



Cumbria & Sweden



One of the great things about living in Scotland is how easy it is to visit the foreign countries of Europe. Such as England.....which believe me, is considered to be a foreign country by the Scots.

So, when the university took its fall break, we decided to go visit friends from my Fulbright Scholar Exchange days, when I was teaching at Lancaster University. We spent the week in the Lake District of Cumbria, just south of the Scotland-England border, surrounded by beautiful scenery.



One of the places we visited was the Threlkeld mine and quarry, where we gained a huge amount of respect for the miners who used to enter the dark, tight caverns of the mines under Cumbria, using black powder explosives and pickaxes to harvest the earth's valuable minerals. Here is one of the mine entrances they would have faced each day.



We came across the smallest cannon we had ever seen, less than a foot tall, used to test the burn rate and power of black powder charges being developed for the mines.



And the smallest train car we had ever seen, used to pull small carts of ore out of the mines on tiny steel rails.



The quarry is now home to a collection of excavation machinery, most of it privately owned by collectors who come on weekends to play with their massive toys.



This is for folks who have a really big bucket list.



The brass eagle Bible lectern is one of the most unique pieces that I have ever seen in a church. It was donated in 1874 in memory of a former pastor.

After much searching, we also found the barely marked path through the fairy woods (look closely to see the wee fairies dancing between the stones – or maybe they don't show up on camera film).



We visited a 12th century church, in the small village of Beetham. To keep the old building in use, it is now shared by four local congregations: Church of England, Methodist, United Reformed Church, and Salvation Army.



The stones and trees along the path were covered in the densest moss growth I have ever seen.



And the fairy steps themselves climb up through a very tight crevice in the rocks. The legend says that if you can climb the steps without touching the wall on either side, the fairies will grant your wish.



As you can see my wish was to find a bonny lass waiting for me at the bottom of the steps. Afterwards we ate in a local pub that has been operating since 1609. Wendy loved the antique lantern fixtures which had been turned into lights over the tables.



We also visited the Druid Stone, a standing stone dating from ancient times.....and the Bowder Stone, a precariously balance rock weighing an estimated 1200 tons, which has been resting like this since it fell from the mountainside millennia ago.



We stopped at Penrith Castle, with its well preserved moat still offering protection from invaders (albeit, a dry moat in today's times).



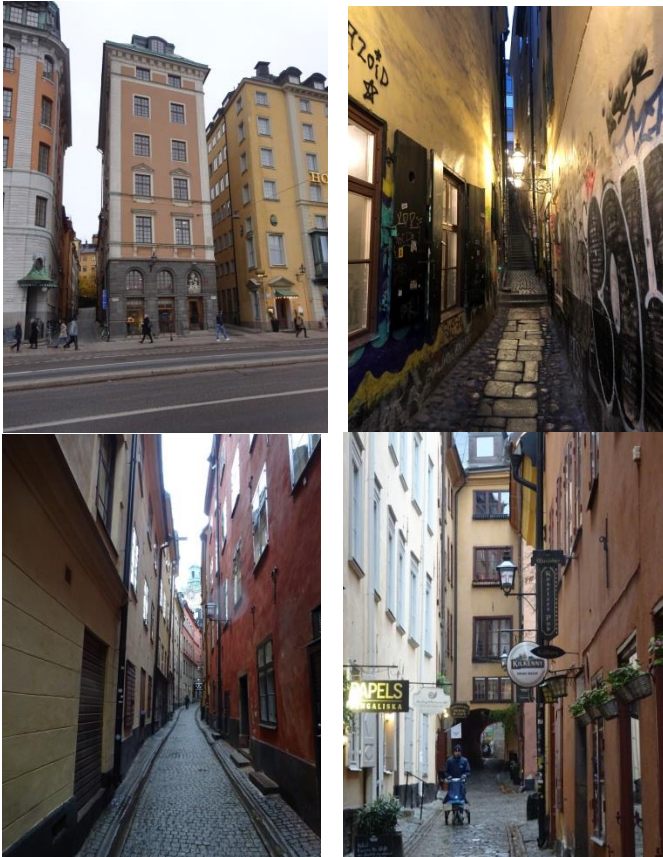
As I said, one of the joys of Scotland is how easy it is to travel to Europe. So when the NHL announced that my favorite ice hockey team, would be playing a pair of games in Stockholm, we viewed it as an excuse to explore another Nordic country. And the trip was fantastic.



Not only did the Lightning win both games, but Stockholm turned out to be awesome. We stayed in the old town (Gamla Stan), which is full of renovated old buildings almost all of which are full of spiral stairs and old wine cellars converted into dining rooms.

