

SCOTLAND TRIP MAY 14 TO JUNE 5, 2001

The author of this travelogue wishes to acknowledge the following people without whose assistance our trip to Scotland would not have been so successful. Deepest appreciation is paid to Dr. Prof. Mrs. Linda J. (call me "Lee") Magid whose numerous university- and research-sponsored plane trips under the worst circumstances (packed like a sardine in the steerage cabin with the scum of the earth as her fellow passengers) allowed her to accumulate enough frequent-flier miles to get us free Business Elite tickets on Delta Airlines. Thanks are also due to the Directors of Delta Airlines whose miserly policies (setting aside but a tiny number of these "free" seats per flight) forced us to: (a) travel earlier in the summer than we had wanted, (b) spend three days more than we had planned, and (c) fly to and from destinations that are near, but not in, Scotland. Special tribute is also paid to good friend Prof. Dr. Dr. Maitland "Mad-Dog" Jones whose ire at our having traveled Business Elite last summer makes having done so, this summer, all the more enjoyable. EAT YOUR HEART OUT, JONESIE! Prof. Jones is also thanked for the confusing, misleading, and just plain wrong information that he provided, based upon his own travels in Scotland while in an alcoholic haze. And who could forget (although we'd like to) good friend Prof. Kelsey Cook who had visited the Scottish Highlands last summer and who provided maps, tour books, sage advice, and an interminably long slide show of his adventures; Prof. Cook is also thanked (hic!) for the wide variety of single malt scotches that he *forced* the formerly abstemious teetotaler RMM to consume prior to force-feeding him the slide show. I also honor graduate school friend Tony Velturo (retired chemist, amateur golfer) who will be horrified when he learns that we were so close, so very very close, to famous courses like St. Andrews, Carnoustie, and Turnberry, but never set foot on one of them. Finally, I am pleased to acknowledge our travel agent, Bill Busser of All Ways Travel, who managed to secure some of the most fantastic hotel rates (some of them astronomically high, some pleasingly low) for seven of the 12 hotels that we visited; alas, we, alone, are responsible for the rates charged at the five that we booked on our own.

Monday, May 14 to Tuesday, May 15

As was the case last year, we are almost off to a disastrous start. This time it is not bad weather that delays our departure from Knoxville. In fact, we push away from the terminal at 4:50 p.m., just ten minutes late, and travel some 1000 feet under our own power, then make a U-turn and return to the gate "for a small engine repair." We are told (as if it's supposed to mollify us) that this same engine malfunction had occurred when this very plane was on the ground in Atlanta, earlier in the day. During our 45 minutes parked at the gate, we are informed that (a) there is no Delta-trained mechanical crew in Knoxville, (b) the airport's own maintenance people are in contact with Delta's mechanics in Atlanta and are receiving instructions over the phone, and (c) the problem is really very minor and nothing (nothing, I tell you!!) to worry about. Well, whatever is being done in the way of fixing gets done and we push away at 5:40, landing (safely) in Atlanta at 6:10, well in advance of our 8:15 scheduled departure to London. We go to the very well-appointed Business Elite lounge (YOU ENJOYING THIS, JONES?) for free drinks, snacks, and newspapers. The plane boards on time and, *mirabile dictu*, departs on time as well (well, 15 minutes late, but goodness knows that they tried their best).

The plane, a Boeing 777, is quite luxurious, at least in the Business Elite cabin (which information is, I hope, giving Jones an ulcer). This front cabin consists of nine rows of 2/2/2 seating (unlike the tourist cabin whose seat arrangement is 8/7/9/8, or something close to that). We have enormous leg- and head-room, and we have access to those wonderful seats whose electronic controls do everything short of applying a full-fledged Swedish massage. There is, as was true last year, a wide choice of movies, games, and music on demand. The movie selections are excellent, but we had already seen the best of them: "State and Main," "Chocolate," etc. So "the man of our traveling team" doesn't even turn on his monitor, choosing to improve his mind through reading, while "the female of us" watches (for a second time) "State and Main" followed by something else (mercifully forgotten). Our request for a single malt scotch, neat, is granted (my goodness, how it's granted!) by the steward's emptying almost half a bottle into each glass. Well, we don't *have* to drink it all, but then again it's bad manners

not to show appreciation of the host's generosity. We have an excellent meal (excellent by airline standards) with a nice selection of wines. An added bonus: Delta's pre-flight patter no longer includes the grammatically incorrect instruction that people sitting in an exit row: "... must be able to see the door, follow instructions, and not be distracted by other **attentions**." [NOTE ADDED IN PROOF: Back in Knoxville on July 4, we listen to a reading of the Declaration of Independence by the staff of NPR news. Lee is sure that she hears the word attentions in the recitation. Sure enough, there is this passage: "A Prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people. Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our British brethren." The misspelled "Brittish" may or may not be a typo. Several web sites show the original handwritten copy of the Declaration, but it is so faded that the words can't be made out. Much more legible is an engraving done in 1823, the reproduction most often displayed in books, and it does have attentions and Brittish; see, for example, <http://www.nara.gov/exhall/charters/declaration/decstone.jpg>. However, the Library of Congress's web site shows Jefferson's handwritten draft copy and though it has attentions, British is spelled correctly <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/images/dec4.jpg>. When the extra "t" got inserted is not clear.]

At about 11:30 p.m. (edt) I stretch out on my luxurious bed-like chair (Jones, you still reading?) and manage to sleep until about 2:45 a.m. (edt) when the sunrise awakens me (it's 7:45 a.m. London time). The pilot announces that the highs and lows expected for the day are 11°C and 8°C. Wonderful! The heat and humidity of the Southeastern U.S. are left behind. Good riddance, I say! A nice breakfast is served about an hour later. We land at 10:10 a.m. (local time), 45 minutes behind schedule. The weather at Gatwick is overcast, breezy, and mild.

There is a long line at passport control, but it moves rapidly (no terrorists or illegal immigrants here, boss) and we get our luggage (all of it!). The airport terminal and the train to Victoria Station (a 30-minute trip) are stuffy and hot (some air-conditioning would have been appreciated). We then take a taxi to King's Cross station (30 minutes away) to get the train to Edinburgh. The taxi driver is a real character - he's a strong Labour supporter (I did it! I spelled it the English way!) but far to the left of Tony Blair. He hates Margaret Thatcher (smart man!) who, he says, nearly ruined the country. The next election is on June 7 (two days after we'll get home) and he tells us that the polls are predicting an easy victory for the government which, if it occurs, will be the first time ever that Labour has won two consecutive elections. There is another party, the Liberal Democrats (nicknamed Lib-Dems), who may wind up with more seats than the Tories. As the Conservatives have moved far to the right and Labour has captured the political center - much as Clinton did with the Democratic Party - the Lib-Dems are positioning themselves on the left, in the philosophical space that Labour has deserted. [In the June 4 issue of *The New Yorker* that we'll see upon our return, Joe Klein describes the Labour Party manifesto as "The Blair Wish Project"! Now why didn't I think of that?]

We get to King's Cross station 30 minutes before the 1:00 train, which proves to be "sort of" air-conditioned. The journey to Edinburgh (with many stops) takes nearly five hours. During the ride, I begin reading *England, England* by Julian Barnes, a satire about converting the Isle of Wight into a self-contained ersatz-England, a tourist attraction that will save people the bother of having to travel to the real Buckingham Palace, the real Big Ben, the real Sherwood Forest, and so on; Lee raved about it, but I don't enjoy it as much as she did - maybe I'm just exhausted and not in the mood for light-hearted humor. The train ride is annoyingly bumpy (often it's difficult to confine one's coffee to its cup), making it very difficult to write neatly and legibly in this journal (a challenge even on *terra firma* for a noted penmanship-challenged person like me). The passing countryside proves interesting: many green pastures, some with animals (sheep, cattle, horses) who have not been dispatched to animal heaven because of foot-and-mouth disease worries. There is also, alas, the occasional golf course (with very deep sand traps), and, alas raised to the alas power, the occasional junk pile of old autos and tires (oops, I mean tyres); the latter makes us feel right at home, East Tennessee being famous for such scenery. Cell phones (in the plane, at the airport, on the streets, on the train) are not as common as in the U.S., but those that are employed are all equipped with ghastly signaling chimes - a businessman sitting near us is alerted to an incoming call by an electronic version of the Ride of

the Valkyries! Also, it seems to be a universal truth that people using cell phones TALK VERY LOUDLY - this was true when we were stuck at McGhee-Tyson, not knowing whether we'd even get to Atlanta; is true on the train from Gatwick; and will continue to be true on the way to Edinburgh and for the rest of our vacation.

The weather is pleasant in London, but by 1:30 the clouds are thickenin' ("with each drop of strychnine" as Tom Lehrer might have sung?) and we pass through (and, unfortunately stop at) a number of nondescript or grubby cities and towns with decrepit row houses, tiny gardens, community vegetable plots, and clotheslines with laundry (in the rain). In Durham (about 2/3 of the way), it begins to rain; Lee claims to have seen some small red cattle (the accuracy of which I doubt as I was looking through the same window) - are these, perhaps, the famous Durham Bulls? (I didn't think so, either.) As we enter Scotland, we're along the coast of the North Sea which is rough and is pounding, wave after wave, against the craggy cliffs; there are sheep grazing on top of the cliffs, right near a small castle ruin. (Can it be that this scene was the inspiration for Bach's "Hunting Cantata" BWV 208: "Schafe können sicher weiden" or "Sheep may safely graze"? Probably not.) Dunbar, at first sight, seems to be a pretty town, but before we finally leave it we see some truly ugly back sides of row houses. (I'm reminded of Dunbar, a principal character in *Catch-22*: Nurse Duckett says, "They're going to disappear Dunbar," to which Yossarian replies, "It doesn't make sense. It isn't even good English.")

By the time we arrive in Edinburgh (right on time at 5:45) where it is cold (11°C) and rainy, and take a taxi for the short ride to the Royal Terrace Hotel, we are tired and grubby and much in need of a shave (well, one of us is), having now been traveling for close to 23 hours. Even getting the taxi is a challenge. Edinburgh may be the country's capital and a city of nearly half a million people, but there are no taxis (none, nada, zero) to meet the long line of train arrivals, all of us dutifully queued up at the taxi stand. Finally and slowly, one by one, the taxis begin to arrive - we get the 19th vehicle after a 30-minute wait.

The hotel has its own special charms. It is located on a quiet residential street, adjacent to Royal Terrace Park and Regent Gardens, and just a brisk 10-minute walk from busy city streets. It exists in five conjoined five-storey (British spelling) apartment buildings, built in the 1860s. Along this street are other hotels, a restaurant (see tomorrow's entry), some doctors' offices, etc. Some of the rooms in our hotel have recently been remodeled, and these are named after various single malt whiskies; we are staying in the Talisker Room. The room has air-conditioning (pretty minimal by U.S. standards), which we need from time to time. It is large (well, for £170 it should be!) but could be larger and has new bathroom fixtures, ample light (for reading), a large bed, comfortable chairs, and (as will be the case in every room on our trip) coffee/tea service consisting of an electric pot for heating water, numerous packets of instant coffee and tea, sugar, ersatz cream, and cookies or cakes. A curiosity at this hotel (and, with just two exceptions, every other one that we booked during the trip) is that the bathroom sink has separate necks for the hot and cold water - because the streams of hot and cold are not mixed, it becomes a challenge for us to wash our hands, clothes, eyeglasses, etc. [An interesting coincidence: on our return flight three weeks hence, Lee sees an obituary notice in an issue of *TIME* for one Albert Moen (1916-2001) who, having burned his hands while a student at University of Washington in 1937, invented the single-neck, single-lever faucet that is so familiar in the civilized part of the world.]

At the suggestion of the hotel staff, we walk a short distance to busy Leith Street where we can choose from a variety of restaurants. We pass up "The Gurkha Brigade," whose specialty is Nepalese food. I wonder if they serve yak? Hey, here's a **guaranteed money-making idea**: they should convert to an Internet Bar whose motto is: "First you yak-yak-yak, then we serve it." [Another bizarre coincidence: 2½ weeks hence, the entire royal family of Nepal will be wiped out by what is first described on the radio as "an unfortunate accident with a gun" but what is later acknowledged as a murderous attack by the inebriated crown prince, who then turned the gun on himself.] We choose an Italian restaurant called Giuliano's (and misspelled as Guiliano's on the credit card receipt) where the food is excellent, the service prompt, and the atmosphere lively. The walk to and from the

restaurant is through cool drizzly weather. We hope that this is the worst that we'll encounter, but such hopes will be dashed more than once over the next three weeks.

Wednesday, May 16

Even though we awaken to a dreary cloudy day, we are reminded how far north we are (and how much farther north we're going to be fairly soon) by the late sunset last night and the early sunrise today. (The official sunset and sunrise on June 3 in *The London Times* are 9:11 p.m. and 4:47 a.m., but one can assume that northern cities will have sunsets at least 30 minutes later and sunrises at least 30 minutes earlier. For sure, we find that we can read a book by natural light as late as 10:15, a necessity in some hotels that provide very few watts-worth of lamp light.) The "free" breakfast is served in a basement restaurant: small, crowded, noisy, and hot (because of poor air circulation and a heated and steamy buffet table). Everything except beverage and toast (which are ordered from a waiter) is at the buffet which includes cold items (juice, fruit, cereals, etc.) and hot food (a typical Scottish breakfast consisting of sausage, bacon [which resembles ham more than what we think of as bacon], eggs, fried tomatoes, porridge, sauteed mushrooms, black pudding [more about this later], etc.). Disappointing here and at the other places that we'll stay is the poor selection of bread and rolls, the absence of cold meats, and the absence of cheeses (except for a few commercially packed cheeses in bite-sized portions). Great Britain insists that it is not part of Europe, and, if nothing else, this confirms it.

We set forth in the cold and rain. Armed only with a map and her inerrant sense of direction and adventure, Lee suggests that we take a "shortcut" to avoid the very congested Leith Street and its confusing traffic circles. Dubious, but wanting to be a "good soldier," I agree. What a mistake! In a dark and narrow alley, populated by drunks, drug peddlers, and other ne'er-do-wells, we descend at least 5,000 feet, reach the train station(!) (no, still no taxis), then ascend some 5,000 feet to High Street (the name is appropriate!). According to thermodynamics (in which I believe with all my heart and soul), having reached the same elevation at which we began, we have expended no energy! But my body tells me otherwise. Our first stop is at the Tourist Information Centre on Princes Street where we pick up useful hints about how best to get around the city. (Oh, I guess that I should also tell you that Lee's "shortcut" put us considerable south of Princes Street, so we have a bit of a hike from High Street before we get there.) On sale are numerous Scottish tchochkes (if such a cross-cultural link is permitted) including "To A Mouse Pad" written on a ... well ... on a computer mouse pad. Let the record show that for the first (and probably the last) time in the history of our marriage "the man of us" recognized a literary allusion that "the woman of us" did not. These words are meant to bring to mind the poem "To A Mouse, On Turning Her Up In Her Nest With A Plough" by Scotland's favorite poet, Robert Burns. This poem is, in fact, the source of the often misquoted line "The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men/Gang aft agley"; the poem, in its entirety, is translated into French, German, Spanish, and (yes) even English at a web site: <http://www.robertburns.org/works/75.html>.

We walk to the National Museum of Scotland (no admission fee) which is excellent. In well-marked displays, beginning on the lowest floor and working chronologically upward, it tells the story of Scotland from prehistory to the present. We arrive at about 11:00, but as the guided tour won't start for about 45 minutes, we begin on our own. Here's a "Fun Fact" (quotation marks used because I refuse to acknowledge the use of Fun as an adjective) with which to amaze your friends: the chunk of land that is now Scotland began life as a land mass in the most southern parts of the ocean; it then migrated even further south toward the South Pole, then slowly traveled north (reaching the equator a goodly number of eons ago) before finally attaining its present position (a much more desirable neighborhood, I'd say). In the museum, Level 0 concludes with "early people" (ca. 8000 BC to 1100 AD); Level 1 covers "The Kingdom of the Scots" (up to 1707); Level 3 [what happened to Level 2??] from the Jacobite rebellion to 1914; Levels 4, 5 and 6 modern times, industry, inventions, etc. The "early people" are depicted by some fascinating cubist-like sculptures by Edinburgh-born contemporary artist Sir Eduardo Paolozzi (see the photos that I took). The tour guide is very interesting: a retired man, well-spoken, moderately knowledgeable. I have a conversation with him in

connection with a statue of James Hutton (1726-1797) who wrote a treatise that established the ancient origin of rocks, thus putting him in direct conflict with the teachings of the 18th century church that the universe was only some 6000 years old. When I tell the guide that such is also the teachings of some 21st century churches in the U.S., he replies that he is aware of that, but that Europeans have managed to reconcile the two different creation stories without rancor and without any current dispute. Just before leaving the museum at about 2:00, we replenish our engines with some coffee and sweets in the café on Level 1. (Still, no Level 2!)

We then walk to the National Gallery of Scotland (also no admission) which features a nice collection of "the usual suspects" that one finds in the art museums of most major cities: Cranach, Titian, Rubens, Botticelli, El Greco, Raphael, Rembrandt (from the long-long-long-ago dead-white-European-imals), supplemented by British talent like Gainsborough and Turner. There are a few impressionists (Gauguin, Cézanne, Monet), but many more are supposed to be in the modern art collection that is in a gallery considerably west of downtown that we will visit tomorrow. Just to prove that one can't get away with repeating the same old stale puns, year after year after year, Lee is right on the ball when I ask "What did they call El Greco after he left Crete?" She quickly answers "An excretion." But she fails to answer the follow-up "And what was his first name?" Answer: "Zorba." The paintings by Watteau put me in mind of the BBC-PBS production of P. G. Wodehouse tales, in which Bertie Wooster would frequently address his butler with a cheery "What ho, Jeeves!" We also see a couple of paintings by Goya, which remind me of the time that the TV quiz show *Jeopardy* had a category Judaica next to another category called Goya. Ya wanna know what I love about art museums? They give one the opportunity to ogle nekkid big-bosomed women at their toilette (or wherever) without being arrested for voyeurism or prurient behavior. (Even Jesse Helms might enjoy these paintings.)

We walk (as, finally, the rain wanes - weally!) to St. Giles Cathedral, described as Edinburgh's High Kirk ("Beam me up, Scotty"). The present church (14th century) is the third on this site, the earliest one dating from the 9th century. The church alternated between Catholic and Reformed until the arrival of John Knox as minister in 1560. Knox was also important in the secular realm as the sponsor of a law to establish an elementary school in every parish and to guarantee a free compulsory education for, at least, the oldest son in each family. It is not true, however, that he moved to Tennessee and founded the fair city in which the Magids now live nor that he moved to Kentucky to establish the fort where our nation's gold would be stored.

At this point in the narrative, a brief history of Scotland is in order, as matters will soon get quite complicated with tales of bravery, treachery, loyalty, infamy, and a grrreat many blooody murrrederrrs. Some key dates and events: the Romans (ca. 55-400 AD) are driven out by the Picts; St. Columba brings Catholicism from Ireland to Iona in 563; the Scots, Britons, and Picts unite under the Catholic flag of Malcolm III (1058-1093) whose son, Edgar, signs a treaty with Magnus the Barefoot (King of Norway) in 1098. (You following this?) Over the next couple of centuries there is a lot of to-ing and fro-ing as armies move this-away and that-away. The year 1297 finds William Wallace (a.k.a. Mel Gibson) winning the equivalent of the World Cup by defeating the English, the French, and the Norwegians at Stirling, only to lose a great battle the next year at Falkirk. Then Robert the Bruce (strange middle name, what?) has himself crowned (1306) at Scone (thus establishing the tradition of afternoon tea and scones). A century later come the Stewarts (also spelled Stuarts): there is a succession of kings named James, leading eventually to Mary, Queen of Scots (well, what else would she be queen of?) who refused to ally with one of the sons of Henry VIII; this got Hank pissed off, so he attacked Scotland (1544) but Mary escaped to France. In 1561, her French husband having died, the 18-year-old Mary returned to Scotland and married her cousin (a tradition continued by their modern-day descendants in Tennessee and Arkansas) who was murdered six years later. Mary abdicated and fled to England where she was imprisoned by Elizabeth I, when she wasn't worrying about getting tickets to Shakespeare's new plays. Mary had a little lamb ... oops ... Mary had a son named James (so you expected something different?) who became James VI of Scotland and, when Elizabeth forgot to produce an heir, also became James I of England in 1603. Thus the two nations were united in *unending harmony* which, alas, *un-unended* when James's son, Charles I (at last a new name!) imposed the Scottish Prayer Book (and the infield fly rule) on the Episcopal Church,

leading to the stool-throwing incident at St. Giles Cathedral. (One assumes that these were stools of the sitting-down type, but then again ...) Well, push came to shove, armies moved, Charles I was executed, Charles II was defeated by Cromwell's army in 1650, and Scotland became an occupied country. This Charles II was executed so that another Charles II could become king, this avoiding the necessity of changing the name on the stationery and linens. (You sure you're still following this?) This second Charles II was replaced in 1689 by his brother, another James (VII, in case you're counting) who was a Catholic and therefore in conflict with the Protestant William and Mary in England. The Jacobites (followers of kings named Jacob - I mean James) tried to go into hiding, but were, for the most part, bumped off. Now the Presbyterian Church reigned supreme in Scotland. England decided "To hell with all these Jameses and Charleses" and they crowned George I in 1714. There were several Jacobite uprisings, the most determined of which occurred in 1745 during the reign of George II* and was led by Charles Edward Stuart (and you thought that the Stuarts were long

*These kings, George I and George II, are not George Herbert Walker Bush and George Dubya Bush.

since gone) a.k.a. Bonnie Prince Charlie. His army had some successes, but then he suffered a crushing defeat at Culloden in 1746. (Curiously, modern Scots celebrate their defeat at Culloden with the same intensity that modern Serbs celebrate their defeat by Ottoman Turks in 1389.) Scotland was occupied again and the Scots were forced to give up their customs (the wearing of kilts, the playing(??) of bagpipes, etc.) and were driven from the most fertile farm lands to barren tracts near the coasts. This forced migration called "the clearances" (not to be confused with modern clearance sales) was awful for the Scots and, subsequently, for the French Canadians who were themselves packed off into exile as the Scots made their way to Nova Scotia. Well, George II was succeeded by George III (the only king whose name and number Americans know) whose son IV (well, if we can refer to our President Bush as "W" ...) visited Scotland in 1822 at the invitation of Sir Walter Scott. IV is revered for having allowed the kilt to be worn again, but reviled by everyone (except the Scots) for permitting bagpipes to be played. Well, there was more to-ing and fro-ing, including the finding of the stolen "Stone of Destiny" in Westminster Abbey and its return, after an absence of 700, years to Edinburgh in 1996 (more on this at Edinburgh Castle, p. 8-9). In 1999, the Scottish Parliament was opened (a beautiful modern building is currently under construction) and Sean Connery became King. OK, so he didn't. Nor did Mel Gibson. There will be more historical interludes, most notably on p. 40.

At St. Giles Cathedral, we missed seeing the plaque and statues commemorating one of the protests against the Episcopacy, the "Jenny Geddes stool-throwing incident" (no, we still don't know for sure what kind of stool it was), but we do see the Moray aisle (an obvious typo - they must have meant the moray eel), the Thistle Chapel (built this century in honor of The Order of the Thistle from the time of James VII in 1687). [One reflects, at this point, on the difficult words that the Scots have imposed on us: The Thistle, The Firth of Forth, and probably Phthalic Athid, which it is difficult for a chemistry professor to say without thpraying the firth theven rowth of hith audienthe with thspit.]

Near St. Giles is a statue to David Hume, 18th century philosopher, whose contributions were dismissed by my freshman-year philosophy professor, Brand Blanshard, with these words: "The trouble with Hume, gentlemen [back in the days when Yale was uni-gendered] is that he fails to take into account the innate goodness of man." No, I don't know what it means, but it has stuck with (and to) me for over 45 years. The statue depicts Hume draped in flowing robes (à la Socrates). I think that he might have been the founder of Secular Hume-anism or, perhaps, the inventor of the relative Hume-idity scale, but then again maybe he wasn't.

On the walk back to the hotel, we pass the grotesquely ornate 200-foot tall monument to Sir Walter Scott, 1771-1832. It's not hard to resist the temptation to pay an admission fee that would allow us to ascend its 287 steps. Although his earliest fictions were published under the nom-de-ridiculous Jedediah Cleisbotham (no kidding!), "Great" Scott, as he came to call himself, was the much-beloved author of many historical (if not historically accurate) novels like *Ivanhoe*, *The Lady in the Lake*, and

Rob Roy. [A week before leaving Knoxville, some channel-surfing while riding my exercise bike rewarded me with Liam Neeson's portrayal of Rob Roy MacGregor; the one scene that I watched showed our hero moving a herd of Highland cattle by swatting one of them on its rump with a broad sword. We are too far south to have seen any of these wond'rous beasts, especially in downtown Edinburgh, but I just know that I'm going to want to swat one with a broad sword when I finally encounter them. As our friend, Robert Burns, put it, "WEE, sleekit, cow'rin', tim'rous beastie/O what a panic's in thy breastie!" - alas, he was still talking about the mouse, not a cow.]

