

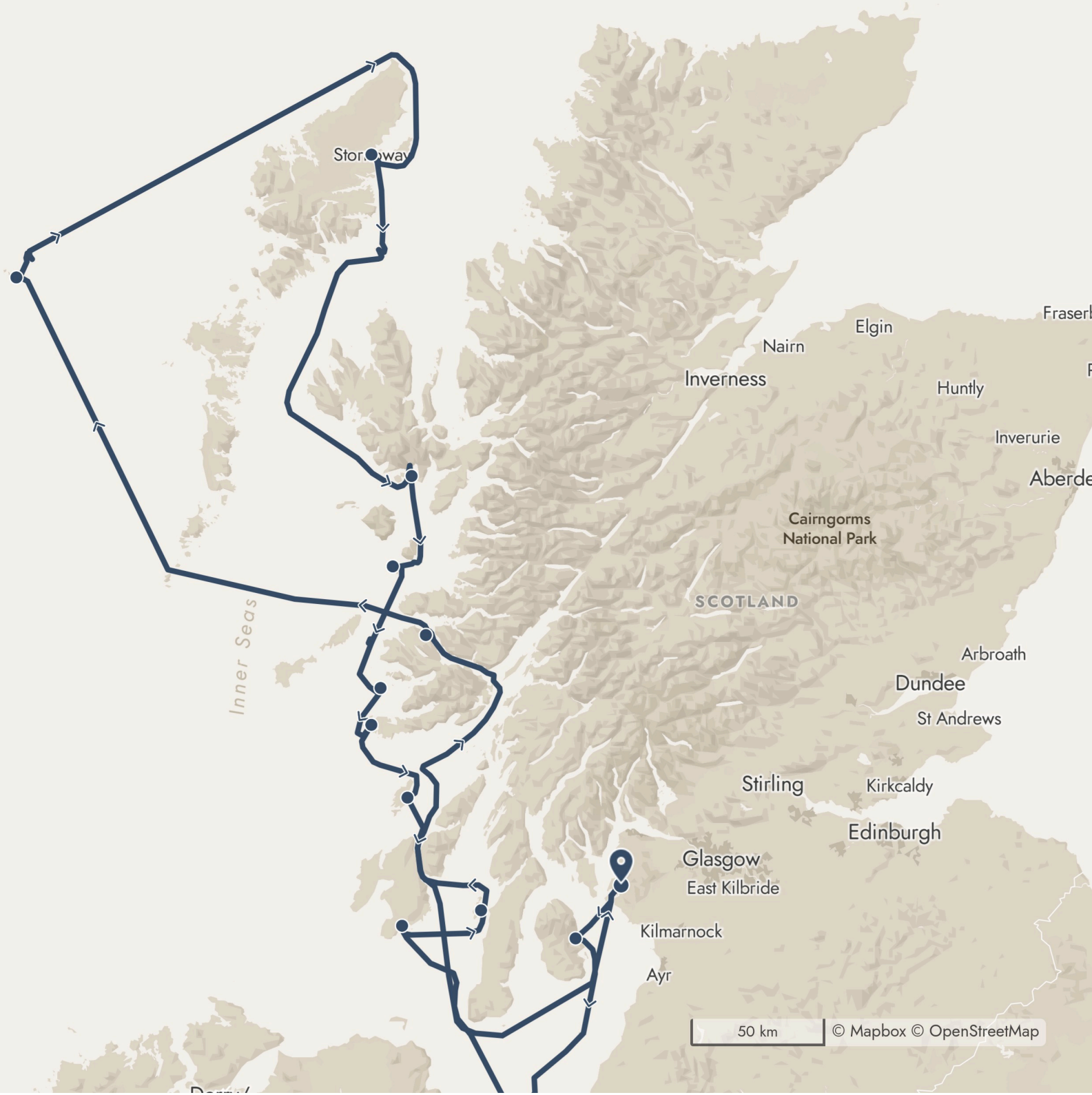


The Scottish Isles: Island Hopping in the Hebrides

MS Spitsbergen, 17 – 27 May 2026

Legend

— HX Expedition



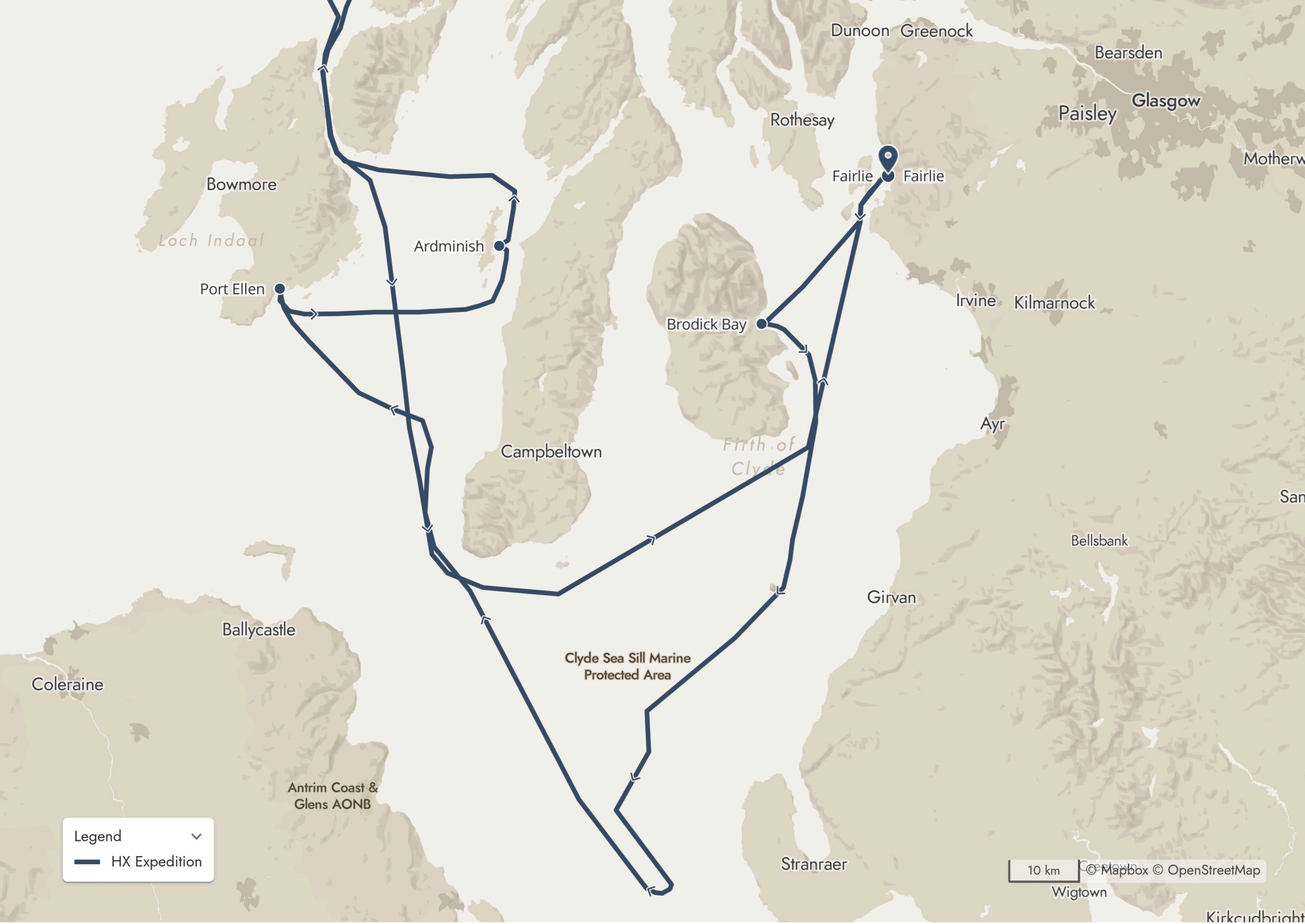
Day 1 - Embarkation in Fairlie

Our journey together began in Fairlie. 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 gathering for the mandatory safety drill, an important step before our departure.

Later, our guests with the Expedition Leader and Hotel Manager, who

introduced the voyage and what to expect in the days ahead. As the ship prepared to depart, our guests stepped outside to witness a memorable farewell, accompanied by the sound of local bagpipers playing from the quay; it was an atmospheric and distinctly Scottish send-off. With the coastline slowly receding behind us, our journey around the Scottish Isles was underway.





Day 2 - Brodict Bay, Isle of Arran

Our first full day exploring the western Scottish Isles began with beautiful weather as sunshine greeted us upon arrival at the Isle of Arran. Calm conditions made for a perfect first Zodiac cruise of the voyage, and guests eagerly headed ashore to begin discovering the island's landscapes and history.

Many chose to visit Brodict Castle and its immaculate gardens, either travelling directly there via shuttle or enjoying the scenic walk along Fisherman's Walk beforehand. The Activity Team also led the Fisherman's Loop hike for those wanting a longer walk in nature and more time to stretch their legs. Throughout the day, a variety of excursions explored different corners of the island, including the Forest Safari through the Isle of Arran's varied landscapes and the Glen Rosa walk, where lucky hikers even spotted golden eagles soaring overhead. There was also time for guests to explore Brodict at their own pace, enjoying the island's welcoming atmosphere along with its many shops, cafés, cheese stores, chocolate shops, and of

course, the famous Arran Ice Cream.

