

GROUP HOLIDAY TO FORT WILLIAM, SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS : 31 MARCH – 4 APRIL 2025

This year our coach holiday was with Alfa Travel. Several of our group had toured with them previously and gave a good recommendation. The holiday met the group requirements for accommodation, pick-ups. Included trips to Inverness/Loch Ness and the Isle of Skye and local and accessible walking.

Fort William, self-styled at the 'outdoor capital of the UK' is at a cross-roads of major long-distance walking routes; Great Glen Way, West Highland Way, Cape Wrath Trail and convenient for mountain ascents, easy forest, woodland, and canal walks and snow sports.

After local pick-ups we boarded our main Tour Coach at the Burtonwood Interchange and set off at 11.00am. It was a long journey, with stops and some great views along the way arriving at the hotel in time for dinner.



Our base was at the Croit Anna Hotel, 4 miles from the centre of Fort William. Nestled beside Ben Nevis and a beautiful stretch of water Loch Linnhe.



After dinner and a brief meeting to look at the options for the 3 days: trips, walking and what to do on the free day it was time to relax and sample the delights of the half-price bar !!

The attractions of the holiday were opportunities to visit Inverness along Loch Ness but mainly the Isle of Skye. Alongside the tours, local walks were offered

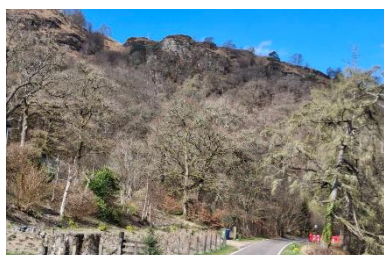
to Camnasagaul crossing Loch Linnhe by local ferry, Cow Hill, Glen Nevis trails from the Visitors Centre and Glenfinnan.

Day 2 – Weather Forecast – Great!

Trip to Inverness along the bonnie, bonnie banks of Loch Ness

(1) Local Ferry and walk at Camusnagaul, (2) Fort William to Inverloch Castle circular walk

(1) 8 Ramblers caught the bus outside of the hotel to the local ferry 'port' and took the boat across Loch Linnhe to Camusnagaul. We followed the steep Crofters Wood path through the woodland to a viewpoint for coffee. The views across the Loch towards Fort William and Ben Nevis were fantastic.



Andy and John continued climbing to make a much longer walk, while the rest followed the path down to the road. The walk was less than 1.5 miles but involved a climb of 100 metres. A lovely walk in super weather. [Helen Lea]



As Eileen's group made their way down through the woods to catch the early return ferry, John and I climbed up across pathless grassland to the mast and trig point at 291 metres.

From here it was an easy descent on the mast access track back to the shore for the last ferry of the day back to Fort William. [Andy Webb]

(2) The 6 of us returning on the early ferry had our picnic lunch at the Old Fort, which gave Fort William its name. We took a circular walk on a part the Great Glen Way trail along the River Lochy to Inverlochy Castle. Returning through the town.



Inverness

On Tuesday morning a group of Ramblers set off on the coach trip to Inverness and Loch Ness in glorious weather. Our driver, Mark, pointed out interesting landmarks along the way and stopped to allow photo opportunities and coffee breaks. En route to Inverness, we visited The Commando Centre, a moving memorial to World War II commandos, close to their former training centre, and stopped for coffee at Fort Augustus, a picturesque village in a beautiful setting alongside the Caledonian Canal.



We were treated to some spectacular views whilst driving alongside Loch Ness, and our driver negotiated some tricky, narrow roads so that we could also view what he described as “the uncommercialised side” of the loch – truly stunning!



We arrived in Inverness in good time for lunch, with an excellent choice of eateries, and some time to get a taste of the city. Following a delicious lunch, time was spent viewing the sights,



including the cathedral and the castle (currently closed for refurbishment but due to reopen in the summer), browsing the shops and galleries and strolling beside the River Ness, before heading back to our coach for the return drive to the hotel – all in all, a most enjoyable day. [Chris Ashton]

Day 2 – Weather Forecast – Even Better!!

