

Three trips to Scotland



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Title page: Top to bottom. Lossiemouth lighthouse, Scottish thistle, Aberdeen North Pier lighthouse, two mountainous ridges Glencoe Three Sisters area, Neptune's Staircase Fort William.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Pierre de Villiers was born in Durban, South Africa. He was trained to World Meteorological Organization class one meteorologist and multi-discipline weather forecaster in the South African Weather Service where he reached the rank of Director. He served on a weather ship in the South Atlantic. He served on World Meteorological Organization expert teams and was World Meteorological Organization rapporteur for the Africa region. He was also a commercial pilot and flying instructor. More recently he was a weather forecaster in the United Arab Emirates, then in England. Now retired.

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Scotland

We had an excellent week near Aberdeen in the company of the Scots and Chinese couple from our time in Abu Dhabi and travel together. Travelling northward we took a slow 2 days drive on the 10th and 11th September 2005, via York, Scarborough, Robin Hood Bay, Alnwick (pronounced without the l and the w), Amble and over the Firth of Forth bridge near Edinburgh. Then through Dunfermline, Perth and Dundee.

We had a picnic lunch in the Abbey ruin car park at Whitby and spent the night on the way north near Ashington. Cannot remember the exact place. It was near The Plough Inn, maybe it was The Plough Inn, because there is a photograph of it with the car outside in the evening where we had a pub meal.



Picnic lunch at Whitby Abbey ruin and evening meal at The Plough Inn.



Warkworth Castle ruin.



Alnwick Castle.

Onward the next day we stopped at the large extent Warkworth Castle ruin near Amble in Northumberland. It is a motte and bailey castle managed by English Heritage. A motte is a raised mound on which is built a fort or keep. A bailey is a surrounding walled area with a ditch and palisade (stake wall or paling). According to English Heritage, the 12th century castle was once the residence of the knight Sir Henry 'Hotspur' Percy (1364–1403) who fought against the Scots and the French during the Hundred Years' War, as well as instrumental in deposing



Maryculter.

but our Chinese friend closed all the windows because she was cold and to keep the flies out. I saw one fly the whole time we were there, well maybe two. It's not like the UAE, where the flies come out in winter, because it is too bloody hot in summer. The "chalet" was fully equipped with toilet/shower, kitchen, 3 bedrooms and lounge/dining room with a big TV. Our Chinese friend said the "TV programmes are bloody crap. All one can look at is the log fire." An electric one at that. It never worried the Scot, he simply made sure he had a beer in his hand, which he kept in a cooler sleeve so that his hand would not warm it. Although, I never saw his beer last long enough to get warm. His favourite chaser was red wine. His wife would scold him about this because she said the red wine made him snore. I thought it was simply the alcohol in total that made him so relaxed and snore, but I kept this to myself.

Richard II and rebelled against Henry IV.

We stayed in a wooden holiday chalet at Maryculter (pronounced without the l), about 18 kilometres by road inland from Aberdeen. The way many place names are pronounced one could save a lot of money by omitting unused letters on signboards and space when printing them. There is something to be said for the Afrikaans and Arabic phonetic spelling.

The "chalet" was very cosy. Except my wife wanted fresh air even if it was arctic at times,



Craigievar Castle.

pigments to give it the pinkish colour to match the local granite (National Trust for Scotland).

Also, beautiful little harbours, like Stonehaven and Johnshaven on the coast south of Aberdeen. And sheep. Oh, did we

We travelled around quite a lot and saw many castles, such as the fairy tale castle at Craigievar and passed Balmoral. Originally, in the 1500s, it was a 4 story tower house of grey rough stone. In the year 1610 its transformation to a 7 story structure began and roofline with an "exuberance of turrets, viewing platforms, balusters and chimneys" Harling was applied to the outer walls to waterproof the building. Harling is a mixture of lime and aggregate (small pebbles or fine chips of stone). The original colour was cream. When it was repaired and restored. Reharling tinged with



Stonehaven.

see sheep! It must be their national animal. There were some cattle in the lowlands. We had



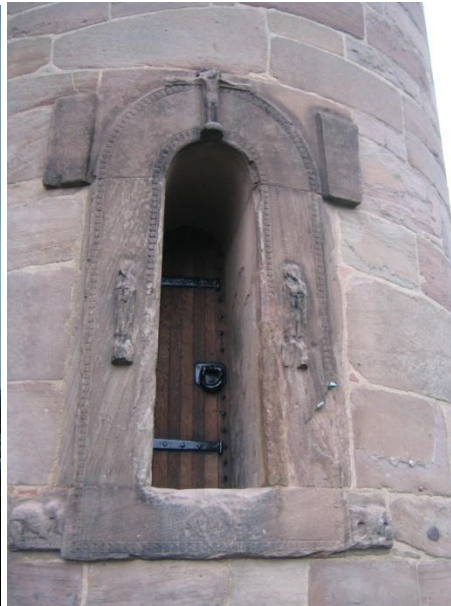
Highland cattle.

mutton on the hoof in a field next to our palatial residence and we considered ways of enticing one close enough for our barbeque on the patio on the 2nd night. Strangely, although they grazed near to us in the mornings, by the evenings they were always in the furthest corner of the field.

