

Scotland 2022

June 2022

Originally planned for June of 2021, this trip finally went forward in June 2022. Knowing what we know now, delaying it again might have made for a better trip, since no one besides us were masked, many attractions had taken the pandemic to do renovations, and many bars were just beginning to promote music, which was probably our biggest disappointment. And of course, most restaurants now required advance booking, which does not lend itself to our travel style, never being exactly sure when we might get somewhere. Putting that aside, the trip was wonderful, we saw lots of new things, and are already planning a return in a year or two.

Airline headaches

In the few weeks before our trip, British Airlines canceled two of our flights, one at a time. Each cancellation resulted in hours of hold music and disconnects, but eventually led to revised schedules which maintained the fundamental plan. It did cost a lot to re-schedule a perfectly good LoganAir flight because the revised route used Edinburgh instead of Glasgow. Touch and go there for awhile. Part of the process, I guess.



Day 1 – Isle of Lewis

After successfully completing four consecutive flight legs, we found ourselves in a rental car for the 10 minute trip to Stornoway and Hal 'o the Wynd B&B on the harbor. The proprietor was a Gaelic speaker, and most of Stornoway, although his English was better than mine. After an hour or two of napping, we headed off to find

dinner, eventually winding up at The Eleven restaurant, part of the Crown Inn, where lack of a booking wasn't an issue, and we enjoyed the first of many fish & chips.

They offered a nice buffet that the locals seemed to be enjoying, but it was simpler to order off the menu, given our jet lagged cloudy thinking.

We hope the need for dinner bookings goes away with the pandemic, but I'm worried the restaurants actually like it.

We walked the harbor front on the way home which was sprinkled with various statues and monuments to the fishing life. We walked by most of the bars hoping to find some music, but we failed, so we



Stornoway Harbor



Stornoway Harbor

surrendered to tiredness and went home to recharge.

Day 2 – North Lewis



Butt of Lewis

After a nice Full Scottish, we hopped into the car and started our actual plan. Spectacular birding (except for puffins) at the Butt of Lewis, where we saw gannets, skuas, petrels, cormorants, and varied gulls, but no puffins, wheeling around the spectacular cliffs. This was followed by a quick stop at the Blackhouse Arnol, then on to Blackhouse Village which included a nice simple lunch at their cafe. Both blackhouses

were restored 1950s (and older) homes showing how the locals lived in that era. There was a peat fire burning indoors, which filled the house with choking smoke, but was apparently quite beneficial for the thatched roof, in that it keeps birds nests and insects at bay.



Dun Carloway

We headed on to Dun Carloway, an ancient broch, but it was one of the many “under restoration” spots we found.

A lot of the soon to be common scaffolds, and no one actually on the job. Hiked back down the hill and drove on to Calanais Standing Stones, which were billed as the inspiration for Outlander’s centerpiece. Calanais 1 had elaborate stones in a circle with adjacent “runway”. Calanais 2 was a short drive away, and had a few stones in a circle, and Callanais 3, on the next hill, had a few more stones with some interesting granitic rock types. This one was Kathy’s favorite of the three, mainly because of the composition of some of the rocks. It wasn’t clear



Calanais 1

which were the Outlander inspiration as the surrounding area was barren, unlike the forested area seen in the show. Ended back up at the Crown Inn for pizza, which wasn’t too shabby (and beer and whisky).



Calanais 3

Day 3 – South Lewis

After another nice breakfast, we then headed off to Talbert and points south. Bypassed the actual town, as it was tiny and we're just not good shoppers, instead going straight to Luskentyre Beach. Low tide offered a nice stroll on the fresh sand in nice sunny weather with a few threatening clouds. Back in the car, searching for lunch, we found an art studio/camping enclave where we got the last open table. After nice fish & chips (and more Guinness)



Luskentyre Beach



St. Clements Porn

we drove farther south, finding St. Clements church, after a few U-turns and false jogs. Fairly interesting old stone structure with very racy stone carvings.

Then headed north along the east coast, never actually seeing a sign for the Golden Road. We might have missed the last quarter by missing a turn, but otherwise a scenic, if slow, drive. Headed back to Stornoway in time to make it to our booking at the Boatshed Restaurant. Took the usual after dinner stroll looking for music, only to throw in the towel and head home.

Golden Road



Stornoway was in the throes of a Covid-19 spike, so it's not too surprising we found the evenings fairly quiet.

Day 4 – On to Shetland

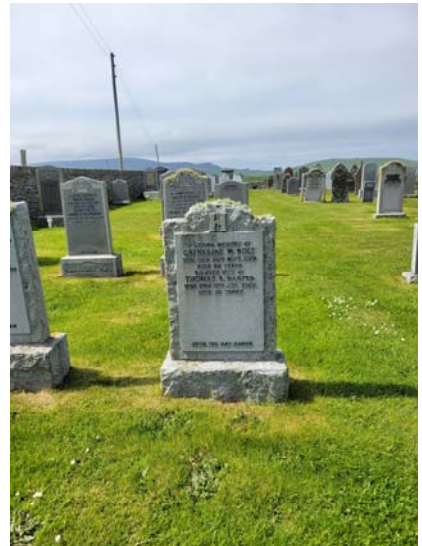
After a rushed breakfast, we boarded LoganAir for a series of hops to Inverness, Kirkwall, then finally Sumburgh, where we rented another car, and headed north. Unbeknownst to us, and without our consent, I might add, the Queen's 70th Jubilee was a major bummer for our plans.

First stop was Sumburgh Lighthouse, which was closed for the holiday. After loitering in the carpark looking over the cliffs, we proceeded to Jarlshof Village, which was also closed. Undeterred, we drove on to Old Scatness Village, which made it three closures in a row.