Back on board in the late afternoon, Science and Education Coordinator Charlotte introduced guests to the onboard Science & Education Programme, highlighting the opportunities they would have to learn more about the wildlife, geology, and culture of the places we visit. Later, we gathered for the Captain's Welcome, where our guests met the officers of MS Spitsbergen along with the Expedition Team who would guide them throughout the voyage.

After dinner and our 'Plans for Tomorrow' presentation, the day still held one final highlight. During the evening we enjoyed scenic sailing around the dramatic island of Ailsa Craig, famous for the granite used to make curling stones. Gannets soared around the cliffs while numerous grey seals rested along the shoreline, providing a wonderful ending to our first unforgettable day exploring the Scottish Isles.



Day 3 - Port Ellen, Islay

We arrived in Port Ellen on Islay under grey skies and some wind, a contrast to the morning before. However, the morning quickly brought a delightful surprise while guests waited for the Expedition Team to prepare operations ashore. Three common bottlenose dolphins appeared beside the ship, swimming and playing close to us for nearly an hour! Their visit brought joy to everyone who saw them and created a wonderful start to the day.

As guests headed ashore, the sky slowly began to brighten. Excursions throughout the day explored Islay's landscapes, history, and whisky heritage. Two groups headed out to the Lagavulin and Ardbeg distilleries to learn more about the island's world-renowned

whisky-making traditions. Local guides Donald and Tom also led their popular guided walk which ended at the Laphroaig Distillery, where participants also learned more about Islay life and its fascinating history.

As we were here the whole day, there was also time for guests to browse local shops and soak up the relaxed island atmosphere. Throughout the day, changing weather moved across the island in true Hebridean fashion, though by late afternoon brighter conditions had finally returned as we prepared to leave Islay behind. As the ship sailed onward into calmer evening light, guests reflected on another memorable day exploring the Scottish Isles.



