

Barb & Paul's (with Jules & Verne) Scotland Road Trip July 2013

Plan is to leave the wonderful city of Liverpool and obviously head North up the M6, so after loading Gloria (Glo) with far too much stuff (Barb & I do find it difficult to pack light) Jules & Verne's luggage however is minimalist to say the least. So, we (that's Barb, Paul, Jules & Verne) depart our great city at 12.10



Our Highland's Adventure Begins

So here we go Day 1

After breakfast we pack Gloria and then it's off to the post office and the local shop to post and drop off the weekends eBay sales 12 parcels in all, and then it's the usual have we got everything check, knowing full well that we will have forgotten something, we climb aboard. With 0 miles showing on Gloria's trip meter, a full tank of fuel and enough stuff to sink the Queen Mary we depart Dunbabin Road. Barb is driving so I busy myself sorting out Sylvia (the sat nav), maps and various other stuff to keep my mind off the fact that Barb is driving, it's not that Barb's a bad driver but more that I am a bloody awful passenger, I cannot help it, and will always be one however much I try not to be. Barb say's that I do not try that hard to be a good passenger but that I am just a control freak. The plan was to leave at 10.30 but best laid plans and all that we finally depart at 12.10 fairly uneventful drive up the M6 and a stop off at our favourite shop & cafe Cranston's in Penrith for lunch and to collect a few essentials. Next decision where to stay the night Barb finds a campsite on the internet (wonderful thing this mobile MiFi)

£12 per night all in sounds good only one snag phoned up to book and fully booked, so it's back to the Caravan club book and the Internet, Barb finds another site at Loch Lomond and phones up yes they have a pitch and it's £24 per night (no wonder they had a pitch) I have stayed in cheaper hotels, 246 miles later we arrive just before 6pm and after the moan it is a very nice site.

After a walk to the lake oops sorry Loch it's back to Gloria for cheese and biscuits and a little glass of red possibly two. The plan tomorrow is to have a look around Loch Lomond and weather permitting we may go on a boat trip on the lake oops again sorry Loch, then we are heading for Glencoe and its stunningly beautiful scenery the plan is for a roadside camp tomorrow night to make up for tonight's 24 quid. Well that's it for today more tomorrow and not so much driving and more sight-seeing as Jules & Verne are getting a bit stir crazy sitting in the back of the van.

Day 2

So we are awake and up by 7.30 then breakfast, tea, coffee, toast and Barb's homemade raspberry jam then it's off to the showers, do the dishes (not in the showers) and pack Gloria back up and we are ready for the off after returning the keys for the washroom and retrieving our £5 deposit we depart at 9am. We have a quick look around the local town of Balloch from where the cruise boats leave for cruises around the Loch it would have been nice to go on one apart



from one thing that I have not mentioned yet, and that is that it is persistently raining and doing so fairly hard at that. So, it's off up the A82 along the left side of Loch Lomond towards well north anyway, I bet they had a right laugh when they classified the A82 as an "A" in some parts I have been on wider whites. However, this is the only (main) road from Balloch up towards Glencoe so live with it even if there is a forty-footer heading towards you using both sides of the road good fun. I did ask Barb if she wanted to drive and her response was do YOU want me to drive, I think that was a rhetorical question.

After covering about 30 miles in an hour it was time to stop for coffee and tea at a cafe at the side of the Loch looks like a nice place, the waitress gives us some menus and I am tempted by the sausage and egg bap, so the order is placed for a sausage bap, a sausage and egg bap and a pot of tea for two. Well looks can be deceiving the tea was not good by any standards then when the cook no the destroyer she (if think) looked like a proper skank that could do with getting in the dish washer if they had one, delivered the baps the sausage (square) looked like it had been cooked in a volcano for some considerable time and the egg looked like it had met Ali in his prime. So won't be going back there any time soon, back into Gloria and off up the road and after a while we stop off at the village of Luss we have a drive around this quaint village however I think I mentioned before that it was persistently raining well it still is so we don't get out of Glo but instead head off for Glencoe. If you have not been to Glencoe you must go as the scenery is as I said yesterday stunningly beautiful, but not today its blowing a gale, raining and the cloud cover is down to a couple of hundred feet. I suggest to Jules & Verne that they get out for a photo opportunity they look at me as if I am mad and decline my offer instead, they sit by the window inside Gloria and have their picture taken.

Now the plan was to stay at Glencoe for a couple of days but as the weather is bad, we decide to change our plans push on towards Skye and to stop off at Glencoe for a few on the return journey hoping that the weather will be better. Fort William next stop after driving for ever to do 20 or so miles we arrive at Fort Bill park Gloria for the sum of £1.50 for a whole day (Liverpool one take note) we have a wander around the town managing to drag a fairly unimpressed Jules & Verne with us, unfortunately lots of closed shops and not a great deal else to see, there is a boat leaving at 7.30pm for a Loch cruise but as the weather has not improved we give it a miss. Gloria is getting thirsty and needs fuel, if you have not been to the west of Scotland you need to get it when you can (fuel that is) as petrol stations are few and far between so we find one yippee it's only £1.42 a litre. I fill Gloria's tank and go into pay the very friendly cashier asks me where we are going so I tell him we are going to Skye he says it's a shame about the weather then continues to tell me how good the weather has been and that it was the hottest place in the UK last month with temperatures hitting 30 degrees (more like 13 today). He continues to tell me that he is off on his holidays in a couple of weeks and that he is going to Romania (been going for years) he has found an Irish bar that sells Guinness for 80p a pint lager for 45p a pint and he gets 20 percent discount as well, the foods cheap, the weathers hot and the women are hotter (sexist pig) I wish him well and leave, I hope he catches something. Gloria be afraid be very afraid.

We carry on up the A82 and find a roadside parking place to stay the night alongside Loch Lochy what a great name, time for Moroccan Chicken with Dauphinoise Potatoes not bad in the back of a van by the side of the road, well don't kid yourselves came from Morrison's 45 minutes in the oven hey presto done. We have been joined by a wagon carrying waste oil and another camper van I hope that there is nothing to do with dogs going on here, all that in just 109 miles, we'll tomorrow another day and should see us on the Isle of Skye. It's time for a little drink an early night and I suspect an early start in the morning due to the traffic waking us up, so it's good night from us more tomorrow and hopefully some more pictures of Jules & Verne

Day 3

Loch Lochy to Portree

Don't you just love the name Loch Lochy it's as if they could not think of another name, anyway as I thought it was an early morning in fact 5am so a very early morning our neighbour with the waste oil truck is off on his collections so I may as well make the most of the opportunity to catch the morning light so wake Jules & Verne (who may I say are not too happy) I go down to our beach and take some photographs. The sun is trying to break through but the low cloud wins the battle and the sun gives up and hides behind the clouds, the clouds however keep moving with the breeze and make the mountains play hide and seek. After an hour or so I return with Jules & Verne both muttering that their cold to Gloria and bed down for a little more shut eye, we awake just before 9 and after a few more pictures breakfast, tea & coffee we depart our beach and Loch Lochy (I love it) on our journey to Skye. Sylvia reckons that it should take 2 hours that however does not take any stops into consideration, so it's off up the A82 and then left onto the A87 it's either left or straight on navigation is not too difficult as there are only two roads. The A87 has some fantastic stopping places to park up and take advantage of the beautiful scenery Glen Shiel has to offer we stop a number of times for picture opportunities. Our next stop is at Eilean Donan Castle for tea, coffee and some more pictures, the stupidity of the human race never ceases to amaze me, example six people standing in front of the only door in or out of the place having a good old natter not noticing that no one can get in or out, and the three German motorcyclists in the loo two of them having a wee and the other taking a photograph of his mates. Then it's back into Gloria and back on the A87 towards Kyle of Lochalsh our last stop before going over the bridge to Skye, for a walk around and last minute food shopping at the Co-Op. The

bridge is just outside the town so we are soon on the Isle of Skye and it's time for a spot of lunch, Barb gets the electric kettle out and then realises that the gas one may be a better idea. After lunch we press onto Portree just stopping once to top up Gloria with fuel and water, you can tell the difference driving her with a full water tank but this is going to play havoc with the fuel consumption. We arrive at Portree and after a walk around which does not take long Barb decides she wants to watch the tennis (some feller called Murray is playing) so it's off to the pub when we get there he is one set down and not looking good, then it's two sets down not looking good at all. There is a load of Aussies in the pub and there is a fair bit of banter regarding the outcome of the match, they ask if he is British or Scottish, I say it depends if he wins or loses. Give him his due after 5 sets he is victorious and we are still in the pub drinking coke, we had not eaten or found anywhere to park up for the night so it was fish and chips at Portree harbour and then a drive to find an overnight parking place. How is it when you're not looking for something you find loads of them and when you want one you cannot find one, well so it is with parking places on Skye. We eventually find what appears to be a perfect spot, at the top of a hill overlooking the Sound of Raasay, well that was then and now it's decided to blow a gale, it's a bit like don't come knockin when the vans a rockin but it's just the wind as I am awake and Barbs asleep having a little snore. Well that's it for today but as it does not really go dark and gets light very early I expect it may be another early wake up tomorrow let's hope Mr Sunshine is coming out to play so that we can take in the wonderful view from bedroom window, however after looking at the forecast I doubt it.



