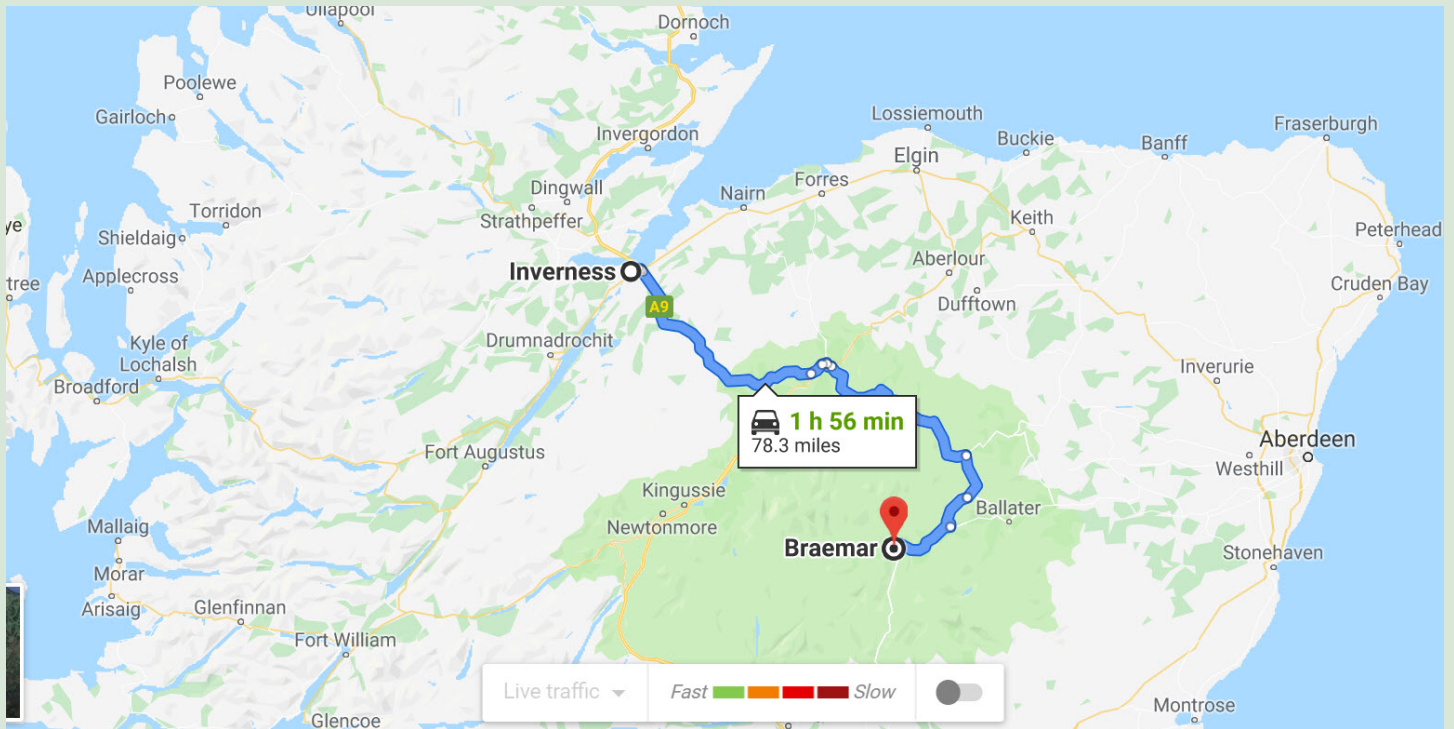


Wooly's Wanderings - A Whirlwind Tour of Scotland – 2019

David G Woolcock 9th July 2019



Now that I am back in London, I finally have the chance to relax at Mum's flat in Hampstead and collect my thoughts on what was a lovely two-week holiday in Scotland. Ostensibly this was to celebrate my 65th & my mother's 85th birthdays. It was the first real holiday for Mum with her two sons since we were children so it was special.

Day 1: London Euston Station to Inverness

It has been a long time since I have travelled on an overnight sleeper train to anywhere. The last time was Sydney to Tamworth back in the '70s. All very exciting when you look at the Caledonian Sleeper service on their website.

