prepared for another day exploring the Scottish Isles. Although the bright conditions were accompanied by a cold wind, spirits were high as guests headed ashore for the morning's expedition experiences and adventures.

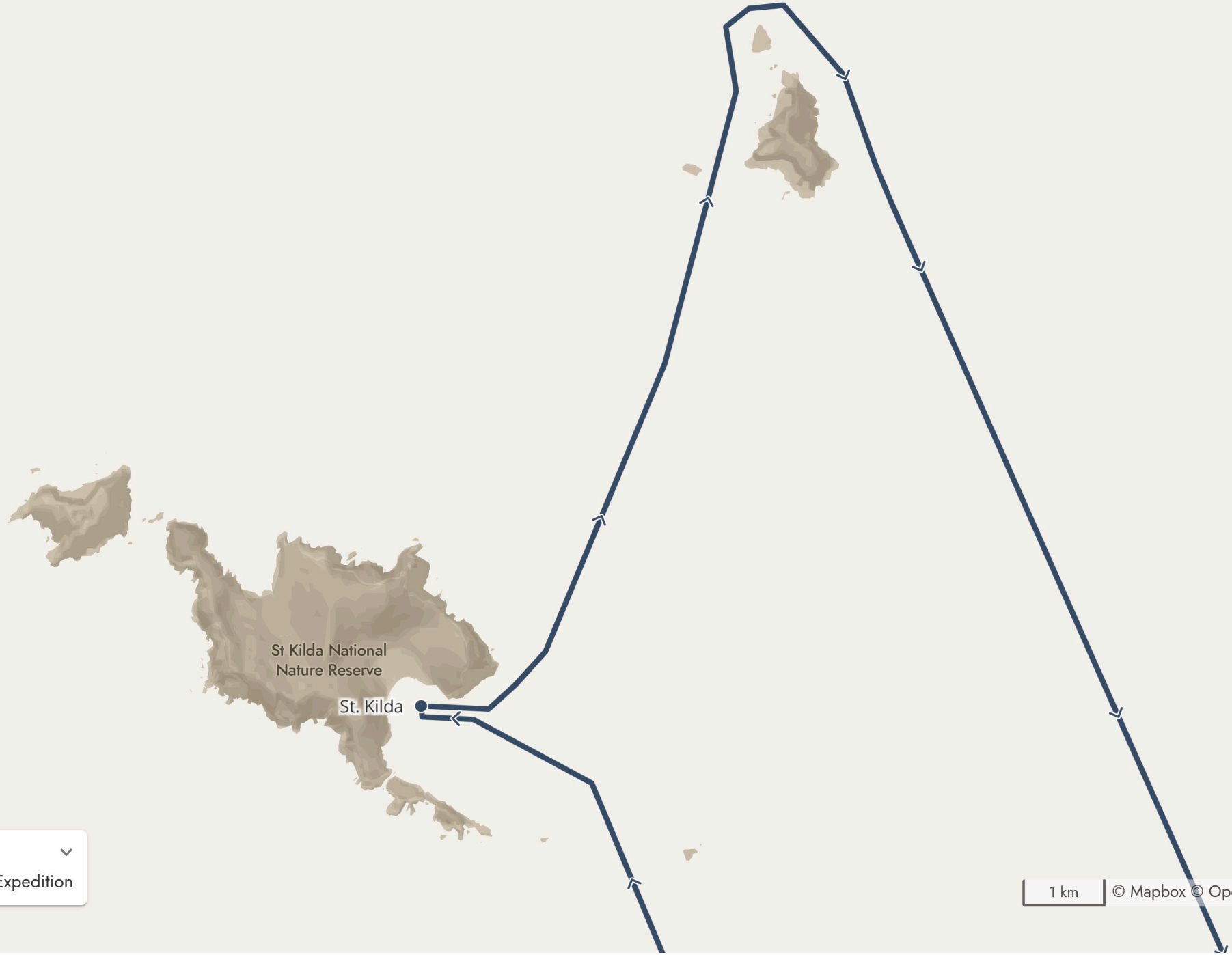
Many guests took the opportunity to learn more about Islay's rich history and world-famous whisky heritage, while others explored the island's wildlife on a coastal boat tour. During the wildlife cruise, seals were spotted resting along the rocky shoreline, red deer appeared on the hillsides, and lucky observers even caught sight of a white-tailed eagle soaring overhead. Meanwhile, HX Ambassador Monty Halls led a beach clean-up activity, combining conservation work with a closer

look at the fascinating coastal environment of the island.

Back on board during the afternoon, changing weather conditions for the coming days led to a modification of our plans. However, the change brought an exciting bonus; we would begin our journey towards St Kilda earlier than expected. As the ship sailed northward, conditions became livelier, adding a bit of movement to the evening at sea.