Day 4

Well the wind did not stop blowing last night so it was a rocky night in Gloria and as suspected another early rise, we decide to pack everything away and move to lower ground for breakfast and we find a spot to park up by the sea on the north east coast of Skye a little less blowy but not much, so a cooked breakfast by the sea and then a little exploring on the rocks and a chance for some more photographs. I suggest to Jules & Verne that we go for a row in a boat they take one look at it and decline, they then consider a swim but think better of that as well. We have decided that we will find a site to stay at tonight as we are both indeed of a shower, so we start looking at the caravan club guide and also trawling the Internet and find what looks like a great site on tinternet.

Eventually we get a phone signal and I ring to enquire if they have a pitch available and yes they do, the lady asks for our membership number which I supply only to be told that its wrong, I then discover that they are a camping & caravanning club site not a Caravan club site. Ok so no great problem other than the charge for a night for none members is £29.50 and members its £16 as we are planning to stay here for two nights (you know what's coming next) yes have a gold star you guessed it right we are now members of the Camping & Caravanning club as well any more books maps and literature we will need a trailer. The site is great it overlooks a Loch Greshornish and the owners who are not local have been here since 2007 are extremely efficient (possibly a tad to efficient) they ask how you are at reversing, escort you to your pitch explain where all the facilities are, it's a bit like going to a posh hotel, the facilities are pristine mind you they should be if you're paying £29.50 a night. Anyway it may be a great site however with its open aspects it's still blowing a bloody gale. As it is our wedding anniversary today, we were planning on going out tonight but as there is nowhere to go for miles it looks like we are staying in Gloria tonight. As I write Mr Sunshine has come out to say hello and the wind has dropped a tad however looking at the clouds coming over Mr S may lose out again. Well that's about it for today but you may not get this until tomorrow due to the fact that there is no WIFI and no phone signal.

I ask JSV if they fancy a boat trip and they look at me as if I am daft
And they were not too fussy going much closer to this chap

Day 5

Well avid readers due to the complete lack of any phone or WIFI signal you are getting two days together, John has mentioned that he could not open the link so I think I may have sorted the problem I have reduced the file size of the

pictures so that should in theory reduce the overall document file size (we will find out later when I send the document). Well we have decided to stay at the campsite until Sunday so we are going out for the day, as we leave the campsite Barb spots that there is an information kiosk adjoining the campsite office and pops in to see if they have any interesting literature, I think that I have mentioned previously that we have just a few books, guides and pamphlets with information regarding Scotland. Well I can now confirm that have enough to start our own information centre if not a library and that Gloria is now definitely overweight due to the fact that she is carrying half a forest in paper. The first stop is going to be Dunvegan Castle (so I better send this to Dave & Judith in Greece) as it is the ancestral home of the Macleod Clan.



According to Sylvia it's a thirty five minute drive to the castle so off we go, after looking at Gloria's fuel gauge my fears of her fuel consumption look well founded so first job is to dump the 50 litres of water we loaded the other day as we do not need it until we leave the campsite for another night of roadside camping. We arrive at the Castle and for a mere £9.50 each we are granted access to the house and oh great the gardens, I leave Barb to look around and read every piece of information she can find while. It takes me about 10 minutes to tour the house as I am a bit of a philistine when it comes to looking around old houses however I have taken some pictures for Dave even though you are not supposed to take photographs in the house, what a maverick I can be, it takes Barb considerably longer. Then it's a tour of the gardens unfortunately for me this bit takes considerably longer as Barb wants to look at everything and would like me to be with her, so we have a pleasant wander around looking at this and that and oh yes, a few more photo's.

Next it's time for lunch and rather than having it in the car park we decide to find somewhere a little more scenic so we drive down to the village and park at the water's edge and I prepare sausage and duck egg barm cakes and for desert Barb had found a little cake shop in the village and purchase a slice of lemon drizzle cake, sounded lovely until I found out it was £4 for a single slice and a not very big slice at that. After lunch our next stop was to be at the Talisker

distillery at Carbost, now even though I am not a great lover of whisky this is much more up my street even if, you have seen one distillery you have seen them all as it is more or less the same process everywhere. So, Sylvia tells us that it's a forty minute drive, if there was a straight road anywhere to be seen it would have been 10 minutes away, so of we go. We arrive and trot up to the counter to purchase our tickets £7 each for a tour that will take about half an hour as part of the distillery is closed for ESSENTIAL work (how come they have been distilling the stuff here since 1830 and they choose today for essential maintenance) oh and by the way you will have to wait an hour for the next tour, deep joy. There is one benefit no two, the first one in that you get to taste their medicine after the tour and second that you get a voucher that if you buy a large bottle of the product gets you £3 discount. Which under normal circumstances would be ok, but when I am looking around the shop killing time before the tour begins, I look at the prices and some of the stuff is £525 a bottle. I bet you don't get to taste this stuff and no you don't. The tour is pretty good and so is the thimble full of the 10 year old malt you get at the end.

(I am starting to sound like a right moaning git, must be an age thing)

Next, it's time for something to eat and as it was our wedding anniversary yesterday, we decide to go out for a meal, there is an Inn about a mile from the campsite so that's where we head. We go into the bar and first impressions are not good and neither is the bar menu, however they have a restaurant in the next room, we go through to have a look, it's like walking into a different world the two are like chalk and cheese. So, table booked and we have a great meal, Barb has scallops with Stornaway black pudding parcels, absolutely fantastic and I have a pretty good steak but not as good as the scallops mind you, they did not have to come far. So full and happy with our day we return to the campsite it's not long before Barb is asleep and I am putting my ramblings to paper (well nearly paper) just in case someone is reading them, more tomorrow if you like, goodnight everyone.



Day 6

Well dear readers not a great deal to report today apart from it peeing down and blowing a proper gale, may have to nail Gloria down if it gets any worse.

Had a full lazy morning sitting off in Gloria, sorted out the Road Trip website it should be better than trying to send and receive large email attachments. Barb is watching the tennis and a sun drenched Wimbledon instead of looking out of the window at a rain drenched Scottish campsite. So, after the tennis has finished, we decide to go for a drive. After about 5 miles we saw a hotel so we thought that we would stop for a drink, after driving down a rally route we got to the hotel only to find that there was a wedding reception going on so we gave it a miss and carried onto Portree. After having a little walk around getting a little bit wetter and getting some provisions from the local coop we decided to go to the pub for a little drink and a dry out, this is the same pub we were in the other day watching Murray with our new found Aussie friends. We don't stay for too long as we have Gloria with us there is a hotel (by all accounts) in the village by the campsite so we pop in for one before returning to our pitch, the guy behind the bar ask where we are from, it's obvious that he is not local and a northern lad, it turns out that he was a wagon driver and used to deliver to Liverpool docks (in the good old days) and moved here 16 years ago, big planet small world. When we depart this strange establishment, the rain has stopped the wind has dropped, the sun has come out and it is a beautiful evening. After dinner we walk down to the beach the view is wonderful with the setting sun shining its last few rays of light over the calm still waters of the glorious Loch. Looks like it's time for pictures, after watching the sun go down and taking a number of photographs we return to Gloria, there is still a few moments of daylight left so walk down to take a couple more shots. There's a German guy sitting outside his ageing motorhome playing folk music on a squeezebox, I have to say he is pretty good so here I am taking photographs of the beautiful scenery while listening to this guy play his squeezebox what more could you want, oh I know a drink best get back to Gloria's fridge. It seems to take for ever to go dark here, it's now 11.20pm and it is still light and there is not a lot nearby there is no light pollution. Well it's time for bed Barb's already asleep must be the fresh air? Only a short one today I will add the pictures tomorrow as I would not like to give you too much excitement in one day, leaving Skye tomorrow heading for the beautiful Torridon for a couple of nights wild camping so goodnight all and more tomorrow.

Day 7

Well we awake to a beautiful morning, the plan is to leave the Isle of Skye and to head for Torridon for a couple of days of wild (well roadside) camping so we pack everything away, it seems that we have more stuff now than when we arrived, I did not think that would be possible. Apart from the library of information books and guides we have accumulated as I previously mentioned.

As we are not planning on staying on a site for a couple of days, we take advantage of the facilities, empty stuff out, enough info, and top up with fresh water and stuff. This is a fantastic site and we would have stayed longer if we did not want to push on further north. So, we depart and as the weather is good, we are going to go on a boat trip from Portree, on route we eventually get a phone signal and phone to check availability yes, they have space on the 12 o'clock sailing. All we have to do now is get there before it leaves so, we have to put our foot down which is fun on these roads as Gloria handles a bit like a boat in a large bowl of jelly.

We make it on time and depart Portree harbour on the Brigadoon with Peter (yet another Englishman come north of the border) the skipper at the helm, at just after 12 o'clock. He informs us that on the previous trip they had found a school of porpoise and would see if we could find them on this trip. Did we, did we heck, we do however find one seal well we can just see the top of its head then it's on to see the white tail Eagles. Peter stops the boat and gives us a bit of history of how the Cullin mountains were formed 60 million years ago, he was very knowledgeable knowing the names of all the mountains in gallic as well as English, he was also very knowledgeable about the local birds, sea-life and wildlife, he had a bear grills top on don't sure if that had anything to do with it, or it just kept him warm.

