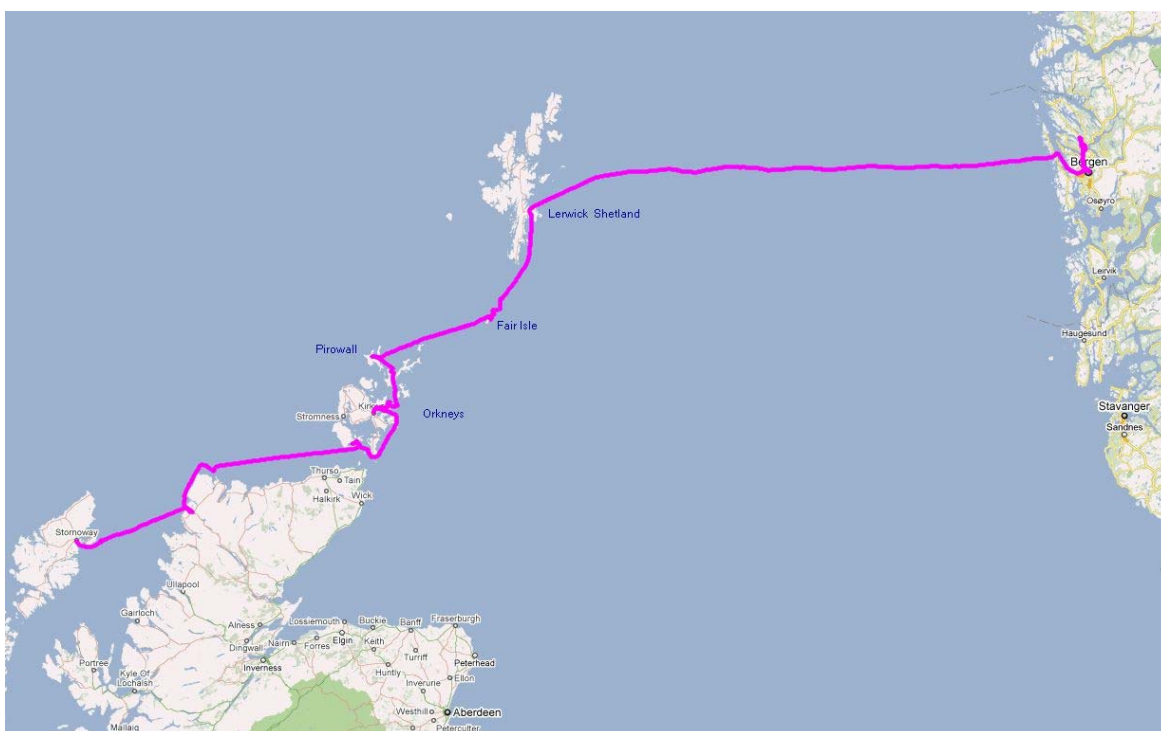


**1st Report: Litlebergen 60°32'26.8"N 5°14'19.1"E
Stornoway 58°12'37.5"N 6°23'23.5"W
March 1 to May 22 2010**

Route Overview



Wednesday, March 3. We left Switzerland by car after an eventful stay and reached Bergen by ferry from Hirtshals in the north of Denmark. The city was drowned in snow, a very unusual situation and not experienced in decades. Many roads were blocked and our little navigating machine despaired, since we could never follow its instructions. With the little bit of our geographical knowledge of the place and a good deal of luck we finally found our way out of the city and to Litlebergen, where



Reports Silmaril 2010

Silmaril lay in the snow-covered marina.

Our dear friends who work here and also live on their boat *Helmax* on the same pontoon had shoveled a narrow path up to the stern of *Silmaril*. We could reach her easily and found everything in good working order. Only the water hoses were all frozen and we had to rely on what was available!



The water problem was solved on the following day and we were happy to return to the comfort of cold and hot water from the tap in the pantry. Alex started work on the installation of the water maker and the generator. And with work and small outings the days passed swiftly.

Thursday, March 18. Alexander came to visit. He had never been to Bergen, so we took him to the city and showed him what we considered highlights: the medieval quarter Bryggen, the harbor, the university the aquarium and some cozy cafes.



Reports Silmaril 2010

After his visit, we returned to all kinds of chores. Alex tackled the task of making mooring lines out of 30 feet of rope that we had purchased on sale. He managed to form and sew one loop every night, since his hands needed at least 24 hours to recover from the taxing job.