Growing tired of being thwarted at every turn, we elected to return to Old Scatness Village and ignoring the "exit only" sign, gave ourselves a private tour, although there were a few other scofflaws as well.

Our next stop was Dunrossness Cemetery, where my wife thought there might be ancestors, and we found several of her distant family.

The next objective was Saint Ninian's Isle, but having mis-programmed the dashboard GPS, we found a road closure rather than an Isle, so we muttered more Queen criticism and headed to Lerwick.



Dunrossness Cemetery

Arriving ahead of our intended schedule, we added Broch Clickimen to the agenda, parking in a nearby business lot and walking out the short isthmus to the broch, enjoying the examination of 3,000 year old residences.



Broch Clickimin

We drove the short distance to Aald Harbour B&B, where an easy parking spot was found, and we checked in, caught our breath, and headed out to find some dinner, which turned out to be where I thought we might go, The Dowry. We managed to get a spot despite not having the dreaded booking, and had a delightful,

somewhat exotic, meal, then strolled the town briefly before we returned to our room for a quick nap before the big evening adventure.

Got back in the car just after 9pm and headed for Sandsayre Pier, where we eventually boarded a small launch for a fast trip over to the Island of Mousa. The Skipper and his son, who actually owned the business, each took a group of 20 or so for a short hike across the island to get to the Mousa Broch, which is close to 4,000 years old. They were in no hurry, because the “event” is very precisely timed, and not till around midnight. At the magical hour, the storm petrels began arriving from sea, wheeling around the broch (and the spectators) disappearing into the smallest of crevices between building stones, where they were nesting, making a contented drumming noise that could be heard easily when the wind subsided. Being summer in Scotland, it doesn’t ever get dark. This was a fantastic experience and was the highlight of the trip so far. The Father/Son operators are 2nd/3rd generation on the route, and take up to 60 people on daily day trips and several evening trips per week. When tourists evaporate, they move sheep. Managed to stay awake for the drive home, falling into bed at 2am. Although we felt like invaders into the petrels’ space, the guide explained our presence keeps the otters and mink away from the birds, hence it’s a symbiotic relationship.



Mousa Broch



Stanydale

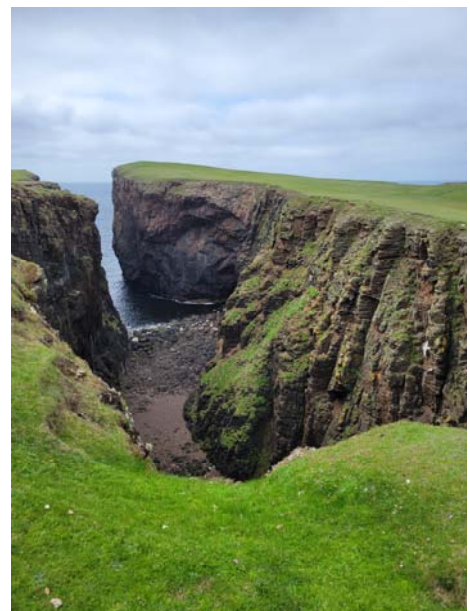
Day 5 – Northern Shetland

Our B&B hostess had been forced to run a second lodging for a sick friend, so our promised full Scottish turned out to be a satisfactory in-room continental breakfast. Having slept in a bit after the long evening, we wolfed down breakfast, got in the car, and headed towards Stanydale, a neolithic domed house, not too different from Clickimen and Scatness.

The mandatory lunch at world

famous Frankie’s Fish & Chips with (surprise!) fish & chips. It was very good but after awhile, most of them become a blur. There’s only so much you can do with white fish and potatoes.

On full stomachs, we set off to Eshaness, which is both a lighthouse and a large hiking area with jagged sea exposure. There were some puffins, but mostly gulls, gannets, and other seabirds. Even a few puffins is satisfying, though!



Eshaness

Our next stop was rather obscure, but I had found a reference on a travel forum, so there we went. Called by some as Moder-Dye, it is where the Tingon Burn (river) pours down a cliff face into the sea. It involved a fairly long hike across private land, crossing a few fences, then climbing down a fairly steep rocky cliff to get a view.

My wife passed on the steep rocky thing, so she'll have to believe me that it was pretty. But she was enjoying the interactions with the oyster catchers, which were playing all over the fields and fences as we looked for the right path to the falls.

Not sure I would recommend the visit given the time, the ambiguity of access and the ability to even see it without risking life and limb (slight exaggeration). During nesting season, it would be worth the effort.

Moder-Dye (Tingon Burn)



Textile Museum

Eventually getting back to the car, we headed back to Lerwick, via the Textile Museum, to catch a glimpse of the famous knitted fence.

We then got back to the B&B called a few bars about music, and headed for the Douglas Arms for a promised trad session which finally provided our much sought after music.

A fiddle and guitar duo performed Scottish flavor trad, and after a few hours and a few Guinness' we headed home to catch up after our short sleep the night before.

Day 6 – Lerwick & More



Lodberrie

Our original plan called for renting bicycles and taking the Bressay Ferry and visiting the Noss Nature Reserve, but since it was a bit windy, we made reservations for a Seabird Tour of Noss by boat, and strolled around Lerwick catching some of the sights. These included Lodberrie, Lightsome, the Market Cross and of course, Fort Charlotte, which was closed for the Jubilee.

Expecting to depart soon for our Seabirds trip, I got a text informing us that their boat broke down, and the trip was canceled.



