

2011 - SCOTLAND

12 May 2011



North Harris

WEATHER

We have generally been very lucky with weather during our past travels. In Scotland it's been rather cold and windy, but as predicted. This weather makes us realise how nice our camper is to live in. We experience island living conditions from the warmth and comfort of our seats. Who would want to be a farmer making a living here? Not us. But, this said, we are not really that inconvenienced because coaxed out of the warm and cosy van we put on our woolies and heavy coats and go walking. The streams are rushing with water after the rain which is a lovely thing to see but these places do not encourage you to go walking far or riding bikes.



We are currently camping in Stornoway, the largest town in the Outer Hebrides. The population



is around 6000 and it has a large fishing port and a ferry terminal. We know the town is "big" because, according to the guide book, it has a bank AND a number of ATMs. We were not able to verify its lively night life because caravanners can't dance and tend to go to bed before 10pm.

The countryside of Uist was like another planet. The closest we have ever seen to this, was in Sweden, where we took a short trip many years ago.



Standing stones at Callanish



Between Dun Carloway walls

We are having a very interesting time -- at least the cold weather is eating up calories!

IRON AGE HOUSE

In 1996 archaeologists excavated an entire iron age village (dating from 800 AD) at the head of a secluded beach on the west coast of Lewis. The location is quite some distance from the main road. We loved being on our own early in the morning, with only sheep as company. In order to protect the remains of the village, it has been covered with sand. However, a replica of one of the houses has been reconstructed. Unfortunately, it was locked so we were not able to go inside.



Iron age house

CALLANISH STANDING STONES

These standing stones are one of the most complete stone circles in Britain. We were very impressed. They are not as high as Stonehenge but there are more stones. The visitor centre was an impressive understated design.

DUN CARLOWAY

One of the best preserved dry stone brochs in Scotland. Over 2000 years old, 6 meters high, and perched above a lovely lake, this unusual "house" has no windows and has dual outer walls which double as stairwells. We were fascinated.

GEARRANNAN BLACKHOUSE VILLAGE

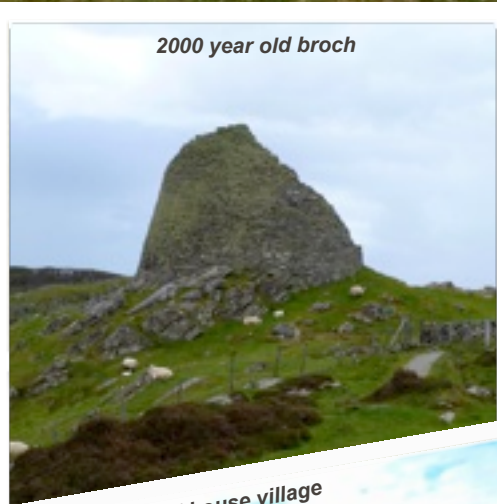
These houses were lived in until 1974. Because they were the last of their kind, the authorities, decided to keep them for posterity. Blackhouses were built from stone set into the ground and have straw roofs. The name came from the fact that the houses had no chimneys, and thus the smoke blackened the inside. The houses were apparently remarkably warm. This was no doubt due to their thick walls and the fact that they are set down into the earth.

Peat in its raw state is extremely wet and takes many months to dry out.

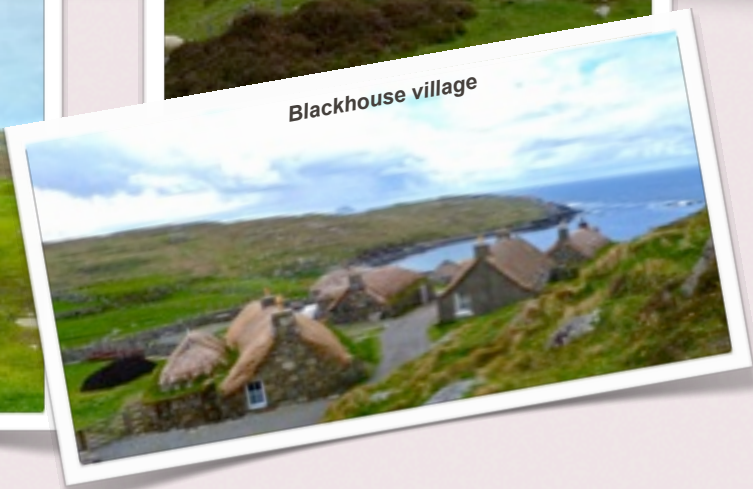
Rectangular blocks of peat are cut with a peat iron which is extremely hard work. Peat blocks are stacked in a grid pattern to increase air circulation and once the peat dries out it is stored under cover.

Peat burns much more slowly than wood or coal. Although oil central heating is the norm, many people have held on to their peat burning stoves. Old blackhouses do not have chimneys so the aroma of peat burning permeates every nook and cranny of the house.





2000 year old broch



Blackhouse village