

A Busy Summer in Scotland

It has been a busy summer for us here in the Highlands, and here are some of the highlights.



Lots of hiking, like this one to Castle Varrich in the village of Tongue.



Heather (both purple and white) was starting to bloom on the hillsides.



Ben Loyal, highest mountain near our house.



The rocks of Ard Skinid



We continue to find cultural differences in some of the strangest things. For example, Bingo over here is played a bit different, using the card shown here.

18	24	36	40		71	
	25		41	51	60	81
6			44	58		75 82
HOUSE						
	20		43	53	62	86
2	13			49		72 87
7		23	30			65 79
HOUSE						
4			33	48	50	61
8	16		39		57	70
9	17	28				66 84
HOUSE						
1			31	45		64 80
	14	26	32		54	
	19			46	55	69 77
HOUSE						
	10	21				63 74 83
5	12		34		56	67
	15		38	47		78 88
HOUSE						
	11	22			52	73 85
3		27	35	42		
		29	37		59	68 76

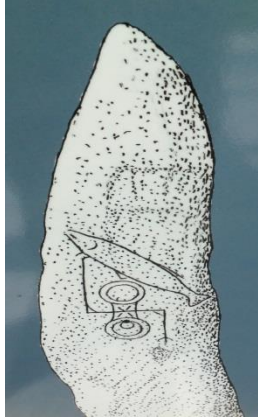
The caller reads off numbers, and you mark them on your card. First person to complete a horizontal line calls out “line” and wins a prize. Then the first person to fill a three line “house” calls out “full house” and wins a bigger prize.

One lovely sunny Saturday we made the very scenic drive from Dornoch to Tongue, through the heart of Sutherland. We stopped at several Pictish stones. These were all carved by the ancient inhabitants of the far north, the Picts. The stones are scattered across Ross, Sutherland and Caithness.

The Clach Biorach (Pointed Stone) stands in an open field, with the mountains surrounding. The artwork, heavily faded from centuries of Highland

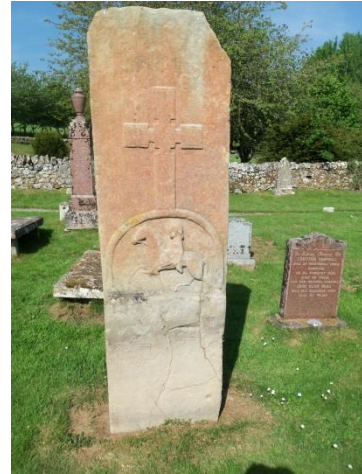


weather, is believed to represent the Salmon of Knowledge found commonly in Gaelic culture (as opposed to The Salmon of Doubt, for all you Douglas Adams fans). The twin circles possibly refer to the sun and moon and may relate to the nearby remnants of a stone circle, since many such were aligned with solar and lunar phases,



After the Picts began to adopt Christianity, their carvings started to include versions of the cross. The Edderton Stone is one of these. Often

when Christian communities later grew up, they used the sites of these stones for their cemeteries and chapels.



The Clach Farr (Farr Stone) is another.



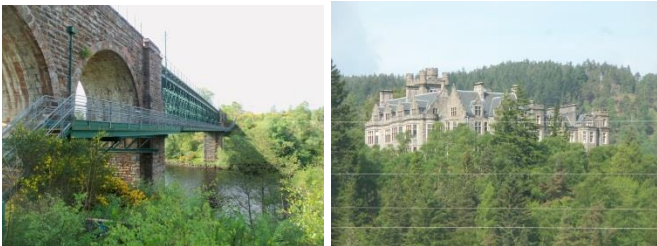
Its cemetery includes some “newer” gravestones from the 1700s.



