

IOMRAMH BHRÉANAINN
BRENDAN VOYAGE

SCEIDEAL / SCHEDULE
(subject to weather and other factors)

ÉIRE

Bealtaine/May

Sun. 15	08.00 pm: An Daingean . All aboard for dinner.	Mile
Mon. 16	07.00 am: Sail north past Cnoc Bréanainn/Mt. Brandon & past Sliabh Ailbhe/Slieve Elva in NW Clare, & overnight to Ardoileán , W. Galway.	80
Tue. 17	PM: Ashore on Ardoileán (St Feichín). Then sail on, passing Inis Bó Finne (St Colmán of Lindisfarne), to Inis Gé , W. Mayo, to moor overnight.	37
Wed.18	AM: Sail to Inis Glóire , W. Mayo, containing many dedications to <i>Bréanainn</i> . PM: Anchor and land. Afterwards sail overnight to Toraigh/Tory I. , N. Donegal, passing on the way Inis Moccu Birn/Rutland Island .	8 95
Thur.19	AM: Land at Toraigh pier. Crew change.	

ALBA

Fri. 20	AM: Early start and sail for Colonsay , landing at Ferry Pier Berth. Meet Oban ferry at 5.00 pm.	85
Sat. 21	Ashore on Colonsay.	
Sun. 22	AM: Sail to Eileach an Naoimh , at mouth of Firth of Lorn, and land. <i>Bréanainn</i> visited here. PM: Sail to Í/Iona .	15 20
Mon. 23	On Iona. Crew change.	
Tue. 24	AM: Sail to Eigg and land. <i>Donnán</i> martyred here.	40
Wed. 25	AM: Sail to Aporcrosan/Applecross , via Papadil on Rum (where <i>Beagán</i> (anchorite?) died in 677, Canna (most recent suggested location of <i>Hinba</i>), through Kyle of Loch Ailsh, past Pabay . Anchor at Poll Creadha . Meet <u>Applecros Historical Society</u> .	
Thur. 26	: At Aporcrosan/ A' Chomraich .	
Fri.27-Sat.27:	Sail round Cape Wrath, possibly overnighiting ashore.	75
Sat. 27	PM: Sail to Stromness , SW Orkney Mainland.	60

ORKNEY

Sun. 29	: In Stromness. Crew change.	
Mon. 30	AM: Meet <u>Orkney Heritage Group</u> . Visit Skara Brae, Scapa Flow, etc.	
Tue. 31	AM: Sail up W coast of Mainland & then E to Papa Stronsay	40
Meitheamh/June		
Wed. 1	AM: Sail to Papa Westray .	20
Thur. 2	: On Papa Westray.	

SHETLAND

Fri. 3	AM: Sail to St Ninian's Isle , SW Shetland.	60
	PM: Sail to Papil , West Burra, Shetland. <i>Céilidh</i> with <u>Burra Historical Soc.</u> in their Easthouse thatched croft; possibly stay in their Bridge-End Outdoor Centre.	15
Sat. 4	On West Burra .	

- Sun. 5 AM: Sail to **Scalloway**. 15
- Mon. 6 AM: Sail by **PapaStour**, on the way observing the **Brei Holm** monastic(?) site, and the ecclesiastical(?) ruins on the summit of the adjacent **Maiden Stack** (60' vertical cliff).
- Tue. 7 AM: Sail to **Faroës**.

FAROES

- Wed. June 8 AM: Arrive at **Faroës**, passing **Baglaholmur** (< Irish *bachall* 'staff'), to land at **Øravik** on Suduroy. 170
- Thur. 9 AM: Sail to **Thorshavn** on Stremoy. Crew change.
Visit Museum, where **Skuvoy slabs**, carved in the style of the Early Christian period in Ireland, are. Here also are the carved choir stall benches from Kirkjubør cathedral.
- Fri. 10 AM: Overland to **Brandansvik**, and nearby roofless medieval cathedral of **Kirkjubør**, in which was an effigy of *Bréanainn* carved on a choir stall end panel. Adjacent is the ruins of '**St Brendan's Church**', the foundation stone of which was laid on May 2, 1420, now much eroded by the sea. In the nearby medieval Bishop's palace is a cross slab in the early Irish style.
Meet Tróndur Patursson who sailed with Tim Severin, nearby. 10
- Sat. 11 AM: Sail to **Leirvik**. Visit Viking farmstead at **Toftanes**, and **Bønhústoftin**, the best preserved early church site in Faroës. BBQ, *ceol agus craic* with Faroese friends.
- Sun. 12 AM: Sail around **Kalsoy** and back to Leirvik.
- Mon. 13 AM: Visit **Klaksvik**, on Bordoy, and sample St Brigid's Ale !
- Tue. 14 AM: Set sail for Iceland, passing almost inaccessible Faroese **Mykines**, on which is found the ruin of the most characteristic church in the early Irish style in the northern ocean.
St Patrick's Day was celebrated on this island until the 19th century.

