

SCOTLAND, SWITZERLAND & ITALY

PART 1 OF 3: SCOTLAND (with a little bit of England)

Lurking around London

From Page 5

Setting off to Scotland

From Page 14

The Great Glen

From Page 45



SCOTLAND

COLD

and

WET!

Scotland

And a little bit of the UK

For the overall 2024 European Trip, I am blaming the rigger (we spent seven weeks last year sitting idly in, and around, Morton Bay, waiting for new rigging for Sengo, with nothing to do but hide from the wind. We had to find something to fill in the time - booking a European holiday for this year became an unplanned distraction). For the Scottish section of the itinerary, I am blaming D & W (fellow cruisers), whose recent biennial trips to Europe tend to consist of day cycling trips staying on barges along continental European canals. We are not cyclists - certainly not for the distances achieved on commercial cycling holidays. We are however walkers (although Andrew is trying to deny this - his activity probably only a result of being reluctantly pulled into my adventures), and thanks to algorithms on the 'all-pervasive' internet, we did end up on a barge. But not on continental Europe - instead in northern Scotland - doing a bit of walking, a bit of cycling, a bit of canoeing, and a bit of sailing. The barge in question was not a luxurious offering like those available on most well-known European waterways - and indeed more luxurious barges were available along the Caledonian Canal. But they were also a lot more expensive, and they didn't offer a chance to 'complete a trail.' Or 'almost.'

The Caledonian Canal, for all intents and purposes, runs along The Great Glen trail. Or the other way around, depending on which way you want to look at it. The idea of the Great Glen Journey trip from our hosts was to

complete the distance of the Great Glen under our own steam; by foot, bike, canoe, or sail. The barge would be waiting for us at night; a place to be fed and to sleep. Due to the weather, which was at times exceptionally cold, and oftentimes wet, there were a couple of instances where some of the distance was travelled under 'barge' as well.

Having booked the barge trip, we then went about booking the rest of our trip. Australia is a long way from Europe and, as it was going to take us at least 24 hours to get to London, we weren't just going to be going for a week. So we scheduled five days in London (nowhere near enough, but we hadn't explored the city before so a taste was deemed prudent), and whilst we were in Scotland we booked five days on the Isle of Skye (which we had been recommended to do, but, due to weather, we really didn't see much of it; all of the intended classic walks on the Isle were missed), a couple of days in Oban to fit in a tour to get up 'close and personal' with puffins (respectfully, of course), and a couple of days in each of Glasgow, Inverness and Edinburgh. As usual, not everything went to plan.

'Scotland,' as part of the land mass that currently forms the main island of the UK, has a long human history (evidence dating back at least 8000 years), most of it, obviously, not documented, and some of that only interpreted. The last few hundred years have more sources of record, and show a bloody and aggressive progression. Museums were a mixed bunch in terms of information and presentation - it actually took me over a week to find someone to tell me who the Jacobites were - there is an assumption at each historical location that the visitor knows a basic Scottish history!

Most of the photos in this document came from my phone; because of the modes of travel - a significant amount of them were taken through bus, train and car windows.

Preparing to leave:

Port Stephens to Sydney International Airport

13th June 2024. Originally we had planned to pick up the hire car from Newcastle Airport around 1100 today, and head directly to the Sydney International Airport. Given that we had picked up the car yesterday, today's plans changed a little, but after a sleep in, a final clean up, handing over the last of our food to the marina staff, and pickling the water-maker, we left the marina at 1115, only slightly later than first planned.

To get lunch we got off the M1 at Morisset (I am sorry to say we ate lunch at a major franchise...we didn't have a lot of choice), and then, after resuming our journey, followed the non-toll route to Sydney International Airport, diverting to a fuel station not directly on route as the one on route had a queue that was so long it was blocking the bus!

The rental car return was next to the hotel and we handed the keys in at 1600.

Checking-into the hotel for the night was a little odd. There was no-one behind the reception desk: instead there was one lass helping

out with a couple of self-service machines. She brushed over our choices for dinner, and if we were looking to save money we should have investigated the first mentioned establishment. The restaurant was doing a fixed two-course meal. That will do we thought, without actually thinking. When we noticed the prices after we had settled in upstairs to eat, we had a fit!

We got back to the room after dinner just before the beginning of Total Recall on television...a movie I hadn't seen before but having just read Arnold Schwarzenegger's biography (with the title of 'Total Recall') I was keen. After that movie finished I started watching Flash Gordon but given the time, and the quality of the movie (cringeworthy compared with today's standards), and the fact Andrew was trying to sleep, I switched it off.



Leaving Australia

Sydney International Airport to Heathrow Airport, London

14th June 2024. Grey sky. A silhouette of Sydney was the view from the Qantas Lounge. Darker grey skies were spied to the south and north of the city. Light drizzle. Leaden skies to east and rain on the bom.gov.au rain radar off to sea. At around 1230 I could have taken a lovely photo where the Sydney city buildings seemed framed by dark grey. I didn't know if I could (legally) and the photo's base would have been filled with building roof and the top of the tail of a Qantas plane (we found out later this was actually our plane). At 1300 rain was teeming and only the roof of the attached building could be seen.

The population of the Lounge varied. It was busy around breakfast time, and likewise around lunch time, but there seemed to be less people in attendance in between.

The plane was a 380. Neither of us had been on a 380 before. It is a very big aircraft with two levels. We were on the upper deck. The flight itself was a shared flight....with 9 other carriers! But at least it was a Qantas plane!

Once we had started our flight the Captain announced the expected temperature in Singapore when we were due to land was 28 degrees - with some expected showers. When we landed he amended that to a 'current 27 degrees.' (Celsius). In the dark, around 2230!



We thought we had around 90 minutes to relax between getting off the plane and getting back on again. Boy, were we wrong! It took around ten minutes to walk to the Lounge. We grabbed something to eat and drink and sat down to relax. The departures board was on a distant wall from us, and at an obscure angle, so it wasn't easily seen. When we checked it there wasn't a comment stating 'Go To Gate.' Instead it read 'Gate Open.' Andrew enquired with staff as to what this meant. Essentially it means the same thing as 'Go To Gate,'.....and the journey wasn't as easy as expected. So, after skulling my hot chocolate...which wasn't all that hot, we merged back into the crowd and headed towards the plane. The expected journey time to the gate included a delay we were not expecting...we had to go back through security!



I am not sure if the above tracking was deliberate or the result of foreign government interference, but it clearly wasn't the route we took!

Landing in London

15th June 2024. I don't know how they work out the meal times on these flights. And I hate to even begin to calculate how many calories we consumed, but having got on the flight in Singapore we were given snacks, and then given a main meal within an hour or so, and then, finally, a breakfast about two hours before landing. This stretch from Singapore to London is around 14 hours. I started the 'House of The Dragon' HBO series and then watched an American's documentary of the affects of Climate Change in Australia (specifically noting changes to the Great Barrier Reef). On the flight to Singapore I had watched 'Killers Of The Flower Moon' and 'Bodicea' (the latter given a rating of '2 out of 5' by the critics, and a '3 out of 5' by the viewing public. After watching it, I would concur with the critics' rating).



We attached to the terminal at Heathrow at 0645. And got out of the plane in a temperature of 10 degrees! (C). What a contrast to Singapore...and it is supposed to summer here!

We could have bought a ticket for the Heathrow Express (which would have taken a shorter time to get to Paddington Station) but it would have cost 20 GBPs each! We were happy to take the normal train which ended up costing 12 GBPs each instead. It left only a few minutes later, and given the time we had travelled already, the extra time was not noticed.



Paddington Above Ground

Emerging from Paddington Underground we took a rest at the above-ground station, enjoying a coffee and a sugary snack to wake us up. The bookshop, WHSmith (established in many airports and no doubt more stations than just this one), had a couple of options for a city map, and a couple of guidebooks. The map of London we bought was cheaper than the cost of a cup of coffee!

We located the appropriate street of our hotel on the map, and after admiring the statue outside Paddington Station (the marina at which Sengo is moored at has two statues by the same sculptor), walked our way to our accommodation. On the way I got a bit distracted by the architecture along the suburban streets - it was very London - just like we have seen on tv!



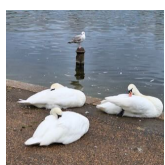
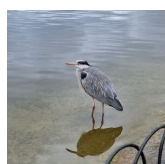
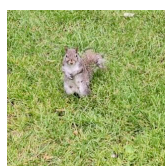
'The room is not ready yet.' The lass behind the desk informed us. This we expected.

'And, of course you know the lift is out of order,' she continued. This we certainly did not expect!



Starting to Explore.

We left our main luggage at the hotel and headed across the road to the park.... officially I think we walked in Kensington Gardens to the south west of Serpentine Lake - but at first I thought we were heading into Hyde Park (the other side of the Lake).

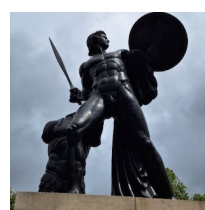


As we approached where a 'white cup' symbol was supposed to be on the park map, we could hear music. Trooping Of The Colours was underway for King Charles. And had it not been raining I may have been more enthusiastic to follow the music and see the spectacle; it wasn't that far away. But

instead we changed into our rain jackets and Andrew put up his umbrella...mine was in my luggage at the hotel.

The cup symbol turned out to represent a small kiosk. Being small it had limited stocks..but given the weather, thankfully, they could supply hot chocolate.

Indoor seating however consisted of only two tables and these were already taken, so we had to do with the outdoor facilities under the eaves on the side of the building that gave the most protection. Once the rain had stopped we continued exploring; walking along Serpentine Lake and then to the corner of the gardens, asking two concierges from a fancy hotel for directions to a pub for lunch - that we discovered wasn't open yet, kept going to see what else we could find and found ourselves in the diplomatic quarter - which unfortunately didn't seem to have any restaurants, returned back to the pub (as we were getting hungry at this stage), but ended up rejecting it because of the prices on its menu. We ended up upstairs in a cafe back at a gate of Kensington Garden/Hyde Park and then after a less than satisfying meal, headed back to the hotel.



Now we had to get to our room! As there was no lift we had to carry our bags - up five (5) floors; the stairs getting thinner and narrower as we ascended. Andrew slept for the rest of the afternoon. I slept some and watched tv; the English television version (and probably original version) of 'Chaser' on silent for a while. I did search for possible dinner options but in the end we didn't leave the room.

During our cross traverse of Kensington Garden, after dropping the luggage off, we had seen pigeons, magpies, cravens, swans, blackbirds, gulls (sp?) and grey squirrels. There were lots of dogs (some chasing said squirrels, and we got licks by Choula a 13-month-old canine).

On Serpentine Lake we saw; Canada geese, Egyptian geese, grey geese, bar headed goose, grey heron, duck (sp?), grebe, coots, rock dove, wood pigeon, and a red breasted pochard.

To Greenwich-

Cutty Sark and the Royal Observatory

16th June 2024. We had an early start today: which begun by dropping off our bags to tonight's hotel before breakfast (at 0745). Tonight's hotel was, fortunately, just around the corner. Of course the room wasn't ready but at least we could store our luggage. This odd situation had come about because of the mismatch of my original hotel booking and the later booking of our flights. Originally I had an AirBnB booked - fully self contained - in the middle of SoHo. The problem came about when I tried to add an extra day. The cost of the extra night was going to be double the cost of each of the subsequent nights. When I queried this they promptly cancelled me out! This left me trying to scramble for accommodation in London in peak tourist season for a reasonable price. The last category of course, is impossible with little notice (our original accommodation booking had been over twelve months in advance - (I now had only a couple of months). So London accommodation was split over a single night in one establishment (originally booked as the fill-in because I didn't want to pay the extra in the AirBnB) and the subsequent nights in a different establishment

(booked after AirBnB cancelled on me). We managed not to pay the final AirBnB price but we ended up paying a higher price than I had originally budgeted for.

Breakfast was at 0800 at last night's hotel. It was very basic - with no gluten free bread (not necessarily an issue as that usually contains allergins for me anyway). I had two small yoghurts, a couple of lumps of cheese and ham, tomatoes and cucumber. We started walking away from the hotel at 0845.

This morning we took similar paths back through Kensington Gardens as we had traversed yesterday afternoon (in reverse), crossed to the roadway between Green Park and Buckingham Palace, and walked along the side of St James Park and continued along Birdcage Walk towards Westminster. The Queen Victoria Memorial was impressive!