Saint Ninian's Isle

Rather than drown our sorrows in Guinness, we hopped in the car and tried to find Saint Ninian's Isle again. Successful, we walked across the sand spit, cognizant of the tide, and walked all around the island.

Lots of sheep to dodge and a few fences to find ways around. Very few other walkers, and gorgeous views.

Returning to Lerwick, we pulled into the Shetland Museum. For a small town, this was a very thorough and science-y place.

Lots of exhibits including geologic and human history. As we made our way to the exit, we saw a simple sign on a door "Archivist", which led us to Angus, who jumped into the task of finding Kathy's family roots. As a Bolt, she was quite thoroughly connected (we had a Bolt Rent-a-Car), and Angus arranged for someone to point out the old family homestead across the bay on Bressay. We then had dinner at The Fish Shack which was togo-F&Cs, which we ate on a bench on the street, fighting off the brazen seagulls, who were obviously familiar with this bench and the menu.



The Bolt ancestral home on Bressay

Finishing up, we could hear very haunting singing, which we followed down to the wharf where we found a talented woman from Brittany, sitting at a piano on the stern of her sailboat, playing and singing mostly self-written songs telling the tale of their trip from France. Headed to Norway, she was raising living expenses by singing for her supper.

Slipped home during her next break, calling it a relatively early night, although with it not getting dark, it's hard to tell!



Lerwick Harbour

Day 7 – Leaving Shetland



Scalloway Castle

We went ahead and stopped at Scalloway Castle on what was essentially a circuitous trip to the airport, even though we knew it was closed. Not much to do but walk around the castle and poke around in the town.

Having made an early start, we headed to Jarlshof Village, knowing it to be re-opened. It was, and we were able to do a nice walk around the ruins, reflecting on the thousands of years of civilization it represented.

The highlight, however, was the return to Sumburgh Light, as the puffins were arriving in droves. After an encouraging few down by the car park, by the time we got to the lighthouse, we were nearly puffin-saturated. We walked the cliffs rather than try to tour the lighthouse, since we had a plane to catch.



Jarlshof Village



Sumburgh Lighthouse

Shetland was the highlight of the trip (so far), and it was with some regret that we needed to get on a plane to keep on our plan. Not really an option to change at this point! On to Glasgow...

While flying back to the mainland, we flew over huge arrays of wind generators, arranged in flawless grids in deep water.

Day 6 – Glasgow

After catching a noon LoganAir flight to Glasgow, we found an empty taxi stand with 20 people in the queue. Since we were traveling light, we got a lead over our fellow passengers, and the line grew to 100+ pretty quickly. After a fifteen minute wait, taxis began trickling in, and we got our ride after about a 30 minute wait. We dropped our bags at Argyll Guesthouse, then walked the short distance to Kelvingrove Museum. After an hour of museum, we walked around the grounds on the way back to the lodging. This was the nicest day of the year for Glasgow, so the number of people lawn bowling and sunbathing was remarkable.



Kelvingrove Museum

We returned to the guesthouse to move into our room, then headed on the Kelvin Way for the Kibble Botanical Garden. Again, the sunshine brought out huge crowds. We got there after the glasshouses had closed, as expected, and simply spent time cruising the gardens.



Kitty O'shea's

While heading back to the guesthouse, we spotted Kitty Oshea's Irish Bar, which offered interesting food downstairs plus live music upstairs. We had dinner, then moved upstairs for about three hours of music from several bands. Not Scottish Trad, but we're always happy with Irish.

On the way home after dinner, drinks, and music, we walked along Kelvin Way again, spending some time at a curious sculptured bridge, depicting four pairs of muses. The name escapes me at the moment.

Anyway, after a satisfying first week of the vacation, we headed to bed, getting ready to meet our travel companions the next morning at the airport to carry on the grand plan.

Day 7 – Glasgow to Oban

After eating a nice buffet breakfast provided by the guesthouse, we called for a taxi to the airport, and waited in the arrival lounge for Mike and Lisa. There was some confusion as they had hoped we would be at the gate, but they eventually figured out that was impossible, and they popped out of the exit.

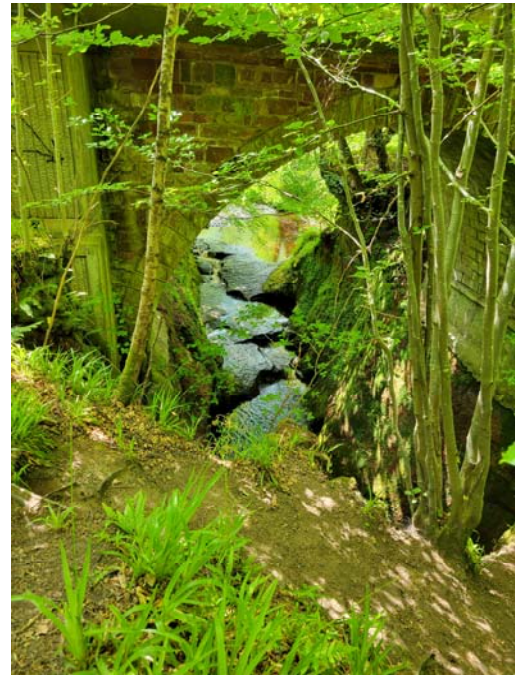
Marched over to the telephone, called for the Car Rental shuttle, then quickly found ourselves in the car lot filling out paperwork.

Our friends were starved, so we drove off, first stop the Farm at No. 12, a very nice farm restaurant. I had mapped out several options for adventures on the way to Oban, but every single thing I had mapped out were closed for renovations or the Queen's Jubilee.

