

Chesapeake Paddler



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Sheep may safely graze where an accordion plays photo by May Win

A Baltimore Pirate In Scotland

by May Win

Scotland: Land of lochs, legends, islands, and highlands: what better way to experience it than by kayak? As the sole American among four Brits, I was a curiosity. Why had I come so far? After our pick-up, we put in for a half-day paddle in our P&H Capellas on Loch Torridon in the North West Highlands. Carol and Dave, our two guides, assessed our skill levels and reviewed safety procedures. Dinner at the bunkhouse was family style, with all pitching in to help.

Our first full day was bright and clear. We would paddle from Applecross, on the mainland, to Skye. Carol had never done this paddle before due to poor weather conditions. We rounded a rocky outcropping, and suddenly there was music. A man strolled by a ruin, playing an accordion as sheep grazed in the field nearby. The sky was darkening ahead, and the wind suddenly picked up. We headed for the open water crossing, buffeted by cross-winds. Three of us crossed quickly. The others had stopped—had someone fallen over? When the others arrived, they told us that 20-30 dolphins accompanied them through the

crossing, then disappeared. Paddling fast had been a distinct disadvantage. We paddled onto Skye for lunch, landing on a bed of floating seaweed. Carol surprised us with supplies for hot soup, tea, and coffee. Meanwhile, a lone seal watched from the water. Heading back to Applecross, the seal followed, popping up periodically to stare at us. On shore, we hurriedly changed, somewhat sheltered by our van, which was fortunate for those who lacked undergarments. Dinner was at a local pub, well-stocked with whiskey (DON't call it Scotch), of course.

We woke to gray skies and wind. Carol took us to sheltered Loch Shieldaig to teach skills: strokes and edging. Because of the steady wind, we attempted to kayak sail. Of course, as soon as the sail was out, the wind died down. Above us, the elusive local sea eagle darted by, chased by gulls.

The next day, we drove to our second base. It was cold and pouring rain. We did not relish a paddle in that. As we arrived at our launch in Arisaig, on the West Coast, the skies cleared and bright sunshine greeted us. We headed for the skerries, small rocky islands scattered around the channel. After exploring on our own, Carol gathered us together for a paddle into the bay. We rode the long swells, searching for dolphins. As we entered the southern skerries, an otter skittered away ahead of us. As we slowly paddled, the first head appeared, then another and another. Over 15 seals surrounded us, popping up to stare then disappearing with a loud sigh. We drifted, mesmerized, as the seals "danced" around us. Gradually as the shadows lengthened and temperature dropped, we reluctantly headed back in.



Lochs on our itinerary

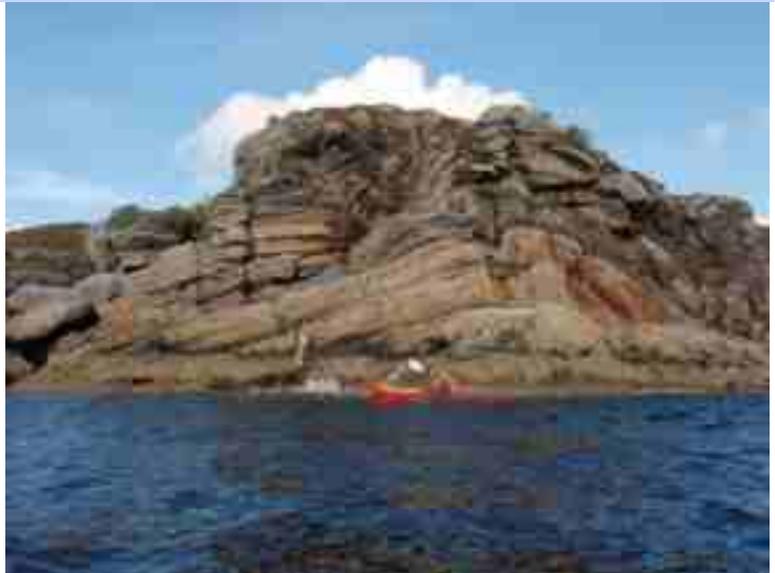
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A Pirate in Scotland (Continued from page 1)

The next morning, Carol discussed tides and winds. We were in for an interesting day on Loch nan Uamh: sunny, steady 25 mph winds, gusts to 35 mph. Carol and Dave stayed with the less experienced paddlers while allowing the rest of us to charge through the chop to pre-determined points. We swept by wind-carved limestone shoulders to a small cove. On shore, Carol gave us a "treasure" map which led us to a cave 12 meters up a rocky hill. Legend said Bonnie Prince Charlie hid there after a failed attempt to claim the English throne. We entered and tried to imagine spending months in the cramped, damp, dark cave.

At our lunch spot, we were in for another surprise. Dave led us through a small rocky ravine to a steep path up to a little fisherman's hut perched high above the beaches. Inside, protected from the rising winds, we munched our lunches as Chris, Richard, and Mike traded humorous barbs. Warm, rested, and full, we headed back down. The winds had picked up substantially. We launched quickly through 1 to 1.5 foot waves, quartering from the right, perfect conditions to play!



Loch nan Uamh, on the Treasure Hunt photo by May Win



Castle Tioram on Loch Moidart photo by May Win

The next day was cold, raining, with wind gusts to 27 mph: Typical Scottish weather. We headed to Loch Moidart. My kayak was again weighed down. Because of the adverse conditions, the guides taught us low braces. We practiced as we were buffeted around the cove. The rain was heavy enough to make seeing beyond our kayaks difficult. We stopped for lunch at a former heron colony on an island just as the sun broke through the clouds. We were cold and wet. Carol and Dave quickly built a fire for hot drinks. After lunch, we practiced side strokes and sweeps and searched unsuccessfully for otters. As we headed back, we paddled around the ruins of the Jacobite castle Tioram. The castle's claim to fame? It was featured in a Superman movie! Thanks to the retreating tide, we were faced with a portage of nearly 100 feet! Between fighting winds and dragging our kayaks so far, we were looking forward to a hearty meal. Our bunkhouse had a wonderful menu: Local seafood and North African food. As expected in Scotland, it also had a full array of whiskeys.

On our last day, we had strong winds again. We stayed in Glen Uig Bay, just outside our bunkhouse. As we rounded Samalaman Island, Dave asked if I thought the trip was worth the long journey over. I responded, without hesitation, "Absolutely," not only for the stunning scenery and challenging conditions, but because I also enjoyed the company of a wonderfully welcoming group of Brits.

This trip was done through Wilderness Scotland. Trips were 6-19 km, depending on weather conditions. Everything was included except dinner and drinks. Refreshingly, in Britain, tips were given by paying for the guides' dinner on the last night.

Website: <http://www.wildernessscotland.com/adventures.php?tripID=177>



May Win (center) and welcoming Brits on Glen Uig Bay photo by Carol Lang