

# 2011 - SCOTLAND

20 May 2011

## Balmoral



Heather fulfilled two dreams in one day - she had lunch at Balmoral Castle and then rode a horse around the Balmoral estate. But before I explain how that happened I must tell you what we did in the morning.

We woke late to rain and the usual cold wind and decided not to go to Elgin on the northern coast. Instead we headed south from Alford in the general direction of Perth. The weather improved slightly and the green rolling hills beside the valleys we drove through, looked beautiful. The road we were on had some delightfully named villages - Muir of Fowlis, Mill of Craigievar, Milltown of Learney and Milltown of Campfield. Obviously the torrents of water we passed, provided energy sources for mills in years gone by.

We saw the sign to Craigievar Castle so we decided to take a look. Entry was free to Trust members (like us) but unfortunately the place was closed. With nobody around it made the place so much better for external photography. The castle looked so like a Disneyland or fairytale building - it was pink to start with and had funny little turrets. The building sat tall and stark but looked very serene. We spent an hour walking around enthralled by its charm.

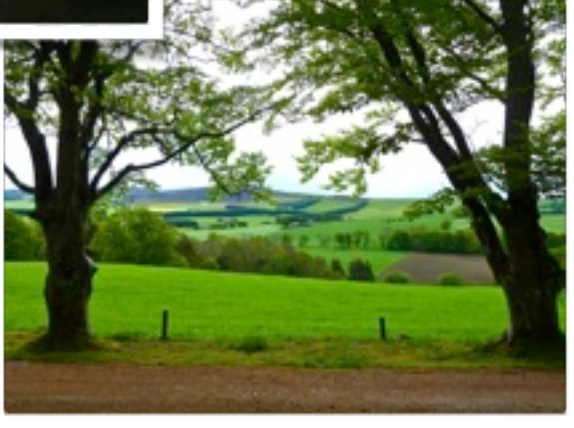
We continued on to Banchory, a typical busy little town with lots of stone buildings, and headed west following the Dee River. The day kept improving so we slowed our pace considerably to enjoy the pretty views around each corner. The Dee is as well known as the Don River for fly fishing so there was a fishermen in view at regular intervals. Evidently fishing licenses are very expensive and the law requires that fish caught must be released. We saw more fishermen than fish that's for sure.



*Huge pine tree trunk*











*Waiting to meet the queen when she finished riding*



*Balmoral is surprisingly small*

**BALMORAL**

After a quick lunch in the van in the Balmoral Castle car park we entered the estate and spent a short time wandering around listening to the audio phone that explained about the various rooms and garden features. Then Heather decided to continue on horse back while I roamed around on foot. Balmoral is owned by the Queen and she spends part of the summer here. While she is away the place is open to the public. There are 1200 people that look after the place which covers 56,000 acres. Heather came back very excited and I promised to rub oil on her tired bum for the next few days. She is worth it.

**BRAEMAR**

So much for wanting to escape the cold weather! The brochure stated that Braemar had just recorded the coldest temperature ever in UK!! We drove through the town but surprisingly the sun kept shining. Further on we re-entered those famous Grampians again. At 3000 feet we passed a ski lift and a number of ski slopes. Brrrrr. The drive was amazing - like driving up the Perisher Valley in Victoria. We passed through Spittal of Glenshee (no joking) and camped at Pitlochry.

