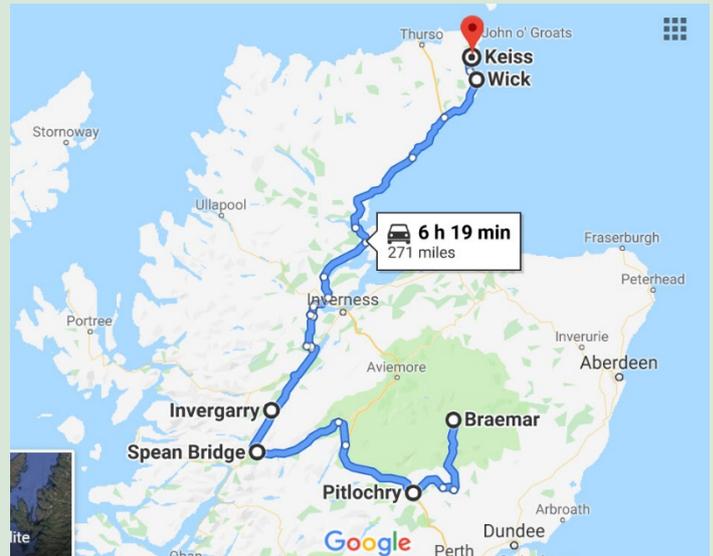


Wooly's Wanderings – Part 2 of 4

Scotland - Day 5 - Braemar to Keiss

Having enjoyed four days in the Cairngorms it was time to trek to our next destination in the far North East of Scotland. Our next destination is Keiss (Scottish Gaelic: Cèis) a fishing village at the northern end of Sinclairs Bay on the east coast of Caithness in the Scottish council area of Highland.

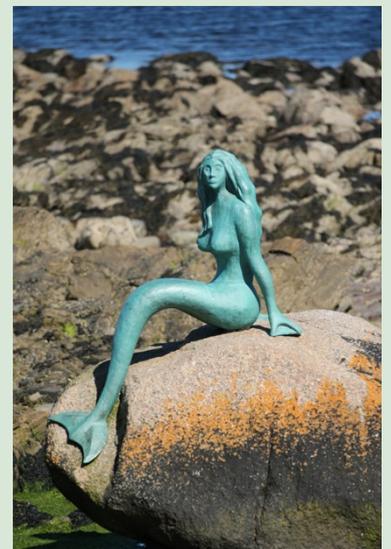
We had decided early on that we would see if we could spot Nessie the legend of Loch Ness. Sadly, that did not occur but we did get to have the best Haddock & Chips that I have ever eaten at the wonderful Invergarry Castle Hotel on Loch Oich just before Loch Ness. We were the only people dining in this splendid room with a beautiful outlook onto Loch Oich. At Drumnadrochit we turned north to Dingwall so we could



bypass Inverness. This country is truly beautiful to drive through but in summer can be extremely busy. This day we were on a mission as it was a long driving day with no time for side trips except one to see the Mermaid of the North at Balintore. I could not drive that far north without taking the ten-mile (16 kilometre) diversion at least to take a photo and have a quick loo break. In the map above it is



located under the trip mileage sign. There was not even time to call into Glenmorangie Distillery just north of Tain. As we had left late from Braemar (10am) it was late in the afternoon when we arrived in Wick which was the last town in the North with a supermarket. Topped up with groceries at a Tesco Superstore plus some wine to wash down with dinner.



Very pleasant 3 bedroom apartment on the second story of a building in the start of the town. Refurbished only 2 years ago so very modern and comfortable. First night I set off the fire alarm when cooking dinner - we later found out that these new sensors required us to close some of the doors as the draft was blowing smoke straight off the stove up the alarm unit – we had no instructions on how to reset the panel

so we had a ½ of drama waiting for the owner to come around and sort it out. I definitely needed a large G&T after that! At 70 GBP per night this was the cheapest and loveliest of all the AirB'n'Bs we stayed at in Scotland.



Day 6 – Keiss, John-O-Groats to Eriboll

Next morning, I was up at 0530 to go exploring whilst Mum & Michael snoozed on. Looked outside to see the Haar rolling in. This sea mist is quite common up here where warm land air blows out over the cold North Sea and creates a thick fog which lingers for hours. It was quite eerie driving through it on my way up to John-O-Groats for the first time. It was cool but not cold that morning as I wandered around what I thought was the most northern part of the UK. Sadly, it is not as that honour belongs to Dunnet Head further along the north coast. On a clear day you can see the Orkney Islands directly north.