We also travelled to Brechin to see Highland wild cattle, but they weren't wild and they weren't in the Highlands. I thought of wagging a stick in their ears to see if that would make them ferocious and wild, but decided the locals would not see the humour.



Silhouette of the Bell Tower and the raised doorway is 2 metres (80 inches) above ground level.



While in Brechin we visited 13th century Brechin Cathedral. The focus of attention was not the cathedral, rather the curious bell tower. A notice board proclaimed that it was “one of only two such towers of Irish type in Scotland. These towers date from 950 to 1180 with “a date around 1100 seems likely for Brechin.” As the name implies the tall six story round tower served as a

bell tower with hand bells rung from the top story windows. They also a secure place during danger and safe keeping of valuable possessions. Hence the door “well above ground level.”



As to be expected in Aberdeen, North Sea oil and gas industry dominated the harbour.

We saw Ostriches as well. In Scotland!? They were in a field on a farm not far from where we stayed. Also saw lots of locals. Most disappointing they were. Not a kilt in sight, or Scottish brogue heard. They looked like everyone else you see in the UK. Walking along the pavement in Aberdeen one day we found they have a strange habit

of walking on the right, as opposed to on the left when driving on the road. This caused some problems at first, because we were walking on the left. We adapted.



Driving in Lecht.



Tomintoul.

Went up into the Highlands in the Lecht area, a winter ski location in the Cairngorms, passed through Tomintoul billed as the northern gateway to the Cairngorms National Park, Tomintoul at an altitude of 355 metres, (1164 ft), is also known as the highest village in the Highlands. It is very open and covered with heather. Most trees there have been specifically planted for timber. The slow growing Pine is supposed to be better than the faster growing Pine in warmer climates, such as South Africa. This was told to me by a guy in the know in South Africa. Not many villages in the Highlands, mainly heather and sheep. Went to Balmoral, but the queen had already left after her summer hols. Didn't even prolong her stay, in spite of us coming up. Then on to Loch Muick, which is on the Balmoral Estate, where we saw and photographed Red Deer, albeit from some distance. Stopped at the Bridge of Feugh. This is apparently a good spot to stand and watch the Salmon fighting their way upstream through the rapids in spring to spawn. All we saw was water rushing downstream over the rapids, but then this was logical, because it was the beginning of autumn. We still watched the water though.

Came home in one day on the 17th, but it took 10 hours with a long delay on the motorway near Leeds. With my wife driving, we used our AA roadmap book to detour through the eastern part of Leeds to avoid the hold-up, but everyone else had the same idea. In most cars one could see the front passenger bent over a map book, while the driver sat staring ahead with a glazed look while going nowhere fast. The distance from Aberdeen to Birmingham is only 690 kilometres, about the same as Pretoria to Durban, which one can do in about 5 hours 30 minutes on the toll road. We saw enough of Leeds to decide that this was a good place to pass and not visit.

Back to Scotland

We arranged to spend a week in Scotland with our same friends from the UAE. He still worked in Abu Dhabi, but once a year they would come across for him to see his relatives and then, as he puts it, he doesn't have to see them for another 364 days. So from the 13th to the 20th May 2006, we stayed in a self-catering cottage at the Blackhills about 15 kilometres south-east of Elgin.

We travelled northward there a day earlier on the 12th on the M6 then the M74 and various other M and A roads, passed a burning car on the M6 somewhere north of Manchester. My

wife drove to Carlisle and I drove the rest. We turned off the main road before Perth and went via back roads past Gleneagles (and the Golf Course), Crieff, Amulree and Dunkeld to Pitlochry (as in Dunkeld and Pitlochry roads in Durban). There are many British Isles named places, roads, etc., in South Africa. Although most changed since 1994 after the first post-apartheid election.



The Wellwood Manor and the Moulin Hotel photographed the morning after our meal.

We spent the night at a B+B hotel in Pitlochry, that was actually the Wellwood Manor. A bit pricey, but worth it. We asked the Scots “Lady of the Manor” where there was a good place to eat that evening. We were told to go out the gate to the left and follow the road until you feel you have walked too far when you will come to a good pub. Well, she did not say it was all uphill and that it was nearly a kilometre away. The pub was at the Moulin Hotel. We could already see the plus side to this was that when it came time to go home, one staggered downhill and not up.