We get back to the hotel at about 5:30 and decide to have dinner at 3 at 6:30. Say what? Well, you see, "3" is the name of the restaurant located at 3 Royal Terrace Road, just west of our hotel. We get there in time for what retired Floridians would call The Early Bird (but the Scots probably had a fancier name), an excellent prix fixe three-course dinner. We precede it with a single malt whisky: I choose a Lagavulin 16-year old, which is overpriced at £3.25, but my fancy traveling companion opts for a 30-year-old Ardbeg at £ 6.95! [Interesting - in some circles, a 16-year-old would cost more than a 30-year-old. But I digress.] Upon returning to the hotel, we decide to take advantage of the lull in the rain by walking through the lovely gardens, gazebos, and pavilions at the rear of the hotel (at the base of Royal Terrace Park). Two days later, the next time that the rains will let up, we'll return to take some pictures of these gardens.

Here, now, is the first of several paragraphs about **BritSpeak** and its delightful variant, **ScotSpeak**. Our taxi driver in London maintained that the Edinburgh accent is beautiful but the Glasgow accent is very difficult to understand. Thus far, we've had no trouble, except for one desk clerk at the hotel who is not only less than helpful in answering our questions about restaurants and attractions but speaks very rapidly with her lips nearly closed and with a verry prrronounced rrrolling of her r's. Every time I ask a question, I'm unable to understand more than half of her answer - I will assume that Lee has taken it all in, but when I have the chance to ask her I learn that she is as flummoxed as I. The other desk clerk is Welsh and is much easier to understand; perhaps it is because we've grown accustomed (to the extent that that is possible) to our colleague, Ffrancon Williams. We learn of her nationality when she tells us that her father was terribly upset over whom she was marrying. "A Scot?" asked I. "No, an Englishman!" I ask if, in her opinion, the Welsh are unusually opinionated and dogmatic (à la Ffrancon); she concedes that this is, indeed, a national characteristic of people from Wales.

At dinner at "3" we discuss an article from *TIME* about a major study on the incidence of Alzheimer's among nearly 700 nuns of the order "School Sisters of Notre Dame," who were observed for several decades by researchers at The University of Kentucky. Lee says that the research would suggest that my love of doing crossword puzzles should keep me spry and alert (without my having to enter a nunnery - damn, and that was one of my goals for my dotage). I reply that just as encouraging for the two of us is that those nuns who wrote interesting, complex, and content-laden sentences as initiates tended to have a lower incidence of the disease. [Dear Reader: if ye ha'e any sense of decency, ye'll skip the perrrrsonal details in the rrrremainderrr of this parrragrrrraph, but if yerrr of a prrrrrurriert frrrame of mind, read on!] Lee recalls that she wrote a term paper for her freshman English class at Rice on Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* that was so good that she was propositioned by her instructor. That the instructor was a woman makes it all the more intriguing. "Really?" say I, "So just exactly what was the nature of this proposition?" "She asked me quite directly if I wanted to go out with her." "And you *refused*???" How could you do this? If she calls back, please accept the offer and invite me along to watch. And to take pictures. OK?" But wait, there's more. Lee speaking again, "In sophomore year I started dating Roy Meals. I'll think that he's gay." "Well, that's certainly a strong recommendation for you that you have the sort of sex appeal that attracts homosexuals of both sexes! Remarkable, I'd say. But tell me, what in the world makes you think that Roy Meals is gay?" "Well, he never married." "Oh sure, that certainly proves the case." But the story has a happy ending - during her sophomore year, Lee fell hopelessly in love with another of her instructors (male, this time; and an organic chemist, if you must know) and during junior year used all of her feminine wiles to win his heart. And the rest, as they say, is history. [An aside - loathe as I am to use the noun input as a

transitive verb, isn't it interesting that this is done routinely with proposition?

Observations about Edinburgh:

- I note that there do not seem to be many newspaper and magazine stands, nor are there the racks of postcards that typically spill out of store fronts onto the streets in European cities.
- Also, cigarette smoking is more prevalent than in the U.S., but not anywhere close to as heavy as it was last year in central Europe; alas, most restaurants do not have separate seating for smokers, although it's clear that many office buildings do require that workers who smoke go outside to indulge their habit.
- We need to remind ourselves, as we try to cross busy streets, that one must look right (not left) before stepping off the curb; then, having reached a safety island, one must look left (not right) to complete the journey. Most intersections without traffic lights also have no pedestrian crossings, so it is safest to cross where there is a traffic light and a walk/wait sign. The traffic circles ("roundabouts" in the British lexicon) are a particular problem (and we'd better learn about them before we start driving): not only does traffic circulate the "wrong" way (clockwise) but it's not clear who has the right of way when several streams of traffic are entering and nobody has a yield sign.

Thursday, May 17

The skies are overcast: heavy clouds, cool, a threat of rain - much like yesterday. Breakfast is not as pleasant as yesterday because the dining room is overrun by a chattering group of people who are attending some sort of teachers' conference.

We walk to Waverly Bridge to catch a tour bus that had been recommended at the Tourist Information Centre. These are double-decker buses (with trained guides on board) that crisscross much of the city and allow unlimited on/off for an entire day; thus they can be used for people-transfer as much as for information-transfer. Much to my delight, I learn that I am eligible for a "concession" (the term that's used for the very young and for the very very very old - defined as over 60); not only do I get a discount on the bus ticket (£7.00 vs. an adult ticket of £8.50) but also at nearly every attraction that has an admission fee; for example when we arrive at Edinburgh Castle, I pay £5.50 and Lee pays £7.50, both of which are then reduced by 10% for our having bought the tour bus ticket. (I try to convince the ticket seller that Lee is a child, not an adult, but without success). I knew that sooner or later my having reached this advanced age would pay off.

The weather is dry during our time at the castle. We obtain (for free!) portable CD players that we hang about our necks. The CD contains historical and sociological information about each interesting room and building on the castle grounds; and each segment (typically 3-4 minutes) has links to other more detailed discussions if one is interested. It's really extraordinarily well-done and thorough, but we don't listen as carefully as we might because we choose to walk up to the top of the hill with a guide (also free) who stops at various attractions and gives his spiel. He has a series of bad jokes, many of them for the benefit of or directed at foreigners (from England, the U.S., Germany, etc.). Some jokes are about the legendary thrrrrrriff of the Scots (*e.g.*, the reason that the castle's cannon is fired at 1:00 rather than at noon is that only one shell is needed). The only joke that I remember to write down is this: "What's woorrn oonderrr a Scotsman's kilt? Nothin' is woorrn oonderrr a Scotsman's kilt. All of the equipment is in perrrrfect worrrking orrrderrr!"

Parts of the castle date from the 11th century. Only once has it passed out of Scottish hands (when captured by Cromwell who successfully repelled a raid by Bonnie Prince Charlie). The Royal Palace houses "The Honours of Scotland," principally the bejeweled crown (which, by law, never leaves Scotland but was actually *touched twice* by Elizabeth II during a visit - this is of great significance to our guide, although the meaning of it escapes us) and "The Stone of Scone" a.k.a. "The Stone of Destiny" (see p. 6), believed by some to be the very stone that Jacob used as a pillow during his famous dream. Uh-huh. According to the *Michelin Green Guide*, "the Stone of Destiny [is] the ancient symbol of Celtic kingship. [It] was returned to Scotland in 1996 after 700 years under the Coronation

Chair at Westminster Abbey." (And if you think that a little pea under a mattress was disruptive ...) I'm sure that this stone has great importance to the Scots, but this dispassionate observer is neither in awe nor inspired. A big amorphous-shaped rock, that's what it is. Underwhelmed as I am by the crown and rock (oops, I mean stone) and the various capes and swords, I step outside into the courtyard, but Lee continues on to see the Royal Quarters where Mary, Queen of Scots gave birth to James VI who forced her to abdicate leading to her exile to England and imprisonment by Elizabeth who, because she had no male heir, was succeeded by James I who was, in fact, James VI of Scotland - but you knew all of this from your study of p. 5-6. We visit The Great Hall (armor, swords, seals - all the usual stuff). The Scottish War Memorial is impressive: it's dedicated to Scotsmen and - women who died in the many many many wars that have been fought for, by, against, and in Scotland. St. Margaret's Chapel (12th century, probably the oldest surviving building in Edinburgh) is dedicated to Malcolm III's queen (Margaret) who died here; every day a bouquet of flowers is delivered to it, but only by a person whose name is Margaret (the waiting list is 1.5 years long). We head down the hill and make a brief stop at the bathrooms. [In some guide book or other, we read that this very facility had won the "Great Britain Loo of the Year Award" for three consecutive years! This is a serious business: the British Toilet Association, every year, announces the winners for England, for Scotland, for Wales (but not for Northern Ireland?), and for all of Great Britain. And if you're really curious, "An informative guide to 50 of the Best Loos in Britain, based on the findings of the Loo of the Year Awards over the last thirteen years, has been produced by the British Toilet Association. Copies can be obtained by calling the BTA on 01962 850277." That's a long-distance call, I hasten to add. For further information, see <http://freespace.virgin.net/martin.higham/news.html>] Upon emerging from this three-time-award-winning loo, we are deluged by a torrential downpour. (Of rain! What ever did you think?) We make our way to where the tour bus is supposed to pick us up ... but no bus. Then Lee notices a handwritten sign that says that the bus will stop at the bottom of the hill, not here at the top.

By chance, we get on the same bus (with the same guide) as this morning. The one difference is that neither she nor any passengers are on the upper level (the rainy level) as they were earlier. We ride for the complete circuit so that we can pick out things that we'd like to visit later today or tomorrow. We then get off on High Street and walk a bit on the Royal Mile. We have coffee and cakes at Deacon Brodie's Café in Brodie's Close (one of many narrow alleys that lead from the Royal Mile to well-hidden interesting courtyards). Upon emerging from the restaurant, the torrential rains resume, as if on cue. [A vignette: Deacon William Brodie was a town councilor, businessman, and pillar of society, but at the same time also a womanizer, a gambler, and a debaucher - sort of an 18th century Donald Trump. He was arrested, then escaped, then recaptured, and finally hung in 1788. (For more details, see <http://scottishculture.about.com/aboutuk/scottishculture/library/blfamdeacon.htm>) He is believed to have been the model for both Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in Robert Louis Stevenson's novel.]

We walk to the National Gallery of Scotland where we visit the one gallery room that we had missed yesterday, then catch the free shuttle bus that stops at the downtown National Portrait Gallery (where we do not get off) and then at the Gallery of Modern Art (in the western outskirts of the city). Sitting on the bus next to us is a delightful woman who fills in all sorts of details, such as the very exclusive school we pass where Tony Blair had been a student. The collection of modern art is fair (I'd give it a B-): one each of Picasso, Miro, Braque, etc. plus a good number of work by Scottish artists, the best of whom (to our eyes) is Samuel Peploe (1871-1935); quite a few of his still lifes, landscapes, and portraits are on display. There are many other "Scottish Colourists" represented, but the only one whom we enjoy (although not as much as Peploe) is Cadell (1883-1937). (That's Francis Campbell Boileau Cadell, in case you're interested.) Directly across the road from the Gallery of Modern Art is the Dean Gallery, supposedly the repository of Dada and surrealism, but largely off-limits today because of a special exhibit that will open that very evening. We take the shuttle bus back to the National Gallery.

We stroll along Princes Street (it's been drizzling nearly all day) and do some window shopping, then go into Jenner's (a billboard proclaimed: "Bloomingdale's in New York, Harrods in London, Jenner's in

Edinburgh" but the comparison seems weak). Nearby is a nice pedestrian-only street where we decide to eat dinner at Abbotsford, upstairs from a pub of the same name. Let the record show, let the angels proclaim, let it be known to one and all that the "man of the us" was the first of us to sample haggis* (in a main course consisting of a very nice chicken breast stuffed with haggis). It is deemed "very tasty!" but the "woman of us" refuses to try it (although she'll do so later on the trip). We walk back to the hotel in another downpour. (We had been expecting to find bad weather in Scotland in May, but this is getting ridiculous!)

"What is haggis?" I hear you ask. Well, according to the *Michelin Green Guide* (p. 23), "Haggis** (see index) is the national dish" but when one consults the index, **haggis** is not listed! So, instead, here's a recipe that I lifted from a web site. (Just remember: the recipe for what goes into American frankfurters is probably just as off-putting as the following.)

Ingredients: 1 sheep's stomach; 1 sheep heart; 1 sheep liver; ½ lb suet, fresh (kidney leaf fat is preferred); ¾ c oatmeal; 1 ts salt; ½ ts pepper; ¼ ts cayenne; ½ ts nutmeg; ¾ c stock

Wash stomach [the sheep's, not yours!] well, rub with salt and rinse. Remove membranes and excess fat. Soak in cold salted water for several hours. Turn stomach inside out for stuffing. [I think they're serious about this.] Cover heart and liver with cold water. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, cover and simmer for 30 minutes. Chop heart and coarsely grate liver. Toast oatmeal in a skillet on top of the stove, stirring frequently, until golden. Combine all ingredients and mix well. Loosely pack mixture into stomach [the sheep's, not yours!], about two-thirds full. Remember, oatmeal expands in cooking. Press any air out of stomach and truss securely. [Motto: "In haggis we truss"?] Put into boiling water to cover. Simmer for 3 hours, uncovered, adding more water as needed to maintain water level. Prick stomach [the sheep's, not yours!] several times with a sharp needle when it begins to swell; this keeps the bag from bursting. Place on a hot platter, removing trussing strings. Serve with a spoon [and an air sickness bag?].

Another web-based recipe calls for "the liver, heart, and lights (lungs) of the sheep" but warns that "The United States government has determined that sheep lungs are unfit for human consumption. It is therefore illegal to import most haggisses into the U.S." [Well, maybe this ban was imposed by the Clinton-era FDA, but one can be sure that the new improved FDA would consider such a ban an infringement on business.]

One of the most popular ways to serve haggis (and we found this at several restaurants) is Haggis with Tatties-an'-Neeps (*i.e.*, with taters (potatoes) and turnips).

Guaranteed money-making ideas (the first two of which I propose on every European jaunt): (1) air conditioning for stores, restaurants, hotels, etc.; (2) screens for the windows (if the windows are designed to open); (3) as mentioned on p. 3, replacement of all of the double-necked faucets by a single neck that carries hot and cold streams together - thus far, the double-necks are what we've seen in every hotel, restaurant, public toilet, etc.

When walking down one of the closes off the Royal Mile, Lee notes the presence (despite the cool weather) of little flying insects. "Are these the famous midges?" she asks. "I don't know - I think that they're merely gnats. So tell me, my darling cherub, do you recall what I told you these insects things are called in Germany?" "No, I don't." "Well, of course they're called Gnatsies!" "You just made that up!" she replies. "Not so," I counter, "But I did make it up when we were sitting along the river in Dresden last summer, and all that it got me was a sharp elbow jab in the ribs. I'm proud of you for not falling for the El Greco pun again, but it really behooves you, if you want our marriage to last, to remember all puns, not just a few of them, that I've told you over the years" whereupon I am rewarded with another sharp elbow jab in the ribs.

A scurrilous myth, propagated on women-oriented TV talk shows and even featured in TV ads: *MEN*

REFUSE TO ASK DIRECTIONS. This is patently false, at least for the Magid family. On the grounds of Edinburgh Castle, inside Jenner's, on the streets of downtown Edinburgh, etc. etc. etc., were it left up to "the woman of us" we'd be wandering aimlessly for days on end, but fortunately "the man of us" stops to ask directions. Hence this revised myth - no, not a myth at all but rather an eternal verity: *WOMEN REFUSE TO ASK DIRECTIONS.*

In The Great Hall at Edinburgh Castle we note that the monogram of James IV on his royal seal is **IR4**, clearly the inspiration for A. A. Milne's "Now We Are Six"! Or maybe for "Toys 'R' Us"?

Many Edinburghians (did I make that word up?) walk in the pouring rain without protection from umbrellas (brollies, in the local patois) or raincoats. From observing them, Lee concludes that Scots don't get as wet as Americans do! (My guess is that there's probably some sort of protective hydrophobic coating on their clothes and skin from eating haggis three times a day.)

Friday, May 18

Today is our anniversary (number XXXII if you insist on knowing) and we exchange cards that we had bought in the U.S. [A little background on this: as is my wont, I had purchased all of the birthday and anniversary cards that I'd need for the entire calendar year many weeks earlier, but "the woman of us" managed to forget all about our anniversary. Another "Man vs. Woman Myth" exploded!! So, on May 11 when we are walking back from graduation (compulsory attendance for the Magids this year) and heading to the student center for lunch, Lee, having realized that she still hadn't bought my card, said "I'm going to leave lunch early and go to the university bookstore to buy your card. But I don't have any money with me, so would it be too tacky if I asked you for the money?" "Yes it most certainly would be tacky, but here are two \$20 bills - buy me something really nice.] Back to Scotland. So we exchange cards and discover that, just as happened on a Valentine's Day a few years ago, we have purchased the identical card! (Think of the money we could save in the future if we were to buy only one card, then pass it back and forth.) This card carries a particularly warm, loving, and romantic message. On the cover is a rough/tough/badly-dressed man, locked in arm wrestling conflict with an equally rough/tough/badly-dressed woman. She's saying, "Give up, Wimp!" and he replies "No way, Tinker Bell!" Inside is the message, "Another anniversary and still holding hands." And who says that the Magids are not romantic?

We had planned (today or yesterday) to visit Holyrood (not far from the hotel), a lovely large park with a famous abbey and also the site of the Royal Palace that is used by the Royal Family (uppercase, always) when they visit Scotland. Alas, Holyrood is closed to the public because ... well, because the Royal Family is occupying it this week. We are not told who, from among the many Royals, is actually here, but I'll bet that it's Prince Charles (that "gorny huy" - *pace* Capitol Steps) and his paramour Camilla Parker-Bowles. So, instead of visiting it, we read about Holyrood in the travel guides and we cluck our tongues over the sights we'll never ever see. The upside of being excluded from the park is that this provides us with an excuse for not climbing Arthur's Seat, a huge volcanic hill (one of seven in the city) that rises 825 feet above the city and offers a breath-taking view of seven states - oops, that's Rock City near Chattanooga. (Our guide on the tour bus had said that nobody knows where the name Arthur's Seat comes from, but it's almost certainly not associated with King Arthur.) So excluded from that hike, we do something a little less strenuous.

This morning the sky is blue (really!), the winds are strong, and there's no haar (Scottish for "sea mist"), so we walk up Calton Hill (358 feet, 100 meters) which is very close to the hotel. At the top, the winds are fierce and it's quite cold, so I wear my jacket. We decide that there's no point in climbing the phallic monument to Admiral Nelson (rising 106 feet above the hilltop) but we do take pictures of it and of the partial Parthenon replica (partial because they ran out of money), both of which are also easily seen from lower elevations in the eastern part of the city. There is a circular Greek temple that's a monument to Dugald Stewart (1753-1828), Professor of Moral Philosophy (as opposed to immoral philosophy?) at the university and, finally, a National Monument to Scots who died in the

Napoleonic wars. Still no haar here, har-har!

Walking down Calton Hill proves to be much more pleasant than was the ascent, and we go to High Street (although not by that "terrific shortcut" that Lee had found on Wednesday). High Street is one segment of the so-called Royal Mile. As it is not raining today, we take the opportunity to explore more of this famous street by walking east to Canongate (a tollbooth from 1591 and, also, a church from 1688, indeed the official church for Holyrood Palace where the Royals are keeping us out). [The guide on our bus the other day noted that the Canon part of the name related to church dogma, not to weaponry. Well, we knew that! The weapon has a double n. But it reminds me of the time, many years ago, that I was reviewing a manuscript in which the author referred to the "cannon of nonclassical ion theory" and I countered by saying that "although many BIG GUNS had worked in this field, the correct spelling is canon."] I take pictures while I can (the sun is such a rare event) while Lee goes into a couple of shops. I hope that the picture of the Haggis Travel Agency comes out! In fact, it does. It wouldn't be Edinburgh if there weren't a little spitting rain, but the rain stops shortly after it begins despite the ominous looking clouds that have formed overhead. We observe that Edinburgh is about 1.5 months behind our part of the U.S. in terms of blooms. The courtyard at Canongate Church, for example, is strewn with what look like a blizzard of apple blossoms. In other locales, we see flowering tulip trees, cherry trees, etc., still in full bloom.

We walk west on the Royal Mile and then north to Charlotte Square (northwest of the castle). On the way we pause at the base of Castle Hill and wait for the 1:00 cannon (double n) firing; I have my camera focused on it, primed to take a picture; but then there's a small pop and Lee says, "Is that all?" so I point the camera away when the real explosion occurs. (Somehow it doesn't seem worth it to come back tomorrow at 1:00 just to get a photo of the spewing smoke and flames.) Charlotte Square is considered the most splendid in "New Town" and was designed by noted architect Robert Adams. Most of the connected buildings are now used as office space but a few belong to the National Trust of Scotland. In one of these is a small collection of art from the Scottish Colourists and a small lunchroom where we have coffee and cakes. Much better is the Georgian House which we tour at some length: it's a two-storey (yes, yes, but if I'm going to put the extra u in Colourist, I can put the extra e in storey) home from the early 19th century, wonderfully restored; our appreciation is greatly enhanced by a video tape and by the very knowledgeable guides, one in each room. We walk back (it's still sunny, but also windy and cold - temperature around 50°F?) to Princes Mall, the below-ground shopping center near the Tourist Information Centre.

Such a quiet and uneventful day. No rain. No bad jokes. No humorous incidents. We have failed in our mission to see both The Hotel Maitland (where Bill had tried to put us up and where friend Maitland, himself, had stayed - we will see it tomorrow morning on the taxi ride to the car rental office) and the hotel at the foot of Castle Hill, where Norris Dryer complained of having had the most expensive/worst tasting meal when he was there at Christmas many years ago.

My apprehension about getting the rental car tomorrow has been building for three days. I mean if I can't figure out how to step off a curb, how in the hell can I figure out how to maneuver a car with its steering wheel on the wrong side (the right), its gear shift at the wrong hand (my left), the traffic on the wrong side of the road (the left), the entries to roundabouts in the wrong direction (clockwise) and so on. I've been studying our bus and taxi drivers; they seem to be managing quite nicely, but, of course, they've probably never been told that they're doing everything backwards. As I noted earlier, many intersections are quite a challenge for us foreign pedestrians: the cars come whizzing by at funny angles, entering the intersections from unexpected directions - we are very appreciative when we can find a wait/walk pedestrian signal. Earlier in the day, we had seen two cars (a VW sedan and a commercial vehicle) with their steering wheels on the left, exactly where the automotive gods had intended them to be. I wonder: Would we be better off with a steering wheel configuration that we're accustomed to, even if it would mean having to pass on-coming traffic along the passenger side of the car? After reflecting on this question for ... oh, a good minute or two, I decide that, in fact, we would be better off with a steering wheel on the left, but only if the country agreed to change to right-side of

the road driving for the next 16 days.

We choose to have dinner at "3" again, but this time we order from the full menu. Lee has an excellent piece of venison while I enjoy a wonderful tuna meal. Lee disdains ordering a very expensive whisky, but that doesn't prevent our waiter from telling us a story (or is it storey?) about how the casks of whisky or whiskey (the Scottish spelling is without the e) in the Lagavulin and Ardbeg distilleries on Islay are bathed by the salt water from the ocean. (The Scots do so love their myths, but just wait until I share with you the full propaganda treatment, p. 51.) We return to the hotel - still no rain!

Earlier in the day I had bought an *International Herald-Tribune*. This was a dumb idea - it has too damned many pictures of George W. Bush: stories about his energy policy, his environmental views, his tax cut, his judicial appointments, etc. Memo to self: DON'T BUY ANY MORE NEWSPAPERS THAT CARRY NEWS FROM THE U.S.

Saturday, May 19

We check out of the hotel and take a taxi to the car rental agency on the west side of town. I pay close attention to what the driver is doing, how he shifts, how he turns, etc. When I tell him about my apprehension about driving in Scotland and I ask for his advice, he replies (sighing), "Stay to the left ... Just stay to the left." (Not bad advice politically, but can I follow it in my driving?) While seated in the rental office and waiting for our car to be readied, there is this conversation (a figment of my imagination but it *could* have happened). Ron (in a courteous and genteel manner): "Dearest Lee, why don't I do the chivalrous thing and allow you to be the first driver? I have so much confidence in your ability that I just know that you'll do a wonderful job." Lee (in an unladylike and gruff manner): "In your dreams Bozo! You get behind the wheel and maneuver us out of this crummy city traffic." And so it came to pass.