Guests gathered indoors to relax and enjoy the onboard programME, including a highly entertaining whisky talk by Niek from the HX shoreside team, the perfect way to end the day before settling in for the night, ready for tomorrow's adventures.





Legend ▼

— HX Expedition

Day 4 - Hirta, Boreray, and St Kilda

We awoke to the ship rolling through active seas under a grey sky on our approach to the remote archipelago of St Kilda. Gradually, the dramatic silhouettes of the islands appeared on the horizon, creating an unforgettable first impression of this isolated place at the edge of the Atlantic. Upon arrival in the sheltered bay of Hirta, conditions proved favourable, allowing the Expedition Team to head ashore and collect local ranger Vivi, who later joined us on board to share fascinating insights into the history and wildlife on these extraordinary islands.

Soon after, Zodiac operations began and guests eagerly made their way ashore to explore the UK's only dual UNESCO World Heritage Site. Throughout the day, guests enjoyed a variety of expedition experiences despite the frequent passing rain showers. History walks brought the abandoned village and stories of the St Kildans to life, while nature walks explored the island's wildlife and rugged

landscape. A particularly adventurous group of hikers tackled the steep route up Conachair, the highest point of the archipelago. Having most of the day to explore Hirta was a true privilege and a highlight of the voyage.

Later in the afternoon, we departed St Kilda and continued through lively seas towards Boreray and its famous sea stacks, home to the second-largest gannet colony in the world. The cliffs teemed with life as gannets circled overhead alongside common guillemots, razorbills, and even a few Atlantic puffins. As if the wildlife spectacle was not enough, a pod of white-beaked dolphins appeared amid the waves to bid us farewell as the islands disappeared behind us. Thankfully, the sea gradually calmed as we sailed back towards the Hebrides, giving everyone the chance to relax, reflect, and appreciate what had truly been a magical day in one of the most remote places in the Scottish Isles.



Day 5 - Vatersay (AM)

Changing our plans for St Kilda meant updating our itinerary. Instead of going to Gigha, instead we headed to the beautiful island of Vatersay for a morning nature landing. And what a morning it was! Calm seas, bright sunshine, and almost no wind created perfect conditions for exploring ashore.

Guests joined photography walks with Geraldine and nature walks with Andres and David, while Monty Halls and a dedicated group contributed to the Big Blue Bag project along the stunning white sand beach near our landing site. We were welcomed by the friendliness

of the local community and treated to remarkable wildlife sightings throughout the morning. The highlight for many was seeing the elusive corncrake, with some birds even wandering across the paths in front of us. Golden eagles and white-tailed eagles were also spotted soaring overhead, while kayakers enjoyed calm conditions and visits from curious grey seals.

After a rewarding and memorable morning ashore, we returned to the ship for lunch before continuing towards our afternoon destination.



Day 5 - Mingulay (PM)

