

Hebrides - the Isles at the Edge of the Ocean

It was some years after her initial wanderings from her native Clyde waters that **WAVERLEY** first visited that area closest to her base, the Western Highlands and Islands of Scotland. In 1981, as part of her first circumnavigation of Great Britain, she made her way over the top of Scotland and around the great turning point of Cape Wrath to enter the seas around the Hebrides, the islands at the Edge of the Ocean, for the first time. In Kyle of Lochalsh and Oban she revived memories of the paddle steamers of the proud David MacBrayne fleet, magnificent Clyde built beauties such as **GRENADIER**, **IONA** and **CHEVALIER** which had served the Inner Hebrides with distinction until their eventual replacement in the nineteen twenties and thirties. It had been half a century since those craft had gone and few people had reckoned on hearing the beat of the paddle wheel in the Minch or the Sound of Mull ever again. The events of the next fifteen years were to become a remarkable new chapter, not just in **WAVERLEY**'s story, but in the history of the paddle steamer and the steamers of the West Highlands. **WAVERLEY** would eventually visit many of the Hebrides' enchanted isles, explore in remote highland and island sea-lochs where it is doubtful if paddle steamers had previously strayed, certainly not one of her size and not on the type of excursion sailing in which she was engaged. She would cross the Minch and visit the Outer Hebrides, where paddle steamers had rarely been seen even in their halcyon days. She would add life and spectacle and enhance the natural beauty of some little ports where there had been no ships of any type for many years. There is not room here to describe in full the adventures of **WAVERLEY** and her small devoted band of Hebridean explorers but in describing some of the most memorable events, perhaps, the sense of historical event will encourage others to join **WAVERLEY** in future excursions in the Hebrides.

We have to thank David Neill for the revival of the West Highland paddle steamer and the use of his knowledge gained many years earlier whilst in service with MacBrayne to compile a programme of visits that grew from short weekend breaks to full blown 10 day expeditions in 1990 and 1995 - the collection of sailings operated in those two years being, arguably, the greatest that the vessel has operated in her first half century.

Her first visit in 1981 was a brief affair but she did manage a call at Port Ellen on the Isle of Islay (her first ever call at a Hebridean island) and stirred thoughts of the very last of the MacBrayne paddle steamers, the **PIONEER** of 1905, which had served in the Hebrides until 1943 when she was eventually requisitioned for service with the Royal Navy. **PIONEER** had been a sturdy little craft, built at the A & J Inglis Pointhouse Shipyard in Glasgow for the exposed summer and winter service to Islay. Her longevity on that and other challenging Hebridean routes is surely testament to her builders skills, though perhaps they were not as celebrated as the better known builders such as Fairfield, Denny and John Brown. As **WAVERLEY** reaches her 50th anniversary she reinforces the point because she was also built by Inglis. It is nothing short of remarkable that the vessel that they produced in 1947 to operate the sheltered sailing from Craigendoran to Arrochar would follow the **PIONEER** across the Minch and wander much further, justly claiming to be not only the last but also one most travelled of the Clyde's sea-going coastal paddle steamers.

In 1982 **WAVERLEY** returned to the Western Isles, visiting Port Ellen and Oban on the first of many popular sailings around the Mull of Kintyre, known to many as 'MacBrayne's Cape Horn'. That year she added Fort William to her itinerary. The garrison town at the foot of Ben Nevis had not had a regular paddle steamer visitor since the demise of MacBrayne's third **MOUNTAINEER** in 1939 although **PIONEER** is known to have made at least one visit (between 0945 and 1028 on

Saturday 19th October 1940; for cattle rather than humans!) and it has been reported that the Clyde paddle steamer EAGLE III was stationed at Fort William on military duties towards the end of the Second World War but confirmation of this is hard to find. In any case it had been a long time since the thud of paddle floats had echoed off the hills of Lochaber and locals mixed in considerable numbers with many far travelled enthusiasts for the beautiful sailing down Loch Linnhe, into the Lynn of Lorne, passing the stunning scenery of Appin and Ben Cruachan, by Oban and out along the south shore of the Isle of Mull to the sandy blue green waters of the Sound of Iona where her near compliment of passengers were ferried ashore to visit the cradle of Scottish Christianity, Columba's Sacred Isle of Iona. There the enthusiasts were in their element, photographing WAVERLEY from every conceivable, and some inconceivable angles! Meanwhile, her less esoteric passengers managed a visit to the restored Abbey church of St Mary, now a world renowned shrine. The peace and serenity of Iona cannot be overcome, even by a full load of steamer passengers. There's magic there.