While sitting in the waiting room and watching cars being driven out of the garage, I pray that we're not getting one of the grotesque egg-yolk yellow cars that are spewed forth from time to time. Our car turns out to be dark blue Vauxhall Vectra (similar to the Opels that we've rented before). We (i.e., moi!) are delighted to learn that it has air conditioning, something that we did not expect. On the other hand, we are devastated to discover that it has a CD player but no cassette deck (despite assurances in the other direction by our travel agent). So here we are with 17 audio cassettes, painstakingly chosen to provide a wonderfully varied concert of Beethoven, Bach, Mozart, *et al.*, and they're of absolutely no use! Following Herself's orders, I position myself behind the wheel, adjust the inside and outside mirrors, test out the gear shift, check the dashboard controls, position myself behind the wheel, adjust the inside and outside mirrors, test out the gear shift, check the dashboard controls, position myself behind the wheel, adjust the inside and outside mirrors ... and finally (having stalled long enough) ... carefully ... cautiously ... deliberately ... turn the key in the ignition and (with a prayer to the patron saint of automobile drivers) put the car in gear and move forward. As the car is pointed in the wrong direction, I make a U-turn (being careful to look in every possible direction, not knowing where danger may come from) and proceed down the street. The blood-curdling screams of my traveling companion notify me that I'm much too close on the left-hand side to the parked cars, so I move toward the center of the road. Apparently I drift left several more times, as the screeches emanating from the passenger seat inform me. After successfully (more or less) negotiating a few roundabouts, while reciting the mantra KEEP LEFT ... CIRCULATE CLOCKWISE, we reach the open highway. And we're still alive. And the car is undamaged! There's light rain most of the way, but I succeed in driving 110 miles without causing or being part of an accident. I'm chagrined to have to report that the most impatient drivers on these Scottish roads are those who are driving either a VW or an Audi (our cars in the U.S.). Most drivers, however, are courteous and (wonder of wonders) they actually use their turn signals. Very few drivers exceed the speed limit by more than 5 mph. This is most unexpected, compared with what we encounter every day in Knoxville. The most interesting car (we saw a few of them in the city and on the road) is the three-wheeler (one wheel in front, two in

back) that looks like a gasoline-powered version of one of those prams that jogger-parents push in front of them.

On the way to Inverness, we make two stops. One is at the Highland Folk Museum in Kingussie (pronounced KingYOUsee, according to *The Rough Guide*). It consists of several old farm buildings with displays inside. While "the man of us" is sloshing, in the rain, through a muddy field trying to get pictures of the many rabbits who are skittering this way and that, "the woman of us" has taken shelter in a thatched roof home, heated with a peat fire, and watched over by a very cold, bored, and lonely teenager wearing period costume. She is actually well versed in the mores of this old society. The exhibits in the other buildings are also interesting, but we need to move on. At this point, Lee takes over the driving responsibilities and delivers us to the nearby Highland Wildlife Park in Kincaig. Under ordinary circumstances, visitors would drive their own cars through the park, past the deer and Highland cattle and wolves(!) and other animals, but because of the foot-and-mouth epidemic, we are required to park our car and travel by bus; the driver is quite knowledgeable about the animals, although seriously impaired (to our untrained ears) by a thick Scottish accent.

During this drive, we sample various FM **radio** stations. One of them appears in the tuner window as *Classic FM*. I would equate this station with "Top 40" pop stations in the U.S. In fact, one of the daily programs (I mean "programmes") is titled "Top Ten Classical Countdown" and is based on Internet votes by listeners; in keeping with the pop format, the announcer's voice is modulated by echo-chamber reverberation and other special effects. Another daily offering is called "Smooth Classics at Seven" which, as the title implies, consists of "musically tranquil familiar themes" that will "comfort [us] after a hard day of work." According to their web site (<http://62.189.86.227/>), found after our return to the U.S., this programme "brings you two hours of some of the smoothest sounds in classical music. Each track is carefully chosen for its calming and uplifting qualities." Gag! Reading further, "The popularity of Smooth Classics at Seven has inspired the release of three successful CDs on the Classic FM label. Smooth Classics I and II, and The Best of Smooth Classics guarantee tranquillity with no nasty surprises – three collections of beautiful music to soothe away the pressures of the day." That's for me: music that's calm and soothing with no nasty surprises. You, Dear Reader, have my permission to visit the web site and discover what gems you might purchase on these CDs. I make a mental note to tell Norris Dryer, our friendly classical music director at WUOT-FM, that I am eternally grateful that Knoxville's public radio station has not gone the way of so many others, not only in Europe but across the U.S. and Canada. When we tune in to "Smooth Classics at Seven" they play such "musically tranquil" fare as "The Lark Ascending" or the minuet movement from a Boccherini quintet or the second movement from Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 21 (the theme from "Elvira Madigan"), without bothering to reveal who the artists are. *Classic FM* also has **advertisements** for a very small number of sponsors, which means that they repeated over and over and over throughout the day: for the movie *Bridget Jones*, for a particular car dealer (in what city?), for health-care products, for "powerrrrrrras" (from Marks and Spencer), etc. For more details on the latter, see the entry on May 20 (p. 16-17).

Lee drives the rest of the way to Inverness. Honesty compels me to report that she does much better than I (especially in her ability to locate second and fourth gears - well, she is left-handed), although honesty also compels me to report that she does have a number of close scrapes that prompt me to declaim LOOKOUTFORCHRISTSAKESYOU TRYINGTOGETUSKILLED? Armed with only the crudest map, she manages to find the Marriott hotel at about 5:45. For this achievement, I give her full credit - it is an amazing illustration of the maternal instinct in a frightened bipedal animal who is worried that her helpless young (moi!) is not going to get fed. In the local patois, "Lee, yerrr a wee bonnie fine-figurred lass, but (*pace* "Capitol Steps" again) also a gorrny hirrrl." The entire drive from Edinburgh into the Highlands was past beautiful green rolling fields and hills, a few mountains off in the distance, sheep everywhere on the hillsides and in the pastures, many lambs (mostly black-faced but a few all-white ones), and run-of-the-mill cattle (not, alas, the Highland variety). We did see Highland cattle under the controlled conditions of the Highland Wildlife Park, but didn't take any pictures. Contrary to what we had come to believe, these animals are not only red but also black; the

guide at the park had said that the red are bred only for the tourist trade, but this seems implausible, given how prevalent they are. (♪ The red are bred but still they tend to shed ♪)

Although Marriott had taken over an existing facility (the Swallow Kingsmill Hotel) in a nice residential neighborhood, the hotel has all the essentials of American comfort: a king-sized bed, modern bathroom, no air-conditioner (but not needed), ample lighting, comfortable chairs. We choose to have a very nice dinner at the hotel, then spend a restful evening in our room, thankful that we and our rental car are all still intact.

Sunday, May 20

The day begins (surprise!) grey and overcast and cool. Breakfast at the hotel (not included in the price, a hefty £13 each) is a nicer spread than at the Royal Terrace, but similar: very few roll or bread choices but lots of hot Scottish breakfast fare. The menu proclaims "free range butter" and "free range eggs" which I assume refer to the cows and chickens whence these products came. As we finish breakfast, the sun comes out! A good omen?

We find a place to park downtown (amid all of the church-goers) and walk to the Tourist Information Centre for ideas on where we might have the best chance of seeing dolphins, seals, and (of course) Nessie. Deprived as we are of any recorded music, we seek the advice of a young female employee in choosing a CD with authentic Scottish music (a nice mix of instrumental, vocal, and chorus); her suggestion is a good one, and we play the CD many times, especially north of Inverness where we are unable to pick up *Classic FM* any more. We are advised that the best place to see aquatic animals is at North Kessock on the other side of the Beaulie Firth (cool name, eh?). Alas, when we get there the game warden disappoints us by saying that dolphins are not expected until the afternoon tide, but he does answer a number of my questions about language: *firth* refers to an estuary, *inver* or *aber* means "mouth of" (Inverness = Mouth of the Ness, Aberdeen = Mouth of the Dean, Eliot Ness = ...?). We also learn that we Americans put the accent on the wrong syllable in many of these place-names, but it's really hard to get accustomed to saying InverNESS and AberDEEN. Although dolphin-free (which is good for canned tuna but not for American tourists), our trip to North Kessock is not without its rewards: the public restroom (which Lee uses but not I) was nominated for the "1997 British Loo of the Year Award" (see p. 9); Lee reports that there is a trash can for towels inside the women's room with the sign "Please feed me - the floor is on a diet."

So we re-cross the Kessock Bridge and drive down the eastern shore (the non-touristic side) of Loch Ness. Here is where we encounter, for the first (and certainly not the last) time, that wonderful British invention: the **single-track road**. Although the surfaces will vary widely on our trip (paved or dirt or gravel) the rules for proper use are well-established. At various intervals (sometimes frequent, sometimes not frequent enough) there are "passing places" where the road is widened a bit. If the passing place (a.k.a. "aire de croisement" in French or "Ausweichstellen" in German) is on the left and you come to it before the on-coming driver reaches one of his/her left, the proper etiquette is to pull off the road into it, flash the car's headlights, and let the other car(s) pass - usually the driver will wave in acknowledgment of your courtesy. If the passing place is on the right and you come to it before the on-coming driver reaches one of his/her own, you stop in the road, flash your lights, and let the on-coming car(s) get around you by going into the passing place that will be on their left. The passing places are usually marked by diamond-shaped signs on the top of poles, but in some regions they're denoted by tall black-and-white striped poles. One should also pull into a passing place on the left if someone is trying to overtake you from behind. It is forbidden to park in a passing place, although sometimes we do violate this (in very deserted areas) so that we can get pictures. What's not mentioned in the printed rules that come with the rental car is what happens when neither car pulls into a passing place - this catastrophic situation occurs several times during the trip (when either the passing places are too far apart or when the oncoming car cannot be seen around a curve); the first strategy is to see if there are a strong enough shoulders on both sides of the road for the two cars to move partway onto - but, if not, then one of the cars must back up to the previous passing place, often

a difficult job. This all seems to work out very well, as long as drivers in both directions are paying attention. "The man of us" confesses that he is not as diligent as he might have been in pulling over when obliged to do so, but he does tend to improve over the course of the trip. "The woman of us" is, of course, perfect, absolutely perfect, every single time, no exceptions, in observing the etiquette of the passing place.

Back to the drive along the shore of Loch Ness. We fail (but don't know how) to see Urquhart Castle on the other bank of the loch. When we reach Foyers, we park and walk steeply downhill to see a nice waterfall, but given the nature of such things, we then have to hike up a steep grade to get back to the car. I believe it is at the information sign near these falls that there is a warning that the path might be "slippy" (an adjective we would see several more times). Well, when one thinks about it, "slippy" makes more sense than "slippery" because it makes one slip, not slipper. I believe that it is at the public toilet near this parking lot that there is a warning sign at the sink: CAUTION: VERY HOT WATER. So, again, one wonders: why do none of the sinks have single-necks through which hot and cold water can be mixed?

We turn around at Foyers and return to Inverness by a slightly more inland route (with not as much single-track to contend with) where we have the first of many many many many sheep encounters. We take pictures of the animals (as we do every single time), but until I see the developed roll of film I won't know how they come out. There is one lamb that had got separated from its mother: a long wire fence (with a opening at only one end) separates two pastures, but the lamb is unable to find this opening and so it runs back and forth alongside the fence, bleating for assistance. We, of course, cannot discern which of the many ewes is the negligent mother, but Lee (bless her heart) makes cute little lamb sounds in an effort to attract the youngster to the opening. Alas, she fails, and is probably having nightmares about it to this day. This does, however, have a profound effect on her husband, who does his best to hide his embarrassment from thousands of peering eyes, all ovine I should add.

I do the driving from our hotel to North Kessock and then to the waterfall; Lee then takes over and drives for the rest of the day. I know that this will be hard for you to believe, Dear Reader, but she is much better than I at driving this strange car on these roads that are mirror-images of what they should be. On three occasions, when I am driving, she screams SIDE! SIDE! (her "subtle" signal that I'm about to clip a car on my left) whereas I do the similarly for her only two times as she attempts to drive up onto a curb. Well, it's day 2 of driving and thus far we are accident-free!

Classic FM broadcasts another program called "If You Liked That, Then You'll Like This" which sounds dumb but is actually quite good. For example, they will play a familiar piece such as "Fantasia on Greensleeves" by Ralph Vaughan Williams, then follow it with several of his less well-known symphonies. It's a decent way to build on one's musical knowledge.

Yesterday, I mentioned the **advertisements** that are broadcast, over and over and over again, on this radio station. One ad is particularly amusing, but it takes many hearings before I finally get it written down *verbatim*. (My task is made difficult by the bounce of our car on the single-track - Lee, of course, is driving at this time - and it is compounded by my problems in deciphering what I'd written when trying to enter this into the word processor in Knoxville.) Finally, here it is: "Marks and Spencer have established that greater than 90% of British women are wearing the wrong size bra, but our specially trained staff of over 2000 uses a unique sensor to bring science to the art of bra fitting." Hey, I'm a scientist - can I join this specially trained staff?

We return to Inverness and cross the Kessock Bridge, again, to Black Isle for a drive to the Groam House Museum in Rosemarkie. Inside are a video about Pictish sites and a display of many old stones, some from many centuries earlier. There is also a wonderful display about the types of geometric designs that are typically carved into these stones. At the northeastern tip of Black Isle is the town of Cromarty (pronounced CROMertee), a well-preserved fishing village where we stop for coffee and pastry. On the road back to Kessock Bridge, "the eagle-eyed female of us" spots a field

full of Highland cattle; undaunted, she wheels the car into a farmer's field so that I can take pictures. When the dumb beasts refuse to cooperate by looking at the camera, Dr. Mrs. Doolittle "talks" to them in their own language (*cf.*, her bleating at the sheep earlier today). One of the animals, clearly "mooved by the experience" turns its head and poses for me. Modesty prevents my revealing too much more, but I think that this animal (male or female, I don't know which) fell in love with her. Well, who wouldn't?

Many of the fields are used as grazing pastures for sheep or cows (of the Highland and "regular" varieties) but some are planted in grain that makes the terrain look a lot like Iowa or Nebraska. Boring! Very interesting are those fields that are planted with the brilliantly bright yellow rapeseed, used for animal feed and for its oil, which easily offended U.S. customers call canola.

Although the day began with clouds and rain at about 11°C, it has cleared up and there is some sun in the warmish (15°C) afternoon. Earlier in the day, we had asked the hotel staff for a dinner recommendation. They mentioned three downtown restaurants, all of which are guaranteed to be open on Sunday evening. Returning to Inverness in the afternoon, we look at the menus in the restaurant windows and decide on Café One. We return to our hotel, but just before venturing forth in search of dinner, we ask the desk clerk to phone in a reservation for us. There's no answer ("Perhaps they're just too busy?") and we learn that there's a good reason for it: when we get to the restaurant, we see a CLOSED ON SUNDAY sign. So we go to our second choice, Woodward's. It's a very elegant restaurant, the best we'd eaten in thus far on the trip, according to the palate-conscious "woman of us." That evening, I finish Julian Barnes's *England, England* (I'd give it a B-) and start Saul Bellow's *Ravelstein*.

Monday, May 21

It's overcast, but with a couple of patches of blue; it's cool, yet a little milder than yesterday. We check out of the hotel and head north. The terrain becomes increasingly more rocky and less fertile-looking, but even in the most barren locales there are ample sheep and cattle. A peninsula between Moray Firth and Dornoch Firth is our next destination. We visit the towns of Tain, Tarbat Ness (at the most northeastern point), and (you should pardon the expression) Nigg (at the southeastern corner, just across Moray Firth from Cromarty, and reachable by ferry although we choose the overland route).

We begin in Nigg at its old church, an 1800-era building on a site that's been used for a church since the 1200s. In a recessed part of the church is a weather-beaten, but magnificent, stone slab, carved with a cross and various symbols and figures representing Biblical tales. It's rare to find an ancient slab in such (relatively) good shape. Then it's on to Tarbat Ness for a discovery center that is located on the site of an ancient Pictish church (8th century), complete with gravestones and crypt. [The first syllable of Tarbat is of Viking origin, the second Gaelic (pronounced Gallic), and the full word means "dragged across" referring to hauling things across the narrow spit of land from Moray Firth to Dornoch Firth. Silly me, all along I thought that Tarbat referred to the famous pine tar incident when George Brett's home run at Yankee Stadium was disallowed because he had rubbed foreign substance too far up the bat handle.] Tain is important for two reasons: it is the site of the Glenmorangie distillery and it has a store where I can buy a replacement battery for our camera, the old battery having died without any warning; I won't know until we develop roll #3 if we have lost some pictures at the end; in fact, it turns out ok. (The name Dornoch reminds me of Mel Brooks's movie "Young Frankenstein" and of the scene where Gene Wilder approaches an enormous door at the entrance to a scary-looking castle and says to his traveling companions "Nice knockers" to which Madeline Kahn blushes and says "Thanks." Isn't it amazing how many things remind me of bosoms? Dave Berry has got rich by devoting many of his columns to this phenomenon that afflicts most males between the ages of 2 and 102.)

Observations (on why it's so damned hard to get accustomed to the car, aside from the obvious

things I've already pointed out):

- When getting into or out of the passenger's side front seat, there is no steering wheel to hold onto. • Conversely, when getting into or out of the driver's side front seat, there is a steering wheel that gets in the way.
- Lee keeps screaming SIDE! SIDE! just to make me feel insecure when I'm driving - I'm quite sure that I'm always allowing at least 10 mm of clearance from parked cars on the left.
- The interior rear view mirror is not only in the "wrong" place for both driver and passenger, but it's also canted in the "wrong" direction.
- When another car passes us and then pulls in front, it appears as if it has a passenger but no driver.
- When driving down a highway that is one lane in each direction, if there's an exit to the right I can't break the habit of looking over my right shoulder to see if any cars are coming from behind; maybe it's a good idea that I can't break this habit, because it's certainly a habit that I want to retain when back in the U.S.

Maybe this would be a good time for a treatise on **BritSpeak**. It's hard to get accustomed to the surprisingly low-brow accents of the announcers on *Classic FM* when they pronounce foreign words: the titles of compositions, the musicians, or the composers. This is almost impossible to capture on paper, but for a people who are famous for using round vowels (rOOWWund vOOWWels), the vowel sounds for foreign words are terribly flat: e.g., "ann-dan-tee can-tab-ill-lee" or "laa traa-vee-at-a." Often this is made worse by accents that seem misplaced to our ears, as in early music written in the "ree-NAY-sense" period. [Other words that are accented strangely are "the weekEND" and "conTROVersy" and "teleVIsion." I mean, we Americans should know how to pronounce TELEvision because, after all, we invented it. Well, maybe not. Our guide at Edinburgh Castle and also the authoritative Michelin Guide claim that a Scot should be credited with (blamed for?) the invention of TV: John Logie Baird, 1888-1946.]

Driving north from Tain, along the Eastern coast of Scotland and through some run-down towns, we finally locate a small attractive tea shop in Helmsdale where we stop for a coffee and pastry. I am so sorry that we have parked a block away and left the camera in the car, because another patron (an American woman) having ordered langoustines for lunch is rewarded with the most incredibly huge stack of crustaceans, piled high in artistic fashion. We drive further north to the Hill of Many Stones (Hill O' Many Stanes) in East Clythe, two miles north of Lybster (but you knew that), only to discover that entry to this Bronze Age site (ca. 1800 BC) is prohibited because of "the foot-and-mouth" (the word "disease" has disappeared from the phrase). The description in *The Rough Guide* tells us that we missed something quite special and mysterious: "Some 200 boulders stand in the ground here, forming 22 parallel rows that run north to south; no one has yet worked out what they were used for, although archeological studies have shown that there were once 600 stones in place."

The "major" city here is Wick (population 7770) which turns out to be ugly and largely depressing: working class neighborhoods with unattractive residences and unkempt kids playing in the streets. I am in good company in my negative assessment of the city - no less an authority than Robert Louis Stevenson called Wick "the meanest of God's towns, situated on the baldest of God's bays." Take that, Wick! We ask for driving instructions to Wick's castle (an ugly little turret is all that it is) and try to see the ruined Sinclair and Girnigoe castles, three miles north of town; we give up on this because not only would it require that we walk across a muddy field but also a disreputable-looking house trailer (the very words of my fearless traveling companion) is parked there and is undoubtedly filled with escaped convicts, just waiting to steal the suitcases from our car as soon as we walked away from it. We continue north to John O' Groats (local pronunciation is Johnna Groats), the gateway to Duncansby Head at the most northeastern tip of the Scottish mainland, site of a famous lighthouse and the Duncansby Stacks - both are reached by crossing a field populated by many sheep, up close and personal, along with their sheep dung. But the best animal encounter occurred earlier in the day when the car in front of us unexpectedly came to a stop in order to allow a line of baby ducklings (no mother duck in sight) to amble across the road.

The price of gas (I mean petrol) has varied from a low of about £0.80/litre in Inverness to about £0.90 here in the north. This translates to a range of \$3.77 to 4.15/gallon; now I'm sorry that I made the conversion calculation! The weather has also taken a turn for the better; not only was there no rain today but the sun has actually come out at the end of the day.

From here, we turn west and arrive at Forss Country House Hotel, five miles west of Thurso. The hotel is a very old house (ca. 1810); it has been a hotel for only about 15 years. We have a lovely, large, second-floor room with both a queen and a double bed (the extra bed might have been needed if I had misbehaved, but I didn't), no air conditioner of course (and we could actually have used it). The increase in insect population is most evident on the car whose window and hood (oops, I mean windscreen and bonnet) are decorated with insect detritus. We discover that one reason that the room is hot is that the radiator is on; we remedy that, but are not bold enough to do the same for the radiators in the dining room, bar, and lounge downstairs.

The owners, Jamie and Jackie MacGregor, are in the kitchen or elsewhere, but we are greeted by a woman named Ann who seems to serve as resident hostess, waitress, dog's-body, and factotum. She shows us to our room and we begin to unpack. I go downstairs to ask to see the day's dinner menu, but Ann "takes charge" and asks if I'd like to bring some whiskies back to the room. "OK!" say I, trying not to sound too eager. (For a description of the bar and Ann's ideas about whisky, please see the passage on p. 46.) We (and our drinks) come down for dinner, but we are shunted into the adjoining lounge where we sit for a while before placing our dinner orders from the menu; only when our dinner is ready are we invited into the dining room. After dinner, we are given the choice of having coffee in the bar or lounge. (This sort of arrangement seems to be fairly common throughout Scotland. At Inverness, there was no pre-dinner ritual, but after-dinner coffee was also served in the lounge. Later, we will encounter the Forss sort of thing (both pre- and post-dinner in the lounge) at Borgie Lodge and Inver Lodge; at Kinloch Lodge, they will go one step further by asking us to make our dinner selections a couple of hours before the meal, but then there will still be pre-dinner drinks and post-dinner coffee in the lounge; at Western Isles, coffee will be served in the lounge to the accompaniment of two very noisy ladies (see later); and at Port Charlotte, we will order dinner in a fairly small lounge, made unpleasant by one cigarette smoker - so when the opportunity to retire to this lounge for coffee arises, we will opt to stay in the dining room. The only hotel restaurants that do no such thing are: Ayre Hotel, Creag Mor, and the two Hiltons at the end of the trip; we don't know about The Royal Terrace because we never ate dinner there.

The lounge at Forss is a formal room, but there is also an informal bar where we are astounded to see 200 varieties of single malts, including about eight (from various distilleries) that are labeled "cask strength" - very potent, very high alcohol content, they sit in the cask longer than does the regular strength. For more details on this lounge, see p. 46.

Tuesday, May 22

The day begins cloudy, misty, and cool - so what's new? But the sun comes out during breakfast, which is served in the "conservatory" (a very cheerful enclosed porch next to the dining room and overlooking the garden). Here the meal is ordered entirely from the menu (no buffet). Lee starts with porridge (How "Goldilocks and the Three Bears"!) and I with cold cereal. We follow this with the full Scottish breakfast (sausage, eggs (any style), bacon (for me), grilled tomatoes (for Lee), sauteed mushrooms, toast, coffee, and black pudding - which finally, after seeing it at every breakfast buffet, I bravely sample - much too salty for my taste, it's a blend of oatmeal, sausage, and [yecch] pig's blood). We are seated next to an elderly couple who were also in the bar last night where they lingered for quite a long while before having dinner. Both are now dressed for fishing or hunting, it's hard to tell which: woolen knickers, boots, long woolen socks; she wears a sweater pullover with a wrist watch pinned to the front. What a sight!