The Bird Man

We will ignore that the 'bird man' was 'feeding' birds on the front side of the notice 'not to feed the birds'. To give him credit, he was feeding each different species he interacted with with a different nut or seed, rather than the destructive bread that those that feed birds in public places often doll out to waiting avians.. He was clearly a regular - the birds were familiar with him, and would land on his hands to take the treat. Or at least most of them would - the jay was a bit more hesitant and hadn't yet got the confidence of touch, Mind you, the jay is a big bird in comparison to the tits that were coming in for their morning feed. Of course we engaged with this individual. He had a riches to rags story (well - just a note he had fallen on hard times a few years ago) but apparently at least now had a house to stay at. The birds were clearly his solace. He was generous enough to give us some 'food' and he was surprised the blue and great tits were confident enough to land on our fingers and nibble from our hands. The bird man gave us a compliment that the animals know animal lovers when they see them. Whilst I agree with him to a large extent, I suspect that the birds had also acknowledged that their usual feeder was comfortable with us, and that had helped as well. (We cant just say that they would have landed on whoever hand had food - for some



individuals it took the bird man months to get their confidence). The local squirrel even came up to the bench and took some food from me. It was a great morning wildlife interactive experience.

We eventually left our avian friend and headed toward The Thames, getting chatted up by a couple of Aussies. As they were fairly blunt and full-on however (noting that a lot of Aussies are blunt and full-on but these two were over-the-top), I wondered whether they were a confidence trick and extracted us away from them as soon as possible. As we approached Westminster the crowds increased. Clearly this is a busy city; but of course it is a busy city - it is London!. I think the Uber boat is probably the cheaper river transport to Greenwich from Westminster - but we took a tourist ferry.



Cutty Sark

Our main aim today was to visit the Cutty Sark. As indeed it seemed to be for quite a few people. I was glad we didn't have to wait in a long queue to get tickets, and we bought a combined ticket that would get us into the Royal Observatory as well. The Cutty Sark is surrounded by a 'fence' and I was disappointed we couldn't see her without this restriction.



Lunch, after walking around the ship, was not purchased at the cafe below the hull (she is on land) because there really wasn't anything suitable for me to eat.

Instead we found a Vietnamese restaurant opposite the 'monument for a dead parrot.' (We didn't visit it)..



The Royal Observatory

After lunch we followed the wheelchair entrance direction signs to the front door of the Observatory; which meant we didn't take the shortest path. This route was steep enough however and we were a little leg sore by the time we reached our destination (walking most of the morning may have also had something to do with it). Of course I stood on the meridian - such a touristy thing to do!



This site was busy, but not as busy as the ship, and we made our way through the old Observatory museum at a reasonable pace. Outside again we admired the view over the landscape; it is on quite a hill -no wonder they put the building up here!

We were tired by the time we came down the hill. There was however still one site we intended to see here: the Maritime Museum.

Given we were flailing, we asked the Info Officer at Maritime Museum what he would recommend in 'an hour's visit'. His answer: Nelson's jacket; the one that he wore when he died at the Battle Of Trafalgar, and, given we were Aussies, the paintings from descriptions of Joseph Banks' notes from his visit to Australia with Captain Cook. The kangaroo we have seen in books before...not a bad rendition considering, although the attendant thought it was not quite right (which it isn't). The depiction of the dingo however was a dark brown and fluffy dog - and looked cute enough to take home - but didn't look much like a dingo.

Birds: blue tit, great tit, jay, craven, rock pigeon, robin, black backed gull (of some ilk), equiv of silver gull. Andrew saw a cormorant (sp unknown)

Animals: one dachshund, one cat (in a stroller!), and squirrels.



Changing Of The Guard

17th June 2024. 'Are you British? We need to talk to British people.' The accent wasn't local (American). My answer was 'Not quite.' 'Oh, Australian,' the speaker said. There were three of them. One had a two-foot long, professional-looking, fluffy microphone. One had a TV-quality-looking camera. They were walking in the opposite direction from us, paced as if 'on a mission.' Clearly we were not even worth a chat - they kept walking. We had got our train at Paddington, changed at Bond Street and got off at Green Park. At the time of this exchange we were walking south towards The Mall.

A brief chat to police at the gate to Clarence House alerted us to the fact that Changing of the Guard today would not consist of all red uniforms; which was a bit of a pity as the image you get when you think of the process is red coats and black hats. The group going on duty were the burkas. Dark uniforms. No bear skins. We had a plan. We would follow the suggestions of the you-tuber and stand at certain spots at certain times. Unfortunately a lot of other people seemed to have the same plan. So we gave up the first standing viewpoint, opposite St James' Barracks, because there was already a significant crowd there, for a spot on The Mall in front of the advancing troupe. The



idea then was to follow the troupe down a way before veering off across the park to the next viewing point. Following down The Mall was difficult because of the amount of tourists, and a significant number veered off as well. We didn't get the ideal spot at Wellington Barracks...we were blocked by a policeman. We made our way back to Clarence House, watched a small change there (where the different uniforms helped us see just what was happening) and then made our way to a cafe in St James' Park for lunch.

The idea from then was to walk past the Admiralty Building (with Captain Cook's statue outside) and under the arch to the Art Gallery. The driveway under the arch and the building facade were under renovation and we didn't know if we could take the expected route. We asked a traffic worker how to get to the Art Gallery... he sent us in the wrong direction - and directed us to the wrong building! We sussed this out fairly quickly, turned towards Pall Mall (full of a row of statues) and walked amongst the most amazing architecture. I didn't know where to look - Romanesque and Greek style facades and all sorts of other period frontages that I just couldn't put a name to (including one very ugly flat-faced building up a side street). The city was in full flow here... with lots of people milling about and moving around, and a very long queue into the gallery. We weren't going to be standing in that! Andrew's suggestion of just getting on a bus for a few hours had merit but got all too confusing in the end so we headed down into Charring Cross Station (no toilets) for the two step, change-over (there are lots of criss-crossing underground train lines), coming out at the end at Bayswater Road and near the supermarket where we got provisions for dinner.

Birds: scaup, bar headed goose, Egyptian geese, greylag goose, Canada goose, craven, magpie, gull, wood pigeon, scaup merganser? Grebe, coot, mallard?

Animals: Tortoise, grey squirrel, bat boxes in St James' Park.





British Museum

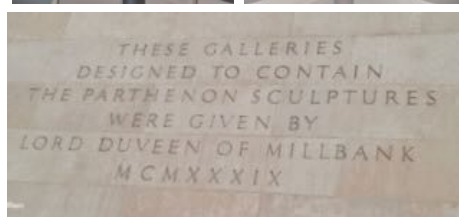
17th June 2024. London has a lot of museums! Housed items include those from the natural world, the human world and the imaginative world. A lot of The British Museum focuses on archaeology, with both local artefacts and those from ancient civilisations from around the World. It is a huge building and there was never any chance of seeing all of it. Technically we had a ticket for 1120. We left our accommodation at 0905 and got to the Museum at 1020 but still had to queue in a long line. The exhibits I wanted specifically to see were the Rosetta Stone, the items from Sutton Hoo, and, if I got around to them, items from the Roman occupation of Britain. By the time I got to thinking about the latter I was getting hot and dehydrated. And hungry. I had to call Andrew to find out where he was (he walks around museums at a different pace than I do) and we managed lunch together (at the in-house pizzeria where we swapped a chair at our table for a free chocolate ice-cream). After lunch we searched out the Parthenon Sculptures, previously known as the Elgin Marbles. Boy was I surprised. I knew this



collection was controversial and the Greek people wanted it back. But I didn't quite realise what it was....or the extent of it. After this we were both exhausted so we decided to head back to base. The stairwells are huge and long and my niggly knee was not happy. The final exhibit spotted before leaving the building was an Easter Island Statue - boy the early British collectors didn't really respect anything!.

We reversed our morning journey, caught 'the tube' back, picked up some supplies for dinner and we were back at base at 1600.

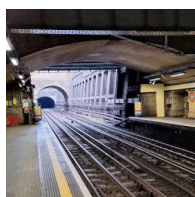
We saw minimal bird life today: carrion crow, rock pigeon.



Portsmouth

19th June 2024. What a long and arduous day this turned out to be! We had planned on it being long - but not as long as it ended up. To be fair the delays were due to a truck accident with a cyclist on the Chelsea Bridge, and there was nothing the bus company could have done about it - but it wasn't welcome. I had booked the bus instead of the train because it was a bit cheaper; I won't make that mistake again.

We left our accommodation around 0700. The local trains were more punctual than I expected and we found ourselves at the bus terminal at 0730 for what became an 0830 bus. The delays had extended out by the end of the day and a scheduled 1800 bus back didn't leave Portsmouth



until 1915. We were back at Victoria Bus terminal around 2100. When we finally got back to our closest tube station Andrew headed back to the room to cook a 'very' late dinner. We were both getting sniffly, and sore throats were threatening, so I wandered the street looking for a pharmacy. I found one (after asking the locals) at 2145. The pharmacy had closed at 2100!

Our main aim today had been to visit the HMS Victory. We got a good look inside. Outside however was a bit of a disappointment. She was covered in scaffolding and cloth/plastic and both her main masts had been removed. Apparently she is a few years into a renovation - purported to be a twenty year project. So much for seeing an historic vessel in all her glory - from the outside we saw a cocooned lump with the ends sticking out - hardly the magnificence we were expecting!



Andrew wasn't particularly interested in looking at the Mary Rose, and to be fair we probably wouldn't have had time to see her anyway. By the time we actually got to Portsmouth, spent time in the Victory, had some lunch, and timed the departure of one of the short harbour boat cruises, we had little time to spare if we wanted to fit anything else in. We did manage to walk around the Warrior - where Interpretation Officers in period costume were a bit over the top, and reminded Andrew of Sovereign Hill (he doesn't like their style of interps either). I got caught with one 'chap,' who I admit did a good job in character when I did engage with him - it would have been rude to ignore him. His sense of humour was great, however the topics of conversation that came up as a result of some of my comments may have been seen as a bit risqué by many; none-the-less, I appreciated his efforts.

*In bed with
the lurgy!*



20th June 2024. There is too much in London (and surrounds) to see in five days. I had given us five days to see 'a little bit.' That 'sort-of' turned into six as we had arrived very early in the morning - but it was back to five as today the sniffly noses and the sore throats that were becoming an issue yesterday, caught up with both of us. It didn't help yesterday that we were twice in an enclosed space for an extended time with a couple of coughers and splutterers. However, I think our issue, given bugs tend to take a few days to incubate and become a problem, originated much earlier in our trip. We had been milling with the tourists in some big exhibition spaces, squeezed between individuals along almost the entire route of Changing Of The Guard, and enclosed in small public transport spaces (train, bus and boat) but I think we picked the bug up on day one. When we had walked over a particular bridge in Kensington Gardens, an individual coming the other way sneezed - without a handkerchief and without blocking his nose and mouth. We were quite close. At the time I had thought, as I walked into the spray area, 'oh, that is not good.' My subconscious is rarely wrong when it makes my conscious mind think like that.

And the result of all this was that I spent most of today in bed (after creeping out to the pharmacy to get the 'strepsils'). Andrew spent most of the day on the couch. The planned excursion to a wetland just outside the centre of town - where they feed otters (I was looking forward to that) - did not happen. Maybe next time. In the morning we had acknowledged that after a rest we may entertain the idea of an afternoon walk - however when the time came, neither of us were well enough.

Scotland

21st June 2024.. On the plus side we managed to get to Glasgow, Scotland, without spluttering too much on the couple in the seats opposite us - which was just as well as they were going to a wedding.

Neither of us had felt particularly energetic this morning, and the first activity of the day was dragging our luggage up a set of stairs (no lift again but we were in the basement this time, rather than on the fifth floor - so whilst it was up - it was only one level).

Our travelling companions got off halfway along our journey and we were temporarily joined by another local who had heard our accent and came to say hello. Well, actually, I think she came to check out the charging ports at our table. We were regaled with a couple of her thoughts on the Isle of Skye (along with the fact she has booked one of the boat trips we have booked three times and it still hasn't run - I hope that isn't an omen).

The train was a fast train in as much as it can be - 'express' might be a better word. Commuters were sleeping, doing computer work, writing, playing games with kids, and playing backgammon. Given we had spent yesterday in bed we had little in terms of food for the journey so I wandered twice to the 'cafe'

car. I could get Andrew a bacon roll. The only thing wheat-free for me was a chocolate bar. Not exactly the best food options given the state of our health.

