



**Scotland Trip Notes: The Isle of Skye with Inverness and Edinburgh
July 9-21, 2015**

“Skye is not a location. It's an intoxication.”

Author unknown.



The reason we referred to this as the “Poo Week”

Another adventure. Scotland is not a totally new experience but one I hadn't hiked, and one I hadn't experienced for a few years. In the 70s when we lived in Europe we made quite a few trips into Scotland. In the 90s I worked with the aquaculture business and we had salmon farming on the Isle of Skye and anytime the directors, reporters, analysts, insurance consultants, etc. needed to see the business, I was the one to “herd the cats” so to speak. We might get picked up from a private jet trip across the Atlantic and definitely would get the last leg of the trip via helicopter as there wasn't much other way to get there. (The helicopter would “ski” up and down the Highlands Hills and around the castles and even search for the Loch Ness Monster, much to our delight. Once we set down on the golf course of Gleneagles for a couple days where the boys played golf and I had a falconry lesson with the famous Emma Ford.) Then in the early 2000s being in charge of Investor Relations for still another but related company we would go into Glasgow and Edinburgh to meet with investors. So this was an extension of those trips.

Husband abuse? Leaving on Thursday and only on Tuesday did Tom have a hospital procedure on his heart called cardio-version. He seemed well by the time I was to leave and I really don't think he'd want me to change my life on a just-in-case basis. He was to have some oral surgery on the first Saturday I was gone, but the cardiologist put a kibosh on that – no surgery that requires cutting out the blood thinner since potential of stroke after Cardio-Version is high for about a month.

With www.CountryWalkers.com. This trip was worthwhile but maybe the least for the money of all dozen or so I've done with this company. Am I getting jaded or just realizing that my domestic hiking company www.ParksPlusHiking.com is such a good deal?

- Hotels were just okay. Even the best one, with the magnificent view like looking out at what seemed like the Grand Tetons, had an odd set up. They were simple and smallish and/or way up a hill and/or in a remote location.
- The transport was unique if not odd and not all that comfortable: It was a yellow van used primarily as a school bus.
- Weather is delightfully cool; it is probably always wet and windy, yet we were ready and all days gave some good sunny weather also. Weather was extremely changeable from hour to hour.
- Wi-Fi and connectivity was tedious and sometimes near non-existent and annoyed me in addition to taking up much time searching for a signal. At the last, one of the bus drivers shared the secret of where to get a signal with the caveat that she had rights to the location first.
- Meals were just okay. I always find them tedious and leave pre-dessert hour which was especially helpful since they went on forever. Foodstuff like lamb and more lamb were special. Tasting of things like “haggis” (sheep innards) were prepared in interesting fashion and something I’ve always liked.
- Drinks were limited to wine at dinners whereas we usually have aperitifs and some after dinner drinks added in. Not to be left out, I bought my own, of course.
- Leaders were very knowledgeable, specialists in their fields, even excitingly so with Brian being an author and subject of BBC documentaries, but both maybe less enthusiastic than we are generally accustomed to. Towards the end of the week they opened up more and we learned more about them.
- Hiking choices were numerous which is good but maybe added to the costs since transport for both choices was needed and thus a 3rd leader/driver. Hiking was extremely varied from flats, coastal, islands, ferries to get there, huge mountains, waterfalls, muddy bogs, abandoned villages with history, etc. Most all the time there was sheep poo to contend with and I just got used to stepping wherever instead of watching out. See itinerary below about the extreme hiking choices.
- The memento gifts at the end were creative and generous: a special local soap, a CD of Scottish songs, a “Haggis” slate coaster, a box of poo chocolates, all in a whiskey tasting nice bag.
- Whisky tastings could be had at every town plus more. The cutest and funniest was this “whisky” memento found on a ferry boat ride: McCondom, tasting of whisky? Who knows!



Trouble at the start

I was to start my adventure in Inverness but had a day less than intended. First the plane out of Newark had to wait for weather, sat on the runway, then suffered a water pump problem, then another weather problem, then returned to the gate, at which time I knew that my connection in Birmingham UK was lost. The agents tried many alternate routes but I didn’t want to risk going into Belfast and changing airports on the quick and 25 miles apart, nor going into London and the same airport change problem too. I’d made an error in accepting a flight with only one connection a day, and the following day was sold out. But I risked it and when the plane went, so did I, not knowing what I’d do when I landed in Birmingham but knew there was a train with 2 connections and 12 hours ride.

But United Airlines really came through: they met me at the deplaning gate in Birmingham, gave me a meal and drink coupon, arranged for a 3 hour taxi ride to Manchester and a later flight into Inverness, getting me into Inverness the same day as planned, only about 10 hours later.

Inverness

This is way, way north and on the water. I hooked up with fellow hiker and friend from Dallas, Sonya, and we did a late dinner before I swept myself away downtown to a whisky tasting and purchase. We booked and did an historical 3-hour walking tour the next morning. While she watched the tennis match, I did another 5-hour bus tour of the area including the upper Loch Ness.

That whiskey tour would be only the first of four.