Meteorological Observation:

- With the low heat and humidity throughout the trip, everything dries rather quickly: clothes that have been washed, tooth brushes, hair brushes and combs; even one's face for shaving. Nice. Now back to our travelogue.

We check out of the hotel at about 10:30 and make the short drive to Scrabster to catch the ferry to Stromness (on the southern coast of the main island of the Orkneys). The slightly bumpy passage takes about two hours. This will be, by far, the largest of the many ferries that we will take. Driving onto the ferry or off the ferry, we cross a pool of disinfectant to remove "the foot-and-mouth" from our tyres (sic). Friend Maitland had alleged that Scrabster is a town name that only the Brits could invent, but in fact it's of Viking origin and means "Homeland by the Rocks"! (Probably its counterpart in Native American language is Alcatraz.)

A favorite word in **ScotSpeak** that one hears in conversations, radio ads, nearly everywhere is "wee": "the boat crossing is a wee bit bumpy" or "tomorrow we'll have a wee bit of rain" or "the road makes a wee turn" and so on. Okay, class, use wee in a silly sentence. OK, teacher, how about: "Whee! Wee wee-wee! We wee-wee. Oui?" And now, class, your second question: What is the silliest town name in the Orkneys? That's easy: it's Twatt.

Upon arriving in Stromness, we drive north to Skara Brae, the remains of a Neolithic fishing village dating back to 3000 BC. These remarkably intact ruins of houses were discovered in 1850 when a violent storm ripped away the layers of grass and sod that covered them. We visitors walk on paths that allow us to look down into the exposed houses where the remains of stone beds, dressers, hearths, etc. are easily seen. Two helpful guides are also on site to answer questions. We spend about an hour at Skara Brae and take many pictures, partly because the site is so interesting and partly because we have, at long last, bright sunshine (along with, much to my taste, low temperatures.) We are required to buy a combination ticket for Skara Brae and nearby Skail House (the former home of the Laird of Skail), which we have no intention of visiting, but are not permitted to buy a desirable combination ticket to seven of Orkney's historic attractions because one of them, The Broch of Gurness, is closed owing to "the foot-and-mouth." (As it will turn out two days hence, it's no longer closed.)

We then drive south to the Ring of Brodgar (no admission fee), an extraordinary circular array (diameter 103 m) of 36 large stones (from the original 60) of Bronze Age vintage (around 1500 BC) and unknown purpose. Some of the stones are huge (the tallest is 4.5 m); how they were moved to the site and then driven into the ground is another mystery. Several stones lie on their sides, felled by lightning strikes. A short drive eastward takes us to the Standing Stones of Stenness (four stones remaining from a circular array of 12), entrance to which is forbidden because of "the foot-and-mouth"; we stop the car to take some pictures of the sheep, who, unable to read this sign, are all over the site, and who hightail it toward the stones as I approach with my camera. From there, it's only another short drive east to Maes Howe, an extraordinary Neolithic (3000 BC) burial chamber. A surprisingly long walk from the ticket office takes us to the entrance where a guide leads small groups into the chamber. Entrance is gained through a 9-meter long, 1-meter high tunnel (many bunged heads as we follow, Quasimodo-like, the guide's flashlight) leading into a large chamber where one can finally stand erect. Its walls are covered with relatively modern (12th century) Scandinavian graffiti in the form of runes written by the invaders who plundered the tomb of its contents. The guide tells us that at the winter solstice, the sun sets behind a tall stone, quite a distance from the entrance, and that a shadow of the stone is cast through the tunnel and onto the back wall. We take her word rather than waiting around for over six months; besides, it would be just our luck that there'd be thick clouds on that December day. As the guide points out interesting features within the chamber, one or another of the Brits who were with us would softly mutter words of approbation like "Indeed" and "Ah yes" and "Good show" and "Uh-huh" and "I see" - it could have turned into a Monte Python routine.

We continue driving east to Kirkwall (population less than 6000, but still the largest town on these islands) and to the Ayre Hotel, arriving at about 6:00. The hotel, probably the best in town, is a bit

disappointing: the desk clerk is a large young man with numerous face piercings, a fierce-looking arm tattoo, and a very thick accent - he also does double-duty as a food-server in the restaurant along with other staff who, like him, work extremely hard. The king-sized bed nearly fills the room, there is only minimal storage space, the easy chair is not so easy. The room is too warm (outside temp about 25°C) but cools off when the window is opened. On the drive here, I am suddenly reminded that the e-mail exchange that described this as a second-floor room meant that the room would actually be on the third floor - and so it was. Groan.

Dinner at the hotel restaurant is surprisingly good (local scallops, yum!). After dinner, we stroll through downtown Kirkwall (where absolutely nothing is open) to identify the locations of shops (I mean shoppes) where Super World-Class Shopper Wife plans to squander our retirement money tomorrow. We return to the room where it is still quite warm: the window is open, but a second window that could have given us some cross circulation seems to have been painted shut. This is probably the last day when I'll suggest that I'm too warm. This is, after all, northern Scotland and its weather can (and will) change rapidly, most of the time toward the cold/rainy/windy end of the scales.

Wednesday, May 23

Breakfast at the hotel consists of cold food (cereal, juice, fruit) from the buffet and typical hot Scottish breakfast fare ordered from a menu. Just after breakfast, I finish reading *Ravelstein* (very good, but not as good as some critics have raved).

We explore Kirkwall on foot. Our first stop is at St. Magnus Cathedral, whose construction begun in 1137. Sainthood was conferred on Earl Magnus (murdered in 1117 by his cousin, Haakon, in a fiendish plot of treachery and deceit that lured him into dangerous waters) through the efforts of his nephew Earl Rognvald (who never forgave Haakon for having stolen the extra vowels of the alphabet for his own name). It is a beautiful structure, inside and out, with impressive stone pillars (still holding up the roof, mercifully) and interesting grave slabs on the walls. One of the slabs is for the daughter of John Napier, inventor of the **e^x** and **ln** buttons on your calculator. The picture that I take of the inscription is not very legible; on the other hand, how appropriate it is to have entombed these **Napier's Bones** (an early form of the slide rule, based on addition of logarithms, just in case you didn't know - see, for example, <http://www.cee.hw.ac.uk/~greg/calculators/napier/>.) According to *The Rough Guide*, "When Magnus's body was buried in Birsay [an island off the north coast which we will visit later today] a heavenly light was said to have shone overhead"; hence his claim to sainthood.

We then visit the Orkney Museum (in Tankerness House) which provides a wonderful history of Kirkwall and the region from the Bronze Age to Iron Age, Pictish, Christian, Viking, and, finally, George W. Bush. There is a fascinating display of the game of Ba', still played by two teams of townspeople (Uppies and Downies) at Christmas and at New Year's, in which the object is to carry (by whatever means possible) a ball from the center of town to the goal: the Uppies' goal is (not surprisingly) north of the central square, the Downies' south. Whether this is a genteel sport or a murderous battle between soccer toughs is not made clear, but I'd guess that the participants are both well-lubricated and emboldened by consumption of a goodly supply of a local anti-freeze. [An English visitor to the museum stands near me; after reading each inscription and looking carefully at the display, he utters a nearly inaudible "Uh-huh" and moves on to the next window. I'll bet that he was equally fastidious as a school boy.] While "the woman of us" is trying to spend the family fortune in the museum's gift shop, I have an interesting discussion with the manager about the way that the different religions view each other. He claims that north of Dundee (where the Highlands traditionally start), religion is never an issue (Protestants coexist with Catholics "wi' nae a conflict") but in the southern cities (Edinburgh and especially Glasgow with the recent immigration of Catholics from Ireland) sectarian strife is rampant. [As everywhere, I guess, people live peacefully with one another unless and until one of the groups increases in size and political power so as to be a threat to a formerly relatively benevolent majority. Did anyone ever express it better than Tom Lehrer in his song about National Brotherhood Week: "Oh, the Protestants hate the Catholics/And the Catholics hate the Protestants/And the Hindus hate the Muslims/And everybody hates the Jews!! But during National Brotherhood Week/National

Brotherhood Week/It's National Everyone-smile-at-one- another-hood Week./Be nice to people who/Are inferior to you./It's only for a week, so have no fear,/Be grateful that it doesn't last all year."]

Observations:

- When a British citizen needs to make his/her way through a crowded room or if he/she accidentally bumps you, the accepted apology is "Sorry ... sorry ..." and never "Excuse me" or "Pardon me" or "Gedouttadawaycreep!"
- Again we are surprised by seeing essentially no people of color in the northern part of this country. • We are also surprised to see very few windmills (after having seen so very many in Germany last summer) in this region of fierce and strong and constant winds.

A *startling news bulletin* heard on *BBC Radio Scotland* (which has replaced *Classic FM* as one of the few stations that we can get in the car): A man was arrested because inside his flat were found some 90 pairs of stolen pants, 30 shirts, other articles of clothing, including 36 "breast enhancers" (whatever these may be). An even more *startling news item* later in the day: "Police were called to investigate a haggis that had been thrown through the window of a woman's house. The haggis was confiscated and is being examined for clues." (Dear Reader, I do not make these things up. I don't have the imagination to come up with news items as weird as these.)

We are really pleased with ourselves: five days of driving and still no accidents!

Causeways connect Mainland (a strange name for an island, eh?) to a small island called Burray and then to a larger island called South Ronaldsay. [So where is North Ronaldsay or even just plain Ronaldsay? And whence cometh the name Ronaldsay? These important questions are never addressed.] The causeways are called The Churchill Barriers, as they were planned when Winston Churchill was First Lord of the Admiralty during the World War I; but they were not actually constructed as submarine barriers until World War II. [An interesting sidelight: I recall that Franklin Delano Roosevelt served as Assistant Secretary of the Navy before he ran for national office. Maybe we should recruit our next political leaders from whoever holds these positions in England and the U.S.? It certainly makes more sense than choosing an inexperienced state governor.] Left as reminders of the carnage are many partly submerged ships, abandoned ramparts and bunkers, as well as the barracks where the construction workers lived. Of the 1700 men involved in building the barriers, 1200 were Italian prisoners of war. [This explains, I suppose, the use of pasta as mortar for the bricks.] In the town of St. Margaret's Hope (curious name, what?), we stop for coffee and delicious hot desserts (sticky gingerbread pudding for Lee, caramel apple crumble for me - what calories??) at a hotel-restaurant; then Lee finds a store to buy some woolen goods while I prowls around taking pictures. There are two town drunks who may well be from Central Casting, as one or the other of them seems to materialize on every street corner, not only in this town but also in Kirkwall the next morning. Perhaps they're really CIA?

Friend Maitland had urged us to visit "The Tomb of the Eagles" at the southern tip of South Ronaldsay, "a mom-and-pop archeological site that gets the MJ 200 star award." Well, perhaps ... but other tourists to whom we speak urge us to save our money, that the experience is whimsical but not enlightening. (There'll be further details about this at the end of the document, p. 56.) Besides, today we need to worry about getting to Birsay at low tide (see below).

On the return trip north, we stop at a Sheila Fleet craft shop (on Mainland, east of Kirkwall) where I make the horrifying discovery that I no longer have the sheet of paper on which I'd been taking notes for the past two days!! Lee, bless her wonderful grey matter, remembers the name of the hotel-restaurant (The Murray Arms) in St. Margaret's Hope; and the nice people at the craft shop allow me to call. "Yes, there is a crumpled piece of paper on the windowsill, covered with incomprehensible scribbles." "That's it!! That's it!!" "You must be a doctor." "Sort of." I ask if they will hold onto this "precious" document; we'll plan to pick it up (about a 50-minute round-trip drive) either in the evening or tomorrow morning.

Having checked, yesterday, for the time of the tides, we know that the walk to the island of Birsay is not under water in mid-afternoon. At Eynhallow on the drive to this northwestern corner of the island, we find ourselves in the middle of a COW SCRUM. About two dozen cows (none of them Highland variety, alas) are being herded by a man in a tractor from one field to another and they are heading straight toward us - Lee is the passenger at this time and is, therefore, in charge of the camera. She opens the passenger's side window for a picture but quickly closes it when one of the beasts is about to stick its head in. Several pictures are then taken through the closed windows. We finally reach the parking lot for Birsay where we must abandon our car. We descend 39* steep stolid stone steps [nifty alliteration, what?] to beach level, walk across rocks both large and small, then across sand

*You don't suppose that this was the inspiration for the Alfred Hitchcock movie? I didn't think so either.

and gravel, finally reaching an asphalt causeway across the water (where we peer into the pools and observe some interesting tidal life); we then cross more rocks (large and small) and sand and gravel and finally reach the Brough of Birsay, an old Norse village in which the stone remnants of a church, a monastery, and a house are standing. Most of the structures are 11th century, but there are some also from Pictish times (8th century). We make it back across the rocks and sand and gravel and causeway well before the tide comes in. Phew! And we return to the hotel to rest up a bit. It's considerably cooler than yesterday (about 15°C) so the room is more comfortable than it had been.

We have an excellent dinner at the restaurant of Foveran Hotel in St. Ola, just south of Kirkwall and near Scapa Flow; this is one of the best meals of the entire trip. Although fairly pricey on the food, they charge only £2 each for whiskies and only £2.20 for a local dark beer. Unfortunately, a noisy group of six Brits, who are staying at the Ayre Hotel and who were very loud at the Ayre restaurant last night, are with us at Foveran. Their only redeeming virtue is that they are driving three classic cars (two antique sports cars and an old Rolls Royce) which we admired in the Ayre parking lot. As we are south of the city, we decide that this is the better time to drive to St. Margaret's Hope; we recover my "precious" travel document and get back to the hotel at about 10:00. I begin reading Robertson Davies's *Fifth Business* (part one of his *Deptford Trilogy*). It occurs to me that having read his *Cornish Trilogy* during last summer's travels through central Europe and his *Salterton Trilogy* when in Scandinavia in 1998 and *The Cunning Man* in Toronto in 1997, what in the world am I going to do when there are no more Davies works to read during next year's summer travels?

Thursday, May 24

Random observations:

- Walking through Kirkwall, this morning, we pass a barber shop with the sign: PIERCING - NOSES AND NAVELS OUR SPECIALTY. This is a barber shop?
- Thus far, every hotel except Forss has provided two wash cloths (called face cloths in this country). Nevertheless, we did the right thing by packing two of our own.
- Every hotel has provided cookies/cakes and an electrically heated pot for making instant coffee, tea, and (sometimes) hot chocolate; and (with one exception, at whom a finger will be wagged in due course) all replenish the supply each day.
- Ayre Hotel is by no means the most elegant of those we stay at, but it has perhaps the best service. The two overworked waitresses were outstanding at dinner the other night. And the front desk personnel have not only provided useful tourist information but willingly made last night's dinner reservation at Foveran, activities that ought to be routine but were not at the much pricier Royal Terrace in Edinburgh.
- It's nice to be able to talk to local folk (cabbies, hotel staff, store clerks) about Scotland, politics, history, religion, etc., unless, of course, their accents are so thick that conversation is impeded. Then it's as if we were back in Germany where a real language barrier existed.
- Car drivers are very competent, not aggressive, and cognizant of the rules (e.g., at passing places). Why ... they even use their directional signals!
- The most popular car colors seem to be dark blue (like our Vectra) or red; fortunately, we see very

few of the egg-yolk yellow cars that were fairly common at the car rental place in Edinburgh.

- There are very few cell phones in use, by drivers or pedestrians or diners or shoppers, in Orkney. And these people claim to be civilized?

For much of the day, it is cloudy with a hint of rain; the temperature ranges only from 11°C to 15°C. After checking out of the hotel, we drive to the Broch of Gurness (on the northern coast of Mainland), now opened after the "foooooo-'n'-mouth" scare. On the way, we are on the northeastern shore alongside Aikerness Beach, which is described on a tourist map as "perfect for bathing, picnicking, or beach-combing for shells, especially cowries (Groatie Buckies)" - well, I'm glad that they "explained" what cowries are! (Actually, a web search when back in Knoxville reveals that "Groatie Buckies is the Caithness name for the small cowrie shells found along the shore at John O' Groats.") The Broch of Gurness was discovered in 1929 when the leg of a stool, sat upon by local scholar Robert Rendall, pushed through the earth; the full mound was uncovered in 1930. It dates from the 1st century AD and was originally a defensive tower, but it changed hands (Picts, Vikings, etc.) and purposes many times over the centuries. We then drive to Marwick Head (on the northwestern shore of Mainland), an RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) Reserve where there are numerous birds (kittiwakes, guillemots, razorbills, but alas no puffins); to get to it, one parks the car and walks about 15 minutes over a "path" that is 2/3 grass and 1/3 loose stones. We walk toward the dangerous cliffs (we know that these are "dangerous cliffs" because a sign says that they are) where the wind is fierce and cold - surely no gendarme would believe me to be innocent of foul play if Lee were to be swept off the cliffs by a gust of gale-force wind, so I caution her to stay far far far from the edge. We look upward to (but choose not to hike to) the Kitchener Memorial on top of the hill. [Lord Kitchener was a British "war hero" -Boer Wars, India, Egypt, Gallipoli (where he "lost" 250,000 men); he died when his ship, HMS Hampshire (on a secret mission to Russia), was torpedoed in waters just west of the Orkneys in 1916.]

We are now so accustomed to the right-hand drive car on the left side of the road with the gear shift at the left hand that when we return to the States, I think that I'll insist either that Lee do all the driving or that I be allowed to keep our own cars in first gear.

Radio information: Having been unable to get *Classic FM* here in the north for the past several days and listening to *BBC Radio Scotland*, we hope that when we take the ferry from Stromness on Mainland to Scrabster on the real mainland that we'll be able to hear classical music again. This turns out to be a vain hope, although we will discover another source of classical music a few days from now (see May 31, p. 45).

We get to the ferry at 1:30, well ahead of the 2:15 deadline (for a 3:00 departure), so we have ice cream cones (while trying to keep out of the bombing pattern of the numerous gulls). I take a priceless photo of a truck that's waiting to board the ferry - it has a picture of a happy family group (mom, dad, two children, all smiling) sitting at the dinner table, and it advertises "HALL'S The World's Favourite Haggis"! (An unusual incident on the ferry: when we return to the automobile deck as the ferry is arriving in Scrabster, we note that the front bumper of the car behind us is touching our rear bumper, something that was not the case when we first parked. The driver of the offending car shows up, as he would have to, and "explains" that the agent directed him to park so close to the left-hand wall of the ship that his wife was unable to get out through the passenger door; only by moving the car forward was she able to open her door enough to get out. I grunt a few unpleasant grunts, but am appeased because there's no damage to our car. A similar situation will occur when we take the ferry from Port Ellen to Kennacraig on June 3, p. 53). We drive through much rougher and more barren terrain, with hills and mountains nearby (and with many sheep who persist in walking onto the road and crossing when least expected) and we get to Borgie Lodge, situated in the countryside between the thriving "metropolises" of Tongue and Bettyhill (yes, yes, I too can make a dirty joke about these names, but I'm going to resist - and I hope that you will too).

Borgie Lodge is another rather old building that's been made into an inn. We have a large room with

a king-sized bed, windows that open (the source of the three dead bumblebees that we find on the window sill and floor), a bath without shower (contrary to the promise in the e-mail reservation), somewhat ragged furniture (chair upholstery torn, smelly towels), and very poor lighting for reading (just one small ceiling light and an even weaker table lamp - perhaps 1 milliwatt) but it stays light late enough that it's still possible to read by natural light until about 10:15. The view from our room is of several fields (with hills in the background), farming equipment in the fields, and (best of all, probably from "central casting") a ewe and lamb close by. In the room is a book called "Taste of Scotland 2000" which is a guide to the best restaurants in the country. The book also has recipes, one of which begins "Buy the best end of a black-faced lamb" - no quantities given, no hint as to which is the best end. Maybe this is the origin of the strangely accented weekEND that Brits use. (Also in this book is a description of the Kinloch Lodge (on Skye) where we will be staying. I'll enter this passage when we get to the lodge in two more days, p. 34.)

[When we return to the States, we'll see the following "filler" item in the June 4 issue of *The New Yorker*. It's from an ad for a Radison Hotel in Vienna, but it would apply much better to almost any hotel in rural Scotland: "Please try our Royal Club room category with such advantages as: Deluxe room and suites. Exclusive breakfast in a separate lounge. Newspaper on your doorknob. Welcome gift. Free use of the fitness centre. Bathrobe and slippers. Cattle."]

We have a four-course dinner (uh-oh, no prices on the menu!) at the hotel restaurant, and it is superb. The lodge also has an excellent selection of single malts. We learn that Peter MacGregor (who owns the lodge with his wife Jacqui) is the brother of Jamie MacGregor, co-owner of Forss Country House. (Maybe this familial relationship explains why Borgie, as was true of Forss, provides no wash cloths.) According to Borgie Lodge's web site, "After the day's activities guests gather in the Naver Lounge and chat over a pre-dinner dram whilst perusing Jacqui's daily changing menu." Nicely put, because we did indeed gather and chat and peruse. See the entry for May 21 (p. 19) for a discussion of sitting in the lounge to order dinner, prior to being escorted into the dining room.

We note at dinner here (and at nearly every restaurant we've eaten at in the Highlands, starting in Inverness) that there is a pitcher of ice water on the table. What a change after having had to pay for tepid, room-temperature, bottled water throughout central Europe! As I had written on May 21, we sit in the lounge to order dinner, prior to our being escorted into the dining room. We also go to the lounge after dinner for dessert and coffee where we have a nice chat with a British couple who live in Stratford-on-Avon and who tell us that "the foot-and-mouth" has nearly destroyed the tourist season in their part of the country.

Two **radio**-related items: Before leaving the Orkneys, a weather forecast from The Shetlands informs us that "it will nae go below 6 degrassrees t'night." But even better is the report later in the day that Sen. Jim Jeffords has decided to leave the Republican Party and that the U.S. Senate will now be reorganized under Democratic control. I savor the words "Trent Lott, *Minority* Leader" as I roll them around in my mouth, much like a fine single malt.

Friday, May 25

Breakfast at Borgie Lodge is the (by now) expected fare: juice, cereal (hot or cold), hot Scottish breakfast, coffee, toast. So many calories! So many grams of fat! We check out of the hotel and drive westward. (On examining the bill, we are relieved to learn that last night's dinner, whose price was missing from the menu, was a reasonable £25/person, but with a grossly inflated £5 for whiskey and a low £2.50 for wine. Go figure.)

Today it is sunny with a slight haze, the afternoon temperatures fluctuating between 19.5°C and 22.5°C. Rather than starting out on the "main road" (if it can be graced with that title), we follow the advice of the British couple (from last night) that we might find some Highland cattle if we take an indirect loop that goes north toward the coast before coming south. Well ... we do see two of these

fabled beasts, but of more concern is that we're desperately in need of petrol and won't find any until we make it to Tongue. Crisis averted - we do make it to the filling station, where we have a nice conversation with the petrol station owner, who also runs the nearby grocery store, about where best to find seals and dolphins. I make the embarrassing discovery that I still have the room key from Borgie Lodge, but he assures me that this is no problem: he'll simply give it to the mail carrier when he passes by.

The drive west and then south is interesting: much of it hugs the coast, but we go through and over hills, fairly barren pastures (but not enough to discourage the sheep who are all over the road). We pass up the opportunity to visit Cape Wrath at the far northwestern tip of Scotland. A highlight is when a man uses his black-and-white border collies to herd a small flock of sheep from one side of the road to the other. These dogs really know their business! (But if one's business consists only of one stupid pet trick, maybe it's not so impressive.) We stop in the Scourie Hotel for coffee and sweets, then continue on to our destination, Lochinver. During the drive from Tongue to Lochinver drive, we change drivers; I have to shout "Watch out!!" two times when I'm the passenger, but Lee shouts it only once when we reverse roles. Thus, clearly, I am the better driver. At least for today.

