



Travels in and from Scotland



I had a day of lovely day hiking in the Glendevon area of central Scotland on my way south to races at Knockhill. One of the walks is above the quaint little town by the name of Pools of Muckhart (seriously).



There is a lovely gorge in the area known as Rumbling Gorge because of the noise that the water makes as it tumbles through the gorge.



Through various cascades like this one known as the Devil's Mill.



And to allow the road to cross the gorge, there is a very interesting double-decker bridge. You cannot tell how interesting it is unless you climb down into the gorge.



We usually make at least one trip to the Orkney Islands each year, often for the huge vintage car show in August to display our 1948 MG-TC racecar. This year we boarded the Hamnavoe Ferry at Scrabster, just down the road from us in Thurso, and sailed across the Pentland Firth.



We had good sailing with a particularly good view of The Old Man of Hoy, a sea stack along the coast of the island of Hoy.



For those of you not familiar with Orkney, I should relate the legend of how it came to be. Once upon a time, there was a creature known as the Stoor Worm, king of all sea monsters. Ships were dashed to bits by the lash of its tail and with one sweep of its tongue, it could lay waste to a castle or an entire village.

At a loss for what to do, the King sought the guidance of a wizard, who told him that in order to appease the Stoor Worm, the people must feed it seven maidens at dawn every Saturday. And so it was done, and the Stoor Worm's wrath was kept at bay. Yet the beast did not leave, and the people grew tired of giving up any more of their daughters. The King sought the wisdom of the wizard a second time, and was told that in order to truly appease the Stoor Worm, the King would need to feed it the loveliest maiden in the land: his own daughter, the Princess Gemdelovely.

Heart heavy, the King agreed, but before it was done, the king sent out word, seeking a hero who might save his daughter from this terrible fate, promising that such a man would be given the King's legendary sword Sickersnapper, as well as the Princess' hand in marriage.

Far away on a distant farm, the news reached Assipattle, and he knew at once what he must do. Assipattle's father owned the swiftest horse in the land, Teetgong, and he had once overheard his father telling his mother that in order to attain the horse's full speed, the rider must blow smoke in the horse's ear. So Assipattle took a smoldering clod of peat from his fire, carried in a bucket, and was off into the night on Teetgong's back.

By now the king had grown desperate and had come to the shore with his great sword, planning to face the monster himself. As the sun rose, the Stoor Worm began to yawn, water rushing into its mouth, and before the King or his attendants could react, Assipattle had leapt into a small boat and had pushed out onto the water. The currents dragged Assipattle and the boat into the Stoor Worm's cavernous mouth, and then down, down into the dark of its belly.

The boat came to rest, and Assipattle knew he had but little time before the Stoor Worm yawned again. He jumped from the boat with his bucket of smoldering peat in hand, and ran faster than he'd ever run in his life. On and on he went, until at last he reached the Stoor Worm's liver. With a large knife, he sliced open the creature's liver and shoved the smoldering peat inside. Then he blew and blew on the peat, and finally it took light. With a spit and a crackle, the monster's liver caught fire, and soon the blaze spread.

Assipattle ran back to the boat and just as he clambered inside, the Stoor Worm gave a huge retch. In one motion Assipattle and his boat were thrown out into the

open air on a tide of brine. The Stoor Worm screamed and writhed in agony, smoke billowing from its mouth. It fell to the sea, its giant tongue cleaving Norway and Sweden from Finland and creating the Baltic Sea. It tossed and thrashed and with each throe of anguish, teeth fell from its mouth. The first group of teeth became the Orkney Isles, the second the Shetland Isles, and the last the Faroe Isles. Then, finally, the Stoor Worm coiled its body up into a tight knot and breathed its last breath. Its body became Iceland, and it is said that the volcanos and hot springs of that land are evidence that deep below the surface, the Stoor Worm is still burning.