On the last day of her 1982 visit WAVERLEY sailed south and passed through the famous Whirlpool Gulf of Corryvreckan, the tempestuous cauldron between the islands of Scarba and Jura and the swell that caused WAVERLEY to roll for a few minutes gave us some insight to the potential of this natural phenomenon, which can be heard for many miles around on wilder days.

The 1982 sailings had reminded many of the steamer enthusiasts aboard of the similar sailings operated by the magnificent MacBrayne turbine steamer KING GEORGE V, which had made those waters her own for 40 years until her untimely withdrawal in 1974. WAVERLEY had proven a worthy successor to the "George" and it was very good to be back in those waters.

In the period from 1983 to 1987 WAVERLEY established an early springtime visit to the Hebrides, usually of four or five days around the early May holiday period as a favourite feature of her annual programme. It was then that a loyal band of followers established firm friendships on their annual sojourns to the Western Isles aboard the "Mighty Paddler". They came to appreciate the wonderful scenery, often seen at its best at that time of year which is usually blessed with dry sunny weather, though sometimes the north west wind tested their resolve to stay on deck despite the evening chill. The friendships stretched across Britain and beyond, bonded by the sense of goodwill and good spirit that WAVERLEY engenders. The holiday antics of the regular passengers cannot be revealed here (for fear of litigation!) Suffice to say they amused and bemused the crew in their annual high jinx.

In 1983 WAVERLEY visited the Mull capital of Tobermory for the first time, just a few days before the town's old steamboat pier was closed. It was a day of scorching sunshine and the sight of WAVERLEY berthed at the pier alongside the characteristic, brightly painted harbour-side buildings was very memorable. The visit helped the locals to launch their campaign to have their pier replaced. Thankfully, they were successful and WAVERLEY returned many times in subsequent years. Her 1983 call at Tobermory, the Well of Mary, had been the first by a paddle steamer since calls by PIONEER in August 1943.

The 1984 visit to the Western Highlands was notable for a spell of very fine weather and WAVERLEY made the most of that with a series of unique excursions starting with a Friday sailing around the Mull of Kintyre from Ayr to Port Ellen, Oban and Fort William which was to become a regular feature over the following 10 years. It is difficult now to realise how unusual it was to sail round the Mull on a traditional paddle steamer in those early years. Apart from a return to Iona that year WAVERLEY revived old routes by sailing to Tobermory and on past the famous Mull lighthouse at Rubh nan Gall to circumnavigate the island of Staffa, The most significant feature of

Staffa, Fingal's Cave, inspired Mendelssohn to create his famed Hebridean Overture after sailing round the island by paddle steamer in 1824. Also that weekend WAVERLEY operated her first "Four Loch" sailing from Oban to the Lochs of Melfort, Shuna, Crinan and Craignish. After traversing the famous tide race in the little sound between Craignish Point and Garbh Reisa, known as the Dorus Mhor (the Great Gate), WAVERLEY sailed to the top of Loch Craignish, surely one of Argyll's most beautiful. She held a course by the western shore on the inward sailing but, after sweeping round off Ardfern, she traversed the narrow channel between the eastern shore and the twin islands of Makaskin and Eilean Rìgh. It must have been many years since any sizeable ship had sailed those memorable waters. Fortunately WAVERLEY was to return several times in subsequent years.

The most historic feature of WAVERLEY's 1985 visit to the Hebrides was her visits to the very picturesque little village of Crinan at the end of the canal that stretches over from Ardrishaig on Loch Fyne. Like Tobermory in 1983, the weather was superb for the paddler's first visit to sleepy Crinan on her sailing around the Mull from Campbeltown to Oban and Fort William. She was probably the first passenger ship to call at Crinan since the start of the Second World War, forty six years earlier. In its heyday, Crinan had been an important staging post on MacBrayne's routes to the Highlands and Islands. For half a century passengers had been able to leave Glasgow just after 7 am on the magnificent paddle steamer COLUMBA for a sailing down river and firth, through the Kyles of Bute, round Ardlamont Point and into Loch Fyne. At Ardrishaig they would transfer into the steam "waterbus" LINNET for Crinan where they would find another MacBrayne paddler, often the CHEVALIER, ready to carry them on to Oban. At that great Hebridean Gateway they could transfer to other steamers for the islands or continue on to Corpach, near Fort William. There they could transfer to yet another MacBrayne paddle steamer, possibly GONDOLIER, for the traverse of the Caledonian Canal to Inverness. This amazing transport system became known as the Royal Route after Queen Victoria used it on her West Highland tour in 1847. WAVERLEY looked magnificent at Crinan that day, the bright sunshine reflecting off her newly painted red white and black livery to provide a stunning contrast with the lush green grass of the canal banks and the deep blue waters of the loch. The scene from the steep hill behind the pier as she drew out astern, describing a graceful white arch wake in the loch was unforgettable.