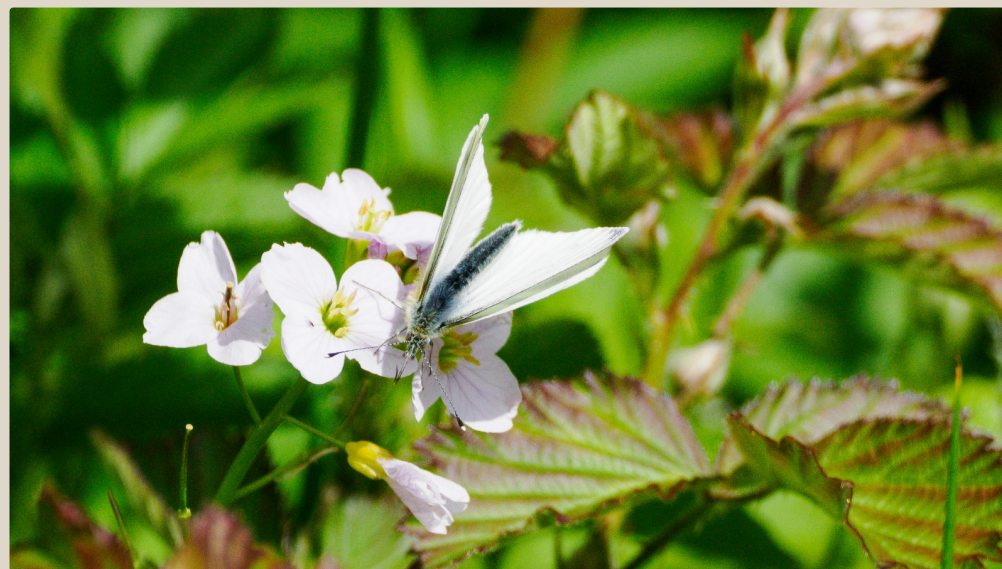
Day 4 - Ardminish, Isle of Gigha

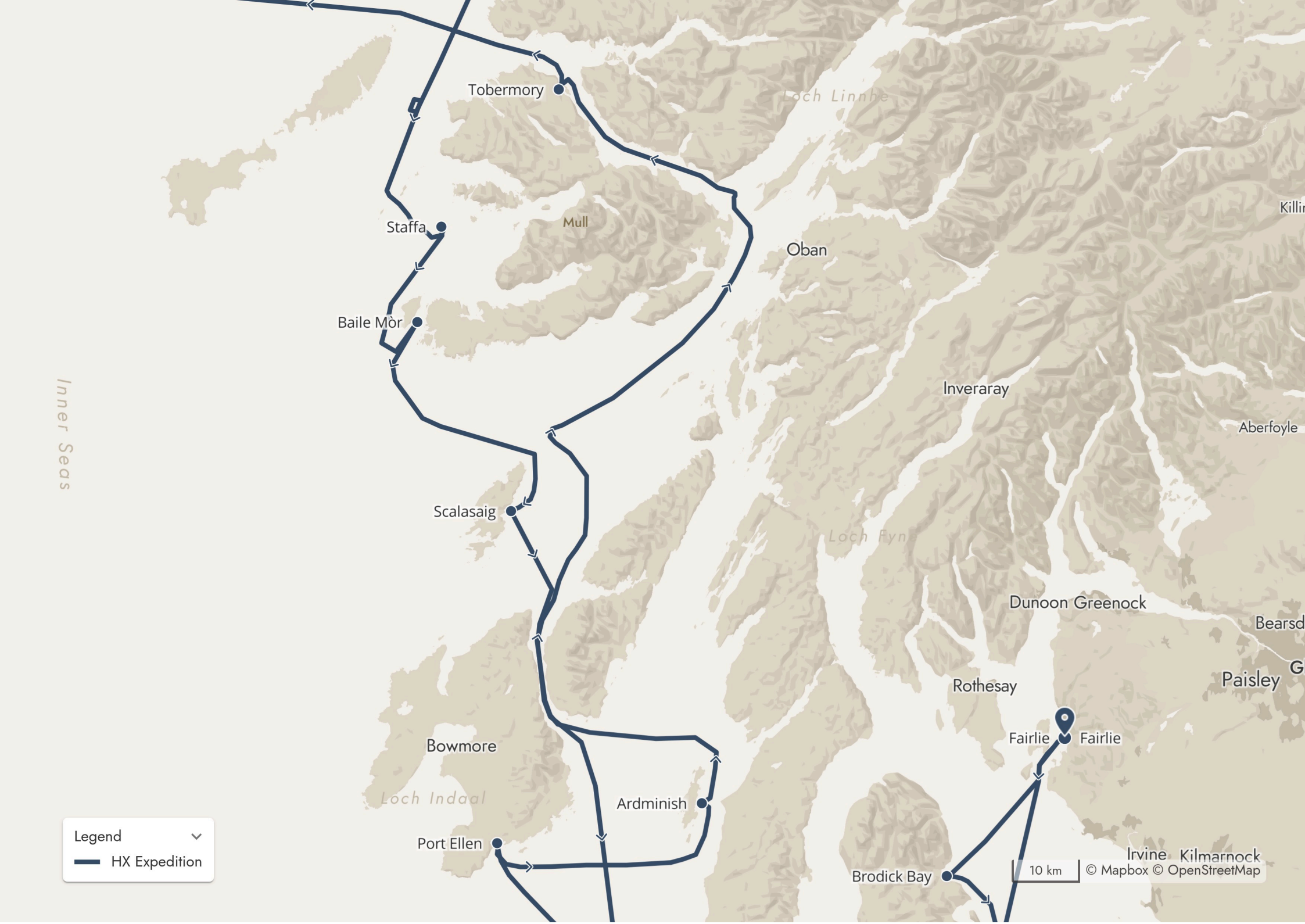
Our visit to the Isle of Gigha began beneath grey skies and light drizzle, though the weather did little to dampen spirits as guests headed ashore for another day exploring the Hebrides. We had a full day here to discover the island's peaceful atmosphere, beautiful landscapes, and welcoming community. A special highlight of the morning was a talk from local ranger Casey, who shared insights into life on Gigha, its environment, and the island community that calls it home. Achamore Gardens was visited by many guests, with Achamore House standing tall and proud among the garden grounds.