It was a lovely pub. Not much to look at outside, but cosy, low ceiling, full of locals, friends getting together and families. We had to order drinks and wait for an available table. Of course, the barman’s accent I recognised straight away. Been there 3 months from South Africa. We finally obtained a small table with two chairs and a bench. Almost immediately a woman came in with two small children and asked if we minded if the children shared the bench to colour in as they were not allowed in the bar area behind us. Well behaved they were. A child from another table decided to join in. I had a worrying moment when the child’s father asked me if I minded him playing with my children. What did he know that I did not know? Especially as

I had never been in the area before. I had to tell him we were not the parents and refer him to the mother of the children.



The mill at Blair Atholl.

The next day, after breakfast at the Manor, served by east European waitresses (sod the word waitrons), we detoured to Blair Atholl not far north of Pitlochry, because it has the same name as Blair Atholl Road in Pinetown next to Durban. Because it was a rather short drive to the Blackhills Estate, we diverted via Inverness (not much to look at, but with an impressive high suspension bridge across the Moray Firth) and then took the coastal road

to Elgin and the Blackhills off the B9103.

Elgin, with its 13th century abbey ruin looking very much like all other ruined abbeys, is slightly inland of the coast on the road between Inverness and Aberdeen close to where we were going to stay.



Our accommodation.

The weather was mostly cloudy and cold with temperatures below normal and plenty of rain from the north-east to north-west to start, but less so later and a bit warmer when the rain came from the south-west. The Blackhills Estate is actually a farm come Manor House, with some restored cottages and houses clustered near the barns. We stayed in a place that was more like a large house with an upstairs dormer windowed loft room that sleeps six. Eight if you opened the futon.

There is a nearby valley that is famous for its wildly growing Rhododendrons. It is open to the public for three Sundays late in May. May the 14th being the first visitor's day. People that visit pay a fee that goes to charity for the privilege of tramping through the forest glade in the rain. At least that is what happened on Sunday the 14th. As residents we did get to see it all free and to tramp around the woods on recuperative walks after the previous night's drinking. The Scot is a great believer in supporting the beer industry. In fact, our first afternoon there when we all went into the local Asda supermarket to stock up with food for the week, The Scot bought beer. On the Monday when we went to Inverness and the big Tesco there, he bought beer. Mind you on these occasions, so did I.



One of the ponds and the old kiln where the crocodile skull was seen.

There are two lovely large ponds (more like small lakes) in the Rhododendron valley, one complete with a pair of swans that hatched 7 signets while we were there. While walking passed the one pond, some debris floating in it looked startlingly like a crocodile's snout. Upon remarking on it our Chinese friend said that where she comes from it is known as a Pook Pook. We thought she said poop poop, which we thought was apt. Then believe it or not we walk on up to the nearby disused Kiln building and what do I find on a ledge, but the skeletal head and jaw of a small crocodile. There must be a story behind that.

There was an interesting small museum house with domestic relics of days gone by, such as an old manual equivalent of a washing machine and spin cycle. One was free to enter and wander around. There was even a very old steam tractor.



Washing barrel right and dry press left. On the right, an old steam tractor.



The Glen Grant distillery.

also a Connoisseurs tour that costs £15. We were given a free tot each at Glen Grant. My wife never drinks whisky and I thought I would get hers. Much to my dismay she drank her entire tot. So now I know all about malt whisky and I doubt if I will drink blended whisky again, unless it is all that is available. It is obviously powerful stuff, because I noticed a peculiar black

The, the area where we stayed is slap in the middle of the major Scotland distilleries around the Spey River. So of course the four of us had to visit one. We went to the nearby Glen Grant (established in 1840) at Rothes. It is free and you get a free tot. Most places charge an entrance fee, which you get back when you buy products at the shop when you exit. The guide, Rob, nearly had a heart attack when I asked him about my favourite single malt Glenfiddich, which is also distilled nearby at a place called Keith. We nearly went there as well because the “original” tour is also free, although there is moss on the building where the casks are stored for 10 to 50 years. When I pointed it out to my wife the guide heard me and said it is caused by the fumes.



The Carrbridge Packhorse Bridge.

On the way to Loch Ness, we paused near the village of Carrbridge in the Cairngorms National Park. Its claim to fame is the old Carrbridge Packhorse Bridge. The bridge, built in 1717, I was told is the oldest stone bridge in the Highlands. It is now rather unstable. A notice warns people to stay off and view from afar.



Loch Ness with Urquhart Castle ruin on the west bank.

