

“Photographing the Hebrides” is my take on capturing and visualizing the extraordinary beauty of the Hebridean Isles.

This book captures 700 km of experiences, primarily from Coll and Tiree in the Inner Hebrides to Barra and South Uist in Na h-Eileanan Siar, the Western Isles. Brief forays into Benbecula and North Uist are included, also.

While this book misses out on a multitude of other islands and is indeed deficit for Benbecula and North Uist, it is hoped that it stimulates some form of yearning for the isles: rest assured that any future editions will most certainly attempt to capture the reality of the islands that were missed here.

Callicious



Publishing

Photographing,
the Hebrides

Special thanks are given to the many locals I met along the way who regaled me with whimsical tales and gave me help, and to the official websites of all the islands, which provided much-needed information, some utilised here. The Hebrides wouldn't be what they are without the community that makes them up.

*Hopefully you enjoy the book and go visit!
~Sebastian*

Contents

| | | |
|-------|------------|-------------------------|
| 1 | Preface | |
| 2 | Contents | |
| 3-16 | Coll | <i>Cola</i> |
| 17-36 | Tiree | <i>Tiriodh</i> |
| 37-46 | Barra | <i>Barraigh</i> |
| 47-66 | South Uist | <i>Uibhist a Deas</i> |
| 67-72 | Benbecula | <i>Uibhist a Tuath</i> |
| 73-80 | North Uist | <i>Beinn na Faoghla</i> |

Coll

An island in the Inner Hebrides, the Isle of Coll, Cola in Scottish Gaelic, has a history dating back to the Gaelic Kingdom of Dál Riada, over 1,500 years.

Coll is very much a hilly, heathery, sphagnum-coated island. The western coastline is peppered with white-sand beaches and magnificent dune systems against crystal clear water, while the east has rugged, rocky outcrops and shelves.

The skyline from the north to south-east is dominated by the topography of the Inner Hebrides and Mainland Scotland. From the southern tip of Coll, the isle of Tiree is clearly visible, set apart by the small island of Gunna.

Coll is most accessible via ferry from Oban.



Waves collapsing by the rocks



Bàgh Cramneach
East

Arinagour Pier





*Looking South-East,
Toward Ben More and the Isle of Mull*





*The Vista North-East across Tràigh Garbh,
Eigg and An Sgùrr in the distance*

The Isle of Rùm, framing Skye
Due East of Eilean Deadh-bhreat



From Tràigh Thorastain

Bàgh an Trailleich



Surfers enjoying the bay



North of Bàgh an Trailleich



A' Clhròic
South-West Vista

the South-East...



and the East

The island is dusted with spatters of machair, fertile sandy grassland layered with wildflowers. These ecosystems are unique and often house a wide variety of rare flowers during their yearly primes.



Daisy and Buttercup Machair



Tràigh Hogh
To the Hebridean Sea



To the North



Ben Hagh

“Old” Breachaca Castle



For 500 years Coll remained home to the Macleans of Coll. The lands were originally obtained as an inheritance, having been bequeathed by the Third Lord of the Isles to the (later) First Laird of Coll, John Garbh Maclean. *He'd seen another fellow milk the Lord of the Isles by threatening him, and so he tried the same: it worked. By the way, the original milker was a bastard (in the literal sense) grandson after an inheritance, plenty of Macleans were of this sort, apparently.*

The Macleans of Coll called “Old” Breachaca Castle their stronghold, the tower-house fort dating to the 15th Century. Later, in the 1750s, the “New” Breachaca Castle was constructed, replacing the now-ruinous old castle. Both buildings may be found toward the southern tip of Coll, by Loch Breachaca.

“New” Breachaca Castle



Tiree

Tiree, Tiriodh in Scottish Gaelic, lies south of Coll. It is renowned for its sweeping Hebridean machair, often a vibrant yellow from all forms of dandelions, buttercups, and daisies.

With evidence of human habitation dating to 1st Century AD, Tiree is one of the oldest continuously lived-in islands of the Hebrides. It currently has a population of ~700, with an economy dominated by tourism, crofting, and fishing.

Tiree boasts a coastline speckled with beaches on all sides, with white sands and azure waters. Never-ending wind and abundant sunshine, and trust me it does *never* end, provides conditions ideal for windsports, a popular motivation behind many tourist visits.

Tiree is readily accessible by ferry from Oban, however it also has an airport, with somewhat regular flights from Glasgow via Loganair.



