



## Summer in Caithness

So what happens in Caithness in the summer? Rather a lot. First off, there are the pipe band marches down Princes Street in Thurso, every Saturday night in the summer.



You can catch a shinty game. Shinty is a unique Highland game from which ice hockey derived. Note the similar sticks. The Scots fleeing the Highlands after the Clearances who settled in Nova Scotia could not find a field long enough and flat enough for shinty ....until the lakes froze.... and thus came ice hockey.



You could join the Caithness Field Club for a day out hiking. I joined them for a Sunday afternoon at Drum Hollistan, where we hiked across a small part of what is known as the Flow Country, one of the world's largest peat bogs that goes on for miles and miles. We reached the coast by following a small stream to where it disappears over the edge of this waterfall, in front of a sea stack with many nesting seabirds.



On the hike we saw a skylark, kittiwakes, fulmars, shags, razorbills, oystercatchers, a variety of gulls, and puffins !!!!!



Every town in the north has a Gala week, or at least weekend, during the summer. Think of this as being like a US small town Fourth of July celebration.....without the fireworks.....and with every town having theirs on a different week. As one of the larger towns in the north, Thurso has a week long list of activities, including contests, competitions, venter booths, entertainment, a treasure hunt, all sorts of special events, a parade with floats (pirates made a lot of sense around here), highland dancers, and of course.....a pipe band ! This is the Scottish Highlands, for goodness sake !



Change the pipe band to a Midwest high school marching band and it could look a lot like any Midwest town fair. Except no funnel cakes, only fairy cakes. Substitute venison burgers for pork chop sandwiches. And do you recognize Candy Floss ?

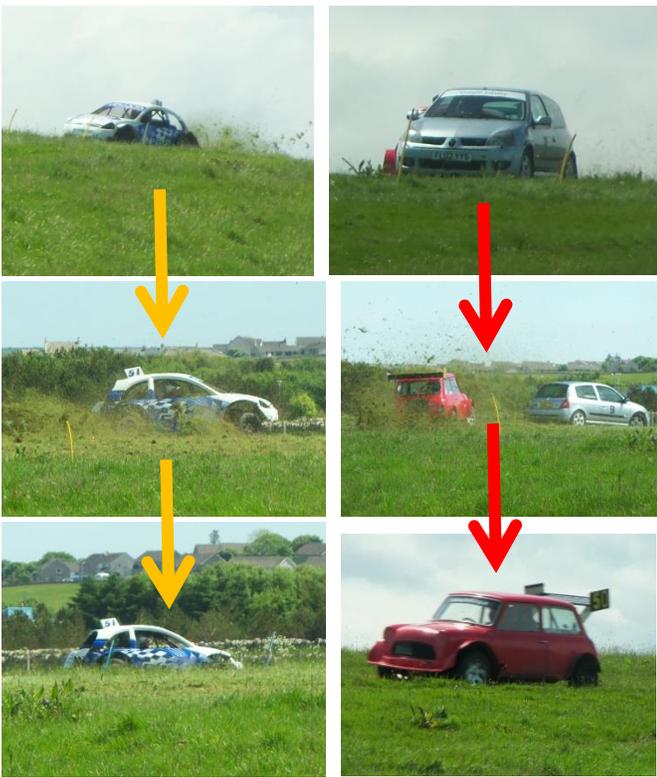


You can go to the tractor races.



You can go to a highland autocross - an automotive time trial competition held in an open field. This next picture seems to take the place of a Scots event release and waiver.





You can do the town's 3K run. I may not be in bad shape for a 60 year old Hoosier. But I am out of shape compared to folks here, most of whom walk more than they drive.



I did manage to beat the pipe band !



The carnival comes to town, just like every small town in the American Midwest.



As for unusual events, there is the Caithness Viking Festival, celebrating the Viking heritage of the north. For much of the 10<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, Caithness, Orkney and Shetland were ruled by the Norse. Our town, Thurso, derives its name from "Thor's River." It was not until the Battle of Largs in 1263 that King Alexander of Scotland took control of the north from the Norse. That was also supposedly when the Thistle became the flower of Scotland, as supposedly a field of the horrendously

spiky Scottish Thistle (not your wimpy Indiana variety) ruined a surprise night attack by the Norsemen on the sleeping Scots army.