The remaining option was to visit Finnich Glen, which I had been iffy about because of the need to get wet feet and limited parking. As luck would have it, one of only two parking spots appeared in front of us, so we pulled in. In my haste to get out of the car and get the door closed before traffic tore the door off, I tripped, falling on the asphalt, tearing a large piece of skin off my forearm (and banged knee, broken rib, and sore wrist). Nothing serious, but I did have to wear large bandages for the remainder of the vacation to not leave a trail everywhere I went.

Finnich Glen was VERY crowded, maybe because of the fine hot weather, or maybe because of the natural beauty. In any case, the beauty was over-shadowed by the crowds, large clouds of pot smoke, and my not feeling very chipper, wearing a bloody handkerchief secured with a hair bungee.

After a short walk up the burn to the Devil's Staircase, Mike ventured down into the smoke and loose dogs, while we waited above. As we left we could see the local constables having a field day writing parking tickets for the scores of cars that



Finnich Glen

apparently hadn't read about the parking problem.



Inverglass Pyramid

After a bit of wandering due to a detour on the main road, we eventually made it to Loch Lomond, making several stops, first Firkin Point and then Iveruglass Pyramid. Again, the crowds were large because of the extraordinary weather, and the southbound traffic was bumper to bumper for miles on end (luckily, we were headed north).

One more closed Kilchurn Castle, then we made a quick shopping stop at a Super Tesco (for breakfasts and band-aids), and eventually threaded our way to the Landsdown Terrace apartment I had reserved (after Roseneath Guesthouse canceled on us). Moved in with a coin flip for bedrooms, then made the 20 minute walk to Oban

town center.

Looked around briefly for dinner choices (and whisky), and settled on Taj Mahal Indian, mainly because they didn't require booking and it had space (and whisky). Much better food than the clamoring mass of clients would lead you to believe. Had a beer or two at Molly's Bar, but with half of us exhausted and a quarter of us leaking out of their elbow, we hiked back up the hill to the apartment and called it an early night.

Day 8 – Kilmartin

Mike got up early to make us oatmeal for breakfast, then we hopped in the car, driving down to the town center to pick up our tickets for the next day's Three Islands Tour with West Coast Tours. That accomplished with a little bit of double parking, we headed for Carnasserie Castle. Short hike up the hill from the car park, we spent an hour poking our heads into the ruins. We also got to chat up the gardeners that were mowing the extensive grounds.



Kilmartin Stones

Then onto the multiple standing stones and burial cairns of Kilmarten Glen. Parking at the Lady Glassary car park, all the cairns/stones are easily walk-able.

Took the road to the water, finding the Crinan Hotel for lunch, along with seeing large sailboats in a very small canal transiting to an inland marina via a sea-lock.

We then headed to Moine Mhor Reserve for an easy walk to digest the nice lunch, before heading back to Oban.

After returning to the apartment, we walked back down the hill, found a table at Markie Dan's Bar for another good dinner, and then made it down the harbor to the View Oban for the weekly Celidh. Although the band was okay, there were only a few paying customers until they (apparently) opened the doors to the locals. We were the only table willing to brave the dance floor to be taught what were essentially Appalachian square dances. It was quite invigorating (tiring) and I had to pass on any dances that involved the right elbow, rather than gross strangers out.

After the rather disappointing adventure (the organizers TRIED very hard to get people to participate), we headed back up the hill and called it a day.



Carnasserie Castle



Mhor Moine

Day 9 – Three Islands Tour

We ate another oatmeal breakfast and headed out at about 6:15am to walk down to the Oban Pier to set out on our Wildlife Tour as arranged by West Coast Tours. First, catch the CalMac Craignure ferry, which was a 50-minute ferry to Isle of Mull. Then boarding a WCT bus, for a 45-minute ride to Fionnport, which included a running commentary by the driver, then meeting up with Staffa Tours, for a series of boat rides. The launch took us to the Isle of Lunga, where we made a shore landing on the beach with the aid of anchored walkways, with the instructions to be back at the boat in 2 hours. You could probably circumnavigate the island if you were focused, but there were puffins absolutely everywhere, just steps from the landing. We walked about one mile to a large outcropping, but it turns out the puffins knew where the tourists were, and were thickest right by the boats.



Lunga



Fingal's Cave

After re-boarding, we moved on to the Isle of Staffa, where we had another hour to explore Fingal's Cave, which is a spectacular basalt formation (much like Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland). After waiting our turn, we got to enter the cave via a ledge (with railing). After our hour passed, we all re-boarded the launch and continued over to Iona, which has a legendary Abbey (where the Irish monks first brought Christianity to the UK), an interesting museum despite it being a "working abbey", and most important, a nice harbor-side restaurant for a late lunch to complement our sack snacks we had eaten on Lunga. Staffa Tours left us to return on the small ferry to Fionnport, then back on another bus back to Craignure and the CalMac ferry to Oban. Makes for a very long, but very spectacular day. It didn't hurt a bit that you could sit outside on the ferry in a T-shirt wishing you were wearing shorts. Absolutely stunning weather!

Looked briefly for dinner, finding a Wetherspoon, which we were not familiar with. Only after sitting for 20 minutes looking for a waiter to come by, we dolts discovered you had to order online, which Lisa managed to accomplish.

Reasonably edible food and Guinness, followed by more beers at Martyr's Bay Bar, then home to end a long day.

Day 10 – Oban to Fort William

Our apartment had one of those instantaneous water heaters, that never seem to work. Four college educated professionals were unable to get anything but ice cold or scalding hot water. We must have been over-thinking it.

