



The NG Scottish Road Trip

May 2019



Road Trip Diary

Charlie Killick

Tour d'Ecosse Diary

Friday 17th May

A grey morning but at least the forecast isn't too bad for the first leg of the trip, up to Scotch Corner.

The shuffling about of cars completed my NG is in the drive ahead of the tin top, all ready to go as soon as Rocket arrives.

At just before 9 a V8 burble announces that Rocket is here. A quick discussion as to route and planned stops and the show is on the road.

I lead the way through the lanes to pick up the M25 at Swanley then through the Dartford Tunnel and round to the M11. We've missed the worst of the rush hour and although busy there are no hold ups. We'd agreed that I would lead until we joined the M11 and then Chris would take over for a bit.

Onto the M11 and Rocket takes the lead. The traffic is heavy but maintaining a good speed until it drops to two lanes when all is well until lorry has to overtake lorry, then progress slows, never the less we are able to maintain a pace to meet our schedule for a planned 11:30 rendezvous with Chris and Lesley on the A1 at Peterborough Services.

As we leave the M11 onto the A14 the road works for the "upgrade" brings everything to a grinding halt. Just before everything comes to a stop a last minute lane change puts Rocket in what proves to be the slightly faster queue. By the time everything is back moving Rocket is well ahead and out of sight so off I go in pursuit.

Onto the A1 and still Rocket is not in sight. I'm in the outside lane overtaking a line of lorries and suddenly there is Rocket waiting in a lay-by, but I'm past so now I'm leading.

Fortunately Su spotted me so we're back together soon and continue together to the Peterborough Services. A quick tour round the car park but there is no sign of Dobby so we park up, and moments later he pulls up next to us. The eastern tour party is complete



Following a welcome coffee, "use of the facilities" and a refuel for Rocket, we returned to the A1 to press on to our intended lunch stop at Wentbridge. All was going well until



Stamford where an accident on the south bound carriageway caused huge southbound queues and slowed our northbound progress. Once past the site of the accident where breakdown vehicles were clearing the wreckage our pace picked up but we had been delayed sufficiently that we arrived at the Blue Bell just as the kitchen closed, so our lunch plans were thwarted. Ferrybridge services would have to do!

A brief stop for drink and sandwiches in the sunshine and back to the A1 for the remaining section to our overnight stop at Skeeby Travelodge, alongside the old A1 about a mile south of Scotch Corner; I'd reckoned that it would be quieter than stopping at the services.

All three cars refuelled at the Shell garage just before the Travelodge, very convenient and without the inflated prices of the service area.

The Travelodge looked a little forlorn but the rooms were spotless and comfortable, the car park deserted and in view of the rooms. There was no restaurant but they suggested places to eat locally. We decided to try the Frattello restaurant attached to the Scotch Corner Hotel (now a Holiday Inn) and enjoyed an excellent meal with the bonus of discovering that they served breakfast, available to non-residents, from 6:30 am, so Saturday would kick off well!

Saturday 18th May

After a good night's sleep; my thought that the Travelodge would be nice and quiet had proved correct, I could sleep with the window open unbothered by traffic noise.

An early morning e-mail from John Watson told us of Matt's problems, fixed, and his own, as yet unfixed so we departed uncertain when, or whether, we would be seeing him.

We checked out and drove the short distance up the road for an excellent breakfast at the restaurant at the Scotch Corner Hotel.

Refreshed we started the next leg of our journey, crossing through the Pennines on the A66, a good road with spectacular views, to join the M6 at Penrith. We were fortunate that traffic was light as the stretches of single carriageway can be tiresome if stuck behind a lorry.

Travelling north on the M6 and then the A74(M) we passed through belts of heavy rain but as we were able to keep going remained dry although hoods stayed down.

