

Wooly's Wanderings - Part 4 of 4

Scotland - Dornie to Oban & Edinburgh

Day 12 Road trip to Oban

Starting to wish we had more time in Dornie but our next destination was calling us. The plan was to have our usual leisurely start around 10am then have a long lunch at Fort William then onto Oban. In my research I had found what I thought would be an interesting side visit to a site to see near Fort William – one of the longest railway viaducts in the UK near Glenfinnan plus the Jacobite Memorial Tower

“Framed by spectacular Highland scenery at the head of Loch Shiel, the Glenfinnan Monument is a striking tribute to those who fought in the Jacobite



Risings. Less than a year before the Battle of Culloden, Prince Charles Edward Stuart raised his father's Standard at Glenfinnan, marking the start of the 1745 Jacobite campaign. An army of 1,500 rallied to join Bonnie Prince Charlie – they marched as far south as Derby before the retreat began that would seal their fate.”

This image is from their website. The tower is on the left near the shore and be climbed to give you views up to the viaduct.

Like many places in Scotland in the summer these places are overrun with tourists and the car parks were chokka. Never having read a Harry Potter book nor seen one of the movies spawned from the books how was I to know that this is where they filmed the 'Hogwart Express' – o silly me!!!! – the hordes of fans was huge. One day I will go back but very early in the morning before the hordes get there to take some photos – you have been warned! Sadly, we had to retreat to an early lunch at Fort William at Michael's choice of restaurants without even seeing the viaduct. Lunch was to be at the Crannog after we first navigated through a three-kilometre traffic jam.

Fort William was packed to the rafters with tourists and holiday makers from all over the globe.

Brother Michael and I had been looking for a restaurant that had fresh lobster for ages and this time we were in luck. Isn't it strange



when you conjure up an image of what your food will not only look like but taste like then you become disappointed when it does not meet that expectation? Presentation wise it was fantastic and the wine (a Sancerre) was perfect. Unfortunately (or is that fortunately?) Australia lobster will flog the European version for taste and texture. And the shells are rock hard even with a nut cracker – the other lunch guests would have been very amused to see an Australian trying to crack the large claw by hammering it on the table with the nut cracker as I could not crack it open in the usual way – NOTE to chefs that you should pre-crack the claw for your guests to avoid such a scene or provide a small sledge hammer for the guests to use!

Back on the road south suitably nourished and refreshed to view more spectacular scenery on our journey. The rugged west coast of Scotland is a pleasure to the eye even if there are very few places to pull over and take a photo. Oban is quite a large town and also very busy with hordes of tourists. Met the host of the Air B'n'B to get the keys (*she worked in the hairdresser's downstairs*). Lovely lady who had laid in milk, cakes & bickies to have for afternoon tea which was very thoughtful of her. Carting gear up flights of stairs was starting to get to me by now and made me appreciate home where most Aussies live in bungalow style housing which is all on one level.

We had been warned that it may get noisy in this place as there was a pub across the road and another just around the corner. There may have been some noise but when you are tired you will sleep through anything especially after a bottle of wine with Michael and a couple of whiskys.

Day 13 Exploring Oban & Glencoe

The next morning when we awoke was to find the town shrouded in fog and very, very quiet with all sound muffled. Love this type of very peaceful morning but we had places to go and sites to explore. So, after breakfast we headed north to Glencoe (the name is actually the Glen that has the River Coe running through it. This area is thought to be one of the most beautiful places in Scotland. The area is also steeped in a bloody history as this is where Clan Campbell members massacred the McDonalds for their part in the Jacobite uprising. An estimated 38 members and associates of Clan MacDonalld of Glencoe including the Chief were killed by troops serving under Archibald Campbell, the 10th Earl of Argyle, that were billeted with them, on the grounds they had not been prompt in pledging allegiance to the new monarchs, William III of England and II of Scotland and Mary II.

This the view looking up Loch Leven with Glencoe on the right.



This the glen with the River Coe flowing to Loch Leven. An absolute beautiful spot in Scotland. The tourists were like a rabbit plague with very few places to pull over and take photos as the layovers were full of cars and coaches. We continued along the valley until the Bridge of Orchy then turned off onto the B8074 to follow the River Orchy down to Dalmally. What a lovely drive as we never saw another soul in some of the most beautiful



country I have ever seen. It made my day when we pulled up beside the river and as soon as I got out of the car to take a photo a wild salmon made an attempt to jump up the waterfall in the photo below. As you can imagine I was wishing I had a fly rod in hand and not a camera but alas there is no fishing allowed in this river by the peasants. Back cast might have been a bit hard with all the shrubs close to the river anyway. O well back on the road again as we headed for a pub for lunch back in Oban.



