

The 2018 David Boyd Event

The Machair of the Uists and Benbecula

Part 1 : Our Road to The Isles



Ben Ledi and Loch Lubnaig near Strathyre

[Inset] Ben Ledi from Dunblane



Loch Lubnaig near Strathyre

We left a Dunblane in sunshine after a blustery weekend. Our route to Benbecula and the Uists would take us through some of the best scenery in Scotland. Towering above the eastern border of the Trossachs and Loch Lomond National Park is Ben Ledi. Our route follows the River Teith and enters the Park at just before Callander. Past the Falls of Leny and along Loch Lubnaig-side and through Strathyre. "Bonny Strathyre" is a favourite Scottish song and recorded by Sir Jimmy Shand as a Waltz on the flip-side of his number 1 record "The Bluebell Polka".

We by passed Rob Roy's grave at Balquidder, continuing westwards through Lochearnhead where the winding road climbs up Glen Ogle. On the opposite side of the Glen the old railway line and its viaduct remind one of just how easy this journey would have been on a train had not Dr Beeching decided otherwise. The railway is now a popular walking and cycling route



Strathyre & Sir Jimmy Shand



The old railway viaduct in Glen Ogle us now a walking route



Wind Turbines on the braes of Doune, seen from Kippen



Loch Tay from Kenmore

At the head of Glen Ogle, on the north side of Loch Tay sits Ben Lawers, famed for its alpine plants. It is a short drive vis Kenmore to Loch Rannoch and the famous mountain, Schiehallion, where in 1774 experiments were carried out to determine the mean density of the earth. Schiehallion was chosen because of its isolation and symmetrical shape.

The drive west to Crianlarich takes us through Breadalbane with Ben More to the south. At Crianlarich the Loch Lomond-side road from Glasgow joins our route.

At the gold rush hamlet of Tyndrum the 'Road to the Isles' heads north west while that to Oban is more southerly. We missed Loch Tummel but were en route to Rannoch Moor and Lochaber. In Tyndrum there is a good information centre.



Schiehallion



Tyndrum



Ben Lomond & Loch Lomond



This is a popular stop in Tyndrum





Blackmount from above Tyndrum



Loch Tulla from Black Mount



Loch Tulla from Black Mount



In June the mountainsides are green but turn brown quickly in prolonged dry weather. The trees are in full leaf and foxgloves and white gowans speckle the roadside fields and meadows. In wilder marshy places wispy cotton grass dominates the bogs. Rannoch Moor provides one the aesthetic highlights of the journey. At the summit you can see far into Perthshire and Lochaber. Scarcely anyone lives within miles of here. Wild and magnificent, surrounded by mountains and studded with lochs, Rannoch Moor is exceptionally beautiful in summer and in winter. The sun sparkles on the mountain lochs and lochans , many of which have small islands.

This open moorland sits in stark contrast to the claustrophobic beauty of Glen Coe. A dead hind by the roadside reminded me of the large herds of deer which live near the King's House Hotel. I well remember trying to photograph individual deer in the Glen a few autumns ago. I did get some far off pics. We dined at the King's House Hotel and when we left we found the car park full of semi tame red deer, each with "take my picture" look on its face. At the head of Glen Etive stands the magnificent Buchaille Etive Mor, maybe the most photographed peak in Scotland. Certainly it is one of the most spectacular and most easily seen without leaving your car!