I took the obligatory photo of the signpost at John-O-Groats plus checked out the small harbour where the first passenger ferry for the day to Orkney was preparing to leave. Nothing else except the ferry office was open nor were there suitable photography subjects around so I headed back to Keiss for breakfast. I did find an abandoned farmhouse which I had missed in the thick fog on the way up there so stopped and took a few photos plus one of the town on the way back in. The fog lingered until around 10am then we had lovely sunshine to go touring the countryside again.

First stop was the Queen Mother's old estate at the Castle of Mey. I am really surprised that these were not massive places but I was surprised at the crowds. Personally, I do not like being in huge hordes of people but in summer in the UK you have to expect it. The car park was overcrowded so we left and continued on our journey along the coast. We passed a small port that ran a car ferry to Orkney so pulled in on the off chance of taking the car over for the day – sadly they were booked for the next three days. Ever persistent me was determined now to get to Orkney so drove along to a town called Scrabster just past Thurso. We were in luck – two tickets and the car for the early ferry the next day for 188.50 quid (\$337.60) not cheap but I may only pass this place once in my life and I did want to visit the island I had read so much about as a youngster.



Continuing along the rugged north coast with magnificent mountains on my left and steep sea cliffs to my right interspersed with white sand beaches was amazing. Many of the town names were familiar as they are replicated in Australia especially in South Australia.



We had lunch at a pub in a tiny but very beautiful town called Tongue. Guess what I had for lunch!!!! Haddock & Chips – I was becoming a connoisseur of this delightful meal washed down with a pint of shandy. After lunch it was onto Eriboll to see the favourite property of the famous (*or is that infamous?*) Tory minister Alan Clark.



Again, the scenery was breathtaking and my images don't really do it justice as it was at the wrong time of the day.



Mum was getting tired so it was time to head back for sundowners in Keiss. Went into the local pub on our return to see if it was a suitable place for dinner but whilst it was nice and snug for drink (20 people would pack the pub out) decided the beer was nice but would cook at home again.

Day 7 Scrabster to Orkney for the day

Up again at 0530 the next morning, looked out and pea soup so back to sleep, checked again at 0630 still the same. Got up anyway as we had to be at Scrabster by 0830 for the ferry. By the time we got to the ferry the sun had burned through the fog and it was a beautiful day. The seas were calm for the trip across which is always a bonus. Upgrade to the first-class lounge for 7.50 GBP (\$13.40) on the MV Hamnavoe which includes a free breakfast, tea & coffee and beer and snacks on the return trip. It is also a quiet place so no screaming kids – I am getting to be a grumpy old bugger who does like peace and quiet.

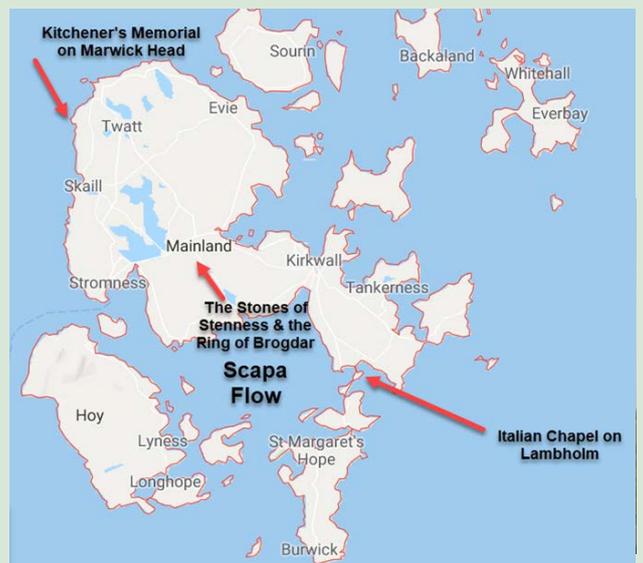


The ferry trip only takes an hour from Scrabster to Stromness and you land on Orkney with only 6 hours before catching the ferry back in the afternoon so it was a bit of a sprint. On the way over you pass the sea stack known as the Old Man of Hoy. There was a crush of people on deck so I opted for a stock image to show you



what it looks like. On the list was Kitcheners Memorial (In 1916 the HMS Hampshire sank off Marwick Head in mysterious circumstances. Among those who lost their lives was Lord Kitchener, minister of war at that time. A memorial was erected atop the cliffs in honour of Kitchener and the others who lost their lives aboard the Hampshire.); The Stones of