"Go First Class and enjoy the Caledonian Sleeper at its best. Drop your suitcase in your cosy one-person cabin, then head to the lounge car for a nightcap and menu full of the finest Scottish produce. Wake refreshed to breakfast in bed or in the lounge."



But what we actually got was the old train with very narrow cot beds, no lounge car and no dining car. Dinner consisted of sandwiches from the economy rail car and a couple of glasses of red in paper cups supplied by brother Michael. Not impressed especially considering we had been charged at the new train rates – more than 220 quid each (\$400 AUD).



Arrived at Inverness at 07:30 to a raw, wet and windy day. Finally managed to find a large cab to take us and our luggage around to the car hire place. Nice surprise to find a relatively new Mercedes-Benz GL350 turbo diesel SUV was to be our transport for the next two weeks. Mother was still fuming about the rail journey and will seek restitution for the difference in fares when we return to London.



Day 2: Inverness to Braemar in the Cairngorm Mountains

This was my first trip to Scotland and to say the scenery was stunning was an understatement. With only two weeks we had no chance to see everything. Sad to say that I even drove past Culloden (*the famous battlefield*) without looking as my first priority was to purchase a stepping stool for my height challenged mother so that she could get in and out of the SUV which was too tall for her.

We had made an early decision that we would use Air BnB for all our accommodation except for the final night in Edinburgh. So after provisioning up at a Tesco superstore (*imagine a big Coles or Safeway with the booze section included in the shop*) it was off to Braemar in the heart of the Cairngorm Mountains. I will endeavour to create a map of our travels to include as a separate graphic. We passed through a lot of towns with unpronounceable names which are listed on signposts in both Gaelic & English. Finally pulled up in the town of Tomintoul for lunch – the home of Glenlivet whiskey. Lovely lunch of haddock & chips washed down with a pint of shandy – as the designated driver for our trip there would be a minimum of drinking whilst driving.

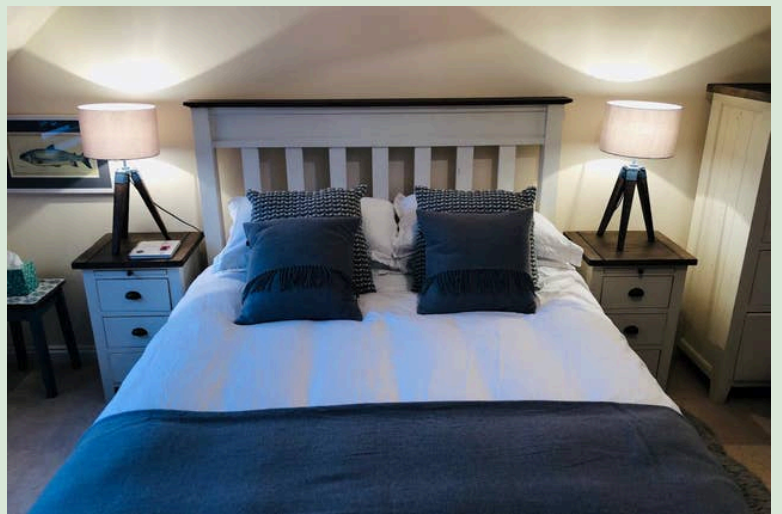


Here is a photo of our digs in Braemar. 3 nights for 3 adults cost 400 quid (\$720 AUD - \$240 each for 3 nights which to me is cheap compared to hotels).

We had a lovely time here but the weather was not as nice as one would have wished for a summer holiday. By this time I had not seen the sun in three days whilst it was sweltering in southern England with temperatures over 30 Deg C. Most days for us were around 14 Deg C.



The house was quite spacious but had some quirks which took us two days to figure out. The house locks needed to have the handle pushed up before you could engage the key locks – very unusual. When we talked to the owner, she said that most people do not lock their doors up there as there is very little crime in the hamlets. The town had some beautiful homes which were quite modern (*ours was only three years old*). There is a very flash pub in town where we had dinner one night. The ambience was beautiful. All of the images so far are stock images but you will see mine soon.



