



Bahá'í Journal UK

Journal of the Bahá'í Community of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
May 2001 / 158BE

Travel Teaching and Homefront Pioneering

Island Hopping in the Western Isles

by Jeremy Fox

Jeremy Fox, who has recently returned to the UK from his pioneer post in France, and his daughter, Nickie, went travel-teaching to the Western Isles and sent this report...

Mainly for convenience sake and to gain time Nickie and I flew to Stornoway. Regretfully, there was too much cloud to be able to appreciate all that beauty below us. Once we landed, Nickie was whisked away to the Emersons' house, to join the youth dance group. Meanwhile I went off to Ray and Mina Sheppards' at Point and after lunch indulged in a particularly typical island winter activity - a bring and buy sale in aid of Bethesda Old Peoples' home. A queue built up in the fairly bitter wind whistling round the Primary School and no-one was slow to enter and pay their £2 entrance fee (or was it £3? Ray paid it anyway!).

Ray explained the rules of the game to me. You try to get round as quickly as possible pressing your way gently under all those bodies (what's the limit of pressing gently?) to check out anything interesting in case you lose it to some other eager beaver. This happened to me with the cakes, many of which looked disastrously wonderful, but thank God I resisted for a good while and by the time I was weakening the ones I'd had my eye on had gone.

More advice for travellers

As it turned out I needn't have worried about the cakes. It seems the entrance fee includes tea and cakes, as much as you want, and apparently both Ray and I wanted. When you are travelling I find it's best to forget any rules you may observe when at home about eating between, or even during meals. In fact we needed them because once outside again the wind was what they call a lazy one, it can't be bothered to go round you so it goes straight through.

We walked, rather than wait for the bus, because, unlike the mainland, buses on the islands stop where requested and: the only snag being it can only stop to pick you up if it's there, which it wasn't. Ray, being a compulsive buyer, was much more heavily laden than me, and not so keen on walking. Eventually, when I was just beginning to think this wasn't really all that enjoyable a lady with a nice big four-wheel drive stopped and gave us a lift. "There's civilized we are", as they say in Wales, where we'll be going in Spring.

Next morning we gathered at the Emersons' house. They and Nickie had been busy designing a beautifully artistic arrangement of chocolates, sweets and fruit from the mainland.

Then we tackled the first of the workshops for the islands:

- Your five year / twenty year vision for yourself (not an easy, or even necessarily an agreeable task for some!)
- for the island
- for the Bahá'í community on the island... Needless to say we never finished the workshop, but ideas and feelings soon poured forth, Nickie busy noting them all. Then, next evening, our old friend, Ian

Stephen, Stornoway's Poet Laureate, came and picked us up to savour his cooking (or was it his wife, Barbara's?). Anyway it was delicious and plentiful. The killer was that their youngest son had recently learned about making milk shakes including large quantities of ice cream. An experimental kiwi fruit concoction first of all. It was good. Then the well-tried quadruple chocolate one which was even better, but definitely the limit.

Contents Page

Regular Features

- Bahá'í World Centre
- National Assembly
- Regional Councils
- BOREA
- International Travel Teaching & Pioneering
- Travel Teaching and Homefront Pioneering and Advice for travellers
- Youth Space
- International News
- Letters
- UK Community News

Highlights

- Social Transformation
- Island Hopping
- Beyond Words
- UK Community History
- How I became a Bahá'í

- Archives Index

Ian gave us a book of his poetry which included one that speaks of Denise's (my late wife) cooking, and a CD from a project about fishing on Mull where half the voices were ex-pupils of mine from long ago. I showed him slides of when he was a young, long-haired youth. A lovely evening.

Next day, Mina Sheppard took Nickie and I to Alma Gregory's grave and that of Henry Baker too and we said prayers.

Monday came and I was supposed to make my way down to North Uist, but the snow and gale prevented the ferry from sailing, so MacBraynes advised me to stay where I was. I had spent at least half a day trying to work out my journey down to Barra. You need more than a degree to come to grips with these timetables with their endless footnotes.

There are two boats you cannot rely on and each solution seemed to involve one vital stop where the bus connections broke down and obliged you to spend a night in a B & B. Anyhow, on Tuesday I made my way down to N. Uist.

George Macdonald came and picked me up off the ferry and I got to see the curious landscape of that area, where the emphasis is on water. We took his dog for a walk over the peat bogs and managed a nice evening with George and Sheila and Lyndon Payne, looking at slides, George recognizing many of the youth from Stornoway in the mid-seventies, and we talked about the island, so if you fancy hunting mink, there may well be a job for you!

Benbecula to Barra

I eventually decided on the plane from Benbecula. George kindly took me, as the bus was scheduled to arrive shortly after the plane's departure! This is probably because the plane times vary: Barra is the only airport in Britain where the runway is a beach and flight times have to correspond to low tide. It was a dream of a flight, skimming over the coast of South Uist and other islands to Barra where I was the only passenger on the Post Office bus to Castlebay, the island's main town.

Paul and Irene Donnelly actually live on Vatersay which was only recently joined to Barra by a causeway. I enjoyed some idyllic walks and twice was able to perch on the top of a hill overlooking the sea and other islands to say the Fire Tablet, as promised to Christine St. Clair who is from Barra. Magical moments.

I showed my slides of French-speaking Africa to one of the French classes in the school. Also, while touring the island Paul took me to visit the local dentist and his wife, Robert and Jackie Macintosh, himself an incomer who had worked on the Turks & Caicos islands where he had met the Bahá'í community. They came to Paul's the next day for more African slides and we exchanged e-mail addresses.

Finally, I returned to the beach for the flight back to Glasgow. I went for a stroll among the millions of sea shells and was politely requested to get off the runway!

I then returned to the mainland, as if from another world, the only regret being that as we flew over Mull and perhaps my old home and, further down, Rhiannon (my other daughter), the cloud was thick and I had to just imagine it all.

Throughout the trip the quote that kept trotting through my mind was that lovely call to adventure: *"The movement itself, from place to place, when undertaken for the sake of God, hath always exerted, and can now exert, its influence in the world."*¹

So, I'd better keep moving... a rolling stone...

1. Bahá'u'lláh, *Advent of Divine Justice*, p.84