Thursday, April 1. We started on our trip back to Switzerland. The weather was awful, cold and wet. In Bergen we were hit by a downright snow storm, but the passage to Hirtshals on the ferry was calm and very restful.

Our visit in Switzerland was crammed full with visits, doctors and dentists appointments and a short trip to the hospital in Interlaken, where the metal was removed from my leg. The surgery went well and we were supposed to leave again on the 20th. Volcanic ash in the atmosphere from an active volcano in Iceland caused all kinds of delays in northern Norway. We said goodbye to all our dear friends there. By Hurtigruten we returned to Bergen and started the preparations for the crossing of the North Sea to Shetland.

Tuesday, May 4. Finally the day of departure from our winter quarter had arrived. We left the pontoon, went to fill up diesel and teary-eyed waved to Raymond (hardly visible on the picture) until we could no longer see him.

We sailed to Bergen to fill up the gas bottles and to go on a last hike to the top of Mount Floyen.



The view was glorious and we looked and looked and looked. We had spent a great time in Norway and did not feel like leaving at all.



Reports Silmaril 2010

Wednesday, May 5. Our last day in Norway. We were very spoiled with last goodbyes: Swiss friends and three very dear Norwegian friends were there. We all spent a lovely evening on the boat of our Swiss friends Claudia and Ruedi

Thursday, May 6. At 08:30 last hugs with Claudia and Ruedi, 08:40 the mooring lines were taken in and we were on our way to Shetland. The weather was awful, snow prevented clear sight and almost no wind forced us to motor out of Bergen with last looks shrouded in snow or mist, the sky covered with dark low clouds. The very narrow waterway out to the open sea was full of turbulence and strong currents. Norway did not easily let us leave! With speed we passed through the rocky passage safely and were out on open water, leaving Norway for good. We saw the coastline for many more hours, but the bow definitely pointed toward Shetland.



The weather had improved considerably and toward midday we unfurled the genoa to sail more comfortably through the rather tall waves. We took turns keeping watch over the autopilot. Alex had the greater share, however. For the first time in my sailing career I felt nauseated when lying down in the boat. *Silmaril* was pitching and scending on the short steep waves and threw me up, down and to both sides in my bed in the fore cabin until my stomach turned. Back up on board I felt much better. Toward 14:00 we also set the main sail. For many hours we continued under full sails with a steady following wind. Now there was only water, looking ahead and back.

Reports Silmaril 2010

Toward the evening the sky was clear above us. Only toward Norway we could make out a bank of low clouds. In the deepening dusk we saw the first oil rigs, tall giraffes, brightly lit, some of them burning off adorning them with a huge torch on their heads.



We kept well away from them. It costs a fortune to approach them closer than 500m, since production is stopped for security reasons, if any vessel comes nearer. And never-ending water. We sailed all night long taking turns on watch every 1½ hours. It was so cold that we put on layers and layers of clothing until we could hardly fit into our oil skins. The heater was running all night long to give us the chance of warming up a little bit before the next watch.

Reports Silmaril 2010

The sun rose out of the water during my watch, a fiery ball climbing into the cloudless sky.



Alex was asleep down below and I did not wake him, but took a few pictures for his enjoyment.

A few birds circled the boat once in a while, otherwise water, water, water.



Reports Silmaril 2010

During the day the temperature rose to agreeable above zero degrees and Alex let the sun roast him.



Later on the wind decreased and we had to deviate from our ideal course due west. Unfortunately we had to run under motor for the last four hours.

Friday, May 7. Toward 18:30 local time Alex called the harbor authorities in Lerwick announcing our arrival. He received a friendly instruction where to go and when to complete what paperwork. A seal accompanied us from the approaches to the harbor almost to the pontoon at Victoria Pier. The harbor master had sent his apprentice to take our lines and to



Reports Silmaril 2010

hand over a city guide and various forms to be filled out eventually. We felt welcome and very happy to be here. Still in the process of clearing *Silmaril*, an elderly couple called us from the pier. They were friends of our friends in Norway. Ragnar and Jenny Mine had mailed them to inform them of our arrival and stay in Lerwick. Meg and Douglas received us like old friends and invited us to join them on Sunday for an extended drive through their country. What a welcome!