Anyway, to celebrate this Norse heritage we have the Caithness Viking Festival, with an authentic village set up in the park in town



Spinning and dyeing yarn with all natural herbal colors.



Embossing and carving leather, without decent knife. Specialty tools included badger hair and duck feathers. And he makes it the traditional way.



A game of Kubbs. Toss your sticks and knock down opponent's soldiers and then his king.



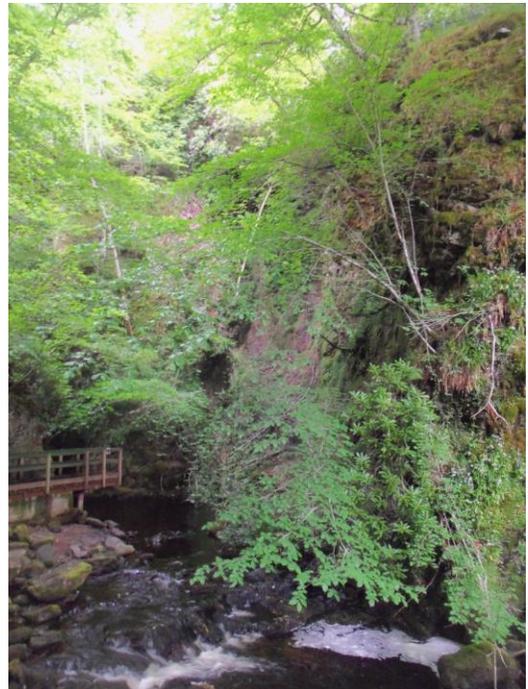
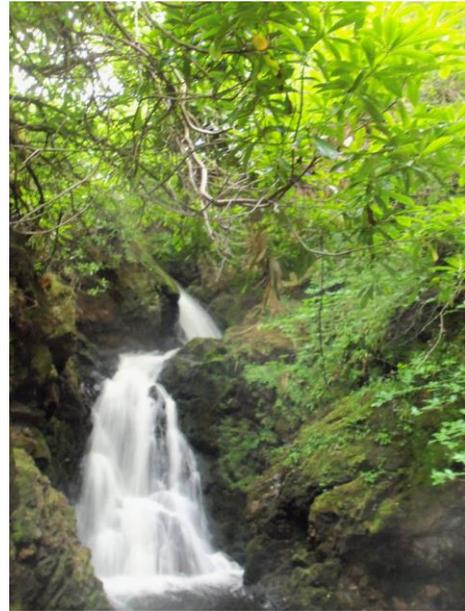
Viking banquet: Pork belly roasted with apples and honey, roasted root vegetables, hard boiled eggs, some really thick porridge, coarse bread and cheese, fruit and cream for dessert,



The re-enactors were quite interesting. The one below on the left is either Thor, son of Odin, king of the Norse gods, or Hagrid from the Harry Potter movies. The one on the right is either Petriof, slayer of dragons, or some colonial engineering professor. For future reference, fighting your way through a dragon infested valley or a field of Saxon warriors to rescue the beautiful Viking Princess while wearing full chain mail requires you to be in top shape.



Everything is in bloom here. Most of it is green and gold. More shades of green that I could imagine, as shown in the following photos from a walk I took to Big Burn Falls, in Golspie.





And the gold is from the blooming golden gorse that is everywhere in Caithness.



But there are a lot of other colors in bloom as well.



On a pretty day you can hike to a historic monument, like Sinclair Girnigoe Castle. It was built in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and belonged to the Sinclair/St.Clair clan. My masonic brethren will recognize the St.Clairs as having built, and for centuries protected, Rosslyn Chapel, arguably the most significant Masonic and Templar site in Britain. I've not had time yet, to research if any Masonic connections exist to this northern St.Clair holding.





Or you can walk the seashore.



Or, on a quiet afternoon, I can sit at the table I have in the garden here, amongst our flowers and ferns, and read the Guardian while looking out at the Pentland Firth and Dunnet Head in the distance.



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