Nessie? Scotland and what do you think of? The Loch Ness Monster, of course! Years ago I used to make trips with investors, and directors, and reporters up to the Isle of the Skye where we had salmon farming. We would take them via helicopter across the Highlands and almost helicopter-ski up and down the hills. Going by Loch Ness was a necessity but no matter how hard we looked we never saw anything but beautiful hills. Once we landed the helicopter on the notable grounds of Gleneagles for an overnight. There the reporter got in a few rounds of golf and I spent a day with Emma Ford, famous falconer. Here are ten facts plus a picture of the Loch Ness Monster:

www.travelertoday.com/articles/9543/20140420/10-facts-about-the-loch-ness-monster.htm

Don't believe in Nessie? Or other lives?

I've always felt that I knew another life and the house I lived in, on a rocky shore line and with a Celtic influence. I can see the house and it's interior and exterior. I came close to a remembrance of it while in Ireland, and so close as to feel a strong emotion like I do with Celtic music. Here is another similar type of house which we saw on our first hiking day.



The hike(s)

I'll leave the descriptions to the professional ones in the itinerary below. I did two of the easy options, adding miles on for myself, and the other hikes were the supposedly tougher ones. I'm clear that other than side-stepping sheep and cow POO and lots of MUD, there was nothing long or difficult or strenuous in any of the hikes.

Edinburgh – the last stop

There wasn't sufficient time and I'd like to find a way to return to this medieval village with hill after hill, a castle up on the highest, and most friendly people. It's such an easy, short and direct flight from Newark that it warrants another trip. Yet summer or not, a coat was generally needed, whether for rain or wind or cold or all.

I stayed at a sweet little good priced B+B the first night, then moved to the Grand Sheraton downtown for two more nights.

Upset – Something had happened at the last night's dinner and I was very ill all night, spending most of it on the bathroom floor hanging over the toilet, and not any of it sleeping, so come the last day and 5-6 hour drive from the Isle of Skye to Edinburgh, I couldn't think of anything to do but suck it up and GO. I don't ride well anyway so it was a miserable ride coupled with the yellow school-bus not being the best. Upon arrival at the B+B, I crawled into bed, clothes and make-up remaining, and slept for about 12 hours.

It acted like food poisoning but no one else was ill, so there you have it. Good timing? Or bad timing? It worked out. Literally.

Bus tour – I was fine in the morning for departure from the B+B at 7:30am for a 13-hour bus trip of out skirting areas of Edinburgh and the Highlands, to include castles, gardens, another cruise of Loch Ness but the southern section this time, and the dramatic hills on the way. I didn't expect more surprises, but Scotland didn't let me down.

Walking tour – The following morning the hotel suggested a walking tour with a Highlander of famous origins. Stuart showed us a side of Edinburgh that only a local celebrity could. I half expected to see his ancestors in the portrait gallery of the Art Museum. We had a couple meals together and maybe I'll get to meet up with him again. <http://www.edinburghguidedtour.com/>

Another local who loves Edinburgh - <http://intelligenttravel.nationalgeographic.com/2015/02/27/my-city-alexander-mccall-smiths-edinburgh/>

Pictures from my collection – in chronological order



The first hotel, in Inverness, was facing a roaring and colorful river and I was pleased to have upgraded to a corner room with river view. The whisky tasting the first night didn't hurt either, nor the small bottle I purchased.



This church was just down the street from my hotel, with the main street and pedestrian mall as well as some local entertainment.



We showed up for the walking tour and were told that it hadn't happened for a couple years: we had an old guide. But Happy Tours in his kilt took us anyway, and I stayed the afternoon with him too. Here he is, up on top of the hill, at the old castle with an overview. In the afternoon we'd take a boat ride on the upper northern part of Loch Ness to Urquhart Castle. We were told that we either would believe in the Loch Ness Monster or we'd be fed to Nessie.



The boat ride was easy, the whiskey tour easier.



We drove out to an overlook of a fort, a famous old lighthouse, and to watch the dolphins play. There wasn't much of a picture, only fins and tails, but the tourists were picture worthy as were the tourists lining up to take selfies of their 'cows' with horns.

The next day our hiking group would be given a tour of the battlegrounds, painting the picture of Scotland's rough history. Followed by a walk through Inverness and an island full of plantings of dozens of rare trees and a river running on both sides. We ate in a lovely kitchen type restaurant, sampling haggis, and had some of our last decent Wi-Fi of the trip.



Our first hotel of the hike could do no wrong for both the island/seaside location and that they gave us whisky samples in the room. This would be my third whisky sampling. It was here that we realized how extreme the tides ran.



The fog and periodic drizzling was usual, but it would clear at times too. This lovely walk was through farmyards, old mining facilities and railroad trails long since abandoned, and stories to tell. There were numerous types of sheep but their poo was all the same – everywhere! After our walk, waiting for the rest of the group, I walked up this cliff walk and thought of Cliffs of Mohr and turned around at the farmhouse.



If the group looks none too happy, it was probably because they were waiting for the drinks which wouldn't come until dinner. I learned to bring my own in order to suffer through the pre-dinner meetings. We took a car ferry over to Rassay Island and were none too warm as you can tell. Here is Sonya and Kim, my hiking companions met first in the Amalfi hike and then a few more.