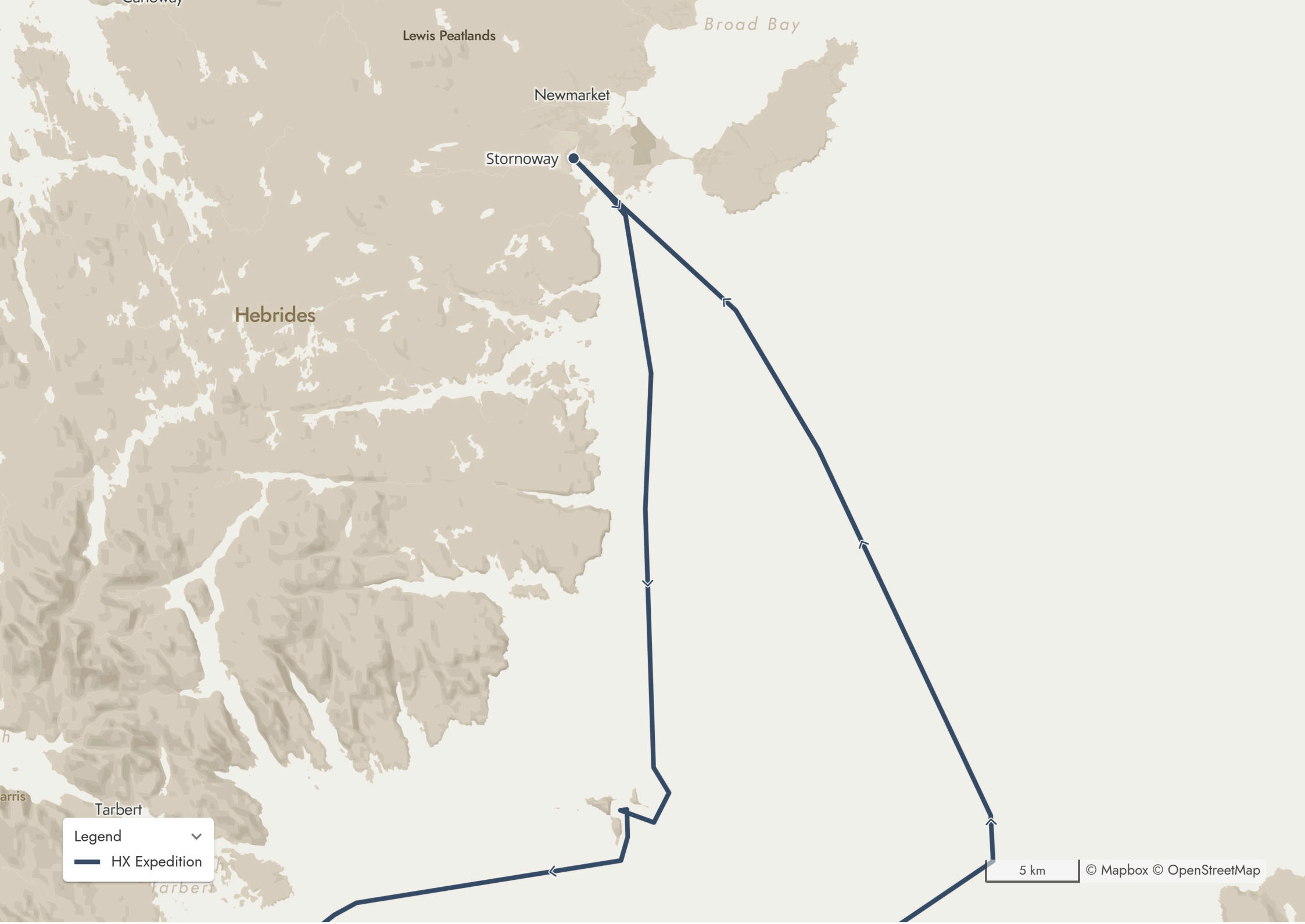
The fantastic weather continued into the afternoon as we sailed towards Mingulay for our Zodiac cruising adventure. Calm seas and clear visibility created perfect conditions for wildlife watching along the way, with those out on deck even able to spot our first minke whale of the trip.

Once at Mingulay, it became immediately clear just how rich these waters were with birdlife. While the Expedition and Deck Teams prepared the Zodiacs, Monty Halls entertained guests with stories from his time living in the Scottish Isles, including fascinating insights into the life of a crofter. Once out on the water, we found ourselves

surrounded by puffins darting across the sea and circling the dramatic cliffs of gneiss and granite. The scenery was spectacular, made even more memorable by the many grey seals watching us curiously from the water. Time seemed to pass far too quickly before we eventually returned to the ship after another unforgettable outing.

Following another wonderful dinner on board, we gathered to hear the plans for tomorrow's visit to Stornoway. The evening concluded with an engaging talk from Ornithologist Andres about Scotland's white-tailed eagle reintroduction programme before we headed to bed after another adventure-filled day in the Hebrides.





Lewis Peatlands

Broad Bay

Newmarket

Stornoway

Hebrides

Tarbert

Legend

— HX Expedition

5 km

© Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

Day 6 - Stornoway; Lewis and Harris; and Shiant Isles

We arrived in Stornoway to another bright and sunny day in the Hebrides, with an unexpected but welcome surprise. Due to the strong winds outside the harbour, we remained alongside in Stornoway for the entire day, giving everyone extra time to fully enjoy both the expedition experiences hosted here and the town itself.

Guests headed off on tours to experience Hebridean traditional ways of life, the blackhouses, and of course Stornoway's famous Lewes Castle. After lunch, many took the opportunity to wander through the charming streets of Stornoway at their own pace. The town's famous tweed shops, craft shops, and cosy coffee shops proved especially popular.

Back on board in the afternoon, some guests joined the onboard programme, including knot-tying sessions with the Activity Team, before we departed and headed south toward the Shiant Isles. By the

evening we had arrived among these remote and dramatic islands, where hundreds of puffins could be seen resting on the water and flying around the cliffs. A lucky few even spotted white-tailed eagles soaring nearby.

Perhaps the most unforgettable part of the evening was the incredible strength of the wind. Gusts whipped the surface of the sea into twisting spirals of spray, almost like miniature tornadoes dancing across the water, forcing many of us to firmly hold onto our hats while out on deck. As rain showers began to sweep across the islands, we gradually made our way indoors to warm up and enjoy Monty's talk about the Galápagos Islands and his work there as an HX Ambassador. After another day full of adventure, exploration, and memorable moments, we headed to bed excited for whatever the next days might bring.