As the day progressed, the weather transformed completely. By the afternoon the skies had cleared into brilliant sunshine, with hardly any wind to be found. As we made the most of this glorious weather, the air was filled with the songs of willow warblers, a sound that had become more and more familiar as our voyage through the Scottish

Isles continued. Guests enjoyed wandering through the island under these near-perfect conditions, making the most of our time ashore.

As our time on Gigha drew to a close, back on board Marine Scientist Holly gave a fascinating lecture on Scotland's marine biodiversity, revealing both the obvious and hidden abundance of life found along the west coast. Later, many guests headed out on deck for a wildlife watch as we sailed onward. While wildlife sightings were quiet on this particular afternoon, northern gannets and common guillemots were among the species spotted either sitting on the water or zipping through the skies. Our day concluded beautifully with scenic sailing through the Sound of Islay. At only 1.4km wide, with Islay to the west and Jura to the east, it was a wonderful way to bring our day to a close, as we watched the sun set behind the rolling hills of this truly beautiful landscape.





Inner Seas

Tobermory

Loch Linnhe

Mull

Staffa

Baile Mòr

Oban

Inveraray

Scalasaig

Loch Fyne

Bowmore

Dunoon Greenock

Loch Indaal

Ardminish

Port Ellen

Rothsay

Fairlie Fairlie

Brodick Bay

Irvine Kilmarnock

Legend

HX Expedition

10 km

© Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

Day 5 - Tobermory, Mull

We arrived in Tobermory on the Isle of Mull under mild conditions, with light rain drifting across the harbour during the morning. Despite the grey start, guests were soon ashore exploring the colourful waterfront town and surrounding landscapes, enjoying another memorable day in the Scottish Isles.

Many guests joined the Expedition Team hike to the Tobermory Lighthouse, following the scenic coastal route overlooking the Sound of Mull. Others chose to make the walk independently, taking their time to enjoy the views along the way. A lucky few were even rewarded with sightings of seals swimming in the sound during their walk. Excursions throughout the day included guided walks around this charming town, and trips further afield to Duart Castle, the historic home of Clan Maclean.

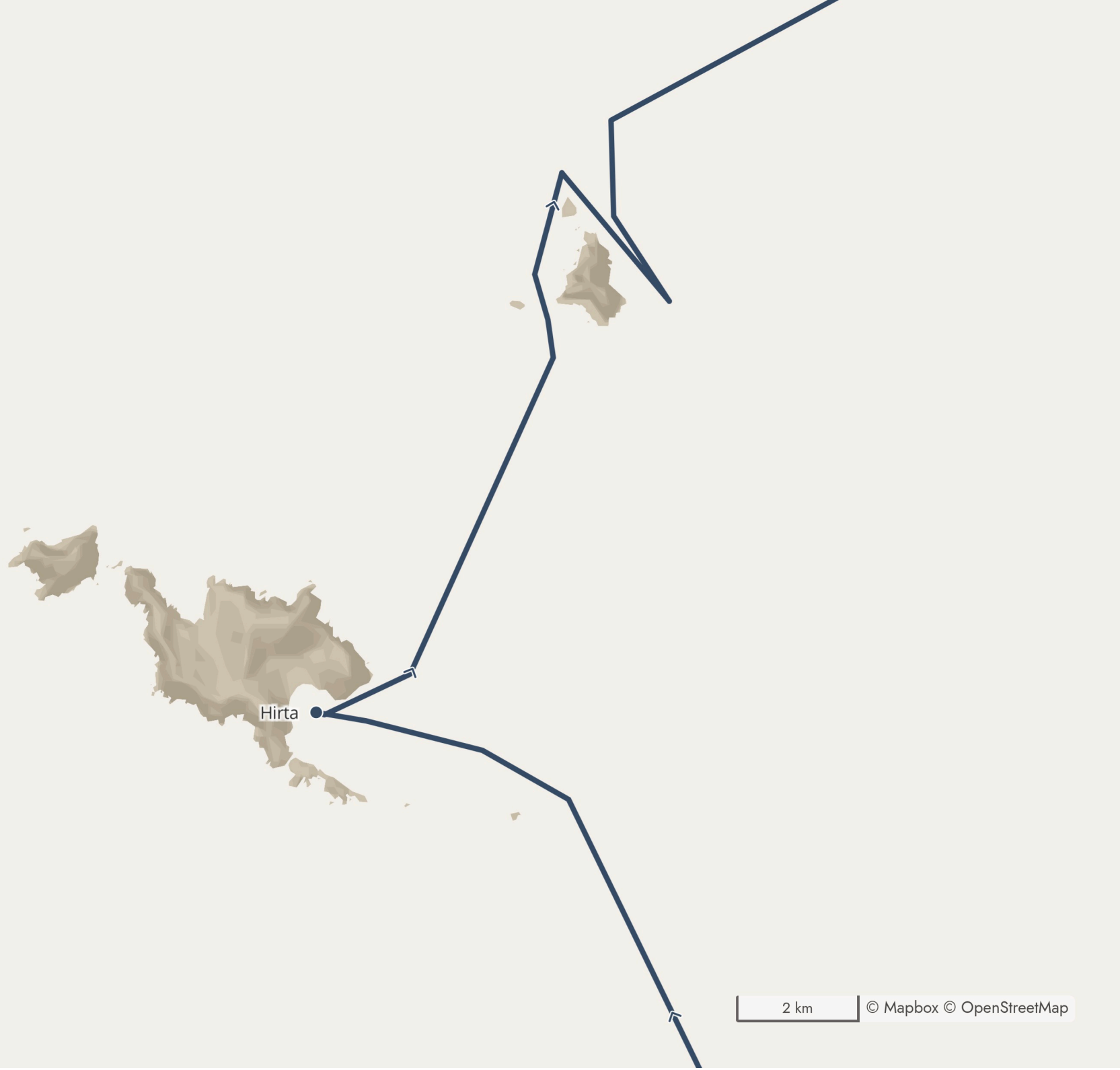
As the day progressed, the weather steadily improved, with brighter skies and pleasant conditions arriving by the afternoon. Guests made the most of the sunshine, wandering through Tobermory's charming streets, browsing local craft shops, cafés, bookstores, and enjoying the relaxed atmosphere of this iconic Hebridean harbour town.