After a hearty dinner and a Shetland ale in a nice pub close to the harbor we crawled into our beds dead tired and were asleep in no time.

Saturday, May 8. We took a stroll through Lerwick and discovered a few very cozy corners.



From the Knab, a rocky outcrop, we enjoyed the wonderful view over the sea and the Isle of Bressay.

On our return, *Silmaril* was no longer the only boat at the pontoon. A Gib'Sea 472 lay behind her with a family of 5 on board. We exchanged greetings and questions about how to get an internet connection.



Reports Silmaril 2010

Sunday, May 9. Meg and Douglas picked us up for the tour around the main island.

Douglas is a tour guide and knows everything about his country. He showed us the place where our friend Ragnar in 1941 had landed together with 14 comrades after a 7-day passage from Norway in a small sail boat, fleeing from the Nazis, all of them absolutely inexperienced sailors, now half famished and hypothermic. We knew the story from Ragnar and were again deeply impressed.

After the tour we went to a charity tea, a weekly event in different locations, where people meet for tea, coffee and cake or a shopping stroll through the second hand bazaar to support a particular charitable organization.



Monday, May 10. Nanny and Michael arrived toward the evening. They will accompany us to Fair Isle, the Orkneys and the Outer Hebrides. We inaugurated our voyage with a good dinner in the Queen's Hotel.

Reports Silmaril 2010

Tuesday, May 11. We stayed in Lerwick for another day and visited the Jarlshof, a prehistoric and Norse settlement at the southern tip of the main island.



After a tour through the ruins in the rain, we walked along the beach to Old Scatness, where a group of young archeologists have unearthed a Stone Age settlement.



Reports Silmaril 2010

We had an excellent guide who explained and showed us details that we had never noticed without his expertise. The stones of all the structures are piled on each other, no mortar added. Large slabs form lintels for window and doors or their supports.



This picture shows part of the wall of a stable. The floor is layered, stone, manure, stone, manure. And the hole in the stone slab was presumably used to tie up animals.

There are two reconstructed houses. The first showed living quarters lighted with oil lamps and burning peat fires for cooking. The smoke and soot must have created a very unhealthy atmosphere.



Reports Silmaril 2010

The second house was rebuilt as a workshop where Theresa demonstrated a number of crafts, stone and wood carving, leather and wood work, spinning, weaving, and pottery.



She beamed at us and declared that she preferred working outside in the summer, since in winter smoke and dust from her work was affecting her in the small and dark working place.

We returned to Lerwick by bus and paid a visit to the new museum, where we ate lunch. nanny and Michael stayed there to see the exhibits, Alex and I walked to the small textile museum. I asked many questions about the wonderful Shetland shawls and the lady answered them very competently. Meanwhile, Alex talked to a group of men, not about textiles, who obviously waited for their wives as well.

Reports Silmaril 2010

Wednesday, May 12. Passage from Lerwick to Fair Isle. We started with very little wind and sunny weather. The light house at the tip of Bressay remained in our view for a long time.

the day passed very peacefully.



We reached the small north harbor on Fair Isle in the evening. The large supply ship *Good Shepherd* takes up a good proportion at the concrete pier. Since two other sailboats lay already moored, we tied up along side the larger one. The owners were out walking their dog. On their return we let them know that we would move *Silmaril* or use our own lines to make fast at the pier.

Reports Silmaril 2010

Nanny and I walked south along the road and saw sheep in great numbers, many of them with one or two lambs.



Seventy people live all year round on this tiny island in the middle of the North Sea. The landscape is bleak, brown, green or rocky grey as far as you can see. There are no trees, only heather, some small flowers and grass. The shore line is all rugged cliffs. It is truly a perfect place to raise sheep.



Michael and Alex went fishing, but no success. Before we started cooking our evening meal, we hauled *Silmaril* to the now free space between the *Good Shepherd* and our neighbor. With the tidal range of 2m to 3m we wanted to unburden his mooring lines and tie up with long lines directly to the pier.

Reports Silmaril 2010

Thursday, May 13. We took the whole day to explore the island. We climbed the hill behind the harbor and got really close to a large flock of puffins. The cutest of birds is my favored and we took many pictures.