The Island is magical so no wonder it has a resort on it. And who would think about Thistle being lovely as it is in purple bloom. It is the state flower. We hiked past ruins, from one side of the sea to another, through forests, down memorial pathways in honor of those moved out of their homes, and finally to a luncheon at the historical resort.



No playing on Sunday! Nicely quaint. Uniquely quaint.



We were given a tour of the resort, the library, and a series of suites, before going on to our next hotel destination in our little yellow school bus. This next location was like being surrounded by the Grand Tetons. We had been warned that the hotel was simple and it was best known for the convenience and the gorgeous surroundings. I would have liked it had I not hated the hunt and seek of Wi-Fi so I could be in touch with Tom.



Yep, that's it. That's all there was to my room and tiny bathroom. Yet the flash heater that required turning on a switch and then pressing a few buttons and dialing in a temperature worked very well. When we lived in Belgium in the 70s, we learned that flash heaters went from hot to cold and back again in seconds. Not so this one. You can see the contraption in the shower.



This was a more moderate hike with change of scenery throughout the morning and some hands and feet required at times. It was through bogs and mud and into the fairyland waterfalls and pools before getting to the coastline and finding a lovely little Pub with seafood selections. The day was capped off with a whisky tour – my fourth if I was still up to counting.



The seaside Pub with seafood. We would go to the “coral beach” the next day, find cows on the beach and climb the hill to look down at the not-really-coral.



Cows in the morning and the oldest continuously inhabited castle known in the afternoon. We had a guided tour, a historical video, and walk through the noted gardens before heading off to the next hotel and still some more unique and surprising landscape. Another “Tetons” in the view and then out our hotel window.



The view from this hotel was spectacular. We were up high on a hill looking down at the largest town in the Isle of Skye. The room was the best, lovely, and well appointed, but with some oddities such as the bathroom counter was so large and deep as to have trouble seeing in the mirror. But it was a welcome relief to have better Wi Fi.



This is the view from my hotel room and it was ever changing. I would later walk the town while others shopped and go out onto this point, and up into the hills.



I don't know why a dozen or so pictures were green tinted. Everything was green but not this green. The hike was a little bit perilous with some careful stepping needed and trekking poles when the wind picked up. It was worth it and still not considered strenuous in my book.



Along the idea of Bryce Canyon, the winds had swept the land away and many huge hoodoos were remaining with some called names like 'the castle.'



Fencing for cattle created some need for climbing over barriers. We had Brian to help before we finished on a roadway and found our way into this castle/pub and the old home of Flora MacDonald. I should find Flora's story for you . . . She is worthy of the bios written on her. She saved Bonnie Prince Charles by dressing him in her maid's clothing and sneaking him out of the country.



Lovely old castle pub on the water where we sat at the Pub (a little too long) and I took myself on a couple tours: one through the hotel with the help of a maid, and the other down by the water, looking back at the castle, and to the 1745 cottage of Flora MacDonald.



While some went shopping, I went walking. It was in this pink building that our leaders stayed. Not sure why unless our hotel was pricey or sold out. Boats and water everywhere. But it would be a tough last night for me, and when I got into Edinburgh and the B+B, the room seen in this last picture was a sight well needed and I fell into bed for about 12 hours.



It was a B+B well worth staying and a good price, yet I had a better (employee) price at the downtown Grand Sheraton for the next two nights. The first picture is the view of a castle out my window, then the front door of the townhouse looking street, and the lovely dark wood interiors. They offered breakfast and afternoon snacks. I would learn that my 2nd day's walking tour guide, Stuart, grew up right down the street where his uncle maintained a townhome. .



If I thought the Isle of Skye was full of surprises, well, so was the day long Highland's bus tour. Huge mountains, streams, serious landscape, and of course all as green as could be.



Stuart from the old line of Scotsmen and famous relatives knew his town for an excellent walking tour, and where to stop for coffee, and where to have lunch. The inner historical courtyards I'd have never found on my own.



The famous streets, the art museum full of surprisingly loads of old masters, lunch underneath their huge carousel and then a walk through Princes Garden, alongside the Princes Street where in the 70s we would come to shop but where now has chain stores.





I would return in the early evening after a bus ride tour on a hop-on/hop-off ride in the rain to see inside White Hart Inn, the oldest pub, and the Last Drop where prisoners got their last wish drink.

Go again? I do hope so! It's easy to get there, it's a delightfully easy city to navigate, and it's full of history, surprises and museums I'd like to see or spend more time in. And that's **NO PUFFIN**.

Traveling alone? - Some folks sound surprised at my traveling alone. Here is a good explanation of the advantages.

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/advice/2015/07/20/women-traveling-alone/30299859/?csp=travel>

The Benefits of Spending Time Alone, According to Science | TIME

<http://time.com/3973326/spending-time-alone/>



Itinerary

Thu Jul 9

7:00 pm Depart Newark EWR via UA#27 – of course this didn't happen as planned and I got into Birmingham too late for connection; United sent me by taxi to Manchester and I arrived to Inverness in the evening.