Back on board in the evening, we were treated to a special performance by the Mull Gaelic Choir. Their traditional songs and warm atmosphere created a memorable ending to another wonderful day exploring Scotland's western isles as we continued our voyage northward. Tonight we also learned that we would be sailing over to St Kilda during the night! We settled down for another night of sleep on the MS Spitsbergen as we sailed towards tomorrow's adventures.



Legend

— HX Expedition



Day 6 - Hirta and Boreray, St Kilda

We awoke to a morning that was much the same as the ones before. Grey skies, drizzle, and thick fog surrounded the ship on our approach to St Kilda. Slowly, the dark outlines of the archipelago emerged through the mist, creating a dramatic and mysterious first glimpse of these remote islands. As always, all eyes turned towards the Bridge and Expedition Team as we waited to see if conditions would allow us ashore. Thankfully, after careful assessment, it was all systems go.

While the Expedition Team prepared the landing site on Hirta, local ranger Vivi came on board to share fascinating stories about the history of St Kilda, its remarkable wildlife, and what life was like for the isolated community who once called these islands home. Soon afterwards, it was time to board the Zodiacs and head ashore.

The hikers adapted their route due to the heavy fog, but the mist only added to the atmosphere, creating a magical feeling as the group moved together through the landscape. Others spent the day exploring Hirta at their own pace, wandering through the remains of

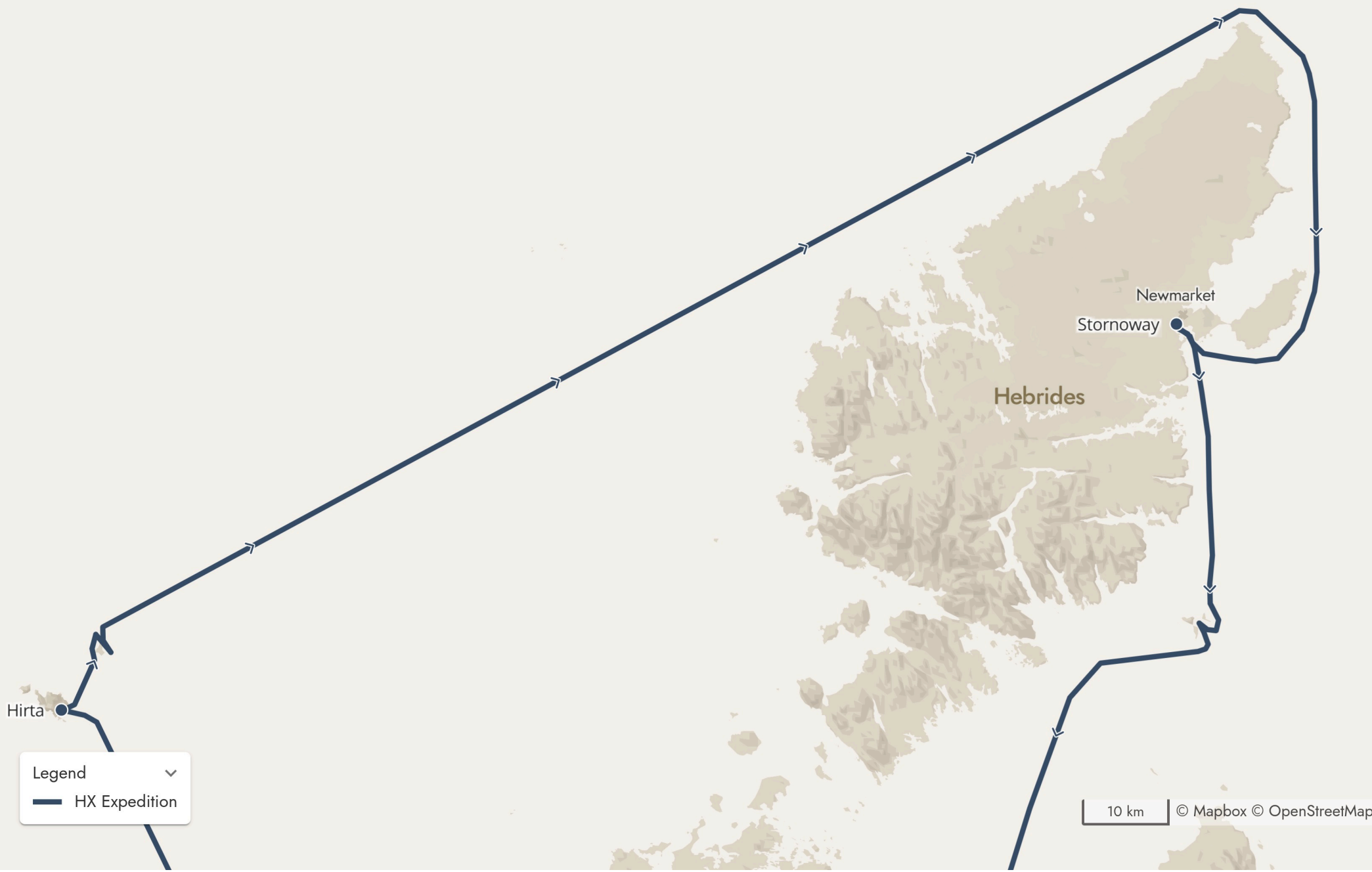
the ancient village and joining nature and history walks led by the Expedition Team. Wildlife highlights included fulmars gliding effortlessly around the cliffs and the distinctive calls of the endemic St Kilda wren hidden among the stone walls. Even the Zodiac ride back to the ship became part of the adventure, with puffins resting peacefully on the water beside us.

