



Adventure # 2 – Caithness & Hadrian's Wall

I had an invitation from the North Highland College of the University of the Highlands and Islands to visit and discuss curriculum development topics with them. So we headed north up through the Scottish Highlands, into Caithness, and on to the town of Thurso. Thurso is the most northerly major city on the island of Great Britain, and is actually further north than Juneau, Alaska. But because of the Atlantic winds, it is much warmer. In fact, Wendy checked on it regularly through December, and it was warmer than Indianapolis every single day. And as Indianapolis watched 8 inches of snow fall with -25 windchills predicted.....we were a balmy 42 degrees. Thurso has a lovely beach with a view into the Pentland Firth, and there were actually surfers in the water.....in wet-suits.....but still surfing!!



On the way back to Lancashire, we made two stops. First we visited the “16 men of Tain” who have the reputation of making some of the best Scotch Whisky in the world at the Glenmorangie Distillery. We walked away with a few bottles to warm the chilly nights.

Then we stopped in at the Benleva Hotel in Drumnadrochit to stay with brothers Steve and Alan. I lived in this 300 year old inn for a couple of months on my sabbatical back in 2012. It has the shire's historic hanging tree in its front yard



Back to Lancashire at the end of the week, after our northern jaunt and we decided to use the nicest day of the weekend to explore Hadrian's Wall. Roughly 70 years after Christ's birth, the Roman Empire expanded into Britain. They marched through what is now England and Wales without much trouble. But then they got to Scotland.....and ran into the Picts. The Picts were one of the two native peoples of the north, along with the Scotia. When Kenneth MacAlpin eventually united the two tribes he became the first king of what would become Scotland. But long before that, the Picts threw up a resistance against the Romans.....painting their faces blue and running screaming from the forests with sharp spears for weapons. If you saw the movie “The Eagle” a couple of years ago, it was about how an entire Roman Legion disappeared when it tried to go north into Pictish territory to conquer it. In the end, the Romans decided not to try to defeat the Picts, but rather, they built a wall to keep the barbarians away from the Roman “civilization.” The result was Hadrian's Wall....named for the Roman emperor of the time, who decided keeping the Picts out was easier than defeating them.



The wall covered 73 miles of distance, from coast-to-coast across the Cumbrian Hills. It was built 5 to 10 feet wide and 15 to 20 feet tall, all the way across Britain. Major forts were located roughly every 8 miles with smaller structures (milecastles) located every mile, and turrets in between those. This maintained line-of-site coverage for the entire length of the wall.

About 400 AD the Roman Empire abandoned the wall and withdrew from Britain. Stones were scavenged from the wall and forts for use in everything from castles, to abbeys, to cottages in the centuries after the Romans left Britain. It is likely that any stone structure in Cumbria or Northumberland that dates from the 10th to 12th centuries probably has stones from the wall used in its construction. Today there are only a few places left where you can visit a partially intact portion of the wall –none is still at original height – but it is possible to get an impression of the magnitude of the task that Emperor Hadrian set for his soldiers when he ordered the wall built. Although the weekend weather was threatening a wintery-mix of snow and rain, we decided to visit at least a couple of the wall sites.



Hadrian's Wall stretched across the entire width of Britain.



Hadrian's Wall & attached fort at Housesteads



What it looked like when we started up the hill (left) and what it looked like when we got there in a snow storm (right) – Scottish weather !!!!

By the way.....the Romans may have considered the Picts, with their faces painted blue, to be barbarian warriors.....but the Picts were also incredible stone masons, creating some intricately carved stones which still dot the highlands and islands. The one shown here was originally on the Glenmorangie Distillery property near Tain up in Caithness.



We also visited the 800 year old St. Andrew's church (part of the Church of England) in the small town of Greystoke (does that ring a bell with you readers of the Tarzan novels, as the



original home of the African hero?). This 13th century structure is certainly the most unique I have ever attended a service in. The beautiful baptismal font is relatively new – it dates from only the late 1800's. One of my photos shows it in front of the arched doorway that leads to the bell tower and under the 20 foot high arches that run the entire length of the church sanctuary. It is quite an impressive place to hold services.



My VW Polo parked in front of 13th century St. Andrews Church in Greystoke, Cumbria, England



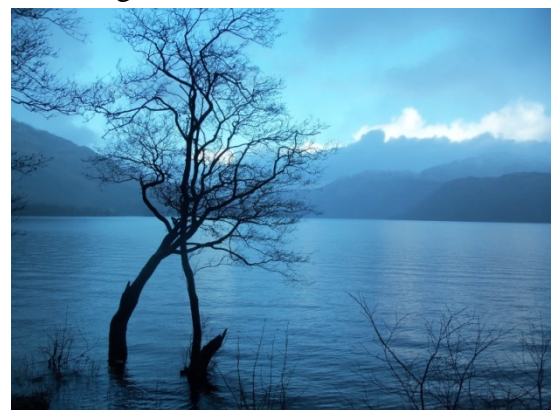
The 19th century baptismal font in St. Andrew's church.



Down street from the church is a relatively new pub called the Boot & Shoe where we stopped for a pint. It was built comparatively recently.....in the 16th century. Apparently the Duke of Norfolk who lived in the castle here had a bad case of gout affecting one of his feet so he wore a shoe on one foot and a boot on the other. So, there are several pubs around Lancashire and Cumbria that go by the name "The Boot & Shoe.



Otter Crossing in Caithness



On the bonnie, bonnie banks of Loch Lomond.