Glengorm

Sorne

Tobermory

BALISCATE

Upper Druimfin

Drimnin

Bonnavoulin

Achnadrish

Dervarg

Legend

— HX Expedition

1 km

© Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

Day 7 - Tobermory, Sound of Mull

Early risers were rewarded this morning with beautiful views as we sailed through the scenic Sound of Mull on our approach to Tobermory. The colourful harbour town welcomed us under pleasant conditions, setting the scene for another enjoyable day exploring the Scottish Isles. Various expedition experiences were enjoyed throughout the day; the hike to the Tobermory Lighthouse proved especially popular, while local guides introduced others to the history and charm of the town itself. Some ventured further afield to visit the impressive Duart Castle, the historic seat of Clan Maclean, perched dramatically above the water on the Isle of Mull.

Back in Tobermory, the bright waterfront invited everyone to explore at a relaxed pace, though the occasional rain shower had to be avoided! Chocolate shops, bookstores, cafés, and local craft stores kept many happily wandering through the town during the afternoon.

Meanwhile, we were finally able to launch our first Science Boat of the voyage, where guests joined the Science Team in collecting environmental data and plankton samples from the surrounding waters.

As the day came to an end, guests returned on board for more activities and lectures, including a fascinating presentation from David on the geology of Scotland. One final highlight still awaited us, however, as the Isle of Mull Gaelic Choir kindly rearranged their schedule to visit us despite arriving on a different day than originally planned. Their performance created a truly special atmosphere on board and was a memorable way to end our visit. After another delicious dinner, we sailed onward through the evening towards the Isle of Skye, looking forward to tomorrow's adventures.





Sgurr Dearg

Loch Scavaig

Elgol

Broadford

Glenelg

Loch Eishort

Sound of Sleat

Rùm National Nature Reserve

The Small Isles National Scenic Area

Mallaig

Morar

Loch Morar

Arisaig

Eigg

Legend

— HX Expedition

5 km

© Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

Day 8 - Loch Scavaig, Skye (AM)

We awoke to a windy morning along the dramatic coastline of Skye, with some uncertainty as to whether conditions would allow us ashore at Loch Scavaig. Thankfully, the Captain was able to find a suitable anchorage, allowing operations to begin. Although this meant a longer and wetter Zodiac ride to shore, it quickly became clear that the journey was more than worthwhile.

Towering above us, the dark peaks of the Black Cuillin mountain range created one of the most dramatic landscapes of the voyage so far. The scenery around Loch Coruisk felt wild and untouched, with shifting colours of grey rock, green moss, and yellow grasses constantly changing beneath the passing weather. Even with wind and occasional showers, guests tackled the famous metal staircase with great enthusiasm.

The Activity Team led a challenging hike along Loch Coruisk for the more adventurous walkers, while others explored the landing site at a gentler pace, taking time to enjoy the spectacular scenery. A special surprise came when a herd of red deer appeared near the shore, delighting everyone lucky enough to witness them in such a stunning setting. Guests who preferred to remain on board were still able to enjoy the scenery through a scenic Zodiac cruise to the landing area and back.

Too soon, it was time to return to the ship for lunch, though not before one final wildlife moment as we paused to observe several common seals hauled out along the rocky shoreline.



Day 8 - Eigg (PM)