But before lunch we headed up to the top of Pulpit Hill to take a photo of the lovely town of Oban. The weather gods had smiled on us and it was not raining for a change.



Lunch was at the Royal Hotel as it was just around the corner from where we were staying. And yes, I had Haddock & Chips again – this one rated around 4th place in our trip so far. The beer was even better. Mother & Michael retired for a rest whilst I stayed and enjoyed a few more pints. I discovered that my limit was 5 pints before I staggered out the door and down the hill to our apartment 200 metres away. It was my turn to have an afternoon nap!!

Before I left though Mum & I had a pleasant conversation with some locals who told us we should not miss a visit to Seil Island. So, this was added to the list of places to visit the following day. A bit of confusion for me at first as I thought they had said Seal Island which of course was nowhere near Oban! Eventually I found it and it also has a fascinating history.



Day 14 Seil Island & Oban

This island is one of the Slate Islands and has been linked to the mainland by a beautiful old stone bridge built in 1792 called the Clachan Bridge. It was also called the Bridge Over the Atlantic as the waterway separating Seil Island from the mainland is called Clachan Sound as both ends flow into the Atlantic hence giving Seil an island status. Slate is no longer mined on the islands so they have slipped back into obscurity and has become a tourist spot.



It's other claim to fame is that 'Ring of Bright Water' was filmed here back in the 1960's. We drove out to the

small coastal town of Ellenabeich which as very quaint with tiny little homes leftover from the slate mining days. They had all been done up and were all whitewashed and looked quite flash.



They had all been done up and were all whitewashed and looked quite flash. There was one of these up for sale recently for 130K GBP (230K AUD) as a two-bedroom refurbished house. Would be lovely in the summertime but I can imagine miserable in winter with the wind howling in off the North Atlantic.

Mum was horrified to spot a sheep feeding on the top of the cliff face overlooking the town. Don't know what she expected Michael & I to do about it except pray for a fall so that the meat would be well tenderised at the bottom – oops wash my mouth and mind out!!! Damn but BBQ Lamb was looking good there for a second.

Returned to Oban late in the afternoon and the weather had much improved with sunshine and a slight cool

ocean breeze. The town was packed with tourists joining or disembarking ferries to the outer islands. That night we had booked into a 4 ½ star seafood restaurant called Eeusk down on one of the piers. The place was packed parking at a premium but I got lucky and a large SUV pulled out just after I dropped Mum & Michael off and I had resigned myself to doing 20 laps of the

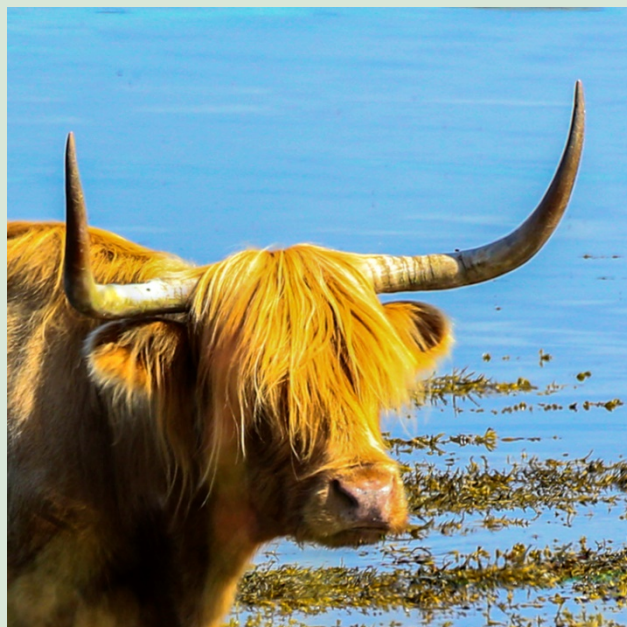


carpark trying to find a space. What can I say the food was great and yes they served large portions of Haddock & Chips. At this rate I was going to turn into a fish before leaving the UK. My rating put this in 2nd place behind the Invergarry Castle Hotel as a good food place in Scotland.

