

# TRIP DIARY 2016

## To England

### Tuesday 26 July

We started our trip this year by public transport to the airport: first by bus to Manly, then ferry to Circular Quay then train to the airport – about three hours in all. Because of our very early flight the next morning, we'd decided to spend the night at the airport Rydges hotel. Reasonable dinner there.

The general plan for the 2016 trip to Europe was that after visiting sister Katie near Hereford, we would drive up to Edinburgh for about a week at the Festival. After that, we would cross to Ireland for a comprehensive tour.

### Wednesday 27 July

Over to the terminal about 0430, quick check-in. First seated (as booked) near the front, but squashed in by a big neighbour, so moved to the back section of the plane with a window and aisle seat, much better. Did much the same for the Dubai-London leg, changing at service desk in Dubai – exit row seats, but rather too close to the galley for peace. Arrived on time, and as usual got the free red bus to hotel row and the Ibis (having first wrongly stopped at the well-marked Ibis Style, a new more upmarket version).

### Thursday 28 July

Good night in the slightly updated Ibis, with very comfortable beds, good sleep. Bus back to the airport, then tube into Waterloo, no delays, plenty of time for the 1120 train to Gillingham. Met by Richard, and out to the van – freshly washed and MOT-ed. Good service!

Van mileage 64,546 miles. Spent the rest of the day getting a bit organised, and settled in for the first night aboard this year.

### Friday 29 July

Relaxed start, and up to Katie in Clehonger. Weather unsettled, cool, showery. Great welcome, as ever.

Invited to a neighbours' barbeque at Roger and Sandra's place, with Darren and his wife and daughter from the house between. Very pleasant evening, but not a BBQ of Oz standard!



## Saturday 30 July

Into Tesco with Katie for shopping and basic provisions for us. Quiet afternoon, catching up. Then in the evening to Abbey Dore for a concert. Dore Abbey is the remains of a 14<sup>th</sup> century Cistercian abbey, and now the only one in the country used as a parish church for worship. It sits in the middle of a farm. The concert was the climax of a week of English choral music performed at various venues by the choral group English Choral Experience. The music was not all to our taste, especially the newer pieces, but it was a great experience anyway.

## Sunday 31 July



Drove in the morning over to Grosmont to join Niki and Nell, Sam and girlfriend Hanna for drinks at the pub – preceded by a walk round very attractive ruins of the castle.

A quiet afternoon with the papers and books, talking, and unfortunately with me developing a runny nose. Probably a cold, so started medications. Watched the German GP, extended highlights.

## Monday 1 August

Bad day with a cold, so pretty quiet again. Got the van taxed at the Madley post office, no problems.

## Tuesday 2 August

Decided yesterday that today's intended departure was not advisable, but gradually started feeling better. Heavy prednisolone, doxycycline and cold medications seem to be working.





**Wednesday 3 August**

All well enough, so away about 0930 and to Tesco for cash

and a few basic stores. Then pleasant and generally rural run due north, heading now for Scotland, past Shrewsbury and Wrexham and to the Wirral Peninsula, across the Mersey from Liverpool.



Our first visit in the Wirral was to the National Waterways Museum at Ellesmere Port – literally, the port for the Ellesmere Canal. The museum is on the banks of the Manchester Ship Canal and the Mersey, where they are joined by the Shropshire Union Canal. This enabled a link, with docks built by Thomas Telford and William Jessop, between the Shropshire town of Ellesmere and the then mighty port of Liverpool. The dock complex was abandoned as a working site in the 1960s but resurrected by volunteers who rebuilt the warehouses and docks, storing and restoring a large collection of old working longboats. The museum well describes and depicts the history of the engineers, entrepreneurs, navvies and boatpeople who were working the vast network of British inland waterways. We were particularly taken by the tiny longboat cabins shared (usually) by just a couple, for decades on end: a stove, a bench seat, and a drop-down double bed in the stern, with the helmsman overlooking the long expanse of the barge ahead, full of goods including coal.

