

## Row, Row, Row the Boat – up The Great Glen

Due to travel restrictions in 2021 The Polar Academy charity have had to postpone their planned trip to Greenland for their annual Polar Expedition with pupils from Bell Baxter High School.

This was a huge blow to all involved, however in the spirit of true resilience and exploration, it was decided the show must go on - and a Scottish Expedition (with a twist) was created. The new expedition will see 14 pupils aged 15-17 from Bell Baxter High School in Cupar to be the first group of under 18's to attempt to paddle up the Great Glen from Fort William to Inverness in a Birlinn (the Scottish equivalent of a Viking Long Boat) lent to them by Galgael Trust.

The trip will take 5 days in the traditional Birlinn boat, which is made by hand and has no mechanical instruments on board, all navigation will be done traditionally. The group will be covering 60 miles in 5 days, 8 rowers at a time will take turns to row the *Orcuan*, a 30ft wooden vessel.

Craig Mathieson – Head of the Polar Academy

“Having completed the Great Glen in a Canadian canoe with my son some years ago I am thrilled to be sharing a similar experience with this amazing group of young people. These kids have been through real adversity with everything that has gone on, but I’m so proud of the team they have become. Due to COVID-19 this group has had so many ups and downs and to finally have a tangible expedition for them is brilliant.

This trip presents an amazing opportunity to undertake a voyage like no other that will make Scottish history come to life. The challenge is daunting and will test each one of our young people, but I have full faith that if they pull together as a team, it’ll be plain sailing.

As ever we are reliant on the magnificent supporters of the Polar Academy to make these life changing trips possible. I would encourage any businesses or individuals to come forward to help us do more.”

Gehan Macleod from Galgael Trust said “Building *Orcuan* was something of a wild journey into the unknown for us nearly twenty years ago and we’re delighted that she’ll now take a group of young people on their own journeys of discovery through the amazing work of the Polar Academy. Rites of passage have always been an important dimension in our work and I’ve no doubt the voyage will provide them with just that.

Eve Gill (16) from Bell Baxter High School said ‘At the start we were just scared individuals. The Polar Academy has changed me and my friends into stronger,

more confident people. now we get to celebrate that growth by going on a trip with each other as a team.”

Any support you can off the Polar Academy to achieve this expedition would be hugely helpful as we are 100% reliant on fundraising. Please speak to a member of the team regarding sponsorship or patronage.

ENDS

Contact Viki Mendelssohn for any further information [wiki@bigbluepr.co.uk](mailto:wiki@bigbluepr.co.uk) 07980744048

Notes to Editor:

Website: [www.thepolaracademy.org](http://www.thepolaracademy.org)

School of 2021 : Bell Baxter High School, Cupar

Number of pupils : 14 young people aged between 15-17. Pupil names in the picture: Bryce Tyndall, Louis Finch, Ember Davidson, Rachel Murray, Stephanie Birrell, Molly Poolman, Blair MacDougall, Lauren Calley, Sophie Blair, Molly Turnbull, Emily Birrell, Eve Gill, Leah Graham & Boo Scott

Itinerary

23<sup>rd</sup> June – 1<sup>st</sup> July

### **Stage 1 – Fort William to Inverness**

Scottish Long boat supplied by [Galgael](#) Trust (Glasgow)

Traditional Birlinn boat – made by hand with no mechanical instruments on board.

Will be covering 60 miles in 5 days.

8 rowers at a time - take turns to row the 30ft wooden vessel.

Two support boats which will teach the young people how to operate a power boat.

### **Stage 2 – Dava Way – Forres, Glenmore Lodge**

40 mile hike

3 days - 2 nights camping

### **Stage 3 – Helicopter home**

As the young people were not able to experience their helicopter ride into Tasiilaq in Greenland, The Polar Academy has been fortunate enough to secure ride home for these exhausted explorers. Provided by a Polar Academy supporter this wonderful finale with give the young people a true taste of explorer stardom.

About GalGael <https://www.galgael.org>

GalGael's 30ft long *Orcuan* was built in 2001 to an ancient Scottish prototype. She is an interpretation of the historic galleys of the West Coast: the Birlinn, Scotland's traditional Gaelic longboat.

These boats were effectively banned by the repressive Statutes of Iona, 400 years ago. Once, they would have provided the main form of transport in a mountainous island region, linking the constellation of settlements on the West Coast of Scotland and beyond to the coasts of Ireland and Isle of Man.

Today, GalGael use *Orcuan* and their other boats to open sail training opportunities to the local community, linking urban and rural communities and enabling access to Scotland's unique natural heritage.