We found the eagles (surprise surprise, as there was a money back guarantee if you did not see one) they were sitting in a tree doing a whole lot of not much we wait for a while to see they will fly, but Peter tells us that is unlikely to because there is very little wind, they need wind to give them lift and also as it gets light here at about 2.30am they have most probably fed earlier in the day. The other problem was that even with a 600mm lens on my camera they are still like a dot on the horizon, the photographers that travel with David Attenborough do make the job look so easy.

We travel on to see what else we can find while all the time surrounded by the wonderful vista, we do find an otter, well the top of its head again. Peter tells us

that whatever the brochure says it's unusual to see one, he also says that we need to be heading back as we are running late, so we turn around or come about same thing I suppose, he tells us that we will have a quick stop to see the eagles again on the way past. We have only stopped with them for a few minutes when the female (the bigger of the two) takes flight, what a wonderful sight to see such a beautiful bird, her wingspan is huge the flight is not long and she is quite far away but it's still an amazing memorable sight to see them in the wild.

We head back to Portree harbour and join two other tour boats one of them named the Skyclark, I am glad we weren't on that one with Captain Pugwash, Roger the cabin boy and all that. We depart Portree on our journey to Torridon but it's not long before Barb mentions again that she is missing the tennis, so we find a pub called Seumas' Bar, the tennis is on and the place is full, luckily we find a table and sit down to watch the game and a very good game it is. As you know Andy won and is now the British Wimbledon champion, at the end of the match one of the barmaids stood up on a table and announced that in honour of Andy winning, the owner of the pub would like to buy everyone a whisky (I am starting to get the hang of stuff), now I am saying nothing other than, that was a very generous offer which everyone took part in. As it's now getting on a bit and we have managed to do about 18 miles in seven and a half hours, not including the nautical ones, we decide to have a bite to eat before we leave. So, it's two Cullen Skink and a bowl of chips, I have to say that it was very good, and I bet there are a few asking what Cullen Skink is and others that defiantly know what it is.

It's now 7pm and the Grand Prix is on but we have over an hour and a half drive to get to Torridon so we pay up and depart. The A896 to Torridon is another one of those roads that they must have had a right laugh when they categorised it as an A road, for most parts it's single track with passing places. It also has lots of bends and a lot of hills to go up and back down. It's 8.45pm and we are about 4 miles from Torridon but we decide that it's time to stop for the night, we find a suitable parking spot with beautiful views overlooking Loch Torridon so this our rooms view for the night. The nights are amazing here, as it does not get dark until after 11pm and it starts getting light again not long after 2.30am. We have set up for the night and after a bowl of Scottish strawberries and cream, a bit of time transferring photographs to the laptop and a while longer writing this lot (it's up to 5300 words now) it's time for bed, no 3G signal so I will have to send this tomorrow if I can get a signal somewhere, so good night to one and all.

Day 8

I awake just after 7am and open the blind on Gloria's window, wow I am greeted by the most stunning view, the sun is shining over the still and tranquil Loch and the drifting clouds are just touching the very tops of the highest mountains. There are a couple of pictures of Jules & Verne admiring the view.

After breakfast of sausage and duck egg sandwich a tea and a coffee we drive the four or so miles into Torridon village, we carry on through the village, (the contents of which is one cafe combined with a shop and that's it) to find the next stopping off point for tonight. We drive down the single track road for a couple of miles taking in the views of the mountains and the loch to our left, we have spotted a couple of overnight parking spots on the way, so that's that job sorted.

As we continue along the road, we find a car park, so we park up and have a look at the information sign which shows a walking route along through the woods and alongside the loch. Sounds great until you read to the end of the information when it says that it's 8 miles, so 8 there and 8 back 16 in total, let me think. As we have not intended a walk of that distance today, we decide to just do a couple of miles and then return. So, we set off on what looks like a gentle walk, which after 100 yards turns into a boggy swap and I have come unprepared, as in not wearing walking boots and no water (Schoolboy error number one). So, Barb continues down the track and I make a brisk return to Gloria to don a pair of walking boots, change into shorts, gather a backpack some water and a snack, just in case. Now most of us know that my beloved wife can at times be a tad accident prone, you know the kind of thing falling over a front door step and ending up in Bangor hospital. Well nothing quite so dramatic today, however while walking close to a river which flows into the loch. She has managed to stand on what she thought was a solid branch but it was not and her left leg had sunk up to her knee in the muddy bog, I can't leave her for a minute. Barb said that I would have laughed my socks off had I been there, who me.

About 2 miles down the track we find a disused church at the side of the loch, now this would make a fantastic project as it does not look in a bad state of repair and low and behold it's for sale. Only thing is you would not want to forget the milk when you went shopping, it's in the middle of nowhere. None the less I phone to enquire about the price and it's 100k which looks like pretty good value for money, one snag it's under offer and in Scotland that means

its sold, what do they say it's all about timing, bugger it. I did mention schoolboy error number one but I have forgotten to tell you about number two, and that is, before you go for a fairly long walk with the idea of taking lots of photographs, bet you have guessed what's coming next. Well yes, your correct make sure the camera battery is fully CHARGED or take two with you as it renders your hundreds of pounds worth of camera equipment bloody useless. We return to Gloria, Barb gets changed I put batteries on charge doh! and we head back to Torridon to the cafe for a cup of tea and a toasted cheese sandwiches.

Now Barbs jeans are covered in mud and in need of a wash, luckily there is a campsite which is only for tents but does have a washing area that anyone can use so jeans on and boots cleaned we head off to the deer park (a field with some deer in it) a couple of hundred yards away. When we get there, there is an information centre and yes, we as well as adding two more brochures to the library we also have a DVD containing even more information about the highlands. As we drive along the road towards the park you can see the deer wandering around the fields, we pull up and I get my camera ready, get out of Gloria and low and behold their gone lying down in the long grass playing hide and seek. Considering their size, they are very good at this hiding lark. Eventually they decide to show themselves for a photo opportunity, they are magnificent creatures and it must be wonderful to see them in the wild, photographs taken its time to park up at the side of the loch enjoy the sunshine the views and just chill.

I have bought Barb a fishing rod and she is longing to go fishing, unfortunately the tide has gone out so we will have to wait until later. On a bonus point that gives me more time to see if I can remember how correctly tie a hook to the line. Well after some time I think I have it would have done it sooner if I could have Googled it or even asked Doug, Dave or Ross to show me before we left doh! Barb sits outside enjoying the sunshine while I load yesterdays and today's photographs on to the laptop and sort out which are to go onto the web site, when we eventually get some form of Internet connection. The tide has decided to come back in after its trip out to sea, having been dragged there by the forces of Mr Moon, it is pretty amazing this planet we have the honour of living on, if only for a blink of an eye when all said and done.

Right fishing lesson and then dinner, so I put dinner in the oven and then it's a very short walk to the water's edge, about 20 feet, nothing too complicated just a 9 foot rod and a spinner, apart from the fact that Barb has never fished

before and there is loads of seaweed, good job we are not expecting fish for dinner me thinks. Barb get the hang of casting fairly quickly. So, I return to the kitchen to finish preparing dinner, tonight we are eating alfresco and we are having Hunters chicken with mushroom risotto and rocket salad, followed by lemon cheesecake with cream, bring on come dine with me. Oh, and some gin and tonics.

Barb gives up on the fishing as the seaweed is a bit of a pain, just at the right time as dinner is served. After dinner we get a phone call from Jennie and Antony to say that Antony has been short listed for, he cakes verses pies competition when we go to Carfest North, this should be good if he gets through and add extra excitement to the weekend. Now it's time to sit and relax watch the setting sun and to put the days exploits into words on the iPad its then that I realise that Jules & Verne have not had much to say today, I am sure they will have more to say and do tomorrow, again no Internet connection so posting this on the web site will have to wait another day if not longer, goodnight one and all.

Day 9

We awake at around 7am to another beautiful morning the view over the loch is fantastic, we have breakfast alfresco now it decision time do we stay for another night. Well we decide to move on further up the coast, Barb would like to see Inverewe Garden not far from Poolewe so we ask Sylvia for directions, she tells us the journey should take 51 minutes (oh yea I have heard that before), before we go we have a shower and wash the dishes at the campsite facilities. After two days of roadside camping and a good long walk in the sunshine, a good hot shower, no matter how basic, makes you feel refreshed and ready to go.

So we depart our new found love Torridon but is it true love or just a holiday romance, this is the second time we have been here this year we do love the place and it is beautiful, but it's in the middle of nowhere with one shop and no pub, so in reality I wonder. We leave via the A896 the single track "A" road that goes through Glen Torridon the Beinne Eighe mountains to our left, this would be a great road in a fast sports car, not for the faint hearted and if you get it wrong, you may be there a while. We stay on this road for about 9 miles, stopping fairly often for passing traffic, then it's on to the A832 this would be another great road in a fast car with wide long sweeping bends much more forgiving than the A896 would be if you made a mistake. The views on both of these roads are stunning, every time you turn a corner you are treated to views that take your breath away, you could stop to take a picture every couple of

hundred yards but you would not get anywhere and in Gloria the going is slow enough. So, in the interest of getting there Barb is taking photographs through Gloria's fly splattered windscreen not great but better than nothing.