Not far to the north was another very interesting site, the village of Port Sunlight. In 1887, Lever Brothers began looking for a new site on which to expand its soap-making business, which became Port Sunlight, where William Lever built his works and a model village to house his employees. William Lever personally supervised planning the village, and 1899 and 1914, 800 houses were built to house a population of 3,500. The garden village had allotments and public buildings including the Lady Lever Art Gallery, a cottage hospital, schools, a concert hall, open air swimming pool, church, and a temperance hotel. Lever introduced welfare schemes, and provided for the education and entertainment of his workforce, encouraging recreation and organisations which promoted art, literature, science or music. Each block of houses was designed by a different architect and there is half-timbering, carved woodwork and other European styles. The philosophy was both practical and philanthropic, and the atmosphere peaceful and enchanting – quite a difference from the usual living conditions of workpeople of the time.



We thought of staying the night there, but stuck to plan A and went up to the very tip of the Wirral to a car park at Wallasey we knew about overlooking the sea at the mouth of the Mersey. All day the weather was threatening, with a deep depression centring over the British Isles, and when we got to the near-empty car park the wind was really whistling in. We chose a spot partly sheltered by a grassy rise, but it was still very gusty.

#### Thursday 4 August

Wind continued overnight and continued into the morning, with passing showers. Short wet windy walk in the morning, and stayed over for lunch. Then across the Mersey via the tunnel and up to the east of Liverpool via some depressing-looking suburbs and small shopping precincts with shutters down. What looked like old bomb damage was belatedly being cleaned up.

Further north to Southport, with a call in to a caravan centre for an expensive replacement of one of our empty Calor bottles. Also in Southport, to its north, to Europa Engineering and Richard Winter. Viewed his extraordinary collection of glittering custom motorbikes which he puts together from old components, and a few other cars in his workshop. Not a real lot going on – he says he is pulling back, so that his mainstay is supply of Lotus Europa parts to



all Lotus people and others over the world (including us, obviously, as new owners of one).

Then round the wide mouth of the River Ribble, and to Lytham St Anne's. Aiming for a known parking spot, we were directed right through the middle of the town because the coast road was closed as part of the week-long Lytham Festival. So, a long drag along a busy, crowded street! Out the other end, took the

second of a couple of pay parks right by the beach.

North of the town, there is an enormous expanse of flat sand and marsh, very popular with dog-walkers in the late afternoon. Weather cleared during the afternoon, some wind still from the west, but generally warmer and much more pleasant.

#### Friday 5 August

Some sun through high white cloud, cool wind again. But acceptable. Away from this convenient and quiet car park and along the waterfront road. This took us along the colourful promenade at Blackpool, where lights were strung all along the road for the illuminations. Countless hotels, boarding houses, games places and funfairs. Surprisingly quiet for about 10:00 am, but sure to warm up.





From there up country roads with Morecambe Bay to our left, and to Lancaster. Although it is the county town of Lancashire it is surprisingly small. We parked by the Maritime Museum down by the River Lune quay, where ships once brought goods from across the Atlantic. Quite a good little museum, describing the Atlantic triangle trade including the slave leg, and a movie about Lancaster and Morecambe.

Walked up the hill to Lancaster castle, which we expected to be more impressive, given the history of the place. But although still quite massive from the outside it has been rebuilt many times over the years. Most recently it has been a large prison, mostly within what used to be the massive central keep. You can't get in there now because of rebuilding, and other parts of the castle are active court houses.

We had identified that there was a convenient Tesco at Carnforth to the north, so we stocked up there before going down to the waterside villages along the Kent Channel at the very head of Morecambe Bay. It was a fair bit busier here, and we would have stayed if we could have found a good place to park overnight by the water. But we continued further up to Kendal, a very attractive stone town but also very busy, being on the fringe of the Lake District. Again, we could not find anywhere to spend the night, so continued up towards Windermere, having a look at a couple of possible wild sites and inquiring at one posh and expensive camp site at a farm. But in the end we stopped in a lay-by off the busy main road, rather than continue undecidedly meandering.

Dry all day, shirtsleeves in a coolish breeze, acceptable conditions all day.

## Scotland

### Saturday 6 August

Quite a peaceful night, considering, with some noise from passing traffic. Away early for a fast drive up to Scotland. The first 20 miles or so were very attractive, skirting the eastern side of the Lake District. Joining the M6 the countryside levelled out, but still green and pleasant. Had a good run past Carlisle and into Scotland, but some long drags in traffic into and through Glasgow. Crossed the Erskine Bridge over the River Clyde, and again joined a lot of traffic making for Loch Lomond. Diverted west near the southern end of the loch, and crossed over to Helensburgh on the Firth of Clyde, where it is joined by Gareloch.