A stop at Gretna Services for "the facilities" and fuel for Rocket and onward to the Riverside Museum in Glasgow to meet up with Ken Molson, a local NG owner, and the western travellers, John Watson, Matt and Rob Bolt and Jeremy Evans. A minor navigational error took us on a quick loop through western Glasgow before we got back on track arriving at the Museum to be greeted by Ken as we pulled into the car park. No sign of the western party yet although we had received news that John was underway following assistance from Jeremy.

We adjourned to the cafe for refreshments and to await the arrival of the others.

By about three o'clock we were getting concerned as there was still no sign of the others so a "where are you" text was sent, answered almost immediately by a call to say that they had arrived.

Rapid refreshments for the late arrivals were taken before we scattered to take a look round the museum, full of interesting things with an emphasis on Glasgow's proud engineering heritage, principally in ship building and heavy engineering. There was a good selection of cars, motorbikes and bicycles plus a few buses although as most were displayed on ramps winding round the walls it was difficult to get a close view of most of them.

We regrouped at the cars after a look round the museum and a more permanent fix to JW's



electrical problem was carried out allowing him to depart with confidence to collect Jane from the airport, while the rest of us followed Ken Molson out of the city heading for the Argyll Motor Works at Alexandria



Then on to our overnight stop at the Anchor Inn at Garelochhead, via a refuelling stop in Helensborough, where we met up with John and Jane and were joined by Kevin and Norma who had travelled across from Belfast.

We enjoyed a good meal in the pub and went over the route options for the onward journey to Corran Ferry on Sunday.

Sunday 19th May

While those who had decided on the Trossachs route breakfasted at the Anchor Inn those of us taking routes via Inveraray had opted for kippers or smoked salmon and scrambled egg by Loch Fyne en-route so checked out and said goodbye to Ken Molson who was unable to join us for the rest of the trip and was returning to Glasgow.

We headed north alongside Loch Long before turning west passing through Glen Croe, with a brief hold up at temporary lights where the road is being rebuilt after damage from a landslip, an all too common occurrence. At the head of the valley we stopped at the Rest-and-be-Thankful viewpoint to look back down at the old military road snaking up from the valley floor in a series of hairpin bends, once a well known venue for a round of the British Hill-climb championship.



Continuing on down through Glen Kinglas and around the end of Loch Fyne brought us to our breakfast stop. We got in just ahead of a full coach so ordered quickly and had an excellent breakfast.

John and Jane had decided to turn north at Inveraray but Chris & Su in Rocket, Jeremy in his trusty Volvo (Mr Toad not being finished in time for the trip) and I continued to Lochgilphead before turning north and up through Kilmartin Valley, an area rich in ancient sites, to our next stop at the Bridge over the Atlantic, somewhere that I'd last visited with my NG 25 years ago – how little had changed!



1994



2019



We returned to the main road and after a lunch stop and a provisioning stop in Oban, and a fuel stop for Rocket, continued north to Connell before heading east to bring us along the northern side of Loch Awe heading for Rannoch Moor and Glen Coe. Coming up behind a queue of cars with two artics at their head I realised that we would be unlikely to overtake them all so decided on a short cut that I knew, up through Glen Orchy, about 12 miles of single track road following the river through birch woods and meadows but with very little traffic, I only met one on-coming vehicle on the whole stretch!



We rejoined our intended route at Bridge of Orchy with no sign of lorries!

We continued across Rannoch Moor and down through Glen Coe before crossing the bridge at Ballachulish and on to Corran



We were the last to reach Corran having taken the longest and most meandering route from Garelochhead. By the time we arrived the tour party was complete having been joined by Steve and Val who had driven up from Pickering in a single leg of over 300 miles



We checked in quickly, had a swift freshen up and walked down to the ferry for a trip over to Ardgour where Andrew Green, an NG owner resident on the Ardnamurchan Peninsular, and his wife Margaret had booked a table for us all to have dinner at the Inn at Ardgour, a few yards from the ferry ramp. We all sat down to an excellent meal before returning by the last ferry back.

