

## **Scottish Diary 2018 – Belinda and Alan Dawes on their travels again, but no Scottish Sockeye Salmon up there so far!**

Alan and I have just ended our first week up here on the far north coast of Scotland.

Before that we had a few days at the Porsonachan Hotel on Loch Awe. You may have seen the owner or manager at Fly Fishing fairs and such like. Three nights bed and breakfast for £99 each. Great value believe me.

The weather wasn't conducive to fishing, too windy, but they do have their own small fleet of boats, all pristine and the engines start first time!

Since we arrived here we've had our day in Thurso, nearest supermarket and fuel, an 80 mile round trip.

Also, a visit to Caithness Smokehouse, which is near John'o'Groats. Great smoked products including smoked mussels! I even bought some smoked butter. The owner sends loads of it to London restaurants every week. After chatting for a while, we discovered that the owner had recently been to Alaska, fishing for Sockeye Salmon, just as Alan and I did in July, so the visit lasted about an hour comparing notes.

We have also been to Wick, about 70 miles away on the North East coast. It is a busy little town with a thriving harbour and an excellent whisky distillery, Pulteney, where we bought a bottle of their best. The best place to eat is undoubtedly "Wickers World" for great fish and chips.

I also spotted the "Camp Bar"! I know a couple of gentlemen in Derby that would love to visit. However, it has nothing to do with Gay men, it was a meeting place for military about a hundred years ago.

So, back 'home', where the view from the dining table is so spectacular that I set the table with knives, forks, glasses and binoculars! So far we have spotted heron, curlew, various geese, buzzard, kestrel, stonechat, robin, skylark, and loads of plovers on the shoreline. High tides this week, the local sheep get stranded on little hummocks of grass. They just sit there munching until the tide turns and goes out again.

I have mentioned before that the local bus shelter is used as a greenhouse. This year there a few additions to the usual tomatoes, cucumber and marrows. There are now strawberries, spring onions, mint and a grape vine. Plus, there is now a selection of craft products, there is a recovered footstool, cushions, various knitted, and craft jewellery. There is an honesty jar for payment.

This is a very generous community, so far I have received eggs, mushrooms, plums and apples, plus a promise of a couple of small lobsters. These usually come accompanied by a bucket load of crab.

Our nearest neighbour is Mark, about a hundred yards up the hill. He is the local Postie. He came here from the West Yorkshire about four years ago after his wife of 45 years died and he wanted a complete change of scene. He could not however bear the thought of leaving his dear wife behind, so he had her coffin brought up here and laid to rest in the cemetery below us on the seashore.

He has quickly become a valued member of the community. Not only delivers post, but also prescriptions and messages and flowers from the florists which is 40 miles away. He also looks in on old folk who would otherwise not see anyone all day, he is also known for distributing big chunks of hind liver to the old folk too, given to him by a local gamekeeper.

He is the chair of the River Naver fishing club, is on the village hall committee, and writes a local newsletter. He is also an excellent cook and has three lively Jack Russells, one of which is due to give birth to pups any day soon.

I must mention the weather. Scotland had its share of the hot summer. Two consequences of this are firstly the lack of water in the rivers. It is really dire in many places. Never in my 33 years of visiting this place have I seen the water so low. The Salmon that managed to get up the rivers before the draught really set in, are now swimming up and down the pools, unable to get further up river or back to the sea. They are just about impossible to catch as we found out yesterday on the Association water of the River Naver. It was worth a try at only £25 per rod, 9am to 6pm. And a lovelier place not to catch fish can't be found anywhere!

We shall probably try the hill lochs next. This involves a steep treck up through the heather and peat bogs.

The other effect of the hot weather is that the midge population is about 60% down! Great news for sufferers of the wee devils' bites. However, we still cover exposed bits with Boots Repel cream (NO DEET!) just in case.

Great distress in the Dawes household today! Walking in the Borgie Forest this afternoon, I happened to look down at my left hand and saw that the diamond in my engagement ring has disappeared! It could be anywhere! Sadly, I lost the original stone a few years ago, what are the odds of losing a second? I just hope I get a sympathetic response from the insurance company when we get home.

## **Scottish Diary Part 2**

Just our luck! Finally, the rain has come to the Northern Scottish Highlands! Just as we are leaving, both the Naver and the Borgie are up at least two feet.

The fishing has been very poor due to the long, hot and dry summer, I bet the salmon are racing up the rivers now, wiggling their tails with joy.

We had a few days on Orkney. We took our rods in case, but it was so very windy, and that's when the rains started. The last knockings of the hurricane I expect. We were, however, lucky with the ferry crossings, picking the two days when the wind was lower and the sea was calmer, the Pentland Firth is not to be trifled with in bad weather.

Just south of Orkney lie the Pentland Skerries. This is the boiling point of the meeting of the Atlantic and the North Sea. Boats large and small all rock and roll there, even on a calm day. The best route to take is the trip from Gills Bay to St. Margaret's Bay on the catamaran .

On a recent trip to Durness, near Cape Wrath, we passed the sight of the Rip Wire over Rispond Bay where, last year, a local lady did the trip, dressed as a witch for a local charity. I am giving notice now that I shall be doing the same next year to raise a contribution to Prostate Cancer UK. Members of the club will know that I have promised that every penny I raise this year and next will go to this charity in memory of my very dear friend who died of prostate cancer in January. I will be looking for sponsorship, so watch out! Perhaps I should do it clad in just my waders!

Yesterday we were taken to meet Hugh at Kinloch, the far end of the Kyle of Tongue. Hugh is the head keeper of the estate there, and has a side line of smoking salmon. He also does venison, duck and haggis, all from wild fish and meat.

He has a Jack Russell called Jake who is something of a local character, setting off for the pub whenever the mood takes him, a journey of some five miles or more, which is a long way for a little dog with short legs! There seems to be no problem for him getting home. Locals will give him a lift, sometimes just pushing him in the back door in the early hours. Doors are rarely locked up here! Occasionally, the local policeman will phone to say that they have him for the night and will return him next day.

He, Jake that is, not the policeman, also is the dog of choice for local lady Jack Russells. People bring their bitches from far afield to see him. Mark, our neighbour, had his bitch in heat to take to take to Kinloch, and passed Hugh on the road, even though he was expecting Mark at the house. The conversation went something like, "Just got to go to Altnaharra, I'll be back in an hour or so. Here, catch this!" At this point Jake was unceremoniously chucked through the driver's window of Mark's truck, where Loulou, Marks' bitch was very pleased to see him!!

She has just given birth to five lovely pups. All the spitten image of their father.

**Dear Jake is due to visit the vet soon, he has fathered a few too many in the area now.**

We received a gift of two small lobsters at the door the other evening. Typical of the generosity of the people in this wonderful community.

So, we are now packing up after four weeks of gazing out at the best view in Scotland and Great Britain and walking the hills and beaches. Pity about the fishing, but there is always next year.

From Monday we shall be on the Aberdeenshire Don with John Rooks of the F.F.F.A, Jane Thomas from Sutton on the Hill, and of course Bill Cottle our wonderful ghillie.

Hopefully, the Don will be carrying more water now and we stand a chance of catching a salmon.

Tight lines all!

PS. Wouldn't you know it, the sun is shining!