True to Hebridean form, the weather began to improve just as it was time to depart. The skies brightened, the seas calmed, and we sailed onward towards Boreray and its spectacular sea stacks. Along the way, HX Ambassador Monty Halls gave a fascinating lecture about his experiences living as a crofter in the Hebrides. Almost perfectly timed, the towering stacks appeared outside the windows just as the lecture ended. Home to more than 40,000 gannets, the cliffs were alive with birds soaring through the remaining mist, creating one of the most memorable scenes of the voyage.

Following another delicious dinner in Aune, we gathered for our daily 'Plans for Tomorrow' briefing before Andres delivered an engaging

Tiny Talk on bird navigation. Reflecting on another truly unforgettable day, we eventually headed to bed ready for tomorrow's adventures.





Hirta

Newmarket

Stornoway

Hebrides

Legend



— HX Expedition

10 km

© Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

Day 7 - Stornorway, Lewis and Harris, and the Shiant Islands

We arrived in Stornoway under bright sunshine and a fresh breeze, a beautiful welcome to the Isle of Lewis and Harris. With a full day ashore ahead of us, there was plenty of time to explore the town, join excursions, and soak in the atmosphere of the Outer Hebrides.

Guests joining the guided walk through town learned about Stornoway's rich history from local guides, wandering through the charming streets before finishing at the impressive grounds of Lews Castle. Others ventured further into the traditions of Lewis and Harris, discovering crofting life, weaving, and the skills behind the famous Harris Tweed, while some visited a traditional Blackhouse village for a glimpse into island life of the past.

The sunshine stayed with us throughout the afternoon, making it the perfect opportunity to continue exploring the castle grounds or browse the local shops filled with tweed, crafts, and regional

delicacies. Back on board later in the day, many joined the onboard programme, from knot workshops with the Activity Team to a fascinating session on marine animal acoustics with Marine Scientist Holly and Environmental Scientist David's lecture on Scottish geology.

As evening settled in, we sailed away from Stornoway and towards the dramatic Shiant Isles. After another delicious dinner, many wrapped up warmly and headed out on deck to enjoy the spectacle of countless puffins and seabirds darting around the cliffs. To make the evening even more memorable, a few lucky observers also spotted majestic white-tailed eagles soaring nearby. With the sun setting over the islands as we sailed on, it was a fitting end to another wonderful day of culture, wildlife, and exploration in the Scottish Isles.





Sgurr Dearg

Glenelg

Loch Scavaig

Elgol

Loch Eishort

Sound
of Sleat

Rùm National
Nature Reserve

The Small Isles
National Scenic Area

Mallaig

Morar

Loch Morar

Arisaig

Muck

Legend

— HX Expedition

5 km

© Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

Day 8 - Loch Scavaig, Skye (AM)

Gone was the bright sunshine from the previous day, replaced instead by what could only be described as proper Scottish weather. Rain and mist greeted us as we arrived at Loch Scavaig, with low clouds and fog wrapping themselves around the dramatic peaks of the Black Cuillin mountains. The ever-changing conditions gave the landscape an almost mysterious atmosphere as we prepared for our morning activities.

Our more adventurous hikers headed off on a trek around Loch Coruisk, while others explored the landing site or joined a scenic cruise to admire this spectacular corner of Skye from the water. Throughout the morning the fog drifted in and out, teasing us with brief glimpses of the towering mountains surrounding the loch before

hiding them once again behind a curtain of mist. Even in the rain, there was something unforgettable about being immersed in such wild and rugged scenery. Wildlife added to the experience, with sightings of red deer along the shoreline and several common seals hauled out quietly on the rocks. Though the weather left many of us thoroughly soaked, it also made the experience feel all the more authentic, a true taste of Scotland. Eventually we made our way back to the warmth and comfort of the ship, grateful for a chance to dry off and enjoy a well-earned lunch on board.

During the afternoon sailing, many gathered to join Marine Scientist Holly for a fascinating lecture on Scotland's marine megafauna as we continued onwards towards our next destination, the Isle of Eigg.