Fri Jul 10

7:10am Arrive Birmingham, England BHX for plane change

10:50am Depart Birmingham BHX via BE#831

12:25pm Arrive Inverness INV

From Airport is about 7 miles to Glenmoriston. A taxi is about 26 GBPs.

Hotel Glenmoriston Town House Hotel – 2 nights
20 Ness Bank, Inverness IV2 4SF, Scotland Tele: 011 44 1463 223777
Email reception@glenmoristontownhouse.com

www.glenmoristontownhouse.com - *This famed Inverness hotel is set in a tree-lined river bank terrace in the city centre and only 20 minutes from the Loch Ness, The Glenmoriston Town House Inverness is a luxury boutique hotel with that little bit more. One of the most respected of Inverness's hotels has an enviable reputation for service and style, with 30 stunning bedrooms, brasserie, cocktail and whisky bar and fine dining restaurant.*

www.CountryWalkers.com - **Overview of hike:** Unparalleled scenery, incredible walks, local folklore, and history come together effortlessly in the Highlands and Western Islands. Your adventure begins in Inverness, "capital of the Highlands," with a tour of the Culloden Battlefields, scene of the last Jacobite Rebellion. The Isle of Skye, buffering Scotland's northwest from the Atlantic, contrasts rocky shoreline and plunging cliffs with soft white-sand beaches and timeless villages in placid bays. Walks reveal the rugged interior and, rising to headlands, distant views of islands and mainland, shimmering water contrasting with verdant pasture. Scotland's history comes alive along the way, in stories and sights, castles and country-house hotels. This is a place where time means nothing and beneath every footprint lays millions of years of history. Accommodations are the epitome of comfort and coziness, perfected in plush rooms, fireside cubbies, and in Skye restaurants, dining on quality Scottish fare—salmon, beef, and fine malts.

Sat Jul 11

Book? Loch Ness Cruise at www.jacobite.co.uk - For the finest way to see Loch Ness, nothing compares to Jacobite 5 star cruises. Whichever season you choose to visit, a cruise on Loch Ness is a superb way to experience the magnificence of the loch and its stunning attractions, such as the ancient ruins of Urquhart Castle. Our boats sail close to the imposing battlements of Urquhart castle ruins. Jacobite Cruises can be accessed directly by bus from waiting areas very close to the Hotel. The nearest pick up point is outside of the Law Courts on Ness Bank about 10 minute walk from the Hotel.

Alternately take walking tour or a hop on hop off tour bus of sites.

Sun Jul 12

9:00am Tour Meeting Points at Glenmoriston Town House Hotel (lobby)
20 Ness Bank Inverness IV2 4SF, Scotland Tel 011 44 1463 223777

9:30am Culloden House (lobby), Inverness, Scotland, Inverness IV2 7BZ, Scotland Tel 011 44 1463 790461 (remote)

Sun Jul 12 - DAY 1

Tour of Culloden Battlefields; 1 mile, easy. Inverness riverside walk; 2.5 miles, easy. Transfer to the Isle of Skye 2.5 hours.

You meet your guides and the rest of your fellow travel companions and begin the day by walking the nearby Culloden Battlefields. In April 1746, this site saw the last pitched battle on British soil, when the British Army decimated Bonnie Prince Charlie's small force in a brief battle that had a lasting effect on Scottish, British, and European history. The morning concludes with a pleasant, easy walk along the banks of the River Ness to the charming Ness Islands, a series of small, wooded islands surrounded by the surging river.

After lunch in town, your drive to the Isle of Skye begins along the shore of Loch Ness, Scotland's most famous loch and, at 23 miles, one of the longest. After passing the remains of Urquhart Castle, your route heads west through Glen Shiel, taking in some of the most stunning scenery in the Scottish Highlands. Shortly before reaching the Isle of Skye, you make a brief stop at the restored 13th-century Eilean Donan castle, one of Scotland's iconic landmarks. You cross the Skye Bridge and from here it is a short drive to today's final destination: the charming Eilean Iarmain Hotel, located on tranquil Isle Ornsay on the Sound of Sleat.

Hotel Eilean Iarmain, Sleat – 1st of 2 nights
Isle of Skye Tel 011 44 1470 833 332 Email hotel@eileaniarmain.co.uk
www.Eileaniarmain.co.uk

This charming hotel, with spectacular views overlooking the Sound of Sleat on the Isle of Skye, has comfortable rooms with traditional fabrics and furnishings, and in its public spaces, traditional Highland décor featuring fireplaces and tartan fabrics. Fine cuisine is served by candlelight in the wood-paneled dining room and the on-site bar offers a wide selection of whiskies, local ales, and traditional Scottish music.

