



Autumn in Scotland



While I was recently out on Dunnet Head, the most northerly part of the island of Great Britain, I visited a small, remote harbour, whose claim to fame is that the Queen and her family once docked here. In Britain, this is a big deal, and warrants a significant plaque.

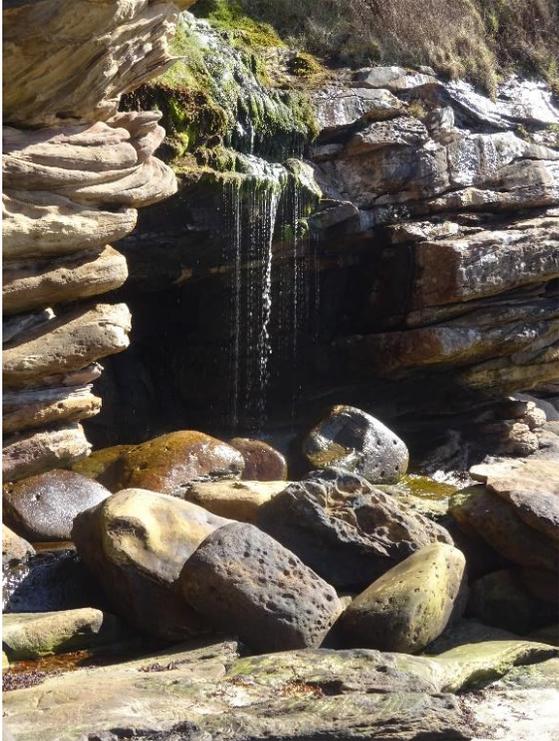


From the harbour, there is a path that heads north over a significant hill, but once on the other side, you get a lovely view of the sea cliffs and also of a lovely beach known as Peedie Sands.



At first the sands seem unreachable from atop the cliffs. But I explored around a bit, and past the solitary grave maker and the remains of an old hunting lodge, I found a place to scramble down over the rocks, abloom with small white and yellow flowers, to find the lovely beach below, and several small waterfalls flowing off of the cliff.





On another sunny day, I hiked the path along the gorse-covered hills, along the north coast, past an abandoned mill to Saint Mary's Chapel, the oldest still-standing ecclesiastical building in the far north of Scotland. It features familiar stone steps to get over some of the walls.

As things in Scotland finally fully opened up from covid lockdown in July, I was able to travel to Scotland's foremost auto racing circuit for a variety of sports car racing.





On the way, I stopped at the village of Fowlis Wester, where a medieval church now stands and inside it is a protected Pictish stone, with a replica standing in its original location outside.



You are likely familiar with the traditional red phone boxes. With nearly everyone having a mobile phone nowadays, most of these no longer contain working telephones. But many have found other uses. This one in Fowlis Wester is the local book exchange.



I took a hike in Perthshire, through a moss covered forest.





At the top of the large hill, overlooking the cauldrons, was a large monument to Henry Dundas, Viscount Melville, who died in 1811. This is one of many such monuments that I have come across in my years here. It almost seems that in the 19th century there was a regional competition to see who could build the largest giant stick into the sky in the most inconvenient spot, such that the workers had to carry the cut stones up the steepest slopes. Now, two centuries later, in many cases, they are lost among the trees and only visited by a few hikers like me.

That led to two waterfalls, named the Devil's Cauldron and the smaller Wee Cauldron.



As travel under covid has become more possible, I have hiked to a number of scenic locations, like the Fairy Lochs.



And Rogie Falls



And Victoria Falls



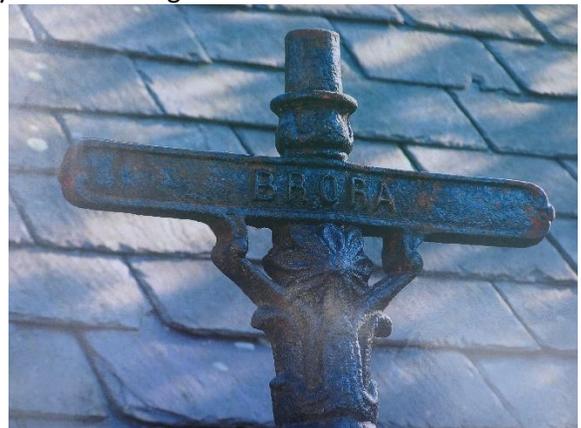
Even travelling along the backroads of the far north can yield some awesome views.