The A832 travels up the left hand side of Loch Maree and then heads up into the hills, as we climb to the top of the hills above Gairloch the cloud drops along with the temperature and covers the tops of the hills. We head down into Gairloch the mist and cloud has made the loch look eerie as a lone small sailing boat heads in from the sea to the safety of the harbour. Now Gloria has suffered a couple of problems over the last few days, nothing major but with the lack of a B&Q around the corner a bit of a problem.

First problem is with her water works there is a water leak under the bathroom sink from one of those new-fangled push fit pipe connectors, and the second is that a piece of wood, well it's not wood it's more like paper that the centre part of the double bed runs on, has broken (not what you think) this is the second time we have needed to replace this as when Phil and his mates borrowed her it broke then, I did blame them for messing about its happened to us now so sorry Phil.

So, we need a piece of wood and a 10mm push fit pipe connector to affect the repairs. Now as I said this would not be a problem if there was a B & Q handy but that's in Inverness at least two hours away, we find a farm and garden shop, he has not got what we need but he directs us to a builders shop about two miles away behind a hotel. So, you drive into the hotel car park and out the other side and low and behold a builders merchant, in we go and it's like Aladdin's cave. The lady asks us what we need and sets about showing us the plumbing connectors, and then takes us over the yard to the wood cutting shed and lets us rummage through the collection of wood until we find what we need. Now obviously the pieces of wood we find are not the correct length but that's no problem she lends me a saw and a tape measure and tells me to bring them back when I have finished. Fantastic service that you would not get at B&Q, the best six quid I have spent thank you very much very helpful these Scottish folk.

Time for a coffee after all this hard work, oh hang on I have not fixed it yet. We walk down the quayside to find a cafe, what do we find, we find a guy playing the bagpipes at the quayside. Bloody hell it's the same guy we saw a couple of days ago playing at the side of the road in the middle of nowhere, and his playing is not getting any better. I understand that it is a difficult instrument to play but if your busking it should sound half decent.

We then carry on to Poolewe towards the gardens it's only taken four and half hours to get here, god knows where Sylvia got 51 minutes from. We drive past a campsite at the edge of the loch and decide to stay for the night as we need to drain the water from Gloria's tank to repair the water leak and roadside camping with no washing facilities is a no for me.

After draining the tank, setting up for tonight and connecting the now much needed electricity (every gizmo battery is flat) we go for a walk, hey look there's a pub come on I will buy you a drink to celebrate our shopping experience, oh well any excuse. A couple of drinks and three games of pool, Barb lost (all of them) we return to the campsite we have decided to stay for two nights so we go to reception and make the necessary arrangements, well pay that is. This is another Camping and Caravanning club site (in fact the most northerly site they have) and as we are now members and we get an age discount (for god's sake) it's £14 a night and £2 for 24 hours internet connection great value for a lovely site, and that's the membership paid for. (no more fibbing JENNIE)

Barb prepares dinner while I carry out the repairs to the bed, and load the pictures onto the hawkeyethenoo web site which is a slow process with this internet connection, the plumbing repairs can wait until tomorrow. Dinner is alfresco again, getting a bit of a habit, and it's Chicken breast with cheese wrapped in bacon with minted new potatoes, sorry make that new potatoes as the mint has gone off. As Barb reads her book, I sit down to put today's offering into words on George the iPad again, now it's going to be a little GST and then to bed trying all this hard work you know. So, goodnight one and all more tomorrow while we have the wonders of the Internet available.

Day 10

Well yet another beautiful morning we awake early again but going to have a little lie in today, Barb delivers corn flakes and coffee in bed, well not far to go. I check what's happening on eBay, it never ceases to amaze me the things people buy but I am glad they do. While in the washroom I start thinking about things like, the amount of stuff we take to the bathroom, I don't think you realise until you go camping and carry it all across a field, actually how much we do take. Think about it for a minute, soap, shower gel, shampoo, flannel, razor, shaving cream, toothpaste, toothbrush, mouthwash, deodorant, after shave balm, aftershave lotion, hairbrush anything else oh yes a towel, what a complete quilt and that's just the boys god knows what the girls take. Most of that crap is going down the drains and into the sea what are we doing? While I am at it, another thing that I can never understand is why pubs, bars, restaurants, cafes in fact anywhere that has washroom facilities, install hot air hand dryers that are about as effective as a politician spouting a load of hot air onto your hands. The things that go through my mind while I am having a shave it does make me wonder about my sanity.

We are going to walk to Inverewe Gardens today and along the pinewood trail through the 60 acre estate, so time to prepare a packed lunch for the day, so tuna mayo, and cheese with red onion marmalade or the order of the day. Backpacks packed we leave Gloria to do whatever she does when we're not there, now the gardens are only about half a mile away so it does not take long to get there. On the approach there is a wildlife hide overlooking the loch, so we stop to see if there is anything worth watching, and just as we look out of the window there is a sea eagle hovering majestically over the loch looking for fish. After a few seconds it dives down to the loch and into the water, but it misses its prey, he or she fly's around for possibly 30 seconds and decides to give up fishing and to go back to its nest on the far side of the loch, we write the sighting on the white board and continue on to the gardens.

The gardens where started in 1862 and has an array of exotic plants from places like New Zealand, Chile, South Africa and Tasmania to name a few, it is mad to see plants from these countries growing here but they do quite happily thanks to the Gulf Stream. We stroll around the gardens (Barb's not to impressed by the gardens) and through the woodland pathways, until we find a suitable place to eat our packed lunch in the sunshine. We return to Gloria at about 3pm, Barb fancies an afternoon nap, so I leave her to it and wander up to the only shop in the village to get provisions for dinner. We are

being really healthy tonight and are having a vegetarian mixed bean, fennel and tomato stew, the little shop has most of the ingredients required excepting fennel, so a mixed bean and tomato stew it is then.

Now the only pub in the village is about 10 yards from the only shop in the village so it would seem a shame not to pay it a quick visit as I am so close, and Barb's asleep so I pop in for a quick pint of their finest. Barb won't miss me and won't know that I have been there, well not until she reads this, as when I return, she is still asleep. We are going to a ceilidh at the village hall this evening, so after dinner it's a quick shower change and a short walk to the hall. To start with a young girl comes in playing the bagpipes, she could give the bloke we saw the other day a lesson or two as she is very good. The dancing starts the second dance is the silver sergeants, Barb is invited to dance by a chap in a kilt so off she goes for her one and only dance, it's a great night, there is a great sense of community spirit with all ages attending. After doing a spot of people watching, I mentioned to Barb to remind when I am older to trim my eyebrows there was a chap there that had bigger eyebrows than the stags antlers, we saw the other day.

We could see through the window that the sun was setting so I went outside to take a photograph, the sunset was awesome and I waited until Mr Sun had hidden himself behind the mountains it was without doubt a beautiful sight. At the end of the night there is a raffle and low and behold we win the last prize, A WHOLE FRESH SALMON, now what the stuff are we going to do with a whole bloody salmon in a camper van. We thank them for the offer but explain that unfortunately it's not really much use to us at this moment in time and ask them to raffle it again, what is it they say about timing, sod it that's what I say.

We return to Gloria after an enjoyable evening, we need to be up early in the morning as I have not yet repaired Gloria's plumbing and it needs to be done before we leave. So what am I doing writing this at this time of night, no make that morning, I don't know why but I can't sleep but I am going to have another try now, so goodnight to you all, not sure about an Internet connection tomorrow so we will have to wait and see.

Day 11

We do not wake up at silly o'clock this morning, must be all the excitement of the Ceilidh last night, I am still pretty fed up over the Salmon but Barb reminds me how nice Gloria would smell in another ten days with Sam salmon with us.

So, the days plan is, breakfast, fix the water leak problem, pack and tidy Gloria, shower, fill up with fresh water and then head north for Ullapool and beyond. So breakfast ok done, Barb goes for a shower and I start the task of repairing the water leak, as you will know there is not a great deal of room in camper van bathrooms so it's a right fiddle, eventually I remove the leaking connector and go to fit the new one. Bit of a problem as what I thought was a 10mm pipe is actually 12mm so the one I have purchased is about as much use a chocolate fire guard, what's with this 12mm pipe lark I did not know it even existed, so that's that job stopped. Barb returns from her shower and enquirer's how the repair is going, I manage a few expletive's and explain the problem.

My turn for a shower while Barb sorts out Gloria, while in the shower I am reminded how men make such odd noises whilst showering, the guy in the next shower sounds like he has been under water for 4 minutes and is trying to get his breath, and has then got in the ring with Mike Tyson. Honestly there is less grunting and groaning from a female tennis player at Wimbledon. I get dry exit the shower and walk over to the sink to have a shave, the nutter from the shower is using the sink furthest away from me, thank god. I start the shaving process and he says "sorry to interrupt but do you know what this is" pointing to a mop and bucket, I think for a minute and stop myself from telling him to F off, and say yes it's a mop and bucket for when you make a mess and need to clean up, as I had not made an unholy mess, as he had, I had not used it. No, he replied it has a disinfectant into to mop the floor after use in case you have verruca's, and that being a member he thought that I would have known that.