The careful reader will recall that Lee bought an excellent CD of authentic Scottish folk music at the Tourist Information Centre in Inverness. Trying to capitalize on this "string" of good luck, she purchases another CD at the Tourist Information Centre in Durness (west of Tongue, not far from Cape Wrath). What a mistake! From the description on the jewel box, it sounds as if it would be fine, but it turns out to be Scottish tunes in a New Age format: huge, blooming string orchestras (think Mantovani) with heavenly choirs and the like. The CD is called "Stone of Destiny" and it is arranged by, and stars, one Steve McDonald. In other stores, we see many other CDs with his name, so he's obviously quite famous and, just as obviously, not in accord with our tastes. An interesting coincidence: on returning to the U.S., Lee gets an e-mail message from amazon.com about a music sale, in which this very CD is featured ["Big Brother is Watching You" I suspect] and receives a 4.5 out of 5 rating from delighted purchasers. Yecch! A customer from Western Australia [which may explain a lot] offers this testimonial at amazon.com's web site: "I bought this album when on holiday in Edinburgh in Jan 2000. I was being measured for a kilt in my clan tartan [OK, it's established, quite clearly, that we're dealing with a weirdo here]. I heard the vocals and rythms [sic] and fell in love with the album instantly. I know that this album has had a bad review, but in my small [agreed!] but honest opinion, Steve's got the trail of the Scottish heart summed up in the mixture of heavier rythms [sic, again], sad mournful ballads, and brilliant layered harmonies. 'Bannockburn' gives a superb combination of bagpipes and percussion. 'Fallen Flowers' had me in tears when I listened to it for the first time. [we were in tears, too, but for a different reason]. 'The Painted Men' has good combinations of slower rythms [oh, never mind!] counterpointed [this is a verb??] by melodies with more complex note combinations, yet the harmonies used are simple, but strong. 'Oran' is sad, but enlightening. 'The Harvest' has a good underlying rhythm [no comment] with simple 'choral' sounds [why the quotation marks?] over the top to produce a reflective track. With these descriptions to tempt you (and 60+ minutes of music) then what more can I say. [Well, you *could* have ended with a question mark!] I've not even touched all of the tracks from the album."

We reach Inver Lodge at about 2:30. Situated on a private road atop a hill, it has a great view of the Loch Inver harbour (translation into American English: harbor). There are twenty guest rooms on two floors. We are delighted with ours: a huge room, very well lit, excellent modern bathroom facilities, king-sized bed, excellent amenities, modern coffee/tea service, very comfortable chairs, fresh fruit, and (be still my heart!) a single-neck faucet in the sink for delivering hot/cold streams together!! Perhaps best of all, Travel Agent Bill had screwed up, somehow, and made two reservations for us, so tomorrow we'll be moved into an adjacent room, a suite, at no increase in cost. Not only is this the nicest and best-run facility on the entire trip, it's one of the best we've encountered ... anywhere. Later in the evening, we'll chat with a British couple who are here for the third or fourth time. It's easy to understand why they would return again and again for a five- or six-day stay.

Observations about hotel bathrooms in Scotland:

- Every one thus far - and it will hold true for the rest of the drip - has a heated towel rack. These are electrically-heated inverted U-Shapes with two or three rungs. They are excellent for warming up the towels, but even better for drying socks and underwear, if one has done a small load of wash with the damned two-necked sink faucets (Inver Lodge being the one exception).
- In France, Germany, Switzerland, etc., one encounters an interesting (and sometimes bewildering) variety of toilet-flushing mechanisms: a handle (à la the U.S.); a plunger on top of the water chamber; a cord connected to an overhead water chamber, etc. In Scotland, it seems, there is uniformity: every toilet has a handle on the front of the water chamber. The only real difference from U.S. toilets is that these use much less water: when they re-fill, they do so to a height of ... oh say ... about 3mm? Because the mechanism is the same everywhere and also familiar to us from the U.S., they should be easy to use. Right? Wrong! The problem is that pushing down on the handle does not always result in a significant flush. This is true even in the otherwise near-perfect Inver Lodge. Like primitive people grasping at coincidences that may or may not have deep spiritual significance, every once in a while we think that we've discovered a pattern. "Flush really hard one time," Lee proclaims. Well, it worked for her, but not for me. "No, that's wrong, I got it to work by pumping it four or five times weakly, then a really strong one." Well, it worked for me, but not for her. So, in desperation, I ask the clerk at the Inver Lodge front desk "What is the secret to getting these toilets to flush." "Oh, sorry, but there is no secret. Sometimes they flush and sometimes they don't. They're imported from France." Oh! That explains everything.

After checking-in, we drive some 40 miles south, in a light rain, to the fishing port (population about 1000) of Ullapool to visit their museum of local history. The admission fees total £3.50 (£2.00 for the junior of us and £1.50 for the senior) but the museum is not really worth much more than £0.50 (although Lee might disagree). Lee buys two wonderful sweaters at the knit shop across the street. We then drive back to the hotel for dinner. On the way, the pastures are not very lush and they are littered with rocks, both large and small (looking much like the rocks of northern Maine that were delivered by the receding glaciers). The road is also carved out of cuts in mountain faces, making it look very much like Jellico Mountain or like the coal seams on I-75 in southern Kentucky. We pass a few sheep and cattle, also a deer park. Turning off the "main" road onto the secondary road that leads to Lochinver, the vegetation is ever sparser, but there are some fascinating sights. In Loch Assynt, along whose shore we are driving, there are small islands with some of the most fascinating-looking trees, things that look like they might have come from a Dr. Seuss book. On the mainland itself, there are very few trees; what little pasture there is is dedicated to sheep and cattle.

Dinner at the hotel is excellent and beautifully served. As is the custom, we sit in the lounge, have a single malt, and place our dinner order. The two young men working in the bar (dressed in stiff-looking tuxedos) are Australians who are here on two-year work visas; two more Australians, a man and a woman, wait on tables in the dining room. The service is quite spectacular, with each person who brings or removes plates of food being careful to pick up on the left and deliver on the right (or is it the other way around?) A large staff attends the relatively small number of tables, and they are very attentive (the staff, not the tables). There is, of course, ice water in a pitcher on the table. We worry that the price will be steep, but it is £30, only a little higher than we've been paying. Coffee and sweets are served in the lounge upstairs. Here is where we talk to the English couple mentioned earlier; they make some excellent suggestions about sights for us to see tomorrow.

Saturday, May 26

Breakfast at the hotel is excellent and, thank heavens, much less formal than was dinner. The same staff are working in the morning, but they are dressed much more casually. There is a cold table (juice, fruit, cold cereals) for self-service, and one orders the hot food (eggs, fish, sausage, bacon, haggis, etc.) from a server. After breakfast, we move from Room 18 (a "standard double") to Room 20, and it is even more spectacular: a suite with three bay windows on one wall, another window on the perpendicular wall; a king-sized bed; a large dining table with three chairs; a writing desk with chair; a

comfortable chair; a couch (Lee assesses the fabric, which matches the drapes, and proclaims it "Exquisite!"); the same sort of modern bathroom; and, of course, a even larger fresh bowl of fruit. I don't wanna leave! (But we'll have to leave tomorrow).

The day begins with heavy cloud cover, colder (about 11°C in the morning, rising only to 18°C in the afternoon), intermittent rain, windy. We retrace the route by which we arrived. Just outside of Scourie, in two pastures to the west and in one pasture to the east, there are dozens of Highland cattle. I take lots and lots of pictures. We also get some nice pictures of sheep. We then take a very minor road to Tarbet for the trip to Handa Island. A boat has just left for the island, so we wait around for its return. It is very cold and windy; I give in to the elements and put a sweater on under my zippered jacket. There's no prospect for wearing a hat (too damned windy) but fortunately the jacket has a hood. "What a wuss I am," I think to myself. "I've never been defeated by weather before. I just hope that Lee doesn't tell anybody about this." The boat is a small metal tub, powered by an outboard motor; it carries 13 people tightly packed on its three benches. We make the 20-minute crossing, getting colder and wetter because of the winds and the inevitable spray off the water.

We are greeted by a warden who takes us to an indoor shack (out of the raging wind!) for a presentation (about 10 minutes long) on where to walk, what birds to look for on the island, where to find puffins, and so on. The island is uninhabited (except for lots of sheep, who arrive and leave the same way we do) and the resident birds; the warden and a few rugged visitors can stay in a bothy (where there is no electricity or indoor plumbing). *Bothy*, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is Scottish for "A hut or cottage; spec. a building consisting of one room in which the unmarried men servants on a farm are lodged together, or in which masons, quarrymen, etc. lodge together." On the island, there are about 150,000* guillemots (about 10% of the total for all of Great Britain) plus skua (Viking for the metal rod used to spear pieces of meat?), kittiwakes, puffins, razorbills, and gulls of all

*Depending on the source, the numbers vary widely. My notes from the warden's presentation give the figure above. A brochure that she hands out claims that there are 180,000 seabirds on the island, and that 9,000 guillemots breed on ledges at the east face of The Great Stack (see below). A web site claims 120,000 *pairs* of breeding guillemots on the island. Whatever ... it's clear that there is a slew of them.

sorts. One hikes from the south shore, where the boat deposits us, to the north shore, where most of the birds and the incredible cliffs are. To the cliffs and directly back is estimated by the warden to take 1.5 hours; a full circuit (returning by a larger loop) would take three hours. We are warned that if we miss the 5:00 return boat, we're stuck there until Monday. I ask the warden how strong the winds are and she replies "About force** four or five." Oh.

I'm glad that I've got a sweater and jacket, because it is incredibly cold and windy. The path is part grass, part rocks (either fixed in place or loose), mostly wooden boardwalk (raised about 6" above the bog and muck), a fairly strenuous walk as we are also climbing all the way, although we do proceed at a leisurely pace so that we can observe the various birds *en route* and also look at the ruins of some old stone houses from early in the 18th century. After about 45 minutes, we are at Puffin Bay - no puffins here, but terrific cliffs (about 85 m high) and sea stacks inhabited by some large percentage of the 150,000 guillemots. These are funny birds: when on land, they preen and strut around, much like penguins. We are told that we'll find puffins around the bend at "The Great Stack" and sure enough we do. Two of these implausibly colored and strangely configured birds are on our side of the inlet, but more (another 10 or so) are on the other side, quite a distance off (fortunately we have our binoculars). We walk around, take pictures, and do our best not to get blown away. We stay here from about noon to 1:30, then walk the 45 minutes back to the warden's shack; the round-trip journey is about 6 km. We have to wait about 15 minutes for the boat to arrive. I have a chance to ask the warden if she can convert winds of "force four or five" into mph or m/sec or any useful units, but she can't.** The return trip (with the fierce wind now at our backs) takes half the time; we carry only a few human passengers and one dog. We stop at the restaurant at the pier for coffee and cake. It is very hot inside, and I discover that I am absolutely drenched from the hike. This is, of course, of absolutely no interest to

anybody except me, but so be it! I hadn't realized how much I perspired during our hikes, but my knit shirt is soaked and so is my sweater, which I remove as quickly as I can.

**A handy-dandy (how appropriate for Handa Island) web site gives the answer about "force four" or "force five" winds: http://www.st-barths.com/editorials/editor_7_99.html Quoting, now:

Sir Francis Beaufort was a nineteenth century English naval officer, who devised a scale of wind conditions, still used today, that was expressly meant to be useful to mariners. He divided the range of possibility into twelve parts, gave each a name, and included a few unexpectedly charming descriptive remarks. A sample from his table: "Force Six - Strong Breeze - wind speed 21 to 35 miles per hour - Large branches in motion; telegraph wires whistle; umbrellas used with difficulty." Occasionally, he approaches the poetic: "Force Five - wind speed 19 to 24 miles per hour - Small trees in leaf begin to sway; wavelets form on inland waters." When he reached the top of the scale, the charm and poetry are usurped by a blunt finality: "Force Twelve - Hurricane - wind speed above 73 miles per hour - Devastation occurs."

And now I'm disappointed, because I would have bet that the wind was blowing at a constant 35-40 mph. Maybe the warden was way off with her "force four or five" estimate?

In the evening, we go into the small town of Lochinver and have dinner at the Riverside Bistro: it's an informal place with very good food and, as it turns out, nearly as expensive (£63 including drinks, wine, and tip) as last night's much more elegant spread.

Exciting news heard on the **radio**: A fish and chips merchant heard a crackling noise in his fried potatoes. When he checked, he found a World War II hand grenade.

We have now discovered two new ways to be served coffee in a restaurant. At the restaurant at the boat dock in Tarbet and at The Murray Arms in St. Margaret's Hope, we are served two individual cups; each has a plastic Büchner funnel with a coffee-filled filter at the base; hot water is allowed to gravity-filter through the filter and into the cup. At Borgie Lodge and at the Scourie Hotel, the coffee (about six cups worth) comes in a French Press (don't ask!): the coffee grounds are suspended in hot water in a cylindrical vessel; when one decides that the mixture has steeped long enough, one slowly pushes a plunger at the top to drive all of the solid matter to the bottom of the cylinder and to wring out of it all of the liquid.

In Robertson Davies's *Fifth Business*, the book that I'm now reading, the narrator is traveling through France, Portugal, Switzerland, Austria, Czechoslovakia in search of information about a woman who was sainted when she grew a beard (!!) so as to remain a virgin and not give in to her husband, the King of Sicily. She becomes the patron saint of girls who want to rid themselves of disagreeable suitors. I tell you, Dear Reader, that travel can be so *broadening*! Last summer, in Prague, we visited Loreta Chapel. Quoting from my travelog, this chapel is "a copy of the Holy House of the Virgin that had been miraculously air-lifted in the 13th century (long before Federal Express or UPS) from Nazareth to the Italian town of Loretto; it is one of many copies that appear all over the world. ... Among its many important features are a statue of St. Starosta, the 'Bearded Lady of the Cross'; the story is that she had taken a vow of chastity, but her father, the King of Lusitania, married her off to the King of Sicily - she prayed to God to make her unattractive to her husband and she was rewarded with a beard - this pissed off Daddy so much that he had her crucified."

Sunday, May 27

We have really enjoyed our two days at Inver Lodge. Not only are the public rooms and our individual rooms wonderful, but the staff in the dining room and at the front desk are informative and helpful. And to top it off, at the hotel's gift shop I find postcards of the incredibly sappy-looking Highland cattle that I had seen in Edinburgh and Inverness, but neglected to buy. I don't pass up this opportunity!

Breakfast is the same as yesterday, but today I add haggis to my order. This is my third time eating it, and finally I convince Lee to give it a taste. She surprises herself by liking it. As long as you don't think of its origins ... [But that's true of lots of food that we enjoy, yes?]

The morning begins very windy, broken clouds, cold (so what's new?). We drive south, past Ullapool, to the Falls of Measach (165 ft drop) which is observed, after a short hike, either from a platform or from a spectacular suspension bridge over Corrieshalloch Gorge on which no more than six people are permitted at any one time.

If Twatt was the silliest town name on the Orkneys, what is the silliest one on the mainland? *That's easy - it's Upper Badcall* (just 3 miles south of Scourie). Are there any other contenders? *Yes, there's nearby Lower Badcall as well.* [And if you don't believe me ... well, as Casey Stengel, who suffered many a bad call, once said, "Yez cud look it up!"] And what is the most entertaining road sign (seen in several places, but first in Ullapool)? It's *HASTE YE BACK*. Another road sign that we're searching for, in the hope of getting a photo, is *ELDERLY CROSSING*, usually displayed near a retirement home: an old man and woman are shown in black silhouette, both stooped over, with canes. We had seen such signs in Edinburgh and Inverness, but never thought to take a picture. One road sign that I forgot to mention earlier is *OTTER CROSSING* (just west of Kirkwall). We drive past the Isle of Ewe (Well, I love you, too, but let's not write about it, OK?) which is in the middle of Loch Ewe (Well, I like you, too ...) These names puts me in mind of Rachmaninoff's cheery and up-tempo (NOT!) piece called "Isle of the Dead" (which sounds like a necrophiliac's confession of desire). We also pass Inverewe Gardens (which, according to my acquired knowledge of Gaelic, translates as Mouth of the Sheep(!?); and this then leads to the Scottish expression, "Never look a gift ewe in the mouth."

The roads, miraculously, are mostly double-track. We drive through some rugged, barren country full of rocks (once again we're reminded of Maine) but also through occasional lush regions with trees on both sides of the roads and branches arching overhead (much like some roads through the Smokies). Some of the drive is along various bodies of water: Loch Ewe, mentioned above, but also Loch Broom and Little Loch Broom, which *should* have been called Wee Loch Broom (Well, we like broom, too, but ...). Regardless of the nature of the terrain, sheep are everywhere. Last, we cross a peninsula and arrive at Gairloch on Loch Gairloch (which name seems to me redundant - I mean who in his right mind would refer to Lake Erie Lake?) We stop at the Tourist Information Centre and then walk along the dock to the office that handles marine cruises; alas, there are no cruises at all today because of the rotten weather. In fact, we manage to take only four pictures all day long (at the waterfall) because of the rain.

More adventures in **ScotSpeak**: We stop at a small new-agey gift shop near the docks, where I ask the owner why Celtic, the winner of an important football (soccer) match, is pronounced by the **radio** announcers with a soft S rather than a hard K. He has no good explanation, except to say that the soft S pronunciation is what the team uses. Then, when he says that "Celtic (soft S) is a team that's based in Glasgow" I ask him why he used "is" instead of "are," as most British seem not to have any acquaintance with that radical concept: the collective singular noun. (That is, one usually hears them say "The team are playing" or "The orchestra are tuning" or "RCA are issuing") He admits that it's strange that he had said this, but that he hears so many strange foreign accents (i.e., American) that he unconsciously picks up bad habits. Noted.

We drive the short distance to our hotel, Creag Mor, which we reach at about 1:45, just in time for coffee and cake. Our initial negative impression of the hotel turns out, alas, to be accurate. The staff seem nice, but not hugely competent or energetic. Because our room is not yet ready, we have our coffee in the restaurant, but the service is very slow (which should have warned us about how incredibly slow it would be at dinner). After finishing our much-too-leisurely refreshments, we learn that our room is still not ready, so we drive 19 miles south to the Beinn Eighe Visitor Center (Beinn Eighe, pronounced Ben Ay [as in the salve?], is the highest mountain in this range, 3100 ft) for a simple display of wildlife, vegetation, conservation, etc. We then return to the hotel and, *mirabile dictu*, our

room is ready.

The room is relatively small and, at £110, is certainly the poorest value we've had. Furniture is a four-poster king bed, two not-so-comfortable not-so-easy chairs, a writing desk (with a stool, no chair) decent storage space, two windows. It seems not as nice as Ayre Hotel (£100) and comparable to Borgie Lodge which, at least, was only £85. Most interesting is that the bathroom sink not only features a return to two separate necks, but just to make life interesting the hot tap is on the right, the cold on the left. It's a shame to be cooped up in this room, where the ambience is so much less inviting than it was at Inver Lodge, but the rotten weather is the determining factor.

There is actually something more interesting than the reversed hot and cold taps on the sink. On the bathroom door is a large information sign; printed at the top, in upper-case, large, bold font is: SHOWER USER INFORMATION OPERATION OF CONTROLS. [Uh-oh!] Under these first two lines of print is a diagram of the controls: the upper control dial has four possible settings: OFF, COLD, LOW POWER, HIGH POWER [what "cold" is doing in this "power" group, I can't say] and the lower control dial has an arrow around it, one way pointing to HEAT (in red), the other to COLD (in blue). [So, there are now two settings for cold, one on the upper and one on the lower dial.] Between the two controls is a pair of lights which, presumably, will be illuminated at some point. (The actual control dials inside the shower do look like those in the picture on the door - that's a small blessing). Then, adjacent to the upper control, there are these words (with selected upper case letters as shown here): "The upper control knob (Power Selector) has four positions: Low Power or High Power is indicated by the pilot lights. Choose the setting on the Upper Knob first." And, adjacent to the lower control, there are these words, in which the first sentence is written in black, the second in red, the third in blue: "The lower control knob (Flow Valve) adjusts for flow of water. Turn anti-clockwise for hotter water. Turn clockwise for cooler water." Then in large black print, with purple, red, and blue highlighted words: "Total movement from cold to hot is four and a half full turns. If when adjusting for hotter water the pilot lights go out, slowly turn the lower control knob clockwise until the pilot light comes back on." Finally, on the bedroom wall, adjacent to the bathroom door, there is a red switch for turning on the hot water in the shower; I know that this is its function because of an adjacent tacky Dymo label that says HOT WATER SWITCH.

Well! I study these instructions very carefully, fully aware that I may be either scalded or frozen when I use the shower tomorrow. There are some confusing details. For example, if the upper knob has settings for COLD, LOW POWER, HIGH POWER, why do the instructions for the lower control say "adjusts for the flow of water"? And if the lower control is clearly a temperature-setting device with clockwise getting cooler, why do the instructions say to "turn the lower control knob clockwise until the pilot light comes back on"? Will I be successful? See tomorrow's entry.

Dinner at the hotel is adequate, but overpriced (£25 for the prix fixe), and the service is spotty at best. After finishing our main course, we finally succeed in attracting the attention of one of the servers: there are three on duty (for not all that many tables), but they don't seem to be assigned to specific tables. She clears our dinner dishes and asks if we'd like to see a dessert menu. We say "Yes," but we might as well have said "No," because no menu is forthcoming. Unable to attract her attention again (mainly because she performs the ultimate act of avoiding eye contact - she disappears completely from the dining room), finally after 30 minutes we get the attention of another server, who brings us the menu after another 10 minute wait. Placing our order is slow, and delivery of the goodies is also slow, so we decide not to ask (and wait) for the check, but just assume that they know to charge it to our room number.

In the evening, I finish reading *Fifth Business* (excellent!) and begin *Waiting* by Ha Jin. I'm really looking forward to this, having thoroughly enjoyed his earlier *Under the Red Flag*.

Monday, May 28

In practice, the shower's operation is fairly simple, although it proves to be nearly impossible to regulate the temperature: the water tends to change from steamy hot (when the pilot light is on) to icy cold (when off), and is never at a comfortable temperature. After a while, I discover that LOW POWER on the upper knob is a setting that will allow decent temperature control.

At breakfast, the service is as confused as it was at dinner last night. The hot food that we order arrives much too fast (while we're still eating our cold cereal and fruit), a speediness that we would have welcomed yesterday; and, as it arrives without toast, we have to ask for that two more times. Looking outside, the sky appears "promising" but we're aware that the weather can change dramatically and rapidly. And probably will.

One nice feature: the entire hotel (except for the bar) is non-smoking. In fact, we do see fewer smokers than we had last summer in Budapest, Germany, and Prague.

An interlude of **ScotSpeak**: *odd* is used in the sense of occasional or infrequent; *poor* is two distinct syllables (*puu urrrrrr*); *bonnie* and *wee* are used either together or separately in nearly every sentence. Thus, "*Of an evenin' when me mood is puu urrrr, I'll aft ta'e a wee bonnie nip o' the odd drrrrram.*" [I created that sentence, all by myself. Not bad, not bad at all!] Another delightful example of **ScotSpeak** occurred the other day when I used the exact change to pay for something, and the clerk said, "That's looovely." "Ooh," said I to my beloved traveling companion, "She called me lovely." "Not you, you idiot, she was referring to your money." "Oh."

We drive (a mixture of double- and single-tracks) to Torridon and visit its excellent outdoor deer park/indoor museum. Indoors, we watch a video that describes the changes (climate, vegetation, animals) over a 12-month period, but the highlights are the two outdoor pastures (a fair walk from the museum), one of which has a herd of deer, the other of which (be still, my beating heart!!) a herd of Highland cattle. There are about a dozen cattle, mostly red or tawny and about three black, one youngster, about a year old, and (best of all) a tiny calf that was born on our wedding anniversary, just 10 days ago, who gets most of his nourishment from his mother, but who also eats solids. We learn this from the keeper who arrives to feed both the cattle and the deer. Prior to his arrival, the cattle are randomly distributed in the pasture; one, in particular, is performing an exercise to see how tangled he can get by sticking his head through a relatively large opening in the wire mesh fence. His difficulty is that when he tries to pull his head out, the horns hook on the wire. But he perseveres and succeeds. As soon as the keeper enters and starts spreading food pellets, the animals (including the baby) line up behind him and follow him across the field, lowering their heads to the ground when a nugget of food is tossed. [A quotation by René Descartes, that I've used on exams, is "Any man who, upon looking down at his bare feet, doesn't laugh has either no sense of symmetry or no sense of humor." The same could be said if one replaced "down at his bare feet" by "at Highland cattle"! It's impossible, if one has any soul at all, to look at these animals and not chuckle ... or laugh ... or guffaw. Or, as they say in France, never put Descartes before da cow.]

Driving westward along the shore of Upper Loch Torridon we come to the lovely town of Shieldaig where we park the car and walk around, admiring the varied painted houses. *The Rough Guide* said that at Shieldaig "... a heronry has been established ... you might also have a chance of spotting a kestrel or an otter." Alas, we spot no exotic animals, but there are many ewes and their lambs on the lawns of the homes and even in the town streets. These animals are more skittish than others we've seen, and most become scarce when I approach with my camera. However, on the road leading out of the village, Lee stops the car so that I can get out and take a picture of a mother and her lamb, both of whom are right in the middle of the road. This adult is bolder than most - rather than running off, she turns to face me, a defiant look on her face (or so I imagine), squats, and urinates in the road! Well, who wouldn't? And the lamb, frightened just a wee bit, immediately begins to nurse. Having made their points, momma and lamb then turn around and exit nobly, stage left.