O u r accommodation, when we got to G l a s g o w (another AirBnB), was a 20 to 25 minute walk from the station (I didn't time it exactly), and was on level five of a fairly nondescript looking building. This time, thankfully, there was a lift. Conveniently there was an Aldi and a pharmacy on the street at the ground level. I sent Andrew shopping for food for dinner.



Glasgow

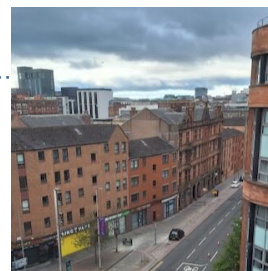
In bed, watching television.

22nd June 2024. Our train trip yesterday had worn out of us any of the energy we had gained with our day of rest in London. I slept a good chunk of today. Andrew, as usual, spent his rest reading on the couch. At one point we turned the television on - and watched a concert at the Royal Prince Albert Hall. It was an opera for kids.; an adaption of the Horrible Histories books into pantomime. It was very funny and at stages I was in tears with laughter -and I am not sure if that helped or hindered because the energy expended in mirth sent me backwards. Later afternoon television viewing was a mixture of game shows, Aussie Gold Hunters (the same as we'd been watching for brain numbing tv at home) and documentaries on train trips in Europe. We went to bed around 2200...before it got dark!



A Bus Tour - The Red Bus

23rd June 2024. We initially woke up at around 0550...neither of us were feeling completely energetic but noted both of us were feeling much better, probably helped by the fact we had discarded the provided pillows last night before going to sleep, and inflated our hiking ones.



We eventually got up and decided to brave the outside world. The least energy taxing tour activity was to get on the sightseeing

bus...which we eventually did at just after 1100. Our bus had a live guide and she was terrific. We got on at Stop 3 (closest to our accommodation). At stop 12 we got off.



The initial attraction here was the *Glenlee*, a steel barque built in Glasgow in 1896. She was sold in 1899 and renamed the *Islamount*. She was then sold to the Spanish and named the *Galadea*. When she was discovered de-mastered and deteriorating in Seville she was towed back to Glasgow and docked. She has now been done-up for display, so not all of her is original - including none of her masts and the deck-top furniture. The Trust is undertaking a renovation and apparently not all the interps boards are there. I got quite confused because the first interps boards I saw used names that were not *Glenlee*. Access to this vessel for us was free but from July 1st The Trust is going to start charging a fee.



By the time we finished wandering the Glenlee decks we were hungry, so our first stop at the Transport Museum, which is a fancy building on shore next to the *Glenlee*, was the cafe. After stomachs were sated we set out to wander through the Transport Museum. What a fabulously diverse and interesting little collection this building has; they have some of their displays up the walls (cars!)- what a novel way to include more artefacts.



The bus we got back on from the Transport Museum didn't have a live guide so you had to use earplugs to plug into the socket at each seat. The tour is in several languages and whilst my socket was geared for English, Andrew had to cycle through gobbledegook before finding some noise he could understand. We had to harass the driver to stop at Stop 3 to let us off (it is a nondescript stop and I doubt many people use it) before grabbing food at the Aldi for dinner, and then heading back to base. We finished the afternoon watching the final three quarters of the 1971 film 'Mary, Queen of Scots,' before Andrew got his GP fix.

Birds: included magpie, jackdaw, ducks, a gull with a grey back, and a black backed gull (sp?).



The Yellow Bus

24th June 2024. Given that we were not fit enough for a bike ride, or blowing a pipe (our original planned tours/ experiences in Glasgow), we decided we would repeat yesterday's fairly leisurely option and take a bus ride again - but choose the Yellow Bus route today, instead. Of course, had we decided this before buying yesterday's tickets we would have saved some money.... Ah well!

But first the Cathedral.

We left the flat just after 1000 and walked up the hill and into the Glasgow Cathedral not long after. In the shop immediately to the right when you enter the building you can grab an audio guide. But we wanted a live one.

We had to wait a couple of seconds whilst an unsuspecting volunteer put on his blue duty robe. The website indicates that the guides will show you around in relation to your available time but to appreciate the building you should at least allow half an hour. Our answer to the question of how much time did we have was that we had no limit. I was suspecting we would get a 30 minute tour and be on the 1106 bus. We didn't get on the bus until 1206, which meant by the time we got to Pollok Country Park and the Burrell Collection

cafe, our lunch was quite late. Given the time, and the limit of the Yellow Bus timetable (the Red Bus route runs longer hours) we only got a very quick run through of this fascinating collection of artefacts. This Burrell Museum deserves a good two to three hours. Andrew's comment was this was Glasgow's version of Mona in Tasmania, and whilst most of the items are 'museum-age' artefacts, there was the occasional



modern interpretation surprise, twisty bowls for instance. We didn't bother with the ticketed special exhibition.

The bus we got back on finished at Stop 1 after 1600. This meant we had to walk back to base. So after checking out Queen St Station for tomorrow, shopping for dinner, walking past the Purple Cat Cafe (hoping we could be a walk in (but the foyer was full of waiting people so we didn't stick around...no cat cuddle today but we did say hello to one individual through the window)) we walked up the hill back to base.

After rehydrating and a short break I headed off to the Cathedral to try and get some outside photos without people in them. I spoke to two groups of American tourists and ended back at base just before the BBC1 News at 1800.



Glasgow to Fort William

25th June 2024. And I was hoping that my coughing fit on the floor of the Queen Street Station (where I was thinking, oh no, not again given I had had one in the *Glenlee*) was going to be the most frustrating situation of the day. I was wrong. The cough, like the one had at the *Glenlee*, was also the result of a tickle in a slightly immune affected throat, but was not from the cold/bug. Fortunately we have lost our cold symptoms. This time it was caused by bad food choices and was the result of me trying to follow a practice Andrew follows. I was eating a basic sushi (white rice (I know, not ideal under the circumstances) and fish). I thought I would eat, like everyone else does, the tail of the prawn. It didn't work, and a short, sharp, section got stuck in my throat...too far down to easily cough up and not far down enough to easily clear. I eventually got myself back to some sort of normal with bit of swallowing and a lot of water.

By this time those who had been around me when I started coughing had moved on and caught their trains, as we should have. But our service was delayed. In the end the train left 40 minutes later than scheduled. After a shocked realisation that our train had

finally been given a gate (after waiting so long for a gate notification to come up on the board), we



chaotically shuffled our way through the gate to be yelled at by the platform attendant. 'Just get on the bloody train,' was his gruff response to my question as I was walking up the platform. Andrew was behind me and was instructed to run. Is this carriage B I asked.' It doesn't matter, just get on,' repeated the rough and bullying attendant. At this point I had gone

into shock and didn't even know if we were on the right train. We had actually got on at one end of carriage E and after crossing into the next carriage found ourselves in the right place; ironically the young couple I asked to check if we were on the correct service (a bit late because the train was now moving) were found to actually be in our seats. The ticket inspector was much nicer.



The train left around 1300. At 1400 the rain came down and visibility to outside was reduced. By the time we got to Fort William around 1625 (only about 20 minutes after we were due) the weather had cleared and, whilst overcast, was relatively free of precipitation; for which we were grateful as we walked to our accommodation (past a particularly unkempt cemetery). A couple of small drops of rain fell as we walked back to Morrison's supermarket (a supermarket like Woolies that is next to the train station), to get food supplies for dinner, lunch and breakfast.

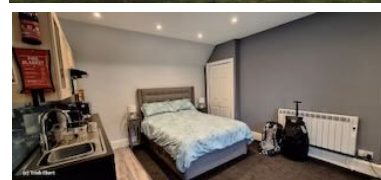
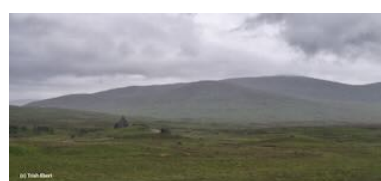
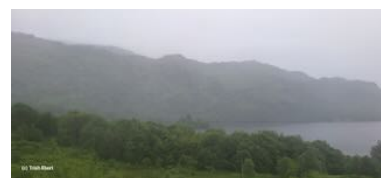
The only bit of the day that actually ran smoothly had been the morning. We had left our Glasgow accommodation early and stored our luggage at the station (for a fee, of course). I had discovered yesterday that one of the grand buildings on the large square outside the station was the Town Hall. And that they do morning, free, guided tours. The only thing is that they can't be booked. You have to turn up to get your ticket (a temporary neck lanyard). Of course we got there with over half an hour to spare.

They wouldn't give us a lanyard but suggested we fill in the time with a coffee. We asked for a recommendation. They suggested Costa's (a franchise). The coffee was terrible.

The Town Hall tour was conducted by a staff member. I suspect all staff members get to conduct this tour on a rotating basis. The blurb is clearly standard because the lass that took our tour was clearly uncomfortable projecting some of it - not that the contents were controversial - just that her 'guiding manner' was not good. None-the-less it was interesting. One of the rooms is lined with Tasmanian Huon Pine panels.

Birds spotted today: gulls, robin, sparrow, swallow blackbird.

Deer were seen from the train windows on hills along the side of track. Hikers were also seen along track...looking a bit miserable in the rain.



Jacobite Train

Fort William to Malaig return

26th June 2024. Yesterday I had had an ongoing email conversation with either a heartless, headless staff member - or an AI assistant. We had booked First Class tickets for the Jacobite Train trip. But we had done it via a booking agency. The idea was to enjoy an afternoon tea on the way back to Fort William. But the booking agency had not booked the afternoon tea and suggested I book it myself. I had used a form to send this information in months ago. I hadn't got a confirmation, but at the time that wasn't exactly surprising - the whole service had been suspended due to Health and Safety Regulations. In fact, the service had only just resumed. Or rather, some scheduled services had resumed. The issue I had was that because the situation was changing every day even the official website of the train suggested that patrons should not check more than five days before their scheduled trip to check if the train is running. According to their website you need to order afternoon tea more than a week in advance. Clearly there was a disconnect here. Because I had used a form I had no email proof. In the end I gave up and we bought our own snacks for the trip back - not quite the indulgent experience I had first hoped for. A staff member on the train had informed us, as we got off at Malaig, of a bakery that might be able to help, but

we had no time to get there; we had booked the Wildlife Cruise for the time in Malaig and that left little time to spare.

Wildlife Cruise. The hopeful crew hand you a thick picture card when you get on the boat displaying photographs of all the wildlife they expect you have the potential to see on the short one-hour tour. We didn't see a lot of them- but seals were plentiful. As were guillemots and gulls.

On the way to Malaig we sat opposite two Americans. On the way back we had the four seats to ourselves, but on the opposite side of the train were two very funny English Tourists - we had also bantered with these two on the morning journey.

There were other Aussies on the train - a couple from Gladstone and a family from Perth.

Dinner was a cooked chook from Morrisons. We spent the evening watching Netflix - we couldn't get normal television - even with the hostess sending up one of the neighbours to help us.







Fort William to Oban.

....eventually

27th June 2024. It was slightly drizzly this morning and Andrew didn't really want to go for an early morning walk - I had to drag him out. We had to depart our accommodation at 1000 but we also had to attain a car at 1000. It was just that we didn't quite know where to attain it from. In our original correspondence with the car hire mob, there was mention of the car hire mob meeting us at the station. But we weren't at the station and we didn't really want to walk out in the rain to get there. Using the accommodation wifi, I sent an email/text. Perhaps we could walk to their premises - which Andrew had looked up and found was closer to our accommodation than the station. In the end the car was delivered to us. But it was not initially paid for (as outside we were out of wifi range to organise payment). And it wasn't what we had ordered.

To be fair we had had previous warning late last night. When we had booked the car, the car hire mob had had a manual booking system. Their booking system is now electronic and the owner had spent some time shifting all the manual bookings across to the new system. But we had been missed. Which meant when he discovered the mistake all the cars of the model we had asked for (a Suzuki Jimny) had been taken. We were instead given an Audi A4 - a vehicle that no doubt would be much more comfortable. It was however also wider, and lower to the ground. We wanted the vehicle to go exploring - some of the intended roads were likely to be dirt - it remained to be seen if this replacement was fit for purpose.