We did a complete circuit around Loch Ness stopping at various places never seeing the Loch Ness monster, The water in the loch looks like the water in any other loch. Apparently, there is more water in Loch Ness than there is in lakes, dams and reservoirs in the whole of England. Loch Ness is a major part of the Caledonian Canal from open sea at Inverness south-west to access to open sea at Fort William on the other side of Scotland. Opened in 1822, built by Thomas Telford and William Jessop, less than a third is canal (35 kilometres) with 29 locks, the rest of the waterway consists of three additional lochs. There are numerous castles alongside the loch.



Locks at the southern end of Loch Ness and the tourist/cruise ticket shop.

While at the southern end of the loch, at Fort Augustus, my wife bought some souvenirs and I bought a jersey, jumper, pullover, whatever. They had a two for one offer at a small shop in the disused church. The Scot wanted one so it was suggested I go halves and buy the other one.



Inside Baxters shop museum.

Wednesday, the 17th, the Scott said we must see Baxters. Baxters is a big business that produces all sorts of foodstuffs, especially canned food, and many other products. It is big in the UK, been going for a long time and it has a small period type village and museum next to its factory

near to Fochabers. In a room dedicated to the history of Baxters and Fochabers is a scrapbook titled “Well known Fochabers.” Among the well-known Fochabers is a Sir James Sievewright, KCMG (Kindly Call Me God) 1848 – 1916, who pioneered telegraphs and railways in the Cape Colony in Cecil John Rhodes parliament.



Other orders of St Michael and St George are; CMG (Call Me God) and GCMG (God Calls Me God).

The Scot grew up in a cottage a few kilometres away from where we stayed and he went to high school in Fochabers. The school was called the Milne's High School. The stately building is now a primary school. I said to him that children must now be much more intelligent, because what they taught him they now teach to younger children.

Milne's Primary (ex-High) School.

The following day, Thursday, the two of us went on a day trip to the west coast. We set out west about 9 am through Inverness to Achnasheen, Loch Maree and Gairloch on the west coast. On the way we stopped at Achnasheen for my wife to post postcards, but the post office next to the station was only open from 11 am to 1 pm and we were not about to wait. However, I did get a photograph of a Scottish two carriage DMU (Diesel Motor Unit) train. Now this does not seem like much, but for days we had been driving next to, close to and within sight of railway lines. I was beginning to think that there were no trains. A bonus is that at the station we now saw the luxury train the Royal Scotsman. So I took pictures of that as well. Finally, at the next little village, Kinlochewe, my wife managed to post her postcards.

The weather was cloudy to overcast, showery and blustery with brief sunny spells. This made the rugged and open countryside seem even more attractive. The thing about lots of Scotland that is a major attraction for us, is that you can actually travel for some miles without seeing habitation, another person, or another car on the road. Something you do not see in England.



Loch Maree and Loch Ewe, the Isle of Ewe in the distance.

From Gairloch we went through places like Poolewe, Loch Maree and Aultbea, passing the Càrn a' Bhiorain area before leaving the A832 and onto the A835 to Ullapool. North of Poolewe on the west coast, nearing Aultbea, my wife received a mobile call, so on a high lay-by overlooking a large bay in Loch Ewe we stopped so that she would not lose the signal. I remember looking out over the loch, which in this case is a sea water loch, that is, open to the

sea, while the wind buffeted and rain pelted the car.



At the Ferry Boat Inn looking toward the fishing boat wharf with the ferry terminal beyond.

We had a late lunch at the Ferry Boat Inn pub on the harbours edge in Ullapool on the bank of Loch Broom, another loch open to the sea. The only claim to fame here is that it is a ferry port to Stornoway, or Steornabhagh in Gaelic. I have come to the conclusion that to pronounce these Gaelic places it helps to be able to speak Afrikaans. Pronunciation is rather guttural. The other claim to fame in Ullapool is that we came around a corner overlooking the entrance to Loch Broom and there is a house called Kyalami (as in Kyalami near Johannesburg, my (lami) home (khaya) in Zulu). From Ullapool we went more directly back to Inverness and home to the Blackhills.

Of course, I had to see nearby RAF Lossiemouth and RAF Kinloss. Kinloss is where the Nimrods were based. These were reconnaissance aircraft based on the old Comet passenger jet frame. So, we all went on a drive around the area. Later, on Friday, when friends and I were driving to see Cawdor Castle, I saw one of these aircraft doing touch and go circuits at Kinloss. My wife did not accompany us, because she was feeling poorly. It was at Cawdor that I saw my first red squirrel. England is overrun with grey squirrels, or tree rats, imported from the USA.

Cawdor's claim to fame, as far as I am concerned, is because it and the Thane of Cawdor, are mentioned in Shakespeare's Macbeth, even though he does get his history and places mixed up. King Duncan was killed in battle against Macbeth, who had an equal claim to the Scottish throne and did not stab Duncan to death in his sleep.