After yet more of Mike's excellent Scottish oatmeal, it was check-out time, and back on the road. First stop of the day was Dunolzie Castle, which as had been our luck, was closed. So we got to Dunstaffnage Castle about 30 minutes before our booking, but no one seemed to care. The castle was a ruin with nothing but exterior walls, much like many "better" ruins, but there was good signage with historical interpretation and a nice gift shop.



Dunstaffnage Castle

Proceeding to the Falls of Lora, we were just not at the right tidal conditions to tell there was anything to see. Looked like a shallow river running under a bridge. Apparently it can be quite a maelstrom under other conditions.



Glencoe Lochan Trail

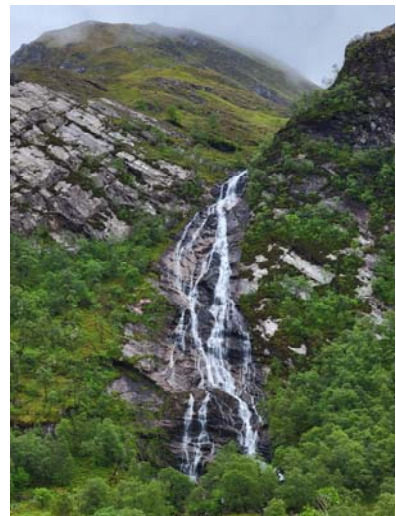
We drove on to Glencoe, hoping for lunch at the Glencoe Gathering, but it turns out it was a much more formal place than the name implies, AND it was closed, so after a brief walk around the village we drove into the glen to the Clachaig Inn, where we had a nice lunch and a beer.

The Glencoe Lochan Trail was a pretty easy stroll around a small loch, including lots of bird activity in the reeds.

I made a tactical error at this point, thinking we could proceed to Steall Falls and not check-in at the B&B. That set me on

edge about getting canceled for late check-in, which made the next hike more stressful (for me) than it should have been. We drove through Fort William, to Steall Falls. Another easy, but longer hike to the falls, and my worries about the time kept us from exploring much of the actual falls (in fact, I didn't even see them, although I could hear them). Cell coverage could have prevented my anxiety.

Returned to the valley floor, and upon arrival at the Myrtlebank B&B, we found that not only were we not too late, but one couple (coin toss went our way) was upgraded from a very nice room to an entire house. The bathroom was bigger than our own living room, and it was a real shame we couldn't take advantage of it for a wedding or something!



Steall Falls

Our companions picked The Geographer for dinner, based on their menu alternatives for the finicky eater, where we found a nice table and had a great meal. After dinner, we wandered through the town center, eventually stopping at the Volunteer Arms for a few brews and whisky.

Day 11 – Fort William to Portree

After a very elegant full Scottish at the B&B, we hopped into the car and headed down to the train station, where I hoped we could catch a glimpse of the Jacobite steam train. Lisa is a big Harry Potter fan, and although she opted out of a ride, we did hope to at least see it. It turns out that non-ticket holders were free to walk the platform, where the Jacobite was preparing to depart. Lisa stopped at car 9¾ to see if there were any wizards about, took some pictures, then we headed for the Glenfinnan Monument, near the famous aqueduct that carries the train over the valley.



Glenfinnan

After pulling into the car park, we hiked the short distance up to a good viewing spot, and along with scores of others, right on time, the Jacobite steamed over the aquaduct, and we got our own copy of one of the most photographed shots in Scotland.

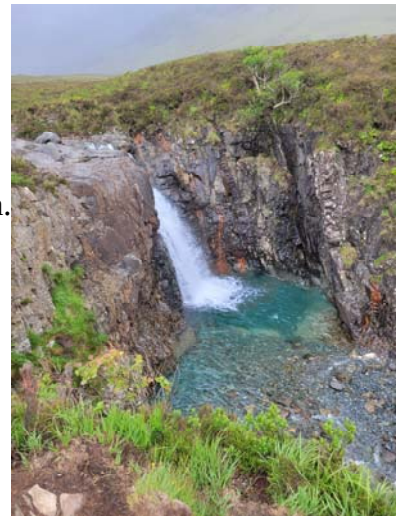
We then completed the journey to Mallaig, where we inserted the car into the ferry line, and had a nice lunch at the Jacobites Cafe.



Jacobite Car 9 3/4

The CalMac ferry boarded, and we were shortly in Armadale, Isle of Skye, driving towards Portree. We stopped at Fairy Pools, which was more developed than I expected. Not only was there paid parking, but there was formal signage and a very crowded trail. At this point, the beautiful sun and warm weather we had enjoyed for the last few days evaporated, and we were subjected to strong winds and horizontal rain. By the time we were back at the car park, everyone was thoroughly soaked and cold.

We drove the rest of the way to the Grenitote B&B, changed clothes, and walked into Portree town with the rain having subsided to a mist. Leaving Lisa at home due to feeling less than chipper, we were confronted with “sorry full” or long lines, so we settled on A Taste of India for dinner, which not only had room for walk-ins, but served an excellent meal that we all enjoyed.



Fairy Pools, Skye



Old Man of Storr

We then headed over to the Isles Inn where they promised music, and stayed for one set of a guitar duo that played “greatest hits” that had a few Celtic favorites but mostly Tom Petty and other American favorites. Good musicians, but hardly traditional. Split at the break and walked up the hill to the B&B for the night.

Day 12 – Trotternish Peninsula

After a good hearty full Scottish, it was off to tour the peninsula on the northern end of Skye. The first stop was the Old Man of Storr, which is about a 3 mile loop. The wind had intensified and the rain held off till the second half of the hike. Gorgeous landscape. Wet to the bone, once again. A raincoat and water repellent pants just can’t stop wind driven rain.