Balephuill, Dune machair



Tràigh Bhi





*Scarinish Pier
Clansman, the ferry to Oban*



*Balemartine
Highland Cattle*



*East of Barrapol
Looking to Tíree Parish Church*



North of Còrnaig Mòr

The flag of Tìree, recently designed in 2018, consists of golden oars of barley arranged in a sunburst spread, against a green backdrop.

It's proudly displayed throughout Tìree and represents the fertility (barley) and propensity for sunshine (golden sunburst) of the island.

The fertility of Tìree is often attributed to its machair, widely impregnated with shell sands rich in calcium carbonate, a fertilizer.



Cnoc àn Lìn
Local sheep posing gleefully



Tràigh Còrnaig
Beinn Hough hazed in the background





Eilean Liath



Tràigh Bhi



Tràigh Baile a' Mhuilinn



Sgeirean (Reef) Dubha, Tràigh Mhòr

Millton

Looking south by the harbour



Tiree's local fishing operations may be seen vividly toward Millton, near her north-eastern limit, by Millton Harbour, built in 1847 to encourage the fledging local fishing industry.



West of Millton, the hill Dùn Mòr a' Chaolais provides a fantastic view west south-west across Tiree, with Ben Hynish casting a fine figure southward (left), with Beinn Hough northward (right).



Sràid Ruadh



Tern
Of the Common (?) Variety, Extra moist

Female Eiderduck



Fledged Seagull Chicks



and the male....



Seagull Nest



*East of Lòn Fàdamull
Looking north-east to Miodar*



Fàdamull



Carnan Mòr

The peak of Ben Hynish at 141m, panoramic view of Tiree with “Golf Ball” radar dome clearly visible.





The coastline due west of Ben Hynish



Golden Plover on Hartabhal

Barra

Barra, known as Barraigh, is the second southernmost inhabited island of the Outer Hebrides, conventionally referred to as the Western Isles or Na h-Eileanan Siar. The southernmost inhabited island is Vatersay, connected to Barra by a short causeway.

As with much of the Western Isles, Scots Gaelic is widely spoken, being the primary language for upwards of 60% (on average) of the population.

Barra has been inhabited since at least 2,500 BC, and currently has a population of ~1,200. Most make their lives through tourism, though crofters are abundant: fish farms and traditional fishing also contribute; Barra is home to the "Isle of Barra Distillers," a renowned gin distillery.

Numerous nearby islands, long subject to depopulation and eventually abandonment, attract wildlife enthusiasts. Especially popular are St Kilda and Mingulay, both accessible by boat tour from Castlebay, the main population centre of Barra.



Beinn Tangabhal
From Bùgh Halaman

Bàgh Halaman



Beinn Eòlaigearraidh Mhòr



Castle Kisimul



Tràigh Eais

Looking to Fuidheigh Island



Heabhal



Hartabhal



Beinn Eireabhal



Beinn Eireabhal

Looking north-east to Barra Sound, Barra Airport in the foreground with Tràigh Mhòr its runway





Barra Airport, the only commercial airport in the world to schedule regular flights that land on a beach, operates atop Tràigh Mhòr.

The beach is formed of cockle shell sands, and vanishes under the tides twice daily, limiting operating times. Conditions on the surface vary, though landings are often considered abnormally soft, as plane tyres sink into the sand on landing: this contrasts to the rough tarmac landings experienced elsewhere.

Scottish pilots all aim to land at Barra at least once, bragging rights obviously afforded to those who have visited and landed on the sands, though care must be afforded to tourists who aimlessly wander onto the beach during operating hours.







Bàgh Halaman
Rocky outcrops at sunset

South Uist

Uibhist a Deas, South Uist, is the second largest island of Na h-Eileanan Siar, behind Lewis and Harris. As with most of the Western Isles, South Uist is one of the last bastions of Scots Gaelic.

The island is a natural wonder, with extensively cultivated and protected machair sweeping the west of the island and the east peppered with isolated rugged hillscape and dramatic rocky coastline. The island makes for fantastic landscape photography, with wildlife photographers likewise attracted for the unperturbed habitats the landscape offers to the overabundance of wildlife, of which Sea Eagles, Hen Harrier, Otters and Deer are of key interest.

Seasonal tourism, as with most of the isles, dominates the economy. Caravanners flock to the island in droves and struggle along thin single track roads, while cyclists on the Hebridean Way feverishly traipse behind them. *I mean it. You should see these guys! It's a miracle they don't run themselves off the road. Hats off to the local bus drivers who deal with all of 'em!*

South Uist is best accessed by ferry from the mainland port of Mallaig, sailing to the ferry town of Lochboisdale, Loch Baghasdail in Scots Gaelic. The ferry passes by Skye, too, and almost certainly guarantees dolphins and seabirds along the way.



