

2011 - SCOTLAND

30 April 2011

A Touch of History & the Start of our Scottish Island Hopping

Scotland has almost as many islands as Greece

BEGINNING OUR SCOTTISH LEG IN EARNEST

When we first started to plan our trip we were unsure if it was better to hire a van for a 3 months block or to break the trip up into smaller legs with different motorhomes/B&B for each leg. We are glad we chose the latter. Its been far easier to plan smaller travel chunks. The 2.5 weeks in southern England was relatively easy as we had a small area to cover. The 7 days in Poland were a no brainer. But last night when we sat down to hammer out a plan for Scotland we immediately realized there was too many areas to cover in the 25 days we had allocated. Heather's top priority was therefore to see as many of Scotland's islands as we could afford and she was also keen to visit some more family ancestral sites south of Glasgow and near the island of Skye.

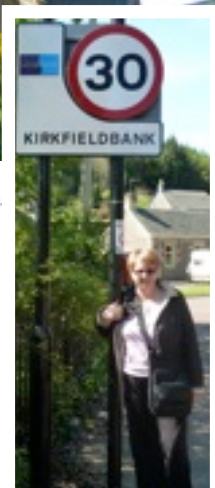
So, with this in mind we woke early and headed west towards the coastline with its rugged islands. We had to travel through Kirkfieldbank, birth place of Robert Lamb, Heather's great great great grandfather (born 1812 and emigrated to Australia in 1862). The village had the busy highway as its main street so we parked and walked around. We found an old unused 3 arch bridge and, after some help from the locals, eventually located the original church which is still in use today but looked very tired and in urgent need of repair.



Kirkfieldbank kirk does not have a cemetery



Kirkfieldbank three arch bridge



Heather holding sign up

We go out of our way to talk to locals. A pleasant "hello" is usually greeted with "you must be Australians". We are soon told about interesting local attractions and places of interest to go and see.





One of the off-shore islands viewed from Arran



Shrubs growing out of the steeple!!

MOVING ON

The area we traveled through, from the Scottish Borders to Lanarkshire and then on to the Argyle coast, was filled with sheep. Most looked like they needed a hair cut and crutching. It was interesting that almost every ewe appeared to have dropped twin lambs. We also came across a number of strange looking long horned Scottish cattle. On first sight we thought they were untidy miniature woolly mammoths. There were numerous signs warning to watch out for red squirrels. Locals told us to run over any grey squirrels because they were invading the area from the south and stripping bark from trees. As we drove west we noted that the general landscape appeared to be more untidy compared to the pristine hills of the Scottish Borders (and Cornwall England).

ISLAND HOPPING


We were advised that ferries are very expensive in Scotland and to save money it was best to buy "island hopping" tickets. These tickets will allow us to take more ferries between islands cheaper plus we have up to 15 days to

use them. In some cases the rugged terrain makes it very difficult to get from A to B so a ferry is the best option. To save time and mileage, we will therefore be taking a ferry quite often in the next couple of weeks.

ARRAN

We arrived at Ardrossan and had to wait nearly 2 hours to board the ferry. The van came into its own because we were able to make ourselves lunch and sit and enjoy the setting, plus use the computer to read any emails and the newspaper while we waited in the line up. There were many cars with occupants having to sit inside because the wind was very strong and cold. It is a long weekend here.

The ferry trip took almost an hour. There were many passengers and cars but only three vans. We then drove down to the southern tip of Arran and found the Seal Point caravan park. We rode our bikes around the village and then settled down to dinner. While I wrote the newsletter, Heather scanned the sea for seals. None eventuated! Tomorrow we see more of the island and then sail to Kintyre.



We have found the Scottish weather unexpectedly pleasant. Fellow travelers tell us that we should expect miserable conditions but, to date, we have had nothing but sunny days with temperatures in the mid teens. Mind you, the wind can be quite chilly. We sojourn into the van to escape the cool wind while the locals rug up and stay outside. Strange!!



Room with a view