They were still working on their nests in holes in the grass-covered rocks, flitting in with material in their beaks and out busily looking for additional suitable stuff. Here and there rabbits raced out of a hole. They obviously sort of cohabitate with the birds! Rabbits are a real pest on the island. The farmers try to get rid of them. But the numbers are so great that they would have to hire a full-time rabbit catcher in order to eliminate them. And that, of course, is too expensive.



Back at the boat, Michael decided to go fishing again and we three went on a long hike way up to the light house on another hill and to the huge fog horn on the promontory. The horn used to be operated by a massif steam generator housed in the hut below it. Today this one and many others are only on exhibit in the outdoor museums around various lighthouses.



Reports Silmaril 2010

Far down on a rock in the sea we observed a group of sunbathing seals.



We walked through vast fields and came across a few small lakes where many scuas swam. A little way up the hill we met a couple that let us come really close before they ran and flew away. They were not aggressive at all, but during breeding season they attack people plummeting from high up and aiming at the head. This couple was either too young to breed and feel threatened or simply friendly and able to avoid confrontation.



Reports Silmaril 2010

Higher up, we could still see the light house and the fantastic "water works" below it on the rocky shore.



Cloudy skies and bizarre rock formations added to the enchanted landscape of this very special island.



Reports Silmaril 2010



Friday, May 14. We got up at 06:00 and left in the general direction of the Orkneys. The passage was rough. The wind was not too strong, but currents and waves caused unpredictable movements of *Silmaril*. Despite her diving and spraying us with the taller waves, she plowed through the water with 7 to 8 knots. Nanny and Michael were below deck when I suddenly saw four orcas and screamed. All four of us saw them then, coming up in long drawn wavy movements, turning away and diving. Of course no camera was ready to shoot.

After long hours on the water we touched at Westray of the Orkneys and made fast at the pontoon in Pierowall directly behind the tall pier to avoid the incoming surf. We went shopping and enjoyed an excellent dinner at the only hotel. Right behind it, an archeological museum was recently opened with exhibits on the findings of the ongoing excavations. A young scientist found a small earthenware female figure, a sensational find, at least here, since it is quite similar to the Venus of Willendorf. The locals lovingly call it "Westray wife".

Reports Silmaril 2010

Saturday, May 15. We decided to spend the morning exploring the surroundings and to leave towards evening and anchor in a bay further south. The local tour guide Graham took us in his van to Noup Head, a well known promontory with a light house and bird sanctuary. Graham told us many interesting things about the island, its farmers, the breeds of sheep and cattle, the prehistoric findings and above all the innumerable birds. He even showed us the nest of a pair of oyster catchers.



The excursion was fascinating and I exchanged a number of e-mails with Graham on birds, their names and behavior.

On our way to the anchoring place the men dropped hooks and regaled us with a scrumptious dinner.



Reports Silmaril 2010

We spent a wonderful evening on one of the guest buoys in Garrick Bay near Eday Island with a fabulous view on an old mansion and golden hedges of broom.



Sunday, May 16. We got up in time to catch the favorable direction of the current in the Shapinsay Sound. Calculations had been too conservative and we needed to wait for about two hours for the current to turn. We drifted and fished, but with no success.

The passage to Kirkwall, the capital of the Orkneys, was very enjoyable. We did our best to find the quickest route through the sound with its small islands, the capricious currents and unsteady winds attempting to beat another sailboat.

Well, he must have been a local with intimate knowledge of these waters. He arrived in Kirkwall way before us! No matter, we sailed all the way and had a great time admiring the gorgeous landscape and the famous castle of Balfour.



Reports Silmaril 2010

Monday, May 17. Sightseeing: Maes Howe, Stromness and the Ring of Brodgar. A taxi took us to those incredible places.

Maes Howe is a Neolithic chambered cairn and passage grave not far from Kirkwall. The round hill chamber was built around 5000 years ago of layered stone slabs, some of them huge and incredibly heavy. Today it looks like a green igloo on the flat land.



(picture from Wikipedia)

Years ago, I had visited this place on an excursion with the university, but had forgotten many details about this amazing structure. The very narrow and low entrance tunnel forces visitors to almost crawl into the vault of the main chamber. Its walls are covered with innumerable runes that probably stem from Vikings who are said to have camped here in the 1150ties.

Three side chambers are situated a little higher than the ground of the main chamber. The guide mentioned many interesting facts and showed us a number of details, which we would hardly have noticed on our own. But many of our questions remained unanswered, simply because even the experts do not know what purpose the side chambers served, for example.