Pulled into a large car park in pleasant weather for lunch, and it looked as though staying the night would be fine. However, an adjacent fairground was getting warmed up for later, and peace was not at all assured. So, after some heavy clouds and rain had passed, we headed up the east side of the loch to Garelochhead, passing the immense – and apparently uncompleted – Clyde HM Naval Station. Turned down the west side, nice drive along the loch, to what might once have been a wild camp but is now the opposite, a huge and posh holiday park.

So, moved on round the bottom of this little peninsula, Rosneath, which lies between Gareloch and Loch Long, and pulled into a little car park by the ferry wharf at the village of Kilcreggan. There was a lovely view across the firth to Gourock, but the clouds were grey and threatening. Tonight's shipping forecast for the area sounded deadly!

### Sunday 7 August

Some gusty winds overnight, but not too bad. The day started with sunshine and showers as we started up the west side of the peninsula, passing a long line-up of very substantial and impressive Scots stone mansions. We were in the county of Argyll and Bute, and it appears that in the early 1800s the Duke of Argyll decided to develop the peninsula as a residential precinct. The houses were typically built by wealthy Glasgow traders and merchants. Most residents are now retired people and Glasgow commuters.



Then a drive up to the top of Loch Long, and round another MOD base, before a cross-country run over the hills to the next loch to the west, Loch Fyne. On its west side lies Invararay, with its famous castle in clear view as we approached the town. It is a pleasant little place, but as in so many small towns it is essentially impossible to park a camper legally. So our walk around was short. There was an iron three-masted sailing ship on the wharf, but the area was closed for work.

Soon the rain started again, progressing from showers to constant heavy rain. We started looking for somewhere for the night, and investigated a motorhome park a long way along a narrow road. But at

£20 a night for power and a loo and nothing else, we moved on. We had a quick look at the Crinan Canal, which splits off the Kintyre Peninsula to the south, but we turned north towards Oban. On the way, running along the southern side of little Loch Feochan we came across a good little picnic layby, which suited us – and another small camper – well. We were right by the side of the loch, looking over to a collection of yacht moorings and hills the other side. The western entrance to the loch leads out to the Firth of Lorn and quickly out to the sea south of Mull.

By 1800 the wind had eased and the rain was less relentless. Maybe the view will be sunlit tomorrow.

### Monday 8 August

Disturbed night, with very heavy and constant rain needing earplugs to block out the noise on the roof, and violent gusty winds rocking the van. Easing by daylight, and becoming sunny during the morning.



Sat around in the morning, then up the short distance to Oban and to the retail centre to do some shopping. Chose to try Lidl, and got sufficient stores, but choice and quality too far below Tesco and the other mainstream shops. Up through the town to a little road overlooking the bay for lunch. Short run in the early afternoon up to Loch Creran, where we came across a Brisbane couple in a buy-and-sell small van on the kind of trip they have done a few times before.



Leaving them to look for a good lochside layby, we went for a drive around the small loch. On the way we got a warning of low laptop battery, which turned out to be a fault in the 12V adaptor wiring. That caused the laptop to shut down, and on restarting (after fixing the wiring) the Microsoft AutoRoute program, on which we depend so much, told us there was a “licensing initialization error” and wouldn’t run. Couldn’t get around it, and it wouldn’t accept a reload from the copy on a thumb drive. (Should have brought the original DVD!! Another lesson learnt.) We’ll have to download a new copy of the program when we get wi-fi again. (Later: program now discontinued by Microsoft, not available or supported, although our version is a recent 2013. Back in Oz, we were still unable to install from the DVD and had to reset the whole computer.)



Still, we did find a pleasant stop alongside this quiet road, with a good view across the loch in quite pleasant weather.

#### **Tuesday 9 August**

More heavy rain overnight, but that seems to be standard. Dry but rather cloudy morning. Stayed over for the morning, and after lunch returned down the Oban road to have a look at Dunstaffnage Castle. This is one of Scotland’s oldest stone castles, and guards the entrance to Loch Etive. It was built in about 1220 by Duncan,

the grandson of a Nordic warlord, and remains in the hands of the Campbell clan. We didn’t go in, but walked around and admired its solidity and strategic position on top of a craggy point overlooking the bay.

Inland, then, and another quick visit to the remains of the Bonawe iron furnace, built in about 1753 and one of Scotland’s best-preserved charcoal-burning ironworks. Providing this charcoal denuded most of the hillsides of their woodland.