Mon Jul 13 - DAY 2

The Cleared Coast: Boreraig and Suisnish; 7.5 miles, moderate, or the Marble Line and Cill Chriosd, 4 miles, easy

You begin the day with an award-winning breakfast—a wide selection of fresh fruits, baked goods, cooked items, and fresh yogurts. Today's longer walk is one of the finest on the island, with magnificent views of Skye's rugged interior and coast, mountains in the distance, and glistening water in the foreground. It begins at the ruined 16th-century church of Cill Chriosd near Broadford and initially climbs gently to the route of a narrow-gauge railway line that ran between Broadford pier and the Kilchrist marble quarries. Skye marble was highly prized, being used in Iona Abbey and Hamilton Palace, and this series of quarries had been worked for at least a century when they closed in 1912. Eventually the track becomes a path and begins to descend coastward to the abandoned village of Boreraig, set in one of the most beautiful locations on the island. In 1853, all the residents were brutally evicted and their homes burned to make way for the more-profitable sheep, and all that remains today are lichen-covered ruins surrounded by lush green pasture. From Boreraig, your route hugs the coastline, passing below several fine waterfalls, and there is a chance that you may see seals and otters. Care is needed in a few places where the path has been destroyed by the decaying cliffs. A brief climb brings you to your picnic spot on a high promontory, and soon afterwards you come upon the ruins of the village of Suisnish, which suffered a similar fate to that of Boreraig. The final part of our walk follows a stony track down to the beach at Camas Malag, affording superb views of the southern end of the Cuillin, Bla Bheinn and the Broadford Red Hills.

Alternatively, today's shorter option begins just north of Broadford. The first part of the walk follows a pleasant lane past the farms of Old Corry and the ruins of Coirechatachan (the Corrie of the Cat Lairs). The house belonged to the Chief of the Makinnons of Strath, and the famous literary friends James Boswell and Samuel Johnson stayed here as the chief's guests during their tour of the Hebrides in 1773. The path now crosses the Broadford River then climbs gently up past a knoll known as An Sidhean (the Fairy Hill). These are the remains of a chambered cairn—the communal burial places of the first Neolithic settlers who farmed the fertile coastal areas of Skye. After crossing the road, you join the Marble Line, the bed of the narrow-gauge railway. The route leads past the lower quarry to the higher quarry, where the circular remains of a winding wheel used to pull wagons up the steep incline can be seen. From here, we turn down toward the valley, with outstanding views of Blaven, one of the Cuillin peaks. This section of the walk ends with a visit to the ruined 16th-century church of Cill Chriosd. You can now either opt for the short ride back to the hotel and a chance to relax, or transfer down to the beach at Camas Malag, where you can enjoy a pleasant walk up the track towards Suisnish to meet up with the remainder of the group.

Hotel Eilean Iarmain, Sleat – 2nd of 2 nights

Tue Jul 14 - DAY 3

Ferry to Isle of Raasay. Churchton Bay to Inverarish via the Emigrants Trail; 3-5 miles, easy

After breakfast you depart Eilean Iarmain, headed for the day's destination—the scenic Isle of Raasay, an island of the Inner Hebrides, lying in deep channels between the Isle of Skye and the Scottish mainland. The name Raasay is from the Norse for “red deer,” and its stark beauty and independent culture were portrayed in the 2006 novel *Calum's Road* about a resolute crofter (farmer) in the island's north.

The short ferry ride from Skye brings you into Churchton Bay, where you begin today's walk, closely observed by two huge, eroded stone sculptures of mermaids on the hillock just above the pier. A delightful path leads round Raasay Harbor and through a thick stand of rhododendrons to emerge above the beautiful North Bay, sandy at low tide, and with broad views towards Skye's Trotternish coastline. A grassy path hugs the coast between beach and forest and then rises to cross a quiet lane and to climb gently on a wide grassy path through a lovely pine wood. Soon you come to a gigantic stone wall; the wall of the old orchard of Raasay House, though the fruit trees are long since gone. A little further is Loch a Mhuillinn and a choice of routes. The shorter route leads directly to your lunchtime destination at Raasay House, while the longer versions take you via a section of the so-called “Burma Road” and the Emigrants Trail on the outskirts of the village of Inverarish.

Many people from Raasay, cleared from their homes by landlords in the 19th century, set off for new lives across the oceans. The delightful short Emigrants Trail takes you to a series of plinths that chart the travels of these pioneering Ratharsairich (Raasay people).

Lunch is waiting for you at Raasay House, which is a completely refurbished and renovated historic clan mansion house, once the clan seat of the MacLeods of Raasay. Boswell and Johnson visited Raasay House in the 1770s and wrote, “We found nothing but civility, elegance, and plenty.” After your plentiful lunch you stroll down to the pier to take the mid-afternoon ferry back to the mainland and settle into your home for the next two nights, the Sligachan Hotel, set in truly magnificent scenery and popular with walkers and lovers of wild Highland scenery for over 180 years.

Hotel Sligachan Hotel, Sligachan – 1st of 2 nights
Isle of Skye Tel 011 44 1478 650 204 Email reservations@sligachan.co.uk
www.Sligachan.co.uk

Originally built as an inn in the 1830s, the Sligachan Hotel now has a great blend of modern comforts and friendly informality. Please note that the rooms in this hotel are simpler than those of the other hotels on this tour; however, it is in a fantastic location, is locally owned, and lends an authenticity to your whole walking experience.