Now, here is another story that they do not tell you when you visit the castle. The castle is owned by the Dowager Countess Angelika Cawdor, the wife of the 25th Thane of Cawdor and 6th Earl and stepmother of the present 26th Thane of Cawdor and 7th Earl. Why was it not inherited by the 26th Thane of Cawdor and 7th Earl Colin and the Castle and other estates were



Cawdor Castle.

bequeathed to a stepmother? In her book "Title Deeds", Liza Campbell, daughter of the 25th Thane of Cawdor and 6th Earl, says it took one "drunken rake," namely the aforesaid 25th Thane "to piss away" 600 years of Scottish history. According to her, her father sold the milk cow and highly profitable Welsh estate, to finance his Ferrari's and women, demolished the Welsh Mansion Stackpole, "brutalised his first wife and indulged in fabulously injudicious sexual adventures." He had always stated that his eldest son and her older brother Colin, would inherit the estate and obviously the title.

Instead, when the will was read after his death, stepmother Angelika, brought up in Rhodesia of 2nd World War titled Czechoslovakian refugee parents, inherited the Castle. Apparently, she got the castle and any Welsh furniture from Stackpole, which included portraits of the forebears, but Colin got the Scottish furniture. At the Drynachan estate, where the countess spends the summer (she winters at the Castle), the house belongs to Colin, but the furniture belongs to Angelika. Confusing. In the UK Sunday Times (2006-06-11) was a rebuttal from the countess. She said he was not an alcoholic and has the medical records to prove it and that the Welsh property had to be sold in the divorce from his first wife, a marriage in which he was very unhappy. Also, that the present Earl knew about the will and that it will all revert to him, or his son, on her death and provided all his legal actions do not break the estate. As for the drugs and paedophile accusations they are ludicrous.



Stirling Castle seen from the motor car.

Finally, on Saturday, the 20th, we headed back home. This time my wife drove the Scottish leg, passing Stirling Castle to Carlisle, then I drove the M6 part. We left about 9 am and by 6 pm we were back in Olton.

Sadly, when we arrived home, we heard from our neighbours, that the previous afternoon on Friday the 19th, between 1 to 3 pm a 25-year-old cleaner in a house across the road and about 7 houses along, was viciously

attacked by what we assume was a burglar. She died 5 days later. A sixteen-year-old from nearby Shelly was arrested and due to appear in the juvenile court at Nottingham.

On a lighter note, the same evening we received a mobile call from the Chinese wife to say that we must check for ticks. She found some on herself and muttered about 3rd world countries. Anyway, there were two on my wife. They must have been picked up when we went walking through long grass on the Blackhills Estate the previous afternoon. The men were not affected, probably because we wore long trousers, shoes and socks.

Scotland, the west

The highlight of the year was an all too short holiday break to Scotland in June 2016 18th to the 23rd. Always like going to Scotland. Once again, too much time spent driving. During 5 days did close to 2000 kilometres. First drove to the Dumfries area in south-west Scotland, then past Loch Lomond to Fort William, next to Ben Nevis. Never saw the top of the mountains once. It was permanently covered in cloud with rain most of the time during our trip. Never had to wash the car. Brilliant scenery along Loch Lomond and beyond Glen Coe to Fort William and south along the coast to Oban. Lots of old castles. On the way back we stopped at the Lake district.

After a very early start Saturday the 18th June, we arrived in the Dumfries area around mid-morning. Nearing Dumfries, we passed a road sign pointing the way to Lockerbie. Lockerbie is about 10 kilometres east of Dumfries where Pan Am Flight 103 crashed on the 21st December 1988, brought down by a terrorist bomb on board. In total 270 fatalities, including 11 people on the ground when large sections of the aircraft crashed onto a residential street.

Our first destination was to the Caerlaverock and Nith Estuary area. Stopped the nearby



Caerlaverock Castle.

remains of the triangular shaped, moated, Caerlaverock Castle. Built in the 13th century it was abandoned in the 17th. It is still in remarkably good shape. Walls and towers almost undamaged. Impressive. The popular concept of how a castle should look, in spite of the unusual triangular shape.

