

Coach to make its final journey back home

Luke Powell

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It is a much-loved coach which was once a familiar sight to residents of the remote Shetland Islands.

For almost three decades it served as a lifeline to the community until it was sold in 1979 and never returned.

But now, thanks to one man from Norfolk, it will be donated back to the islanders after more than 35 years.

Owner Nick Taylor, of Weybread, near Diss, is to drive the Bedford OB coach 1,000 miles from Norwich to Shetland, next June.

It comes after one of the former drivers came to visit Mr Taylor having heard that he had restored the vehicle to its former glory.

Mr Taylor, 66, said: "I was staggered by the depth of fondness not only he [the driver] had for this coach, but also what many islanders had for it.

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He purchased the vehicle five years ago from a private owner in Wincanton for £27,000 and has taken it to various shows across the county.

But when he takes it to Scotland next year, he will donate to the Shetland Commercial Vehicle Preservation Trust.

John Watt, 71, of Reawick in Shetland, who drove the vehicle for 11 years from 1968, visited Mr Taylor in 2013.

He said: "It was nice experience to not only see it again, but to see the condition it was in.

"It was quite a popular vehicle here and was used to carry passengers and help deliver groceries to people."

Mr Taylor and a team of enthusiasts will drive the coach to Shetland over a two-week period in June next year.

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■ Nick Taylor with the restored coach which he will take back to the Shetland Islands.

Pictures: SONYA DUNCAN

The coach's history

The coach was first registered on July 31 1950 by the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society in Glasgow. Later that year it was sold to W Thompson, of Swinister, Sandwick, in the Shetland Islands. With a top speed of 40mph, the vehicle was used to transport people around the islands in all weather conditions. From 1968 the coach was operated by James Watt of Reawick. But in 1979 it was

sold to Kestral Coaches, of Stourport on Severn, where it was named "The Shetlander". The Wimbledon-based company Cresta Coaches purchased it a year later and in 1998 it was sold to a private dealer. Jeff Cook, of Wincanton, undertook most of the restoration work before selling it to Nick Taylor in 2011. Mr Taylor completed the restoration and added the sign writing. The coach's chassis was built in London, and the vehicle boasts a six-cylinder, 28-horsepower, 3,519cc petrol engine.

Nick Taylor's coach trip