Radio news: there is a national election coming up soon (June 7, just two days after we leave) and

there is all sorts of moaning and grumbling about how *long* the campaign has been going on. By American standards, six weeks doesn't sound like a long campaign - indeed, the British would be amazed that our 2004 presidential election campaign has already begun to take shape. All of the opinion polls are predicting the reelection of Tony Blair and his Labour party by a large-margin, so William Hague, the Tory candidate for Prime Minister, is trying to frighten people with comments like "If Labour is elected, it will be the start of a 100-year Reich." A bit over-blown, what? Hague is not the most dynamic speaker; indeed, his speeches are so low-key that one can imagine an entire roomful of supporters falling asleep, even those who are standing. An unrelated news story is about a Swedish doctor who has published a study that claims that women with big hips and bottoms are more healthy than their skinnier counterparts. (If you, Dear Reader, think that I'm going to be stupid enough to write something like "Well, I guess that Lee is healthy" you're crazy! But I can think it, can't I?)

Leaving Shieldaig, we risk our lives by driving (with "healthy" Lee at the wheel) up to Bealach na Ba (a.k.a. Pass of the Cattle). *The Rough Guide* describes the road as "hair-raising in places ... with a gradient and switch-back bends worthy of the Alps" and so it is! We get to the highest point (a climb of over 2000 ft) and park the car (a large parking lot has been built there, somehow) to walk around and admire the view. It's very windy and rather cold (12.5°C) but at least it's not raining. Rather than continuing on in the same direction and descending toward Applecross, we decide to turn back because the fog and clouds are moving in ... very rapidly. (An even better reason for turning back is that while we're standing at the summit, an ambulance goes whizzing past us, in the direction of Applecross.)

Lee negotiates the turns magnificently (while I suddenly acquire religion and pray to every deity that I can think of - I hope that I don't insult anyone by leaving him/her/it out). For some reason, the sheep are not bothered by the hairpin turns or the chasms - they are everywhere, including at the summit. The most challenging part of the climb occurs relatively early when we encounter two huge road construction vehicles (a tractor and a dump truck that wouldn't be called "huge" on an ordinary road, but on a single-track, with precipices at the edge, they are, indeed, "huge"). We (as part of a convoy of about four cars) slowly inch our way upwards (while trying to keep the left-side - my side - tires on relatively firm ground) while the trucks slowly inch downwards (lucky souls, they're along the inner slope and not in danger of plunging to their deaths), passing by the cars with "plenty" of clearance, at least an inch or two. Oh, yes, at the start of the climb, there is a sign with these ominous words: ROAD IS NORMALLY IMPASSABLE IN THE WINTER NOT FOR LEARNER DRIVERS!

We stop for sweets and coffee at a lovely tea room, just south of Lochcarron. Well, the rain may have stayed away when we were climbing the mountain road, but it starts when we reach the valley and continues for the rest of the day. As a result, we pass on the opportunity to visit Eilean Donan Castle ("After Edinburgh Castle, it is Scotland's most photographed monument" and the locale for many movies about Scotland, according to *The Rough Guide*.) Most of the drive is single-track (this is getting tiresome!). At one point, we encounter another car, face to face, the driver having failed to take advantage of a passing place that she had just driven past; the aggressive Lee exerts her willpower and, by dint of edging ever forward, forces this poor woman to back up to her passing place. Well, rules is rules! (This woman is as bad at driving backwards as I am, maybe even worse, but she has the added disadvantage of having a husband as passenger who's giving her all sorts of what I'm sure is "useful" advice. When she is finally in the passing place, her husband gets out to examine any damage to the car caused by Lee's assault.) The single-track does go through some very lush regions (looking much like the rain-soaked regions of Southern Oregon, no surprise!) with lots of rhododendron in full bloom. ("Rhodies" are considered a nuisance in Scotland, as they grow wild and take over entire hillsides.) Also in bloom are apple trees, locusts, and other trees that we can't identify; and the hills are covered with beautiful bright-yellow gorse. We stop in the small town of Plockton, another picturesque setting that is used for movies and TV shows. According to *The Rough Guide*, "The unique brilliance of Plockton's light has made it something of an artists' hangout, and during the summer, the waterfront, with its row of shaggy palm trees, even shaggier Highland cattle, flower gardens, and pleasure boats is invariably punctuated by painters dabbling at their easels." Lovely words, indeed, but not true in today's

rain and 12.5°C temp. Nevertheless, we park the car and walk a bit in the rain. Most interesting, we are starting to see road signs in both English and Gaelic - and this will become increasingly more common when we drive around the Isle of Skye. (Some literature suggests that about 59% of Skye's residents speak Gaelic, and many are taught in an all-Gaelic school.) We then drive (in a somewhat heavier rain) the short distance to Kyle of Lochalsh (that's the name of a town, not a person) where we pay the hefty toll to cross the bridge to Isle of Skye. And as we approach Kinloch Lodge (about 30 minutes from the bridge), the rain and winds intensify. Driving along the private road to the Lodge, we're pleased to note an abundance of sheep, both on the sides and in the middle of the road. Skye, it would appear, is not sheep-free!

If Inver Lodge rated an A (which it did), I'd give Kinloch Lodge a B or B+. In the copy of "Taste of Scotland 2000" that we saw at Borgie Lodge (May 24, p. 25) there are these glowing words about Kinloch Lodge: "... built in 1680 as a farmhouse, it was expanded into a hunting lodge in the 19th century ... As the home of Lord Macdonald of Macdonald, it is full of portraits of ancestors, old furniture, and family treasures. It is very much a family home, with two comfortable drawing rooms [finger paints supplied??], log fires, and a variety of bedrooms. Lady Claire Macdonald is one of the best known cooks in Scotland, an award-winning journalist. Assisted by a small team [dwarves????] she prepares the table d'hôte menu each night, using only fresh seasonal produce. The breakfasts are a special treat ... and were the winner of the Macallan Taste of Scotland Best Breakfast Award of 1998." So that's the hype; here's the reality.

The main building (Kinloch Lodge, ten guest rooms of varying size, dining room, two drawing rooms) was the hunting lodge for the Macdonalds; in 1998, another house was added just a short walk away; it has four guest rooms, another drawing room, a library, and the living quarters for Lord Godfrey and Lady Claire (or Whiskers and Bubbles, as we informal Americans - and our nickname-bestowing president - might address them) who are away at this time. The nerve! They *knew* that we were coming! But at least we get a photo of a wall hanging with the full lineage of the Macdonalds of Sleat,* stretching back to Somerled, First Lord of the Isles (1164-1207). The Macdonalds trace their

*Sleat is the large peninsula at the south of Skye where the Macdonald dominion is absolute. No, it's not true that the family crest shows the golden arches. Yes, it is true that there is an Old Macdonald's farm nearby. No, it is not true that the Macdonalds of Sleat are related to the Snows of Yesteryear nor to the Dukes of Hazzard - besides, it turns out that Sleat is pronounced Slate. But, yes, it is true that the oldest son of old Somerled was Ronald Macdonald.

line to the Third Lord of the Isles, Hugh, son of Alexander (died 1449). The history (www.tartans.com/clans/Macdonald/sleat.html or www.impressions.uk.com/clans/clan_169.shtml) is typically bloody, with wars and inter-marriages and brothers slaying brothers and treachery and treason and double-crossing. Just the sort of good, clean, fun that robust men engage in! The clan's motto is *Per mere per terras* (loose translation: *through the mother comes terror*).

Back to the Lodge. Smoking is permitted in the drawing rooms (too bad) and bedrooms of the original building but not in ours. There are fireplaces throughout the buildings: in the drawing rooms, the dining room, the hallways; and all have fires going - who needs them? Yes, it's 12.5°C outside, but that doesn't mean that it's necessary to heat the interior to 30°C or above! Well, does it?

Rachel McKinnon, who manages the lodge, takes us on a tour through both buildings before showing us to our room. The room is very large, with a king-sized bed and with windows on two sides (no air conditioning, of course, but again not needed), an adequate (but not superior) amount of light for reading, dresser, writing desk, two chairs (not particularly comfortable), coffee/tea supplies (of course), double-necked sink faucet (of course), and several prints of birds on the walls - these seem to be from a limited edition called Archibald Thorbush, but whether this is the name of the bird species or the artist isn't clear. Surprise of surprises, we see the same sort of weird heating system for the shower water that we encountered at Creag Mor (including an on/off switch on the bedroom wall, with the same tacky

Dymo-label announcing its function). It's not an identical system to Creag Mor's, but it's very similar. How well does it work? You'll have to wait until tomorrow morning's entry. Another feature (also found at Creag Mor, Borgie Lodge, and perhaps others) is that there's an electrically heated pad on the bed, under the sheet - I suppose that this is in lieu of having central heat, but we never do test it out.

Another feature of this hotel (and every other that we stayed in) is that every wall outlet has an on/off switch next to it; if it's a double outlet, there are two switches. Some switches indicate which direction is ON and which is OFF; others have a red side and a white side; and with some others it's a matter of guess work. I suppose that these are safety devices for homes with children, although no self-respecting kid would fail to try flipping the switch just to see what happens.

Because the dining room has a limited number of tables, it's necessary to tell the staff whether we'll be eating there. Also, unlike the several places that handed out dinner menus while we were sipping whiskies in the lounge, here it's required to select our starter, main course, and dessert earlier in the day. (After that, no changes are permitted! You haf been varned! Sorry ... I got carried away.) The cost is steep (£38, not including whisky and wine) but if Lady Claire is really "one of the best known cooks in Scotland" ... (Hmmm, in re-reading this, I realize that it doesn't say "one of the best cooks in Scotland"! After all, wasn't Mrs. Lovett, who baked meat pies using the corpses supplied by Sweeney Todd, also one of the "best known cooks"?) At about 6:15, we fight our way through fierce wind and horizontal rain to reach the main house; it will be just as fierce and wet ("It was a dark and stormy night ...") when we walk back to our building at about 9:45. We make our way to one of the drawing rooms for a "wee bonnie nip of the odd dram," but the quiet of the room (several people are reading, others are speaking in whispers) is destroyed by the arrival of one businessman followed by another who, together, join one already there - and the three carry on a loud, cigarette-aided, and liquor-lubricated conversation. And the Brits say that we Americans have boorish manners!

Dinner is excellent, beautifully served, substantial in quality and quantity, so much so that we are too full to have coffee and dessert in the drawing room (or anywhere else). As we waddle through the wind and rain, back to our building, we encounter Rachel, her daughter, and the one surviving Macdonald whippet ("Plum") from the pair of dogs who were featured in the ads. She (Rachelle, not Plum) says, in response to our question, that it will be possible to have an early breakfast on May 30, as we need to catch the 9:20 a.m. ferry from Armadale (about 30 minutes from here).

Monday, May 29

Wonder of wonders, the bathroom shower works much better than that at Creag Mor. After flicking the switch on the bedroom wall, then the on/off switch inside the shower, both the temperature and water flow seem to be quite all right. It seems impolitic to try changing any of the other settings on the two dials, and so I leave well enough alone. Breakfast consists of self-service cold food (cereal, juice, fruit) followed by the traditional hot Scottish breakfast, served by a waiter. Why this won the "Macallan Taste of Scotland Best Breakfast Award of 1998" (p. 34) is a mystery, as the breakfast is no better (and no worse) than the others that we've had. (Maybe it was special in 1998, but I doubt it.) We encounter the coffee pot with the plunger mechanism, but by this time we're old hands at it.

A thought: if ancient bagpipes were made using a sheep's stomach and if haggis was prepared using the same, could a single stomach serve double-duty on a given day? (Can a modern observer even ... stomach the idea of this?)

The day begins very overcast, cold (12°C), windy, but with only a little rain at the start. The temperature stays at 12°C nearly the entire day. We drive north along the eastern coast of Skye: excellent views of mountains and water, but no pictures taken because of the foul weather. Our first stop is at Kilt Rock and Mealt Falls* where the wind is at least "force fifteen" and icy cold. In the

*It's confusing, I know, but a map reveals that not more than a few km from Mealt Falls one finds Lealt

Falls. Just in case I've missed something and the Gaelic citizens are tacking the entire alphabet in front of "-ealt" I wonder if, somewhere, there exist a Healt(h) Falls, a Realt(y) Falls, or a Wealt(hy) Falls?

parking lot, the car is shaking in the wind, and so are we. Just putting on jackets as we step out of the car is quite a challenge. After taking some pictures of the scenery (magnificent!) and of our blowing hair and clothing, we beat a hasty retreat back to the safety of the car's womb. We make a brief stop at Flodigarry Country House (an inn at which we had considered booking a room) because Kelsey had eaten dinner there, last summer, and had taken a fantastic picture of hundreds of rabbits in the garden; when we get there in the early afternoon, only a few rabbits are in evidence, but I take their picture anyway.

As we round the tip of the island and head south, we stop at the Museum of Island Life, which is a very nice collection of thatched houses, one of which (an original crofter's cottage) is outfitted as it was when it was built; the other cottages are used for modern museum displays (history, religion, Highland culture, the Gaelic language, etc.) Not far from here is grave of Flora MacDonald (1722-1790) who orchestrated the escape of Bonnie Prince Charlie from the Outer Hebrides in 1746. Earlier that year, the English routed the Scots at Culloden, and B. P. Charlie went into hiding. The 23-year-old Flora managed to convey B. P. Charlie to Skye, dressed as an Irish servant girl named Betty Burke, and took him to the town of Portree whence he sailed to permanent exile in France. Flora was arrested shortly afterwards and imprisoned in the Tower of London, but she was released in 1747 and married a man for whom she bore seven children. She and her brood sailed to the U.S. in 1774, but her husband was arrested during the Revolutionary War (for supporting the losing side!), and Flora returned to Scotland. When her husband was released, they reunited in Skye and lived happily ever after. Or so we are told.

We are shocked that it's now afternoon and there is not only no rain but also blue sky (on Skye) with some sun, but still cool. We stop at Uig (not a typo) for coffee and sweets. We then drive on to the good-sized town of Portree (population about 1500), Gaelic name Port Rìgh.

Startling news on the radio (reported here more or less *verbatim*): "At a stage show in Edinburgh, an Australian troupe, whose act consisted of bending their genitals into interesting shapes, was closed down by the authorities. When challenged to justify the appropriateness of the show, the Scottish Cultural Board said that the performance serves the interests of variety, that it's no different than ballet or opera." [One wonders what kind of ballets and operas the Board has been watching?]

We walk around Portree, investigate several possible places for that evening's dinner (and settle on the Harbour View restaurant which does not take reservations but assures us that if we get there when they open at 6:00 it's almost certain that we'll get a table). At a CD store, we purchase a recording made at a local ceilidh (pronounced cay-lee, a Gaelic word for a "social gathering involving dancing, drinking, singing, and storytelling" - in other words, a whisky-soaked revelry) featuring lots of home-grown talent who sing and play authentic instruments (Gaelic harp, pipes, etc.). It's far better than the one we purchased in Durness, which I'm still trying to encourage Lee to sail off a cliff into some deep body of water. We then set out again by car and drive northwest to Dunvegan Castle, the ancestral home of the MacLeods. According to *The Rough Guide*, "... you don't get a lot of castle for your money, but there are three famous items: Rory Mor's Horn, a drinking vessel made from the horn of a mad bull [probably from "foot-and-mouth"] which each new chief still has to drain at one draught 'without setting down or falling down'; the Dunvegan Cup, made of bog oak covered in medieval silver filigree believed to have been given to Rory Mor by the O'Neils of Ulster in return for his help against England; and, most intriguing of all, the battered remnants of the Fairy Flag in the drawing room. This yellow silken flag from the Middle East may have been the battle standard of the Norwegian king, Harald Hardrada, who had been the commander of the imperial guard in Constantinople. Hardrada died trying to seize the English throne at the Battle of Stamford Bridge in 1066, after which his flag was allegedly carried back to Skye by his Gaelic boatmen. More fancifully, MacLeod family tradition asserts that the flag was the gift of the fairies, blessed with the power to protect the clan in times of danger." [It's taken longer to type this passage than it did to tour the castle, but I wanted you to get the full flavor

of this story.] Gaels, Scots, Norsemen, Northern Irish, English, Turks - it's got it all! Easily my favorite part of the castle is the dungeon, cold and very poorly lit, where sits an immobile figure of a prisoner who issues a consumptive (recorded) cough about every 40 seconds.

On the return drive to Portree, we hear on the *exciting news* on the **radio** that "The Scottish Ministry got a grant from the National Trust to study what is going on." No, I did not make that up!! Dinner at the candle-lit Harbour View restaurant is excellent. We do get a table, as promised, and the remaining tables (only about eight of them) fill quite quickly; people queue up outside, in the adjoining hotel stairway. Lee has mussels, I have scallops, and the total cost is only £55, which includes whisky and wine for both of us and dessert (for Lee). The restaurant's restroom actually belongs to the hotel and is reached by a spiral staircase (neat!) to a doorway into a unisex bathroom with the most beautiful, brand-new, modern fixtures and plumbing. I don't care which restrooms have won or have been candidates for a government-sanctioned "loo of the year award"; this one in Portree is my own personal choice for the best (see, also, p. 40).

We are slowly learning the subtle details in etiquette for the passing places on single-track roads. To signal an oncoming car that you are going to submit to his superior position by taking the fetal position (i.e., stopping in or next to a passing place), one stops and flashes the car's headlights. Sometimes the oncoming car, having reached a passing place at precisely the same time, will flash its lights. Then, whichever driver gets bold starts inching forward, unless both drive forward in which case one (or both) will retreat to the passing places, where the choreographed ballet begins again. But let's say that only one car has stopped and the other has gone forward. Then the driver of the car in motion signals his/her appreciation of the other driver's courtesy by a hand wave. The varieties of such hand waves will be discussed later (p. 45-46) in this journal. One group of local residents who can certainly use a good grounding in etiquette are the sheep who stand in the road and defy drivers to hit them. (Believe me - after several days of this, it does become tempting.) One can flash lights, beep horns, or inch forward but if the sheep has no interest in moving, it does not move. Here, the immovable object wins over the not-so-irresistible force every time.

During this day, the temperature rises from 12°C to 19°C (for a short while), then falls to 12°C by the time that we return to the hotel. There are some intermittent sprinkles during the day, but for the most part the day is moisture-free, a notable event for this vacation. We are grievously disappointed to find that the coffee- and cookie-supply in our room is not replenished during the day; fortunately, nobody starves, as we had lifted an ample supply of both liquid and solid refreshments from our previous hotel rooms.

Wednesday, May 30

The day begins cloudy, cold (11°C), rainy, and windy - so what's new? I don't know why this occurs to me this morning, but The Royal Terrace (in Edinburgh) was the only hotel on this trip that had a sign in the bathroom about "you can protect the environment by holding onto your towels more than one day ...". I also don't know why this comes up now, but in my notes I have another example of **BritSpeak**: quango = a mess. Here's another curiosity of **BritSpeak**: the inclination to follow a definitive statement with a question that's not really a question, at all, but rather a not-so-veiled demand that the listener agree ... or else. For example, "This is the best tasting beef ... isn't it?" or "They never take baths ... do they?" or "There are only 49 rooms ... aren't there?" or "She shouldn't have done it ... should she have done?" and so on. (Also note the "have done" in the last question - Brits tend to say "He hasn't done it but I have done." You'd think they'd know the language by now!)

Having depressed myself by realizing that gas (petrol) cost about \$4/gal (see p. 19), I do another calculation to determine how efficient our car is: after five tank fill-ups totaling 141.1 L for 1170 miles, this comes out to about 31 miles per gallon - not bad, considering how much start-and-stop driving occurs on single-tracks.

And now, boys and girls, if *Twatt* was the silliest place name in the Orkneys and if *Upper* and *Lower Badcall* were the silliest on the mainland, can you tell me what the silliest-named body of water is on Skye? That's easy: it's *Loch Snizort*.

Prior to leaving the hotel, we take note of the large oil portrait of Godfrey, Lord Macdonald of Macdonald (I wonder if he signs this full name on checks?) at the top of the staircase leading to our room. His kilt is especially admirable. Before breakfast, we settle the bill; despite the hefty room tariff, the cost of the generously poured single malts from two nights ago is only £3 each, a bargain when compared to the same price for the teeny wee sma' portions that we were served at Harbour View. As promised by Rachel, breakfast is served rapidly and we get away in time to reach the ferry (named "Lord of the Isles") at Armadale at 8:50 (for a 9:25 departure). On the way (all single-track, I might add), we pass a dilapidated shack bearing the sign FAWLTY TOWERS PROPRIETORS: BASIL AND SYBIL. Of course we make a U-turn and return to take a picture.

When bad things happen to good people: We are "innocents" abroad, but in the last couple of days we hear some awful **news bulletins** about places we're going to visit or are visiting right now or have visited: (1) There are riots in the Oldham section of Manchester where Asian youths, aggravated by the taunts of right-wing white supremacists, attacked police with rocks and Molotov cocktails. (2) There is a riot in a courtroom in Portree when a man, on trial for taking indecent pictures of children, is attacked by the parents of these children, leading the police to restore order by the indiscriminate use of CS spray (methyl isobutyl ketone for them what cares). (3) A homeless person was murdered on a street in Kirkwall.

Cute lamb behavior (some of which we've seen, some of which is told to us by a woman who operates a counted cross stitch shop out of her own home in Torvaigh, just north of Portree). (1) On Black Isle (p. 17), where we saw our first Highland cattle "in the wild," we also saw about five lambs playing a game of "King of the Hill": there was a small mound which a lamb would mount, then try to fend off the butting of other lambs who try to dislodge it. Mother Ewe stood by, uninterested, chewing grass. (2) When in a car and approaching a lamb and its mother on the side of the road or actually in the road, the adult usually seems totally uninterested in the car but the lamb quickly realizes that this metallic beast is not something that it wants to tangle with, so it retreats to the side of the mother away from the car and always tries to keep mother between it and the car as the car goes past. As before, mother seems unconcerned, a sort of "been there, done that" attitude. (3) When lambs nurse, they attack mother's udder with great enthusiasm. Often mother doesn't want to be bothered and simply shrugs or kicks the little one away. But when maternal instinct gets the better of her and she deigns to allow baby lamb to get some milk, the lamb's head is almost at ground-level, its rear high in the air, and its tail making circular motions (I don't succeed in determining whether clockwise or counterclockwise). (4) Today, for the first time, we see a lamb licking its genitals, which reminds me of the line from Richard Russo's funny novel about campus life *Straight Man*: "My colleagues are academics. They indulge paranoid fantasies for the same reason that dogs lick their own testicles." Another line from the book, not at all germane to this trip, but wonderfully insightful nonetheless: "A liberal arts dean in a good mood is a potentially dangerous thing." (5) I had said to the counted cross stitch designer in Torvaigh that we found the lambs cute, but that locals probably considered them a nuisance; she replied that it's even worse: they're a menace. Stupid sheep, not knowing that the road is where cars travel, often sleep in the middle of a highway; and, as they don't have reflectors on them, they're hard to see. One very dark morning her husband was driving to work and suddenly found himself approaching some sheep lumps in the road; he swerved to avoid a collision, only to run into an oncoming truck, leading to his hospitalization with some serious injuries. (6) But she did confess that she has also seen some cute behavior. For example, a group of lambs, maybe five or six, will play a game of follow-the-leader. One time, she saw the lead lamb leap from a rock onto the back of a ewe who was splayed out on the ground, contemplating the number of angels on the head of a pin; the adult looked up, then returned to her contemplation and grass chewing, only to have lamb #2 jump on her followed by #3 and so on. (7) While most lambs use momma as their security blanket against incoming cars, we saw one who, finding itself separated from mommy, hid behind a garbage can. (8)

And on one occasion, we pulled into a passing place only to find that a sheep had already beat us to it. Well, this is big enough for the two of us, I reasoned - and so it was.

Guaranteed money-making ideas (in addition to the air conditioning, window screens, and single-necked faucets mentioned on p. 10), (1) We could manufacture and supply reflector lights for sheep, but only after the Scottish Parliament passes a law requiring that all sheep display them. Even better, we could install neon billboards on sheep and sell advertising. And even better than that, we could convert selected sheep into the earth-bound equivalents of the Goodyear Blimp, complete with lighted advertising messages that move across one side of the sheep and onto the other. (2) We could also design a mechanical hand for acknowledging someone who has stopped in a passing place to let us move ahead - more about this later on (p. 46).

On the ferry-crossing to Mallaig on the mainland, I step outside (into the wind and rain) to take some pictures and I find myself next to two men (from Washington, DC) who had been staying at our hotel. As we sail past some craggy cliffs with pine trees, one of them says that it looks like the coast of Maine. I agree, but also suggest that it looks like Cape Breton Island, which is probably why the Scots felt so at-home in Nova Scotia.