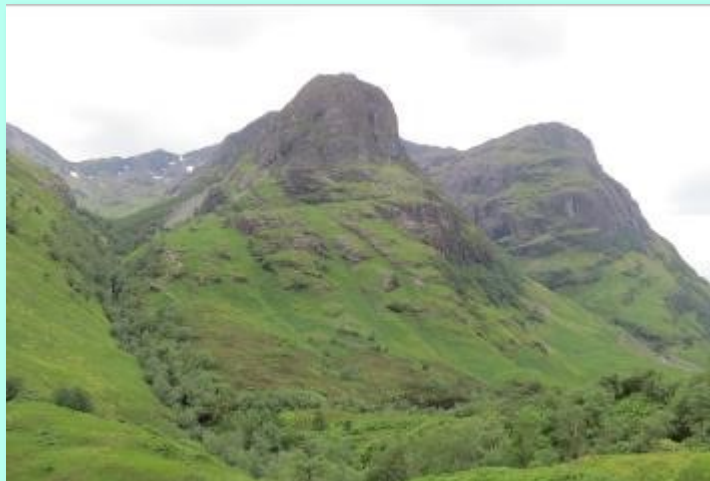


The White Corries Ski Centre



Buchaille Etive Mor

6 Views of Glen Coe.



From here the road twists its way down Glen Coe where climbers and hill walkers park in every lay-by and piece of flat ground at the roadside. It is impossible to pass through the Glen without thinking about the hospitality of the MacDonalDs and the treachery of the Campbells on 13th February 1692. 38 members of Clan MacDonalD were killed by the government troops who had been billeted with them because they had not sworn allegiance to the new King William III and his Queen Mary. Up to 50 more MacDonalDs may have died of exposure in the cold days afterwards. Memories last a long time in Scotland. At Ballachulish we are back to sea level and it is comforting to see the boats bobbing on the gentle waves of Loch Leven. Ballachullish was famous for the quality of its slate which was used on many buildings in Scotland and further afield.

From there to Fort William we follow the winding road by the shore of Loch Linnie. There seem always to be roadworks on this section where the roadside cliffs leave little room for modernising the carriageway. Luckily the ground opens up as it nears Fort William. There is a sense of relief as we enter the biggest town on the west coast. Innumerable hotels and guest houses proclaim "No Vacancies".

Unsure as to the availability of provisions on Uist, we headed for the local Morrison's for a few provisions. Luckily there is a MacDonalDs restaurant nearby so we were assured of good coffee, freshly cooked chips and burgers. Mine was delicious. I have been able to dine chez Macdonald on most of my holidays.....France, Germany, Austria, Italy, the USA or Canada, you know what delicacies to expect and that you will enjoy them.



The Ben Nevis Massif from the Commando Memorial and The Great Glen

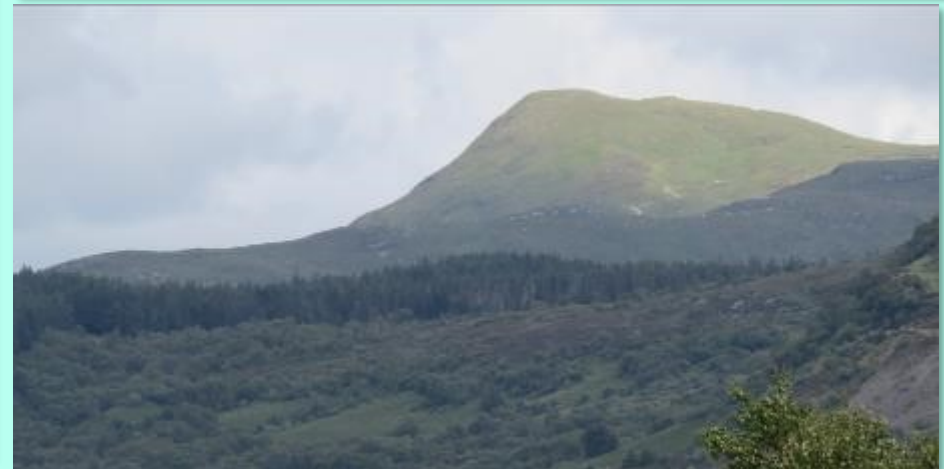


The Commando Memorial, near Spean Bridge



If we had had more time to spend we would have visited the Ben Nevis distillery or walked by Neptune's Staircase, the series of 8 Locks at the western end of the Caledonian canal, built by Thomas Telford between 1803 and 1822.

With Ben Nevis (the highest peak in the UK) on our right, we headed for our next highlight, the Commando Memorial at Spean Bridge, another place with fabulous views in all directions. All over the country there are reminders of how important Scotland was in training soldiers in the Second World War. The memorial to David Stirling of the SAS is just outside Dunblane. He stands on his plinth looking towards zen Lomond. The commandos look towards Ben Nevis.



Loch Lochy — part of the Caledonian Canal



At Invergarry we left the Great Glen and the Caledonian Canal. Here an excellent road climbs high into the mountains before descending to the head of Glen Moriston to join the main road to Skye. The water levels in Loch Loyne and Loch Cluanie, both lochs with hydro dams, were low in spite of our perceived wet winter. This road climbs high into the hills and offers magnificent views in all directions. This route misses out the historic town of Fort Augustus but you could always visit it on the return journey.

