

28 April 2010, Wednesday

Woke up feeling really bad and wanted to go back to Brian and Linda Martin's place. I wanted somewhere to recover where I was among people I knew. To have done so would have brought our travel to the north of Scotland to a halt, even though I considered that after recovering, we could have attempted travel up north again but by a different route.

Sandra persuaded me to stay in Inverness for one more day and night. I went down to breakfast and started to feel a bit better. I wanted to walk for a bit, see if I was up to it. I was and enjoyed the long walk which culminated in going to a chemist and getting some more stuff to keep the dreaded lurgie at bay.

We visited the coastal town of Nairn (website - <http://www.nairnscotland.co.uk/>) after lunch – bought ice cream. I drove – for the first time since we left the Martin's. Sandra must be very tired but she soldiers on. We got fuel and I added some air to the tyres on the Renault.

As I write this, I am feeling much better. The nasal spray and the tablets are working.

What is really interesting is the fact that I am eating less. I have really lost any appetite for larger meals. I still love wine though. Sandra says that my jowls are less noticeable and that I am looking better. Any improvement is a bonus at this age of my life.

We had dinner in the lounge bar at the Beaufort Hotel in Inverness (website - http://www.beauforthotelinverness.co.uk/beaufort_lounge_bar.html). By the time we got there, we had entered and left at least 3 eating places which were deemed unsuitable owing to noise and not very clean. After one experience with a popular Chinese restaurant chain in Perth (WA), both Sandra and I have an aversion to Chinese restaurants anywhere that from the immediate impression is not clean. What is also interesting the volume of music that is played in places where you might like to eat (pubs). You just cannot have a conversation and end up shouting at each other to be heard.

We stayed in Inverness overnight.

29 April 2010, Thursday

Left Inverness and travelled in the direction of Wick, travelling mainly along the eastern part of Scotland.

On the way we stopped at Dunrobin Castle - <http://www.dunrobincastle.co.uk/>

Dunrobin Castle is the most northerly of Scotland's great houses and the largest in the Northern Highlands with 189 rooms. Dunrobin Castle is also one of Britain's oldest continuously inhabited houses dating back to the early 1300s, home to the Earls and later, the Dukes of Sutherland.



We are staying at the Queens Hotel in Wick – a 2 star with prices that are much higher. Fancy paying 80 GBP

overnight. They have wi-fi access which was just as well as the dongle does not work here. The bed was really awful and did not contribute to my back condition. Verdict – don't go back there.

Still have the blocked nose and starting to have a froggy throat – it must run its course – why me?

30 April 2010, Friday

Left Wick and travelled in the direction of John O'Groats at the northern tip of Scotland. [John o' Groats](#) is the traditionally acknowledged extreme northern point of Scotland, in northeastern [Caithness](#). We made our way down to the ferry services at Gills Bay (nearby) and took a service run by Pentland Ferries over to the Orkney Islands.



We took the car (#56 pounds one way including ourselves). Brian Martin thought that it would be quite expensive and was perhaps thinking about one of the other ferry services. It turned out that Pentland Ferries runs a cheaper service with a more modern ferry.

I have never travelled on a ferry before and this involved driving the car onto the vehicle deck (left hand side) and positioning (doing a U turn) the car in the opposite direction (right hand side) so you can drive off easily the other way. Trucks and other larger vehicles were required to back onto the ferry. It was amazing how many vehicles could fit into the hold.

We went up on the deck for the one hour trip across. It was quite cold and I ended up wearing my beanie under my hood and the gloves I borrowed (they were Leslie's – loaned by Pat Smith). Thank goodness for the Gortex jacket. I still felt the cold.



The ferry docks at St Margaret's Hope (image on the left) on the island of South

Ronaldsay. Drive off the ferry and then travel in the direction of the island of Burray and then again to Kirkwall on the main island. These three islands are the only ones connected. To get to the rest, you have to use the ferry or fly. The islands are not large and were occupied by troops during WW2. There is a lot of



evidence of their presence on the islands. In the main, they created a network of roads and put in the entire infrastructure needed. To see the islands (all of them), you would need to stay for at least 3 weeks.



We are staying in the Orkney hotel for 2 nights. The guy in the photo is still there. He kept apologising for the lack of wi-fi in the rooms and gave me a long story about how many times they have had a go fixing it. He said they even put boosters in the passageways but to no avail.

My back is giving trouble. I am finding it quite difficult to walk any great distance.