ICELAND

- Wed. June 15 AM: Arrive at **Djúpivogur** in SE **Iceland**, passing Papey. 260
Change of crew.
- Thur. 16 : Local exploration and/or visit to **Thorbergssetur**.
- Fri. 17 : Conference. (Iceland's National Day).
- Sat, 18 : Sail for **Vestmannaeyjar**, passing **Papafjordur**, **Papafjardaros**, **Papataettur** and **Papyli**, off SE Iceland.
- Sun. 19 : Anchor in the offshore harbour of **Heimaey** island. 200
- Mon. 20 : Crew change.
- Tue. 21 : Observe the summer solstice as it was observed in Iceland by Irish clerics *c.* 760 as related by the Irish geographer Dicuil in his *De Mensura Orbis Terrae* published in the Carolingian court *c.* 825.
- Wed. 22 : Fly by light aircraft to the mainland to visit the **Seljaland** caves on coast, carved out of the rock face, and dated by tephra to *c.* 800 AD. Simple crosses of the type found in Ireland and Scotland prior to that date, are inscribed on the walls and ceilings, and on other features in the neighbourhood.
- Thurs. 23 : Fly again to mainland to explore the region, with a possible visit to **Reykjavik**.

Fri. 24 : Sail for **Hiort/St Kilda**, with a possible diversion to **N Rona**, 50 miles NW of Cape Wrath, with its early corbelled church and grave slabs. Otherwise a diversion to **Sula Sgeir**, with its **Sgeir an Teampail**. Either would add 100 miles to the trip.

ALBA

Tue. 28 : Anchor at **Hiort/St Kilda** and come ashore and relax. 500
Wed. 29 : Visit site of church dedicated to *Bréanainn*.
Thur. 30 : Ashore again.

Iúil/July

Fri. 1 : Sail to **Pabbay** W of Sound of Harris, & on to **Loch Maddy**. 65
Sat. 2 : Sail via Benbecula to **Lochboisdale**, S Uist, and go ashore. 30
Sun. 3 : Ceolas festival in Lochboisdale. Change of crew.
Mon. 4 : On S Uist.
Tue. 5 : Sail to **Pabbay**, S of Barra. 25
Wed. 6 : Sail for Ireland.

ÉIRE

Fri. 8 : Arrive at **Cruach Mhic Dara**, off Galway coast, then ashore at **Corr na Rón**. 265

IOMLÁN/TOTAL (?) 2,500

Do chum glóire Dé agus onóra na hÉireann

IOMRAMH BHRÉANAINN

Brendan Voyage (Breandán Ó Ciobhain, 2.5.2011)

This is a voyage, planned by Paddy Barry, skipper of the 45' sailing vessel, *Ar Seachrán*, and Breandán Ó Ciobhain, researcher, with the aim of revealing the spiritual thassalocracy of Irish monks in the North Atlantic from the sixth century onwards. The crew includes mariners, poets and musicians – saints and sinners ! Various experts on different aspects of the subject being researched will join us at different stages. We are happy to acknowledge the offers of assistance by various individuals and groups along our route. The voyage begins on *Lá 'le Bréanainn* / St Brendan's Day, May 16, advancing from Dingle, SW Ireland, up the west coasts of Ireland and Scotland, by Orkneys, Shetland, Faroes to Iceland, and returning by the Outer Hebrides. *Iomramh* is the term employed in early Irish to describe voyages in the ocean in both the secular and religious spheres.

The most famous of these early voyagers was *Bréanainn* / Brendan (486-578 ?), whose fame depends on the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* and *Vita Sancti Brendani*, both composed about 800 AD, and for this reason his name has been adopted in the title of the voyage. However, it is clear that the theme of the voyage 'in search of the desert in the ocean' was an established reality long before these texts were composed. This is clear from one of the most authentic records from the early period, Adomnan's *Vita Columbae*, written towards the end of the 7th century, the earliest manuscript of which was written by *Dorbéne* (+713), and preserved in the monastery of Reichenau on Lake Constance in S Germany.

This work makes reference to voyages 'in search of a desert in the ocean' made in the second half of the 6th century by *Baethán*, who returned to Ireland, and by *Cormac Ua Liatháin*, who made three such voyages, and also eventually settled in Ireland. Columba or *Colum Cille* (+597) sought the protection of the king of the Orkneys in the presence of the Pictish overking Brude, for *Cormac* on his second voyage. It is clear that *Bréanainn* also had voyaged in the direction of Iona, as he and *Cormac*, in the company of saints *Comhghall* and *Cainneach* are represented as visiting Columba on the island of *Hinba*, still unidentified but clearly not too far from Iona. *Bréanainn* is represented in his *Vita* as visiting the monk Gildas in South Wales, and subsequently sailing on to the island of *Aileach* in Britain (sometimes interpreted as 'Brittany'), where he intended to remain, but ultimately returned to Ireland, having founded a monastery named *Bledach* / *Bledua* in the region of *Heth* (Tiree ?).

