



## More Summer in Caithness

One of the big events of the Caithness summer is the Caithness County Show. It is remarkably like a County Fair back in Indiana. There is animal judging (lots of sheep – big surprise)



and horses



and cattle.....though you do not see many hieland koos in Indiana.



There is a dog show.



There are tractors, both old and new



And food vendors





There are baked goods to be judged.



There are a few things you might expect to see ONLY in America.



And a few scenes which are simply out of place.



There are information booths.....like the one for North Highland College.....with our mascot, Hamish.



There's a midway



And of course, the pipe band.



If you have been following the newsletters from our Scottish adventures, then you are aware that the experience has given rebirth to my childhood interest in the World Land Speed Record (WLSR) and those brave men how have pursued it. I have had the chance to associate with the current Bloodhound Project to break the existing 763 mile per hour record, which is amazing. But no less amazing are the men who held the record in the fifties and sixties, like Craig Breedlove in Spirit of America and Sir Malcolm Campbell and his son



Donald, in their Bluebirds. I even turned one of my Bloodhound kits into a model of Sir Malcolm's Bluebird that was the first car to break 300 mph.



And I recently read "My Speed King," the autobiography of Donald by his wife, Tania Bern-Campbell, who saw him through a 1955 World Water Speed Record in one of the Bluebird boats at Coniston Water in the British Lake District, through a horrendous crash at Bonneville while pursuing the WLSR, through the incredible year of 1964 when he broke both the land and water records in Australia, and back to Coniston for another record attempt in 1967, that resulted in his death.

Donald's Bluebird CN7, the first car to exceed 400 miles per hour, was one of the most technologically advanced vehicles, relative to its era, in history. Adrian Newey, well recognized Formula One designer, has described the CN7, as one of the biggest ever automotive advances, and "arguably, for its time, the most advanced vehicle." Campbell prepared a revolutionary car featuring advanced aluminum honeycomb chassis, fully independent suspension and four wheel drive. It was also the first true ground effects car. It was the last WLSR holder to be wheel driven rather than thrust driven, as all subsequent record holders were jet or rocket powered. The car was designed to exceed 500 mph, but track conditions held Campbell to just a bit over 400. Newey claims that the car was so advanced, that were it to be dusted off and freshened up, that it could still, today, break the world record for a wheel driven car.....50 years after it last ran. Unfortunately, Campbell died before he got to run her a second time.

On my way to collect Wendy on her return to the UK, I made a side trip to visit Coniston Water.



I stayed in the Black Bull Inn, one of the places Donald and Tania stayed during the record attempts. I ate dinner at the Sun Hotel, the other hotel they utilized. It was very strange to be in the places that I had read about, and that one of my heroes had frequented during the height of his career. The locals are very cognizant of the speed history of their town and lake.







Coniston is a lovely village surrounded by hills, lakes, and streams.



I picked Wendy up in Manchester a day late, after a weather delay due to US storms. But her cat did not arrive with her, having been left in Indianapolis by the air cargo folks. That necessitated yet another day's delay. We took the time to drive into the Peak district in Yorkshire, where we visited a lovely mountain town. No self-respecting historic town in Britain can get by without a ruined castle and at least one 17<sup>th</sup> century pub. So we visited the castle and ate at the pub, built in 1660. The sign on the low hanging beam in the center of the pub bore the humorous sign shown in the photos.







So we had to borrow a couple of chairs and sleep on an air mattress for a bit. But, that did not dampen our excitement. We finally have our wee Scottish cottage. Our new address is

13 The Crescent  
Glengolly, Thurso  
Caithness  
KW14 7XL  
United Kingdom

One of the biggest events of the summer in Caithness is the Halkirk Highland Games, which celebrated its 130<sup>th</sup> year this July. It was truly a special year, as wee Halkirk played host to the World Heavy Championships – for the biggest and strongest of the world's Highland Game athletes. They participated in 8 events to crown this year's world champion.

The first competition was tossing a 15 pound ball the furthest distance. Then, as the next two pictures show, there was a contest to toss the Halkirk Stone.....a 22 pounder.....as far as possible. Believe it or not, someone tossed that thing over 46 feet. These are strong lads !!! Next there was a contest to see who could swing a 28 lb weight and hurl it the furthest. Then repeat with a 56 lb one.



After we collected the cat, we headed back to Thurso. Two days after we arrived, the ship believed to be carrying our furniture sailed through the Pentland Firth, and we sat on Thurso Bay and watched it pass by, between us and the Orkney islands. That was a truly strange feeling.



It turned out that our container had missed that ship, so it had still not arrived yet, when we got the keys to our new house.





There was the hammer toss (22 and 56 lb versions – the heavy one went over 121 feet for the winner), followed by a contest to see who could toss a 56 pound weight the highest. And last, but certainly not least, was the caber toss (throwing a 20 foot pole).



As well as other strange things.



There were two Americans in the contest, one of whom was the defending world heavy champion, and they each won a pair of the events. But the title this year went to (oh horror !) an Englishman.

There were also foot races and bike races for all age groups, sack races for the kids, and naturally a highland dancing competition.



And of course, there was a pipe band....but not just any pipe band....the world famous Royal Scots Dragoon Guards. This British army regiment is perhaps the world's most famous military musical group, having produced albums, serenaded royalty



and dignitaries from around the world, and still serving as active military soldiers in hot spots around the globe. Their 2008 platinum album was recorded in Iraq, making it the first professional album ever recorded in a conflict zone. They have been around quite a while. Note they all wear black Canadian bearskin hats....except the bass drummer, who wears a white Polar Bear one presented to the corps by the Tsar of Russia, when they performed before him.....in 1894.



This is the carriage house, now a garage.



Quite a large crowd came out to see the show.



Another notable event of summer in Caithness is the annual open garden day at Dunbeath Castle. It is a privately owned castle, and closed to the public.....except one weekend a year, when the incredible gardens are open to the public. They have quite a reputation, and it is well deserved.

Here is the castle.



And these are a few shots of the gardens.





And of course there was a pipe band.



Summer is also a good time to visit the Orkney Islands, just a half hour ferry ride away. This is the stunning St. Magnus Cathedral



The 5000 year old Skara Brae Neolithic village, built into the hillside for protection from the incredible winds that Orkney experiences.



And the Ring of Brogar, a standing stone circle from 3000 years BC.



There is also the remarkable Italian Chapel, build by World War 2 Italian prisoners of war. They were engaged in building causeways to connect the islands (and by the way, keep German submarines out of Skapa Flow, where the British Navy was based). In their free time, and using only scrap materials, they build a beautiful chapel.



This is the lighthouse at Duncansby Head, which you pass during the ferry trip.





Here is a traditional thatched roof cottage.



Here is the passage way you have to crawl to get inside. Viewed from both outside and inside.



The shipping container finally arrived....returning Maggie, our MG-TC to Britain for the first time she was built in 1948. And we also found a stowaway! Vicky flew over to help unload and unpack.

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



She also went exploring with me, in this 5000 year old burial cairn.