Our destination today was Oban, but I thought we would go to visit Glencoe first, the site of one of the horrible massacres of Scotland's history. It was drizzling when we got there and cloud level was low. We could see the Visitors Centre but we couldn't see much else. That was not immediately a problem as we were hungry



and entertained a cuppa in the cafe. With warm stomachs we headed into the 'interps' bit. But it wasn't entirely engaging. Panels in the foyer area to the cinema were concerned with the mechanics and history of mountain climbing; clearly a big activity in this area. The film wasn't much better - a collection of small pieces. The short on how they constructed a hut as it would have been constructed here several hundred years ago was interesting - but it was still raining outside so there was no chance of us seeing the finished product. There was a brush over of the politics that led to the massacre - but no background information. I was hoping for more (perhaps visitors are expected to know more history) - I would have to get my history background elsewhere. Given we were not going for a walk we moved on. So much for seeing Glencoe!



Lunch (home made sandwiches which were eaten in the car) was had in a yard with a view. It was at a private property on the main road but it had a cafe. I think the idea is you buy food and stay (although the sign does include a note that takeaway is available). To justify our parking place we bought a small can of coke - for 2 pounds!!

When we got over the bridge at Connel we should have been around fifteen minutes from our destination. But we took a lot longer. The main road was closed (due to a horrible fatality, but we didn't know that until we got really stuck). There was one detour sign, and one attendant. And no real direction after this. Clearly locals know where the

detour is. We didn't, and there wasn't a second sign - we were ten minutes drive in the wrong direction along a loch before I realised we were probably going the wrong way!

So we retraced our steps and followed the only option that looked viable (by zooming in on the sat navigation). It was the only option, period. But it wasn't really all that viable; it was a one-lane hedge-lined road. And all traffic was using it. Trucks, camper vans, locals and tourists. Even a policeman got stuck and went for a walk to see what was happening. There were limited passing spots and cars had to get half off the side of the road to pass. One car dropped dramatically off the tar and had lost a tyre from one of its rims. I don't know how long it had been there but a flat bedded tow truck coming the other way was probably going to its assistant. However there was nowhere for the tow truck to turn around - who knows how that car was going to get out of there.

We finally got to Oban but our ordeal wasn't over yet. Roads we needed to access were still blocked and we missed an expensive car park and found ourselves on very narrow village roads heading back out into the rural area. We finally managed to turn around and park around a block from our accommodation.

After accessing our accommodation and having a cuppa we headed back outside. What traffic? What blockage? The nearby roads suddenly seemed clear. We still had time on our car park ticket but we moved to a closer car park anyway.



Getting supplies for dinner was an adventure in itself. The easiest food supermarket to access was Ldl - but there was nothing there I could eat. It took us a couple of attempts to find the entrance to the car parks servicing Marks&Spencers and Tesco. We settled on Tesco for range, and after stocking up got back to base around 1800.

During the evening we got an email to indicate that tomorrow's booked boat trip to Staffa and the Treshnish Isles had been cancelled due to windy weather. We spent the evening trying to watch TV. Like last night the television had issues; we couldn't get normal channels - we could however get Sky News. I suspect we could get streaming channels but I didn't want to experiment getting those. There is a tv in the bedroom and I tried that as well. Same setup; same issue.

Birds: swallow, white wagtail, oyster catcher, gull, raft of duck?, Grebe/merganser?



To varied holes below ground

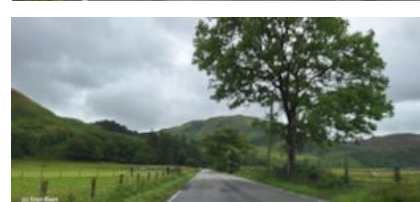
South of Oban

28th June 2024.. I was up at around 0630. From what I could see, looking above the frosted, and out the clear, pane of the lounge-room window, the sky was grey. It didn't sound windy, but I hadn't looked at the trees and we are a street back from the coast. There were twittering birds calling from outside the kitchen window. I can't see out this window and it is on opposite side of the unit to the rest of the windows. Sparrows maybe. I am still trying to get my head around the native sounds here..they are pests in Aus.

Plan B..with some changes

With the boat trip off due to wind we thought we might go for a drive. The aim was Loch Awe, or at least to traverse one side of it. To do this we had to head south. It wasn't raining when we left the car park at 0855 but it was raining around twenty minutes later. Light rain fell on and off for the next few hours.

As an impromptu side trip I directed Andrew off to the right. From the way I read the very large scale map I thought I was directing him to the coast of the mainland, but we ended up heading over a single lane bridge onto the Isle of Steil!. At the end of the road on Steil we found ourselves in a quaint village with a couple of rows of uniform houses, and separate individual huts - they looked like miners' cottages. I was about to find out that was the correct assumption. The wind was extremely cold and there was still an hour before the museum was open. According to the lass in the shop, on the adjacent isle (one of four slate mining islands accessed by a tiny five-seat tinnie ferry) there was apparently a more comprehensive museum. She was very enthusiastic that we should visit the island. As well as the museum apparently there was a walking track, and the high point of the track offers good views. It all sounded very interesting. But not today. If we took the ferry over, by the time we wandered around and saw the museum, taking account of the ferryman's lunch-break, it was going to take all day. It was also bitterly cold. I was wearing a down jacket over my hiking fleecy. The threat of rain was also imminent. So whilst the history sounded fascinating, we moved on.



Back on the main road we continued south, past the turn off we needed to see Loch Awe, and toward the town of Kilmartin. As per most little settlements here, the length of the town along the road was not long, and we turned around at the hotel at the end of town into the car park opposite. There were some picnic tables here but they were wet. I suggested to Andrew we try the museum, which had clear, and modern looking signage. Given that it looked important I suggested to Andrew it might also have a cafe. In the end we had our sandwiches in the car in the museum car park, and then headed into the cafe for a cuppa and something sweet. Ironically the only thing that was gluten free was the one remaining scone...a new batch was coming but not for another 30 minutes.

Sated we headed off to find out what the museum was actually all about. It turns out that this location is one of the richest places in the United Kingdom of archaeological remnants showing human occupation over the past 6000 to 7000 years; artefacts varying from pottery, tools, and traded goods. Monuments include burial mounds, standing stones, and stone circles.

The museum is next to an old church with old gravestones as well. The museum painted a fascinating picture. There is a 'monuments walk' but although I would have loved to walk down into the burial mounds that were excavated, we weren't sticking around long enough; it was also bitterly cold and there was still the threat of rain. We did drive to some standing stones and a stone circle, and I had a quick wander to the centre of the Glen. Given the outside temperature, Andrew, perhaps sensibly, stayed in the car.

Leaving Kilmartin we headed north and climbed the 600m up the track to Carnasserie Castle, the home base of a christian cult minister in the 1600s.

Back on the road we turned off toward Gord, and followed the windy, sometimes



single -lane, road along Loch Awe taking a short stop roadside to view the well-known Kilchurn Castle from the opposite side of the loch. Whilst there were a few taking photographs here I think the more official photo spot of this building from this side was further on; a large carpark was off the road with a bus looking decidedly touristy.

By this time Andrew was looking for a cuppa. I was looking at the time. We suddenly came across St Conans Kirk around the corner, a location on today's original visiting list. The Tea Room Open sign was on the road. But it wasn't. We had missed it by 15 minutes - they just hadn't taken the sign down. It was cold and blowy and if we wanted to actually go into the church (which is a 'modern' church built in a mixture of styles) we had to pay a donation. We moved on, finding ourselves instead in the carpark of the Cruachan Dam Visitor Centre.

Looking through the window of the visitor centre as we drove past to park the car presented me with a staff member looking back with a strange look on his face. Our timing would be tight... the facility would be shutting in 45 minutes but it had a cafe. However, Andrew didn't get his coffee. Before we had opened the car door the staff member was standing next to the car. Are you looking for a tour? Yes,



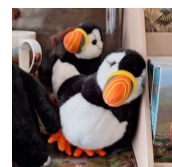
if we can? The staff member literally ran through the building to catch the last tour bus of the day so it wouldn't leave without us.

What a fascinating story this location tells. This is an 'on demand' electricity generating hydro power site, and it is older than I am! There are quite a few of these scattered around Scotland.

Back at Oban we took an evening walk around town after dinner. We also got a phone call around 1900. The wind predictions had mellowed for tomorrow. Our Puffin trip was back on!

Animals seen: a rabbit

Birds. White tailed eagle, harrier?, blackbird, Martin, gull, swallow, sparrow, European shag?, grey heron.





Puffins...and others

29th June 2024. We were on the 0955 ferry to Mull. Along with hundreds of other people; including at least one tour bus full of Americans, and several coughers and sneezers! Fortunately this ferry is huge so keeping personal distance on board wasn't a problem; keeping personal distance whilst waiting in the ferry terminal was another matter!.

When we got to Mull there were two mini busses waiting for the participants of our particular tour; these would take us to the other side of Mull so we could get our boat to head to the Isles of Lunge and Staffa. Fingal's Cave at Staffa didn't really interest us (although when we got there I conga-lined it to stick my nose around the corner), it was the puffins on Lunge that we were interested in.

The other occupants of the boat were a mixture but did include one poorly equipped young Canadian couple. They were wearing shorts. It was bitterly cold. I had thermals on under my trousers so I offered the lass my wet weather pants as some wind protection; she was very grateful. I was also

grateful that it didn't really rain - we could see it from the ferry but we got very little whilst on the island.

Puffins, and indeed, guillemots, were within touching distance of the path -but of course one doesn't. And whilst I had the good camera my timing was often out - they move so fast; the money shot of the returning puffin with fish in his mouth was seen, but not recorded.

We were back on the big ferry from Mull to the mainland at 1925. Given the time we had dinner on board.

Roads on the isle of mull have otter crossing signs. We didn't see any

Animals: grey seals.

Birds: puffins, razorbills, guillemot, tern, gull (sp?), kitty-wake, gannet, small brown bird, duck (sp?), goose?,





Oban to Portree, Isle of Skye

30th June 2024. We paid for an hour's parking this morning - I had a particular mission in mind before we left town - I was hoping I could find a postcard with puffins on it. The 1 pound paid at the car parking machine, instead of giving us an hour, gave us five. But we weren't going to stick around that long, in fact we were gone by 1000. As the stores, those that were opening on a Sunday, weren't going to open until 1000 anyway, I gave up on the quest. It was nice however to walk around for a little while and soak up the sun!



Originally we had toyed with the idea of visiting the falconry. Our experience at Duncan on Vancouver Island a couple of years ago had been amazing and hands-on experiences help these places keep running. However, the establishment was, according to the internet, a little over an hour south of us. Factor in windy, thin roads, and the fact we are unfamiliar with them and you can probably add fifty percent to that time. If we were staying around the area that would be fine - but we were moving on. North. To a location that again according to the internet was around 3.5 hours away. We reluctantly dismissed the idea of the falconry after 'umming' and 'ahhing' and visited places on our direct route instead.

The first place we visited wasn't all that far away and I had booked morning entry tickets to Dunstaffnage Castle: a more significant site (although still a ruin) than the priests' house investigated a few days ago. Built in the late 1200s over the top of an older 'fort' the building was captured by Robert The Bruce at one stage, and various sides of politics over the next few hundred years resulted in Clans losing their access, regaining it, and losing it again, and a woman who assisted Bonnie Prince Charlie escape sheltered there temporarily before being taken away for execution.

When we finally got to Fort William the first priority was lunch. Most places were full but we found a cafe at the less popular end of town. Then we had eyes on a the second activity - but it didn't happen. The Highland Museum in Fort William is open six days per week. And, of course, today is the seventh....

So we moved on, firstly heading to Banavie to see where our barge was going to leave from on 6th July. According to Google maps we are leaving from a



reasonably rickety looking jetty! There were other boats in the Caledonian Canal along this section; several monohulls were tied to the other side. Quite a few people were about, wandering along the multi-lock system to the west of this. We will check this out when we return to Fort William..it is called Neptune's Steps and a couple of cafes have been set up adjacent to this area. This is the end of The Great Glen and we had to drive a section of it.

From the barge landing area we took the back road for a while from Banavie until it joined the A82 at the Commando Memorial. At one stage the road crossed the Caledonian Canal with a single lane swing bridge. There was a possible glimpse of the top of Ben Nevis in the shifting clouds but as we were driving away from it it was difficult, under motor, to work out exactly which was the famous 'peak.'. A woman on the Jacobite Train had mentioned she had been to Fort William three times and hadn't seen the peak. Turning back on the main road we crossed the Canal again and turned at Invergarry towards the Isle of Skye.