Across Scotland there are a number of sites known as Cloutie Wells. These are natural springs, reputed to be inhabited by fairies. Folklore says that the fairies will bestow good luck on anyone who leaves them a piece of colorful cloth. In my recent travels I visited one of the Cloutie Wells. Naturally, I left a cloth. Scots know better than to mess with fairies. If they offer you good luck in exchange for cloth, then leave cloth.



The village of Brora here in the far north has a very active Heritage Center



Recently they performed a reenactment of traditional salt-panning, which is the process by which sea water is boiled to create sea salt.



Across 6 hours, the pan was repeatedly filled with sea water to the depth of about 4 inches and boiled down to 1 inch, then refilled with more sea water. This was done 4 times, to increase the density of salt in the water in the pan. After the final boil, the density of salt is such that crystals form and can be scooped out and harvested.



Brora was fortunate to have just the right combination of natural resources. The Brora River was a salmon run, and the fish were easily captured. But to transport any distance, they needed to be preserved. And the only available preservation method in the 1800s was salt. Brora sits on the North Sea. So, salt water was not a problem. And there happened to be a vein of coal near the surface. So, the villagers mined the coal, and carried it to fire the salt-pans.



As Covid restrictions continued to open up across the summer in Scotland, we joined some friends for a Whisky Festival at Castle Menzies, near Aberfeldy, for both a taste of whisky and a taste of how the medieval residents lived, see following pictures of some of the bedrooms, and the garderobe (toilet).





A striking monument to the Black Watch stands next to the bridge. The Black Watch has been recognized as one of Scotland's elite regiments from the time of the Jacobite Rebellions all the way to the recently ended war in Afghanistan.



Wendy checks the time in the castle, to see if we are late for dinner.



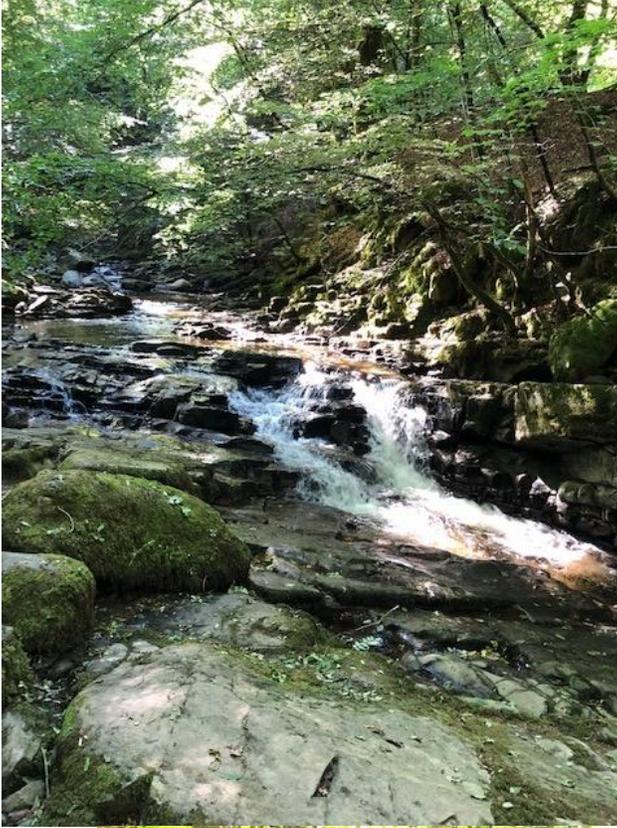
To finish off the trip, the four of us hiked from the town up the valley of the Moness river, through the birch (birks in old Scots vernacular) forest. These woods and this river are where Scotland's bard, Robert Burns penned his poem "The Birks of Aberfeldy." These pictures follow our path from the village upwards through the gorge past all the waterfalls and cascades to the top.