Back into the car for a short hop to Lealt Falls and then Kilt Rock, then we headed for Staffin, where we planned to visit the museum and cafe for lunch. They were both closed, so we ended up scrounging food at the Staffin Market, as there was nothing else to be had.

After at least quenching our hunger, we headed up to Quiraing, a four mile loop around a steep ridge. The wind was 60-70 mph, and although it wasn’t raining very often or hard, it was actually challenging to walk without resorting to using all fours. We got as far as the mid point of the hike and another hiker advised us that the second

Quiraing



half was much more exposed and even windier, so we wimped out and backtracked. The extreme wind made it a very memorable experience!

We stopped at Brother’s Point on the way south, but with the wind and wet, we got as far as the trailhead before heading back to the B&B to let our ears stop ringing from the gales. Walked back down to Portree, finding the same “sorry, full” or long lines, so we had a second, equally good, meal at Taste of India.



Lealt Falls

We had a beer (and whisky) at the Bosville Hotel before heading back to recover from the ordeal of the day.

Day 13 – More Trotternish

After the usual excellent breakfast, we headed north again, taking the western route up the peninsula, finding a parking spot near the Uig police station, and walked over to RHA Falls. Not real well marked, but good enough for us to find. After a short hike, we encountered another foursome, exchanged cameras to do group photos, then spent a few minutes at the falls.

Next stop was Fairy Glen, where we strolled around in the continuing strong winds and intermittent showers. Quite the change in weather from Oban!



Fairy Glen



Flora MacDonald

We had planned to go to Skye Brewing for lunch, but it was closed, as was the hotel, so we found

The Galley restaurant, which was crowded, but had one table, which we nabbed. Just up the road was the grave of Flora MacDonald, maybe the most famous woman in Scottish history for her role in the Jacobite rising.

Backtracked a bit to get to the Museum of Island Life, which might have been more entertaining if it hadn't been raining so hard. It was just dashing between buildings.

After a short stop at ClachArd, it was back to the B&B for dry clothes.

Walked into town again for dinner, this time opting to wait in what looked like a short line at Cuchullin, where they proceeded to seat half a dozen couples and singles before finding a table for us but the food was worth the wait, and it wasn't Indian again.

The Portree Hotel claimed to be having trad music, so we found ourselves a table, and after a long delay, the same two guitar players we had seen two days earlier arrived. We exchanged looks, and snuck out while they were still setting up the stage. As I said earlier, they were good musicians, but not the trad we sought.

Day 14 – Portree to Inverness

It seems the storm system had dissipated overnight – not as warm as a few days earlier, but just “normal” rain and a bit of “normal” wind. Yet another nice breakfast (we had a choice of full Scottish, fruit, or porridge), packed our belongings and headed south over the Skye Bridge to Eilean Donan Castle. We had been there in 1997, but as you age, things become all new.



Eilean Donan Castle



Urquhart Castle

Continuing our journey, we headed for Fiddler’s Cafe for lunch, then made the short drive to Urquhart Castle on Loch Ness which we found far more interesting than expected. At this point, we had planned to circumnavigate the Loch via Fort Augustus and Falls

of Foyer, but we were a little tired, so we went straight to The Ness House B&B in Inverness.

As usual, we went exploring for music, and discovered music in progress at MacGregor’s Bar so we managed to forget dinner listening to the players. Mike and Lisa left early to have real food while we stayed till the end, succumbing to a terrible Domino’s Pizza on the way home.



MacGregor’s Bar

Day 15 – Inverness to Dunkeld



Culloden Battlefield

The advertised full breakfast was Covid-replaced with a nice continental. Still good and filling, but not quite the same. Our first stop was Culloden Battlefield which deserved more time than the two hours we had planned. Interesting walking tour, and lots to see. We finally pried ourselves away to continue on to Clava Cairns, also more elaborate and interesting than expected.

Cafe Kincaig was our lunch stop, followed by a visit to Ian Burnett Chocolatier (at Lisa demand!), then moved on to The Hermitage where



Clava Cairns

we walked the Ossian's Well loop trail. Good for chocolate digestion.



Ossian's Well

After a five-minute drive to Dunkeld, we checked in at the Birnham Hotel. Technically in Birnham, not Dunkeld, this was obviously the poshest of hotels in its heyday. Now it was showing its age, and the staff reminded us of Fawlty Towers.

Walked across the bridge to Dunkeld, and found the usual dearth of restaurants with space, but we had a pleasant meal at Z's Kitchen, then Kathy and I swung by the Perth Arms Hotel for a beer before heading back for the night.

Day 16 – Dunkeld to Orkney

Nice breakfast at the hotel, except the waiter seemed to be having a bad morning, and was quite rude, we thought. Maybe it was his John Cleese imitation. Lisa had been under the weather a few times recently, probably due to a reaction to her diet. She ran before breakfast, and that seemed to do her in, so a lot of the next few days saw Lisa staying in the car or the lodging.

We had gotten an email from Historic Scotland that Doune Castle was unexpectedly open today for members, so we quickly reserved a slot, then headed off to at least see the Wallace Monument. We only had about 30 minutes before our Doune booking, so we hiked up from the car park, arriving, huffing and puffing, in time to take a few photos, and head back to the car. The bus avoids the heavy breathing but the timetable didn't work.



Doune Castle

It was a short drive to Doune Castle, which didn't seem to care about the booking time, as I guess not many people read their email. Anyway, this is the setting of many scenes from Outlander. One of the reasons it had been closed was to "restore" it from the stage props that had been added for television.