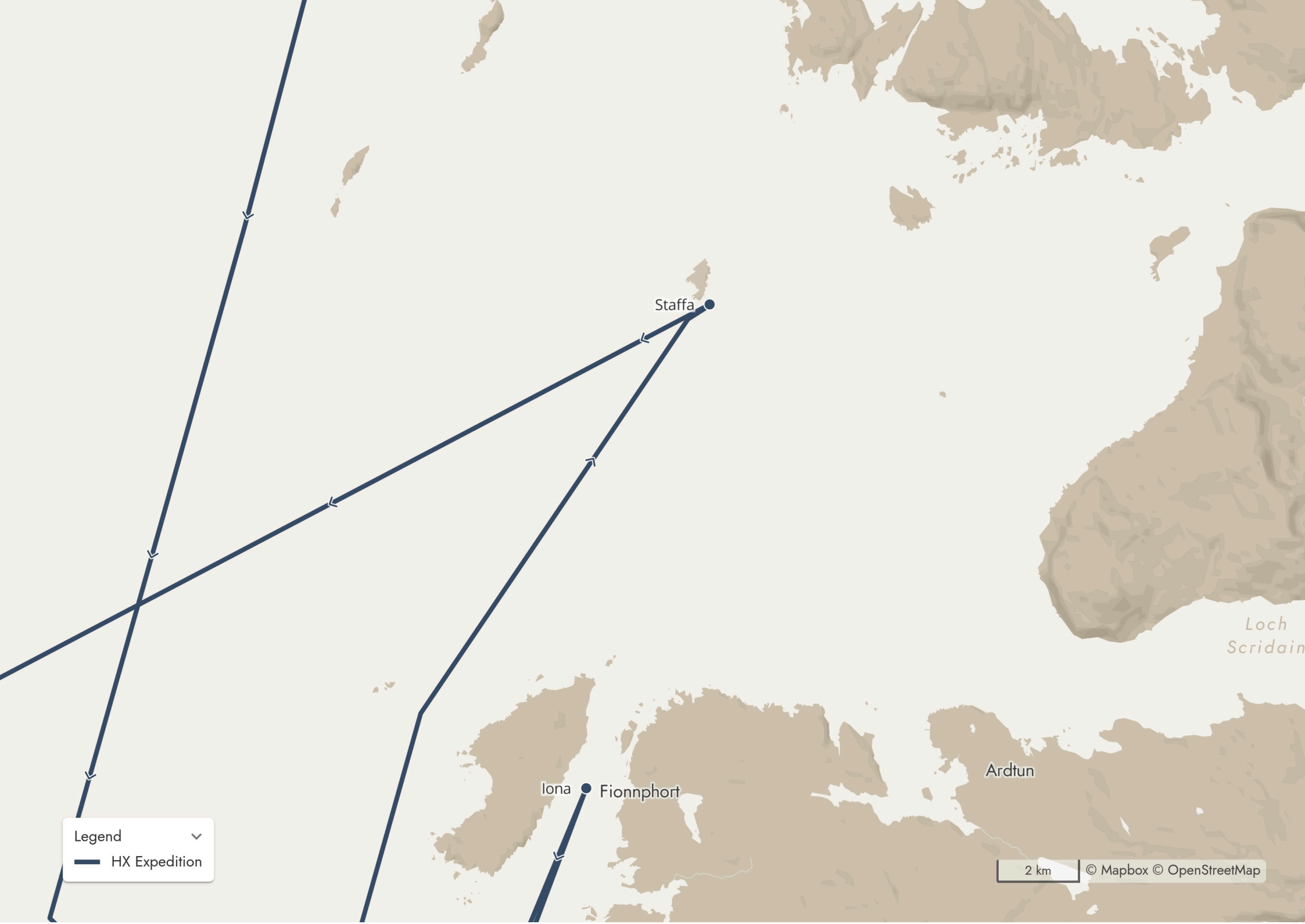
During the afternoon we sailed south towards the Isle of Eigg, enjoying more time at sea among the beautiful landscapes of the Hebrides. On board, the Expedition Team kept everyone entertained with a variety of activities and lectures. Historian Jan shared fascinating stories about the Norse and Celtic history of the Scottish Isles, while Ornithologist Andres hosted a Science Centre session exploring the remarkable biology of feathers. Others spend time out on deck enjoying the fresh air and keeping watch for wildlife as we sailed.

By late afternoon we arrived off Eigg, where the Expedition Team headed ashore to assess conditions while guests enjoyed smoked trout from Tobermory, kindly prepared by the Hotel and Food & Beverage Teams on board. Unfortunately, the swell at the jetty proved too strong for a safe landing operation, and the team was forced to

return to the ship. As always, a quick change of plans led to another memorable experience. Instead of landing, we set off on a scenic cruise along Eigg's dramatic coastline. From the water we enjoyed spectacular views of An Sgùrr, the island's striking volcanic peak, towering above the rugged landscape. The calmer conditions also meant this boat ride was considerably drier than the morning's adventures at Loch Scavaig!

After a pleasant time exploring the coastline from the water, we returned on board for dinner followed by the HX Foundation Auction, hosted by Assistant Expedition Leader Lauren together with Monty Halls. It was wonderful to see so many guests supporting the important work the foundation carries out around the world, bringing another rewarding day to a close.





Staffa

Iona Fionnphort

Loch
Scridain

Ardtun

Legend

— HX Expedition

2 km

© Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

Day 9 - Baile Mor, Iona (AM)

Early this morning we sailed through the beautiful Sound of Iona, with the famous silhouette of Iona Abbey gradually appearing ahead of us as we approached our anchorage. Although a cold breeze greeted us outside, the waters remained calm, allowing for a smooth landing operation ashore onto this peaceful and picturesque island. The first guests ashore were the hikers, who enjoyed time walking along the coast, over hills, and some of Iona's stunning white sand beaches. Others spent the morning exploring the island's rich history and culture, wandering through the village, visiting the Iona Heritage Centre, and browsing local shops filled with handmade crafts, artwork, and jewellery.