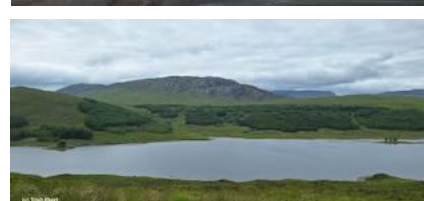
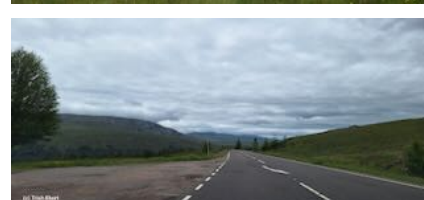
Andrew saw deer on our trip; I missed them as I was looking in a different direction at the time. We saw quite a few birds; jackdaws, crows, grey heron, gulls, a pinkish pigeon, swallows, blackbird, robin, rock pigeon.

Other mammals spotted: rabbits, goats, sheep, cows.

Yesterday there were 'otter crossing' signs on the road. Today we had signs for crossing 'people', crossing 'elderly people', crossing 'goats', crossing 'sheep', crossing 'deer!'

The scenery along the journey ranged from pleasant valley views to dramatic mountain tops: some of it seemed awe-inspiring. The roads were windy and, on most of them, there are no overtaking lanes.

We got to our accommodation (a self contained unit off to the side of someone's home and Bed and Breakfast) around 1700. We were greeted by the hostess and had a good chat. A supermarket run was done for dinner (I was worried that on a Sunday in remote Scotland that



we wouldn't find the food shops open, and we had been warned that the restaurants needed booking). Dinner was pulled beef and a cannelloni bean based salad. I was going to use quinoa but we couldn't find any on the shelves.

Before bed I spent some time looking at options for tomorrow, as our trip to St Kilda has been cancelled due to weather. Andrew has done all the driving and wants a break tomorrow (or at least not a long drive). The weather will probably dictate our options.





A boat trip: just not the one we expected

1st July 2024. I got up to low cloud and light drizzle. The mountain edges that we could see from the window yesterday were behind a light-grey low cloud/fog.

After lunch, as the fog had lifted somewhat, we walked into town...steeply down hill - which was fine - it was the uphill back that was going to be a challenge.

There is nothing flat in town and like balls in a pinball machine making their way to the lowest spot, we found ourselves at the portside jetties. The weather looked like it had cleared a bit and we booked a local boat ride; although it was never going to be an equivalent replacement to the one that had been cancelled.. There are two obvious companies offering short boat trips here (there are probably more) each leaving dock at slightly different times. The 1400 boat trip was fully booked so we put our names down for the 1600. To fill in time we wandered back up the hill to look around. The Visitors Centre was not open so the next task was to try and send a postcard (I had finally found

one in Fort William), and there were conflicting reports of where the post office might be, or indeed if it would be open. I didn't want to waste time on that potential so after a cuppa and cake in a pub we headed for the bookshop.

Watch your language!....

... which in a bookshop is an appropriate term, but not in the manner it was delivered. I had been looking at the back of books on local subjects and came across a rather long and unpronounceable word. In my typical Aussie vernacular I said to myself 'what the hell does that mean.' I didn't say it loud, and I didn't say it to anyone - it was just a verbalised thought. Upon hearing it the bookseller started to head over to me and just as he arrived a loud and deep 'Watch your language,' reverberated around the shop. Everyone stopped. It took me a



startled couple of seconds to work out the individual making the loud accusation was addressing it to me. I was in shock, and unfortunately, having grown up not being able to defend myself (classic 'fright' personality vs 'fight' or 'flight'), when I recovered (unfortunately after I had left the shop), I found myself in a severe and angry depression. Who did this individual think he was? If he was objecting to the word 'hell' in a religious sense (Scotland can be very Christian cultish - of various ilks) he clearly does not know what the word meant for that cult a couple of thousand years ago (and therefore I have every right to use it), and the assumption was I was using it in an 'English' derogative sense (I could have been referring to another language; the word has many meanings in German and who knows what in other languages). If I had been in a place of religious worship I would have been very conscious of my speech - but in a bookshop! Unfortunately this interaction soiled my entire trip - I will not forget this bullish, rude and awful man. I just wish I had had the fortitude at the time to tell the individual to f* o*. The word in question was 'Camustainavaig' which is actually a place name but probably had a literal meaning in Gaelic at one point.

The boat trip at 1600 helped clear the mind a bit. The boat however didn't travel far - it made its way along the nearby coast and then over to the opposing coast adjacent Raasay Island. There was a little bit of commentary - but not a lot. Ironically all of the rest of the individuals on board our boat (two boats went out) were from a large travelling group of Italians, so in theory, a perfect chance to improve my listening skills. I didn't try to pick up on their conversation however (which would have been rude), I was trying to listen to the skipper and his sidekick. The sidekick was good value once we got him separately, and Andrew plied him with questions about the area. Andrew also spent time with the skipper as it had started to rain on the way back to harbour and we sheltered inside with the skipper to keep out of the weather.

To save us walking back to the accommodation in the rain, we got a table at the Pier Hotel for dinner; a small establishment that, in its restaurant, seated only around 15 people. After dinner (the rain had stopped) we wandered back up the hill to base.

Birds: including on the boat trip: sea-eagles, shags, guillemots.

Animals seen whilst on the boat trip: sheep, seals.



Trottenish Peninsula...

*or at least the tiny amount
we could see of it!*

2nd July 2024. The weather prediction was for rain all day, in varying amounts for each hourly forecast depending on which forecaster we looked at. And whilst there was the occasional very short period where precipitation didn't fall, the predictions were right. Which of course meant we were essentially relegated to the car. We did get out for the short walks to the lookout at Leary Falls, and to walk downstream of a bridge that is, according to some walking notes I had, a potential place to spot otter (none seen), but all other potential 'walks' were 'off the table'. The rain was just too unpredictable. There were a couple of dozen cars at the car park for the walk to The Old Man of Storr, and several cars at the obvious tourist spots that we passed, but we left them to it. The cloud was low, and the expected spectacular rock formations were not seen. I had had my eye on an 11km walk to some old mines but if we started that we could guarantee we were going to get wet. We stopped in the car park at the Island Life Museum and got wet getting to the cafe at the top of the driveway. There is no seating here and whilst I



was prepared to stand and occupy the tiny space on the customer side of the counter until the rain stopped, we suddenly discovered that it had. We retreated to the car to enjoy our hot drink but having got wet legs just in that short run was enough for Andrew. He stayed on the car. I however entered the museum grounds, taking an hour reading interps before I realised that if I read every word I would be another couple of hours. Taking photos of the remaining panels I made my way back to the car and we continued on.

The only other stop we made at the top of the Island was at an Iron Age Souterrain. I used the torch on Andrews phone to enter but didn't get far because of the puddle of water. Andrew didn't even attempt to get in. It was too small - he wouldn't have fit!

The cloud had lifted a little but the intermittent showers persisted. We headed back toward base, and after a food shop, sat down with a cuppa in our accommodation, in the warm, around 1430.







Waternish Peninsular

3rd July 2024. Rain. Wind. I was lucky to get Andrew out at all today. But it didn't happen until after lunch. According to predictions there was likely to be less rain in the afternoon but that didn't stop the first shower coming down around 25 minutes after we left. Today our aim was the Waternish Peninsular. We took the Dunvegan Road out of town and then turned north toward the Stein Jetty. A group of whitewashed buildings along the road to the jetty is quaint and includes the Inn where we would have had dinner if our trip to St Kilda had gone ahead. Shortly after this we visited a tanning factory, where the purchase of a pair of sheepskins slippers was a tempting prospect, but, although made in the UK, they were not from this business (this business only tans sheepskins). The end of this road got us to Trumpan, the 'church' where the MacDonalds slaughtered the Macleods in 1577. The ruins are surrounded by graves. It was threatening rain so I didn't investigate but I suspect the Celtic Cross headstone had some age on it. There were also apparently war graves here and some quite recent editions (within the last 50 years). I didn't search them out - it was warmer in the car.

We followed the thin road back to the main drag, and stopped briefly at a shop at Dunvegan that sold alpaca goods and souvenirs (to be honest, I wasn't interested in the gifts..I just wanted to pat the cat outside). Getting back in the car we didn't stop at the main hub of Dunvegan. The road was technically wide enough for two cars but people had parked on both sides of it, making it a chaotic mess! I was going to try and send a postcard here but we gave up on the idea of stopping.

We did end up stopping at Dun Braeg (an Iron Age 'broch') where, thankfully, the sun came out for a





short while and we didn't get wet.

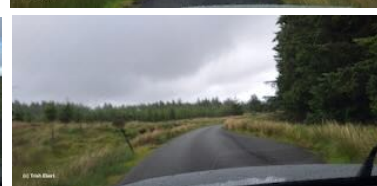
Leaving the guard sheep of the broch behind, we took a short cut back to Portree on a back road, rather than driving the long way around on the main road, and I was hoping for some dramatic rocky landscapes now the clouds were higher than the past couple of days. It was not to be, and although we at times found the road was high above the creeks, the bucolic landscape (only) consisted of rolling hills and forest plantation...

Of course the rain came down as we were nearing town, and after a shop for dinner we were back at base around 1600.

Birds. Jackdaw, black backed gull, silver backed gull, sparrow, song thrush?, dunno?, blackbird, raptor (not specified).



Dun Braeg



The wettest day of the season so far, apparently

4th July 2024. And for us a very long one. We slept in. The forecast was, as usual, for rain. Today we decided we would drive the Slea Peninsula and see what was down there; but it had to be reasonably inspiring for us to get out of the car to explore as the inclination to



get out whilst it was raining was lacking. In the end it was a toilet stop that made us park the car, missing a cafe and instead finding ourselves at Torabhaig Distillery. Whilst we were there we thought we would take a tour - our booked tour to Glenmorangie out of Inverness had been

cancelled. The tour was interesting and we were the only people at our time - but it is not an old distillery (although the history of the buildings is interesting) and it is a smoky whisky - a style Andrew is not that fond of. At least we can say, however that we've done a whisky tour in Scotland!. Moving on we passed an historic house and

museum belonging to the Macdonald Clan before coming to the jetty at Armadale Bay. Here the ferry heads across to Malaig - the location at the end of the line of the Jacobite Train. Perhaps, I thought, we could use this way to get back to Fort William tomorrow. Asking the attendant about times and costs he noted that one ferry was going in a few minutes. Caught up with the discussion we asked if there was room. It took several tense minutes before he just told us to get in queue, and then when we found ourselves at the end of the line of vehicles we were asked if we had a ticket. Well, no - the attendant said just to get in line.

In the end we got a ticket, got the ferry (with two feet to spare) and found ourselves on a significant swell affected vessel across the strait. It was only when we sat down that we realised what we had done.

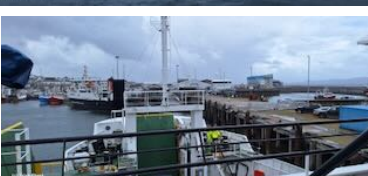
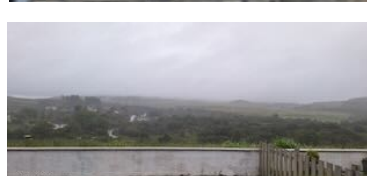
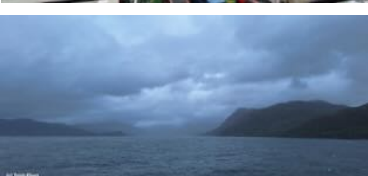
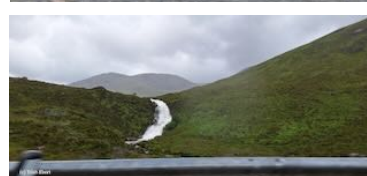
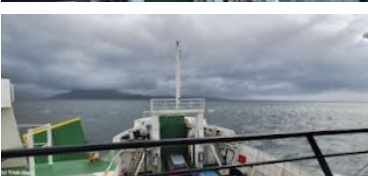




Taking this ferry back to Fort William made sense, taking it today to have to drive almost back into Fort William and then back up to Portree meant we had several hours of driving ahead of us. In the rain. Which happened to really pour down as we got to the mainland. That's ok, I thought to myself, we can stop and have a look at the Glenfinnan Bridge - we should be in time for the train to come through. That was never going to happen -the car park was full, the better viewing spots were up the hill, and you could hardly see anything through the rain anyway.