Continuing east, on our way to Edinburgh tomorrow, we spied a picnic ground well set back from the road between Dalmally and Tyndrum. This was an ideal night stop, down by the stream that is the River Lochy, running along the glen of that name. Later we were inevitably joined by other local and overseas vans. Scattered showers and bursts of sunshine continued into the evening.



Brian, with whom we were all staying.



### Wednesday 10 August

Got going after lunch, as wind, rain and mist continued. Then generally south-east towards Edinburgh, where we looked forward to catching up with Michael's cousin Libby and sister Katie.

Arrived at the home of (Michael's) cousin Libby's close friend Brian Hughes at about 3:30 pm, to a good welcome. Katie was picked up from the station soon after. Plenty of chat and some outlines of up we were up for in the coming week. Outstandingly good dinner cooked by our host

### Thursday 11 August

First outing was to visit Libby's new flat, about 20 minutes' walk away. Very smart and quite large, and totally different from the Scottish mansion that was her last place, right down to the furnishings.

Then into the city for our first Edinburgh Fringe performance, a reworking of the satirical songs of Tom Lehrer, done well and good fun. Almost immediately afterwards, and in the same building, to a new "dark comedy", *The Club*. Advertised as suitable for kids of 14 and over, this turned out to be an unfunny (for us) and quasi-pornographic play based on a '90s London club, prominently featuring a large pink dildo throughout. "Well, you lose some", commented Brian, who otherwise had done an amazing job in



selecting Fringe performances.



Dinner then at the Angels and Bagpipes restaurant, joined by Libby's son Michael's lovely wife Lizzy. From there it was a walk up to Edinburgh Castle and the vast auditorium built each year for the Tattoo. We had been wanting to see this event live for years, and Libby had secured some splendid seats with a great view over the scene and up to the face of the castle. It was really everything that we could have expected, especially as by this time the worst of the gloomy weather had passed, leaving simply a strong wind under dry skies. The show featured military music through the ages, as played by bands from all over the world – plus, of course,



Highland dancers and other troupes. Fireworks burst into the sky from time to time over the evening, culminating in an impressive show before the quiet of the Lone Piper's *Sleep, Dearie, Sleep* and the final massed March Out. A wonderful evening.



### Friday 12 August

Off in the morning to a coffee concert in St Mary's Cathedral of piano sonatas by Beethoven from three periods in his life: boy, man and master. They were introduced and played by an inspiring academic musician, John Bryden.

In the early afternoon we were at St Mary's and St George's West church for a semi-staged concert performance of Henry Purcell's short opera *Dido and Aeneas*, played by Coro 16 under Neil Metcalfe. This was absolutely lovely, and the music made much more sense in the live context of the story rather than through listening to a recording.

The major evening event of the day was at the King's Theatre for Tennessee Williams' play *The Glass Menagerie*, which was new to us. Although with some comedic moments this is a sombre play, with the son of a domineering Southern would-be belle mother trying to escape her tentacles, and his pathologically shy and introverted sister forced to engage with an extrovert "gentleman caller". Moments of optimism in the story faded as the lights finally went down. A terrific and memorable performance.



### Saturday 13 August

Back to the St Andrew's church for another piano recital, this time Chopin, with a wide selection of short pieces of ferocious difficulty played by William Alexander. He is another academic, but without Bryden's presentation skill.

In the early afternoon we were at the Assembly Theatre in George Square for *Out of the Blue*, a physically vigorous *a capella* performance by a group of Oxford University undergraduates. This was

full of fun and greatly enjoyable, although the smoke effect throughout did nothing for the asthma that had been troubling me since the onset of my cold.

We returned to Brian's home for his penne pasta and salad before returning to the city and the Usher Hall. This was for Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, presented by Sir John Eliot Gardner and his English Baroque Soloists and Monteverdi Choir, with James Gilchrist as the Evangelist. What an experience! We were high up in the gods, to a vertiginous extent, but this did nothing to spoil our enjoyment of this monumental piece of sacred music.

Home to a wee dram from Brian's impressive store of fine whiskies and wines.