In 1985 WAVERLEY also visited Loch Sween for the first time turning off Tayvialich and later sightseers caused a major traffic jam on the steep road down to the pier at Crinan - which could not be seen under a massive crowd. The traffic jam was such that buses intending to return day trippers from the ship to Glasgow were unable to reach the harbour and the ship's pursers were despatched over the hills to find the missing vehicles!

In 1985 WAVERLEY visited the Mull ferry port of Craignure becoming the only paddle steamer ever to have called there as the pier had been built long after the demise of the native MacBrayne paddlers. The 1986 and 1987 programmes followed the then established pattern of a long weekend of special sailings in early May based on Oban but novelties included a first visit to Loch Sunart and a rather unexpected trip in the ship's motorised lifeboat across Oban bay at dusk - after damage to one of her paddlewheels prevented her from continuing on to Fort William and a crew-less coaster prevented her from returning to the normal berth at Oban North Pier. All part of the great highland adventure!

After six years based mainly in the Lorne area 1988 brought a new and exciting extension to WAVERLEY's Highland wanderings. Following the traditional "Oban weekend" she set off on Wednesday 4th May 1988 at the early hour of 0700 for a quite magnificent sailing in superb weather through the Sound of Mull, round Ardnamurchan, the Point in the Great Ocean (where the atmosphere was so clear that one could see out to the Outer Hebrides, fifty miles to the west)

and on past the Small Isles of Eigg, with its prominent Sgurr peak and Rum, with its round topped mountains to berth at the great herring port of Mallaig at the western end of the West Highland Railway. She was the first paddle steamer to be seen there since the late 1930s. She continued onwards from Mallaig through the grand scenery around the Sound of Sleat and the fast tidal race at the Narrows of Kyleerhea where Skye is only separated from the Scottish mainland by a couple of hundred yards. Eventually she reached Kyle of Lochalsh and boarded a large complement of local school children for a unique excursion around the Crowlin Islands and into Loch Kishorn. As the sun was setting about 9 p.m. that wonderful day WAVERLEY was steaming northwards in the Sound of Raasay to make her first ever visit to the capital of Skye, Portree. Despite the cold wind with the failing light and our weariness after the long 14 hour sailing from Oban we were strangely reluctant to leave the upper deck, being engrossed in the awesome sight of the orange skies above the crystal clear Cuillin peaks of Glamaig, Blaven and, most awesome of all, the stunning ridge and peaks of Sgurr nan Gillian, surely one of Scotland's most majestic mountains. It was a rare sight which we still cherish many years later.

As WAVERLEY raised steam next day enthusiasts swarmed around the hills of Portree harbour photographing the first call by a paddle steamer at the Port of the King since PIONEER, forty-five years earlier. Later, on the ship's first ever visit to the quiet little isle of Raasay, which is dominated by its once-volcanic flat-topped peak of Dun Caan, the ritual of the steamer enthusiast (or nutter to the less sympathetic) was re-enacted as the hill above the old mining pier at East Suisnish was scaled for a breath-taking picture of the graceful steamer and the superb Cuillin back-cloth. It is, perhaps, in locations such as that that the WAVERLEY looks her very best. For an hour, WAVERLEY's presence was the only event of interest on Raasay, rather like the arrival of the mail steamer at most Hebridean islands in older, slower times. It was a welcome reminder of those scenes we could remember of old.