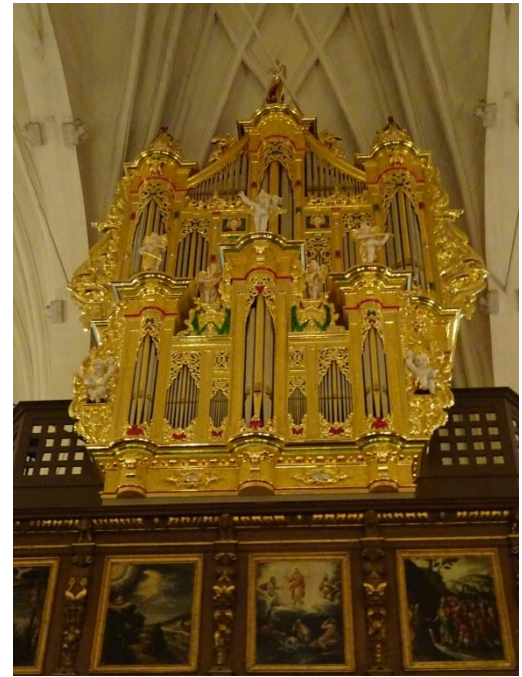


Gamla Stan is full of tiny little streets, some barely wide enough for one person.



The buildings are very colorful and covered with ornate architecture, with turrets and spires in abundance, and wonderful old fountains and statues.



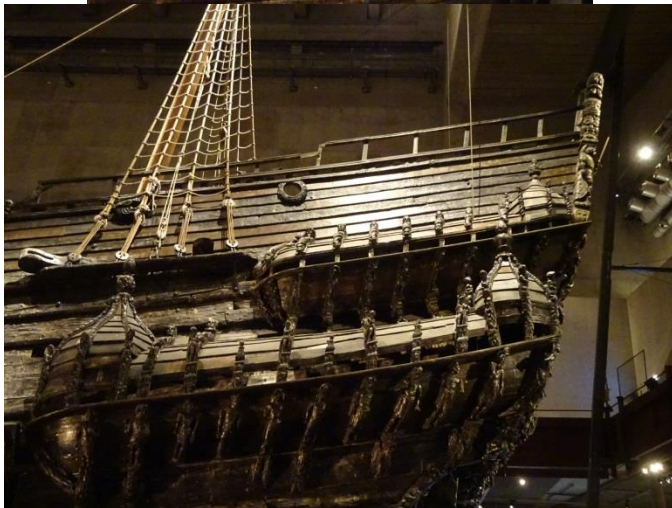


We visited the Vasa Museum, which is one of the most amazing of the many museums that I have visited. The Vasa was a Swedish warship launched in 1628. It carried the heaviest load of cannon of any ship at sea in that era.....for 20 minutes. It sank on its maiden voyage, due to a fundamental design flaw. It was a modified version of several very successful ships that had sailed for years. However, to make it faster, the draft was narrower, and the gun decks were very heavily loaded. So the lower gun ports were riding only a meter and a half above water level. A gust of wind tilted the ship, water poured in through the open gun ports, and the ship sank. It lay on the bottom for 333 years. Fortunately, due to a unique set of conditions of the waters of the harbor in Stockholm, it did not deteriorate, and in 1961 it was refloated, virtually intact. The museum was designed and built around it. Including the masts sticking out of the roof of the building.

We visited St. Gertrud church, built in the 1500s, and it is full of amazing golden forms, like the royal apartment for the royal family to sit in during worship, the altar, and the organ.



Amazingly 95% of the ship is original, with only the, rigging and rusty iron hinges and bolts replaced. And the intricate wood carving is still intact and the detail can still be clearly seen.



The engineer in me loved the large collection of block-and-tackle pulleys and deadeyes that were salvaged and are in use with the new ropes that make up the rigging today.



The tour guide books all say that one must go see the daily changing of the guard, at the royal palace, so naturally we did.



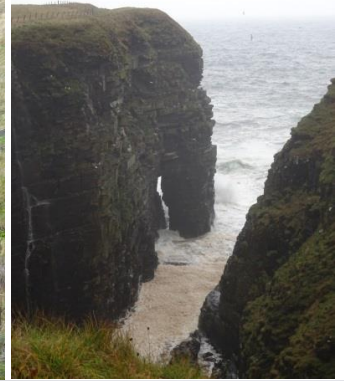
Wendy made friends with several animals.



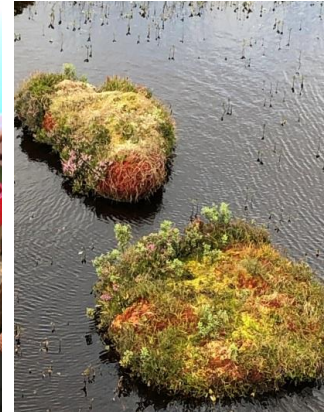
And we ate numerous wonderful meals of traditional Swedish cuisine, including this unique Christmas cola which is sold only one month per year – and it out sells Coke during that one month.



As winter closed in, I took another hike along the John O' Groats trail, with more stunning scenery.



We ended the new year, by finding a cute furry replacement for the two cats that came to Scotland with us from Indiana, but succumbed to ailments of old age. The new comer is quite a little explorer. So Wendy named him Shackleton. Final photo is colorful moss and algae that grow in The Flow Country bogs up here in the far north. We are trying to get the Flow Country world heritage status due to its uniqueness.



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