

2011 - SCOTLAND

17 May 2011

We only have 7 days to go but so much still to see in Scotland.

Culloden and Fort George

SCOTLAND'S GALLIPOLI

The 1745 battle of Culloden, where the English routed the Scots (Jacobites), was the last battle fought on British soil. The location of the battle, east of Inverness, has been preserved as a Scottish public monument. It also acts as a cemetery commemorating the over 1800 soldiers who lost their lives here - 1500 were Scottish.

We visited the site where so many died in the short one hour battle. The place was rather sobering as the guide walked us through the field and explained everything. We then retraced our steps to take photos and to re-read some of the information tablets. Before we left we spent more time in the pavilion. Here we learned more about the battle, its aftermath and the political background. Every injured Jacobite soldier was knifed to ensure that they were dead. An untold number of the civilian population in the surrounding area were also killed by the "English army" in the years after the battle. The guide told us that there were a good sprinkling of Scottish soldiers fighting with the English.

The two hours we spent on this site went very quickly. There is something morbid but fascinating about such sombre sites with grave stones and a commemorative cairn. It reminded us of our time at Germany's Bergen Belsen concentration camp two years ago.



Reconstruction of the farmhouse that stood on Culloden battle site



One of many clan burial tablets



Calloden Monument



The cinema in Culloden Battlefield has four different views of the same film synchronised to the same sound track and projected on the four walls around you. It is so realistic it makes you feel like you are in the actual battle itself.



Fort George is immense



Embattled Heather

BRIEF WHISKY STATISTICS

I read today that Scotland has 97 distilleries - more than any other country. The Scots want to make sure that there is enough for everyone. The Scots want us to believe its an excellent use of peat as a medicinal "burning" agent. Foreigners, especially canny Australians, don't believe everything they are told.

FORT GEORGE

With the morning sun on our backs we decided to make haste and not revisit Inverness. The plan was to visit some well known castles and to see Elgin with its famous Geddes family history. But, as usual, you don't get anywhere fast in Scotland. Heather found a brochure which showed a lovely forest bike track on the other side of the inlet. Off we drove, but we spent an hour trying to get from one side of the freeway, to the other. Hopeless, so we gave up. We enjoyed a little village on the sea shore and then reluctantly turned around and headed back over the bridge from whence we had come. We felt very disappointed. Heather gets crotchety when we don't get in a morning ride.

Its amazing how many castles and embattlements we have seen in the last few years - Germany, Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic, England and of course Scotland. Each one is different and each one has something noteworthy to offer. 17th century Fort George was no exception. We only recognised it as a fortification when we noticed a large car park and flags fluttering out front. Fort George has no high turrets to speak of. It sits squat on the land but only when you get inside its ramparts do you realise that this is a formidable place. It bristles with huge cannons and its walls are six meters thick. The fort still houses an army regiment and we saw numerous working soldiers as we walked around. We particularly liked the hand held audio phones which gave us information at certain points. Many of the buildings recreate earlier times and the cannons populating the emplacements were from different periods. The place was very large so by the time we completed our tour we only had time to travel a little further on to find a place to camp.

On the road to Elgin we stopped in a quiet side road beside a river to wild camp for the night.

The water rushing out of the Inverness inlet was extremely wild with the strong current throwing up thrashing water close to the land - very visible from Fort George. Heather was lucky enough to spot a dolphin which regularly frequent the area.





Great balls of fire



Gunpowder room



Dolphin watching



More dolphin watching