Day 8 - Isle of Muck (PM)

By mid-afternoon we arrived off the beautiful Isle of Eigg, but unfortunately the swell around the ship made it unsafe for us to launch the Zodiacs. Not ready to give up on the afternoon's plans, the Expedition Team and Bridge Team quickly worked together on a Plan B. Instead of remaining at Eigg, we sailed towards the smallest of the Small Isles, the peaceful Isle of Muck, in the hope that conditions there would allow us to get out on the water.

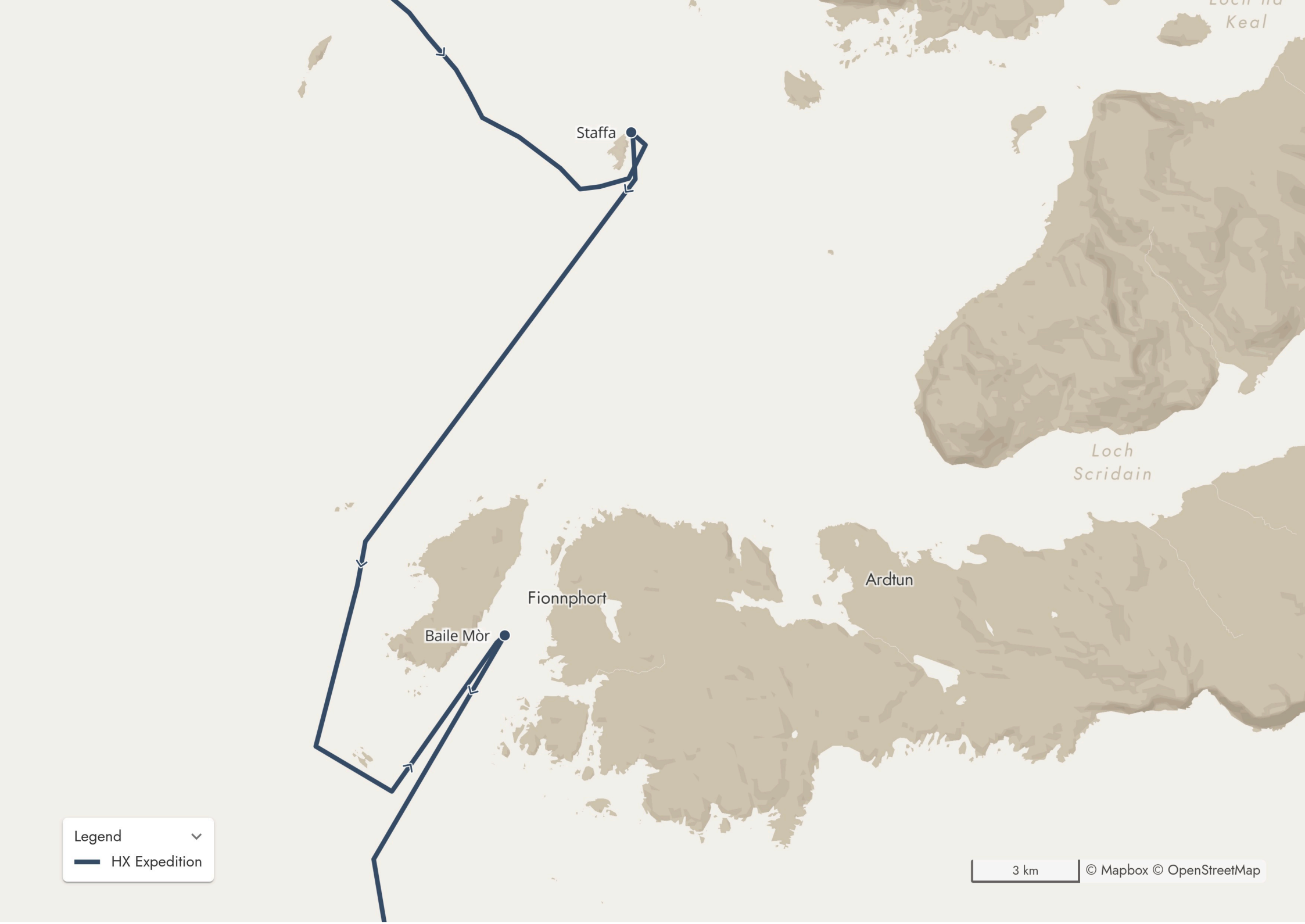
The difference could hardly have been greater. Upon arrival, we were greeted by calm seas and barely any wind at all. After the wet conditions of the morning, many were simply happy to head outside without their waterproof clothing being put to the test yet again.

However, the weather quickly became secondary as everyone's attention turned to the incredible wildlife spectacle unfolding around us. Hundreds upon hundreds of Manx shearwaters filled the area, gliding effortlessly over the surface of the sea in tightly coordinated groups as they searched for food. Watching these remarkable seabirds skim the water at high speed was truly mesmerising.

The wildlife surprises did not end there. From the upper decks of MS Spitsbergen, several guests managed to spot the distant backs of minke whales further away, while those joining the Zodiac cruises enjoyed unforgettable eye-level encounters with the shearwaters. Some were even lucky enough to have a curious grey seal pop up nearby to inspect our boats before disappearing once again beneath the calm waters.

Although the afternoon had not unfolded quite as originally planned, it became another reminder that some of the most memorable moments of expedition travel often come from the unexpected. Back on board, we rounded off the day with a beautiful seafood buffet in the Aune restaurant before gathering for the HX Foundation auction presented by Monty Halls. It was wonderful to see so many joining in, showing their support, and helping raise funds for worthwhile causes. After such a long and eventful day, many were more than ready for a good night's sleep ahead of tomorrow's adventures.





