

The Faroe Islands Expedition, 1979: the usefulness of class reunions

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A list of all University of Glasgow Exploration Society expeditions, focussing on their natural history interest, was compiled by Downie *et al.* (2018), from the first known (Canna, 1936) to the most recent. Glasgow Natural History Society has been a major supporter of these expeditions since the beginning of the Blodwen Lloyd Binns Bequest (Downie *et al.*, 2012). One of the sources of information on past expeditions was the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland which supplied records for all the expeditions which they had supported financially. In a few cases, the Carnegie grant was the only information available, since no expedition report had been deposited, as was the norm, in the University of Glasgow Library. One of those without any report was the expedition to the Faroe Islands in 1979.

In September 2019, the Zoology (and related subjects) class which completed their studies in 1979 held a class reunion, to celebrate 40 years since graduation. Roger Downie, along with several colleagues, was invited to attend and to give a short presentation. He talked about the development of the Exploration Society since their time, and happened to mention the missing Faroes report: did any of those attending the reunion know anything about it? Eyes lit up: three of them had been on the expedition and remembered many of the others who had participated. Some had good recollections of what they had done, and some even had photographs and other relevant material in their lofts.

The overall leader and instigator was Malcolm Beveridge, who had been completing his Ph.D. at the time, which explains the lack of a final report. Malcolm went on to an international career in fisheries and aquaculture, but is now back in Scotland, and was easily contacted via Colin Adams. Malcolm was very willing to contribute to a summary report from memory. Another team member, a junior honours level undergraduate in 1979, and now a senior staff member

at SEPA and GNHS Council member, was Myles O'Reilly. He was also able to provide some details and photographs, partly with the help of another team member, Matthew Service, an ecologist working at the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute in Northern Ireland. Another contributor to this article is Lesley Wiseman-Orr: Lesley was at the class reunion, and was able to find various records of the expedition, including her daily diary, which she has allowed to be copied for the Exploration Society archives. Lesley has enjoyed a varied career in publishing, science and education, and is currently an honorary research fellow and tutor in the University of Glasgow. All the collected material will be deposited in the archives. This paper provides a brief summary.

The expedition team (16 members including one post-doctoral fellow, one Ph.D. student and 14 undergraduates including two botanists – Anne and Laura - and 12 zoologists: Fig. 1) sailed from Scrabster in Scotland, via Kirkwall, Orkney and Lerwick, Shetland to Tórshavn, capital of the Faroe Islands on 17th July and stayed until 5th August (20 days). The team camped in the grounds of the Youth Hostel and were able to use its kitchen for catering and its toilets, shower and sauna. They did their own catering, supplemented by many samplings of the local pastries and coffees. The team even tried whale meat purchased locally which came as dark coal-like chunks of flesh along with pale potato-like lumps of blubber. No-one having any idea how to cook whale meat, the whole lot was stewed for hours in the youth hostel kitchen suffusing the entire hostel with a strong fishy smell. The hostel provided good interactions with other visiting groups from Newcastle and France. The expedition was funded by local Glasgow businesses, such as Tunnocks, as well as by the Carnegie Trust.



Fig. 1. The expedition team in front of Tórshavn youth hostel, Faroe Islands. Back row, left to right: Laura Vogt, Griselda Campbell, Anne Kominsky (?), Claire O'Brien, Margaret Muir, Kathryn Broadway, Lesley Orr, Clotilde Carlow, Susan Melrose, Tom Bladon, Malcolm Beveridge. Front row: Alister Hamilton, Peter Mayhew, Huw Smith, Matthew Service, Myles O'Reilly. (Photo: Clotilde Carlow)

The expedition worked on three main themes;

1. An investigation into hunting and killing methods of long-finned pilot whales (*Globicephala melas*), and an estimate of the numbers being killed.

It was also planned to collect whale teeth for age determination and examine whale stomachs for the presence of squid beaks to contribute to a study at Plymouth Marine Laboratory. However, no major pilot whale kill (known locally as a *grindadráp*) happened during the expedition, although landing and processing of fin whales (*Balaenoptera physalus*) did happen and was observed (Fig. 2). Some baleen plates from old whale skulls beached near the processing station were collected. The whale team, led by Malcolm Beveridge, carried out attitude surveys among the local people without experiencing any hostility, although the Scottish students were looked at suspiciously when observing whale processing. Faroese whaling was internationally notorious, and it was anticipated that the local people would be defensive and possibly unwilling to speak about it.



Fig. 2. Captured fin whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*) at the whaling station, Faroe Islands, ready to be processed. (Photo: Matthew Service)

2. A study on the prevalence of the parasitic nematode *Anisakis* spp. in Atlantic cod (*Gadus morhua*) processed at a commercial plant in Tórshavn.

The parasite can enter the human food chain through the eating of raw or under-cooked cod. The team, led by Dr Huw Smith, sampled from processed and unprocessed fish, searched local literature, visited hospitals and spoke to staff, who confirmed the occasional incidence of *Anisakis* infection in the human population. Huw was motivated to undertake this study by finding patients at Stobhill Hospital in Glasgow, with stomach problems related to eating infected fish. Huw Smith went on to a distinguished career in parasitology, founding and directing the Scottish Parasite Diagnostic Laboratory, before sadly dying at the early age of 63 (Innes *et al.*, 2011). Team member Margaret Muir remembers horrifying her parents back home by finding worm cysts in fish purchased from the local fishmonger. Team member Clotilde Carlow was so inspired by the work that she proceeded to a career in human parasitology, via a Ph.D. at the London School of

Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and then to New England Biolabs.

3. Observations on kleptoparasitism (food-stealing) by skuas.

The bird team, led by Myles O'Reilly and Peter Mayhew, visited several of the archipelago's 18 islands, but skuas were hard to spot, and the team resorted to making general records of seabird occurrence instead. Myles kept a daily record of species encountered, mainly birds but also mammals, plants and other taxa. Puffins were very abundant on some of the islands. Peter went on to a Glasgow Ph.D. and then a career in wildlife conservation with the RSPB.

Lesley Wiseman-Orr's diary gives a vivid account of the expedition's daily activities, describing the beauty of the islands, the occasional awfulness of the weather, local festivities and the surprising ease of getting around. The team hired a car for longer journeys, but it was often possible to hitch-hike, with local people very willing to go out of their way. However, in those pre-mobile phone days, arranging appointments to meet people was often very frustrating. The enthusiastic reaction of the reunion participants to the mention of the expedition, 40 years on, was testament to the impact of the expedition experience, as documented in detail by Harper *et al.* (2017). We hope that reports on some of the other "missing" expeditions (Czechoslovakia, 1975; Pyrenees, 1975; Crete, 1980; Morocco, 1973; South Uist, 1980) turn up eventually.

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