Wed Jul 15 - DAY 4

Coire na Creiche and the Fairy Pools; 2-5 miles, mainly moderate, or Glen Brittle and Eas Mor Waterfall; 4 miles moderate with elevation gain/loss of approx. 1,000 ft., or Talisker Bay and the Fiskavaig Peninsula; 1.5 miles easy or 4.5 miles easy to moderate

The Fairy Pools is a delightful walk set against the backdrop of the rugged Cuillin Mountains. From Glen Brittle, you initially descend towards the crystalline Allt Coir a Mhadaidh stream and then climb gently towards Coire na Creiche, in 1601 the site of the last clan battle fought on the island, between the MacDonalads and the MacLeods. The trail runs alongside the Fairy Pools—a series of translucent aquamarine pools linked by small waterfalls and rapids, tempting for a dip on a hot day and enchanting whatever the weather. Straight ahead are views of the impressive pinnacle of Sgurr an Fheadain, appreciated by serious mountain climbers since the 19th century. Here you may be lucky enough to sight a golden eagle soaring over the hilltops and valleys. At any point you can retrace your steps back down along the pools, or you can continue further to traverse the lower slopes of Bruach na Frithe and return to the starting point on a higher trail.

Alternatively, you may prefer a more challenging walk. This begins from the beach at the end of Glen Brittle and climbs steadily up towards Coire Lagan on the westerly flank of the Black Cuillin. As height is gained, tremendous views open up of the Isle of Rhum and, later, Eigg. After an elevation gain of approximately 1,000 feet, you reach a large cairn where you pause to enjoy the tranquility of the location and to gaze at the awesome rock face of the Cuillins. You then follow the well-constructed path which descends gently past Loch an Fhir-Bhallaich toward the final highlight of the walk: Eas Mor Waterfall, where crystal-clear water from the high Black Cuillins falls uninterrupted for 200 feet into a chasm below. The path continues descending to emerge on the Glen Brittle road a short distance from the starting point.

The morning's gentler alternative takes you past stately Talisker House, which so impressed the diarist Boswell during his stay there in 1773. You then proceed to the wide sweep of Talisker Bay, spectacularly sandwiched between impressive high cliffs at the foot of Glen Oraid and with a huge sea stack and waterfalls adding to the magnificent scene. Retracing your steps back to the vehicle you may opt to continue your walk on a pleasant upland track, which climbs gently from Talisker Farm over the Fiskavaig peninsula to the crofting settlement of Fiskavaig near Carbost. (The name Fiskavaig originally comes from the Norse, meaning "fish bay.") Lunch today is at the Old Inn in nearby Carbost. The remainder of the afternoon offers the opportunity to visit the famous Talisker distillery—the only whisky distillery on the island.

Hotel Sligachan Hotel, Sligachan – 2nd of 2 nights

Thu Jul 16 - DAY 5

Ramasaig, the Hoe and Waterstein Cliffs; 6 miles, mainly moderate; or Coral Beaches and Two Churches; 5 miles mainly easy. Afternoon visit to Dunvegan Castle.

Today, after a wholesome Scottish breakfast, you visit the most westerly part of the island. The longer walk takes you to the imposing high cliffs of Waterstein Head and offers unsurpassed coastal views. Beginning from the isolated farmstead of Ramasaig, your route follows the old cart track heading south towards Lorgill Bay. Below you in the sheltered and fertile valley lie heaps of grass and moss-covered stones, the remains of the homes of the crofters evicted in 1830 and sent to Nova Scotia on

board the ship Midlothian. You then traverse open terrain to reach a spectacularly located promontory high above Hoe Point. This affords magnificent views of the dramatic Duirinish coast and, in the distance, the three impressive sea stacks known as MacLeod's Maidens. The tallest stack – the mother – rises over 200ft out of the sea, accompanied by her two daughters. You parallel the side of The Hoe and then climb gradually to the cliff edge at Gob na Hoe with tremendous views of Waterstein Head and Moonen Bay ahead. From this point the path follows the edge of the cliffs, the home of nesting seabirds, and you are accompanied by their calls as you make your way down to Ramasaig Bay, close to where the Ramasaig Burn drops an impressive 60' into the sea. You return to the walk's start point through the low stone walls of the once thriving crofting settlement.

Alternatively you can enjoy a couple of low level short walks near Dunvegan castle. The first walk is to the spectacular Coral Beaches---one of the most beautiful coastal locations on Skye. The walk affords lovely views across Loch Dunvegan to Borreraig and Dunvegan Head, with the chance of seeing inquisitive seals popping up out of the water. The Coral Beaches are a beautiful sight, appearing almost tropical on a fine day. The 'sand', however, is actually dried, calcified sea weed known as maerl. There are also thousands of tiny, delicate snail shells. Before retracing your steps you can climb a little flat-topped hill known as "Cnoc Mor a Ghrobain" directly behind the beach to enjoy the extensive views.

