

SCOTLAND WEST HIGHLAND WAY 2016



Scotland is to Scotch Whiskey as Napa and Sonoma are to good wine. OBAN distillery has been around for 100 years. We did the tour!

One needs to stay hydrated when hiking. I drank two pints of Guinness each day. It does taste better over there!



Scotland is full of history, especially castles and ruins. This is Eilean Donan Castle, probably the most photographed castle in Scotland. It is located in the western Highlands on a tiny island where three Lochs (Lakes) meet. Built in the 13th century it was a stronghold of Clan Mackenzie. The English destroyed it in 1719 due to the Clan's involvement in the Jacobite rebellion. It was restored in the early twentieth century.

The West Highland Way is the most popular trail in Scotland. It is 95 miles long and was completed in 1980. It begins in Milngavie, a northern suburb of Glasgow and ends in Fort William at the base of Ben Nevis, Scotland's highest mountain.

It passes from the lowlands, along the shore of Scotland's largest lake, and into the Scottish Highlands. Aside from newly constructed trails,

it makes use of drove roads along which highlanders herded their cattle and sheep to market to the lowlands. It utilizes military roads built by English troops to control the Jacobite clans, and old coaching roads and disused railroad lines from the more recent past.

We called our hike B, B, & B. Bed, Breakfast, and Beer!



There were 14 in our entourage. We posed for the proverbial group picture in front of our Baggage Truck. A tour company booked rooms for us at B&B's throughout the trip...8 nights. Each morning the truck picked up our luggage and moved it ahead to the next night's lodging. We only had to carry a day pack. A shower every night, then dinner and a nightcap in the bar. Now that's roughing it!



Standing at the monument commemorating the start of the West Highland Way in Milngavie.



This was not a difficult hike. There was very little steep uphill or downhill. Not many trees in Scotland either. Most of the terrain was called Moorland...grasslands with peat. That's me on what was once a British military road.



There were sections where the trail was a 'real' trail, like along a twenty mile section that meandered along the forested, eastern shore of Loch Lomond.



Loch Lomond is the largest lake in Scotland (surface area) and is about 22 miles long and between 1/2 - 4 miles wide. It crosses the Highland Boundary Fault, which is considered the boundary between the lowlands of Central Scotland and the

Highlands. The lake is surrounded by hills, including Ben Lomond on the eastern shore at 3196 feet high...more like a real mountain.



We stayed at a different Hotel, Inn, or B&B every night. They were all located in either small towns or out in the countryside near the trail. Most had a bar/lounge and a dining room where we usually had our meals.



They all served the traditional Scottish breakfast which included fruit, juice, tea, oatmeal, toast, potato (tattie) scones, grilled tomato, baked beans, sautéed mushrooms, bacon, egg, and sausage (bangers).



If you're brave, you can also sample a slice of Black Pudding which is made from pork blood, pork fat or beef suet, and a cereal component, usually oats or barley. No thanks!

If you're really brave, you can also try the traditional Scottish dish known as Haggis. This is a savory (?) pudding containing sheep's pluck (heart, liver, and lungs) minced with onion, oatmeal, suet, spices, and salt, all mixed with stock and cooked while encased in the animal's stomach or some other artificial casing. I believe it is an acquired taste. I had one bite...that was enough for me.



The most unique lodge was the Drover's Inn, located in the hamlet of Inveraman at the northern tip of Loch Lomond. It opened in 1705. It takes its name from the Highland drovers who used to drive their cattle and sheep down the side of Loch Lomond to the markets. The most famous of all the drovers was Rob Roy MacGregor, a folk hero and outlaw, often referred to as the Scottish Robin Hood.



The Inn has an authentic three hundred year pub with a variety of Scottish cuisine. The Inn also has had many ghost sightings, including that of a murdered drover who can sometimes be seen wandering the halls late at night.



Pretty pictures of the Western Highlands as we hike along the Way. It was even sunny one day!





Most days in Scotland (in June) were overcast, with either fog, mist, or light rain. We were fortunate in that we didn't have any steady, heavy rains. 50-60 F was the usual daytime temperature.

Very few people live in the country...just cattle ranchers and sheep herders. I never did see a 'real farm' that grows crops like here in America. The Highlands lack adequate flat land and the soil is poor. We did see some tree farms. There are few paved roads in the country. Most people get around via a good system of trains.

We were there during the summer solstice. Scotland is so far north that there was only about three hours of actual darkness at night. Just imagine what it's like in winter. No wonder they drink a lot!



We saw very little in the way of natural fauna in Scotland. There were a few sightings of Red Deer and a rabbit....and that was it. The most common mammal seen was domestic sheep. They were everywhere. This is the Scottish Blackface sheep, the most typical of breeds.



This atypical breed of sheep is still unclassified.

It did have a big ass however!