We got back to base at 1900. We had briefly considered going out for dinner but reluctantly went supermarket shopping instead. The cheap steak that Andrew bought and then cooked was one of the best I've had. It was followed up with an indulgent, sugar rich, gluten free chocolate cake.

Because it was 4th July and we had been following UK politics for the better part of four years, we waited up for several hours to see what the result of the General Election would be.



Portree to Fort William

5th July 2024. To make today a bit more interesting I was looking for a distraction for the journey between Portree and Fort William. It couldn't be too big a distraction, as Andrew was to have a few hours of driving. We didn't rush to get up but we did end up leaving our accommodation at the expected checkout time. Shortly after, we turned out of the turn off to town and spotted two hitchhikers. They were standing in a very awkward (impossible) spot for someone to pick them up. Andrew in his generosity turned around and we found ourselves with the company of two young German backpackers. They had also spent the past few days on Skye - hiking in the rain! They were good value and it was interesting to hear where they had been and some of the background of places in Scotland that I have yet to explore. We drove them to Kyle of Lochalsh and dropped them off at the railway line - they would be catching it to Inverness and attending a Highland Games tomorrow - what a great idea - I hadn't looked the schedule up when planning this trip - what a pity (from what I can gather the Highland Games schedule is a bit like the rodeo circuit - over a particular season the games are in a different town each week).

Then we backtracked. The distraction I had chosen was the Otter Hide at Kylerhea, apparently one of the best places in the UK to spot otter. The road to this location however left a lot to be desired; the scenery was pleasant - but the road the surface was windy and narrow, and very churned up!

We weren't the only ones trying to spot otter. Several other visitors were at the hide, once we'd got to it, after a walk down hill. Andrew spotted one otter, briefly. I missed it; I was looking the other way. I did spot seal though so at least I saw some wildlife. We had lunch at a picnic table back up the hill near the car park before deciding that we would take the historic ferry across the Kyle Rhea. We had to wait for a while - the ferry trip is not long but we just missed a ferry and found ourselves in the ferry lunch break. When we finally did get on board we baulked at the cost; it cost us more to get across this small stretch than it had to get across the Sound of Sleat yesterday!





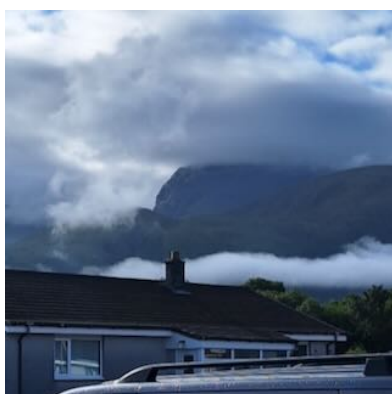
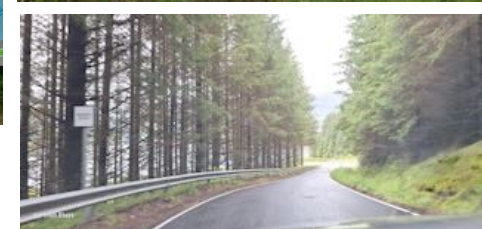
Never the less, we can say we have taken the last hand turned spinning turntable ferry in the the World (apparently). On the other side of the waterway we were distracted again. I had seen on the map that there were a couple of brochs quite close to this crossing... so we redirected ourselves to have a look at those. Both were built at much lower elevations than the one we had inspected on Skye, but they were also in better condition, although both were ruins. Access to one was flat. Access to the other up a 'goat track' which proved a hazard returning to the car.

We finally got to Fort William around 1700. The room tonight was similar to the one we had in Portree in that it was attached to the hosts' house/garage. It was different however that it was just a room, quite small (the bed is against the wall on one side) and there is little room to do anything else. But it was all we needed for tonight. The hostess is delightful (and possibly soon to be an Australian resident).

We took one of her recommendations for dinner and headed off to the Ben Nevis Inn. The establishment is in an old ski



lodge and was clearly very busy. I took a standard dish off the menu (chicken and haggis) and was disappointed. Not because of the haggis - but because of the chicken. I couldn't cut through it. I ate it anyway because it took a while to come out, but compared with a bit of cheap beef that Andrew cooked that we could cut through with a normal knife, this, from a professional cook, was terrible. When we went to pay the lad at the tiller tried to explain the difficulties of cooking some pieces of meat (Andrew had already explained to me the difficulties of cooking uneven poultry). I told him that wasn't good enough - used the example of the beef we had had a few nights before, and told them if they can't get a consistent product, it shouldn't be on the menu. However, I ate it, I was prepared to pay for it (every chewy chicken mouthful) but in the end they extracted it off the bill. We weren't complaining.



The Caledonian Canal

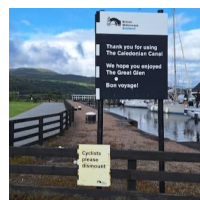
6th July 2024. Today we started our first organised tour. But, first, we had some time to fill in.

A morning walk - for one of us

Surprisingly it was a lovely clear morning. The top of Ben Nevis could actually be seen! (Eventually). I went for a walk; to enjoy the sunshine, stretch the legs, have a look at some new scenery, and pick up some anti-inflammatories for Andrew as, having twisted his knee yesterday along the goat track to the second broch, he was not in the mood to aggravate it.

After I had got back and we had left our accommodation we had to decide how to fill in four hours. The first choice was the Ben Nevis Visitors Centre. Clearly all the other visitors in the area had the same idea. The car park for the Visitors Centre is quite large. It was full. In fact, it was overflowing, with cars parked in several dubious places as well as for hundreds of meters down each side of the road! Ok, with that off the list, we took the road to its conclusion, (getting a sense of the lower slopes of the area), tried to have an early lunch at the Glen Nevis Restaurant, (but its carpark was closed (too early)), and headed back to town. Of course, at this point, it started to rain...just as we were going to start walking around. We parked in the Morrison's carpark (it was free) and walked under the pass to main street. After lunch in the Old Deli we tried the Highland Museum again.

We didn't stay particularly long. Unfortunately. A couple of volunteers quickly explained what was in each room and both of us jumped in different directions. I only briefly saw the natural history section because the toilet is in it, but I wish I had had the time to stay longer. There was a fabulous (and simple) video showing of how the Highlands were formed and the ongoing geological processes shaping them. However, we had a barge to catch, and in my paranoia, I didn't want to be late.



The Barge Trip!

Of course we got there early. There are instructions on the booking information that they don't want to see you earlier than the boarding time of 1400 - staff would be far too busy.



As it was the rain was coming down a bit more consistently than before and heavier; and for a few minutes you would consider it 'pouring'. We stayed inside the car until just before 1400, when another couple of travellers got dropped off by a taxi and were taken in. And then two more cars turned up, so we thought we may as well join the fray.



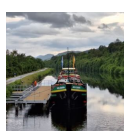
So our luggage was loaded (with the help of the skipper, C) and we said goodbye to the Audi A4 that had kept us dry for the past 10 days, locking the keys inside so the owner could pick it up at his leisure.

The Journey Begins.

Once everyone had their gear stowed we gathered for instructions. As this was a 'Journey The Great Glen' cruise, the idea was that participants would journey the distance on foot, by bike, or by canoe - depending on the group, the weather, and what the guide had prepared. I am sure the guide was hoping for this morning's weather this afternoon. However, at about 1500, six out of seven of us ventured out into the rain and rode to the Fort William end of the Caledonian Canal. The barge, with those remaining on board, was going to head in the opposite direction. We met up with the barge again at around 1700.

The shower cubicle, although basic, was a welcome retreat when we got back to boat. And the water was deliciously hot!

Birds: Goldfinch, white wagtail, sparrow, mallard?, gull (sp?)



To Laggan Locks

7th July 2024. The generator went on at 0700. We are at the stern end of the cabins and quite close to the generator's position. Or at least that is how it sounds. I had had a disturbed sleep..and found myself getting up about every hour. Breakfast was at 0800; porridge and sausage and scrambled eggs.

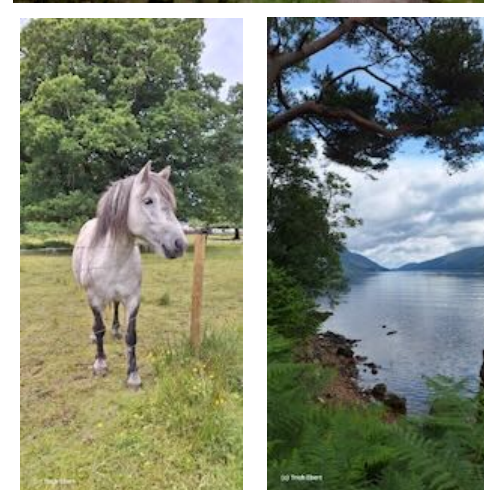
This morning a walk was planned - all of 3 miles - which I had to recalculate in my head to get some perspective. Before we went back to boat we visited the Cameron Museum. Here I was starting to get some history of the Highlands, albeit one sided. Here also was written in interps something that shouldn't have been. It was a horrible description of the naming of a local waterhole, and whilst it was local lore, it was terribly insensitive to those who might get affected - I am one of them. On the other hand, the making of the Highlands seems to be just one horrible event after another.

We had taken our rain gear off as we had approached the museum; the weather seemed to be improving. Unfortunately, it started to rain just as we were waiting to get picked up by the rib and we got back to boat a bit wet. Lunch was a welcome warm carrot soup.

After lunch we got some sailing in. The barge has a small sailing craft. Unfortunately there were two others who wanted to sail as well so we had to split the afternoon. Fortunately however Andrew and I went first - with a guide. We got some nice wind and in the end had to slow down for the barge to catch up or we would have not left any sailing time for the other two before the end of the day. The wind was dropping off by the time the barge caught up to us and the little sailboat swapped crews. Of the rest of the participants; two walked and one stayed on the barge all day.

The barge made the Lagan Lock at 1715. We were last through the lock for the day at around 1730, tying up to dock just downstream of the lock for the night.

Birds. Black headed gull, other gulls, mute swan, house martin, chiffchaff, robin, black craven, osprey with nest, wagtail





To Loch Oich

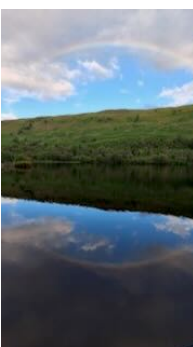
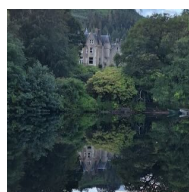
8th July 2024. When I looked out the window this morning there was light cumulous in the sky with a bit of sun popping out from behind it. We got up when the generator went on at 0700, and there was a bit of cloud on the top of my 'yesterday's favourite hill'. The wind was nippy. I went across the other side of the Canal to get another photo of *Ros Crana*...Using the good camera this time...with the small lens. I also went back to get a photo of the whacky 'le boat' hire boats.

We took the canoe option for our journey this morning, the first part of the paddle through a narrow (canal section) of The Great Glen. When the waterway opened up we were shown the *Meredith* dredging barge (towed there, it didn't have its own engine), the monument to the Seven Heads (another gruesome story - Scotland seems to be full of them), and a recent wreck. The *Ros Crana* was anchored within site of Invergarry Castle, Invergarry Castle Hotel (currently not open), and the recent wreck.

After lunch we had a choice. Andrew stayed for a try at sailing but the lack of wind meant he didn't get the chance. I went for a walk with R...a 7.5 mile wander up to a waterfall using a mud map that was 'almost' accurate. By the time we had

returned to boat we had probably walked a little further than the 7.5 miles stipulated and been, in R's words, 'temporarily disorientated'. Three times! We took slightly longer than we expected but we were back on boat before 1800.

Wildlife: Slug, blackbird, toad. There was deer spotting from the boat after dinner



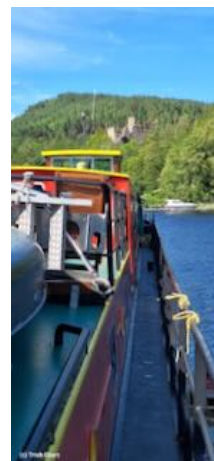
A Day in Three Halves!

