

We stayed overnight in a bed and breakfast (Beaufort House in Fort William). Very reasonable tariff (60 GBP) with a room overlooking the loch. Very clean and well presented. Ray Smith – if bnb is your preference, stay here. I will send the contact details to you in another email. Your other alternative is the Alexandra Hotel – good rooms and food.

No internet at the bnb but my dongle works.

6 May 2010, Thursday

We are travelling back to Avonbridge today – according to Google – 117 miles – should take between 2-3 hours at average speed (less than 60mph). I want to stop over at Falkirk and have the car cleaned.

Some reflections on the shower systems in Scotland. Most have a bath with a high side to step over – not very good for people who are older and less agile (Sandra actually said this – I agree). It is time that the baths are taken out and replaced by showers. Scotland relies on tourism. A good shower (with adequate space to move in) would be ideal including good water pressure.

Other reflections – the habit of charging for your parking when you turn up to tourist locations. It is very off putting as it signals the rip off process that is already in place especially with the charges to see things (see my notes at Culloden) that are interesting but not spectacular.

Other reflections – the roads are not great and are constantly in need of repair. The lanes are not wide and often you have to slow and pull to one side to let the person coming the other way pass safely. What is wrong with wider roads? We do it in WA and we make the room.

Other reflections – when work is being done on roads they don't use the lollypop men. Instead a system of signals is used that controls everything quite well. There is not a long wait.

Other reflections – 60 mph is fast enough on the open road and you are forced to keep to the speed limits with the number of speed cameras around. You are forced to drive at 20 mph, 30 mph and 40 mph in built up areas and it is safer. Is speeding the problem or driver attitude? I have often believed that speed is not the real problem on WA roads. Rather, it is one of attitude.

Other reflections – people eat and drink all the time and consume a lot of it. The meals in pubs are huge. I had a pint last night at the Alexandra Hotel and found it difficult to get through it with the meal. The ROLOs are better men (and Lou Lou) than me because they can polish off many pints in one sitting.

Travelled from Fort William (via Oban) to Avonbridge arriving at 4.30pm. Again, thank goodness for the sat nav as Sandra could not remember how to get to Avonbridge from Falkirk (she lived there – well – 30 odd years ago).

Did some shopping on the way. Stopped at Stirling Castle and bought a tee shirt for Dylan. Also, a few of the ladies are getting cashmere scarves. I will not say who as that will spoil the surprise.

Brett and Andrew – got yours and it is not what you are thinking.

Brian Martin is due to go back to Azerbaijan next Tuesday morning and I hope to spend some time with him before then. Hopefully, I will also get over my feelings towards sightseeing and hotel rooms. I should be ready to go again from Wednesday next week.

7 May 2010, Friday

Woke up feeling really good. We are travelling to Edinburgh today (by train) to do some sightseeing on a tour bus (website - <http://www.edinburghtour.com/our-tours/the-majestic-tour-recorded-commentary-britannia.html>) around the city. We are also going to see the Royal Yacht Britannia (website - <http://www.royalyachtbritannia.co.uk/>). My back held up okay and I did not have sore feet.



This is an audio tour which is a must in order to fully take in all you see.

You start at the bridge and work your way down all the decks. Each area is explained and it is quite something to appreciate how many people are involved in running a yacht of this size which by the way it decommissioned. The Queen no longer has a yacht anymore and that is a pity.

It took almost 2 hours to see the whole yacht and that included taking an early afternoon tea in the tea room. Very nice setting and very opulent!

Been keeping up with the British elections as well. They need Phil Richards over here to sort them out. The Returning Officers made a lot of mistakes with queues of voters on Election Day (Thursday – a working day). Sandra and I travelled on the day of their election and we passed many of the polling stations which did not seem to be very busy. The idea of closing polling at 10 pm encourages people to leave it to the last minute. Voting is not compulsory. Given that, the turnout was very good and reflected the mood for a change. I reasoned that with the country experiencing a Labor government for the past 2 elections (they have 5-year terms) and the economy in general, a change was in the air. I even suggested (to our hosts) that Nick Clegg (the leader of the Liberal/Democrats) will prove to be a kingmaker.

Worried about the stock market in Aus. The results are not encouraging for my super balances.

8 May 2010, Saturday

Travelled to Stirling to see the William Wallace Monument (website - <http://www.nationalwallacemonument.com/>).

The walk up the mountain takes it out of you – it is so steep. Once you get there, you have the climb all these stairs to get to the rooms in the monument. The audio is not very good. There is a competing video presentation as well and that interferes with what you want to read, see and hear. The whole presentation could do with better organisation.

An actor presented the story of Wallace – he does this 6 times a day. At the end of his performance I asked him how the movie (by Mel Gibson) differed from the historical records. He mentioned that the movie does not make reference to Stirling Bridge which was a key factor in the battle with the English army.