The second walk, known as the 'Two Churches', begins from the Castle car park. The path climbs to the edge of the woods and then onto the open moor, with views of Macleods Tables, and the distant Cuillin. As you begin to descend you see a prominent Standing Stone on the hill to the right. Although the height and shape of a prehistoric monument, the stone was erected on midsummer's day 2000 by the local villagers, using only hand power and ropes. A brief detour takes you to the ruined St. Mary's Church, dating back to 1694 and burial place of some of the Macleod chiefs, as well as generations of MacCrimmons, hereditary pipers to the Macleods. A short walk along the road brings you to the current parish church built 1823-32. The final part of the walk is through a forestry plantation with some amazing geological formations.

After lunch in the Castle café you have the chance to visit Dunvegan Castle, the oldest continuously inhabited castle in Scotland. It has been the stronghold of the chiefs of the Clan MacLeod for 800 years and is still the home of the present Chief. On display are many clan treasures, the most famous of which is the Fairy Flag, a sacred banner dating back at least 14 centuries, which, according to legend, has miraculous powers. Surrounding the castle are magnificent gardens, originally laid out in the 18th century and consisting of both formal gardens and woodland glades.

Your final accommodation is the luxurious Cuillin Hills Hotel on the outskirts of Portree, the island's capital. Tonight you are on your own for dinner.

Hotel Cuillin Hills Hotel, Portree – 1st of 2 nights
Isle of Skye Tel 011 44 1478 612 003 Email info@cuillinhills-hotel-skye.co.uk
www.Cuillinhills-hotel-skye.co.uk

A 19th-century hunting lodge once belonging to the MacDonald clan, this renovated, elegant hotel is in a stunning location overlooking Portree Bay and the majestic Cuillin Hills. Guest rooms blend classic décor with contemporary comfort, and inviting public spaces include a Victorian-style drawing room with fireplace. Both the fine dining room and more casual brasserie overlook the property's lovely gardens and harbor.

Fri Jul 17 - DAY 6

Flora Macdonald's Grave and Skye Museum of Island Life. Rubha Hunish; 4 miles, easy to moderate with shorter, easier option available. Afternoon walk: Quiraing; 4 miles, moderate; or Caisteal Uisdean; 3 miles, easy

You awaken to magnificent scenery and an ample breakfast then embark on a scenic drive north along the coast of the Trotternish peninsula. In the tiny settlement of Kilmuir, you first visit the grave of the famed 18th-century heroine Flora Macdonald, who assisted Bonnie Prince Charlie in his flight through the Highlands after the Battle of Culloden. Nearby is the Skye Museum of Island Life, a privately owned outdoor museum housed in original traditional thatched cottages. The painstakingly assembled collection of tools and artifacts depicts the simple lives of local crofters in the 19th century and emphasizes the tenacity required in their daily struggle to survive in this inhospitable environment.

You then embark on the morning's walk to the tip of Skye's most northerly point, Rubha Hunish. The walk begins near a red telephone booth, seemingly out of place in this remote area. The ruins of the abandoned village of Erisco soon come into view as you ascend gently northwards onto Meall Tuath, eventually reaching a former coastguard lookout overlooking the Little Minch, an important shipping channel. A volunteer-maintained hut offers shelter from the wind if needed and from this spectacular location the north cliffs plunge down hundreds of feet, with magnificent views across the sea to the mountains on the Isle of Harris. The headland's northernmost tip is the best place on Skye for spotting dolphins, porpoise, and whales.

The trail circles back along the coast with views of the melancholy ruins of 13th-century Duntulm Castle, once the seat of the chiefs of Clan MacDonald of Sleat, and for several centuries an important clan stronghold.

After lunch, you may choose to walk the Quiraing. This is one of the island's finest walks, a journey through an elevated wild landscape of fantastic rock formations, pinnacles, and buttresses. From the starting point, a narrow path traverses a grassy ridge then crosses a rocky gully before ascending a rough path among the scattered rocks. Magnificent views of Kilmaluag Bay open up as you reach the highest point of the walk. Further ahead is a valley of austere rocky shapes, but here you begin your descent on a well-walked trail through the heather-filled valley to the walk's end at Loch Langaig near Flodigarry.

The afternoon's gentler alternative is a low-level coastal walk to Caisteal Uisdean (Hugh's Castle) on the western coast of Trotternish. You drive past the Quiraing outcrop over to the outskirts of Uig, the island's ferry port for the outer isles. The walk begins on the road to Cuidrach, a quiet track through pastoral landscape. You pass a crag which was the site of an Iron Age fort, turning south along the coast. A mile or so further on is Caisteal Uisdean, perched on a low cliff above Loch Snizort. The entrance to the castle was via a ladder to the first floor, so there is only a single window at ground-floor level. The castle dates from the 17th century, built by Hugh MacDonald, a lifelong rival to his uncle, Donald Gorm, the clan chief, who lived at Duntulm Castle. You retrace your steps to the van and return to Portree for the final evening's celebratory dinner in one of the town's restaurants.

Hotel Cuillin Hills Hotel, Portree – 2nd of 2 nights

Sat Jul 18 - DAY 7

After a sumptuous breakfast, you transfer to Edinburgh, which takes approximately six hours. En-route, you stop for lunch at the popular House of Bruar near Pitlochry. You arrive in Edinburgh's West End in the mid- to late afternoon.