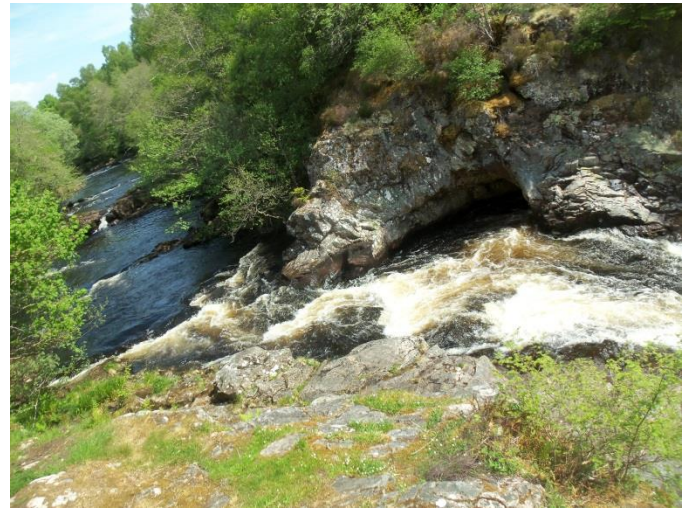
Other Pictish stones on our drive:



Other interesting sites along the road:



We stopped at The Falls of Shin, a salmon jump in fish mating season.



We hiked up to standing stones overlooking the town of Lairg.



And found a Neolithic cairn in the shadow of a cellular phone tower. Signs of two Highland cultures, 5000 years apart.



Although the cairn is collapsed, the lintel stones that would have formed the roof of the

crawlway that would have lead into the central chamber are still visible.



It was a long, but very enjoyable drive when dusk fell.



We participated in the Castle of Mey 10K – the furthest north footrace in Britain (although we only did the 5k due to Wendy's leg).



Here is the castle, viewed from its famous gardens.



Of course there were pipers to welcome you.



Wendy - tired and sore – but happy to have finished.



We visited the town of Falkland, with this unique monument in the center of the main road.



Falkland Palace was the pleasure home of the Kings of Scotland from James III onward, and was a particular favorite of Mary Queen of Scots. It is full of renaissance furnishings and has amazing gardens.



Below is the tennis pavilion. The sport was brought over from France and was very popular with Mary and her father James V. However, this was not tennis as we know it. It was the predecessor of what we play today and is nowadays referred to as “real tennis” or “royal tennis.” The court is surrounded by walls and the ball may be played off the walls, so long as it only hits the ground once. It is sort of a cross between squash, handball and modern day tennis (today’s tennis, by the way, is descended from the variant of “real

tennis” which was developed for playing out of doors, and was known back then, as lawn tennis)



Sometimes when hiking in the Highlands, you do not know exactly what you are getting yourself into (look at the bottom of the sign).



But there are usually friendly locals to greet you when you get there.



I spent a weekend watching British short track racing at a quarter mile oval known as Lochgelly Raceway. The premier class competing was the 2.0 Hot Rods – basically tube frame chassis with a small sedan body atop the frame. They all

use either the old 2.0 liter Ford Pinto engine or the newer Zetec engine. They must weigh at least 700kg and the maximum right side weight is 53.5%.



There was also a strange type of car, known here as a “stock car” even though it more closely resembles a USA sprint car. They utilize the same two engines and must weigh 650 kg, with the left hand side maximum side weight of 52.5 %. Both run treaded Hoosier tires all the way from Indiana’s home-grown race tire manufacturer.



They also ran a class of American import known as “Rebels.”



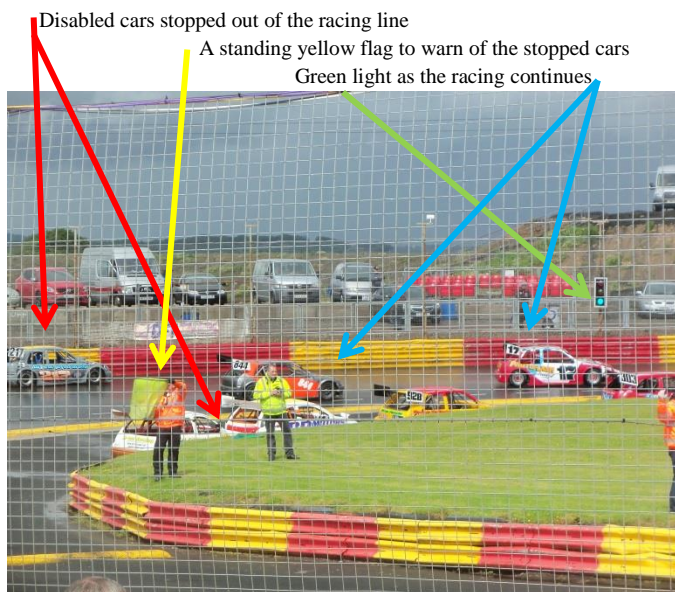
And another class for kids 9-15 years old, racing the original Mini with the original tiny 1000 cc engine.