Monday 20th May

Andrew Green was to be our guide for our tour of the Ardnamurchan Peninsular and trip to the lighthouse, the most westerly point on the British mainland, and we had arranged to meet him on the road to Strontian so we assembled ready to catch the 9:15 ferry. The day had dawned overcast with a hint of damp in the air but was forecast to improve.



We managed to get all six of the cars onto the ferry and made the short crossing to Ardgour, turned left and headed on towards Strontian, Rocket at the head with Jeremy at the wheel and Chris as passenger and me with Su as passenger a couple of cars behind. After a quarter of an hour we arrived at Andrew's immaculate gunmetal grey TC waiting for us at the roadside



Andrew led us along the narrow but largely traffic free roads through open woodland and rough pasture, with wonderful carpets of bluebells, to our first stop at his house, in a lovely spot overlooking the sea inlet leading to Kentra Bay, where his wife Margaret greeted us and showed us round the beautiful woodland garden.

We returned to Salen for a refreshment stop at the Jetty Shop where Andrew and Margaret had arranged bacon rolls and coffee for us all.



Duly refreshed we continued under ever brighter skies to our destination at the lighthouse. By the time we arrived we were blessed with brilliant sunshine and clear blue skies. We were lucky to be able to park close to the lighthouse, so as far west as it's possible to go.



We explored the area around the lighthouse looking at the old compressor room, air reservoirs and mighty foghorn.



Some of us ascended the 152 steps and two ladders to the top of the tower where a friendly and

entertaining guide explained the history and workings of the light and pointed out the islands of the Inner and Outer Hebrides visible from the platform.



After a most enjoyable visit we said goodbye to Andrew and Margaret and all returned to Salen where the group split, some returning directly to the ferry and back to the bunkhouse others turning north to join the road from Mallaig and return via Glenfinnan to Fort William and back down to the bunkhouse.

Tuesday 21st May

Tuesday was a “do your own thing” day but three cars, me with Su as passenger, Rocket with Jeremy at the wheel and Chris as passenger, and Chris and Lesley in Dobby decided to head for Mull, crossing by the Corran ferry then a nice drive to Lochaline for another short ferry crossing to Fishnish on Mull, a tight squeeze as there were a couple of coaches making the crossing with us.

We continued together to Salen, yes another one, where we had an essential cake and coffee stop before Dobby headed north towards Tobermory while Rocket and I crossed over to the west coast to drive the spectacular coast road down to Balnahard.

Stopping at just short of Balnahard to check Rocket’s coolant Chris asked what were the large black birds above us? Looking through my spy glass revealed them to be a pair of sea eagles, quite a treat to see them.





We turned round and returned to Gruline then followed the coast road north to Calgary Bay before cutting across to Dervaig for a lunch stop. From there we crossed via a great twisting road to Tobermoray before returning to Fishnish to catch the ferry back to the mainland.

Moments after we joined the queue Chris and Lesley pulled up behind us in Dobby from the opposite direction having returned from Tobermory and completing the southern loop.



Plenty of room for us for this crossing as there were no coaches.

When we landed back on the mainland Chris and Lesley in Dobby stopped for a coffee while Rocket, now with Su as passenger, and me, with Chris, carried on.

We came up behind some slow moving traffic and with no prospect of getting past took the alternative, and even narrower but traffic free, coast road.



I waved Rocket past for a spell as leader to the ferry back to Corran. We arrived as the ferry was loading. A tight squeeze and Rocket was aboard but no room for me!

I returned to rejoin the queue by which time Chris and Lesley in Dobby had arrived. We looked across the water to see Rocket disembark and waited for the return of the ferry.

Tour d'Ecosse Diary (part 2)

Wednesday 22nd May

Wednesday and it was time to move on to Stromeferry.

Everything was packed back into the cars and we checked out from the bunkhouse and said goodbye to Alan & Halina, the proprietors.