The success of 1988 encouraged Captain Neill to plan an even more adventurous tour of the Hebrides in 1989. After a similar schedule to the previous spring WAVERLEY crossed over the Minch for the first time on Thursday 4th May to make her first call at Tarbert, Harris (the first since PIONEER in 1943) from where she took local schoolchildren on possibly the first ever excursion sailing to Lochmaddy in North Uist, becoming the first paddle steamer to call at that port for almost a century! Later the WAVERLEY paid her first visit to the Lewis capital of Stornoway, where she was the first paddle steamer to call since the relief mailboat GAEL in 1921. Stornoway celebrated her arrival in style. After an almost full capacity schools cruise from Stornoway to the deserted Shiant Isles, WAVERLEY took another large crowd of revellers on a Ceilidh cruise into Loch Erisort. She must surely be the largest ship ever to have penetrated that isolated sea-loch and had to perform a "three point turn" in the loch off Valtos before she could escape back to the open sea. When she arrived back at Stornoway the Ceilidh was still in full swing and so popular was the party that the crew had some difficulty in persuading the passengers that it was time to go home! However, the highlight of 1989 was still to come and on Saturday 6th May she left Stornoway early on arguably the best, certainly the most unique sailing that she has ever performed in her first 50 years. Firstly, she headed down the Lewis and Harris coast, through Caolas Scalpay to Tarbert. Leaving Tarbert she performed what remains, and sadly is likely to remain, her only passenger-carrying sailing across the Minch from the Outer to Inner Hebrides. In calm seas she raced across to Skye, rounding its northern point by the little sound separating it from Eilean Trodday. The view there was almost indescribable. Astern we could still see the high hills of Harris, far across the sea. To the south the Skye peaks, dominated by the weird and wonderful Quiraing almost fixed our gaze but our eyes were drawn east to the panorama of some of the best coastal scenery to be found in Scotland - or anywhere. In the north we could see the mouth of Loch Broom with Ben

More Coigach and An Teallach on opposite sides. Further south we were astonished to be able to make out the distinctive shape of Slioch, the beautiful mountain that stands sentinel over the eastern shore of the equally beautiful Loch Maree and still further south the chain of magnificent Munros - Beinn Eithe, Liathach and Ben Alligan - could be seen stretching along the northern shore of Loch Torridon. Still the visual feast continued with Kilt Rock and the Old Man of Storr off our starboard side and the lonely and secretive isle of Rona to port. After a cruise from Portree to Kylesha we finally disembarked from WAVERLEY and stood in silence to watch her go astern out into the Bay en route to Kyle. As the evening sun cast a soft pink hue on her bright white superstructure, we began to realise the unique privilege we had experienced that day. It is doubtful if WAVERLEY will operate such a sailing again, and in such good weather. It is doubtful if those passengers lucky enough to be aboard WAVERLEY that day will ever forget it.

To round off the magnificent tour of 1989 WAVERLEY made her first visit to Loch Nevis in scorching sunshine with an almost full load of passengers from Mallaig. She sailed up the "Loch of Heaven" as far as a ship of her size can, swinging round at Kylesmorar and sweeping through the bay at Inverie before returning to Mallaig. Leaving her there we had the treat of a run over the West Highland line to Fort William, over Rannoch Moor and down to Glasgow on a fine spring evening.

In 1990 WAVERLEY reached the pinnacle of her West Highland soirees with an eleven day programme that took her to the southern ports of the Outer Hebrides where paddle steamers had rarely called throughout the 180 year history of steamer operations in Scotland. Indeed it had been a century or more since the last paddler had visited Barra and so when WAVERLEY anchored in Castle Bay about 3 am on May 1st it was a most historic event. Three hours later the scene was awe inspiring with the bright morning sunshine enhancing the paddler's fine lines and striking colours against the azure sea and lush green machair. To complement that visual feast there was complete silence. Gazing out on that marvellous sight inspired a great sense of peace and satisfaction.

Later in the morning WAVERLEY came into the pier at Castlebay, under the steep ramparts of Kishmul, the Castle in the bay, seat of the McNeill chiefs. She sailed to Lochboisdale in South Uist on what was probably the first ever excursion sailing between the two islands although they have been linked by mailboat (or latterly car ferry) for two centuries or more. Indeed, so historic was the event that one of her passengers was an octogenarian from Barra who had never left his native isle before that day and when he stepped ashore at Lochboisdale it was the first time that he had set foot in a "foreign" land. How astonishing that WAVERLEY's visit should encourage him to break the habit of a lifetime. Another great feature was that the ship's first ever visit to South Uist was a homecoming for two of her crew, the Bosun Roddy McIssac and Able Seaman Donald McKinnon. After a lifetime of sailing round the world on many vessels and several years of sailing round Britain on the WAVERLEY, they had finally brought her home. Many of their friends had gathered at the pier to exchange a few stories and admire their fine vessel. WAVERLEY's two day visit to Castlebay and Lochboisdale coincided with the finest spell of weather that she has ever experienced in the Hebrides and even the road tar melted at Castlebay, causing one of the regulars to lose his shoe as we flooded ashore on that most enchanted of Hebridean isles.