We then travelled to Larbert and visited the church where Sandra's Mum and Dad were married. Sandra and Abraham got married there. Sandra and Leslie were christened there. Andrew and Linda were christened there. Sadly, the church was locked. We then caught up with Barbara Brennan (her childhood pal) and her husband (Arthur).

After that we returned to Avonbridge, quick tea and then went to visit Kath and Ronnie Martin at their home.

9 May 2010, Sunday

Decided to do nothing today – read the papers. Brian Martin made me a full Scottish breakfast (minus the haggis).

Watched the Formula 1 racing – loved the outcome. Go Webber! Got the result I wanted. Red Bull to do well. Alonso to win in his home country. Hamilton not to win.

10 May 2010, Monday

Woke up feeling very down and depressed. Have to keep busy. That is the only way I can deal with the down side of depression.

Planning on going to see the Concorde today (website - http://www.nms.ac.uk/our_museums/museum_of_flight.aspx). You have to be there to see what a great tourist attraction this place is. Dylan would just love it. I don't think the website does the tourist attraction justice. You will have to wait for Sandra's images and my website to really appreciate it.



The number of aircraft on display is immense and if you like this sort of thing, it is ideal for spending hours taking it all in. We were able to board Concorde and walk down the

isle of seats. There are some no-go areas but everything is there to see. What a fantastic aircraft.

A fish supper tonight. Enjoyed it very much followed by a double cone ice cream. They make great ice cream in Scotland. So is the tablet.

The all ordinaries are up today in Aus.

11 May 2010, Tuesday

Brian Martin goes back to Azerbaijan today. We are going in to Edinburgh airport to see him off and then bus to the CBD for some sightseeing and frivolity.



We took the airport bus to the CBD (£3.50 each one way). On arrival, we walked down the royal mile to the Palace of Holyroodhouse, (website –

<http://www.royalcollection.org.uk/default.asp?action=article&ID=36>) the official residence in Scotland of Her Majesty the Queen. The palace stands at the end of Edinburgh's Royal Mile against the spectacular backdrop of Arthur's Seat. This fine baroque palace is closely associated with Scotland's rich history.

The palace is worth seeing and the tour is handled really well (with audio of every area the public is allowed to see).

My back started to play up and I could not face the prospect of the stairs at Scott's Monument (it is near the railway station in the centre of the CBD). The pollution really stains the stonework and it looks very ugly. You almost want to take a brush and soap to the stone and clean it up. Sandra has been up the stone steps to the viewing platform before and the views (I am told) are terrific of the City of Edinburgh. Being old and decrepit is not doing me any good as I am missing out on some things. Heights are always going to be a problem for me anyway.



A visit to Mary King's Close was another item on the agenda for today which was kyboshed by the fact that there were stairs (lots of them) and walking for one hour. I would have loved to go on the tour as I have read about this in the Inspector Rebus books. Website - <http://www.realmarykingsclose.com/>. The close is underground.

We travelled back from Edinburgh to Polmont railway station and then took a taxi to Avonbridge. We could not contact Linda Martin by phone to pick us up from Polmont.

It is snowing in Avonbridge. Imagine doing that just for me. Only kidding but it is amazing. It is the first time for me to experience this. Quite something that lasted a very short time and amazingly the air was warmer. I expected it to be colder.

I have been following the political situation in Britain. Last night Gordon Brown (Labor) resigned and David Cameron (Conservatives) was asked to become the Prime Minister. It looks like the Conservatives and the Liberal/Democrats will form a coalition government.

12 May 2010, Wednesday

Do you remember the book “The Da Vinci Code?” Well, we are going to visit the Rosslyn Chapel (just outside Edinburgh) today. Website -

<http://www.rosslynchapel.org.uk/>.

The incredible success of The Da Vinci Code is bringing tens of thousands of Grail-seekers to Rosslyn Chapel, but what is the real story of Scotland and the Holy Grail? Go to this website for more information - <http://www.scotland.org/about/innovation-and-creativity/features/culture/the-davinci-code.html>.

In the last few years a series of writers have tried to connect Rosslyn Chapel and the Holy Grail with the Knights Templar. Rosslyn Chapel was actually founded by Sir William St Clair. His family were powerful Scots nobles, Earls of Orkney and ambassadors to the French court. St Clair brought masons and artisans from across Europe to work at Rosslyn, building a wondrous House of God. The Templar’s were a monastic military order that was formed in Jerusalem to guard the pilgrim routes in the Holy Land. In the 12th century, the Scottish King, David I, gave the knights land and money and was said to have surrounded himself with Templar’s. The Templar’s built their Scottish headquarters at Balantrodoch, a few miles from Rosslyn.