And as for Assipattle, the king named him his heir, and there was much rejoicing. Assipattle was married to Princess Gemdelovely in a celebration the likes of which had never been seen. Assipattle grew into a wise and noble king, and they were happy until the end of their days.

And now you know the story of the Orkney Islands.

The vintage car show drew over 400 cars, tractors and motorcycles. And our car got to make friends with some other MGs.



There were many amazing old British cars, like this E Type Jaguar.



There were Rovers and Rileys and an old Bently Le Mans racer.



As well as a couple of three-wheelers like this red Messerschmidt and the black Morgan.



This was the 75th anniversary of the Ferguson tractor and there were a huge number of Fergusons and Massey-Fergusons.



But the stars of the show were the huge old pre-1930 steam tractors and trucks. And one modern one that was built kid-sized.



In one weekend I saw the two biggest races occurring in Scotland. The British Touring Car Championship at Knockhill Raceway. It featured the British Touring Car Championship (BTCC) series, the Ginetta Super Cup, Formula 4, Porsche Carrera Cup, Ginetta Juniors, and a series for Minis, all shown below.



And at night I went to Lochgelly Speedway where they were holding the European Championship for 2.0 Hot Rods (the closest thing Britain has to short track late model race cars) and the Scottish Championship for Superstocks (sort of a cross between an American sprint car and a short track modified).



Interestingly, the flagman does not perch in a flagstand, rather, he rides in the pacecar as shown here.



If you are a frequent reader of this newsletter, then you know that ever since we came to live in the far north of the Scottish Highlands nearly 7 years ago, one of the things we have enjoyed is how easy it is to explore Europe using our home in Caithness as a base.

This summer we explored a number of islands belonging to Portugal. We began in the Azores, a number of volcanic islands smack dab in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, almost midway from Europe to America. The Azores were amazing – a bit like the tropical paradise that you read about in novels.



My favorite stop was Horta on the island of Faial. I had the opportunity to hike on my own, to the top of the extinct volcano just outside of town. The center of the volcano had collapsed to form what is known as a caldera. In this case the caldera had broken down on one side, and the ocean had encroached to form a small bay in the basin. I loved the view from the top. In one direction was a beautiful view of the water filled caldera. In the other direction was a glorious view along the island's coast.



There was a scenic 16th century fort, originally built to defend the town against pirates and corsairs, but later used in defense during an era of European expansion.



The town had just finished an ocean festival, and the decorations were stunning.





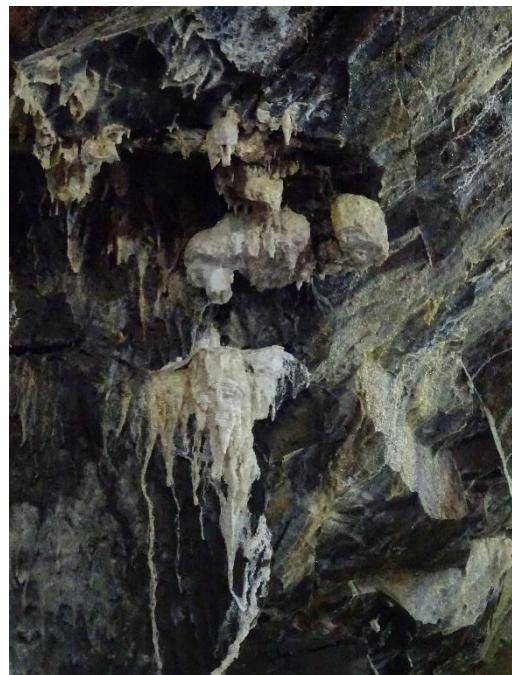
A stop at Praia da Vitoria, on the island of Terceira allowed us to visit the Algar do Carvao volcano, which is one of only three in the world where tourists can access lava tubes that drained before they solidified. What an experience! The first picture is our descent into the heart of the volcano.



The next picture gives you an idea of the vast size of the lava tubes deep below ground, and the final photo from the interior is of the unique silicate stalactites, which resemble the limestone stalactites commonly found in the caves of the Americas.