There was an audio tour that included a lot of Jamie Frazier narrations about the dramatic conversion done to many areas of the castle.

We had a Stirling Castle booking as well, so we moved on, arriving just in time for our entry slot.



Wallace Monument footpath



Stirling Castle

Stirling was a lot busier and entry was enforced. We went straight to the Unicorn Cafe for lunch, then toured the castle to walk off lunch.

The time pressure was the result of needing to get on a LoganAir flight at Edinburgh airport, so we pressed on, only seeing The Kelpies from the motorway. Car check-in was a little slower than hoped due to ambiguity in the location and timing of the shuttle. Nonetheless, we made it to the terminal and the gate with time to spare, to get on the LoganAir flight to Kirkwall on Orkney.

Arriving on Orkney, the rental car counter was already closed (as expected) so we had planned to take a taxi to town, but there were no taxis to be had. Calls to the five working numbers all resulted in no answer, not available, or “maybe in an hour or two”. We walked over to the bus kiosk and found we had just missed a possible bus, so we waited for 45 minutes for the next one to arrive. After about a ten minute walk from the Kirkwall Travel Center, we checked into Benmora B&B, a beautiful location right above the marina.



The Kelpies

We headed to St. Ola’s Hotel for dinner after exploring the wait and or menu at a few other spots, then went over to the Kirkwall Hotel for drinks. Most times we found ourselves in bars, Kathy ordered a local whisky, while I generally stuck to Guinness or other local dark beer. Kathy is much more adventurous than me. The bartender was very talkative, and we learned all sorts of things about Kirkwall, his dog, and his assistant’s boyfriend in Texas. The dogs came up only because many restaurants allow dogs to sit at the dinner table, and there was a nice German Shepard near the bar stools, and Mike and Lisa have a similar one. We stick with border collies.

Day 17 – Neolithic Orkney

After the usual great full Scottish, we walked into town to get our Orkney Car Rental ride, then headed west, aiming for a 10am booking at Maeshowe Tomb. Thanks to the quick car rental, we had time to visit Unstan Tomb on the way. Backtracked slightly to the Maeshowe Visitors Center, which now provides a bus to the old visitor center location. Then it’s a quick walk across the street with our guide (and his look-alike son). Both very Scottish with long red hair, speech, and talkative nature. Very informative tour, although the tomb isn’t much different than Unstan except it was occupied by the Vikings in the 12th century, and they left carved Norse graffiti. Tourists!



Stones of Stennis



Ring of Brodgar

After the thirty minute tour, we got back on the bus, hopped into the car, and headed for the Stones of Stennis, a collection of large standing stones within sight of Maeshowe. One of the stones has a waist height hole through the center that was used to seal handshake deals and baptize infants. The ranger described a gentleman named

McKay that attempted to destroy many of the structures in the area to discourage paganism, but the locals escorted him off the islands.

Then, on to the Ring of Brodgar, a more carefully arranged collection of standing stones, more reminiscent of Callanish 1 than Stennis. At this point, we returned to Kirkwall because Lisa now felt well enough to join us. While in town, we went to Orkney Real Foods (again), mainly because the food was so good and there was a table open.

We then drove back out to the tomb/stones area (luckily, Orkney is pretty small!), and we went to Marwick Head, although the actual head eluded us. Nice view of the rocky coast, even if it wasn't full of birds or seals.



Skara Brae

We had a booking for Skara Brae, so we backtracked to the Visitor Center, claimed our admission, and self-guided ourselves around the settlement. There was also a large home nearby that had been occupied by the early archaeologist responsible for developing the site included in the deal.



Earl's Palace, Birsay

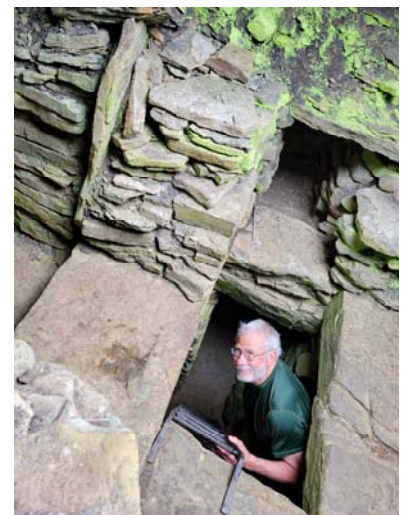
Although we planned to hike to the Brough of Birsay, it had been a long day, so we skipped the hike, instead walking around Earl's Palace which was next on our list. After a thorough explore, we headed back to Benmora, abandoned Lisa, and then walked into town for dinner at the Orkney Hotel. More whisky for Kathy, more chitchat with the bartender, and after a 30-minute wait for a table, a good dinner.

Day 18 – Rousay

After another delicious breakfast, we loitered awhile, hoping Lisa would rally, but failing, we headed out to the pharmacy to buy more band-aids for me and Covid tests. Returned to the B&B, saw Lisa to bed, and thought about how to recover the day's plans.

Our original plan was to take an early ferry from Tingwall to Rousay, rent bikes, and explore the neolithic tombs on the island. Plan B was to take the noon ferry and see what we could accomplish.

Arriving on Rousay, we followed signs to a food truck that served up a good lunch, then decided to walk rather than bike in the limited time we had to invest. We visited Traversoe Tuick, Blackhammer, and the Knowe of Yarso, all which are less developed chambered tombs a short



Somewhere on Rousay

walk from the paved road. It's extraordinary that access to these treasures built thousands of years ago show few signs of tourism damage. Yarso was actually a pretty long walk up a fairly steep grade. Between huffing and puffing and watching our time to make sure we weren't stranded overnight by missing the last ferry, we sort of rushed. We speed walked back to the ferry landing and caught the last ferry of the day back to Tingwall.