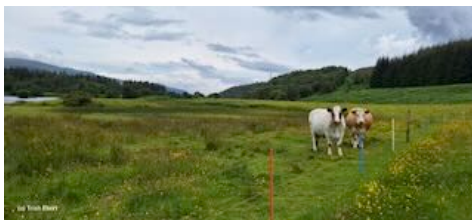
9th July 2024. Breakfast, as usual, was at 0800. The wind was too strong for canoeing up Loch Oich unfortunately so, after a leisurely morning (with the potential of an hour's play canoeing in sheltered waters, a quick sail, or a quick stroll around the hotel grounds, all of which the guests didn't take up but the crew had a bit of a play), the choice was walking or cycling the three miles to lunch. We walked, along with two others - one the guide. Two stayed on board and two cycled. We almost made it back to boat before it rained. (It was the two minute diversion to the shear-able swing bridge that took the time...no photo).

Historic notes on this morning's journey included crossing over General Wade's Way and walking along the old rail line - last used in 1947.

After lunch there were options. Two of our number walked all the way to Fort Augusta along the Tow Path, one stayed on boat for the afternoon, and four of us split the journey. The first 2.5 miles after lunch we took the bikes and we were given 25 minutes to do this so we could meet the barge at K Loch. The complication was that for two of us, our cycling gear was different to our walking gear. When the question was asked about time to change before continuing the journey of foot, we were informed that we would have... maybe, 5 minutes. The changeover had to happen within the lock... which meant we had a short window where stepping on and off was possible. So after leaving the bikes where the crew could get them I jumped up onto deck, stripped my wet weather pants and cycling pants off, put hiking pants on and put the wet weather pants back over the top. To save time I didn't do my boots up properly... that could happen ashore. I still had to step down off boat to the side of the lock but a minute or so later when I looked up from properly tying my boots up, the lad behind me was stepping up to shore. The locks transfer water at an incredible rate.

(c) Trish Ebert www.purringalong.com.au





From the lock, the four 'now ex'-cyclists became walkers, and the guide led us up the 'wee hill'. This involved muddy paths, electric fences, bracken over the height of my head, and a fabulous view over Loch Ness - when we got to the appropriate summit. The location held an official trig point, a cross used by Benedictine monks, and the ruin of a pill box from WWII. The view may have been considered more spectacular if the sun was shining but it was still pretty impressive.

From the view the trail descended through scrub and bracken and across the golf course back to the Canal. The *Ros Crana* was rafted to the outside of her fellow ship at the top of the Fort Augusta lock system.

We had a couple of hours until dinner. Andrew retreated to the relative warmth of the boat. I changed some of my clothing and headed out for a short walk before returning to boat. I had managed 2000 more steps than yesterday and my feet were feeling tired. A short snooze before dinner was also appreciated.

The evening activity was a lovely chat in the lounge with A, R and M

Birds. Oystercatchers, mallards, rock pigeons, swallows, unidentified pigeons, chiffchaff, (a swan was noted around the boat this morning but neither of us saw it). Wagtails

Goats, sheep, cows, and evidence of a pine marten (scat).

Fort Augusta to Foyers Jetty, Loch Ness

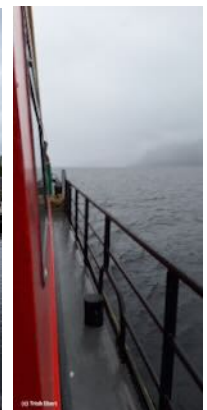
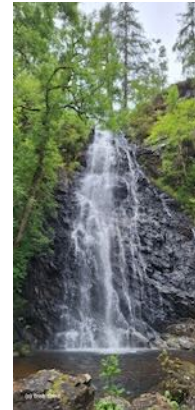
10th July 2024. Grey, cold (expected maximum of 9 deg C!) and expected rain. Oh, and to make it just that bit more uncomfortable, a north-west wind. The journey choices today (after lunch) were down to two...a 14 mile bike ride (initially with a 400m elevation gain), or to stay on boat. Rain was expected. One guest opted for the ride (and one guide went with him) and the rest stayed on board. The morning activities had been to hang around town, explore some walking paths around town, explore some cycling paths around town, or take a walk to Lady Falls - a distance of 6 miles. Andrew and I chose the walk to The Falls and we had two guides to keep us company.

Lunch back at the barge was basic burgers (no carrot line here - and no fancy trimmings - only lettuce, tomato and onion, but the thick home-made patties made up for the lack of fancy stuff. They were delicious and filling).

Ospreys were seen on the motor over, as well as goats. On the way over M started the kingfisher jigsaw.

Around Foyers Jetty field strawberries were collected for dinner, and I headed off on the woodland loop walk.

Birds. Kestrels at Fort Augusta, buzzard at Lady Falls, pheasant at Foyers, swallows, swifts, thrush, wren, duck, gull, craven



Foyers Jetty to Dore to Dochgarroch

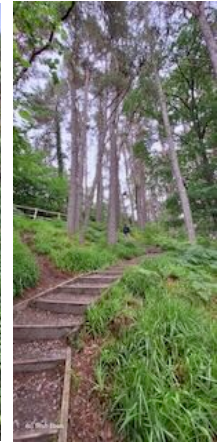
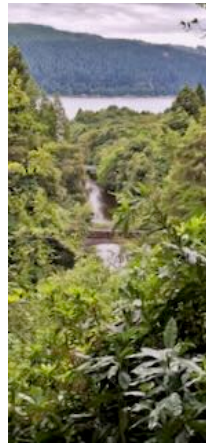
11th July 2024. It was a big day today; I estimate we travelled around 17 miles. The first journey was a walk up the hill to view a waterfall, with a break for a cuppa at the top. Of course neither Andrew or I actually brought our wallet so we were relegated to outside admiring the view. After returning to the barge there was the option to cycle to lunch. Only Andrew and I took this up. The rain from yesterday had gone and kept away the entire cycle. There was an initial steep up which Andrew, to his credit, cycled. I whimped-out and walked instead, but I did cycle the rest of the undulating way back down to loch level. We got to the beach on time for the the rib to pick us and the bikes up, having had a sea eagle welcome us into the town of Dore.

After lunch we went canoeing. I was keen to say I had canoed on Loch Ness, and having missed the opportunity yesterday (the weather was not conducive) decided I would be happy to say I wanted to canoe today. The wind picked up a bit and we were paddling into it so the the trip was truncated and the canoes picked up near a jetty a couple of miles around the corner from where we started. The canoeists continued on foot, past Aldourie Castle Estate and along some wooded tracks where four out of six of us got caught up with picking bilberries. We got picked up near an old boat shed and ferried across to the barge, now tied up at Dochgarroch.

As tomorrow is our last day Andrew and I packed up most of our gear tonight. We were in bed at 2330..it was actually close to dark outside!

Birds: red start, grey wagtail, white wagtail, craven, grey heron, merganser, kite, gull (sp?), dipper, jenny wren, sparrow, swallow, martin, blackbird, oyster catchers, mallards

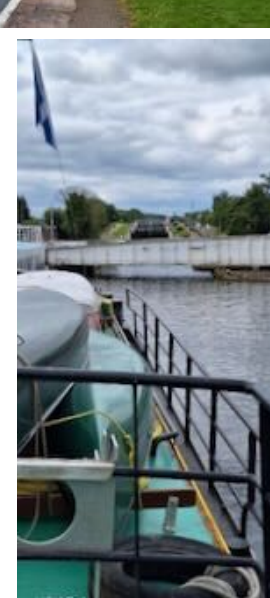
Animals: squirrels, black slug.



To Inverness - and the end of The Caledonian Canal

12th July 2024. I was up at around 0640. No-one else was. I waited for the generator to go on for a cuppa at 0700 but there seemed to be a bit of an issue getting it started. Eventually boiling water was available. Bush birds twitted in the trees between the dock and the A82; the road already busy at this time of morning. We were not far from town. Breakfast (which included yesterdays picked berries) was supposed to finish early and we were supposed to be off boat at 0820. Four of us had elected a cycle to journey's end; to the end of the Caledonian Canal. The remaining two on board were quite unwell but they had been walkers for the entire trip (the remaining guest from the start of the trip had left the cruise unwell a couple of days ago). Andrew and I made it off boat on time...just. The other two cyclists missed the timing and had to disembark in the lock. The ride into Inverness and to the end of the path along the towpath was easy, mostly flat, except for a short down hill for the final set of locks (On this journey iteration our boat does not venture through the very last lock into the Firth).

The view as we rode the last stretch to the very end was of the partial tide over the twin estuaries of Firth Moray and Firth Buely. It was lovely...I just didn't get a photo of it.



Finding our accommodation

We said farewell to the crew and left the boat as scheduled at 1100 (after being on board for the final locks) and walked into town following the suggested route given to us from the skipper. I couldn't find specific instructions to our accommodation, and first contemplated the correct entrance to the apartment building but moved on. I had a funny feeling that I did have instructions in my emails somewhere but trying to avoid a daily Telstra charge I thought we could find a cafe and have a cuppa whilst we used someone else's wifi. In the end we chose McDonald's...always reliable for access. But it wasn't. Whilst Andrew went off to get a couple of thick-shakes to justify occupying a chair, I tried to log on. In the end it wasn't worth it. The thick-shakes turned into mango and pineapple slushees (apparently they don't do thick-shakes here) and probably cost more than the telephone bill I was trying to avoid - and I couldn't get onto wifi anyway. In order to get onto wifi here I needed a code they were sending via text...but I needed wifi to access the text! After giving ourselves brain freezes consuming half the drinks, popping into the Info Centre, walking back to the entrance to the apartment building and being let in by the operations manager of

another set of apartments (not ours), we finally bit the bullet and took the phone off plane mode and rang the owner. We were four hours early for officially checking-in but we could access the apartment - we just needed a code!

After a quick cuppa (someone had left peppermint tea), Andrew settled in for the rest of the afternoon. I managed a quick shop at Tesco (a big store here and they are collecting soft plastic) before heading out to the post office, a huge second hand bookstore (in an old Gaelic Church), and a sample wander around some of the streets in the area (including popping into Marks & Spencer in the opposite direction to Tesco's from us). I followed this up with a snooze before dinner.

The evening task was to book a boat trip for tomorrow.

Birds. Black headed gull plus one other, silver winged gulls plus chicks (I managed photos), Martins, swifts, ouster catchers, grey heron, rock pigeon, wood pigeon, carrion crow, hooded crow, duck (mallard?)

We were delighted to be able to watch the news (getting normal tv was easy despite the remote having a very large Netflix button). We also spent some time catching up on UK politics on YouTube.



Inverness

Boat trip on Moray Firth & visiting the Town Museum

13th July 2024. This morning's activity was a wildlife trip. Except we didn't see much. Of course sightings are not guaranteed, and the first lot of seals near the bridge, not far from the marina, were brushed off by the skipper in close to a one-liner. The aim, it was ascertained eventually, was to head further out of the Firth in the hope of seeing dolphins. The skipper was upstairs. So were 30 exposed seats, and despite a prediction on one web-site of 'no rain', a cold wind and a light drizzle persisted. For those of us downstairs, the skipper's blurb was hard to hear over a bunch of chatting Americans. As was a pre-recorded interps guide when the boat passed certain points of interest. Apparently the bridge was built in 1982 for a cost of 33 million pounds and is the only 'building' in Inverness that is earthquake proof!

There were no dolphins spotted. Apparently there were seals near the yellow marker but we were only told about them as we were heading away ..and they were behind us. Birds spotted included gulls, shags, swans, terns, duck, grey heron, craven.

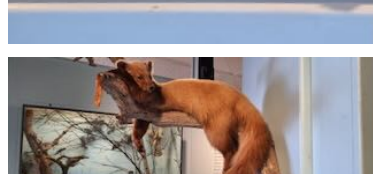
The two-hour trip ended at 1230. We walked back into town via the cobbled Church Street with Andrew ferreting for a barber. One had a long queue. One was closed. I headed off to get lunch whilst Andrew headed back to base.

After a sandwich lunch we visited the museum (which was small but terrific and just across the road from our accommodation), and had a look around the Kilt Visitor Centre but it

just looked like a big shop to us. This was followed by a walk past the cathedral to check out the bus pickup spot for tomorrow, and then via Tesco for dinner provisions. A check-out-chick asked. 'Are you Australian?' She was from Port Macquarie, NSW but had lived here most of her life...she had a local accent. We saw a seal under the bridge in town as well as a mother duck with duckling.

