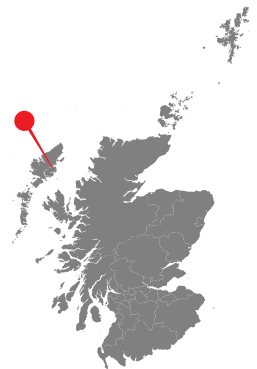




# From the Hebrides to the world...

with Coinneach MacLeod

By Katie Macleod



Coinneach MacLeod can pinpoint the moment he first had the idea that would become the social media sensation known as “The Hebridean Baker.” It was early 2020 and he was visiting his 93-year-old Aunt Bellag at her home on the Isle of Lewis. “She had a duff\* bubbling away on the stove, and she was telling me she had made it the same way for the last 80 years. She made her first duff when she was 13, and she’s had the same recipe since then,” he remembers.

“We were telling stories. She was telling me about her wedding day and traditions, and I was thinking, you know

what, I want to make sure that people on the island don’t forget this – don’t forget these stories, and don’t forget these recipes.”

Coinneach, from Cromore in the Lochs district of Lewis, never imagined that anyone outside the Outer Hebrides would be interested in these recipes or stories. But less than three years later, 21 million people (and counting) have watched his TikTok videos of Scottish baking, Gaelic lessons, and adventures around the Scottish islands with his partner Peter and their Westie dog Seòras.

*\* A duff is a boiled or steamed pudding often containing dried fruit*

And it's not just his home islands of the Outer Hebrides that play a starring role in his videos. Mull, Skye, Jura, and the Isle of Seil all pop up on The Hebridean Baker social media feeds, with videos of visits to local food and drink producers interspersed with dramatic landscape shots of scenery. Comments like "Thanks for taking us with you!" and "I'm literally planning our Hebridean trip off your videos!" appear below them all, showing just how enthusiastic his followers are for stories and recipes from the islands.

Coinneach began sharing his recipes online not long after that day in the kitchen with his Aunt Bellag, but it wasn't until the summer of 2020 that The Hebridean Baker account really took off. Unbeknownst to Coinneach, a writer at ELLE magazine in the USA had penned a column about him, telling readers that his voice "sounds how I imagine a warm shortbread cookie might talk if it came to life." Overnight, Coinneach's Hebridean Baker videos received hundreds of thousands of new views, and the rest is social media history.

He was soon approached by Edinburgh-based book publishers Black & White Publishing to write a cookbook, and *The Hebridean Baker: Recipes and Wee Stories* from the Scottish Islands hit shelves in September 2021. It became Scotland's best-selling cookbook that year, before it was launched in North America in the spring of 2022 with an "amazing" sell-out 12-city book tour of the USA and Canada.

Since then, Coinneach has been featured in local and national media, and appears regularly on prime-time TV, from cooking in the studio on ITV's *This Morning*, to showcasing the Isle of Lewis on *The Travel Show* and Martin Compston's *Scottish Fling* on the BBC. "It still makes me laugh that travel shows in the past would have gone to Rio, Buenos Aires, Sydney, and now they go to Cromore!"

Despite his new-found global fame, Coinneach is in awe of the reach his stories have had. "21 million people have watched the videos. As you know, there are definitely not 21 million people in Cromore," he laughs. "The storylines, the recipes, the culture, the landscapes, they just seem to have resonated with people across the world, and that is just fantastic. Because I did it for the love of the island recipes, the island stories, I never imagined it would come to anything more than that."



Coinneach has always been a keen home baker, taught by his mother and aunt, and his second cookbook, *The Hebridean Baker: My Scottish Island Kitchen*, released in October 2022, is as packed with modern takes on traditional dishes as his first offering. From "Posh Mince and Tatties" elevated with venison and red wine, to empire biscuits, scones, crumbles, and even cocktails, there's plenty to make the mouth water.

But these aren't just cookbooks; they're love letters to the Outer Hebrides, sprinkled with stories of culture and history, and introductions to local characters that bring the recipes to life. His Aunt Bellag makes an appearance in the first cookbook (her photo is next to the duff recipe that started it all), while the second features the likes of Gaelic TV legend Cathie MacDonald and the 'Barley' sisters Shona and Ria, who run Charles MacLeod Butchers in Stornoway, famous as 'Charlie Barley's' for their black pudding. "Having the people in them has been a very important part of the books," says Coinneach. "I hope it makes people smile."

Another important element of both books is "Coinneach's Larder," which appears in the opening pages. "I am passionate

about using home-grown Hebridean and Scottish produce,” he writes. “Eating locally first means choosing food that is grown and harvested close to where you live, investing in the local community and its people.” He goes on to list some of his favourite Scottish island suppliers, including the Isle of Harris Distillery, Charles MacLeod Butchers, Jura Whisky, and Stag Bakeries, with whom he recently launched a range of biscuits.

Highlighting islanders involved in the food industry and encouraging visitors to eat locally when they visit the Scottish islands means a lot to Coinneach, and goes back to the original impetus behind his early videos of documenting and sharing island recipes. As he puts it, “Yes, you’re going to have a beautiful picture of yourself at Luskentyre Beach, but food is always the thing people remember from a holiday.”

Coinneach will be back in the USA in January 2023, on the book tour to launch the US edition of *My Scottish Island Kitchen*, which goes on sale on 24 January 2023. “That’ll be great, and the big part for me is just continuing to do things to promote the islands... I tell people you might hear the Gaelic language for the first time, you’ll be standing in a stone circle that’s been stood in for the last thousand years, you’ll hear about Viking heritage, you’ll try Black Pudding. Whatever it is, you’ll have stories when you go home that you won’t get anywhere else.”



## STORNOWAY SCOTCH EGGS

Adding the rich, well-seasoned flavours of Stornoway Black Pudding to your sausage meat makes these the tastiest Scotch eggs you’ll ever have. Many folk think these will be challenging to make, but with minimal preparation and making sure you are safely deep frying, you will be rewarded with a hearty snack. Perfect warm or cold.

**MAKES 4**

### INGREDIENTS

6 eggs (4 for soft boiling, 2 beaten)  
 6 quality pork sausages (about 300g/10½oz)  
 275g (10oz) Stornoway Black Pudding  
 Plain flour, enough to fill a bowl  
 Bowl of panko breadcrumbs  
 Vegetable oil, for deep frying  
 Salt and pepper

### METHOD

To get the perfect soft-boiled egg, lower 4 eggs into a pan of boiling water for 7 minutes. Have a bowl of ice-cold water ready and drop them in immediately to halt the cooking process. You can peel them once they have cooled.

Remove the sausage meat from the skins and add along with the black pudding to a bowl. Season well with salt and black pepper, mix together and then split into four equally sized portions.

Take one of your portions, flatten it out in your hand and wrap evenly around an egg.

Have three bowls ready: one with plain flour, one with 2 beaten eggs and one with breadcrumbs. Dip the Scotch eggs into the flour, then the egg mixture, then the breadcrumbs.

Half-fill a saucepan with vegetable oil and heat until it reaches 180°C (350°F) on a thermometer. Frying two Scotch eggs at a time, cook for 8 minutes until golden and crisp, turning occasionally, and rest on some kitchen paper.

Make sure the thermometer still reads 180°C (350°F) before adding the next two eggs.