Next door is the Caerlaverock National Nature Reserve, a narrow strip on the shore of the River Nith and the Nith Estuary. It is mostly wetland with mud flats, sand and marshes with grassland inland. Home to wading birds, about 50 summer breeding

species and wintering waterfowl. After a short walk through the grass, we had a relaxing stroll along the shoreline. One is warned “Danger fast flowing tides and quicksands.” A notice board with photographs informs one that the River Nith estuary was home to haaf fishing. Haaf is a Norse word for channel. It was at its peak for about 100 years in the 19th century. During flood and ebb tides, haaf netters stand in a line chest deep in the channel holding a 4 metres long horizontal wooden pole that supports a net so that they form a continuous barrier of nets. The net is divided into two pockets. It is “held against the running tide, when a fish is felt tugging the net, the frame is lifted and the fish is trapped in one of the pockets”. Another method, used in the past, included using Paidle nets. Staked nets form arms that lead to a smaller funnel trap. Then there was Tramping flounders. This involved wading in the shallows bare foot, feeling for fish. The fish “would be speared with a pitchfork or other specially made tool”. I wonder how many times one speared one’s foot.

Anchored further up river at a simply made stone wharf we came across a steel hulled schooner sailing ship flying the Isle of Man flag with 3 square rigged foremast and rear fore-aft rigged mizzen mast. Unfortunately, I have been unable to find the name of the vessel.



The Isle of Man Schooner. The caravan suggests camping there for some time. On the right the Sweetheart Abbey ruin.

We then drove north along the eastern side of the river toward Dumfries until we could cross over to the west side then south to New Abbey (a very pretty little village that developed around the Abby), past the restored water-powered New Abbey Corn Mill to the ruin of Sweetheart Abbey. The 13th century Abbey was founded by Lady Devorgilla in 1273 in memory of her

husband John Balliol. She kept his embalmed heart. Hence the name of the Abby.

Further south, midway between New Abby and Kirkbean, we stopped for our picnic lunch at the Drumburn view sight. The view was not of Drumburn. The view was the expanse of the Nith Estuary and long flat almost uninhabited coastland. Quiet and peaceful. Perfect. Then on to Castle Douglas and the Bridge of Dee to the south-west for no other reason than we had heard it was an attractive bridge.



Hotel's crenelated water tower.

By now it was about 3 pm and getting a bit tired, so we went to Dumfries for a look at the town centre where my wife wanted some item, I forget what it was. Then a short trip out of town, to the east, to our hotel for the night, The Urr Valley Country House Hotel (formally Ernespie House) set in parkland overlooking the valley with an out of place, but quaint smaller scale grey sandstone crenelated tower in the backyard, complete with false arrow slits and semi-circular arched entrance. Found out it was built in the 19th century to conceal a water tower. Lovely and restful place. If touring in the area, it is an excellent place to use as a base.

The next leg of our journey was to Fort William via Loch Lomond and Glen Coe's Three Sisters with a detour to Kinlochleven. An amazing day. The scenery was outstanding from morning misty lifting low cloud and soft light along Loch Lomond to the rugged mountains in later lifted cloud. The road winding low down in valleys then climbing over ridges. At one time seeing a passenger train on the railway line to Fort William high above us to our right on the side of a mountain. Wife kept telling me to stop here, stop there, we are going too fast.



Inveruglas, Loch Lomond.

Our first prolonged stop was at Inveruglas on the coastal road beside Loch Lomond. The misty low cloud, soft light and still water deadening any sounds. So peaceful and relaxing. One could sit there for ages. Inveruglas is also home to the Loch Sloy Hydro-electric Power Station. In operation since 1950, its primary use is to provide electricity when there is a demand for extra power. Water in Loch Sloy at higher altitude to the west is then released via a three kilometres tunnel through Ben Vorlich. Arriving on top of a nearby ridge to the west the water then falls to the turbine building via 4 large surface pipelines.

There was more scenic beauty at Loch Tulla. Then numerous stops while passing alongside the River Coe. At the Glencoe Three Sisters a roadside information board had an inverted map of the area with north pointing downward on the board. A bit confusing at first. Anyway, once again outstanding scenery. Could not photograph the three sisters, one being cloud shrouded.



An obvious composite photograph in the Glencoe Etive area.

At Glencoe, instead of taking the direct route over the western end of Loch Leven at Ballachulish, we took the longer route around Loch Leven via Kinlochleven, a picturesque little village at the eastern end of the loch, for no other reason other than to admire the view. Kinlochleven's claim to fame is that when an aluminium smelter and housing for employees, was built in the early 1900s, it was powered by a hydro-electric scheme situated in the nearby mountains. Consequently, it became the first village in the world with every house connected to electricity. The smelter was closed in 2000.



Loch Leven and Kinlochleven.

From Ballachulish to Fort William (about 25 kilometres), although the scenery was pleasing alongside a loch, we were stuck behind a driver in a Sport Utility Vehicle (fancy 4x4) who maintained about 20 mph (32kph) below the already restricted maximum speed limit with no chance of passing. We were number 4 in the queue with the queue behind us getting steadily longer and longer. Initially, the leader of the queue was a large pantechicon. It quickly disappeared into the distance. Total frustration. We finally passed the car when on the suburban road entering Fort William.