Clan Campbell was the most successful clan in Scottish history. They were also the most hated by the other clans because of their successful criminal behavior, bloodletting, stealing, and constant feuding with their neighbors. Clan Campbell's royal connections and allegiances also brought them the gifts of much land and fortune.

The Clan that hated them the most was Clan Donald, later to be known as Clan MacDonald (my Clan!) At one time they were the most powerful clan in the Western Highlands. However in the 15th century, their fortunes declined and much of their land was forfeited...to Clan Campbell.

In 1645, under the auspicious of English Civil War, violence spread into Scotland. It was a struggle between Covenanters and Royalists.

Covenanters were people who pledged to maintain the Presbyterian doctrines as the sole form of religion in Scotland and were opposed to Catholicism. Royalists were Scottish Catholics and Episcopalians who were opposed to the Covenanters imposition of their religion on the country.

Clan Campbell fought on the Covenanter's side, Clan MacDonald for the Royalists. But for Clan MacDonald, it was really an excuse to attack and fight the Campbell's because they had lost their land.

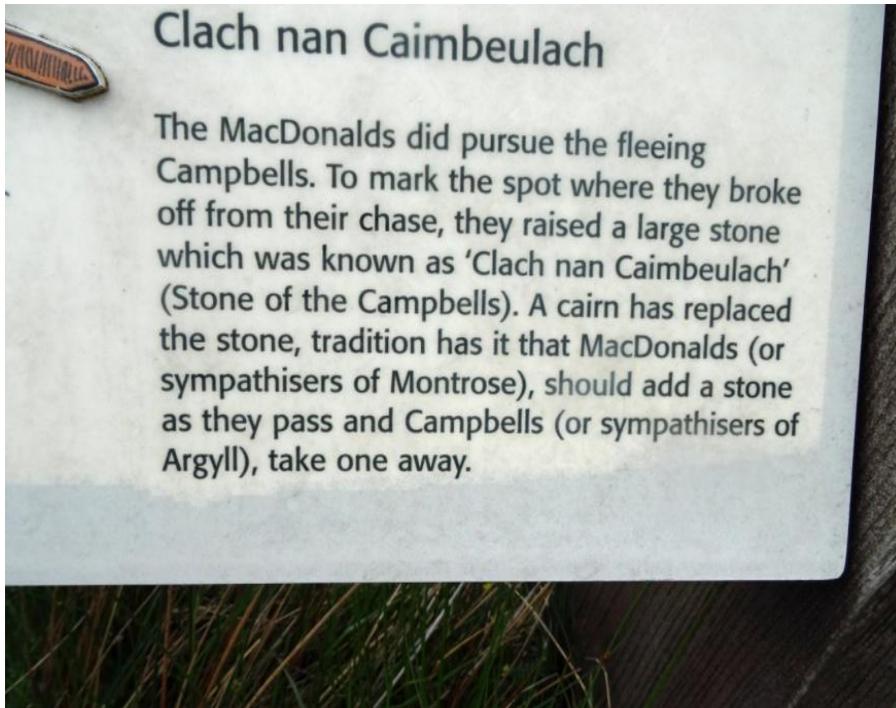
On January 14, 1645, a force of two thousand MacDonald's and other clansman attacked Inverary, a Campbell stronghold. While the seize of Inverary castle failed, they did put to the sword everyone in the adjacent town.

The hierarchy of the Campbell Clan (a guy named Archibald) was horrified at what happened. So he gathered a force of 3000 men and immediately marched after the receding Macdonald army. However the MacDonald's heard of the pursuit and turned around and surprised the Campbell's in an ambush in Inverlochy on February 2.

The ambush turned into a massacre. Twelve hundred Campbell's died while only 20 men perished on the MacDonald side.

Then as the surviving Campbell soldiers retreated...along what is now part of the West Highland Way, the bloodthirsty MacDonald soldiers slaughtered almost every one of them. Finally exhausted by all the killing, the MacDonald's gave up the chase and a few limping Campbell's were allowed to escape.

The stones of the Campbell's (Clach nan Caimbeulach) marks the site at which the MacDonald's stopped pursuing the Campbell's



This site was directly on the West Highland Way.



I threw a bunch of stones on the pile!!



Along rural roads in the Scottish Highlands, we hike toward our final destination, the town of Ft William.



Ft William is a touristy town of about 10,000 people. The quaint main street is a pedestrian way and devoid of most traffic.