I looked at him and again refrained from telling him to F off, instead I told him that I did not have any verruca's but suspected that he might and also I had not been a member for very long and must not have got to that page in the members handbook, with that he left and a good job too. What a complete KNOB it's people like him that make me not want to be a member of any club of any kind, prick, set me up for the day.

Before we leave, I enquire at reception if there are any plumbers nearby, they look at me and I know what's coming, and say you'll need to go to Inverness,

now there's a shock. As the lady in the builders merchant (it's not a builders merchant as we know it) was so helpful the other day I thought it was worth a trip back there, even if it is 8 miles the wrong way. Well it was a complete waste of time as they had never heard of a 12mm pipe fitting, and suggested, you guessed it INVERNESS.

Now Inverness is 60 miles in the wrong direction so stuff that it would to all day, we will just have to live with it. Ullapool here we come, again the views are magnificent as we travel down the A832 and then onto the A835 both great roads if only one was not captaining a boat. We arrive at Ullapool, woefully behind Sylvia's suggested one hour and fifty minutes, more like three hours.

There is a lot of activity in the town as it is hosting the World Skiff Championships (clinker built rowing boats), the place is rammed, we find a parking place next to an enormous American motorhome with three slide outs, it's more like a home with a motor, god knows what it does to the gallon.

We watch the end of one of the races, and then go for a wander as we still have to missions to complete, first purchase a 12mm pipe connector and second you may have read that Sharon set us a task of obtaining a Hamish MacTavish a small Scotty dog key ring as a friend for Jules & Verne, who I must say have been a bit quite for the last few days. So first task the pipe connector, as we are in a ferry port with lots of boating activities I think we may have chance as there is the possibility that boats or yachts may use the same stupid size, well I am sadly mistaken everywhere we ask we get the same reply, yes correct, "oh you'll need to go to Inverness for that" stock answer for anything more than a bag of sweets.

Ok onto the second task Hamish hunting, as there are a few more gift type shops in the town there may be half a chance, but after frequenting every gift shop and Tesco's in the town we failed to complete this task as well.

We did come close though as you can see from the pictures, but none of them key rings or fluffy, well apart from the real ones, and the picture from Tesco's may be pushing it to the extreme.

Well tomorrow is another day and perhaps we will fare better with our tasks, the plans we had to continue north have changed again, isn't that a surprise, instead we are catching the 9.30am ferry to the Isle of Lewis for a day's sight-seeing trip, should be good. Bet if I ask about a 12mm pipe fitting while in Stornaway they will suggest Iceland instead of Inverness. We are parked up at the side of the road for a night of roadside camping just outside Ullapool so it should only take us about ten minutes to get to the ferry in the morning.

Well dear readers (if anyone is) that's it for another day, the Three mobile MiFi is back up and running so you should receive this tonight, more tomorrow as I will have 2 hours and 45 minutes on the return ferry tomorrow night to catch up with the day's events, goodnight one and all.

Day 12

We set the alarm last night so that we would not miss the ferry, we did not need to we are awake at 6am and hour and half before the alarm, as the wagons heading for the early ferry rock Gloria from side to side as they pass by at top speed. In hindsight this lay by might bit a bit close to the main road, however the pikey's had bagged the best spot, and we weren't joining them overnight.

We head into Ullapool and park in the free car park (take note again Liverpool One) as it is still only 7.30am it's a quick visit to Tesco's for a chocolate croissant and an iced coffee, no cafe in this one. Then it's a quick walk to the ferry terminal to wait for the boat to arrive. We find some seats on the upper deck right at the front so we have a great view as we leave the harbour then as we head out to sea, we have a great view of, well of the sea.

After our free (well sort of free) breakfast roll and coffee, as there is not a great deal to see or do Barb decides to use the sailing time constructively and have a little nap. I have lost my Internet connection just as I was checking the Stornaway plumbers merchants web site in the search for the illusive 12mm pipe connector, it appears the as well as not working on Skye Three's mobile MiFi does not work in the North Atlantic either. So will have to do it the old way, make a phone call and actually speak to a human being, don't you just love that idea.

We have not seen any dolphin's, whales or porpoise but we do see a submarine sailing by on our port side not far from the ferry, I thought the idea was that you do not see them? I get up to take a picture, and I must not have my sea legs with me, as I walk across to the window a bit like Bambi on ice. While looking out over the Ocean my thoughts are with the Seamen both Royal and Merchant, who lost their lives in these cold waters during the war running the gauntlet with the German U-boats, getting supplies to and from our country so that we could be a free nation.

After departing the harbour, it does not look like there would be much to do on the bridge until we dock at Stornaway as the ship has sailed in a straight line

from A to B. Land is in sight and we are about 40 minutes from our destination. After disembarkation we are to meet a coach, oh great another coach trip, you know me and coaches, hope Brendon is on this one, just what we need a camp tour guide.

We disembark walk around the corner and find the coach, driver and guide that are to take us on the tour of the island, we hand in our tickets get onto the coach and locate suitable seats, Barb grabbing the window seat. We wait for our fellow passengers to get on, then we have the usual numbers check, obviously all present and correct, we leave the ferry port and the tour commences. Now as soon as the tour guide starts his spiel it is unfortunately obvious that he is not a Brendon. He is through a southerner and I mean a south of England southerner, at the risk of repeating myself, I do wonder if anyone working in Scotland is Scottish, examples, today's tour guide, the people running the campsite at Poolewe, the people running the campsite on Skye, Peter the skipper of the boat trip from Portree, the guide on the Talisker distillery tour, the guy running the pub on Skye, the woman running the restaurant on Skye, ALL English it's a wonder there are English left in England, just shows that it must be a good place to go and live.

Anyway, this tour guide is going to have me asleep before long, with his monosyllabic tone and a total lack of inflection in his voice, yippee we have about five hours of this to look forward to. After only a couple of minutes I have picked up that he has a few favourite words, peat and about, so I start a word spotting and counting game to keep myself amused. He uses the word about when quoting exact numbers in a sentence regarding a factual matter, example they have built about five new schools last year, there is no about, about it they built five new schools. Then he must love peat (the organic matter) as once he has started on the matter he does not stop. It reminded me of a tour we went on some years ago while we were in Egypt, the tour took us into the desert and the guide told us about the Bedouin people and by the time we returned there was nothing we did not know about the bloody Bedouin's. Back to today's tour I had a feeling that we would leave with a greater knowledge of peat than we had when we arrived, whether we wanted it or not. So the word spotting game continued, I had moved to the spare window seat behind Barb so that I could take pictures through the window and every time he mentions peat or uses the word about, I put my hand through the gap in the seats and indicate a number with my fingers, much to Barbs amusement.

The tour apart from peat and about, was very good and we saw things that we would not have seen if we had not got involved, like standing stones, black

houses, a Brochs, and an extremely large jaw bone from a whale, which he assured us was real no matter how fake it looked oh and peat bogs, also we learnt that Lord Leverhulme once owned the whole island and that he had purchased it for a mere £180,000 sounds like a bargain to me.

The other advantage of going on the tour which we did not appreciate until later is that had we not gone on the tour we would have had to spend seven hours in Stornaway now not to be rude it is not the prettiest of towns or very tourist friendly and we would have struggled to find something to do for seven hours. No offence meant but I had expected it to be a bit more touristy. It did look like it was going to have an advantage on other places barring Inverness, as when we were on the ferry I had looked at the local paper and there were a number of plumbing merchants and pneumatic suppliers in the town, I had gathered together 5 phone numbers from the paper and also Mr Barry Shepherd Jnr had supplied me with the phone number of another possibility, so the hunt for the illusive 12mm pipe connector was looking a bit more positive, all I needed now was a phone signal.

Right we have a phone signal let's start the hunt, response to first phone call, 12mm that's an odd size you will need to go to Inverness, second call, 12mm that's an odd size you will need to go to Inverness, third phone call, 12mm that's an odd size you will need to go to Inverness, there is a pattern forming here, not a good one, forth phone call, 12mm that's an odd size you may need to go to Inverness but William Wilson in Bells Road may have. Now hopeful I find their phone number and feeling a bit like J.R. Hartley, I make phone call number five, I talk to a young lady and yes she tells me they have one, eureka, great what time do you close, 5.30 is the reply, this is going to be a bit tight on time me thinks. As none BRENDON has informed us that we will return to Stornaway at ABOUT five fifteen.

We also have another slight problem in that whilst in the interest of taking a photograph of Jules and Verne on the hillside overlooking the Black houses I decided to sprint, well run up the hill, pulling the calf muscle in my right leg, and now instead of running anywhere I am hopping around like a man possessed unable to walk at any speed never mind a fast pace that we may need to make the 5.30 deadline. We arrive back at Stornaway at ten past five, eek 20 minutes to find and get to William Wilson life saver, so in the interest of speed Barb marches on towards Bells Road and leaves me to hobble on behind, I eventually get to about 100 yards from the store at 5.27 expecting Barb to be inside.