Free Day – Mountain Gondola, Fort William mooch

(1) Cow Hill Circular Walk (2) Den Deardail Fort Trail from Glen Nevis Visitor

(1) Cow Hill and Unnamed Hill Walk



A short bus ride took John and I to Fort William Yacht Club where we joined the well maintained and signposted Cow Hill Trail. This took us up to the summit of Cow Hill at 287m for coffee and fine views over Fort William and Loch Linnhe.

Descending from the summit the circuit of the hill is completed on a lower path through woodlands to another viewpoint where we had lunch.



With time to spare on our return we took the opportunity to climb a second unnamed hill with its trig point at the same height as Cow Hill. Although almost directly above our hotel there is no way down to it from the summit so we retraced our steps back to the Cow Hill Trail and walked the 2 miles back to the hotel alongside Loch Linnhe.

[Andy Webb]

(2) Den Deardail Walk from Glen Nevis Visitor Centre

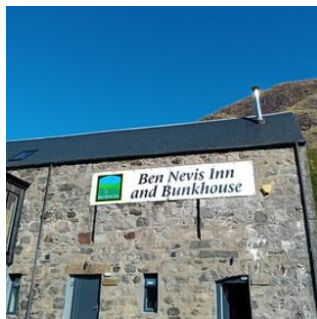


A short taxi ride to the Visitor Centre to start a linear walk of 6 miles with a steady climb and downhill all the way back. Much of the route, on good tracks, is on the West Highland Way.



Den Deardail, is a vitrified fort and scheduled ancient monument thought to have been built during the 7th Century BC. It was destroyed by fire and the intense heat caused the stone and other materials to fuse together. Though the walls are now grassed over, with views across

to Ben Nevis and the surrounding mountains it was a great place for a picnic lunch stop.



And for those who wanted, a beer at the end of the walk, the Ben Nevis Inn over the river from the Visitors Centre is at the start-end of the Ben Nevis trail. [Eileen Dorman]



Day 3 – Weather Forecast – Better Still!!!

Trip to the Isle of Skye

(1) Mountain Gondola Anoch Moor (2) Glenfinnan Trail and Loch Shiel

Skye

For many of us who had not visited it before, the trip to the Isle of Skye was the highlight of the holiday. On Thursday, on another wonderfully sunny day, we boarded the coach ready for the journey north. Once again, we enjoyed a drive through Scotland's fabulous landscapes until we reached the elegant Skye bridge, which replaced the ferry service in 1995 and connects the villages of Kyle of Lochalsh on the mainland and Kyleakin on Skye via the little island of Eilean Ban, and crossed over.





It felt very exciting to be on the Isle of Skye, immortalised by “The Skye Boat Song” and home to so many myths and legends. We proceeded northward on our scenic journey, enjoying stunning coastal and mountain views along the way until we reached Portree, a pretty coastal town, the capital and

administrative centre of Skye. We headed straight down to the harbour to see the colourful houses, which feature in so many tourist brochures. They did not disappoint, nor did the many interesting shops selling traditional goods of all kinds: clothing, food and drink and arts and crafts.



Our next stop was the Eilean Donan Castle, where we stopped to look at and take photographs of this wonderful viewpoint, which has featured in many famous films and has a fascinating history, before heading back to our hotel for the final evening of a fantastic holiday. [Chris Ashton]



(1) Mountain Gondola Anoch Moor

A short 2-bus trip brought John and I to the Nevis Range Ski Centre where we ascended in the gondola to the top station at 650m.

After coffee in the cafe, we walked over to the 2 viewpoints of Sgurr Finnisg-aig and Meall Beag with views over Loch Eil and Loch Linnhe and the surrounding mountains.