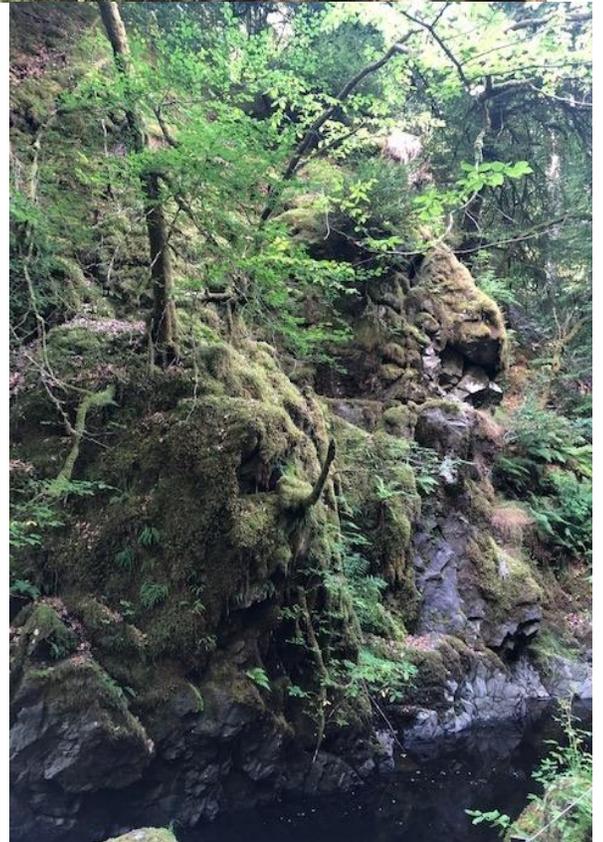
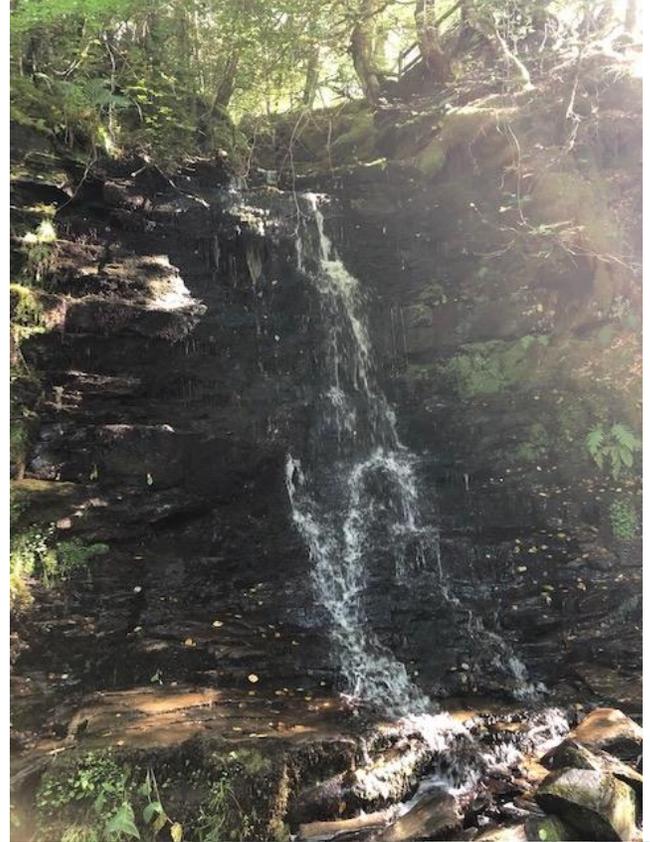
Aberfeldy sits on the River Tay, and the main road crosses it on the Wade Bridge, built by General Wade in 1733 as part of the network of roads he constructed into the Highlands to facilitate the transport of English Troops in order to quell any future uprisings by the Scottish Jacobites who were seeking to put James Francis Edward Stuart, the son of deposed King James II back on the throne.