Reports Silmaril 2010

We crawled out of this awe-inspiring place speechless until a smelly herd of cattle munching grass all around this strange monument brought us back to reality.



A whole carton of brochures from the university excursions waited for me on *Silmaril* that helped me later on to recall many special moments and facts of the two-week excursion on Shetland and the Orkneys.

From Maes Howe the taxi brought us to Stromness, where we briefly explored the narrow alleys, lanes and streets looking for an Orkney curtsey flag, since it is a sign of special appreciation all over the UK not to fly merely the Union Jack! We found one and paid a fortune. Good for them, we really liked the islands, the Shetlands and the Orkneys and were glad to help them make some money here and there and later on in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

We also wanted to visit the boat of Eva and Greg, friends from Norway. *Noomi* lay safely tied up in the harbor and everything seemed just fine. The two had to leave the boat for many weeks, since Greg had to have a delicate operation.

Reports Silmaril 2010

And on we went to the Ring of Brodgar. Twenty-seven monumental stones are standing in a wide circle. Sixty of them were allegedly raised around 2700 B.C. No one can truly imagine how this spectacular ring of stones was built. We tried to absorb the atmosphere of the wonderful place and burn pictures into our memories.



On the way back to Kirkwall, the taxi dropped us off at the whiskey distillery Highland Park, the most northerly in Scotland. We stayed for a guided tour. A charming young woman explained the entire procedure of whiskey making from wheat to flask. It was very instructive and thoroughly enjoyable.

Reports Silmaril 2010

Back in the harbor, Nanny and Michael took a stroll to the fishing harbor and were presented with nineteen scallops fresh from the sea. Nanny prepared them and offered us a delicious dinner.



Tuesday, May 18. Departure for Long Hope on the island of Hoy. We sailed along impressive cliffs and through thrilling water conditions.



In front of the island of Hoy the sea bubbled, churned and boiled around us. The water pictures were amazingly manifold and complex. We observed whirlpools, eddies and standing waves across the entire sound. Such turbulence surprised us, since there was only little current at the time.

Reports Silmaril 2010



I could also feel the turbulences at the helm. Time and gain *Silmaril* seemed to be gingerly pushed and turned by a gentle sea monster.

Reports Silmaril 2010

On the way we came across this sea monster!



After several hours we left the turbulences in the sound and turned into the bay of Long Hope. We passed a series of canons placed on the very edge of the cliff and pointing at us, hopefully a mere decoration. The bay is rather shallow and I nearly drove over a sand bank. The harbor of Long Hope is tiny. The rescue boat nearly fills it. We finally made fast at the pier with very long lines to various points to allow for the tidal amplitude. The slippery stone stairs descending down into the water was quite an obstacle on our way to the top of the pier. But we reached firm ground safely and were able to install a shore cable from a plug in the shed on the pier. Luckily the ferry and the local fisherman moor outside the harbor proper.