The highlight, of course, for many of us, was the historic Iona Abbey, one of Scotland's most important religious sites. Founded in AD 563 by Saint Columba, the abbey became a major centre of early Christianity and learning in medieval Scotland. From here, monks

helped spread Christianity throughout much of Scotland and northern Britain, while the island itself became a burial place for ancient Scottish, Irish, and Norwegian kings. Though rebuilt and restored over the centuries, the abbey still remains an important pilgrimage site today, welcoming visitors from around the world.

Across the island, those with keen hearing were lucky to hear the distinctive call of the elusive corncrake, hidden among the fields and gardens. Meanwhile, near the landing site, guests joined Science and Education Coordinator Charlotte and Monty Halls to explore the shoreline through tide pooling, discovering small marine creatures hidden among the rocks. After a wonderful morning ashore enjoying both the history and natural beauty of Iona, we returned to the ship and continued sailing towards our next afternoon destination: the remarkable island of Staffa.



Day 9 - Staffa (PM)

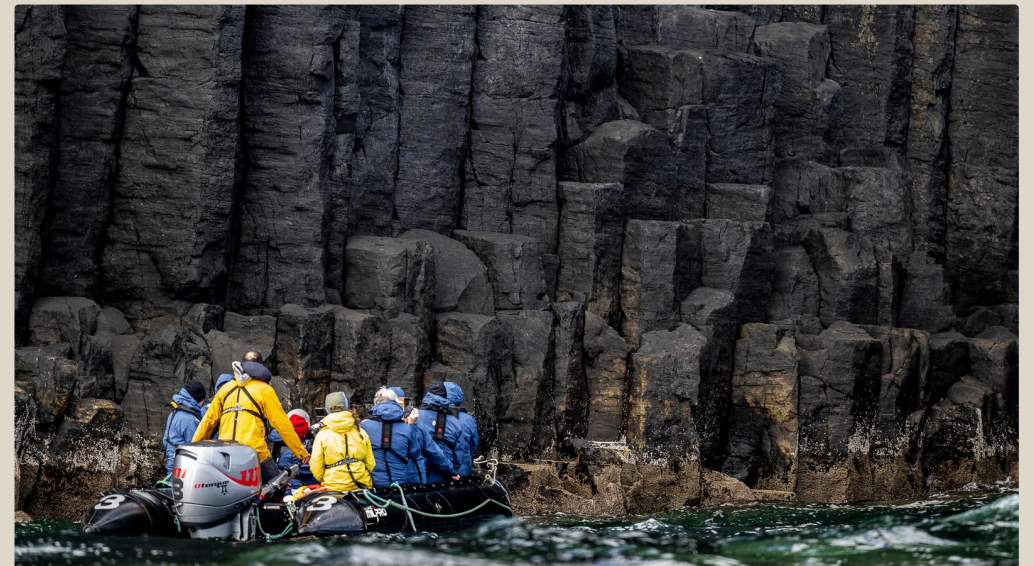
As we sailed north toward Staffa, the wind gradually began to strengthen, but hopes remained high that conditions would still allow for our planned Zodiac cruise. Thankfully, luck was on our side. Shortly after arrival, the Expedition Team was able to launch the small boats and we soon found ourselves cruising beneath the dramatic cliffs of this remarkable volcanic island.