Bonie lassie, will ye go,
Will ye go, will ye go?
Bonie lassie, will ye go
To the birks of Aberfeldy?



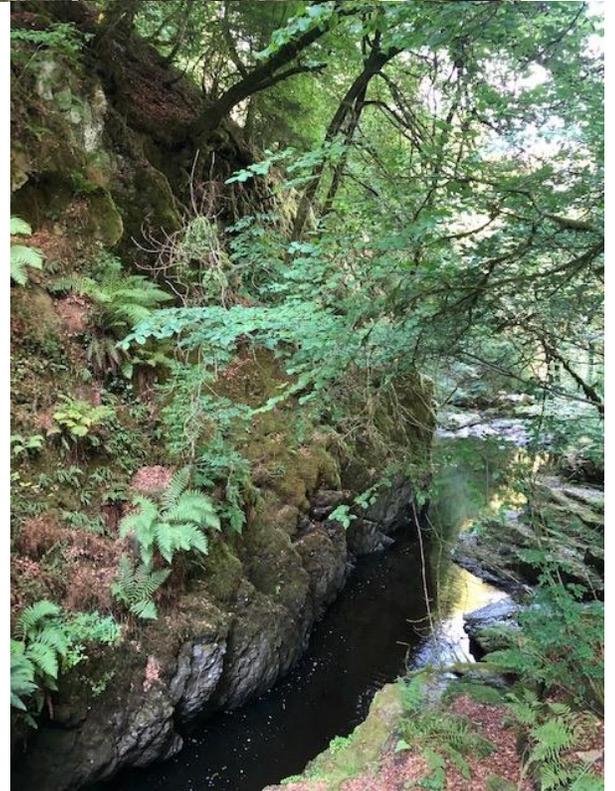
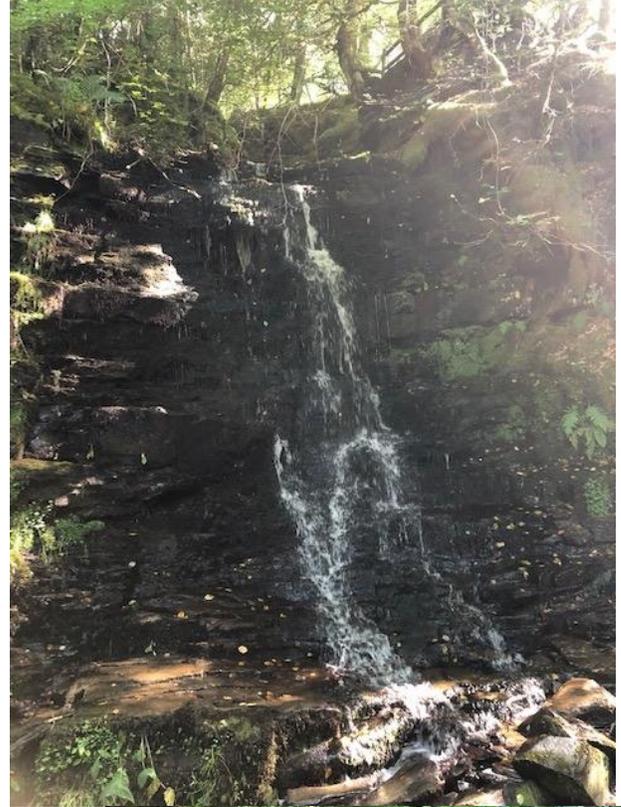
Now Simmer blinks on flow'ry braes,
And o'er the crystal streamlets plays;
Come let us spend the lightsome days
In the birks of Aberfeldy.



The little birdies blythely sing,
While o'er their heads the hazels hing;
Or lightly flit on wanton wing
In the birks of Aberfeldy.