Pollochar, Pollochar Stone

Easabhal
Overlooking Loch Baghasdail, ferry port visible





West Kilbride
Looking out over the Sound of Barra



Pollachan



Eriskay

South of South Uist, providing ferry from Barra with access via causeway



In March, 1941, the cargo vessel SS Politician ran aground by Eriskay, Eirisgeigh in Scottish Gaelic, roughly to the east. Her cargo was export destined for the U.S to garner funds for the war effort, and included (amongst other wares, such as Jamaican cash and fine linens) more than 20,000 cases of whiskey, on which no duty had been paid.

The sailors who abandoned the vessel told locals of the fantastical (see: whiskey) content of the wreck, and soon enough islanders from across the isles flocked to Eriskay to get some. HM Customs and Excise also came, though they were more interested in milking some duty on the contraband which was no longer due for export.

What followed were months of shenanigans, and the story is definitely worth looking up! There's even a movie about it, though it was filmed on Barra and not Eriskay for whatever reason.



Descending Airneabhal

Loch Snigisleit to the left, with the three tops of Stulabhal, Triuirebheinn and Beinn Ruigh Choinnich ahead





Stulabhal

Looking north across Loch Snigisleit in the foreground, with Loch Aincort and Beinn Mhòr in the background

Looking south , with Lochboisdale and Barra fairly prominent, Cleit Hill to the left bearing above Loch Stulabhal





Beinn Ruigh Choinnich
Looking north to Trinnebheinn (right), Stulabhal



*Triuirebheinn
View over the coastal border of Loch Aineort*



Loch Druidibeag
Beinn Choradail illuminated



Western Machair
Looking east to Beinn Mhòr, Thacla protruding to the left

Beinn Mhòr

Solar Corona from orographic lift



Trinneabhal



Beinn nan Caorach



Beinn Choradail



Ascending Thacla





*Beinn Mhòr
Heabhal and Hartabbal of Barra, hazed dark in the distance*



Gleann Heileasdail



Benbecula

Beinn na Faoghla lies between South Uist and North Uist, connected to both by causeway, the northern causeway intersected by the island of Grimsay.

The westernmost coastline of the island houses several beaches. Of note is Culla Bay, soberly referred to as "Stinky Bay" by virtue of the unique aroma that graces its shores. To the east, the coast is studded with sea lochs. Benbecula consists almost entirely of grassland-encapsulated lochs, with nary an area that lacks a body of water.

The population centre of Benbecula is Balivanich (Baile a' Mhanaich), housing an airport with daily flights across the isles and to the mainland, also being the weakest Gaelic-speaking area of the island. Liniclate (Lionacleit), to the south, holds the strongest Gaelic area of the island: it also holds the only secondary school along the entire length stretching from Eriskay to North Uist. *Students bus here daily, an hourlong commute for some. Luckily for tourists, the services to the North and South switch over at Liniclate, making it a convenient spot to stay on the island if travelling by foot. There's a great campsite, too!*



Storehouse by Loch Fada



⊕



Loch Olabhat
Looking north-west



Loch a' Chinn Uacraich
From the south



Borøe Beach
Sunset at its southern tip





Torlum
Ruabhal in the distance



Lionacleit

North Uist

Uibhist a Tuath, North Uist, lies precisely north of Benbecula: like South Uist, its economy is based heavily on tourism and crofting, with fishing also making up a significant percentage. The port town of Lochmaddy, Loch nam Madadh, is North Uist's primary population centre.

Somewhat a mixture of Benbecula and South Uist, the west coast is littered with fantastic beaches and wildlife-rich machair, with loch-encrusted moorland sweeping inland, dotted with untarnished hills. The eastern coastline is rugged and abundant in sea lochs, with dramatic views to Skye. More than 50% of the island is water.

On the northern tip, the island of Vallay (Bhàlaigh) can be found: a tidal island, it is only accessible at low tide, when one must cross the sands. Vallay is an example of one of the many islands of the Western Isles subject to depopulation in the past couple centuries, an old mansion still standing.

Lochmaddy offers ferry services to Skye. Berneray, connected to North Uist by causeway, provides ferry link to Lewis and Harris.



Female Large red damselfly



*Descending Blathaisbal
Looking east to Loch nam Madadh, Skye hazed in the background*



Port nan Long



Beinn Mhòr
Looking north to Berneray.



Buteo buteo, the Common Buzzard, is commonplace across the isles. A pair can be found regularly frequenting the moorland about Clachan Farm, to the north.



Loch an Sticir
Thanks for (hopefully) enjoying the book!