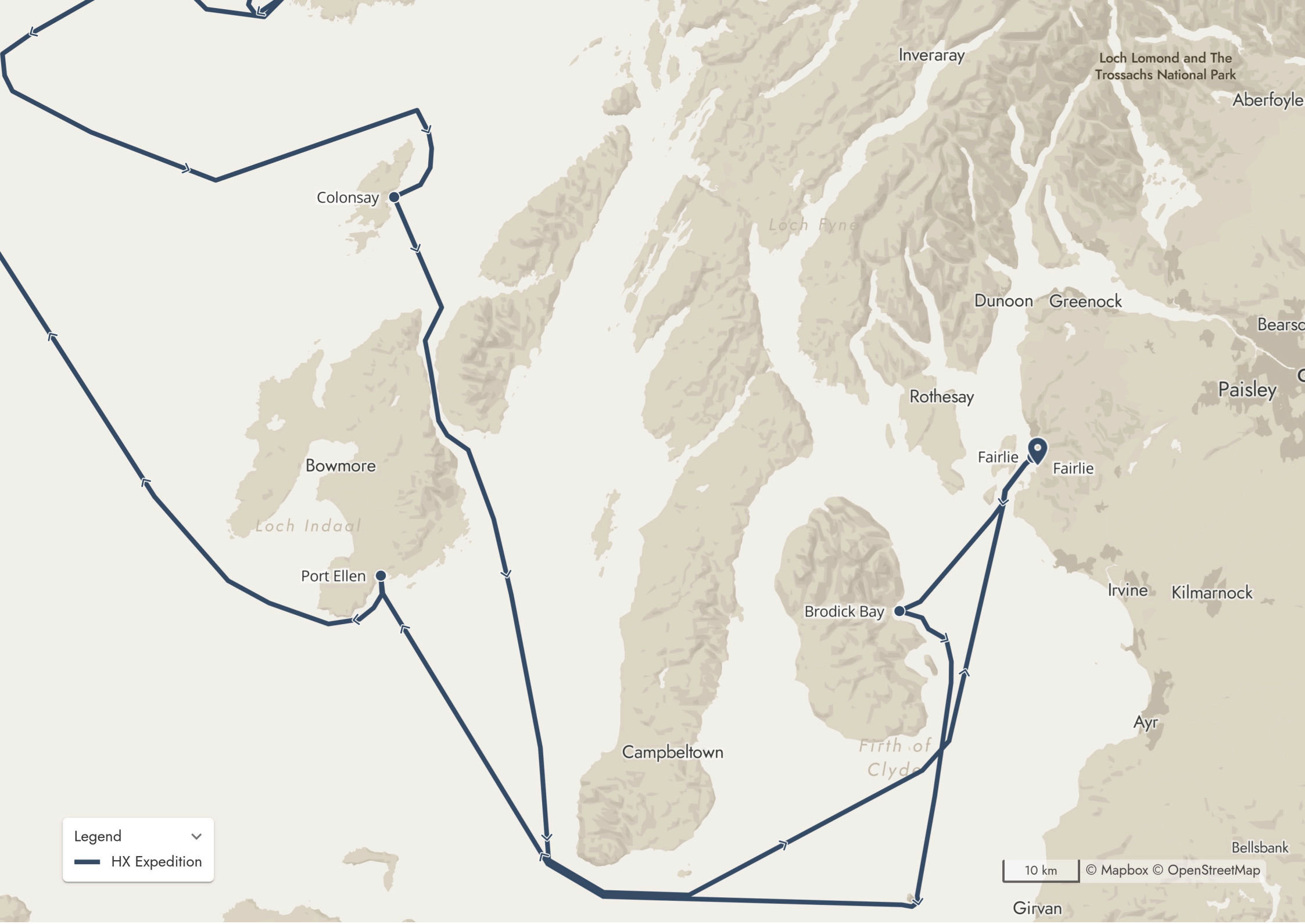
What followed exceeded all expectations. Conditions directly outside Fingal's Cave proved calm enough for the Zodiacs to carefully enter the cave itself, giving an unforgettable close-up experience of one of Scotland's most famous natural wonders. Towering basalt columns, formed more than 60 million years ago, surrounded us as the swell echoed gently through the cave. Seeing Fingal's Cave from the deck of MS Spitsbergen had already been impressive, but entering it by Zodiac brought the experience to an entirely different level.

No visit to Staffa would be complete without spending time with its

famous puffins. The cliffs and waters around the island were alive with birdlife as puffins darted through the air and rested on the sea beside us. Many guests attempted the challenge of photographing them in flight, no easy task with the wind and moving water. Thankfully, the puffins floating nearby gave everyone a better chance to admire these charming seabirds up close. As the evening progressed, the seas slowly calmed and a wonderful feeling of tranquility settled over the water.

Back on board, a magnificent seafood buffet awaited us in the Aune Restaurant. The surprises of the voyage continued into the evening with lively cabaret entertainment provided by Jofel from Reception and JR from Aune. Guests and crew alike quickly joined in the singing and dancing, creating a joyful atmosphere throughout the ship. Eventually, after another unforgettable day exploring the western Scottish Isles, we headed to bed looking forward to our final day of adventure tomorrow.





Inveraray

Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park

Aberfoyle

Colonsay

Loch Fyne

Dunoon Greenock

Bearso

Rothesay

Paisley

Bowmore

Loch Indaal

Fairlie

Fairlie

Port Ellen

Brodick Bay

Irvine

Kilmarnock

Campbeltown

Firth of Clyde

Ayr

Legend

— HX Expedition

10 km

© Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

Bellsbank

Girvan

Day 10 - Scalasaig, Colonsay

Our final morning exploring the Scottish Isles greeted us with perhaps the calmest weather of the entire voyage. With absolutely no wind, we crossed a perfectly calm sea by Zodiac to the island of Colonsay. The peaceful conditions made for a beautiful start to our last day ashore. For many the highlight of the morning was the walk to the Colonsay House Gardens. The route itself was part of the experience, winding first along the coastline before leading through enchanting woodland paths toward the gardens.