The visit to Barra and South Uist was possibly a "one-off" and it was certainly concluded with a unique excursion, almost as memorable as the Stornoway - Portree sailing of a year earlier, the "mighty paddler" leaving Castlebay in the late afternoon with a few lucky souls for the single passage to Lochboisdale and along the coast of South Uist, Benbecula and North Uist for a quick call at Lochmaddy. On leaving the latter port she continued on to Tarbert in Harris before sailing light to Portree where she had a school's cruise next day. We watched her from the pier at Lochmaddy as

she picked her way through the numerous little reefs in the loch, passing those known as the Maddies or sea-wolves.

WAVERLEY's schools cruise from Stornoway was another almost capacity affair - 800 schoolchildren made it a cruise not for the faint-hearted! Having almost emptied the ship's own souvenir shop this incredible invading, 'ant-like' army of schoolchildren swarmed ashore at Tarbert and soon a long snaking queue had formed outside Tarbert's only sweet shop like a vigil for pop concert tickets. It is hard to believe that so many people have even landed from one ship at Tarbert before and it seems unlikely that it will ever happen again. Incredibly, as WAVERLEY pulled away from Tarbert going astern into the loch, every one of the Tarbert invaders seemed to have made it back aboard on time. The WAVERLEY Commodore's resolve to stay on deck was severely tested on the return and eventually they sought refuge from their lively young shipmates in the ship's 'underwater' bar! Another very successful Ceilidh cruise was operated that night before WAVERLEY returned light overnight to Oban for the concluding two days on traditional sailings to the Four Lochs and Iona. For WAVERLEY's regular West Highland passengers the 1990 visit was the peak of their Hebridean adventures. Good weather and several unique sailings combined to rank it amongst WAVERLEY's greatest days.

After the halcyon days of 1989 and 1990, WAVERLEY's western visits were truncated back to the typical long weekend sojourns characteristic of 1982-87. This was necessary because the level of support that she was experiencing had waned in latter years. However, there were some very memorable moments during the shorter visits of 1991-93, especially when Captain Steve Mishel took the ship on a cruise round Craighouse Bay on the Isle of Jura, where a paddler had last appeared half a century earlier, and on a close inspection of the old, sadly ruined, steamer pier at Salen. WAVERLEY did not visit the West Highlands in 1994, the first time that she had omitted the area since 1981 but her fleetmate BALMORAL made her first excursions to the Hebrides that year, calling at Colonsay and Gigha, two Hebridean locations that her illustrious companion had never visited.

WAVERLEY's return to the Hebrides in 1995 was widely appreciated as she had been sadly missed the previous year. Even more appreciated was the return to a full 11 day programme, equal in length and innovation to the great years of 1989 and 1990. The innovation started at the very first sailing when WAVERLEY left her home base at Anderston Quay in Glasgow, rather than Ayr as on previous occasions, for another unique sailing, along the entire length of the River and Firth of Clyde, with calls at Largs and Campbeltown. She continued on round the Mull of Kintyre for a memorable evening visit to Crinan before arriving at the North Pier at Oban just as darkness fell. The whole 13 hour sailing from Glasgow to Oban was performed in glorious sunshine and the crystal clear air brought by the North west wind allowed us to appreciate the great natural beauty of the Clyde and southern Hebrides at their magnificent best. It is difficult to determine when or if a Clyde steamer had ever performed a day excursion from Glasgow to Oban before. It is the type of special day that her small band of regular Hebridean explorers had come to savour over the previous 15 years. As if such a magnificent start was not enough we were treated to an equally memorable sailing the following day, departing from Oban at 7 am, only 9 hours after we had arrived, and before the early morning frost had melted from the taffrails. Once again, like 1988, 1989 and 1991 we headed up the Sound of Mull in stunning cloudless blue skies, rounding Ardnamurchan and sailing on past Mallaig and Armadale. As we passed through Kyleerhea for the first time in four years we were all enthused by our return to those magical waters. Five hours after leaving Oban we were berthed at Kyle and preparing to sail under the incomplete Skye Bridge for the first time. Irrespective of views on the politics of the funding of this structure we were