John and Jane headed for Mallaig to catch the ferry to Skye and on to Stromeferry from there. The rest of the group decided to take the mainland route through Fort William and up alongside the southern part of Loch Ness before turning west.

Chris and Su in Rocket and I made a small detour to look at Neptune's Staircase, the locks linking the Caledonian Canal to Loch Linnhe. Chris and Lesley in Dobby had intended to join us but we got separated in heavy traffic leaving the petrol station and they missed the turning.

When we arrived there was a large Dutch barge and a yacht about to emerge from the bottom lock. We waited to see the swing bridges carrying the Mallaig road and railway open to let them pass. Everything seemed to be taking a long time when we heard a "toot, toot" and the steam train puffed into view on its way to Mallaig, a rare treat.



We stayed to watch the bridges open after the train had crossed, the boats pass through and the bridges swing back into place allowing the road to reopen.

We returned to the main road and headed north to rendezvous with the others. The initial plan to meet at the cafe at Urquart Castle was scuppered by not being able to reach it without paying for the castle tour so we arrived in the car park to be met by Jeremy directing us to an alternative cafe a little further north. This proved to be sound move as it offered great food and even better cakes!

Sadly as we ate the weather deteriorated so we left in steady rain. We returned to Invermoriston before turning west passing through Glen Moriston and Glen Shiel, spectacular scenery and a great road but not at its best in heavy rain. We made a quick stop

for fuel for Rocket before continuing past Eilean Donan Castle and on to Stromeferry, by which time the rain had stopped, although the skies remained leaden.



We arrived at Stromeferry to find poor Jane nursing a very nasty bump on her head having caught her foot in the seat belt as she got out of Bow and landed heavily on her face. It was thought wise for her to be checked out at A&E so Jeremy's trusty Volvo was pressed into service to take Jane and John to the hospital on Skye. Having examined her there the A&E doctor found nothing broken but transferred her to Inverness for a CT scan and overnight observation. Jeremy returned from Skye bringing John back with him.

We all sat down to a splendid meal prepared by Val and Norma

Thursday 23rd May

John received the good news that the CT scan was clear and so Jane was being discharged. He would collect her and bring her back on the train to the tiny Stromferry station, within a few yards of where we were staying.

The rest of the group were going to explore Skye by various routes, some of us taking the old turntable ferry from Glenelg, with a lovely drive to the ferry from Shiel Bridge on the mainland and from the ferry to Breakish on Skye.



Rocket, once again with Jeremy at the wheel and Chris as passenger, and me with Su as passenger were first at the ferry.



The weather was rather disappointing with some drizzle and low cloud but we were able to enjoy the spectacular scenery on the 15+ miles of winding single track roads to and from the ferry.

We joined the “main” road at Breakish and headed north skirting the Cuillins, their tops hidden in cloud, and on to Portree and continued up the east coast, catching a glimpse of the Old Man of Storr, a finger of rock visible through ragged cloud. The landscape has changed greatly since my last visit as the forest has been cleared recently for the timber and will take several years to re-grow



Our thoughts turned to lunch and as we had seen several signs advertising “The Soup Cafe” we decided that it would be worth a try. We turned off at where an arrow directed us through a gate and down a narrow track. We wound down through woodland and were amazed to find a magnificent country house hotel with wonderful views in a sheltered spot and bright sunshine, not what we were expecting at all.



The Soup Cafe had a good selection of very good soups to suit both carnivores and vegetarians; even dessert was a strawberry soup!

Suitably sustained we continued north, passing Steve and Val who had stopped to explore the ruined Duntulm Castle, and rounding the northern tip and heading back south down the west coast to Uig and back to Portree, then back round the Cuillins, now free of the low cloud, returning to the mainland over the Skye Bridge.



By the time we got back to Stromeferry John had returned with Jane from Inverness. Poor Jane was looking very battered but, although a bit sore, was OK.