Although we have plenty *Alchemilla mollis* and some *Alchemilla alpine* in the garden, we were delighted to find a big clump of *Alchemilla vulgaris* by the roadside.

Looking west along Loch Loyne



Looking east along Loch Cluanie



Alchemilla vulgaris



Eilean Donan Castle & Loch Duich



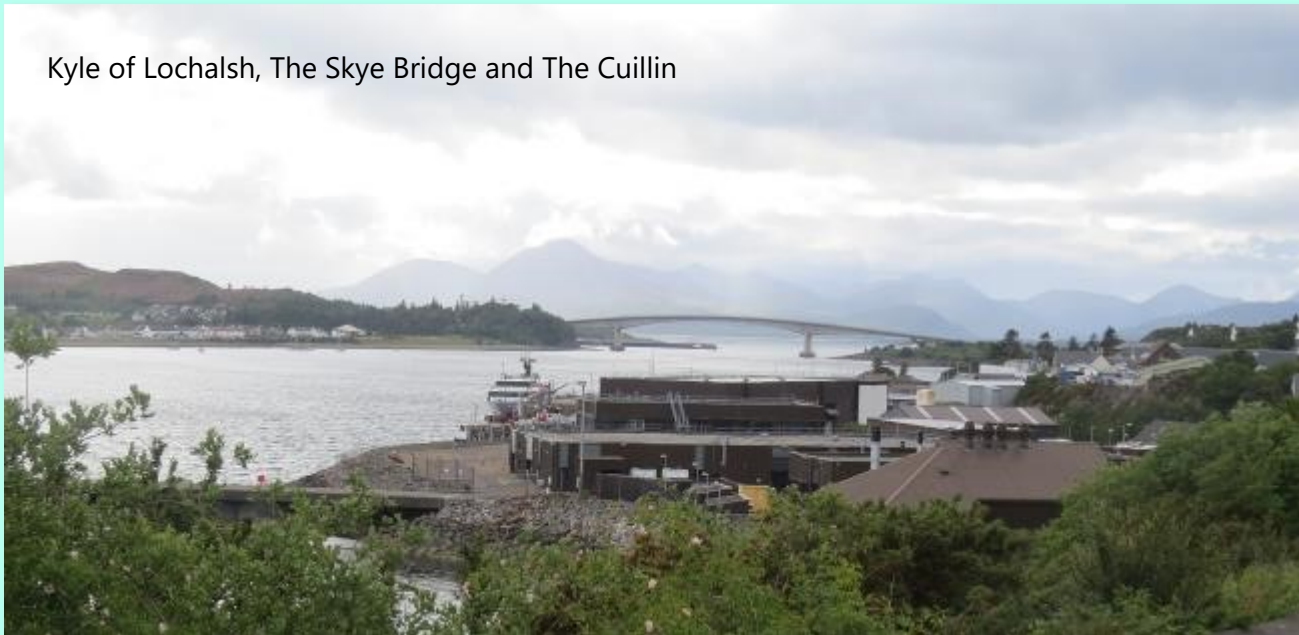
Dark clouds threatened on the western sky and sure enough we were lashed by heavy rain for a short time. Kintail was a mixture of brooding hills and sunlit slopes. At Eilean Donan Castle we found the car park to be a United Nations of holidaymakers. French voices seemed to overpower all others. The castle looked magnificent silhouetted against the western sky. Soon we were in Kyle of Lochalsh, where we got our first glimpse of Skye and the Skye Bridge backed by the silvery silhouettes the Cuillin.

At the Kyle Hotel we had a warm welcome. We settled into our rooms and looked forward to our evening meal. The food was excellent. Lamb shank for me, scampi for Andrew and grilled haddock with herb butter for Anne. The waiters were not locals! One engaged couple came from Romania and the other from Kent. "I Kent they wer'nae local."

There was a nice choice of beer on tap and I settled for Tennent's Amber and then Bass. Andrew favoured Budweiser and Stella. In the cool cabinet there were Bottles of beer from the Skye brewery in Uig. We noted that and made up our mind to visit it before our ferry crossing to Lochmaddy. We had wine with the steak of course!

The day was a great start to our Hebridean adventure.

Kyle of Lochalsh, The Skye Bridge and The Cuillin



Woodbine, Honeysuckle .. *Lonicera periclymenum*