My phone rings its Barb the directions she had been given were wrong and she can't find William Wilson, shock horror, I had used the sat nav on my phone, I hobble over the road and get there just before they close, boy that was close. Hi, I phoned earlier about 12mm pipe connector the guy looked at me and said that's an odd size, yes believe me I know that and I spoke to a lady before and she said you had one. Ok I will go and have a look, he returns empty handed and says no we've not got one you'll need to go to Inverness for one of those, looks like the girl made a mistake, William Wilson have gone from life saver extraordinaire to, well I'll leave that to your imagination. Deflated I hobble back to give Barb the news, not a happy bunny and wants to go and tell W that's she's not happy. So, the hunt for the illusive 12mm pipe connector continues as does the hunt for a Hamish MacTavish as it is now after 5.30 the other shops in the town are closed, I doubt they would have had a suitable Hamish anyway.

Ok the ferry leaves at 8.15pm time for something to eat, we walk, well Barb walks I hobble around the town looking for a suitable eatery, not a great deal of choice I'm afraid and we end up with fish and chips from the chippy, there not the best. Time for drink to drown our sorrows over this bloody pipe connector, when I do find it, I am going to buy five of them, and properly never use them again but at least I will have one.

We manage to get the same seats on the return journey so great views again from the front of the ship, and rather than just the sea, we are lucky to see a large school of porpoise crossing in front of us. Then the mist descends for the majority of the rest of the journey. We arrive back at Gloria at 11.15pm then it's where are we going to stay, we risk the pikey car park when we get there, there is another motorhome so we feel better and get ready for bed it has been a long and busy yet fulfilling day, well apart from the 12mm pipe fitting and Hamish hunting but we will deal with that battle tomorrow, oh no black pudding they were closed by the time we got there. I need to rest my leg and I am sure that it will be stiff in the morning, so goodnight one and all, I will post the pictures tomorrow.

Day 13

Well it's day thirteen of the trip, this is not my favourite number and neither is it my favourite day of most holidays because it usually means sod of home tomorrow, but not on this trip oh no, we have another week or so left to go. I am sure your happy too as it means you're going to receive a least another Severn days if not more of this drivel. Before we get into today's travels, one thing that I missed on yesterday's log was that because of our unsuccessful hobble to WW, you know to get the 12mm thingy, yes, the one we did not get. We also missed the opportunity to go to the butchers to get a fantastic Steornabhagh black pudding as they also closed at 5.30pm double bummer.

Back to today, we awake, look out of the window, the pikey's are still there and so are Gloria's wheels, good start, after the usual wash and tidy up, you know the one that's needed to find the driver's seat. We head into Ullapool to purchase the Hamish MacTavish we saw the other day as there does not appear to be a better option available, bet we find about 20 tomorrow. Right first task complete Hamish purchased (first press release pictures will be published later with JGV) we ask Sylvia for directions to Durness the furthest north we intend to go without getting wet, if we continued north the next stop would be the North Atlantic Ocean, the Faroe Isles, bit more ocean, Iceland, more ocean then Greenland but that's not happening. She tells us that it should take one hour and fifty minutes, like that's going to happen, we set off along the A835, onto the A894 and finally the A838.

These are all fantastic roads offering stunning views of an ever changing beautiful countryside, from soft flowing hills to salt water lochs to mountains to fresh water lochs, there is just too much beauty for your mind to absorb as your eyes continually feed you with the ever changing stunning vista's. Like the ones mentioned before this trio of roads would afford the driver of the right car tremendous satisfaction, provided they did not get it wrong, as they would be most unforgiving. Anyway, we are in a van weighing about 4000kg that handles like a boat so most of the time you just hang on, I have seen Barb clutching the grab handle and the arm rest a couple of times.

It has been a great day for Eagle spotting, it's becoming dead easy, we have seen 10 of the magnificent birds today, most I admit where at a distance but one flew in front of Gloria flying across our path, what you do not realise when you see them from a distance is actually how big they are, and they are big, big and beautiful.

We stop off at a couple of places on route and Phil has suggested that we go to Scourie, when we get there, he is right the views are wonderful, now we have choice stay here or continue onto Durness. We decide to continue on to Durness so off we go and arrive there at about 4pm, so much for under two hours, there is not a great deal there until Barb sees a sign for a chocolate shop. So we head off down a track for about a mile and find what looks like an old World War Two barracks and yes it is, a community has set up there selling their wares, you know the stuff, wood carving, paintings, enamel jewellery, clay pots, that's it a right load of crap being sold by a right load of drop out cranks at obscene prices, one of them wanted £7.50 for an inch high painted puffin well it was supposed to be a puffin I am yet to be convinced. The chocolate selection did look good but it also commanded a fairly hefty price tag, so we thought sod that and leave.

Barb wants to have another go at fishing so we continue on until we find a small loch, we park at the side of the loch and Barb gets her rod out and heads for the water, I am still hobbling around like hop along Cassidy since my injury yesterday, I won't go on about it in case you think that I am fishing for sympathy, unlike Barb who's fishing for fish. Well I get no sympathy and Barb gets no fish so on we go. We have ended up at Tongue and after visiting the local hostelry and partaking in a quick libation we have parked on the west bank of the Kyle of Tongue with beautiful views from both our living room and bedroom windows. There is a lot of bird life around the loch and Barb has had binoculars out and has spotted, a heron, curlew, oyster catcher and black headed gulls, she must be becoming a twitcher I think to myself as she recites all of the names of the birds she has spotted that is until she tells me that there is an information board just at the behind Gloria with all the names of the birds on.

I asked Sylvia for the journey time home and her reply was 530 miles and Ten Hours and Fifty minutes, now we have flow to Antigua and it didn't take that bloody long, also as every time she has given us so far we have managed to exceed by nearly double, this could take a while.

Well avid readers that's it for today, it's time for bed so good night one and all, more tomorrow.

Day 14

Today's plan is to depart the Kyle of Tongue and travel to Dingwall which is just outside Inverness, as we need to go there on Monday morning for you know what. A journey that Sylvia reckons will take 2 hours and 20 minutes, fat chance. I phone the Dingwall site at 9.30 to check availability, yes is the response what time will you be here, I think for a minute and answer about 4.30, if we are lucky, ok done and booked in, of we go.

The majority of the journey takes us along the A836, another great single track road with spectacular views at every turn, and a complete lack of traffic we only see a maximum of 10 cars in about 40 miles. The wildlife spotting was not quite as good as the other day, 2 deer and 4 golden eagles, but that's more than we would have seen in Liverpool.

We have arrived at the A9 and are going to continue on into Inverness as Barb wants to do some shopping, as I am still limping around Barb suggests that I go for a pint while she goes to Primarnie and others. I not wishing to offend I take her up on the idea, earlier on I had phoned a number of caravan repairs to see if they were open alas no answer from any of them. You may have seen this bit on Facebook, anyway while I am having a lemonade my phone goes and it's a guy from Caledonian Caravan repairers, so I tell him what I need and yes Eureka he has one, he asks where I am and tells me that he is on his way into Inverness and will deliver it to the pub. Barb arrives at the pub and I tell her news then thirty minutes the guy arrives with the illusive 12mm pipe connector, amazing service, I am not sure whether to fit it or frame it.

We arrive at the Dingwall site about 40 minutes later, book in and set up, Barb Gloria could do with a bit of a clean as we have been living in her for two weeks now, so it's carpets out and Barb gives her a thoroughly good clean, now she is looking as clean as a new pin and so is Gloria. Right shall I fit this connector now or tomorrow, Barb says tomorrow as she wants to walk into town and get something to eat, so we get changed and head off into town. The lady at the campsite reception had told us that they have arranged discounts at certain eateries in the town, now I am not sure if you have been for a Sunday night out in Dingwall, well if you haven't, don't. Barb takes one look at the first suggestion and says no, then we walk to the other end of town and the only choice is a Chinese, and that looks a bit dodgy.

Barb goes into a sweet shop to ask the location of another pub on the list, she is followed out by a lady, who says sorry to interfere but I heard that you are

thinking about going to the Munro, yes we said, her reply was I wouldn't if I was you. Great have you got any suggestions, well not in town there is a place 7 miles down the road, not much use as Gloria is set up for the night. Any other ideas, well there is an Indian around the corner, so Indian it is then although I am not too sure how good an idea it is while staying in a motorhome. The lady even offered us a lift back to the campsite, very friendly these Scottish folk, we decline thanking her very much for her offer and her help, and walk down to the Indian restaurant.

The meal was very good and we return to Gloria for a nightcap and bed, so that's it for today more tomorrow.

Day 15

So, today's agenda, shower, breakfast, fit the illusive 12mm connector and head off for Glencoe, which is supposed to be a two and half hour drive, well that was the plan.

So, the first bit of the plan went ok, showered, fed and the 12mm illusive pipe connector fitted, so far so good. We pack Gloria ready for the off, drive over to the water supply and top up Gloria's water tank and test her plumbing for leaks, first problem, now that there was full water pressure going to the tap the tap is leaking, oh golly gosh I say that's a bit of a blow old chap. So next question do I start taking the thing apart and try and fix it with limited tools, no parts, and not a great deal of knowledge of how it works, that said it should not be that difficult although access is extremely limited.