Day 15 Oban to Edinburgh

Packing day again as we ended our Scottish sojourn and had to return the car in Edinburgh that day. We had been searching all over Scotland for Highland Cows without a great deal of success when I spotted a herd of about 50 in a paddock next to a loch and we were in luck as there was a parking layby right next to the paddock. Mum was ecstatic and so was I was I to be honest to final see a herd of these majestic animals. They were in a paddock of lush grass yet most of them were intent on eating the water plants which I though was very odd but

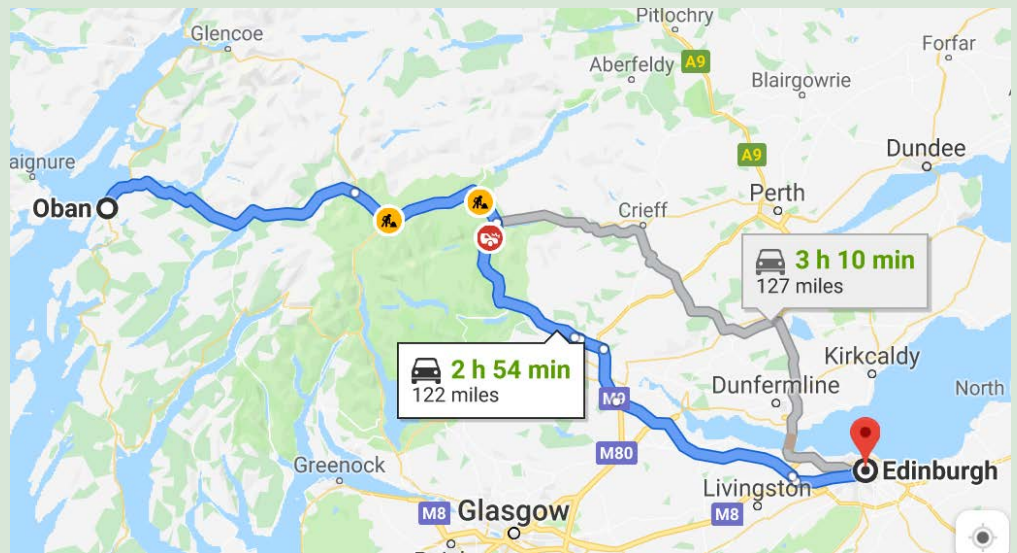
it must have been nice as most of them hardly looked up from their munching.



It was a pleasant drive with the most noticeable event was siting two massive horses' heads just before Edinburgh. When you are whizzing down a freeway at 70mph on a mission to return a vehicle there was no time to do a diversion to go and have a look. If I return one day, they will most certainly be on the agenda.



They are in the town of Falkirk and are called the Kelpies (*another oddity for me as I had always associated that name with the breed of Australian dogs*).



They even have names – Duke and Baron. “The Kelpies are named after the mythical water horses said to be in Scottish lochs and rivers. The Kelpies name reflected the mythological transforming beasts possessing the strength and endurance of 10 horses; a quality that is analogous



with the transformational change and endurance of Scotland's inland waterways.” They are the largest equine statues in the world and the park they are situated in is a free attraction. They are lit up every night and would be a sight to see and photograph – next I pass this way it will be on the list!



People tell me that Edinburgh is a beautiful city but all I remember is narrow streets, even more crowds, closed roads for a festival with no notice and my car return depot was in the middle of it and I could not get there. Managed to find the hotel in the CBD we were staying at so dropped off Mum, Michael and all of our luggage whilst I went to deal with the traffic and the hordes.

Two hours later I had run out of bonhomie for my fellow man and road rage was setting in. Returned to the hotel to enlist support from the receptionist trying to find another Enterprise car depot. Found one ten miles away that was still open but they did not want to accept the vehicle as I was supposed to return it their depot at Edinburgh Railway Station. I swear if another Millennial snowflake has no wish to assist, I will kindly drown them in the closest bog!!!

Eventually common sense prevailed as the CBD of Edinburgh was shutdown for the day and the steam was pouring out of my ears at this stage. They accepted the vehicle and I was glad to see the back of them on a short cab ride back into the city. My cabbie sympathised with me as they had had minimal warning that the main road in Edinburgh – the Golden Mile – was closed for the day throwing traffic into chaos. Time for an extremely large

G&T or two calm down the blood pressure. My room in the hotel was excellent and being on the top floor gave me a beautiful view over the city. It was the end of the perfect trip with Mum to celebrate her 85th Birthday with her two sons as we would catch the train to London the next day – 1st class of course.

I was very pleased to return to London as I had to start getting organised for next adventure. This was to be another lifetime wish list fulfilled – to attend the full six-day program of the Royal International Air Tattoo.

I hope that you have enjoyed my wanderings around Scotland as much as I have enjoyed the telling of it. This was one of the most enjoyable holidays that I have ever had with my family and whilst it was expensive, I would not have saved a penny to miss any of it.

Cheers

Wooly