Staffa

Loch
Scridain

Ardtun

Fionnphort

Baile Mòr

Legend

— HX Expedition

3 km

© Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

Day 9 - Staffa (AM)

This morning brought a slightly different start to our day. Instead of our usual pattern of a morning landing, we opted for an exciting Zodiac cruise around the iconic island of Staffa. Conditions were certainly lively, with a large swell rolling through the area, but thanks to careful work from the Bridge and Expedition Teams we were able to position the ship safely and begin operations. While boarding the Zodiacs at the tender pit proved a little challenging, conditions out on the water were thankfully much more comfortable.

Almost immediately we were surrounded by wildlife, with puffins filling the skies and bobbing gently on the surface around us. The close-up views of these charismatic seabirds delighted everyone as they flapped busily between the cliffs and the sea. Yet Staffa had even more to reveal. Our Zodiacs continued towards the dramatic southern

side of the island, where we approached the famous Fingal's Cave. Here the swell was at its strongest, creating an unforgettable spectacle as waves crashed against the basalt cliffs and surged into the cave itself. Combined with the mist and fog drifting through the area, the dramatic atmosphere added to the magic of the experience.

As the morning progressed, the waves slowly began to increase, and by the time the final Zodiacs returned to the ship, the swell had certainly gotten more challenging. It seemed we had finished our cruising just in time! With everyone safely back on board, we set sail once again, heading through thickening fog towards our next destination, the renowned Isle of Iona, hopeful that the weather would allow us to make our landing later in the day.



Day 9 - Baile Mòr, Isle of Iona (PM)

By the afternoon we arrived at the beautiful and historic Isle of Iona, though it greeted us hidden beneath thick layers of fog. Visibility came and went throughout the approach, giving the landscape a mysterious atmosphere as the outline of the island slowly appeared and disappeared once again into the mist. With the effort of the Bridge Team, they positioned the ship well enough for us to proceed with our landing despite the swell, and soon Zodiacs were shuttling everyone ashore to explore.

Many guests took the opportunity to wander through the peaceful village and along the quiet shoreline, while others visited the famous Iona Abbey, learning about the island's deep spiritual and historical significance. Founded by St Columba in the 6th century, the abbey has long been regarded as one of the most important religious sites in Scotland, and the fog surrounding the ancient stone buildings only seemed to add to the sense of atmosphere and timelessness.

Despite the grey skies and drifting mist, it was surprisingly warm, and

there was something truly special about exploring Iona in such conditions. The soft sound of waves along the shore and the quiet stillness of the island created a memorable experience for everyone. Many guests enjoyed browsing the small shops filled with local crafts, while others took part in the afternoon hike with Activity Guides Carlos and Marcus. Back near the landing site, there was also time for some tide pooling with Science and Education Coordinator Charlotte, who was eager to show those who joined which marine creatures were hiding between the rocks.

By the time we arrived back on board, it was time for dinner and our usual 'Plans for Tomorrow'. But, instead of a Tiny Talk we were treated with an in-house cabaret spectacular from crew members Jofel and JR. And what a night it was! We sang and danced the night away, to hits ranging from 'Money Money' and, of course, 'YMCA'. After a few 'last songs' it was time for Jofel and JR to finish their set, as we headed off to bed ready for our last day of adventure in the Scottish Isles.





Inveraray

Loch Lomond and The
Trossachs National Park

Aberfoyle

Loch Fyne

Dunoon

Greenock

Bearsd

Rothsay

Paisley

Scalasaig

Bowmore

Loch Indaal

Ardminish

Port Ellen

Fairlie

Fairlie

Irvine

Kilmarnock

Brodick Bay

Ayr

Campbeltown

Firth of
Clyde

Legend



— HX Expedition

10 km

© Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

bellbank

Day 10 - Scalasaig, Colonsay

This morning, we finally awoke to sunshine, a truly great way to start our last day of exploration! The fog that there was burned off throughout the morning, leaving us with calm seas, blues skies, and that early summer feeling. There was an opportunity to enjoy the beautiful weather by taking a walk to the Colonsay Botanical Gardens. Anyone could join a relaxed, easy-paced walk led by Andres from the Expedition Team, who guided those interested along the way.. Once up at the gardens, there was plenty of time to explore and marvel at the range of botanical species able to live here due to Colonsay's climate. Just north of the gardens, Kiloran Bay, with its beautiful white sand and dunes, was visited by a few guests, including those on today's hike.

This break in the weather also allowed us to get three science boats out on the water, an opportunity many guests had been waiting for. Back on board in the afternoon, it was the perfect time to have our science boat review. Using the microscopes, we were able to see just what types of creatures we had caught in our samples, with many species of plankton being identified. Many guests would certainly

look at the ocean in different light after discovering the abundance of life hiding beneath the waves!

To finish our afternoon here, we also enjoyed some traditional folk music from some Colonsay locals, a lovely way to end our time before we departed. A lovely sailing through the Sound of Islay late afternoon was the perfect backdrop to our 'What did we see' session with the Science & Education Team as we reflected on the wildlife, culture, and history we had been fortunate enough to experience this voyage.

All too soon, it was time for the 130th Anniversary dinner in the Aune restaurant, where the galley team demonstrated their skill showcasing many classic Norwegian dishes with a modern twist. Then, it was time to gather one last time for the Captain's Farewell and Kay's photography slideshow, the best way to finish what had been a voyage full of adventure, new experiences, and hopefully, many fond memories.





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 the Expedition Team, and to the 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 harbor of Tobermory and the peaceful atmosphere

of the Isle 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, we hope they carried with them many fond memories of rugged landscapes, welcoming island communities, and the unique spirit of the Hebrides; memories that will remain long after the voyage itself has ended.



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