Brogna & the Standing Stones of Stenness; The Italian Chapel on Lambholm; Scapa Flow & the Churchill Barrages which blocked all the gaps into Scapa Flow so submarines could not sneak in there (*it is also where the German Navy scuttled 74 ships in 1919 so history abounds here as it was also home of the Royal Navy's Home Fleet*). We managed to do everything we had on our list but unfortunately could not get right up on top of Marwick Head as it was three mile hike and we did not have the time. Lunch was in a pub at Kirkwall – guess what I had? On a scale of 1 to 10 the Haddock & Chips was 7 out of 10 (*Invergarry was a 10 and Tongue was a 9*). Not being a very religious person, I was moved by the construction of the chapel in an old Quonset hut on Lambholm and the paintings on the ceiling and walls are truly beautiful and well preserved. All this done by Italian POWs captured in the North African desert who were interned in the Orkneys and building the Churchill Barrages. On our return late in the afternoon I found a paddock full of highland cows who were a bit shy and wandered to the back of paddock but still managed a few shots. Back on the ferry it was time to relax in the Magnus lounge and enjoy a couple of beers and a snack on the trip back to Scrabster.

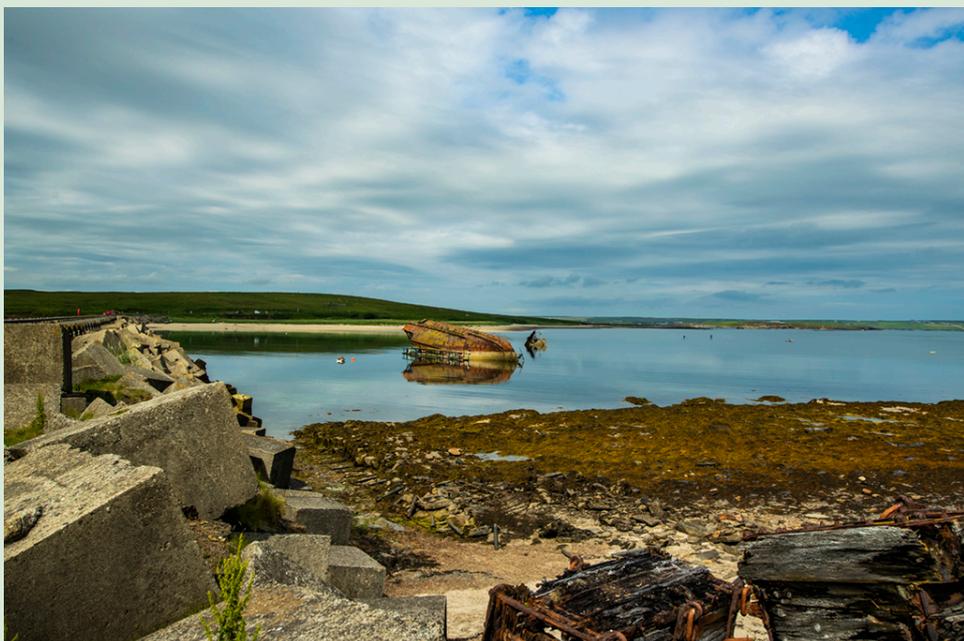


I have many more shots of the chapel and of Scapa Flow which I will post up at some stage as the history of this place really does fascinate me.

Military history has always fascinated me since I was quite young and it has now motivated myself and brother Michael to start planning on a WWI battleground visit to Northern France and Belgium in September next year.



These last three shots are part of Scapa Flow.



And now for what you have all been asking for – Highlan Coos!!! It is like the old cartoons of English Sheepdogs – I wonder what they are thinking as the expression stays the same.







Finally, back at our digs in Keiss around 6.30pm. It was Mum's 85th Birthday so Michael & I whipped up a celebratory dinner for her but not before I had to do an emergency dash for dessert back to the Tesco Superstore at Wick as mum wished for some trifle. Number one son to the rescue and off on the 16 mile return journey not once but twice as we were missing more ingredients. We had a splendid meal to celebrate Mum's 85th birthday with her two sons.

Sadly, this was our last night in Keiss and whilst I wouldn't miss the lugging of heavy suitcases up two flights of stairs and down again, I would miss this quaint little fishing village.

Next stop is to be Dornie on the west coast of Scotland in Part 3 of my Scottish wanderings.