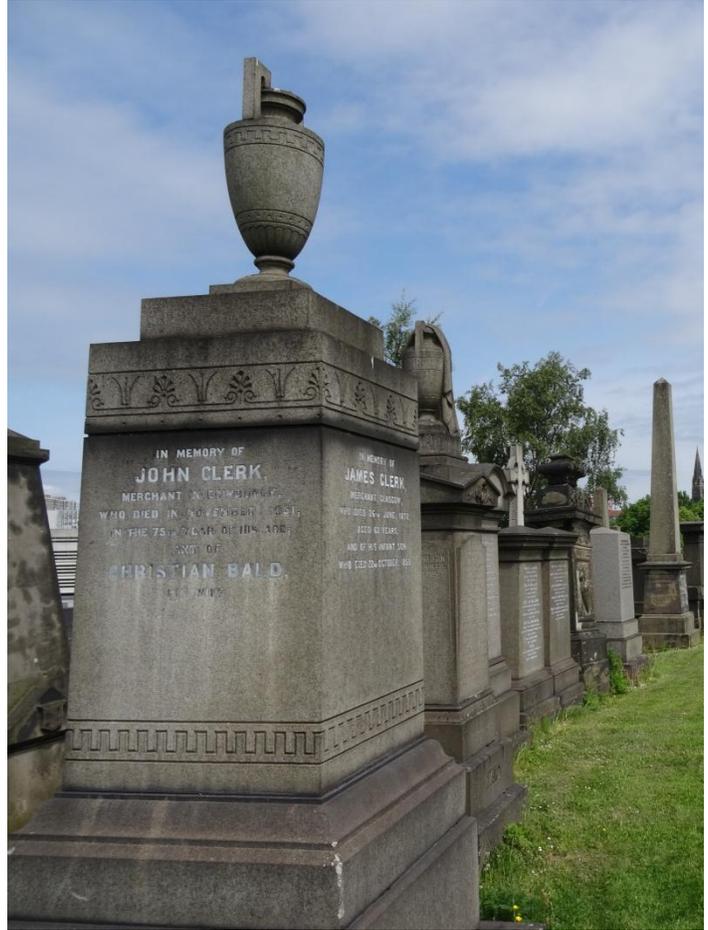
The end of the trail.

But then another adventure began. My wife, Gina, flew over and we rented a car to drive to other tourist locations in Scotland.





The Glasgow Cathedral is the oldest church still standing in Scotland, as well as the oldest building in Glasgow. Construction started in the late 12th century, before the time of the Reformation, and took over 75 years to complete. The building is a superb example of Scottish Gothic architecture. It is currently part of the established Church of Scotland Presbytery.



The Glasgow Necropolis sites adjacent to the Cathedral. It is a Victorian cemetery (during the period of Queen Victoria's reign from 1837-1901). Over 50,000 individuals are buried here, most in unmarked graves. Only a small percentage are named on monuments, of which there are about 3500.



Wall mural of a Toucan painted on the side of a building in Glasgow.



Edinburgh is the capital of Scotland. It is a city of half a million people today. Although bombed in WW II, the city center escaped with little damage. Most of the raids were concentrated on docks and shipyards. This is a view of Old Town, the oldest part of Edinburgh. Much of the medieval street plan and reformation-era buildings and spirals have been preserved. This is now an UNESCO world heritage site.

The Royal Mile is the name coined in the early 20th century for the main street in Old Town that runs downward from Edinburgh Castle to Holyrood Palace. Most tourists seem to end up here.



Edinburgh Castle Celebrated Fortress that sits atop Castle Rock



Holyrood Palace Residence of British Monarch when in Scotland



Royal Mile Historic buildings, shops, restaurants, and pubs



View from Carlton Hill toward Old Town with Edinburgh Castle in the far distance.



The statue of Greyfriar's Bobby is a popular site for tourists. The traditional version of the story is that Bobby, a Skye Terrier (1855-1872) belonged to a night watchman named John Gray. John died suddenly and was buried in Greyfriars Kirkyard, a local, nearby cemetery. For the next 14 years Bobby spent the rest of his life sitting on his master's grave. When the dog died in 1872, he

was buried just inside the cemetery gate, near his owner's grave.