These are images of The Fife Arms in Braemar where we had dinner & drinks. Good thing brother Michael was paying as the wine list was extensive & expensive. This is the dining room and bar. Not often you see Bambi's big brother hanging off the roof!!!!





Now we start on some of my images. There are ruins everywhere in Scotland and Braemar is no different. Braemar Castle is situated near the village of Braemar in Aberdeenshire, Scotland. It is a possession of the chief of Clan Farquharson.



Gairnshiel Bridge is the larger of the two bridges and was constructed in 1751 as part of the Military Road Network, following the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 - 1746. Sadly, this bridge which was designed for horse drawn vehicles has been taking a hiding from large trucks in recent years and has been closed twice in the past year for repairs. I do find it odd that given the repair bill that there are no signs to warn of any traffic difficulty for truck drivers nor are they warned to take alternate routes (*there are alternates which add 24 miles (39 kilometres) to the journey*). I should have mentioned that this far north there is 21 hours of daylight each day and 3 hours of twilight so most days I was up by 5am to do photography as my mother and brother were not interested in stopping every time a scene was spotted. The other thing



I had begun to notice is that whilst Scotland Tourism plugged the lovely scenery there was little or no effort to provide layovers for people to take photographs on the B roads. Many of the roads were single lane and parking in the passing bays can be hazardous to other road users. Good thing was at 5am there was little traffic. Camera settings were 1/8sec f11 ISO100 using a CPL – Canon 1Dx II & Canon 11-24mm f/4 lens – FotoDiox Wonderpana Filter system. By the way I decided to treat myself on retirement and buy some new toys. So new camera body and a wide-angle lens that I had previously been lent by the Canon Collective for a day. As it is so wide it needs a special filter system – and they are huge – circular is 186mm and the rectangular are 200mm on the short side.



The second day in Braemar we travelled to **Balmoral Castle**. This is the Queen's Autumn residence and is only open to the public from may until the end of July. To me it seemed quite small and only the ballroom is open to the public but you can wander the grounds which are well manicured. This day the only camera I had was my iPhone which does not really do it justice. The line-up of Porsches in front of the castle was the Porsche Club of Dusseldorf, Germany were there for a visit. Like all tourists I purchased a Balmoral Jute Bag to carry off my Coarunn Gin & two exquisite gin cups – priorities people!



The third day brother Michael & I went on a VIP tour of **Glenfiddich Distillery** as mother opted to have a day off. On the way you pass through Dufftown – for all those Simpson fans sadly there is no Duff Brewery in this town.



This was a fascinating tour for me as you get to see things a normal visitor would not have access too nor taste some 15yo direct from a Solera – to say the flavour from the 5000-litre vat was extraordinary is an understatement. This is the premium single malt scotch whisky distillery in the world. We also tasted some 21yo which was a delight. I only had a wee taste as I was driving.

This how whisky is distilled (*note the two different size copper stills – one for the wash and one for distillate in the following photo*): “The wash is distilled twice - first in the wash still, to separate the alcohol from the water, yeast and residue called pot ale - the solids of which are also saved for use in animal feeds.

The distillate from the wash still, known as low wines, and containing about 20% alcohol by volume, then goes to the spirit still for the second distillation. The more volatile compounds which distil off first - the foreshots, and the final runnings called feints where more oily compounds are vaporised, are both channelled off to be redistilled when mixed with the low wines in the next batch.

Only the pure centre cut, or heart of the run, which is about 68% alcohol by volume is collected in the spirit receiver. “

Glennfiddich Distillery room



On the way home we came across this lovely bridge over the Spey River. Was wishing I had a fly rod as this was very fishy water. **Craigellachie Bridge** is a cast iron arch bridge across the River Spey at Craigellachie, near to the village of Aberlour in Moray, Scotland. It was designed by the renowned civil engineer Thomas Telford and built from 1812 to 1814.



This was to be last night in Braemar as the next day we had to travel up to a pretty seaside village of Keiss up near John-O-Groats which by the way is not the most northern point in Great Britain as that honour belongs to Dunnet Head further along the coast.

That will come in Part 2: Braemar to Keiss in the next few days.