Descending by gondola we followed forest paths and multi-use trails back towards Fort William and crossed over the river Lochy on Victoria Bridge by Ben Nevis Distillery and Visitor Centre.



A stretch of road walking brought us to Neptune's Staircase, an impressive set of 8 locks on the Caledonian Canal built by Thomas Telford.

Here we joined the Great Glen Way which we followed alongside the canal and then the shore of Loch Linnhe back to Fort William and the bus to the hotel passing the ruins of Inverlochy castle en-route. [Andy Webb]



(2) Glenfinnan Trail and Loch Shiel

The much anticipated trip to the Isle of Skye or an early start, without breakfast, to catch the 08:15 train from Fort William to Glenfinnan left me a solo walker today.

There was a great view from the train before slowly passing over the Viaduct.



Glenfinnan Station on the Iron Road to the Isles [or *Hogwarts*] houses the Station Museum, Dining Car, Sleeping Car (holiday hostel) and a Shop.

The café in the Dining Car packed a small breakfast box for me and so I set off on the Trail.

Starting down through woodland and then climbing up on an obvious path, with information boards and viewpoints along the way.



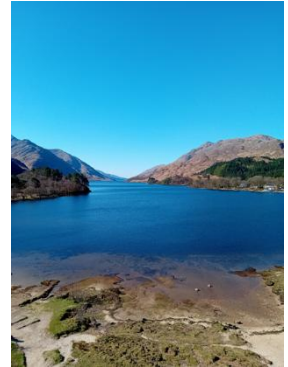
Eventually, reaching the Viewpoints for the Viaduct, there were quite a few people, from as far away as Australia and Canada and places in between waiting to see a train pass over - and the Jacobite Steam train didn't start until 7th April. I expect that brings quite a crowd of train enthusiasts and Harry Potter fans.



The end of the trail brought me to the picnic area where I enjoyed my brunch.

From there a walk over to the Glenfinnan Monument (built in 1815), a tribute to the 1745 Rising when 1,200 Highlanders pledged their allegiance to Prince Charles Edward Stuart (Bonnie Prince Charlie). “ Eight months before the battle of Culloden and After raising the royal standard (flag) and sharing a brandy, they set off on a fateful campaign to regain the British throne for a Stuart king.” The rest is history.

A climb to the top of the tower, though a very tight trap-door, and I was in the company of the Lone [and silent] Highlander. A lovely place to sit and take in the view down Loch Shiel.



After time at the National Trust Scotland visitor centre for coffee (courtesy of my train ticket), Jacobite history and shopping it was time to walk up to the stop for the bus back to Fort William.

A walk through town, visiting the Museum (more Charles Edward Stuart) in time for the bus back to the hotel and to see the day-trippers returning from Skye.

Travel: Although we were staying outside of Fort William town, independent travel was straightforward with a bus-stop just outside of the hotel. Shared taxis were cheaper than individual bus fares when travelling in a small group and so we were able to get about quite easily.

Walking: While Scotland has no definitive map of footpaths, it does respect the Right to Roam and on popular local and national routes there are obvious paths with sign posts and way markers but you need to spot them. A map or route guide and a Navigation App provide reassurance and help greatly with wayfinding.

Evening Entertainment

We were thoroughly entertained on three evenings; four dancers from Fort William gave a charming demonstration of traditional Highland dancing and Gaelic singing followed by a disco playing singalong and dance requests. On the other evenings there were singers, one with a very unusual style and repertoire. Also, the most exciting and stressful Bingo sessions – how many ramblers does it take to play for two lines and a full-house? Ask Andy and Hazel. And finally, a Tombola, where our group won a fair haul of prizes.

Overall, a holiday with lots of options and as some said not enough days. I would like to think that everyone had a great and enjoyable time. As you can see from this diary of the holiday we certainly did. Thank you.

Fort William Blog

Eileen Dorman, Helen Lea, Andy Webb, Chris Ashton

9-April-2025