

22 April 2010, Thursday

Got away OK with Sandra driving. It has been 30 odd years since Sandra was here last and some of the roads were not familiar. No matter! We had a sat nav. Got us to Stirling without too many problems.

First stop was the Bannockburn Visitors Centre -

<http://guide.visitscotland.com/vs/guide/5,en,SCH1/objectId,SIG48321Svs,curr,GBP,season,at1,selectedEntry,home/home.html>

<http://www.simplytop.com/Scotland/Stirling/BannockburnHeritageCentre.php>



Took a photo of ourselves here. It is said that Robert the Bruce, King of Scotland, raised his standard in this vicinity during that historic battle which was fought over 2 days against the English. The heritage centre is full of information and well worth the visit. A small amount of the information is related to William Wallace (Mel Gibson has a lot to answer for). The result of the centre is very good – the audio visual of the battle is very informative and for the first time (for me) provided an insight into the tactics used by Robert the Bruce. It is implied that the Templars may have been instrumental in providing the tactical and training necessary for this particular battle.

Then to Stirling Castle -

<http://www.simplytop.com/Scotland/Stirling/StirlingCastle.php>.

The heritage pass we bought meant that entry was free. Lunch was beckoning and given the cold, anything hot and substantial was the necessary requirement.



On returning to the castle, we joined a tour to visit Argyll's Lodging – very informative and full of information – the guides really know their stuff - <http://www.instirling.com/sight/argyll.htm>. I met a couple from Sydney whilst at Argyll's Lodging.

I reflected that Stirling castle provides a better guide service than Edinburgh castle. This may be a bit harsh but when we were at Edinburgh castle there were no guides in evidence – instead they relied on an audio thingamajig which is in several languages and calls up a commentary (they supply headphones as well) depending on what number you enter in the thingamajig.



Stirling castle is worth seeing. In the picture is the gatehouse. There is a parking area to the left of screen and is less of a problem for old buggers like me to walk up to the entrance. The staff are very friendly and go to considerable lengths to assist you. Being from Australia is a bonus. The Scots love to talk about their own travel experiences to Aus or their wishes to go

there.



The great hall (right) is very imposing and is linked to the palace (left) which is currently under renovation. We had a look at the tapestries that will go into the palace when it is ready to receive furniture (in



about one year). You can see the great hall in the top right hand corner of the palace image. These images do not do the castle justice. Again you will have to wait for Sandra's pictures.

Sandra's great uncle (Duncan Finlayson) served as a pipe Major with the Argyll and Southern Highlanders. They found his records and gave Sandra a copy. Regrettably, they did not have a picture of him. He also served in India in the 1800's.

Travelled to Lake Menteith – stayed overnight – private hotel – very impressive position by the lake – the scenery is just something to be believed - the Martins met us there - <http://www.lake-hotel.com/>

23 April 2010, Friday

After breakfast Sandra and I visited a small island in the lake called "Inchmahome" - <http://www.mysteriousbritain.co.uk/scotland/perthshire/featured-sites/inchmahome-priory.html>

Met Malcolm Hogg who was operated the small boat that took us to the island. Malcolm is from Melbourne and has been living in Europe for some years. He says that although he misses Australia, he is unlikely to go back.



The priory has a very interesting history. Sandra walked around this area frequently when she worked at the Lake Hotel (she was 18 years old). Mary Queen of Scots was hidden here when her life was in danger from the English. The priory is a ruin



and the national trust is just preserving the building as best it can. It is more of a tourist walk, nature, etc type attraction. There is even a shop on the island.

Visited the grave of Rob Roy when travelling to Fort William. It is located at Balquhiddar Church (web site -



<http://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/balquhiddier/balquhiddierchurch/index.html>). I only became aware of Rob Roy when I saw a movie with Liam Neeson playing the lead role. The church is very interesting and it was open even though no one was about. The grave is well marked as you can see from the picture.

We travelled to Glen Coe and the pictures that Sandra took illustrate how cold it really was.