### Sunday 14 August

In the morning we took a most enjoyable little trip out to the west of Edinburgh and to the southern shore of the Firth of Forth. Our visit was to the pretty village of Queensferry, and from the little harbour to the east we could see the magnificent



old Forth railway bridge, and to the west the existing road bridge and also the support towers for the new road bridge, still under construction. In the afternoon, into town again for an afternoon's performance of Lionel Bart's musical, *Oliver*, at The Famous Spiegeltent in St Andrew's Square. A large cast, featuring a gang of engaging and very enthusiastic children, filled the stage for an energetic and, again, highly enjoyable performance.

For the evening's entertainment, we walked to the VinCaffe for an Italian meal with gentle jazz by Philip Contini and his Be Happy Band. After dinner

Contini and his band musically reminisced over the life, times and songs of Dean Martin, one of the most popular entertainers of all time.

### Monday 15 August

A new week, and off to the Pleasance Courtyard in the afternoon for a selection of the timeless songs of Flanders and Swann, played and sung by a couple who have worked closely with the families of the original couple to represent their memorable work in a faithful manner. Something of a singalong at times!

Later the same afternoon we were still at the Pleasance, but at a different site within the venue, for the Reduced Theatre Company and their production of *William Shakespeare's Long Lost First Play (abridged)*. The company – three Californians – reduce serious works into short, sharp comedies. The story here is that Shakespeare's first work has been found near the burial place of Richard III, and is a massive document that contains the basis of all the plays that

came later. So, the three men troll rapidly through the Bard's entire work, changing clothes and voices as rapidly as what may loosely be described as the "plot". A highly intelligent and often very funny performance.



After another Italian meal – these restaurants are clearly popular in this city – we walked to a quieter performance, of poetry and monologues by their author, the prominent Scottish poet Liz Lochhead, and accompanied by a contemplative saxophone. After a long day, we all had some difficult staying awake at times!

### Tuesday 16 August

In the late morning we were in to St Cuthbert's church, lying the shadow of the Castle, for a concert of two of

the Bach cello suites played by the German-born London-based cellist Anne Isabel Meyer. These, again, appeared to be pieces of outstanding difficulty, but played with great aplomb in this spare, Lutheran-looking little church.

The weather had been improving generally, and this day was the best in the whole trip so far – a comment we heard last evening was that "the heat wave will get even worse tomorrow!" We, with Libby and Katie, enjoyed a light lunch lying on the smooth green grass of the parklands between the Castle and Princes Street. Lots of other folk were doing the same.



The evening's show, *Measure for Measure*, from Britain's Cheek by Jowl and Moscow's Pushkin Theatre, was for us preceded by an exceptionally good Italian meal (guided again, by Brian's knowledge of wine) in an adjoining restaurant.

The performance was a dramatic presentation of Shakespeare's controversial play, cut down to just over an hour and a half. It was packed with vivid lighting effects and vigorous movement – and started with something of a surprise. As the dialogue began, it was hard to hear the words. Then, it became apparent that it was spoken in Russian! But the side-titles and the good acting soon made the story easy to follow, although we were glad we had read a synopsis on the internet before coming. In this story of corruption, the power of the state over the individual and sexual harassment, we were intrigued by the links with today's Russia, including the extraordinary physical likeness of Angelo, the baddie, to Vladimir Putin. Another character was likened to Gorbachev.



### Wednesday 17 August

With our hosts' generous agreement, we had arranged to stay a day longer than originally planned because I had picked up a leaflet identifying a Fringe event in the evening that we'd not known about. Meanwhile, in this otherwise un-booked morning, Libby took Katie and us out to the Jubilee Art Park, a large estate given over to installations of modern art scattered throughout it.

Parts of the grounds had been sculptured into grassy pyramids, and in the fields there were flocks of alpacas. A rather weird place, we thought, but we enjoyed a walk through it in the sun.

The performance I had noted was of the Bach Mass in B Minor, a major favourite, and played only on this evening at the Canongate Kirk, overlooked by the Castle on its cliffs above. We and Katie got a lift there early, as Brian was going off to play bridge, so being among the first people admitted we scored seats near the front. This wonderful performance was a most fitting climax to an extraordinary week. It is played every year for a single day at the Festival by the (Scottish) Ludus Baroque Chamber Orchestra and Choir, all professional musicians with impressive CVs.

This was a classic small-group performance of the mass, with stunning singing and musicianship, and with singers and players joyfully smiling with pleasure in their singing. Quite a contrast with Eliot Gardner's austere choir in the Passion of a few days ago!