The internet access from the hotel (website - <http://www.orkneyhotel.co.uk/index.htm>) does not work in the room. My dongle does not work either.



This is the photo of our room which I found on the website. The two single beds were made up as one.

I found later that I could get internet access in the lounge of the hotel but it was a hit-and-miss thing. No matter, it met my needs at the time.

1 May 2010, Saturday



Intending to travel around the main island (see map – west mainland) today. Back seems OK. Cold seems OK. Throat is still sore. Sandra mapped out a travel route around the

main island. My back was fine – did not need to take any pain killers. We started with the visitor centre and walked a short distance to a tomb called “Maeshowe.” This was built in the Stone Age (a very long time ago – older than Sandra) and the construction is unique in that all the stones are fitted together. It is in a pyramid shape and you start to imagine all sorts of things when you look at how the thing is constructed.



Getting in was through a very low ceiling passage way that made you duck-walk of bent over (painfully in my case) for about 20 yards. I don't like being in confined spaces and that just freaked me out. I had to stand around while a very enthusiastic tour guide waxed lyrical about the tomb, the ruins (writing in that century) and so on. Towards the end, I could stand it no longer and went out. You will have to see Sandra's pictures that she took.



Next it was the Standing Stones of Stenness and they remind you of Stonehenge. What was really interesting is the people who concentrated on building a moat around the standing stones, as they did for the tomb. We spent some time here and were quite taken with the spacing of the stones – seemed very even. They are very large and would have taken some considerable effort to quarr and move them into place.



Next was Skara Brae, Neolithic village. Discovered after a storm uncovered sand dunes, this is also a Stone Age village that is underground with living and working areas connected by passageways. Met a girl working



for Historic Scotland who is from Melbourne. She was working as a guide. Let me tell you how cold it was. I was freezing for the first time since arriving in Scotland.

Cannot make a short call using Pennytel – it connects – you can talk to the person and then the call disconnects.

The broadband in this hotel is weird.

We are planning to leave on Sunday on the noon ferry.

2 May 2010, Sunday

We are leaving on the Pentland ferry today at 12 noon back to Scotland. Have to be at the ferry terminal before 11.30am.

Broadband in the hotel is out. The dongle does not work in the lounge (where the hotel broadband does work). Bugger!

Still have the cold (getting better – funny how it spoils everything) and a sore throat. I remarked to some people we met at dinner 2 nights ago that this was the first time I had a cold since I retired in 2005.

Stayed overnight at the Weigh Inn Hotel in Thurso and also fuelled the car.

Why is it that the further north we go in Scotland the rooms are more expensive? The room is supposedly the honeymoon suite – has a Jacuzzi. Quite large but the proximity to the road means we hear all the cars travelling on the highway. Cannot say if the position is ideal! In any event if one were on a honeymoon, the concentration would not be on the sound of the cars. The room was really nice and large. Got a good sleep. Breakfast was also good in an area that has glass as walls and also on the roof. Bit like a conservatory.

Broadband is not available in this hotel despite the steep room price tag. Give this one a miss. If they are going to charge like wounded bulls, they can at least provide a decent broadband service.

Brian Martin called last night. Good to hear from him. He will be leaving from Tuesday morning (in one week) and I would like to get back to Avonbridge to spend some time with him. I think we can manage that provided that Sandra does not want to spend a lot of time sightseeing the countryside of Scotland.

3 May 2010, Monday

Woke up this morning feeling a little depressed! I think I am worried about the network card. I am also feeling the effects of the cold and sore throat. I am getting better but my mood is not. Have to buck up as my attitude will spoil the holiday. Sandra is a prick (oops! I meant to say 'brick') and holds up well despite the little problems.

The dongle does not work in the hotel room. I did not expect that it would.

The trip across the top of Scotland is something that one should not miss. The scenery is spectacular and is so different with every new turn in the road. You cannot drive fast as the road winds and is often a single track (there are passing areas). Sandra had never seen so many mountains and did not imagine it as it was.

Stayed overnight at the Royal Hotel in Ullapool (website - <http://www.royalhotel-ullapool.com/rooms.php>). Very expensive room! There is a picture of it in the home page (it looks out over a balcony and the bloke has his back to the window). We ate in the pub and caused the barmaid all sorts of problems by asking for wine (in a bottle) and for the bottle to be placed in an ice bucket.

Surprise, surprise! Sandra was a little piggy and had two different types of seafood - small yabbies and salmon. She was sick all night.