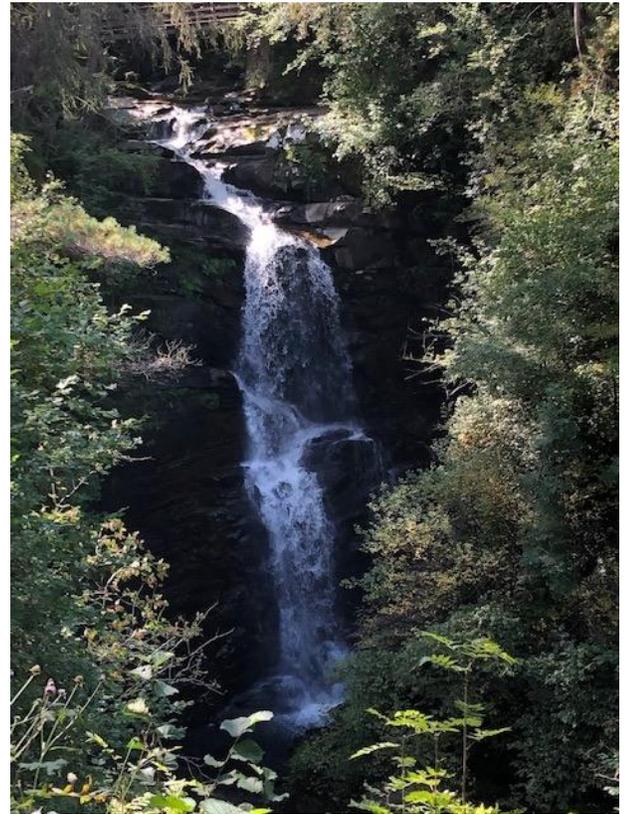
The braes ascend like lofty wa's,
The foaming stream deep-roaring fa's,
O'er hung wi' fragrant spreading shaws,
The birks of Aberfeldy.



The hoary cliffs are crown'd wi' flowers,
White o'er the linns the burnie pours,
And rising, weets wi' misty showers
The birks of Aberfeldy

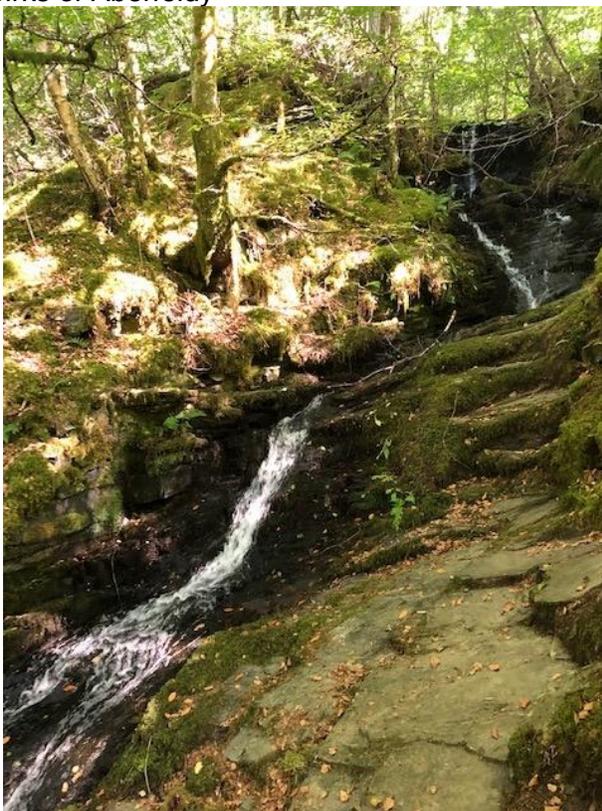


Let Fortune's gifts at random flee,
They ne'er shall draw a wish frae me;
Supremely blest wi' love and thee
In the birks of Aberfeldy



There are so many beautiful walks in Scotland, but I have to say that this one has instantly become one of our favorites. It reminds me of a quote I read recently from an old Scot, that sums up how one comes to feel about Scotland, particularly the Highlands:

"Tis an auld land. God took His time a makin her,
and He done it proper"



Bonie lassie, will ye go,
Will ye go, will ye go?
Bonie lassie, will ye go
To the birks of Aberfeldy?