We checked in with Lisa, walked back to town, and chose Skipper's Restaurant for dinner. Curiously, it was next door to the Orkney Hotel, had the identical offerings, was slightly cheaper, and they shared the kitchen. Unlike the Hotel, there was no wait, and no white tablecloths. I assume locals understand the gimmick.

After a fifteen foot walk to the bar, we had drinks while Mike ordered a to-go dinner for Lisa, just in case.

Day 19 – Orkney to Edinburgh

After the umpteenth fine breakfast of the trip, we stopped by Orkney Real Foods to pick up the key for the Grain Earth House (and I explained we'd bring the key back at lunch). We drove up to the GEH, which was right in the center of a housing tract. Interesting, none the less, and it was nice to have things all to ourselves. Next stop was Rennibister Tomb, which was just a trapdoor in the middle

a farmer's barnyard.

Climbing down, there was an entire multi room tomb completely hidden from the surface. In our hometown, that would be called a fallout shelter.

Another stop at Cuween Hill, then the Broch of Gurness, before returning to Real Foods to return the key, where I was scolded for

keeping the key for more than the allowed two hours, despite no such warning or request. We were told there was someone waiting for the only key, another undisclosed fact. I apologized, but explained no one even hinted at the policy.

Made a speed-walk to at least glimpse the closed Bishop & Earls Castle and the St. Magnus Cathedral.



Rennibister



Cuween Hill



Broch of Gurness



St. Magnus

We had lunch while we were there, then headed back to the B&B, packed up, and drove the short trip back to the airport for our LoganAir flight back to Edinburgh. Unlike larger airlines that seemed to be plagued with staffing shortages, cancellations, and whatnot, in our six experiences, they were always on time, courteous, and efficient.

After landing at EDI, we headed out to the taxi stand and after a brief wait, were on our way to our AirB&B on the Royal Mile at Fleshmarket Close. Mike and Lisa made a trip to the nearby Tesco to

gather food for our stay while Kathy and I walked around checking out bars, music, and menus. After exploring the Royal Mile, and pausing to see some pipers, we ended up at Whiski, sitting at a sidewalk table having drinks and an appetizer while waiting for a table. There was a lot of confusion about whether we wanted a table, which waiter promised what, etc. but we eventually found ourselves at the table that was empty when we got in the queue (one set of diners later).

Good rowdy band with semi-traditional repertoire for which we stayed until 11pm, then home to try to sleep. The apartment was across the street from The Celt, which seemed to specialize in young men bellowing at the top of their lungs until 4am or so, when I guess they get hoarse.

Day 20 – Edinburgh

We helped ourselves to gathered provisions for breakfast, then we set off to Edinburgh Castle for our 9:30am booking. Even though they were just opening, there was a crowd of disappointed people who apparently don't know about the internet and bookings. We threaded our way through the crowd and explored the castle in great detail. After a couple of hours, Kathy and I headed off to the Royal Botanic Gardens on foot, where we found the glasshouses closed, but lots of trails through themed gardens, including many of our Oregon natives. Grabbed a very nice lunch at the Garden's



Edinburgh Castle

Gateway Cafe, then strolled around a little longer looking for the best way home. We found the bus stop and saved ourselves the long walk home.



Sandy Bell's

We found a piper playing in front of City Hall, and called Lisa to come by and get a photo next to him, which he seemed comfortable with, mainly because most photos resulted in coins in his hat. Kathy and I had discovered Sandy Bell's had



Edinburgh

an afternoon session, so we sat in the booth next to the circle of players and ordered beers. Jock, the Bazooki player, struck up a conversation with Kathy, and we were instantly welcomed into the group of friends having a grand time. Jock's non-drinking optometrist Satnam showed up and sat with us, since Mike and Lisa hadn't shown up yet. He was full of philosophical chitchat, and we all had a great time. Mike eventually showed up, and we stayed until the session adjourned. Very memorable experience.

After a short walk to Greyfriar's Bobby, we got a table and had another nice meal. It was our last night, so after dinner we had one more drink at the Halfway House, then headed home early so we could make our 4am taxi.



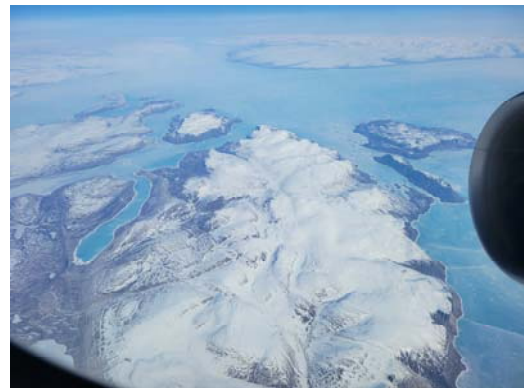
Greyfriar's Bobby

The Greyfriar's Bobby commemorates a tragic tale where a loyal Skye Terrier guarded his owner's grave for fourteen years before his own death at the graveside.

Day 21 – Home

Our original departure was to be 1pm, but the British Air cancellations forced us into a MUCH earlier set of flights. The good news was it was a much more efficient flight, since all the layovers were the bare minimum, and we got home mid-afternoon instead of midnight.

There was some confusion on my part over the address the taxi was called to, but I eventually explained where we were and how he might get there. A heavy middle eastern accent was not helpful plus my being sleep deprived and not knowing the local geography. Got to the airport eventually, got to the gate, and began the long flight(s) home.



Greenland at 40,000ft