No sod that lets phone my new found friend from Caledonian Caravans, he says that he can be with us in about 45 minutes great see you in a while. We park up again and 30 minutes later he turns up takes the thing apart, it needed two rubber o-rings replacing where the pipes go into the tap. Rings replaced we test for leaks looks ok now, pay the bill, a bit more than 5 quid this time, but it's fixed, we say our thanks for the great service and he departs. We depart as well it's now 1pm and we are 2 hours behind schedule, that should not matter too much as its only two and half hours to Glencoe, Ha Ha.

Our journey takes us down the side of Loch Ness we didn't see Nessy but the gift shop had lots of Nessy items (tat) for sale, I was tempted by a Nessy hat but refrained as I did not think the green colour did me any favours plus I look a right waz in a hat. At the bottom of the Loch is Fort Augustus and here you find an amazing bit of British engineering part of the Caledonian Canal built

by the Mighty Thomas Telford (well not on his own) in an 18 year period between 1804 to 1822 is a flight of 5 locks that link Loch Ness to the Caledonian Canal, it is without doubt an awesome sight.

We have spent too long here as we need to be at the Glencoe site by 6pm to book in and it's now 5pm with Sylvia telling us it's going to take an hour to get there. This should be interesting, after just under an hour Barb manages to let go of the grab handle and her white knuckle ride comes to an end as we arrive at the site with 5 minutes to spare. We book in are guided to our pitch, set up and guess what it's raining, I don't believe it, how can it be raining here and nowhere else in the UK. Never mind we ate parked up and staying here for two nights then it's on to Edinburgh to geg in on Barry, Jane, Barbara & Johns holiday, I am sure we will have a right laugh.

That's it for the night dear readers, it's time for a GST so it's a goodnight from me a goodnight from Her.

Day 16

Well we have arrived back at Glencoe and its doing what it was doing last time we were here a couple of weeks ago, yes, it's raining, so not going to be doing much this morning. Shower and stuff then after breakfast, Barb puts a needed clothes wash on while I, well don't do a great deal. The morning is spent mostly playing on gizmos and the Internet, while I have the opportunity there are a couple of things that I have missed telling you about so it's time for a quick recap of the last couple of days. When we arrived in Inverness the other day, the volume of traffic was a bit of a shock to the system as we have not been used to seeing more than a handful of cars a day, let alone hundreds at once, then there's traffic lights now there a bit of a shock as we haven't seen a set of those for two weeks.

Next you may remember me saying get it while you can, fuel that is, so we stop to fill Gloria with go juice at a BP station for the reasonable sum of £1.359 per litre not a bad price considering that in Ullapool the service station charged £1.479 for the same stuff, while there we needed some so paid them £25 and got 17 litres. Now when we were on the Isle of Lewis they were only charging £1.409 per litre which considering they are a two and three quarter hour ferry ride from them mainland, its good value in my books, it does however make Ullapool service station a shower of robbing bastards. Sorry for the language mum.

Next you will know only too well about the woes with Gloria's water works but I did miss telling you about a further problem we encountered yesterday afternoon. This girl is a perfect example for paddy pants, when we arrive at the locks at Fort Augustus, you know the ones built by Thomas Telford (I admit not on his own) we found a pool of water by the driver's seat, no before you ask it wasn't me. Before we left Dingwall we filled Gloria's fresh water tank, we have not completely filled the tank before on this trip and you know why, so logically me thinks that's where the problem is, and bingo the filler pipe to the tank has a split in it just by the neck of the tank. As we have been driving around lots of bendy roads on the journey from Dingwall the water has been swishing about and leaking from the split in the pipe, dead easy fix this one, cut off the end of the pipe a reconnect to the tank, job done dam sight easier than the other leak.

Right back to today just after two o'clock the rain stops and Mr Sun comes out from his hiding place behind the clouds, we decide to go for a walk, nothing too strenuous as I am still in hopping mode due to my pulled calf muscle, any sympathy great fully received. We walk into town, (town you are having a laugh) just the four miles there, and the four miles back so eight in total, glad we had nothing too difficult planned. We leave the campsite through the woods, now as we are walking through damp humid woodland with streams, muddy pools of water and fresh cut grass on route, there are two things we should have done before we left Gloria, 1 applied midge repellent, 2 brought the midge repellent with us, have we done either, no, so we are fresh meat in midge heaven, we will count the bites later.

We arrive in town! and visit the one shop after walking another half a mile the wrong way and back again, purchased nothing and Barb suggested we visit the only other place of interest in the town the pub, no argument from me. After one or two of their finest we depart on the trek back to Gloria through the midge infested forest, it's warmer now and the little blighters are out in force. Back in the safety of Gloria's bosom it's time for dinner, tonight we are having Chicken and Chorizo with roasted sweet potatoes, red peppers, carrots and onions, no not out of a packet all freshly prepared with my own fair hands, and very nice it was.

That's it for today, starting our trip to Edinburgh tomorrow not sure where we are stopping on the way, all will be revealed tomorrow so it's a goodnight from me and a goodnight from her.

Day 17

The day starts with the wonderful news that Donna has had the baby, congratulations to the proud new mum and dad, and welcome to the world Allana we wish you all well for the future. Now there's a life changing start to the day for Barry and Donna have fun it's great, and while we are at it congratulations to all the grandparents and great grandparents.

With the news of the birth in mind, our days news is of little interest so this is going to be short and sweet. We depart the campsite and before we head off towards Loch Tay, Barb wants to go to the National Ice Climbing Centre in Kinlochleven only 7 miles in the wrong direction so 14 all together, but what the heck. It is in an old Aluminium factory which in its heyday employed 3000 people, it must have been devastating for village when it closed. Inside there are normal climbing walls and then what can only be described as a damn big freezer about 40 foot high with the walls covered in ice that you can climb up, very impressive.

We leave the centre and head off along the A82 which takes you through the middle of the Ben Nevis and Glen Coe mountain ranges, now if you have not been here you have got to go it is stunningly beautiful, I know that I have said this about a lot of the places we have visited on this journey, but views here are simply awesome you have got to see it to believe it. We stop for lunch at the village of Killin, we have lunch in Gloria and then walk into the village for a wander and possibly tea and cake. The village is very reminiscent of Llangollen, we find a suitable cafe overlooking the river for tea and cake, as we are roadside camping tonight it's now time to find somewhere to park up, we set off around Loch Tay. Up to now we have not had a problem finding a parking spot but after traveling up the left side of the Loch and then down the right side, back to where we started from, no joy whatsoever.

We have ended up on the A827 and have found a suitable spot alongside the River Dochart, we are now parked up for the night, and have now been joined by two Logging wagons so we suspect it may be an early start in the morning.

That's it for today apart from a goodnight from me and a goodnight from her, and to wish Donna, Barry & Allana much happiness in the new life they have in front of them, sweet dreams Allana on your first night in your new world

xxxx.

Day 18

Sorry dear readers if you have not had your daily fix reasons will be apparent later.

My fears from last night were confirmed at about 4am when our fellow residents fired up their wagons and departed, we suspect for the forest that we had passed yesterday where they were felling trees and had piles of timber ready and waiting to be loaded. We tried to return to our slumber without a great deal of successes, so it was approximately 6am when we departed our overnight stop off point.

According to Sylvia Edinburg is about a two hour drive so we need to kill some time before we arrive there mainly because we have not yet booked onto the site for tonight so at this point in time we do not know if there is space available for us. We stop off at the village of Bo'ness on the outskirts of Edinburg just before 8am we find another free car park and squeeze Gloria into a parking bay. We walk around the village and find a Tesco and an Aldi very handy as we are in need of some provisions oh and some beer, we also find a bakery so fresh rolls will be purchased from there, after we have found somewhere for breakfast it transpires that there are two options. The first does not appeal to Barb so we go to the second option, take a seat and place our order, while we are having our breakfast three locals come in. As you may know I love people watching and I figure out that its grandmother, mother and daughter, the waitress/cook/cremator (well that's what she had done to our breakfast) goes over to them says hello and takes their order, the mother and the daughter both order CURRY AND CHIPS its only 8.15am, strange me thinks.

After a visit to the bakery we return to Gloria and drive around to Tesco's we get the required provisions and beer and load the important things into Gloria's fridge, that would be the beer then. Ok time to phone the site to see if they have space, no answer from the site so it's a call to the booking line, not the response we wanted as they so that it is fully booked and there is no space available. When I phoned the site the other day the guy I spoke to (he's from Southport) was very helpful so I thought that I would give the site another call, this time they answer and yes they can fit us in. We arrive at the site at the site just after 12 o'clock and find that the pitch next to John and Barbara is available so we set up and plug Gloria into the mains supply, time for a cup of tea as it is a glorious day we just sit and chill out in the sunshine, it's refreshing just doing nothing.