Friday 24th May

A bit of shuffling for a quick photo with all the cars lined up for a final time before we disperse on Saturday.



The forecast was better so five cars set off for Applecross; John was taking Jane to the airport and Matt & Rob had decided to have a day off from driving.

We had decided to take the coastal route to Applecross and return via the Pass of the Cattle to make the most of the view. Lots of lovely roads across open moorland and patches of birch woodland and then following the coast in the lee of high ground





When we got to Applecross we went to a restaurant recommended by a friend of Chris Humphreys, The Potting Shed, set in a beautiful walled garden



When we had finished our excellent lunch we continued through Applecross, thronged with cars, motorcycles and scooters, all no doubt doing the North West 500, to look for seals. We stopped at a smooth area of rock just before Culduie where we had a good view to rocks in

the bay where I had seen seals on previous visits. We were not disappointed as there were, I guess, sixty odd seals on any available flatish rocks to relax and get any available sun.

We returned to the village of Applecross, turned right and headed for the Pass of the Cattle. We paused at the viewpoint at the summit before making the descent of the series of hairpin bends for which the road is famous.



There was a good view going down, although Su would have preferred no view for the sections where the drop was on the passenger's side!

We were lucky to encounter almost no traffic on our ascent to the viewpoint and none on the hairpin bend section.



Once we reached the bottom an essential cake stop was made before we returned to Stromeferry.

John returned by train having seen Jane safely to the airport, the intended welcome for him at the station thwarted by the arrival of clouds of midges!

Tour d'Ecosse Diary (part 3 – The journey home via the Far North)

Saturday 25th May

The weather forecast was not good for everybody heading off on their direct, or indirect, journeys home.

We said our goodbyes to the other NGRs, thanked Clare the housekeeper for her help and bade farewell to the Stationmaster's Lodge.



Chris & Su, in Rocket, and I had decided that having come so far, and having been as far west as we could go, it would be a missed opportunity if we didn't carry on north to Dunnet Head, as far north as it's possible to go on the British mainland.

We left Stromeferry and followed the road alongside Loch Carron then up through Glen Carron round to Strathpeffer where we paused briefly to let a couple of enthusiastic tourists take their photos with Rocket. We continued through Dingwall to pick up the A9 heading north under threatening grey skies, past the Moray Firth with views of oil rigs moored in the deep water waiting for maintenance or redeployment, an extraordinary sight.

We stopped at Golspie for coffee and excellent cake, and to use the facilities.

As we headed further and further north the landscape got wilder and hillsides blazed yellow with gorse



We carried on to Wick for a refuelling stop, both for cars and crew. Following the suggestion of the attendant at the petrol station we went for a good lunch at a cafe overlooking the harbour. The weather had brightened slightly and the rain had passed.



Back on the road and up to Duncansby Head, the extreme North East corner. It was very busy when we got there with lots of people with cameras and binoculars looking out to Pentland Firth and Stroma, perhaps hoping to spot the killer whales which had been seen recently.

The Orkneys were clearly visible despite the gloomy weather, after a few photos to record our visit we headed off.



There was a short delay in leaving when two vehicles met on the single track road and neither seemed willing or able to engage reverse to make use of the passing place, impass for about five minutes.

We moved on to our next intended stop, John O'Groats, but on arrival found the car parks heaving with people and the whole place rather uninviting so made a quick circuit and carried on.



A nice drive across wild and empty landscape brought us to Dunnet Head, our final goal. Alltogether far better than John O'Groats, free from the tourist hoards and associated tat and with a great view across to Orkney, despite the dark skies





Our target reached we went on to our overnight stop at the Royal Hotel, Thurso, a rambling old place not quite living up to being Royal!

There was a moment of confusion at checking in, the online booking confirmation clearly showed that of the original three rooms booked two were confirmed and one cancelled but the hotel's own system showed all three cancelled. Fortunately there were rooms available both of which were well appointed and comfortable, although Su and Chris had an unwelcome street light outside their window and both of us suffered from the Thurso After-Hours' Choir serenading us late into the night.