generally agreed that some of the romantic atmosphere of the Kyle was about to disappear and the magnificent panorama of Skye hills and Raasay's Dun Caan from the middle of the Kyle was gone for ever. With the bridge astern WAVERLEY was prepared to make history again by becoming the first paddle steamer to call at the old stone quay at Broadford on Skye for the first time since the withdrawal of MacBrayne's FUSILIER from the Portree Mail Service, sixty four years earlier. The ever-faithful steamer 'nutters' were there to record the event on film in their own inimitable style. From Broadford WAVERLEY operated a cruise into Loch Carron before continuing on through one of our favourite West Highland waterways, the Sound of Raasay, to make a welcome return to Portree. Even then we were not finished for the day as the steamer left Portree for an evening cruise back down the Sound of Raasay, through Caol Mor and across the Inner Sound to Applecross Bay, where she heralded her arrival with a long blast on her steam whistle. Some of the enthusiasts aboard would remember that Applecross had been served for many years by the stout little screw steamer SHEILA, another amazing product of the Inglis shipyard in Glasgow. Despite her quite diminutive size that faithful little ship had battled the wild seas of the Minch, summer and winter, for over 20 years. In all that time she was rarely beaten by the swells and troughs of her natural element and it was almost unbelievable when she was lost by a very uncharacteristic error of navigation after stranding at the mouth of Loch Torridon on New Year's Day, 1927.

When WAVERLEY turned for home that night the view to the west was, in the single word of one of her passengers, 'Staggering'. The setting sun cast a deep orange glow over the backbone of Raasay and Dun Caan stood out in jet-black silhouette against the fiery sky. Westwards, the sight of Sgurr nan Gillean above Sligachan was awesome beyond the power of description.

After two very long sailing days the next was a welcome short excursion into Scotland's most isolated and beautiful natural wilderness, the Rough Bounds of Knoydart around Loch Hourn, the Loch of Hell. This can be an overpowering, fearsome place in time of winter storm but that fine spring afternoon the incredible beauty and peace demanded the respect of even the most experienced Hebridean explorer.

On Tuesday 25th April WAVERLEY operated another of her most special and unique West Highland sailings. Leaving Kyle very early and heading up to Portree and along the Trotternish shore, reminding us of that most cherished of sailings from Stornoway six years earlier. On reaching the northern tip of the 'Isle of Mist' she entered new waters by heading south along the western shore of Skye to make her first ever calls at Uig in Loch Snizort and Dunvegan. Like the Outer Hebridean ports that she visited five years previously she was the first paddle steamer to visit Dunvegan in living memory and the sight of her berthed at the very picturesque little pier rivalled the earlier highlights at Crinan, Raasay and Castlebay. We were most gratified by the support of the locals of Waternish and Dhuirnish and WAVERLEY took almost 200 out for a short sail in the loch. Even the Chief of the MacLeods of Dunvegan had left his Castle to greet us!

The return sailing from Dunvegan to Portree was a WAVERLEY enthusiasts 'dream cruise'. Many of the schoolchildren who had made the ship busy earlier that day had departed for an early return, well pleased with their day's escape from the classroom. So the vessel was quiet as she ploughed on through the swell off the north of Skye and through the Sound of Trodday taking the troughs and swell of the sea in the manner that we have become accustomed to on the World's Last Sea-going Paddle Steamer. It is sailings such as that one which make us return time and again to this remarkable, venerable ship. Despite the length of day, unusual waters and the north Skye swell, the old ship returned to Portree only a couple of minutes late - surely a fine testament to the skill and dedication of her officers and crew. We were weary that night and quickly succumbed to our slumbers with the magnificent sight of a steamship at Dunvegan fresh in our memories.

WAVERLEY continued her 1995 tour with welcome returns to Lochmaddy, Stornoway and Tarbert where she spent the night for the first time. That was a memorable evening ashore as many of her regular Hebridean travellers concluded a fine dinner in the Harris Hotel with stories and reminiscences of other adventures in previous years amongst the Hebrides - the Isles on the Edge of the Ocean.

As this tale of wonderful days in the Western Isles was written in the Spring of 1996 we were sadly missing our annual visit to the West as **WAVERLEY** did not visit that year. Whilst there seemed copious amount of sadness that she would not be seen in the West that year it seemed disproportionate to the amount of support that she has received in more recent visits. If this short account encourages more travellers to experience the magnificent excursions and experiences that **WAVERLEY** offers on her visits to the Hebrides then it will well worth while. If you have not been, go soon; and go again and, hopefully, **WAVERLEY** will return to the "Land of the Ever Young" for years to come.

Stuart D. Cameron

Glasgow, July 1996.