

19 April 2010, Monday

Raining this morning. Brian Martin got back on Sunday. Good to have him here as he will supervise my driving until I gain confidence to do it myself. Linda and Brian Martin have provided a Renault station sedan for our use. I don't want them out of pocket so I will be arranging additional insurance cover in case I or Sandra or someone else bingles the vehicle. Hopefully that will not happen.

Brian thinks the Perth drivers are more courteous than drivers here in Scotland. I am of the opposite view.

The plan is to go into Falkirk this morning and see why the 3G dongle does not work. I suspect it is the range. If my view is correct, the dongle is unlikely to work in the north and south of Scotland if we are outside of the towns. Anyway, wait and see.

Doug Sturrock lent me a book on Churchill written by Martin Gilbert. Heavy going but I am enjoying it. I love history and being here to see history all around you is very special.

Drove for the first time with Brian Martin supervising! The road rules are essentially the same but you do have to be careful with the speed of the vehicle. Brian and Linda have kindly provided a Renault 7 seater with manual gear change. Very nice bit of engineering (I never thought that I would have something nice to say about the French). Drove into Falkirk and managed to get the dongle working at the supplier. Unfortunately when back in Avonbridge, the dongle range is just outside the envelope. Brian suggested we try the dongle within what he believes the envelope is for the 3G dongle to work. I hope the bloody thing works when Sandra and I go off by ourselves.

Bought a hands free Bluetooth for the Renault - £20 – not expensive and that is what worries me - will know later if that works.



Went to the Falkirk wheel and that is really something. Go here to look at their website - <http://www.thefalkirkwheel.co.uk/>. You have to see this to truly appreciate the engineering that went into it. It is the only one of its kind in the world. The Scots are bloody smart buggers.

The wheel is not a concept. It is a fully working operation that provides for the movement of barges and boats from one canal system to another. The canal systems are at different heights.



20 April 2010, Tuesday

Lovely day but quite cold. Funny thing is that I feel the cold least when compared to Sandra and Linda Martin. Must be my Anglo-Indian blood. Went out before lunch and visited New Lanark. Go here for the website - <http://www.newlanark.org/>

New Lanark is really something worth seeing. It is an 18th century cotton mill village in the south of Scotland.



Take time to read about Robert Owen the Mill Manager and his unique approach to his employees. He was certainly ahead of his time. Owen married the daughter of the original owner of the mill and then set about creating working conditions that were representative of his views. Owen seems to be one of a few that actually cared about people.



This overhead views of New Lanark (right) gives a very good idea of the scope of the buildings. Power for the cotton mills was supplied by water.



The wheel (left) is a good example of what was used to generate the power needed for the mills.



The workers quarters are now being converted into apartments and people who buy them are allowed to develop the interior to their own tastes provided they leave the exterior as is. We walked along the apartment buildings and some adventurous souls even have outdoor furniture (there is very little sun).

Owen believed in the benefits of education and built a school so that children and adults could attend. The image shows one of the schoolrooms.



21 April 2010, Wednesday

Went into Falkirk this morning and visited the retailer that sold me the hands-free Bluetooth. Managed to get it working. Hope it stays that way.

Then travelled into Edinburgh by train. Great travel and quite inexpensive for 4 persons (just under £15). Australia could learn a lot about train seating layout and travel. People sit facing each other four to a space with a small table in-between. A person travelling could read, write something or just look at a newspaper/magazine whilst travelling in seats that are similar in shape to aircraft seats.



Visited Edinburgh castle. Walked up the hill(s) from the railway station and was puffing and blowing by the time I got there. I quipped to Sandra that I could imagine men in armour walking up to the castle to begin the battle. They would be buggered by the time they got there.

The people are friendly and the girl who sold us the entry tickets was no exception. She suggested we spent a bit more (£57) and get free entry to all the other castles in Scotland. Given that entry was £13 each to Edinburgh castle, spending £57 was good value.



We got to Edinburgh castle in time for the 12 noon gun salute. Very impressive! You will have to wait for the movie images that Sandra took to see the salute. Lots of pomp and ceremony! The salute was followed by the Pipers marching band.

Of course I needed the toilet. The sign pointed somewhere and I could not find it. Instead I found lots of places where men were kept before being executed. Got out of there in a hurry.

Had to go the café and thank goodness – they have toilets – but stairs – bloody stairs – everywhere you go.

I found it amusing to see a corporal make his authority felt with the guards on duty. From time to time, the corporal took pleasure (it seemed that way to me) to walk up to this guard (who is required to stand very still with his rifle at port) and give him a right bollocking. I don't think that the guards are allowed to talk to visitors. I was not about to risk it in case they arrested me or something.



My back was giving trouble and I needed to sit down and take a couple of pain killers. It is impossible to see the castle in one day. You just need heaps of time.

We left, met the Martins and had a light lunch.

Next was St Giles cathedral - <http://www.stgilescathedral.org.uk/>



You just have to see this. Unbelievable stained glass work and the sheer size is overwhelming. You are just so impressed with the history of the place. You have to pay to take pictures and also pay to enter the Thistle Chapel (right). Sir Robert Menzies is a member of the Order of the Thistle.



Ran out of time to get on one of the double-decker buses and see the city. We will do Edinburgh after coming back from the north of Scotland.

Went out to a meal at a Cantonese restaurant – took Lewis and Emma (the Martin's grandkids from daughter Dianne). My Mastercard was rejected but the Visa was OK. I got in touch with Mastercard when I got back after the restaurant and was assured everything was okay with the card.

22 April 2010, Thursday

We are off to Stirling and then to Lake Menteith. The Martins will be joining us for an overnight stay and touring the next day. After that we are off on our own for 2-3 weeks in the north of Scotland. Sandra has planned this one and I am the tourist.