

The Scotland Adventure Continues

Those of you who received the newsletters sent out during my Fulbright Visiting Scholar Exchange, that sent us to the UK for eight months in 2015, will know how much we enjoyed our adventure, and how sad we were to leave the UK and return to Indiana. You will therefore not be surprised that when North Highland College (NHC) of the University of Highlands and Islands (UHI) in Scotland invited me to become their Curriculum Leader for Mechanical Engineering, developing a brand new engineering program, it was an easy choice to make. The only hard part was getting a visa. However, that was finally accomplished and on 7 March 2016 we returned to the UK, collected items we left behind in a storage unit in Lancaster last year, and headed north to our new home in Thurso, Caithness, Scotland.



Thurso is at the very tip-top of the big island. It is actually further north than Anchorage, Alaska, but is far warmer than Indiana during winter. The trade winds and currents keep Thruso warm enough that the ground never freezes in winter. On the other hand, the highs in summer are only in the 70's. So the temperature swing is much

less than Indiana. The terrain looks a lot like Wyoming, or eastern Montana. The cities are small, the residents are very friendly and welcoming, and the pace is much reduced. It sounds like the perfect place for folks our age to find a way to slow down from the hectic pace that we have been living for the past decade. I am still teaching for IUPUI on-line while on a leave of absence, but my main focus will be developing new classes for NHC/UHI. We are still trying to believe it has all come together, and we are excited at the chance to live in Scotland.

Wendy will be returning to Indiana to close on the sale of our Indiana house and try to sell our Bed & Breakfast and will return once things back in the USA are resolved. Meanwhile I am to get started in this new job, scope out long-term housing, make friends, check out pubs, etc. Tough job, but somebody has to do it. For the present, a small house in Thurso has been rented, as seen below.



From our front yard (in which Wendy is already planting flowers), you can look two blocks

down the street and see the ocean (actually the Pentland Firth)



and across the way on a clear day you can see the islands of Orkney.

The hardy souls of Scotland are already practicing for April's Scottish Surfing Championships held here in Thurso.



We made friends with several neighbors within the first weekend, and found a very active Church of Scotland congregation that was warm

and welcoming. The church building has a brand new interior which has been constructed within the original stone structure that dates back over 200 years.



During holy week they have services every evening, some of which are in partnership with two of the other churches in town, the United Reformed Church



and St. Peter and the Holy Rood Episcopal Church,



which also does Evensong services on selected weekends. We became quite fond of Evensong service while in England last year.

We have investigated the local Accordion and Fiddle Clubs. There is one in Thruso and another in neighboring Wick. Each of them has a monthly meeting with a guest performer as well as performance by local musicians. The first meeting that we made it to had a wide range of musicians, and again we were warmly welcomed. I also hope to connect with the local Masonic Lodges, like I did last year in Lancaster. The local lodge looks like a castle.



Speaking of Lancaster, while passing through to pick up our stuff from storage, I attended a monthly meeting of Lancaster City Lodge and Wendy joined for the Festive Board dinner and St. Patrick's Day musical entertainment.

Everyone assumed that I would have to give up my motorsports activities when I came here. However, through the university I was invited to become involved in the STEM outreach program associated with the Bloodhound SSC project. Bloodhound aims to break the world land speed record (WLSR) of 763 mph using a vehicle which is propelled by an afterburning jet engine to reach 500 mph and then fires a hybrid fuel rocket to accelerate to world record speed. The UK government sees this project as a mechanism to attract young people to Science, Technology and Engineering careers. I think it is a great tool to do just that, and I am thrilled to get the opportunity to participate.



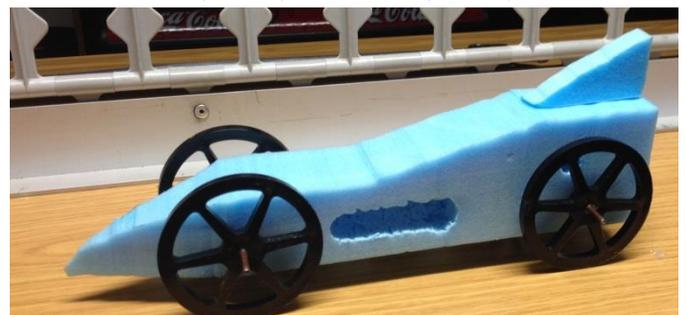
The Bloodhound STEM orientation occurred at an historic site, the Cameron Barracks, constructed by the Royal Engineers in 1876. The barracks were the home of the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders. During the First World War, they were used to process volunteer recruits, returning wounded, and demobilizing soldiers.



We learned how to conduct a STEM program for kids that involved turning a block of foam into a mini WLSR car and launching it down the parking lot using a model rocket engine.



before (above) and after (below)



3-2-1-Wooooooooooooooooooooosh



Kids from schools can compete within their class, or move up to more sophisticated nation-wide categories for under 16, over 16, and “unlimited.” The current record is 533 mph for the unlimited class. These are NOT toys.

Good Friday was a university holiday, so I had the day to myself. When I awoke at 6:30 to stunning sunshine coming through my window, I jumped out of bed to take advantage of it. A quick drive to the coast between Wick and John O’ Groats resulted in a great four hours before the weather moved in again. The next 11 pictures were all taken during that four hours. Caithness is so packed with scenic coastline, castles, cottages and cairns, that you stumble across them everywhere.



Kiess Castle, built around 1600 by the Earl of Caithness, is now a ruin, starkly hanging to the edge of the cliff overlooking the ocean. After the castle photos you will see a type of crofter cottage, literally built into the ground so as to survive the ferocious Caithness winds on this Oceanside cliff.





Caithness has more neolithic cairns, brochs and standing stones than any other part of Britain. Cairns were built roughly 5000 years ago and are believed to have been used as burial chambers and sites of worship. The one shown here, part of the Camster Cairns, is much larger than the norm. The doors that you see in the photo have iron gates, but the gates can be opened and I was able to enter the smaller one and crawl down the passage way to the interior chamber without waking any Pictish ghosts.



The next picture is of Nybster Broch, dating back to 1000 BC. A broch was a neolithic village, built from stone as one large structure. Given the

wind and weather in this area, having the entire village in one structure kept you from having to go out into the elements. The channels cut in the ground in the picture are excavated hallways connecting the internal rooms. Most of the walls are gone, but you can get a feel for the size of the structure. The monument in the background dates from the 1700s when a local land owner decided to add his own touch to the site.



If any of you still wonder why we made the move to Caithness, check out this website which shows pictures from all 13 campuses which make up the University of the Highlands and Islands.

<http://www.buzzfeed.com/mocko500/25-reasons-why-the-university-of-the-highlands-and-ixw40>

I will be regularly working with five of these campuses, in Thurso, Inverness, Perth, Elgin, and Stornaway. The next website shows a drive through Caithness, typical of what I will have to make to reach those campuses.

<http://www.scotlandnow.dailyrecord.co.uk/lifestyle/video-take-virtual-drive-through-5345362>

If you still don't understand.....then there is probably no explaining it to you. The Scottish Highlands is simply not like anyplace else.



And we are not alone in our sentiments for Scotland:

“Did not strong connections draw me elsewhere, I believe Scotland would be the country I would choose to end my days in.”Benjamin Franklin