Sunday 26th May

The forecast was bad for our journey south and although it was dry when we woke by the time we checked out it was tipping down. Hood up for Rocket but I decided to continue with open motoring.

There followed a fairly unpleasant drive until the rain eased as we skirted Inverness and headed down the A9 for about 20 miles before turning off to Grantown-on-Spey, the start of "The Snow Road", 90 miles of great roads through the Cairngorms.

There were storm clouds on some of the mountain tops but fortunately the twists and turns carried us round them. We shared the road with a few motor bikes, and an unfeasible number of oncoming cyclists, given the weather and terrain, but very few cars.



After a steep descent, with hairpin bends a few miles south of Tomintoul we stopped at the Bridge of Brown tea rooms. A fortuitous stop as the heavens opened as soon as we got inside. We had a lovely light lunch, by which time the rain had stopped and the skies had brightened.

We followed alongside the River Dee through Braemar and started the climb up to the Glenshee ski area.



Wisps of cloud were still hanging about on the slopes but the road was clear



The road continued with switchbacks and sweeping bends down through Glen Shee on the way to Blairgowrie where we had an invitation to supper with my cousin





We arrived at my cousins' for a welcome break after 220 miles of driving. We had a very nice time with them and a great barbeque, their first of the year, before heading on to our overnight stop at the Sky Lodge by Perth Aerodrome.



Monday 27th May

I had been aware of a metallic clank on the drive yesterday and guessed that the rubber bobbins supporting the exhaust had sheared, a common occurrence for which I carried spares, however although I found that the bobbins had indeed sheared I found also that the pipe had fractured almost completely through.



A quick detour to Halfords was needed to obtain a repair band and clips and we were all set for the onward journey



Our plan was to travel down through the borders through the Tweedsmuir Hills past the Devils Beeftub and down to Moffat along nice driving roads that I knew well.

We crossed the Forth on the new Queensferry Bridge, skirting Edinburgh on the ring road.



We headed down through Penicuik and onto the Moffat road but before we got to the best bits we came to a road closure and diversion missing out the whole section that I'd been looking forward to. We avoided the motorway part of the designated diversion and followed the minor road on the valley side high above it, down to Moffat.



We had a lunch stop at Moffat and continued south alongside the motorway on the old A74 as far as Gretna Green where we joined the motorway to skirt Carlisle before meandering towards our overnight stop at a Premier Inn between Settle and Skipton. As we travelled through the Dales the heavens opened. A sat-nav error, leading us down ever narrower lanes and announcing “you have reached your destination” in the middle of nowhere did not improve our mood as we were both open motoring. Resetting the sat-nav took us round in a circle, past where we had been told to turn left on the first attempt, and in a couple of miles the hotel came into view, not a moment too soon after 250 miles of driving.

Tuesday 28th May

The rain had stopped and we were greeted by a better day when we checked out.

We headed east, via a fuel stop at Ilkley, to pick up the A1 at Wetherby.

We had brief heavy showers on our trip down the A1 and a short delay where there had been an accident on the northbound carriageway. While we were slow for only a couple of miles the northbound traffic was stationary for mile after mile; how grateful we were that we were heading south.

We'd intended to carry on down the A1 all the way to the M25 to avoid the road works on the A14 where we had been held up on our way up. Our plan was changed by an overhead warning of major delays ahead so we headed off down the A14 anticipating a lesser delay.

We were relieved that traffic through the road works was flowing much better than on the way up and carried on to Bishops Stortford services for a fuel stop for Rocket and snack break for us.

The remainder of the trip was trouble free. When I peeled off at Swanley I parted from Rocket with a flash of lights and a wave and continued through the lanes arriving home at just after 2 o'clock after what had been a memorable and enjoyable road trip.