4 to 5:00pm Arrival in Edinburgh

Hotel B+B Edinburgh – 1 night
3 Rothesay Terrace, Edinburgh EH3 7RY, Scotland Tele 011 44 1312 255 084
info@bb-edinburgh.com bb-edinburgh.com

Sun Jul 19

? Pick up at B+B with suitcase for day tour, and then dropped at Sheraton at end
7:45am Loch Ness & Highlands day tour – 12 hours
www.graylinescotland.com Tel: +44 (0) 131 555 5558

Highlights:

GLEN COE – stop at Kilmahog for photos and to take in the scenery
RANNOCH MOOR – Drive over the area featured in the James Bond movie, Skyfall
LOCH NESS – Stop at Fort Augustus for optional Loch Ness Cruise
PITLOCHRY – stop for photos, souvenirs and to stretch your legs

Tour Route:

- Stirling-Castle4From Edinburgh, this tour heads past Stirling, catching views of the Castle and The Wallace Monument, and then north into The Highlands.
- Passing the town of Callander and over Rannoch Moor the tour comes to the dark brooding Pass of Glen Coe, where we stop for photographs and to hear the haunting story of the massacre of 1692.
- After crossing Loch Leven at Ballachulish we stop for lunch in the Fort William area, then follow the course of the Caledonian Canal up the Great Glen to Fort Augustus on Loch Ness.
- Loch Ness Boat Cruise Information – optional
- Loch-Laggan-2After Loch Ness we will take in magnificent views of Loch Laggan on return our journey towards Edinburgh.
- Forth Bridge. We should catch a quick view of the magnificent Blair Castle, home of the Dukes of Atholl for over 700 years, before making a stop in picturesque Pitlochry, a delightful Victorian resort town.
- We then head south through the Kingdom of Fife, past Perth and over the Forth Road Bridge alongside the amazing Forth Bridge before arriving back in Edinburgh.

Relaxing music will be played during your comfortable drive back to Edinburgh.

Hotel Sheraton Grand Hotel and Spa Edinburgh – 2 nights
1 Festival Square, Edinburgh, Scotland EH3 9SR, UK Tele 44 131 229 9131
<http://www.sheratonedinburgh.co.uk/>

Tue Jul 21 - Diana

12:05pm Depart Edinburgh EDI via UA#109
2:40pm Arrive Newark EWR

Participants:

Kim Young-Epstein

Departing LAX 10:20am Thu 7/09 via Virgin Atlantic #24 arriving 7/10 4:50pm and staying one night of 7/10 in London (hotel not confirmed), then Kings Cross Railroad Station to Inverness arriving Inverness 8:00pm on 7/11 with Hotel at Glenmoriston.

Departing Tue 7/21 via Virgin Atlantic #24 6:35am to London, departing London via Delta #35 to Los Angeles at 1:00pm arriving LAX 4:45pm

Sonya Bland - not in the CW hotels but nearby on first night

Arrives AA#80 departing (DFW) July 8 at 10:00 PM and arriving LHR July 9 01:15 PM (am?)

Sleeper Train July 9th from London Euston station on Caledonia Sleeper train arrive July 10th in Inverness Hotel July 10 & 11 in Inverness:Glen Mhor Hotel (<http://www.theinvernesshotel.co.uk/>), 8-15 Ness Bank, Inverness IV2 4SG Tele: Hotel on July 18: TBD may go to a hotel near the airport but haven't booked yet. Departing Edinburgh AA/BA#6299 July 19, 2015 08:00 AM, arrive LHR 09:25 AM, connecting to AA#81 at 12:25 PM arriving home DFW at 04:30 PM.

Linda Beaton – Etobicoke, ON Canada
Cynda Herbold – Portland, OR
Elizabeth Hestick – Fairmont, WV
Janet Honecker – Wheeling, WV
Judith Jaffe – Brighton, MA
Karen Long – Louisville, KY
Linda and Larry Matlack – Chevy Chase, MD
Sue and Stephen Nadeau – Gainesville, FL

Guides:

Ruth Hackney – Lakonia, Greece

Raised near Manchester, she has always been a passionate hiker and a history enthusiast. Majored in Oriental Studies at King's College, Cambridge, then taught in India for 2 years, followed by a year studying in Australia on a Rotary Foundation Scholarship. Since 1987 she has lived in southern Greece, initially teaching English to Greek teenagers before she found her perfect vocation guiding our CW Greece tours. For many years she has also guided our tours in Scotland, sharing with our guests her deep affection for the history, landscapes and culture of this unique country.

Brian Wilson – Ross-shire, Scotland

A Scottish Highlands-based kayaker, writer and environmentalist, best known for his adventure travel writing. Educated in Aberdeenshire and Edinburgh University, he graduated with an honors degree in Philosophy. Having worked with many of the major Scottish conservation and environmental organizations, he is now a freelance environmental contractor and trainer specializing in traditional stonework and hatching. Among his greatest pleasures are unspoiled coastlines and good books.

<http://dsphotographic.com/photos/scotland/>