We have dinner at around 6pm and tonight it is risotto with chicken and chorizo and very pleasant it was too, after dinner Barb tempts me into going for a walk with possibility of finding a local hostelry after about 20 minutes with no drinking establishment in sight we make the return trip back to Gloria. As we are walking into the site we spot Barbara driving out of the site, Barbara is a bit surprised to see us as we were not expected until the next day, after greetings are exchanged Barbara says she will ring John and tell him we are here, no need is the reply as we are your new neighbours on the next pitch. Barbara continues her trip to the shops and we go and surprise John greetings exchanged it's time for a beer, then another and another. Partaking in this yes I will have another, and the fact that this continued into the wee hours is the reason that there was no blog posted on Thursday.

So that's it for the day other than to say we had a most enjoyable evening with John and Barbara chatting, listening to music and oh yes drinking. More tomorrow folks enjoy the sunshine

Day 19

In the interest of avoiding confusion as we have two Barbara's, and I am nowhere near brave enough to number either of them one or two, I have decided that initials we be the best so it's BG for Barbara Gibson and BH for Barbara Hawkins

We arise at about 8.30 and we are all suffering slightly from partaking in too many beers, Kwak, white wine and whiskey during last nights, early morning Festivities. Jane has txt Barbara and they have left Liverpool at 5am so should be with us between 10 & 11 o'clock. At 10 o'clock Jane phones and they are at the gate, luckily the chap on the pitch on the other side of John and Barbara is leaving this morning so we can a trio scouse camp. Barry parks the car and van while the guy that is leaving farts around for ages getting his van ready to go. In the meantime, Barry has a cold one as its only just after 10am, John and I refrain, eventually Mr Slow next door is ready to leave, enabling Barry and Jane to park and set up.

While Barry and Jane set up, John prepares brunch of bacon, egg and mushroom barm cakes, then it's a quick trip to the local Morrison's for provisions. When we return it's just after 12 o'clock so it's time for our first

cold one, we sit in the sunshine watching the TDF on the tv. The oh yes I'll have another continues until about 4.30 when it's time for a little cesta and it is agreed to reconvene at 6pm for the evenings BBQ

By 6.30pm John has the BBQ well alight salads and stuff are ready and the beef, pork and chicken are cooking over the red hot coals. The feast is accompanied by a selection of alcohol consisting of gin & tonics, miller beer, Kwak and white wine these are not consumed in great quantities for a couple of reasons A, had a few too many this afternoon, B, had a few too many the previous night and C, we are off on a three and a half hour drive tomorrow morning to visit the newest member of the Shepherd family and we need to be up early.

So that's about it for today's activities, not much I know but after all we are on our holidays. So dear readers it's early night for us all, tomorrow we will have stories of babies with lots of oohs and arrs, accompanied but lots of baby Allana pictures, goodnight one and all, from us all in Edinburgh.

Day 20

The alarm awakens us from our slumber at 7am, we plan to leave at eight so that gives us an hour to breakfast, shower, shave and the other, mission accomplished by 7.50am BG takes George for a walk so that he does not see us leave and we depart the site at 8am.

Barry is driving with BH in myself in the rear its really quite nice to be chauffeured in a comfortable car that absorbs the majority of the roads undulating surface, unlike riding in Gloria. We have a pit stop in Stonehaven and find an eatery for breakfast, with none of the other customers having curry and chips, possibly Stonehaven is a little more upmarket than Bo'ness. We continue our journey to Keith, I have to say it's a proper trek and I am pleased not having to drive.

We arrive at Donna's mum and dads, and are greeted with a beautiful bundle of joy my great niece Allana Joyce Shepherd, she is truly beautiful. We then get around saying our hellos and congratulations to Donna, Barry, Jim and Yvonne (Donna's mum & dad). It's then baby holding and picture time, Jane first then Barry and then BH, we have lunch followed by a fabulous chocolate cake and then pass the baby and picture taking continues no one wants to give her back, well that is until its nappy changing time and then dad is given the pleasure.

It's now time for the age old tradition of wetting the baby's head so we, the proud dad, two proud grandad's and myself walk the three minutes, if that to the pub. Now Barry is driving so its coke for him but not so for the rest of the party. We receive a phone call in the pub on the pub phone, there's no mobile signal in here, that supper is ready, we finish our drinks and return home.

More food I am pretty stuffed after lunch and a few beers, but still manage to find space for supper and then a little more space for a Pimm's Sorbet desert, after some more pass the baby for baby holding time it's starting to get a bit late as we have the three and half hour drive back to the site to look forward to.

It's time to thank our hosts for their wonderful hospitality and say our goodbyes and set off for the trek home.

While Barry does a sterling job of driving, the rest of us admire the views and the sunset and I use the time to catch up with the blog, there is not much more to report for today I don't think we will be doing a lot when we get back to the site as it is now 11.20pm and according to Sally Sat Nav we still have a forty minute drive to our destination.

I would like to thank JIM and Yvonne again for their hospitality and extend our invitation for them to visit Liverpool they will always have a place to stay and we will be able to show them our Liverpool hospitality.

So, goodnight dear readers, I will get back on track tomorrow and send the next instalment, goodnight from us all.

Day 21

After yesterday's tiring journey we do not awake until 9am, BH has said that she will prepare breakfast for the six of us, we are having the full hit bacon, pork sausage, beef sausage, square sausage, black pudding, mushrooms, baked beans and eggs. As this may take some time I shoot off for a quick shower when I return breakfast is not far off ready so I prepare the table and we all dig in, after breakfast it is decided that we will all go into the city for a look around.

Now there is a bus that leaves the campsite but that is going to cost thirty quid so John suggests that we all go in his car this should be a laugh the six of us and two dogs in one car. The seating arrangements are John driving Barry in

the front, BH, BG, Jane and me in the back with BG sitting on BH's lap. Now there is a plan if we see a police car that BG will lie across our laps BG then realises that if this occurs her head will end up in my lap and wonders if this was the best seating arrangement, luckily we did not see a police car so the problem did not arise.

We arrive in town and the plan is that BG will stay in the park with dogs, as Alfie has a sore paw and is limping, the rest of us will go shopping and then we will reconvene for a little drinket. So we wander around Edinburgh and pop into a few shops, John needs to get a hat as the top of his head is getting sunburnt, this leads to John, Barry and myself trying on various hats and being a bit silly, hat purchased it time to meet up with BG, we deposit ourselves outside a public house and John goes to get BG while we are there Alfie gets made a fuss of by a little boy and George is kept away from him.

Alfie's limp is not getting any better and BG is going to take him home and watch the TDF while we stay out for a bit and check out a couple more of the local drinking establishments, while we are out I get an email asking if I would like to purchase the hawkeyethenoo domain name, while I am looking at the availability we also have a look at justtheonemrswembley.co.uk and that's available as well so BH now has her own web address.

After a few more drinketts we find a taxi to take us back to the site and then the plan is to order a takeaway, I go to the reception desk and ask the lady if she can suggest a good takeaway, she looks at me and says mmm you need to go to Inverness for one of them, he he. Only kidding there are various menus in the information office, we decide on Indian and place the order which is to be delivered to the site in about an hour.

Now Barry & Jane have been given a bottle of brew by Jim & Yvonne and it's time to toast the birth of their granddaughter, and toast we do until the bottle is empty, no bloody wonder this did not get written last night. The Indian meal arrives is dished out and very good it is. After a few more beers possibly too many it's time for bed, so that's it for today, goodnight one and all. We are returning home tomorrow so you only have one more of these to put up with, well for the time being that's it.

Day 22

The Final Leg

Ok two things happening this morning Alfie has an appointment at the vets and we have got to pack Gloria for the return trip home. John and BG take Alfie to the vet at 9.20 and we start getting Gloria ready for the trip home, while Barry prepares breakfast. John and BG return with from the vet, Alfie has a bandage on his foot and tablets to take well be given. After breakfast, very nice bacon, square sausage and black pudding barm cakes, we finish readying Gloria for the journey home.

We say our farewells and thank our fellow campers for their company and depart, well depart the pitch but not the site as we need to empty Gloria's water tank so we drive round to find the emptying station, BH tells me where it is but I know better and say it is in a different location, anyway I am wrong and BH is right so after another trip around the site as it's a one way system, we empty the tank and depart.

BH says that we should go and see Britannia while we are there so off we trot when we get there you can't get very close without paying the £9 entry fee and that ain't happening. BH sets our home address into Sylvia and off we go right through the middle of Edinburgh now that was fun. We are going to stop off at Gretna Green for lunch and a mooch around, we arrive at Gretna at about 2.30, walk around the outlook village, not much good and a choice of Subway or Costa for food so that's not happening. There's a pub over the road so we head over to it and have lunch.

Then it's back on the road for the final leg of the journey, as its extremely warm in Gloria (no air con) we have one more stop for ice cream and a sit down to cool off then continue homeward. We arrive back in Liverpool and pop into see Jean and Ron one the way home, we pull up outside 68 at 7.30pm and check Gloria's odometer it reads one thousand five hundred and fifty three miles not a bad trip. Now we have to wash clean and empty Gloria and then repack her ready for next week, but that's my job for tomorrow while Barb goes to Marie Curie.

So the trip and the blog have come to an end thank you all for your time if you have enjoyed our travels please let me know, we had a great time and are looking forward to our next trip, this blog has just tripped over eighteen thousand words we will have to see how many we can get in the next one.