A final wee dram on return, along with watching the Olympics, as usual, with Team GB continuing their march through the medals while Australia weeps.

### Thursday 18 August

Time to move on, with fond farewells all round, after eight days we will long remember. Our hosts were supreme in what they had organised for us, including choices from the 2,700 or so Fringe events, selecting restaurants and providing lovely meals at home, and choosing transport and route walks.

The weather had deteriorated overnight, and under gloomy skies and some misty rain we drove first to a nearby Halfords to get a new house battery (discovered yesterday to be completely flat). There was a huge Tesco in the same retail park, so we did a substantial restock of food and wine.

Today's drive was a reverse re-run of the drive across the Highlands into Edinburgh. The weather conditions gradually lightened as we drove north and west. We aimed to stop early, and investigated several parking places in and around the Trossachs National Park. However, as is customary for such parks, all the possible places had stern warnings about sleeping



overnight, so we finally decided to return to the excellent parking place in Glen Lochy from which we had driven to Edinburgh over a week ago.

There was some quite warm late afternoon sun, and we sat out for about ten minutes before both a dropping temperature and a few midges drove us back into the van.

### Friday 19 August

As forecast, the weather changed overnight, centred on a 970 mb depression to the west, and we awoke to grey, low clouds, a strong wind gusting down the glen. With passing showers, we stayed aboard for a quiet day and catching up with this log.

### Saturday 20 August

Heavy rain overnight and continuing early morning, but slowly clearing - indeed, becoming clear and quite warm as we cut north from Tyndrum and headed



up through Bridge of Orchy and on through the national park to Glen Coe. The clouds lifted from the rounded hillsides embracing the glens, with resulting handsome scenery and good views of the Three Sisters of Glencoe. It was in 1692 that the chief of the Jacobite Clan MacDonald was a bit late in registering his oath of submission to William III. On

their way to do so, and after the MacDonalds had hospitably entertained soldiers led by Robert Campbell for ten days, the Campbell militia fell on them and massacred many. The Jacobite movement finally surrendered after its defeat on the fields of Culloden in 1746.

Through this touristy and busy region there were few suitable places to stop, so we pressed on up the east side of Loch Linnhe to Fort William. We had a look at the West End car park on the side of the sea loch, but although the big area had plenty of room we were put off by the signs forbidding sleeping or staying overnight. We knew of a car park by the Neptune's Staircase set of canal locks, and so there was, and very pleasant too. Checking with motorhoming locals, it seems that the many signs discouraging or staying aboard overnight were not only disregarded but also were of doubtful legality and generally ignored. So we joined half a dozen others for this free stop in a good place, and even sat out in the sun for a while, looking over the canal to Ben Nevis.





We took a walk up to the top of the eight locks and admired the system, which was designed by Thomas Telford. A couple of boats waited for the opening of the adjacent road and railway bridges in the late afternoon before setting off further down the Caledonian Canal. Ben Nevis overlooked it all, looking a bit gloomy, but in mild and pleasant conditions. I asked some workmen why they were working on the railway leading to the open bridge – the heat had expanded the rails, they told me!

**Sunday 21 August**

Quiet night, another overcast morning with only a glimpse of occasional sun. Another walk to the locks, and enjoyed watching a set of four varying vessels make their approach and lift through the first set.

The day's drive (of only about 45 miles) was along the over-hyped "Road to the Isles", from Fort William to Mallaig. The scenery is pleasant, with good views over the sea lochs, but not outstanding. The first stretch was along the north side of Loch Eil through Kinlocheil to Glenfinnan. This historic place was ferociously busy, and we were unable to park anywhere near, so pressed on. The monument there commemorates those who rose to support "bonny" Prince Charles Edward Stuart in the second, and final, Jacobite rebellion of 1745.

The road goes down to the sea at Loch nan Uamh, where Bonnie Prince Charlie first set foot on the Scottish mainland, nine months before his defeat at Culloden. Five months later, he and his officers left Scotland for ever on two French sailing privateers anchored in the loch. The French ships had previously been successfully engaged in battle with English ships.

We looped through the pretty little fishing village and anchorage at Arisaig, saw the white sands on the "beach" of Loch Morar, and thereafter arrived at Mallaig soon after noon. All the day's ferries to the Isle of Skye were booked full, as we expected, and we reserved passage for tomorrow morning at the surprisingly low price of £15. We parked on the other side of the harbour, under signs forbidding overnighting, caravans and "caravanettes", a new category to us.