Others joined the Activity Team on a hike across the island, including a spectacular route north to Kiloran Bay with its sweeping beach and rolling green hills. Some guests visiting the gardens also continued on foot to the nearby beach, making the most of the exceptional weather. Calm seas allowed us to launch two more Science Boats with Marine Scientist Becky and throughout the morning and afternoon. Meanwhile the Science and Education Team hosted nature walks ashore exploring the geology and birdlife of Colonsay, while the unmistakable call of cuckoos echoed across the hills. Along the way, many guests visited The Pantry Café, where tea, coffee, and cake

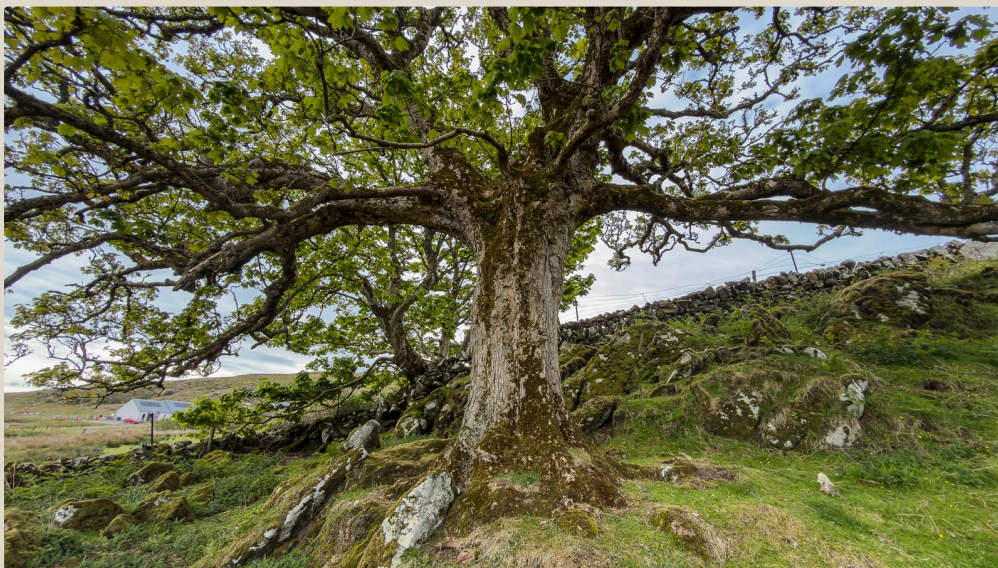
proved a welcome treat. Even a brief spell of afternoon rain could not dampen the atmosphere as everyone made the most of our final day of exploration.

In the late afternoon, we were treated to traditional Scottish folk music performed by local musicians Richard and Caitlin, while there was also time to enjoy some final onboard activities including a session about plankton in the Science Centre. Here, the fascinating world of ocean drifters was revealed under the microscopes. The Science and Education Team also hosted a 'What Did We See?' recap session, reflecting on the wildlife, landscapes, histories, and cultures encountered throughout the voyage.

As evening arrived, we gathered one final time for a special 130th Anniversary Dinner featuring modern interpretations of traditional Norwegian cuisine. Afterwards came the Captain's Farewell and Geraldine's beautifully curated photographer's slideshow, filled with unforgettable images and memories from our journey together. As the ship sailed through the Sound of Islay beneath the sunset glow, it was

the perfect ending to an extraordinary voyage through the western

Scottish Isles.





Day 11 - Disembarkation in Fairlie

Early in the morning we arrived back in Fairlie, where our journey through the Scottish Isles came to an end.

After breakfast, it was time for our guests to say goodbye to MS Spitsbergen, to the crew and Expedition Team, and to their fellow travellers with whom they had shared these unforgettable days.

Throughout the voyage, together we explored remote islands, historic communities, dramatic coastlines, and some of the most remarkable natural settings in the British Isles.

From the colourful harbour of Tobermory and the peaceful

atmosphere of Iona to the towering cliffs of St Kilda and the volcanic formations of Staffa, each destination brought its own character and experiences. Along the way, wildlife encounters, scenic sailings, hikes, Zodiac cruises, and cultural visits combined to create a journey rich in discovery and shared moments.

As our guests stepped ashore in Fairlie, they carried with them memories of rugged landscapes, welcoming island communities, and the unique spirit of the Hebrides; memories that we hope will remain with them long after the voyage itself has ended.



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