Fort William – rained all day – very cold - stayed at the Alexandra Hotel. Very nice old fashioned accommodation. The Martins stayed there as well. This hotel has a



lift but it is very small. Somehow all four of us managed to get into it including the luggage. The image of the dining room is indicative of the old world charm of this hotel.

Appropriate to mention the luggage situation. We took one case (mine). Sandra opted to take several bags. I offered to share my case and when I opened it found that more than 50% was her things. I never ceased to be amazed how much of the available space she needs – at home in Singleton she has 7/8 of the walk in robe (no bull) – pictures supplied if you need proof.

24 April 2010, Saturday

Said goodbye to the Martins who returned to Avonbridge (their home).

Walked around the town of Fort William – my feet hurt – seem to be swelling. Changed shoes. Travelled to Inverness in the late morning.



Checked into the Glen Mhor Hotel late afternoon – a tourist rip off – don't stay there. We had difficulty finding where the hotels were located and finally got there after asking a service station for directions (thank goodness for the sat nav) and the map we purchased. Sandra let me drive for a short distance (she was very tired having driven all day on windy roads from Fort William).

The distance does not seem great (in miles) but getting there takes time because you cannot travel fast on these windy roads.

Our room is less than 2-star and I suspect it is allocated to staff. The toilet roll broke off (plastic). The exhaust fan and the heating do not work.

25 April 2010, Sunday

We planned to look for another hotel and then look around Inverness. A visit to the city centre of Inverness is also on the cards. Also, travel back in the direction of Fort William and see the Loch Ness Visitor Centre and Castle Urquhart, Loch Ness, Scotland (pronounced "urk'at").

After breakfast, Sandra complained about the room and we were immediately offered a room in the main hotel. The room is 300% better than the previous one. Sandra is much happier.

I broke my glasses when I took off my back pack. The connection across the bridge of the nose parted company. Sandra told me off because I don't listen to her and keep my glasses in the vee of my pullover neck. Well they broke! Luckily I had my spare pair in the suitcase.

We spent part of the morning walking around the High street of Inverness.

We then travelled back in the direction of Fort William and visited Castle Urquhart, Loch Ness, Scotland (pronounced "urk'at"). It is a ruin and has some history. Go here to the website to read up on this - <http://www.aboutscotland.co.uk/ness/urquhart.html>



A visit to Loch Ness Visitor Centre followed but that was largely disappointing. The video presentation on "Nessie" was boring.

Stayed overnight in Inverness.

26 April 2010, Monday

Took my glasses into the city centre for repair and had it done at Specsavers (only mob who could do it – sorry Kels – I know that they are the competition – but they did it for nothing).

We are having problems with our international roaming mobiles. Sandra cannot call me on my Vodafone number. I cannot call her Optus number. Thank goodness I had the presence of mind to take an extra mobile phone (the one from Celeste) and arranged for Sandra to buy a local sim card using the O2 network.

We are starting to buy gifts.



Sandra is a big fan of the Battle of Culloden. Getting there proved a headache because it is not signposted very well. We got lost even using the sat nav. Pulled up in front of a butchers shop, got some directions and found it. Have you heard of "rip off Britain?" Well, this place is rip off Scotland. They wanted two pounds to park in their car park. There is no other place you can

park your car if you want to see the battlefield. Then they wanted 10 pounds each to get into the visitors centre. Sandra refused to pay and we left. Have a look at the website – very interesting - <http://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/inverness/culloden/index.html>

We then went looking for Cawdor Castle. Again, bad signposting and we could not find it. We stopped and asked a little old lady in the village and she told us that the castle was closed. This is what I had hoped to see - <http://www.cawdorcastle.com/>

Next we travelled to Fort George. Very impressive and worth the visit. Dylan would love it. Go here for the website - <http://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/nairn/fortgeorge/>

Stayed over night in Inverness. Went to an Italian restaurant for tea – very nice food and wine. Got to keep up the food intake. Seriously, I am not very hungry since I got to Scotland. I wonder if I have discovered a cure for being tubby. Perhaps it is in the water.

27 April 2010, Tuesday

Woke up this morning with a bad cold and decided to stay in all day and try to shift it. Sandra went out and got those day/night tablets. So far so good. Stayed overnight in Inverness.