On the mainland, we drive over roads ranging from mediocre to dreadful, much of them single-track with lots of curves, as we make our way to Kilchoan for the ferry to Mull. We drive through lush rain forests, then through barren vistas with mountain views, always taking care not to hit too many of the numerous sheep in the road. The drive is made even more difficult by the absence of clearly marked passing places on some long stretches of single-track. Furthermore, there are many more commercial vehicles than we had encountered before, and these medium-to-large sized trucks and vans are driven by people who know the contours of the road and do not feel bound to follow the accepted etiquette of the passing places (p. 37). They do not flash their lights, they do not stop in a passing place when they reach one first, they speed to avoid stopping in a passing place, and they zoom through passing places next to which we have dutifully stopped, careening just inches away from the side of our car.

Kilchoan is on the southern coast of the Ardnamurchan Peninsula, the westernmost point of the Scottish mainland. (In my now feeble mental state that has destroyed all short-term memory but allows me to recall events from long ago, I am reminded that *peninsula* comes from Latin *paene insula* which means "almost an island." In fact, the first lesson from my high school Latin text included the passage: *Anglia insula est. Italia paene insula est. Italia est paeneinsula.*" But I digress.) Of interest to nobody but chemistry nerds is that nearby is the town of Strontian. Although it is too far off our route for a visit, we are pleased to add it to this journal as it was the site where a mineral called *strontianite* was found in 1722, whence cometh the element strontium.

We stop at the Glenmore Natural History Center (about 10 miles from Kilchoan), a superb indoor museum consisting of separate rooms (with heavy car wash curtains serving as the dividers) devoted to dioramas and other displays (visual and aural) of animals and vegetation of the region. There are live video cams of herons and fish in nearby locales, and also a window that allows one to view a pond either from under water level or above. And there is, of course, an adjacent field with deer and Highland cattle. The museum café provides an opportunity to buy coffee and sweets. We learn a new phrase: Lee points to a fruit-bar cookie that she'd like to have, but the waitress describes it as a flapjack.

Observation:

- Bathrooms throughout Scotland are amazingly clean. Even in the most rugged places and even if the plumbing fixtures are ancient and rusted, there is very little mess. The floors are clean, the sinks are scrubbed, the toilets are fresh, and so on. This comes as a shock to us, as we live in a region that was settled by Scots-Irish* whose 20th-21st century descendants care not a whit about where they

*A brief history, courtesy of my colleague George Schweitzer: In the 17th century, in an effort to subdue the

Catholic Irish in Ulster, Presbyterian Scots and Episcopal English were provided free land there. (This, of course, is the origin of today's "troubles" in Northern Ireland.) Famine plus religious strife plus uprisings by the Irish convinced many of these Scots-Irish (some 250,000) to emigrate to the New World (New England, Nova Scotia, Pennsylvania - then down into Maryland, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee). These were a fiercely independent people, very religious, suspicious of government, intolerant of other religions, warlike, dogmatic - an excellent description, in fact, of today's dwellers in Appalachia - but how and why they became such ignorant, littering, poor-white-trash is not clear.

discard litter nor about trying to keep public bathrooms relatively clean. As noted in the entry from May 29 (p. 37), the R. M. Magid Award for Best Loo goes to the one associated with the Harbour View restaurant in Portree. Congratulations to them

We arrive at Kilchoan at 1:10 (the ferry is schedule to depart at 1:45) and we wonder if this is the right place, the right time, the right day. The place is deserted! Granted, there is a sign with the logo of the ferry company (Caledonian MacBrayne), but we are the only ones there; at all other ferries, cars and pedestrians start arriving more than an hour before departure; also, the very small building (the ferry company's office?) is locked. Then, at about 1:30, a man drives up on a motorcycle. He is, it seems, the harbour-master. He tells us that the ferry is running a little late but it will be here soon. Compared to the very large ferry between the mainland and the Orkneys or the fairly large ferry from Skye to Mallaig, the ferry that will take us to Mull is a wee thing. Ours is the only car on board (it might be able to hold about 10) and there are a total of 13 other passengers, two Magids, and one dog. All seats are out-of-doors (there may have been an inside room, but the path to it is blocked by a guy who is involved in a large painting project). Although it's not raining when we leave port, it looks as if there's rain on Mull, so we put on coats and hats and whatever else is available. At the end of the 35-minute crossing, there is indeed some drizzle as we disembark in Tobermory (the island's largest town), situated in the northeast corner of Mull.

The good news is that Tobermory is a treat for the visual senses. It is a fishing village with a delightful main street that curves around the bay, and with brightly painted attached houses that are mainly stores and restaurants. The bad news is that the city is overrun with tourists (who must have arrived at the other ferry port, Caignure, the one from which we will depart in two days). There are bicyclists and pedestrians everywhere and there are more cars than we've seen in recent days. The main street (at the end of which the ferry docks) is three lanes wide, but with cars parked solidly in the right- and left-hand lanes, it becomes essentially a single-track with no passing places. There are a few challenging moments that occur over the two days we're here, but we manage to avoid crumpling our fender or anybody else's.

Our hotel, The Western Isles, is described in *The Rough Guide* as "a grandiose Scottish Baronial pile, high above the harbour, with terrific views" and so it is. It is, indeed, high above the harbour and because there is construction that blocks one road, the only access to it is *via* a very steep single-lane road that makes a 180° hairpin turn leading to an even steeper single-lane road. This road is a challenge to the car driver, especially when another car comes from the opposite direction; it's also a challenge to any pedestrian who, while gasping for breath during the ascent, needs to avoid the crazy drivers who are racing up and down. The hotel has two tiny parking areas (four very narrow and shallow places facing the hotel wall and seven marked-off places in the parking lot in front of the staff quarters); thus, the guests (including us) are forced to "create" additional spaces. There is a stone exterior (quite dirty, much in need of a sprucing-up) and a revolving door leading to a huge lobby, featuring posters of Wendy Hiller who starred in a 1945 movie "I Know Where I'm Going" that was filmed here. According to the press release of the film, "Wendy Hiller plays a determined girl who travels to the Hebrides to get married and ends up marrying someone else (Roger Livesey) after being stranded on Mull." Our room is on the second floor (which is really the third floor) and is quite large, with a queen bed. Suspended from the ceiling over the bed is a grotesque Victorian gossamer canopy with cherubs, featuring black-and-gold tassels at the end of ropes that I'm very eager to pull on (but don't do so because Lee threatens me with death). This is difficult to describe, but the canopy hangs

above the bed, fixed high on the wall above the head of the bed and draped over a rail that is at the foot of the bed. (If only I had been authorized to tear it down, I'd not have to describe it. But if you, Dear Reader, want a glimpse of this monstrosity, you can visit the hotel's web site at <http://www.mullhotel.com/welcome.htm>, then click on Hotel Facilities and then on View the Bedrooms; there, on the second row, at the far left is our very room, with our very own gossamer canopy with angels and our very own black-and-gold tassels!) Also, at the foot of the bed, is a stuffed toy, a "sleep seal," that is put outside in the hallway, in lieu of a Do Not Disturb sign for the door knob. There is a large armoire (first time I've used that word, although I could have done so in other hotels), a desk with chair, and two easy chairs in Queen Anne style, or so we were informed in an earlier e-mail correspondence. There is a nice view over the harbour. The bathroom is nice, although the plumbing is not very new.

There is an amusing four-page history of the hotel in each room, written by the current owners (Sue and Michael Fink). The building began life in 1883 as a hotel, but fell on hard times; it re-opened as a relatively modern hotel in 1988. Sue Fink writes that when they bought it, they found that it leaked like a sieve, it had no central heating, and the hot water was inadequate. Each year, they fixed something new. "The beds were iron and the mattresses were horsehair and sagging in the middle. The carpets did not fit, having been bought 20 years previous at a hotel sale by the mile. The wallpaper peeled off, the ceilings fell down, the lights would not work, and if the sun was not shining the rooms got very cold. A quote from an early guest: 'There was not one piece of furniture worth keeping in the whole of the hotel.'" For more of the hotel history and for the full text of Sue Fink's story, see <http://www.mullhotel.com/history1.htm>

After check-in, we reluctantly relinquish our legitimate parking place and drive to Craignure at the southeastern corner of the island, then on to nearby Duart Castle. (The road is a mixture of double- and single-track, part of it level but much of it hilly.) This castle is the ancestral home of the MacLean clan, and the visitor can't escape learning that. The walls are covered with hundreds of pictures (photos and portraits) of this MacLean and that MacLean, posing with this king and that queen, or with these foreign dignitaries and those titans of business. The 27th clan chief became Chief Scout of the Boy Scouts in 1959, so there is, of course, a room dedicated to Boy Scout propaganda. Some of the signs at the displays are just plain silly, written for children (and not for mature adults such as wee ... I mean we.) There is an open invitation for anyone named MacLean to sign the register (a shameless prelude to contacting these dupes and asking for money) and, indeed, they are willing to enroll anyone whose name even approximates MacLean: they show such "acceptable" spellings as McLain, MacLayne, Maglaine, and on and on; alas, they do not include MacMagid. As I commented when driving on the mainland earlier today, it is also true on Mull that the traditionally courteous Scottish driver is a figment of our imagination: many of these road hogs ignore passing places that they could have pulled into, nor do they acknowledge our courtesy when we stop for them.

Upon returning to the hotel, all of the legitimate parking spaces are filled (as we had suspected they would be) so we (actually Lee) succeed in "creatively inventing" a parking space, only partly blocking the road. We decide that this space is better than none and that it would be foolish to give it up by driving into town for dinner, so we walk down the two steep inclines with the hairpin turn (a piece-of-cake, aside from the cars we have to dodge). After peering into a number of restaurants in the harbour, we settle on Anchorage (simple but pleasant) where "the woman of us" has langoustines as her starter (ho-hum) and "the man of us," a Scotsman through and through, has Haggis Dumplings! (Question: Do you like dumpling? Answer: I don't know - I've never dumped.) We both have local scallops for our main course. After dinner, we have to retrace our walking path upward along the two steep inclines with the hairpin turn, but because the evening is cold and windy we make it to the top, out of breath but without a drop of sweat. Amazing!

Thursday, May 31

The morning begins cloudy, cold, windy, rainy - ditto ditto ditto. The temperature is 10.0°C early in the

day, "zooming" up to 12.5°C later. Breakfast at the hotel is what we, by now, consider standard fare: cold cereal and juices, hot food ordered from a waiter or waitress. Two things, however, make this breakfast stand out (not in a positive way) from all of the others: (1) At a nearby table are two female guests, English women "of a certain age," who are almost certainly hard of hearing because they carry on their conversation in VERY LOUD VOICES, so loud that they are clearly heard throughout the rather large dining room. And the quality of their conversation? Well, it was positively ditsy **BritSpeak**, the sort of conversation that one might hear on one of PBS's Saturday night "Britcoms." While in the dining room, I find no particular conversational thread inane enough to write down, but I will be able to write down some of their conversations from the two later meals where we are, also, honored to enjoy their company. (2) It is only after these ladies leave that I become aware of the classical music that is piped into the sound system. It consists of 30-second snippets of "best tunes from the classics" one after another after another. It's amazing how many famous themes can be played in exactly 30 seconds (I time them with my watch) but they can. We hear, for example, selections from operas (the Habañera from *Carmen*, then the triumphal march from *Aida*, followed by the anvil chorus (*Il Trovatore*), followed by the Toreador song (*Carmen* again), Un bel di (*Madama Butterfly*), etc.) interspersed with the opening of Grieg's piano concerto, Beethoven's "Moonlight" Sonata, the wedding march from Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, the "Stranger in Paradise" theme from Borodin's *Polovetsian Dances*, the opening theme from Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, and on and on and on, each one lasting precisely 30 seconds.

Before leaving for the day's adventures, we reserve a table at the hotel dining room for this evening's dinner. We drive south to Salen, then cut inland and west toward Fionnphort for the ferry to Iona. This section of the road is single-track for over 45 miles and very demanding (curves, hills, bad surface, fog, etc.). Off the shore in Loch na Keal is an island called Inch Kenneth. ("na Keal"? "Inch"? Why don't they use words that Americans understand? After all, we're the world's only super power and we have a president who worries about "subliminal" messages.) Inch Kenneth is of interest as the residence (from 1937 to 1948) of one Unity Valkyrie Mitford. Now there's a name! The youngest daughter of Lord Redesdale, she moved to Germany in 1934 and was "one of Hitler's closest companions, accompanying him on official functions, and even addressing Nazi rallies" (according to *The Rough Guide*). On the day that England declared war on Germany, she tried to kill herself with a gun provided by der Führer, but only succeeded in lodging the bullet in her brain, leaving her paralyzed. She made it back to Britain and lived out her remaining years, bullet still safely ensconced, on Inch Kenneth, an island that the family had fortuitously purchased in 1937.

There is lots of interesting vegetation: Lee particularly likes the wild bluebells, but Ron's reaction is WGAFF? There are also sheep on the road (one lamb is so frightened by our car that it runs to its mother and immediately begins to nurse - good move!). On another occasion, two adult sheep and a lamb refuse to budge, so we essentially chase them down the road until they move onto the verge. (Everyone, I'm sure, recalls the Pedro Almodóvar film "Sheep on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown"! Right?) And another close encounter occurs when four sheep (two ewes, each with her lamb) stand in the road facing us and defiantly stare us down; well, we're not about to drive in reverse some 40 miles back to the hotel, so we persevere and inch* steadily forward, finally imposing our superior brain power on the dumb beasts, as they make a "ewe-turn" and retreat to safer ground. (Perhaps instead of "Sheep may safely graze" Bach should have written "Cars may safely graze against the sheep.")

*Perhaps this is where Inch Kenneth gets its name?

At one point we find ourselves in the middle of a herd (well, maybe only a mini-herd) of cattle. Six cows (none of them Highland variety, alas) are on the road in front of us, but at least they are traveling in the same direction, so I pull up behind them to encourage them to either move faster or pull off onto the verge. Suddenly, faster than a speeding bullet, a seventh animal charges from behind us, and joins the others. The Magnificent Seven now trot, amble, race, walk, varying their pace, sometimes listing to the left side of the road, sometimes to the right, but never getting off the damned road. As we approach a passing place on our left, we notice three cars coming toward us (and toward the cattle). We pull into

the passing place and smugly wait to see what will happen. The cows run straight at the front car, screech to a halt, make a U-turn (maybe a Moo-turn?) and charge back toward us. Coming toward us, then, are three files of large moving objects: the left flank is cows, the right flank is cows, and the center flank is the three oncoming cars. Finally they pass us (cows and cars) and we pull back into the road and continue our journey. How long the cows stayed in front of that lineup of three cars we don't know, but it's possible, Dear Reader, that they are still there. (Lee is the passenger at this time and is, therefore, in charge of the camera, but she only manages to take one picture.) The 45-mile drive takes 1 3/4 hours because for long stretches we can't drive faster than 20 mph. Fortunately, we leave this secondary road and the driving becomes fairly easy again.

This peninsula, which juts out into the Atlantic, is called The Ross of Mull (curious name, what?). I may have read in *The Rough Guide*, but I can't find it now, a description of the day-trips that people make from the mainland to Mull. They come over in tour buses (on the ferry that docks at Craignure) and travel in buses to Fionnphort. The bus drivers (who really should be paying attention to the single-track and the occasional bovine/ovine hazards) keep up a constant patter. For example, "Nobody on Mull has ever died of stress, but there have been a few deaths from boredom."

At Fionnphort, while waiting for the ferry to come in, I'm reminded of the young man who was inspired by the sea and exclaimed Lord Byron's words, "Roll on, thou deep and dark blue ocean, roll!" to which his appreciative female companion squealed, "Oh look, Ralphia, it's doing it!"

Here is some important information about the Isle of Iona. (Well, I love Iona, too, but ...) St. Columba (Colum Cille in Gaelic), born in Ireland in 521, was a scholar-priest who raised an army and fought many "holy battles" with the king's men. After a particularly nasty defeat in 563, at which 3000 of his men were killed, he "repented" and went into exile, eventually coming to Iona. Supposedly he chose this place because it was the first island from which he was unable to look back and see his homeland. He is a new-found hero of mine because he banned cows and women from the island: "Where there is a cow, there is a woman, and where there is a woman, there is mischief." How true, how true. No wonder he achieved cult status and eventually was made a saint.

A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, but the name of this Irish saint, Columba, triggered a memory of another Irish saint from our travels last summer. In fact, with regard to our visit to the monastery at Melk (in Austria) I wrote the following in my travel journal: "... Benedictine monastery, originally built in 830 but destroyed and rebuilt in the 18th century. The *Rough Guide* describes it as 'a flamboyant Baroque pile ... with grisly remains such as skeletons that are fully dressed' and so it is. The most hallowed of the relics, alas not accessible to tourists, is the skeleton of St. Koloman; nevertheless we are fortunate to see a tooth and his lower jawbone (unattached to the rest of his body, I should add) incorporated into a monstrosity: a golden cross with a piece of wood from Christ's cross inside (*guaranteed!!*) and covered with too many diamonds and other jewels to count. The monastery does have a spectacular library with some 100,000 volumes; it used to have a Gutenberg Bible, but this was sold in 1926 to a minor university in New Haven, CT. The kirche attached to the monastery is beautiful; it, too, sports fully-clothed skeletons in glass crypts. We walk through the streets of Melk; a guide book's apt description is 'charming but strained, it exists for the millions of tourists who pass through.'"

So, it was Koloman and not Columba whom we saw reference to, but was he Irish? You betcha! The following comes *verbatim* from a German language web site, conveniently (and only approximately) translated into English for you and me: "Koloman was an Irish Pilger. It was suspected 1012 on the pilgerfahrt to the holy country in Stockerau with Vienna, a boehmischer feeler gauge to be, tortured and, since no confession was achieved, attached to a tree. There the body hung for a long time unverwest; when a hunter wanted to determine its death and a Spiess into his page stung, blood flowed out. When holy bury detached and, one transferred it of two years later on 13 October in the monastery milks. Koloman was never officially holy spoken, yet the admiration spread in completely Austria and in Bavaria. Against epidemics and tempests help, if one carries the 'Kolomani booklet' with itself. Numerous churches carry its names. At the Kolomanstag Pferdeumritte take place, on him

geweihte sources are considered as welfare strong, the Koloman benediction protect against fires. Koloman is today still in the consciousness of many Austrians alive; '... that the Kolomandl does not come' threatens one children." So there! But the funny thing is - it kinda makes sense!

The ferry leaves every 30 minutes or so, but first we visit the Columba Center in town for information about the good saint and his many good deeds. We note that the tourists are here in droves [past tense of drives?], along with their many tour buses and guides. Discretion being the better part of valor, we leave our car at the Columba Center parking lot and walk the short distance to the pier. (Besides, if we were to drive too close to the ferry dock, we'd have to pay for parking, something to which I'm allergic.) The ferry (a little larger than the one that took us to Tobermory and with some interior seating) leaves at 12:50 and takes about 10 minutes to cross to Iona; it is packed with pedestrians (including us) plus a few cars (only commercial vehicles and the cars of residents are permitted on Iona).

Iona, despite being overrun by hordes of ill-mannered, uncouth tourists (and the well-mannered, couth Magids), is very interesting. The abbey dates from about 1200 (although rebuilt in the 16th century) and is quite beautiful. There is an 8th century Celtic cross that is in amazingly good condition. Oran's Chapel sits next to a cemetery that supposedly contains "the graves of sixty kings of Norway, Ireland, France, and Scotland, including Duncan and Macbeth" (*The Rough Guide*). "Who was Oran?" I hear you ask. Well, according to *The Rough Guide* (again), "... the plain-looking St. Oran's Chapel ... boasts a Norman door dating from the eleventh century. Legend has it that the original chapel could only be completed through human sacrifice. Oran, one of the older monks in Columba's entourage, apparently volunteered to be buried alive, and was found to have survived the ordeal when the grave was opened a few days later. Declaring that he had seen hell and it wasn't all bad, he was promptly reinterred for blasphemy."

It is cold and rainy (yes, I know, this is getting tedious) as we walk around Iona, so we step inside the dry St. Columba Hotel for coffee and cake. We then catch the ferry at 3:05 for the return to the mainland. There is a resident seal in the Fionnphort harbor which we see and photograph. (He had been present before our departure for Iona, but he didn't hang around long enough to be captured on film.) "The man of us," having driven the challenging drive (and dreamt the impossible dream) from Tobermory to Fionnphort, "the woman of us" drives back. Even though it's mostly single-track, this opening section of the drive is not challenging at all, until we turn off the main road and head in a southwesterly direction. At this point it becomes highly challenging: single-track with essentially no passing places, many near-scrapes for us, as we get to Lochbuie which is, appropriately, located on Loch Buie on the southern coast. We pass a cow which is partway in the road (its hind quarter to be precise, the front three quarters being busy grazing on the grassy shoulder) who would absolutely not be moved; we pass by, without her farting at us or burying us in manure. We see lots of sheep (both in the fields and on the road) and finally, near Lochbuie, we reach a fence that indicates that it's a mere ½ mile walk to "Stone Circle"; earlier we were dissuaded from visiting such sights when they were closed because of "the foot-and-mouth" but this one, although "open," is effectively closed because the walk is totally under water. Discouraged to have driven so far on such awful roads, we make the painful decision that this is just not worth it. Nevertheless, we can read about it in *The Rough Guide*: "... one of the few stone circles in the west of Scotland, with eight stones, all about 6 ft high and dating from the second century BC." So we drive one mile further along this awful single-track in the hope of spotting Moy Castle, but it is just too foggy and cloudy and rainy to see anything.

The entire return trip to the hotel is shrouded in fog and clouds and rain, with the temperature pegged resolutely at 11°C. Interestingly, this drive (and mine in the morning) takes us past lush vegetation with explosions of rhododendrons (considered a nuisance by the locals, as I've remarked earlier). Some of the regions are rain forests with moss growing on boulders and halfway up trees that emerge from the bog. An observation, made many times on this trip but not revealed until this point of the travelogue: the Scots are a very frugal people, even when it comes to road signs. Thus, if a driver misses the one sign for the turnoff to Loch Buie, for example, then that's it! Very rarely were there two

or three signs announcing a road or intersection or exit, even in the more populated region between Edinburgh and Inverness.

Numerous times on various roads we find ourselves driving over cattle grids. These are usually preceded by a sign that says, appropriately, CATTLE GRID. But today we cross two grids that bear this sign: HORSE DRAWN VEHICLES AND ANIMALS KEEP RIGHT. Scottish animals can read???

Somewhere north of Inverness we had lost *Classic FM* and had turned to *BBC Radio Scotland* for our radio entertainment. It's an interesting station: mostly talk, much of it on a fairly high plane, about news, politics, sports, the arts, mixed in with Scottish music and some of the verry best Scottish accents we were to encounter. Today, by accident, I discover *BBC Radio 3* (was it there all along?) which has excellent classical music, performed in full (not the snippets favored by *Classic FM*). Over the days that we tune in, there are live concerts from Wigmore Hall, now celebrating its 100th anniversary, including (as an example) two full-length Haydn sonatas performed by Andras Schiff plus a Haydn string quartet performed by members of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe. The only downside is that the announcer seems to be sitting right in the midst of the audience, because her attempts to speak over the applause are futile. (I suspect that she is really in a studio and is merely speaking over a previously taped performance, but why the engineers don't turn down the audience noise is a mystery.) For the interested American, these stations can be heard on-line and in real time at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/radioscotland/> and <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio/>

While a passenger on this part of our day's driving, I decide to make a catalog of the different kinds of hand signals, almost always with the right hand, that passing drivers give as acknowledgment of our courtesy in pulling into a passing place. There are: the full hand wave; the full hand wave and salute; the full hand wave with the palm forward; the full hand wave with the palm reversed (much like the Pope blessing a crowd); the full hand wave with palm forward and the arm fully extended (Sieg Heil!); the partial hand wave with one finger lifted off the steering wheel; the partial hand wave with two fingers lifted off the steering wheel; the combined full and partial hand wave, with the entire hand lifted and one finger raised; the combined full and partial hand wave with the entire hand lifted and two fingers raised; the semi-hand wave: a half-hearted wave with the left hand, accompanied by the flashing of the headlights. (Maybe the latter was caused merely by a short in the lights - or perhaps by a light in the shorts?) Nobody, so far as we can see, has given the "one-finger salute" that is so common in the U.S. So, another **guaranteed money-making device**: we should manufacture a robotic mechanical hand that can be programmed to do all of these hand gestures (plus several more that are anatomically impossible?) in random order. Right? Right!