The year being near to the summer solstice and that far north, there is daylight long into the evening. In fact, there is hardly any night with a glow of light persisting. After checking into our Premier Inn hotel near the station at Fort William and a meal nearby, we went for a walk past the stately Alexandra Hotel and Duncansburgh Macintosh Church to the nearby main street returning alongside Loch Linnhe to the remains of the old fort of Fort William near to the hotel.



The Alexandra Hotel and Duncansburgh Macintosh Church. On the right damp and misty Loch Linnhe with low cloud patches

A large information board with photographs in forms one that the now remains a fort was built in 1690 on the orders of King William of Orange, ordering it to be named Fort William. It is built on the site where there was a basic wooden fortification erected in 1654 by Cromwell to control local Royalists. According to a notice board at the site, the newer fort was “to keep the turbulent Highland Clans in check and to stop local Jacobites helping the Stuart Royal Family”. The virtually impregnable fort had 6 metres high stone walls, protected by deep ditches, the River Nevis and Loch Linnhe. A settlement of timbered and thatched buildings housed families and tradesmen. The “army permitted only houses of wood and turf because these could be burned to the ground or knocked down quickly, by order of the Governor, if the Fort was endangered by and lodgement there of the enemy.” This happened in 1746. Apparently, this was when 600 soldiers in the fort were attacked on the 14th of March 1746 and put under siege by the Jacobite Army. Despite days of bombardment, it survived largely intact. The Jacobites withdrew on the 3rd of April. Two weeks later they were decisively defeated by government forces at the Battle of Culloden. All that remains of the fort are segments of wall and grassed protective earth mounds. So not much to see. The area is now a grassed park.

Next morning, we set off south along the coast to Oban, stopping alongside Loch Linnhe after crossing the Leven bridge to have a fruit salad and croissant breakfast bought the previous evening from Morrison’s located close to our hotel.

By now we were getting used to the scenery alongside lochs, so it was a rather steady trip south,



The Falls of Lora.

until we crossed over to the south of the entrance to Loch Etive and drove to nearly under the bridge alongside the loch to the Falls of Lora, which is a tidal race. Another notice board (very useful they are) informs that at certain states of the tide, overfalls occur with a lot of white water. For no immediately apparent reason the water level can abruptly fall up to 1.2 metres. It forms at the shallow narrows where Loch Etive in the east meets the open sea of the Firth of Lorn in the west, which is more or less under the bridge. The best time is at an ebbing tide when water flows from Loch Etive. About 66

million cubic metres of water flows through during each ebb and flow of the tide at up to 12 knots. While we were there on an ebbing tide, we could see an overfall. It was obviously not at its peak. Still, it was interesting to see. We could see that the south side was less turbulent. In the past the Great Glen Shipping Company 900 tonnes payload capacity MV Isis and MV Burhou used this south side 30 metres wide deep channel to carry logs from Glen Etive Forest and aggregates from Bonawe Quarry out of the loch, obviously around the time of a calmer peak high tide.

About 8 kilometres further south is Oban. A small town. This was the furthest south we travelled. Close by is the small ruined Clan MacDougall Dunollie Castle dating back to the 12th century. It has a good view of nearby isles, the town and harbour. A good spot to stretch one's legs. Otherwise, nothing spectacular.

On the way back to Fort William we stopped at the places of interest noted on the way south. There are lots of ruined castles. We stopped at the partially ruined Dunstaffnage Castle about 5 kilometres from Oban on a peninsula from which one can see the Loch Etive bridge. The castle dates back to the 13th century built by the MacDougall Lords of Lorn, but held by Clan Campbell since the 15th century, now by a hereditary Captain of Dunstaffnage, whatever that means. although they no longer reside at the castle. I was not too impressed. Took only one photograph.



Barcaldine Castle. Look familiar?
Remember Craigievar Castle?

Further north, about 15 kilometres north of Oban, after heading a short distance inland along a narrow country road we arrived at Barcaldine Castle, or the Black Castle. Why, I do not know? It is not black, really grey. Although, it is different from the run of mill castles and pleasing on the eye. It is what is called a tower house castle in a L shape. It was built by Duncan Campbell of Glenorchy at the beginning of the 17th century. Attacked during the massacre of Glencoe, it fell into disrepair in the 19th century, restored at the end of the century. Since around 2010 it is a luxury B&B guest house.



Castle Stalker on the edge of Loch Linnhe.