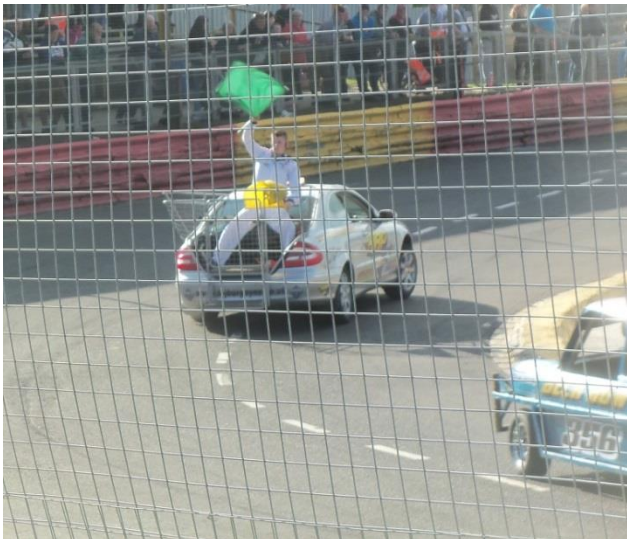
The Hot Rods and Mini-Stox run clockwise, while the Super-Stox and Rebels run counterclockwise (known here as anti-clockwise).



They also run in the rain – which they did during the second day of my visit....which explains the treaded Hoosier tires. And unlike USA oval racing, but similar to USA road-racing, they continue racing with disabled cars on the track as shown.



The flagman starts the race while strapped to the back of the pace car.



I met a number of Brits who travel to Florida in February to see the Daytona 500 and also the USA sprint car racing at Volusia Speedway. I have probably shared the stands with them at Volusia any number of years in the past when I made that trip.

I ended up befriending a young driver named Nick Ross, and joining his family/crew in a flail to get his car repaired after his heat races and before his main even.



Speaking of heats....or qualifying races. Nick explained to me that they draw numbers from a hat and are divided into 5 groups of 6 cars. I nodded that I understood how qualifying heats worked.....until ALL 5 of the groups came on track at the same time and they ran all 5 heat groups simultaneously. Silly me to think I understood.

Nick's team is small, and low-bucks, traveling on an open trailer towed behind an SUV, while many of his competitors arrive inside trucks. He also had the oldest car in the field, a no-longer-in-production Vauxhall Nova. (after all my years racing Thumper, it is no wonder I was drawn to this team, and ended up part of it for the weekend). After his qualifying races, Nick discovered a leak from his fabricated aluminum fuel tank. We made a patch with borrowed liquid metal, which was cured using a borrowed motorhome heater, building a heat box out of car body parts to keep the wind out and the heat on the tank during curing.



In the final race of the weekend, Nick managed an outstanding 6th in the Scottish Championship race for the Hot Rod class. Not bad for the oldest car in a 32 car field.

Soon after, I accompanied the top four teams from my North Highland Bloodhound Rocket Car trials (back in April), to the Scottish Finals for the Bloodhound Competition. One of my teams, comprised of four high school girls from Tain Royal Academy, walked off with First Prize as Scottish Champions.....£1000 for their school, trophies for the team, and the chance to go to Newquay in Cornwall for the first powered test of the Bloodhound Rocket Car, and the only UK test before it heads for the record attempt in South Africa.

As their mentor, I will feel obligated to go too. ☺



And I thought I was getting out of racing when I came over to 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