Bréanainn was of the *Alltraighe*, a people located in the region of Tralee in modern County Kerry, but his main monastic foundation was *Chuain Fearthá*, in the SE of modern County Galway, with lesser foundations in NW Connaught. It may be that *Bréanainn*'s rise to eminence in relation to the theme of voyaging was due to *Cuimín Fada*, an influential abbot of *Chuain Fearthá* in the second half of the 7th century, and the subsequent adoption of this prestigious *Bréanainn* as their patron by the people known as *Ciarraighe*, before 800 AD. The latter had by then subdued *Alltraighe*, and established themselves at the head of an alliance in opposition to the overlordship of *Eoghanacht Locha Léin*. However, *Ard Fheartá*, the local monastic foundation ascribed to *Bréanainn* does not feature in the annalistic record until the 11th century, becoming an episcopal see in the 12th.

The curious displacement of the departure point for the *Navigatio* apparently from *Sliabh Liag* in SW Donegal, to NW Clare, and then to the vicinity of *Cnoc Bréanainn* / Mount Brandon in Kerry may reflect the gradual aggrandisement of *Bréanainn*, and his adoption by the *Ciarraighe* as their patron. With the first departure point is associated *Bairrinn* who tells him of *Tearnóg* / *Mearnóg*'s visit to the promised land, and with the second *Ailbhe*, who has also been there, and whose island in the ocean, occupied by his community, *Bréanainn* meets on his voyage.

Confirmation of the presence of Irish monks on the islands north of Britain, subsequent to *Cormac's* visit to Orkney, come from the Irish geographer, *Dicuil*, whose *De Mensura Orbis Terrae* was published in the Carolingian court c. 825. Briefly, he describes islands inhabited by anchorites for about 100 years prior to his writing but now abandoned, in the face of Viking attacks, to many sheep and sea-birds. These seem to be the Faroes (literally 'sheep-islands'). *Dicuil* says that he lived in some of the northern islands, and gives a description supplied to him c. 795 of Irish clerics, who 30 years previously had spent from February to July in Thule (Iceland), and observed the summer solstice there with the sun circling just beneath the horizon for 24 hours, and the frozen sea to the north.

Irish monks, referred to as *papar* in Norse texts of the 12th and later centuries, have left their mark through the incorporation of the term in dozens of toponyms all the way from Man to Iceland, documented in various publications and online by the authors involved in The Papar Project. A number of these will be visited on *Iomramh Bréanainn*, as will other sites where survey and excavation have indicated the presence of Irish monks, particularly on the Faroes and Iceland.

Sites associated with the early Irish church through iconography, building techniques, and textual evidence will be visited – Columba's Iona, *Donnan's Eigg*, where he and 150 companions were slaughtered by pirates in c. 617, and *Maol Rubha's* foundation (673) of *Aporcrossan* / Applecross on the mainland. Of particular interest will be the island of *Eileach an Naoimh* (= *Aileach* of the Vita) at the mouth of the Firth of Lorne, where two toponyms preserve the association with *Bréanainn* -- *Dún Bhréanainn* and *Cúil Bhréanainn*. There are several churches dedicated to *Bréanainn* in the Highlands, usually styled *Cill Bhréanainn*, and the one on *Hiort* / St Kilda will be our focus on the return journey from Iceland. The unascribed ecclesiastical site on the tiny island of N Rona, 50 miles NW of Cape Wrath, may be fitted into this return journey also.

This spiritual thassalocracy of the Irish is almost completely ignored in Ireland, and the message it has for a generation mesmerised by the allure of material wealth and gratification, is lost. Indeed the political thassalocracy of the same centuries, when the Irish, who had first plundered Roman Britain, established colonies all along the west coast of Britain, is equally unknown. The much vaunted Irish diaspora is associated only with starving Irish poor who committed themselves to coffin ships in a frantic effort to escape a terrible fate in the 19th century. The earlier diaspora has left its mark around the littoral of the N. Atlantic. It is estimated that 1/3 of the early settlers of Iceland had an Irish background, and they had a profound influence on its literature. The last of the Irish dynasties in S. Wales died out only in the 8th century. Gaelic Scotland and Ireland shared a similar culture until the 17th century. Much research has been devoted in recent years to the significant contribution which Irish clerics and scholars made to the creation of the Europe which slowly emerged from the fall of the Roman Empire, but its results are largely confined to the academic sphere.

Iomramh Bréanainn is the effort of a group of individuals, without sponsorship from any quarter, to comprehend the world-view of an extraordinary group of Irishmen, and to gain some appreciation of their spiritual values. Nowhere is their unique implementation of Christianity so tangible as in their remote 'desert in the ocean' of *Sceilg Mhichil* / Skellig Michael off the Kerry coast, founded in the 6th century. This is an appropriate starting point for a voyage whose ambition goes beyond the mere traversing of the ocean, and it so happens that the most southerly dedication in Ireland to *Bréanainn* is on the nearby shore of *Dairbhre* / Valentia Island. This is *Tobar Ula Bhréanainn* 'Well of the Shrine of Brendan'.

May we have the spiritual sense and humility to recognise Tír Tairngire / 'Land of Promise' if we meet it, and to bring back with us its reputed craobh chumhra / 'fragrant branch'.