



Adventure # 1 – January 2 Back to the Borders

On Christmas Day we departed Indianapolis to begin our UK adventure, landing in Manchester on Boxing Day (British holiday the day after Christmas where the tradition is to give the servants and the poor “boxes” of goodies left over from the Christmas feast). We picked up our Vauxhall Astra rental car (cute and sporty but not built for people over 6 feet tall) and headed north to the Scottish Borders. Last year we made friends in Denholm when we attended a 5 day folk music festival that occurs here every year on New Year’s week, and we have been looking forward to returning ever since we got word of the Fulbright Award. We are staying at Lurden House, which is all that remains of a 200 year old estate. Only the factor’s house and the carriage house are still standing. A lovely retired couple lives in the factor’s house and they maintain the carriage house as a holiday cottage for tourists.



We attended Sunday services with the Church of Scotland in Denholm (built 1823) and afterwards had coffee and tea with the pastor and some interesting parishioners. One pastor handles two parishes, sharing 5 village churches, rotating the location of Sunday services between the different village locations.....Quite an interesting arrangement. The sermon was inspired by the 1850’s Christmas carol “Good King Wenceslas” and its connection to Saint Steven. We learned a great deal about both the saint and the song, all imbedded in a powerful message about caring for each other.



After church we took advantage of a lovely day to take a 4 mile walk along a portion of a trail called the Abbey Way. It stretches all the way from Kelso to Hawick, passing most of the historic abbey ruins in the Borders. Our walk skirted along the side of the Teviot, one of the major Borders’ rivers.

The folk festival always starts on the 29th with a concert in the evening, another concert the next evening, a Hogmanay Ceilidh on New Year’s Eve, a Herds Supper with music on the evening of January 1st, and another concert on the night of the 2nd. There is an open session at a different local pub in the afternoon every day except New Year’s Day. On New Year’s Day there is a mid-day group walk to help everyone sober up from the night before. These pub sessions are just as enjoyable as the concerts, as a variety of musicians and singers take turns playing their favorites or experimenting with new pieces. And the other musicians join in as the song goes along. It is all acoustic folk music, with guitars, fiddles, pipes, etc. By the way, I should explain that Hogmanay (New Year’s Eve) is the biggest holiday in Scotland.....far exceeding Christmas. It is celebrated with music, dancing, food and drink amongst friends....which is sort of the definition of a Scottish ceilidh.

On the way to the last event of the festival in Melrose, we passed an obscure site that you find listed in only a few tourist books....the Rhymer’s Stone. It is in the shadow of the Eildon Hills, which are 3 rounded peaks under which the myths say that King Arthur and his knights await the call that will bring them back to save Britain in its moment of greatest need.



It is also the home of Thomas the Rhymer, who legend says in the early 1200's received the gift of prophesy after falling in love with the Fairy Queen (who also lives under those hills – must be crowded). Thomas supposedly left behind some convoluted rhymes that have been interpreted by some as predicting the future.....he would be sort of a Scottish version of Nostradamus. The stone marks the site of the original Eildon Tree under which he supposedly met the Queen of the Fae, joining her for 7 years under the hills, before returning to produce his prophesies.

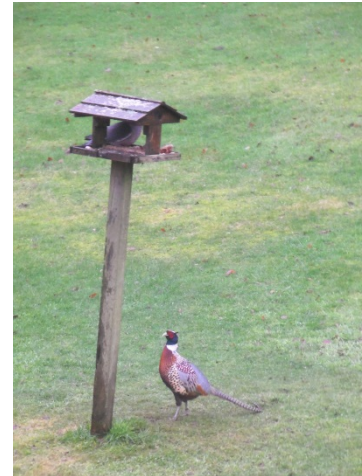
One of his prophesies was that one day a bridge over the River Tweed would be seen from the Eildon Tree. However, the river is so low in the valley that the prophecy was not likely to come true. Until a 19 span railway viaduct was constructed in the 19th century, to carry the trains over the entire valley....and guess what...it is so high that it can be seen from the site of the Rhymer's Stone. Thus the prophecy came true centuries after Thomas rhymed it. Those fairies must be pretty sharp!



Next week we relocate to Lancashire, where we will live for 7 months.....but we also have a side trip scheduled next week to visit another university that has expressed an interest in my helping them with some curriculum development. More adventures!



Wendy shares a funny U-Tube video with one of her new friends.



Pheasants in our yard every morning.



Us at the Hogmanay Ceilidh with friends.