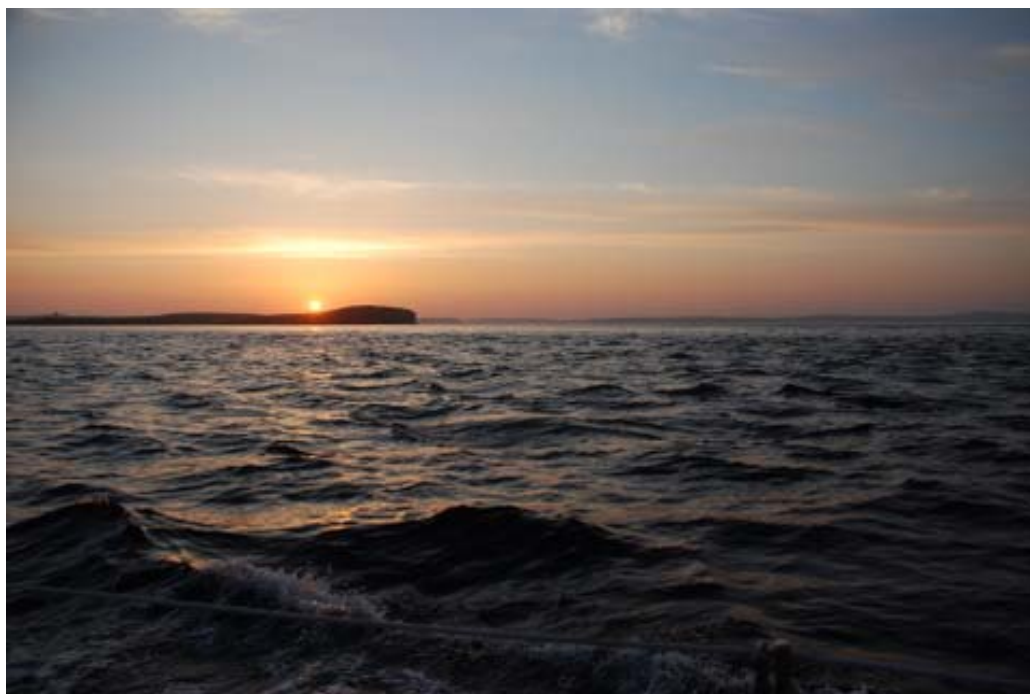


Reports Silmaril 2010

We went to eat in the nearby pub. The grill outside was already laden with hamburgers. Unfortunately they were not for guest consumption. But they still added a few and served them to us at no cost except the ale we drank, wonderful insular hospitality.



Wednesday, May 19. Bugle call at 03:00, departure at 04:25. The Pentland Firth is notorious for its extremely strong currents. We wanted them with us at the high cost of sleeping so little. Alex and Nanny had calculated the best time for leaving and that turned out to be 04:30. And indeed, we noted speed of up to 11.5 knots over ground. Despite good conditions it was going to be a long day.



After the magnificent sunrise, division of labor on board became vital. We all were tired after a short night's sleep.

Reports Silmaril 2010



Nanny took the helm . . .



and Michael the assistant's job.

Reports Silmaril 2010

Alex hoisted the Scottish flag, although the Scottish mainland was still far off. And I went to sleep.



We had planned to round Cape Wrath, the northwestern tip of the Scottish mainland, and maybe head directly toward the isle of Lewis of the Outer Hebrides. Unfortunately the wind died and we had to run the engine for quite some time.

But finally, toward 15:30 we had Cape Wrath behind us.



Reports Silmaril 2010

The wind was still not worth its reputation for these waters. So, we headed for Loch Laxford on the mainland instead of crossing the Minch to Lewis. It was a good choice. We sailed deep into the Loch along its colorful rocky shores.



Reports Silmaril 2010

Way back towards its end we found good anchoring ground near a mussel's farm. After a few unsuccessful tries the anchor caught and we experienced a glorious evening.



All four of us kept taking pictures of the ever-changing colors in the sky, on the surrounding cliffs and on the water.





Reports Silmaril 2010

Thursday, May 20. After a peaceful night we left for the isle of Lewis, the most northerly of the Outer Hebrides. There was not a breath of wind in the Loch. Out on the Minch between mainland and the island it freshened up somewhat from the south and we made good passage. Later on it started to rain and for the dense fog we saw the island only when we had almost reached its shores. In driving rain and very strong wind we fought our way along the southern shore toward Stornoway. *Silmaril* resembled a wild horse on the tall waves, pitching and scending dreadfully, but to my relief still accurately responding to the rudder, keeping a more or less steady course.

Mooring her in the narrow harbor at low water and with much more wind than desirable proved a bit difficult. But with the help of the harbor master and the joint effort of all on board we succeeded tolerably.

So, we had arrived, intended to fill diesel and water and talk about destinations for the remaining days until our departure for Switzerland to attend the wedding of Connie and Nino on the 27th. However, British Airways thwarted our plans. Owing to strikes, many flights were cancelled and we were worried to miss the wedding. We had dinner in a pub and decided to return to Switzerland as soon as possible.

Friday, May 21. Alex managed to rebook our flights to tomorrow Saturday, We filled the day with walks through the city and preparations to leave *Silmaril* for the time of our absence.

Saturday, May 22. Breakfast in the café, a short walk to the small market, meeting with Toni Morrison (not her!!), who had offered to look after *Silmaril* while we were gone and off we went in two taxis to the airport. Late that night we arrived in Untersiggenthal in our little rented apartment, safely back and in plenty of time for the three-day wedding on the coming Friday to Sunday.

Tuesday, June 1. Back in Stornoway after a short but wonderful stay in Switzerland. More in the 2nd report.