The next picture after that is of an area along the coast where lava flowed right out into the ocean and formed some quite interesting tidal pools which are

now quite popular with the locals as a swimming and bathing location.



Calderas can be much bigger than the one I photographed at Horta. This entire valley is the collapsed caldera of a much, much larger volcano which formed the island centuries ago.



Terceira is known as the purple island because of all of the brightly colored hydrangeas that you find all across the island.



The local roads reminded us a bit of back home in Caithness.



The largest town in the Azores is Ponta Delgada on the island of Sao Miguel. The town is almost uniform in the attractive white and brown coloring of its buildings. The third of these photos is of the traditional city gates which face the harbour and served as the traditional entry point for the town.



Ponta Delgado was also guarded by a fort from the 16th century. Take a look at the thickness of those walls, designed to take the pounding of cannonade from approaching ships.





The cathedral is not particularly spectacular from the outside as seen in the photo below.



But inside is another story. The photo below is of the front of the church.



Located around the walls of the chapel are numerous ornately decorated alters. The one shown here is dedicated to the Holy Saints John, that is, Saint John the Evangelist and Saint John the Baptist.



Adjacent to the cathedral is the convent of Our Lady of Hope. It is a pilgrimage site due to its containing the Chapel of the Holy Christ of Miracles.



The wooden image of the Christ of the Miracles has been protected by the convent since the 17th century, and is only taken out once per year to be carried in procession during Easter celebrations. At other times it is securely locked behind a screen, and can only be visited when the chapel is open for one hour each day.



We spent the better part of a day at the Jose do Canto Botanical Garden, marveling at the huge number of diverse plants. It feels as if you are wandering in tropical paradise.



The Moreton Bay Fig tree above is so huge, with such extravagant roots, that you can only grasp its size in comparison to Wendy standing near it. The next photo on the right is the rare paper-bark tree, whose bark peels off in paper-thin bits.



The Pohutukawa tree, shown below, grows such expansive branches that this one has to have steel posts embedded in the ground to support the weight of the branches.



After the Azores, we stopped in Madeira, which while still Portuguese, has a much different feel. It seemed much busier and we missed the slower pace and pleasant scenery of the Azores. But that was

nothing compared to Lisbon, where we stopped briefly. Talk about feeling crushed by that big city feeling. After six years in Caithness, we just aren't much on big cities any more.



Still, there were some interesting things to see, like the city gates and central square.



The architecture was nice.



And I took a walk around the walls of the old castle which sits atop Lisbon's central hill. Moorish castles are much different in style than the Scottish castles that we are used to.

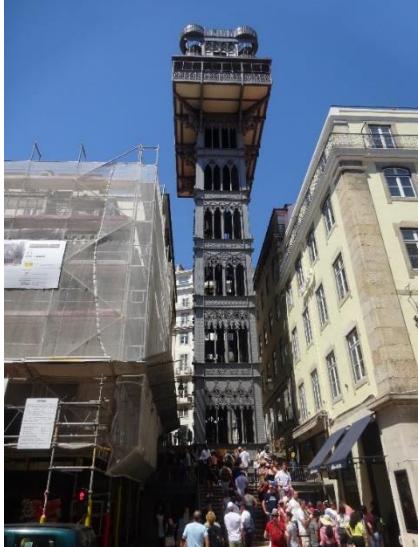


As usual, a few engineering aspects of the trip caught my interest. Such as Lisbon's bridge which is a copy of San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge. And the interesting interlocking concrete shapes used to build reinforced sea-breaks to protect the harbours.



And the most unusual open-air elevators built right in the middle of downtown Lisbon to carry

shoppers from the top of a hill to a street several stories below.



It was a lovely trip, but we were glad to get back home to Scotland



We also spent a day in Cork and Cobh in the south of Ireland. Lovely castle tower and the Cathedral of St. Colman, sitting high upon a rocky outcrop above the city.