Back at base we watched television for most of the rest of the afternoon.

Sunset was officially at 2222!



A Bus Trip

Clava Cairns, Culloden Moor and Glen Affric

14th July 2024. I got up at 0520...it was light. I turned the alarm off and got Andrew up at 0701. Bus pick up was at 0845...and as it turned out not quite at the bus stop we had sussed out yesterday - although close enough for us to see the vehicle from where we were waiting. The bus trip today visited three spots; the Clava Cairns, Culloden Moor - where the final battle took place that made Bonnie Prince Charlie finally decide that perhaps trying to get Scotland back was not such a good idea, and Glen Affric, where we got two quick walks in (accompanied by two Aussies).

We only got 25 minutes at the Cairns - not enough time to really appreciate the site or take in all the interps. The fact that the site was full of lots of other tourists didn't help either.

In contrast we got two hours at Culloden to visit the museum and the battle ground. We got through the museum with a bit of time to spare, and despite being told about the guided tours pulled ourselves out of one when the guide mentioned tickets (we hadn't been given any). Instead we had a cuppa in the cafe.

Lunch was at a Buely village - I think because of its convenient location. We had our lunch with us so didn't patronise one of the cafes and I asked the driver about seating along the river. 'I think so,' he said, but gave no further details. We went for a short walk and found ourselves above the river with a fence blocking access. We retreated to near the bus stop - which had I looked up from here earlier I would have seen a map of a park just up the road which was more likely to have had seating in a more pleasant atmosphere - unfortunately I didn't discover this until we only had 25 minutes until pickup. The Priory is touted as worth a look but was undergoing renovations (covered in scaffold) (and in ruins) and there was a homeless person sleeping under a tree. The 1.4 hours at Buely really was a waste for us as we had nothing to do after eating our lunch (having not found the park).

The one bonus was saying hello to a wiry dachshund called Emma.



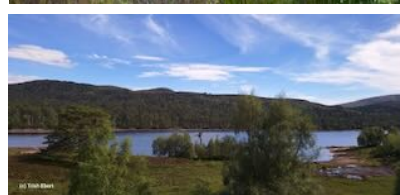
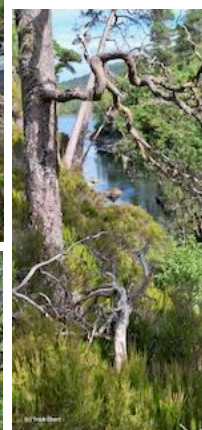
Glen Affric is touted as having original Scottish vegetation. On first read you interpret this as remnant vegetation and that perhaps this is the one place that has escaped the pillaging. The locals are extolling its Scottishness and pictures of some of the park are seen at many public places; indeed the picture in our accommodation was of Glen Affric. However, on closer examination you find that whilst the vegetation here is of native Scottish species, the area is actually a revegetation project. It is apparently a popular area for day and overnight walks. We only had time for two short walks.

On the way back to Inverness the driver stopped so we could all get a photo of Urquhart Castle along the shore of Loch Ness. We were back in Inverness around 1800, and after a shop at Tesco's back at base a short time later.

I went for a short walk after dinner.

Birds. Glaucous gull, rock pigeon, wood pigeon, hooded crow, rook, red kite, swift, robin, sparrow, swallow.

Animals: Seal (Ness River at Inverness), dragonfly



Inverness to Edinburgh

15th July 2024. The alarm was on this morning but as usual I woke up before it; although today it was only half an hour. Having made sure Andrew was awake at the originally set alarm time of 0700, I headed out the door with a bag full of recyclables: glass, mixed hard and some soft plastic. The building the flat is in has a garbage chute but I was informed by the host, there was no provision for recyclables, or was it that she had no provision? The host had informed me that the supermarkets have glass recycling usually in their car parks so the first place I checked was behind the local Tesco. Tick. One down, two to go. As Tesco has soft plastic recycling I got rid of the clean soft plastic I had brought along. Two down. Now what do I do with all the other stuff. By chance there was a chained mixed recycling bin across the road from Tesco that belonged to another building. I don't know which one but there was enough room to squeeze my recyclables in. Not exactly kosher but better than throwing them all in the garbage. After breakfast I did this run again.

To fill in more time I walked to the Ness Islands. Andrew was content to stay in the unit but I thought it a waste of time if I had the chance to explore one more area before we left - albeit rushed.



The train trip from Inverness to Edinburgh was uncomfortable. Surprisingly, it left on time at 1050 despite me being warned by rail staff last night that they had staff shortages and best to get to the station early. It was full and there was little space, and we underwent the usual chaos of trying to store ones bags. There was also little air conditioning and it was hot inside. I arrived in Edinburgh around 1600 with a slightly grumpy husband (little leg room is not good for a man with long legs).

Our booked accommodation (another AirBnB) was around 'a mile' from the station. Before heading off we stopped for a cold fizzy drink at the station to give us some energy. It wasn't raining when we walked out of the station but it did start drizzling not long afterwards. Initially we stopped under the shelter of a doorway but not knowing how long the precipitation was going to last we got our umbrellas out and continued on.

The self contained unit I had booked was on ground level of a multi story building, below the hill that contained Arthur's seat. I put a load of washing on (with inappropriate detergent) and put it on eco mode - it went on forever.



Edinburgh Castle

16th Jul 2024. Pigeons cooed just before 0700. There was another bird outside making an 'interesting' noise but I couldn't identify it. The 'timeless' ticking of a clock punctured the silence inside.

Edinburgh Castle

With a late booking for a tour of Edinburgh Castle, you never know who you are going to get. Our guide was a freelance Canadian contractor who had teaching experience. Anyone with teaching experience is usually a good and clear orator (with a few exceptions - we won't mention my maths teacher in year 12!).

Once the tour was finished we skimmed through several galleries/museums/buildings on site, and waited around for the 1300 time gun.

Walking back down the hill we found a cafe for lunch before checking the location of the airport bus, (for our journey in two days time), purchasing tomorrow's train tickets, diverting to a bookshop that I knew had the book I was looking for, (full price unfortunately - I had found the book online second hand for a third of the price and free shipping in the UK but I had no shipping address and no time to receive it), and heading back to base.

We were back at base around 1600; exhausted and with tired feet.

I did another load of washing - with better (although not totally appropriate) detergent and used a normal cycle. It was a lot quicker this time.



Bass Rock

17th July 2024. Bass Rock off the coast of North Brunswick was never in my original plans. In fact, up until a few days ago, we had not heard of Bass Rock at all. But it is listed as the second largest breeding colony of northern gannets. And you can take a tour around the bottom of it. As we had missed out on seeing the largest breeding colony of northern gannets (because of the cancelled trip to St Kilda Isles) we went for this opportunity instead. As we were late in booking the experience we had limited options available. The rib trip for about the same time would have covered three islands instead of the two we saw, but we chose the more conventional vessel...I wanted to take my good camera and I didn't know what the sea state was going to be like to be able to protect the camera from spray.

Apparently there is one tour where you could land on Bass Rock (conditions pending) but that is currently not available. Given the time of the tour we had limited options for the train - and the lass in the train booking office yesterday had booked us on the train that would get us there in time. After having an early mush with a black street cat as we left our accommodation, we happened to turn up to the train station just as the

previous train was leaving. This was a fluke as the only reason we knew this was because I couldn't find the platform and asked a station worker for directions - he walked us around and got us on the earlier train (to the slight, but humorous and non serious rebuttal from one of his co workers).

Our wander to the lookout point at the end of the rock wall near the marina at North Brunswick meant we encountered a lass doing dolphin and whale counts. She didn't see any but she was a wealth of local information.



The gannets were amazing and my 'good camera' was minuscule compared with some of the equipment on board the tourist boat. Of course the seas were rough enough to not guarantee anything was in focus.



After the boat trip we visited the local museum and grabbed lunch (by this time I was shaking with what I thought was hunger) in an Italian restaurant (other restaurants that were open in town were full). The rude waitress wasn't interested in changing a dish slightly for me - she told me, in no uncertain terms, to order something else!

After lunch we headed back toward base but just having missed a train meant we had to wait about an hour in the heat (we found some shade). Unfortunately, when we did catch the train, the air conditioning wasn't working and we were terribly dehydrated by the time we got back to base (the ticket inspector had said of the air-conditioning on the train 'it was 'sort of' working.' We didn't believe him).

I crashed the rest of the afternoon after we got back. Dinner was omelet with left over food from the fridge.



A permanent birdwatcher!

Edinburgh, Scotland to Zurich, Switzerland

18th July 2024. The alarm was on for 0500. The intention was to walk out the door at 0540. In the end it was 0545 when we started walking (in the rain, typical) and we were delighted that an 'Airport 100' bus was waiting at the stop when we arrived. By this time the rain had stopped.

At the airport we logged our bags into the system, made our way through security, tried to fill in time by ordering a coffee at an 'artisan coffee and bar' establishment and finally only had just enough time to drink it before we had to make our way up to the other end of the airport. Of course the timing wasn't helped due to the fact my watch wasn't reading the right time! I had got it caught on my day backpack as I was leaving the bus and hadn't realised that I had pulled the time adjustment knob out. It was only when I checked my watch a second time after that incident that I realised something was awry. Watch fixed, we made the plane on time, along with, unfortunately, quite a few bug-ridden passengers.

It's just not Swiss!

It's just not Swiss! Or maybe it is! Technically we were on an Edelweiss flight, through Swiss air, having checked in via Lufthansa! All very confusing. My beef...no food. Well not quite. Edelweiss is the budget version of Swiss, I think (booked by someone else) and so I thought when the attendants came around that we would have to pay exorbitant prices to get a drink (9\$ for a coke, \$8 for a cookie). Except No. Because it was an Edelweiss flight, anything in the Swiss booklet was not available. But they could give me a sandwich (no cost). Not useful if one doesn't eat wheat and they had no wheat free alternatives. I had decided to just get water (it had been a while since our last drink) but should have gone for something with more calories. Admittedly they did come along later and offer chocolate.

I am not sure if we landed on time or a couple of minutes late because the flight time had changed by 5 minutes since I last looked at the itinerary before the trip. Baggage collection was easy. Getting through customs a new, old experience. It is a long time since we have had to present ourselves to a booth (Canada was technically a guy standing because they didn't give him a booth) and a long time since we have had our passports stamped. This was the first stamp in our passports. 'We've been Schengenened,'

Andrew commented as we walked out the door.

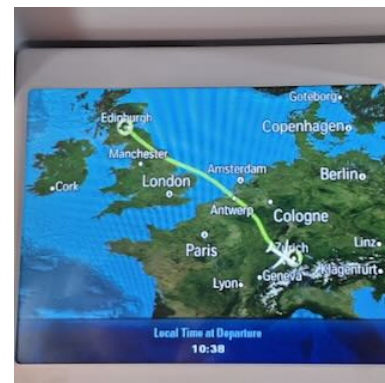
I knew I had a half price Swiss travel card voucher in my luggage somewhere but I suspected the start date wasn't today so we paid the 7CHF to get to Zurich HB. We nearly didn't get off the train. A pack had been dumped near the luggage shelves and in itself was not too great an obstacle but I could see the woman with the pram, who was closer to the door than us was going to have issues. She did, luggage went everywhere and the doors nearly closed on us whilst we were still inside the train! Having made it outside we got ourselves to ground level, found the station wifi didn't work at the top of the steps, descended back into the station and asked for help with a couple of men in fluorescent tops, and headed back out in the direction they had directed us.

Getting a little confused we took the phone off flight mode, found we were close to the booked hotel

and stumbled into reception to find the room not ready. That was okay - we had expected this. So, after storing our luggage we headed out to find lunch....of all things, at an Asian restaurant. Well if we thought London was expensive, Zurich is higher...56 percent I read somewhere. We paid for lunch what I would deem a cost for a dinner. Looking at venues as we passed restaurants, Andrew noted steaks were the equivalent of A\$100.

After lunch we went for a walk towards where the Lake joins the river. It was hard work. It was hot. Very hot. And very draining. Getting back to the hotel we settled into our tiny room (un-air-conditioned, but they do supply a fan) for a rest. Andrew crashed after around 30 minutes. Given the early start and the heat of the day I am not surprised.

Edinburgh



Zurich