Walked round the bay to the little town. This was once an active herring fishing port, but with not much evidence of that now. There were some ocean-going trawlers there in good condition, and a few old and rusty ones of the dumpy, short configuration, dead or dying in the boatyard. Low clouds were obscuring the hills, with the faintest mist in the air. Later, skies cleared quite pleasantly.





## Monday 22 August

An early start for a quick drive round the bay to the ferry. Weather changed overnight, naturally, and really clamped down this morning, with rain and very low clouds. Not many vehicles on the small ferry from Mallaig to Armadale on the island of Skye, about half an hour with very poor visibility and constant light rain in a moderate southerly wind.

The first big attraction here is the Armadale castle, its grounds and Museum of the Isles. This was all part of the 20,000-acre Clan Donald estate, now in trust. The focus of the museum is the history of the Highlands and Islands in the context of the Clan Donald and the struggles with invaders since Viking times and the English through the independence rebellions.

The ruins of the 19<sup>th</sup> century castle have been partially reconstructed, and are centred on large attractive gardens with many exotic (and familiar) plants and trees.

In continuing poor conditions we drove up to the second biggest settlement in Skye, Broadford. We stopped at a large fuel station with adjoined (good) Co-op store, bought some essentials and stayed for lunch. Some sun breaking through by 1:00 pm.

Tried an adjacent parking place for a while in the afternoon, but it was noisy and the environment, in the centre of the town, was busy, so we decided to move on and find a better place in the country. Drove on up the main road and then off through Sligachan and Glen Drynoch. Went as far as Carbost along a busy one-lane road with passing places, and turned round at the Talisker malt whisky distillery – a popular tourist destination. (We later saw a bottle of Talisker single malt at £40, or nearly \$80 Australian!). Back along the road, and in the glen found an excellent off-road lay-by with only a couple of possible stopping places, separated from the road by a heathery bank, giving some privacy and a noise barrier, not that this road was particularly busy.

What we did have was a marvellous view of the Cuillin mountain range, some ever-dark and some splashed with sunlight from time to time. We had also been chasing a good phone signal for a teleconference the next morning, and it was good here.





### Tuesday 23 August

A peaceful night, but awakened by alarm for a 6:00 am AIMSS teleconference. Joined it in bed! Then under overcast and showery skies back to Sligachan and further up the east coast to Portree. The coastal scenery might have been attractive, but it was obscured by mist – as was the Old Man of Storr rock peak and its associated cliff face, part of the craggy Quiraing and Trotternish Ridge, seen behind the town on our approach.

Parked in the long stay parking and walked down to the quite pretty little harbour, with its line-up of multi-coloured terraced houses, now mostly restaurants and shops. Not much evidence of fishing these days, with piles of lobster pots drying on the

dockside, but one small and rusty trawler was lying alongside and departed while we were there.



Further up past some pretty little lochs in the Trotternish peninsula, and after Staffin – a classic crofters' village with cottages scattered over the hillsides – again on to single-lane roads with passing places. Stopped at a viewing place overlooking the sea at the top of the cliff face, looking down at the Kilt Rock waterfall, rushing quite generously as the rain continued on and off. Rushing back to the van as a shower started, Norma tripped and fell nastily, but escaped with some minor lacerations and a sore left wrist.

Not much further along we turned up a lane to a small off-road parking place, primarily for walkers (as these spots mostly are), but with a space in a good position. Levelled up and settled in. We are about as far north as we can drive in Skye.



### Wednesday 24 August

Quiet night in a scenic position overlooking green fields, backed by clifly hillsides. Round the very top of the island we looked back at the ruins of Duntulm Castle, then turned south and visited the Skye Museum of Island Life. This an excellent little museum, consisting of several lightly restored crofters' cottages, a byre, and a ceilidh house. There were lots of old documents on display, along with tools for farming and the

smithy.

There is a monument to Flora MacDonald up here, where she was buried in Kilmuir. In 1746 she helped Bonnie Prince Charlie escape from Benbucula to Skye disguised as her (female) Irish servant. Their little ("bonnie") boat was fired on, but they landed safely and Flora guided Charles to Portree, from where he crossed to the inaccessible island of Raasay. She was arrested and held in the Tower for a year. Poverty forced her family to migrate to Canada, but she returned to Skye where she died in 1790.



