

United States Lighthouse Society visits Scotland's Northern Lights

DURING the past two weeks, 27 members of the United States Lighthouse Society (USLHS) have been on tour with Wildabout Orkney led by local guide, Michael Hartley. Also on tour was Christie Hartley who, since July 2006, has been busy putting this tour together with Jeff Gales, USLHS's tour director based at their headquarters in San Francisco, California.

On Sunday, July 15, the group was met in Glasgow by Michael Hartley and Jimmy Poke of Brass's Buses, who provided transport for the whole journey, which took in the Shetland, Orkney and Caithness lighthouses before ending in Glasgow on Sunday. By the end of the tour, approximately 60 lights were seen by the USLHS members.

Everyone was very impressed with the welcome they received at the various locations they visited.

"The way in which everyone in Orkney, Shetland and Caithness went out of their way to make our group's visit a success was overwhelming," commented Christie Hartley.

The excursion to North Ronaldsay was one of the highlights of the tour. The group enjoyed lunch at the Bird Observatory before meeting Bill Muir, chairman of the North Ronaldsay Trust, who explained the history of the island's two lights. They were then treated to a climb to the top of the new lighthouse. Charles Tait, also a lighthouse enthusiast, accompanied the group to North Ronaldsay and took the official group photograph for the tour.

During their one-week stay in Orkney, the group enjoyed a cruise on Scapa Flow with the Roving Eye during which they were able to view several lights, including Cantick Head, and to make a brief stop at Longhope to visit to the Lifeboat Museum. They also visited Sanday where they met Rod Thorne, the island's ranger, who drove the group to the north part of the island. There, they crossed the causeway to Start Point Lighthouse and met the keeper, Andrew Skea who took them to the top of the lighthouse. The group was delighted when Angus Hutchison, Scotland's last lighthouse keeper, and his wife Yvonne joined them for dinner at the Kirkwall Hotel on their final night in Orkney.

The USLHS members then spent two days in Caithness where they visited Dunnet Head and Duncansby Head lights and enjoyed a tour of the decommissioned Holborn Head lighthouse at Scrabster Pier, which is being lovingly converted into a family home by its current owners, Melanie and Brian Myers.

The USLHS members also had the pleasure of meeting Ian Sinclair during their visit to Noss Head Lighthouse and, the following day, Ian hosted the group's visit to Wick Heritage Museum where they were able to see the complete optical and mechanical working of Noss Head Lighthouse, including the original Fresnel lens.

The final day of the tour saw the group visit Oban and then travel on to Glasgow for their last night. During their farewell dinner,



the group pronounced the tour a resounding success and awarded Christie and Michael membership of the United States Lighthouse Society. Many members plan to return to Orkney and eagerly await Wildabout Orkney's next lighthouse tour.