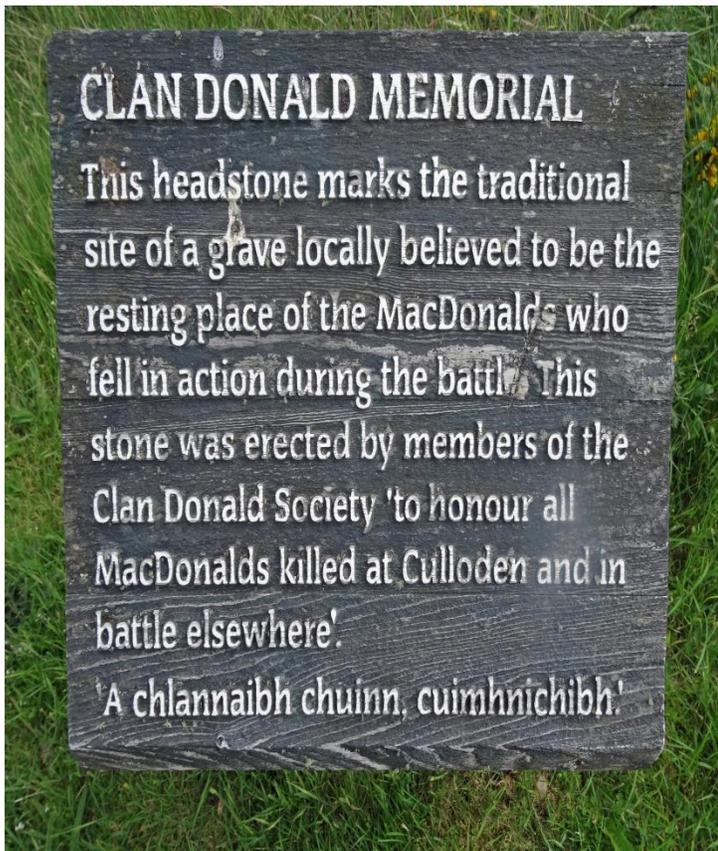
Near the town of Inverness, we visited the location where the battle of Culloden was fought. This was the final confrontation of the Jacobite rising of 1745. This was an attempt by Charles Edward Stewart (known as Bonnie Prince Charlie) to overthrow the House of Hanover and to restore the House of Stewart to the British Throne.

The Jacobite forces consisted mainly of Scottish clansman. They were decisively defeated by British forces raised by the Duke of Cumberland. The battle lasted only an hour. The Highland charge met with resistance due to rough terrain giving the larger, well-armed British the advantage. The bloody defeat left almost 2000 Clansman dead while the British had less than 300 casualties.



The defeat of the Jacobites lead to the eventual weakening of the Gaelic culture and the breakup of the Clan system. Many Highlanders fled Scotland for America during this time, settling in Appalachia.

The memorial headstone for Clan Donald is shown below.





Near Inverness is Clava Cairns, a well preserved Bronze-age cemetery complex of burial cairns and standing stones dating back 4000 years. The word cairn is defined as a man-made pile of stones, often used as a burial monument. It comes from the Gaelic word, carn.

Diana Gabaldon, who wrote the popular Outlander series, incorporated the mystic of standing stones as a portal for time travel from the present to the mid-1700's and the Jacobite rebellion.



One can't help but visit a few castles while in Scotland.

Above is Stirling Castle, one of the largest and most important. It sits atop an intrusive crag and is bordered on three sites by steep cliffs. Most of the principle buildings date to the 14th and 15th centuries. It has served as a Scottish Royal Residency and several Kings and Queens, including Mary, Queen of Scots (1542) were crowned here.

There have been at least eight sieges of Stirling Castle, the most famous being in 1297, in what was called the battle of Stirling Bridge. This was during the First War of Scottish Independence. Scottish insurgents, lead by the knight William Wallace, successfully defeated British forces. Wallace was made famous in the movie Braveheart, played by Mel Gibson.



Doune Castle is near Stirling, in the central part of Scotland. The medieval fortress was built in the thirteenth century. It was damaged and rebuilt several times over the next hundred years. It saw military action in the 17th and 18th century. The castle was made famous more recently as scenes from the movie 'Monty Python and the Holy Grail' were shot here.



The Culloden railway viaduct near Inverness. One very similar to this (Glenfinnan viaduct) was used in the Harry Potter films depicting the Hogwarts Express. This train is also known as the Jacobite train and is part of the West Highland Railway. Tourists can travel 41 scenic miles, between Ft William and Mallaig, traversing over the viaduct.



Loch Ness is a deep, narrow freshwater lake that extends for 23 miles southwest of Inverness. It's deepest point is 755 feet. Loch Ness is best known for alleged sightings of the cryptozoological Loch Ness Monster, better known as "Nessie."



My wife made a valiant attempt to spot Nessie, but alas, not on this day!



The islands off the west coast of Scotland are known as the Hebrides. Those closest to the mainland are called the Inner Hebrides, of which the Isle of Skye is the largest and northernmost.

Skye has been occupied for thousands of years, but for 500 years up until the mid 18th century, the island was dominated by Clan Donald and MacLeod. After the Jacobite rebellion was put down in the 1740's, the clan system was dismantled by the British, and whole communities were cleared out with many people forced to emigrate to distant lands.

Today the main industries are tourism, agriculture (especially sheep farming), and forestry. Skye was a beautiful place to visit!



Our vacation ended in the small resort town of Oban, which occupies a setting in the Firth of Lorn...a fjord or bay. The surrounding waterways and mountains provided a beautiful setting. Fisheries are a primary industry and we had the best seafood in Scotland here. But the modern town of Oban really grew up around the distillery which was founded in 1794.

Scotland was a wonderful place to visit!!