Continuing down the west side of the Trotternish peninsula we came down to the little harbour of Uig, protected only by a long pier but which runs a ferry over to Tarbert in the Outer Hebrides. From there we hooked round the southern end of Loch Snizort and drove across to Dunvegan and its eponymous castle.

It is my clear but rather limited memory that during my school years I was invited to stay at Dunvegan castle, the seat of the chiefs of Clan MacLeod since the 11<sup>th</sup> century, during a summer holiday by a friend who was one of the MacLeod

family. It seems probable that he was Patrick, the twin brother of John, who became John MacLeod of MacLeod, the chief of the Clan. As I well remembered, the castle sits on a rocky knoll overlooking Loch Dunvegan, very picturesque, with lots of little islands exposed in the low tide. The castle itself is now a popular tourist destination, still lived in by the current chief, Hugh the son of John. We walked through the rooms that were open, left pretty much untouched, and down through the extensive gardens to the lochside.

We had a look along some of the minor roads in the area for possible places to stay, but with no luck, so set off down back down the road towards Sligachan. Lit by the westering sun there were some lovely views over Loch Bracadale, which is scattered with small islands. Approaching Struan we spotted a small picnic area off the road, where there was a good spot for us. Overlooking us at the top of a steep hill was Dun Beag, one of a series of ancient hill forts that were probably once lookout and signalling bases.



#### Thursday 25 August



A smattering of rain overnight, but dry. In England, yesterday was the hottest day of the year – 12 people have died in UK waters in the last few days! Overcast but dry early morning, clearing for most of the day.

First stop Broadford, back on the east side of the island. The Co-op, which had seemed to be a good one the first time through, turned out not to be so good after all – but nevertheless, we did a stock-up that only just fitted into our tiny fridge. Also filled up with fuel.

We drove back to the mainland over the Skye Bridge, an impressive but uninspiring arch, and stopped at the Eileen Donan castle. This is a lovely building reached by a causeway over to an outcrop into the



loch in what is an inspiring place. It was ruined in 1719 after Spanish Jacobite forces were defeated in the battle of Glen Sheil and was rebuilt between 1912 and 1932.

As expected, it was thronged with tourists, and we did not venture inside, but simply walked around and took photos. A lovely run, then, through Glen Sheil, with the Five Sisters line-up of hills ranged along to our left. Then, through beautiful Glen Garry to Invergarry, and down the east side of Loch Lochy to Spean Bridge and Fort William. In Glen Garry we and several other tourists were entertained by a piper in full dress, selfie time for a few shekels or a purchase of his CD.

We then retraced the route through awesome Glen Coe and the Bridge of Orchy that we had taken going north, but this time we enjoyed the views in the sun, as it (mostly) shone through scattered white clouds. V-shaped Glen Coe is perhaps the most dramatic of them all, with its slopes spilling down to the heath below.

With little prospect of a finding a good stopping place further south, at about 4:00 pm we again – and for the third time – pulled in to the excellent and quiet picnic area off the A82 and west of Tyndrum. Still generally fine, but a few fat white clouds obscuring some hilltops. A good day's touring in much better weather than we have had so far – doubtless to be referred to in Scotland as a heatwave.

### **Friday 26 August**

Damp to start with, but brightened up during the day, basically a transit drive without much sightseeing.

Back on the A82 and down the west side of Loch Lomond, as pretty as ever, and not too much traffic during the early morning. As expected, difficult drive through lots of complicated intersections bypassing Glasgow to the west, and on down to the east coast of the big Firth of Clyde.

At the ferry port of Cairnryan, near Stranraer, we booked passage to Belfast for early the following morning, as other passage times were much more expensive. Investigated some possible places for the night, but all either no good or height-barred, so returned to the ferry terminal car park for the rest of the afternoon and the night.

### **Saturday 27 August**

Noisy in the middle of the night, when a ferry came in, unloaded and loaded again, mostly with trucks; then up at 5:30 am and over to the check-in queue, where we had breakfast. A pleasant Customs lady did request a “wee look inside”, but only looked in through the open rear door and there was no other security clearance.

Ferry left at 7:30 for a very smooth ride across the North Channel of the Irish Sea, as we just sat and read. Very cool wind outside. Relatively few passengers, arrived before 10:00 am.