Our last stop was to view Castle Stalker seen from afar on the A828. Another tower house. One does not see any then two appear at once. The four-storey tower house or keep set on a tidal islet, called Cormorant's Rock, in Loch Laich, a small inlet off Loch Linnhe, a few kilometres north of Port Appin. It can be reached by foot at low tide. Wellies essential. It was rather cloudy, the cloud settling on the upper reaches of the craggy hills with sun breaking though to give bright/soft light. Even so, the castle, protruding from the low tide muddy plain, looked stark and desolate. An impressive scene. Stalker comes from

Gaelic Stalcaire, meaning hunter or falconer. It is said to be one of the best preserved medieval tower houses in western Scotland.

Later in the afternoon we went to Neptune's Staircase on the western outskirt of Fort William, close to the coast of Loch Linnhe. It is at the western end of the Caledonian Canal, or the Great Glen Way. Once again welcome well provided notice board information. This time three boards. The 117 kilometres route, located in the Great Glen, connecting the east coast at Inverness with the west coast at Corpach near Fort William, took 21 years to build from the first survey to the opening ceremony in 1822. To repeat from our first visit to Scotland, only about 35 kilometres of the passageway was man-made, the rest of the route is via three lochs. Of the 29 canal locks, eight are at the western end at Fort William. Named Neptune's Staircase, it is the longest staircase lock in Britain, lifting vessels 20 metres. Each lock is 55 metres by 12 metres. It takes about 90 minutes to pass through the locks. At the bottom of the locks are two swing bridges, one for the road and one for the railway line. It was a good walk to the top from the bottom of the locks and down again.



At the top of the locks and looking downward.



The swing road bridge and swing railway bridge.

The next morning, we were on the railway station platform early ready to depart at 10:15. Months before the trip to Scotland, we booked to go on The Jacobite steam train from Fort William to Mallaig that crosses the famous Glenfinnan Viaduct. We were there early so that I could get photographs of the steam locomotive and train before too many tourists arrived.

The steam locomotive was the LMS (London Midland and Scottish Railway) Stanier Class 5 4-6-0 built at Armstrong Whitworth in 1937. The train consisted of first and standard class ex-

British Railways 1960s Mark 1 open coaches (that is, no compartments). We were in standard coach E seats 1f and 2f, arrival at Mallaig 12:25, return at 14:10, coach E seats 3f and 4f. Back at Fort William at 16:00. Very clean and comfortable. Total cost £71.50. At the time ScotRail offered an up to four times a day return service (less on Sunday) for about £7.50 (2021 price) single ticket using two-car class 156 Super Sprinter DMUs (Diesel Motor Unit).



Steam travel thrill or efficient and faster diesel, the view is the same.



The Jacobite is the train that was used in the Harry Potter films. A good trip (greater distance than the Severn Valley railway). Seats are pre-allocated using a clever system whereby you face forward going out and in the same row on the other side facing backward. Or facing backward out, forward back. The reason appears to be that the best scenery of the locks is on the way out, but of mostly steep mountain slope near the track on the way back. So, one gets to see both.

Approaching the Glenfinnan Viaduct.



Mallaig seen from the nearest the town.

Mallaig is small, pretty and interesting. It was an important fishing harbour. The railway was



The diesel-electric hybrid MV Lochinvar ferry to Armadale on the Sleat Peninsula.

built to get fish quickly to market in bigger towns in Scotland and south to England. For an hour and 45 minutes the village becomes swamped with passengers and does a roaring trade in food and souvenirs.

We had take-away fish and chips for lunch, as did most of the other passengers, except wife had scampi. She wanted to buy a birthday card. I said we did not come all this way to Scotland to buy a birthday card. She said she had forgotten to buy it before we left home. It was cheaper than buying tourist trap souvenirs.

Next day, Wednesday the 22nd, was the 1st leg of our return trip home to Kendal (petrol and lunch) and the Lake District, more specifically Lake Windermere and walkabout.



Lake Windermere.



The money tree.

While walking alongside the lake we came across a money tree. It's an old tree stump with lots of coins hammered into it, probably using a handy stone. This was new to us. Apparently, across Britain one can find money trees, particularly from the Peak District to the Scottish Highlands. It is a centuries old tradition that stems from the belief that divine spirits lived in trees. Today, it is similar to tossing a coin into a pond for good luck or, perhaps, attaching love padlocks to bridges and fences, symbolising lasting romance. Also, something new to us in Britain. That is, the locks on bridges or fences, or maybe lasting romance as well.

Spent the night at a country B&B called Mills Beck with dinner at The Punch Bowl up the road. Very pleasant, quiet and relaxing.



The 500 metres railway viaduct over the River Kent at Arnside.

The following day was more of a slow tour southward to home via Arnside, a small village on the estuary of the River Kent at north-eastern Morecombe Bay, where there is a 500 metres long railway viaduct over the river. Seems to go on for ever. Had a pleasant walk along the shore. Then a drive through Morecombe, Heysham and Lancaster and home.

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