

2011 - SCOTLAND

13 May 2011

Goodbye Outer Hebrides

Northern Scotland is supposed to be wild and remote - just like the Outer Hebrides!!

OBSERVATIONS

Had a funny conversation today with the owner of a shop. She was complaining that a new machine she just received did not have instructions in English or Gaelic. When she rang the supplier and asked for instructions in Gaelic (her way of pronouncing Gaelic), she was amazed that he didn't have a clue what she was talking about!

The first time we saw a huge pile of peat outside a house we thought they kept elephants as pets. People burn a lot of peat during the winter and it looks just like a big heap of black poo.

What's with the no trees policy on the Outer Hebrides? Constant high winds must surely require protective measures. Maybe its become part of island psyche. Any form of a garden around homes is strikingly absent. We are told that the land is too waterlogged for trees. Common sense Australians would simply advise plantings of trees/shrubs that like water.

Video shops are noticeable by their absence. Obviously they have more fulfilled lives around here.

The Outer Hebrides road safety policy is surprisingly simple - instead of speed bumps, drivers have to contend with free range sheep and one lane roads.

Ferry travel is fast and a very efficient mode of travel in Scotland. We have used 7 ferries in a very short time. Not cheap though.



Sheep everywhere



Windswept



No gardens



Lewis is the only place in the world where there is a traffic rush on Sunday morning.

Everything, repeat everything, closes down on a Sunday because people are rushing to, or are in, church.



Lewis Castle in Stornoway - now a private school



On the bikes again

STORNOWAY

For all the traipsing around Stornoway we could not find a decent retail Harris Tweed outlet. Most of the shops sold an item or two made from the world renowned cloth but Heather was fixated on a Harris Tweed handbag. We could only find a small range to choose from. It's rather strange that, although this well known tweed is manufactured in homes around these parts, there are no large shops that sell a range of tweed products. Mostly its a sports jacket or two, or a scarf or a hat, found in a chemist or flower shop. There is no huge range - as one would expect in the Harris tweed capital of the world. Maybe Heather can satiate her desire on the mainland.

After we left the caravan park we drove to the very north of Lewis island. We had time to spare before the ferry departed at 2pm. This part of the island is much like the rest - groups of houses dotted around. We mused about what the inhabitants did for a living - possibly servicing the metropolis of Stornoway with its 6000 inhabitants.

We arrived at the terminal and still had an hour to kill. Luckily the sun came out. Here was a chance to be reunited with our bikes again. We rode around the harbor luxuriating in our freedom to wander any place that looked interesting. We also prayed that the sun would come out more in the northern parts of Scotland. Our 3 hour ferry trip ended in Ulapool - on the western coast of the mainland. Since the FA Cup is on tomorrow afternoon we will stay here for 2 nights. Just like the royal wedding, "someone" wants to ensure we are near a TV signal. It is an event not to be missed - home or abroad.



Peat (not poo) found on the Butt of Lewis



The northernmost part of the Outer Hebrides is called the Butt of Lewis.

It's supposed to have huge colonies of sea birds on the high cliffs. We decided to leave the birds alone as we had to catch a ferry.