We have the three-course prix fixe dinner at the Western Isles dining room. Lee, who throughout this trip, has been more adventurous than I in sampling different single malts, asks for a Tobermory, but the hotel is out! So she settles for a 20-year old Ledaig, the older name for the whisky made at the nearby Tobermory distillery; all whiskies since 1990 have the Tobermory name. [I shudder to think that this 20-year-old will turn out to be as expensive as the 30-year-old Ardbeg from Edinburgh, but it doesn't.] I have chosen to have Lagavulin or Laphroaig at nearly every opportunity, but Lee has tried to sample at least one of every single malt in the entirety of Scotland. OK, I exaggerate, but in addition to Lagavulin, she has had Ardbeg (see the entry for Restaurant 3 in Edinburgh, p. 7), Dalwhinnie (a bit of a challenge, as it was not available near Inverness, very close to the distillery, but, rather surprisingly, in the west of Scotland), Glenmorangie (located in Tain), Bruichladdich and Bunnahabhain (both, like Lagavulin, Ardbeg, and Laphroaig, from Islay), Talisker, and probably hundreds of others that I've forgotten. The Bunnahabhain was at the suggestion of our hostess, Ann, at Forss Country House Hotel (p. 19). Shortly after check-in, I had gone downstairs to make a dinner reservation, and Ann asked if I'd like to order drinks and take them back to the room while we unpacked. I asked what labels she had, but when she replied that she had over 200 different single malts, I realized how stupid my question had been. I ordered one of my standard choices (I forget which) but she insisted that Lee try Bunnahabhain, "a proper single malt for a lady." I was about to challenge Ann and tell her that Lee is no lady, but I decided that this wasn't wise. Ann was of the strong opinion (Ann had lots of strong

opinions!) that scotch whisky should be drunk neat (as Lee and I prefer) but with a drop or two of water added (which "releases the esters," or something like that). So after pouring our two drinks at the bar, she ran the glasses under a spigot for the requisite two drops. I have no idea whether or not this was done in the places where we didn't see our whisky poured, but Ann's assertion was also echoed by the distillery manager at Ardbeg (*vide infra*, as we say in the chemistry biz).

Just our luck, the peace at dinner is punctured by two major distractions. (1) The ditsy women from breakfast arrive and are seated just one table away from ours. It's not clear why, but they don't seem as loud as they were in the morning. Thus, we (but not the entire dining room) are the only ones "blessed" by hearing their conversation. This really needs to be done in an English accent with a high-pitched, quavering voice, so try to imagine it when one of them says "I love lentils but they give me dreadful wind" [thank heavens that lentils aren't being served at dinner] and "[so-and-so] has nice gelatin molds but they're made of aluminium (sic) and not porcelain like those hanging over there on the wall" and "Is this the same table they seated us at this morning?" "I don't believe it is." "Well I think it is but I'm not sure." "Why don't hotels just assign you to one table and stick to it?" (2) The piped-in music is as it was this morning: 30-second snippets of favorite tunes from the classics. My favorite juxtaposition was the Habañera (again) followed by "Hail Hail the Gang's All Here" followed by the main theme from the 4th movement of Beethoven's ninth symphony, i.e. the orchestral music beneath the famous words "Freude schöne Götterfunken" or "Freud's already got himself in a funk."

Friday, June 1

We have breakfast at the hotel and, for a while, there are no ditsy ladies; alas, they make a belated entrance and resume their not-so-private discussions. (The one piece of good news is that no music is being piped in.) We enjoy the ladies' fascinating observations on: fog; weather variations on the east vs. west coast of Britain; restaurants; brown toast vs. white toast (white bread is cheaper and that's all that she buys); etc. To be fair, this is probably the same sort of small talk that anybody makes when seated in a restaurant, but most of us are discrete enough not to broadcast the banality of our conversation throughout the room.

As bad as the weather has been, today is particularly ugly looking. We had planned to spend the morning around Dervaig and Calgary on the northwest corner of the island, but the rain and dark clouds convince us that we should sit in the hotel's conservatory and read until it's time to leave for the ferry. During this time I finish Ha Jin's *Waiting* and begin *The Manticore*, part two of the Davies trilogy. We make the 45-minute drive to Craignure in fairly heavy rain and fog, arriving at about noon for the 1:00 sailing. There are already a number of cars waiting, but we do have a reservation. We run through the rain to the waiting room (really more of a tourist shop, with only a very few seats). As there is time to do it, we go into the ferry office and get the boarding passes for our ferry trips to and from Islay. We think that we see the ferry off in the distance at about 12:50, so we run through the rain to the car (it's far too windy for an umbrella, so we count on raincoats with hoods to keep us dry) but this turns out to be a false alarm; soon there's an announcement that the ferry won't get to Craignure until about 1:15 and that it won't depart until about 1:30.

We board the ferry in this steady hard rain; much to my chagrin, we are far enough forward in the hold that we are actually in the open air when we're told to park; thus there are now two additional chances to get soaked. The ferry arrives at Oban at 2:15, but the rain is so steady and so hard that we pass on two planned stops. One is Kilmartin House (more archeology, more artifacts from 5,000 years ago, more information about landscape and people, who needs it?). The other is the Fort of Dunadd, a Celtic site atop a rocky knoll. According to *The Rough Guide*, "It was here that Fergus, the first king of Dalriada, established his royal seat, having arrived from Ireland around 500 AD." Who/what is Fergus? Ditto for Dalriada? Well, the latter is the original name of this kingdom and the former is, as the guide says, the first king. This fort actually sounds wonderful: many ancient Pictish inscriptions from before Fergus's arrival, some words written in ancient ogam (an alphabet from Ireland), and so on. It's also believed that the Stone of Destiny (you do remember the Stone of Destiny, don't you?) was used at

Dunadd for the coronation of numerous Scottish kings, before being moved to Scone Palace, then to Westminster Abbey, and finally to Edinburgh Castle in 1996. But it's raining so hard that, discretion always being the better part of valor (I mean valour), we pass this up. About 2/3 of the way from Oban to Kennacraig, the rain lets up a bit, so we stop for coffee and sweets in Ardrishaig.

At some point on our drives, we hear a **news story on the radio** that the British government have (sic) expressed its outrage that two British citizens, accused of selling liquor, have been sentenced by Saudi authorities to a jail term and 500 lashes. Amnesty International, quite rightly, also condemns the decision: not only was the "trial" not fairly prosecuted, but penalties like whipping and amputation are barbaric practices. Although we're not privy to whether the U.S. government also has condemned the penalty, it's interesting that Britain and Amnesty International (plus most of the civilized world) condemn the U.S.'s death penalty as barbaric.

All day long, the temperature has stayed in the 11-11.5°C range. We get to Kennacraig just before 5:00 (the ferry is scheduled to depart at 6:00) in what can only be described as torrential rains and squalls. It is raining so hard and it is so windy that umbrellas are useless, and we get drenched as we run from the car to the passenger waiting room. While trying to get dry inside, I notice that a ferry official is moving down the line of cars, checking reservations, so I run out to the car (getting drenched again), give him our name, then run back to the waiting room, and try to dry off. The ferry arrives on time and departs on time. It is very windy, but fortunately the rain has more or less stopped. We have "dinner" on board, but because of my tactical error of suggesting that we should wait until the crowd has left the cafeteria, we discover at 7:45 that most of the food has also left with the people. So I make do with soup and french fries (a well-balanced diet!) while Lee has scampi and fries. The ferry ride is a bit bumpy, but not enough to cause motion sickness. Lee demonstrates her extraordinary balance and coordination by carrying a tray with two liquids (soup and coffee) to our table without spilling more than a drop. Good for her! We arrive at Port Ellen on Islay at 8:25, a little later than scheduled. Islay is pronounced eye-la. Why? Well, it just is.

Another instance of "*bad things happen to good people*" to add to the **radio reports** mentioned on May 30, p. 38: we now hear that last night vandals put logs on the train tracks between Edinburgh and Glasgow and they threw rocks through the window of the train, thus causing a five-hour delay for commuter trains between the cities. Why is this of interest? Because we are planning to take the train from Glasgow to Edinburgh on June 4, before transferring to a train that will take us to Manchester.

We arrive at the Port Charlotte Hotel (in Port Charlotte, so where did you expect) a little after 9:00. Did I mention rain? Well, it was raining. On the road, we pass the Port Ellen Maltings, a huge place that supplies malt for the other distilleries but no longer makes whisky itself, and two distilleries: Bowmore, in the town of Bowmore (as we are driving north along the eastern shore of Loch Indaal), and Bruichladdich, in the town of Bruichladdich (as we turn and head south along the western shore of Loch Indaal). Islay is the home of five other distilleries: Ardbeg, Bunnahabhain, Caol Ila, Lagavulin, and Laphroaig, each located in the town of the same name. We'll have more information about the three on the south shore of the island (Ardbeg, Lagavulin, and Laphroaig) in tomorrow's journal entry.

This is an old hotel with a very small reception area. To the left on the first floor is the bar, to the right the lounge and then the dining room. The receptionist (from Toronto! - well, we had to ask when we heard her accent) shows us to our room on the second floor. It's a touch Spartan: hardwood floors (not very smooth) with throw carpets, a queen-sized bed, dresser (which doubles as a desk, as long as one is willing to stand up), armoire, two night stands, and only one easy chair. The room lighting is adequate for reading. The bathroom has new, modern plumbing plus old-fashioned face cloths. There is some strikingly modern art on the walls, certainly not typical hotel-fare: for example, we have a Man Ray print in our room. Now that I think of it, the Western Isles had a Dali print in the corridor, along with several interesting old maps of Germany. (Germany? Why Germany? Wer weisst?) and a Glaswegian's view of the world (in the style of Saul Steinberg's New Yorker's view of the world). The Port Charlotte Hotel is right on Loch Indaal - when we open the bedroom window (singular, because

the room has only this one window), we can hear the surf and the waves on the beach and the seagulls. Most surprising is that this old hotel has an old-looking door that features a brand-new Yale lock, and the bathroom door has a latch on the inside that's connected to an "occupied/vacant" window on the bedroom side - nice touch! Alas, there is only the standard DO NOT DISTURB sign, nothing so imaginative as the "sleep seal" from the Western Isles.

Saturday, June 2

Be still my heart - the sky is a bit overcast, but there are lots of patches of blue and ... and ... and ... something that appears to be ... the sun! And there's no hint of impending rain. OK, yes it's windy and cold (11.5°C), but there's actually sun! Can this still be Scotland?

Breakfast at the hotel is the (by now) standard fare: cold cereal and fruit at a self-service buffet, hot breakfast ordered, coffee pot with plunger. Two things do distinguish it from the others, one good and one bad. The good is that the hot food is *excellent*: the sausage and bacon are hot and clearly just-grilled (rather than being reheated) as is the egg (which is hot and sizzling). The bad is that there's just one server in the dining room, a young man who is very slow in taking our order and also slow in delivering the food. At the front desk is a different person, who, we surmise from conversations with the Toronto lady the next day, is one of the owners. When we ask about the island's distilleries, how they differ, which are the best to visit, etc. she escorts us into the bar and delivers a rather extensive tutorial on the types of whiskies available, and why those on Islay are so much smokier than those from the mainland. She also suggests places along the southern coast of Islay where we'd be likely to find seals.

Lee takes some nice pictures in and around the hotel while I try to clear the windshield of detritus that looks like dried salt. (It could be, but I don't do a taste test.) We drive to nearby Bridgend and to the Islay Woolen Mill, a working mill (with adjacent retail store) in an old building, run by a family with only a few other employees. It has some equipment from the 1880s on site, but not in use any more. The current owners bought the mill in 1981. We are greeted at the door by the son of the family and the mill's dog, a weird looking hybrid of whippet (size and shape) and terrier (fur). The son takes us on a tour of the mill and answers our questions, accompanied or even preceded by the dog. We enter the room where the looms are being operated by the father, who stops working and talks with us. He's very familiar with the U.S., and one gets the impression that he'd rather talk than spin wool. He seems quite cultured (much more so than the son's demeanor and language would suggest) and we find ourselves in an interesting political debate. He describes himself this way: "Compared to me, Margaret Thatcher was a communist!" Gulp! Clearly we are at opposite ends of the political spectrum. The one thing on which we do agree is that democracy doesn't work very well, as long as the populace is ill-informed and not engaged in intelligent debate on the issues, and that a benevolent dictatorship would be much better. We disagree, of course, on which of us should be appointed as the benevolent dictator. His complaint about the Labour government is that it's made up entirely of academics; thus, they mishandled the foot-and-mouth outbreak by not moving quickly enough to quarantine and destroy the affected animals. He contends that the last Tory government had a cabinet whose members possessed practical knowledge in their areas of specialization: they were bankers or farmers or industrialists, and so on. I don't have enough information to know if he's right or not. Nor am I willing to debate whether experience in the business world is a necessary qualification for government service.

We head eastward to Finlaggan, the headquarters of the Macdonalds ("The Lords of the Isles") in the 12th to 16th centuries. (These are the same Macdonalds who also controlled Skye for several centuries and whose 20th-21st-century descendent's lodge we stayed in.) After parking the car, we take a modest hike (some of it on a conveniently placed boardwalk across the reeds) toward the ruins. Although the day is sunny, it is still cold and the winds are truly fierce (force 10¹⁰, at least!). [While on the boardwalk, my traveling companion is heard to say, "Oh, look at the cute brown mouse who just ran into his hole." That same "cute brown mouse" at Highland Point Condominiums in Knoxville would have elicited a

quite different reaction. As a wise man once said, "Context is everything."]

We drive west to Bowmore and walk about the town a bit. It's not an especially compelling place, but Lee finds a nice shop, "The Celtic House," that has a good selection of books, clothes, and other tourist-fleecing stuff. Then we head to the southern shore where three great distilleries - Laphroaig, Ardbeg, and Lagavulin - are within a mile or two of each other. We had planned this vacation so that we'd be on Islay for at least part of the Islay Whisky Festival; today, in fact, is the last day of the festival and the only distillery that is open and giving tours is Ardbeg. Although not a single malt that I had ever tasted, I do maintain a small amount of curiosity about why Lee's 30-year-old Ardbeg was more than double the cost of my 16-year-old Lagavulin in Edinburgh (see p. 7).

We drive past Laphroaig, after promising ourselves to take a picture of it on our return, and stop at Ardbeg at about 1:00. The next tour with available places is not until 2:30, so we sign up for it and drive further east. We stop for a picture of the Lagavulin distillery, then continue driving (single-tracks) along the coast until we get to a number of rock-filled inlets with dozens of seals sunning themselves. (The seals would not have been visible had we not brought the binoculars. Having confirmed that those far-off inert lumps are really animals, we also take some pictures, even if they won't convince anyone who wasn't there.) Further on, we get to Kildalton Chapel, with its 8th-century Celtic cross in the cemetery. (It is the only surviving complete Celtic cross in Scotland.)

We then return to Ardbeg. We arrive a little early in the hope that we might get some coffee and cake at the cafeteria, but no seats are available. Not likely to die of starvation, we go up two flights of stairs and walk about the Ardbeg museum, a nicely arranged display of how single malt whiskies are made and about the history of this particular distillery. One of the information panels tells us the origin of the word "whisky" but we forget to write it down; nevertheless, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, which we consult on our return, helps us out: Whisky (in Scotland) or whiskey (in Ireland) comes from a Gaelic word *uisge beathan* which means "water of life"; it was originally called "whisky ba" in Scotland, but this was later shortened to just "whisky." Speaking of proper use of language, one of the information signs in the museum put an apostrophe in IT'S as a possessive pronoun; someone, just as fastidious and fusty as we, had put a piece of tape over the offending apostrophe, as a nice photo will confirm. We walk back downstairs, and as we are still a few minutes early for the tour, we are offered a wee dram of a 1977 Ardbeg. Although they are very proud of this vintage (see below), I find it a bit sharp and raw. Perhaps, think I, after another two or three more wee drams, it will taste more mellow. We shall see.

One reason that the cafeteria yields no empty tables is that the "Islay Festival Menu" is being served there, all day long. Among its featured choices are: Smooth Liver Pate with Whisky Dressing (as a starter); Seafood Salad with Marie Rose Sauce with 17 year old Ardbeg Sauce or Topsy Steak au Poivre with Glenmorangie 10 year old or Honey Mustard Glazed Chicken with Glen Moray Malt (as choices for the main course); and either Ardbeg Cloutie Dumpling or Cranachan with Ardbeg 10 year old (the dessert choices). By the time one finishes eating, it might be difficult to pass a sobriety test.

Our tour is conducted by Stuart Thomson, the distillery manager, a relatively young man (late 30s?) with a wealth of experience in making whisky. He tells us the story of Ardbeg. It traces its history to 1794; throughout most of the 19th and 20th centuries, it produced a well-regarded group of whiskies. In the late 1970s, it fell on hard times, and it was closed down from 1981 to 1989 (which coincides, precisely, with the Reagan years, just in case anyone is interested). It reopened in 1989 under the ownership of Allied Distillers, the makers of Laphroaig, who projected it as a producer of ordinary whisky to be used in blends. Then, in 1997, it was purchased by Glenmorangie (located in Tain) who reestablished it as the maker of a great single malt. Stuart, who was trained at Glenmorangie, was installed as manager; his wife runs the gift shop and tasting room.

All of the Islay whiskies are heavy in peat flavor because the Port Ellen Maltings heats its drying kilns with peat fires. The peat flavor is described by Stuart as "phenol" (probably complex phenolic compounds) which is typically in the range 2-to-8 ppm for whiskies from the mainland (e.g.,

Glenmorangie or Glenfiddich) but enormously higher for these three distilleries on the south coast of Islay: 35 ppm for Lagavulin, 42 ppm for Laphroaig, and 50 ppm here at Ardbeg. I'm not rude enough to suggest that there's a lot of bluster and scam (and blarney, if one can use an Irish word in Scotland) about the quality of the whiskies, but here's what one reads at the Ardbeg web site: "Another aspect of the appeal of Ardbeg is the fact that it benefits from its own private water source. Loch Uigeadail provides a plentiful supply of soft and pure water which on its journey from loch to distillery, flows over rock and peat mosses creating a water that is beautifully suited to distilling." Also, "The site of the distillery was both suitably remote, yet easily accessible by sea such that it was a favoured landing spot for smugglers throughout the 18th century. The Ardbeg Distillery is one of the most atmospheric of all the Scottish distilleries. Part of this is the remoteness of its location and the sense of mystery and intrigue that emanates from the nearby Kildalton Cross." (And if you think that this is purple prose, then *vide infra*.)

The tour (about 15 guests are involved) lasts until 4:00. At the end of the tour, when we are assembled in the warehouse, we are offered another wee dram of the 1977 vintage and then, for comparison, a wee dram of the 10-year-old. Thrrrrrrree wee drrrrrrrrrrrrrams in 1.5 hours and one really starts to rrrrrrrroll his r's. (My initial impression is unchanged, even though my taste buds and brain sensors are, by now, quite numb: I vastly prefer Laphroaig and Lagavulin to Ardbeg.) The people on the tour had, for the most part, been on Islay for the entire Whisky Festival. Many in-jokes (e.g., about the manager at Laphroaig, the distillery that was open the day before) are not funny to us, even while sipping the third whisky. I do learn a number of interesting things: (1) One of the visitors on the tour had purchased his own cask, which he had come "to visit" - I don't recall how many years from now it's scheduled to be opened, but there's always a chance that it will have gone bad or, worst of all, that the whisky will have all leaked out. (2) Because of a U.S. law that forbids bourbon casks from being re-used, people from all of the distilleries in Scotland travel to Kentucky and Tennessee to purchase oak casks that had been used for the aging of bourbon or Tinisee sippin' whiskey (Jack Daniels) or sherry; indeed, Stuart shows me a Jack Daniels cask with the name about 50% obscured. (3) When I have a moment alone with Stuart, I asked if the distilleries use modern analytical techniques (gc, mass spec, ir) or if it is the expert distiller's nose and tongue that say when the process has gone on the proper length of time; he says that both are used, and that they do send samples to a central lab (in Glasgow, if I recall) for testing for phenol content, acidity, etc.

Ardbeg has two web addresses. The older one is more informative but there's a new one that is in the process of development (<http://www.ardbeg.com/flash.htm>) that is something of a hoot. Beyond its flashy dissolving words and graphics, it rearranges the letters of COMPLEX into an equation $e = mc^2/p^0$, the relevance of which I don't pretend to understand. The older web site describes the 1977 vintage (of which they're verrry prrroud) and talks about their other products as well as the history of the distillery.

As for the 1977 vintage (which this unappreciative boor described as "sharp"), here's what Stuart Thomson, the distillery manager, has written. He may have been trained as a master distiller, but I think that his true calling may be at an ad agency on Madison Avenue or as a carnival huckster. Although this passage is lengthy, I quote it completely so that you, Dear Reader, can appreciate the positive contributions (I might have guessed negative) of "medicinal phenols" and "iodine and smoked fish" and "tarry rope and cigar smoke"! Well no wonder I found it sharp and raw. But what do I know? You can judge for yourself. (I suggest that you sit down, before commencing to read).

"Colour - Rich Gold Aroma - Exceptional balance and depth. At full strength, the aroma is a beguiling mix of toffee and chocolate sweetness, cinnamon spice and medicinal phenols. Fresh citrus and floral notes of white wine are evident, as are melon, pear drops and a gentle creaminess. There is also a phenolic aroma of seaspray (iodine) and smoked fish. Hickory and coffee emerge later as the most volatile top notes fade. With water, the depth of the peat opens up, at once revealing layers of phenols with gristy peat and leather followed by medicinal phenols (carbolic soap) and a whiff of wood smoke. However, the sweetness of vanilla and the fragrance of citrus fruits are never far behind, maintaining

the balance and intrigue. Nose - An enormous whisky, embodying the perfect balance of sweetness, fruit and deep smoky aromas. This vintage is a truly sensational example of Ardbeg matured in quality American oak ex-bourbon barrels. Toffee and fudge sweetness emerges first with peat encased in milk chocolate. Mandarin fruit is discovered through the chocolate with a sprinkling of cocoa powder. The oak is gentle and scented, both balsamic and spicy revealing eucalyptus oil and cinnamon. With water, dessert sweetness is uncovered with lemon curd and bitter almonds followed by vanilla. The deep smokiness of Ardbeg emerges with the hallmark aromas of tarry rope and cigar smoke, yet it is soft and scented with woodsmoke, burning incense sticks and cappuccino coffee. Taste - Sensationally smooth and peaty, a mouthful of soft and chewing peat smoke rapidly takes centre stage. The mouthfeel is at once silky, velvety and chewing. The flavours are sweet and scented with milk chocolate, mandarins and parma violets. Peat is present throughout the taste, constantly filling the palate with cocoa and scented smoke from beginning to end. Finish -The taste refuses to go away. The finish is very long and scented with woodsmoke, mandarins and cocoa."

As Mel Allen (himself typically well-lubricated with Ballantine Beer and satiated with White Owl cigars) would have said, "Well, how 'bout that, sports fans?" At the end of the tour and the free booze, we wait around for the promised arrival of the Isle of Islay Pipe Band. The day remains sunny, but very windy and cold (the high is only 13.5°C) but we music-lovers persevere; besides, the cold fresh air is a wonderful stimulant to help us get sober. And finally we are rewarded when a bus arrives and deposits an assortment of 16 musicians, ranging from middle-aged men to teenage girls, all dressed in kilts, jackets, heavy woolen socks (with a dirk sticking out), and other appropriate Highland regalia. The pipe players, nine of them, go inside one of the buildings, leaving the drummers outside, next to the bus. We hear, over a period of more than 15 minutes, frighteningly screechy sounds emanating from the building. Apparently these fine folk are "tuning" their bagpipes, if that's the proper word to use. Finally, they declare themselves ready, and march with the drummers to an open area next to the parking lot. Forming a circle, they play a variety of traditional tunes. The leader is a pipe player whose performance style is to throw his chest forward, his head back, and (with eyes closed, in ecstasy or in pain, it's hard to tell) to pipe away. There is one large man in the center of the circle who is pounding on a large bass drum; as part of the circle are six others who are playing snare drums. Bagpipe music is, for certain, an acquired taste. In moderation and in the good out-of-doors it is tolerable, even enjoyable. I'd guess that these players survive because they'd all gone deaf years before. (My one great disappointment is that nobody uses a sheep stomach for the bag.)

Finally, Dear Dear Reader, if you've persevered this far, you are now going to get an answer to that age-old question that intrigues visitors to Scotland: not "What is worn under a Scotsman's kilt?" (see Edinburgh Castle guide, p. 8) but "What does a Scotsman wear under his kilt?" The winds are fierce and gusty, enough so that the kilts of the leader and one of the teenage girls are blown upward. And the disappointing answer? He is wearing another kilt under his outer kilt, while she is wearing thigh-length bicycle racing shorts (surely part of a tradition going back a thousand years).

Well, after all this excitement, we return to the Port Charlotte Hotel for dinner. As was the case in Forss, Borgie, and Inver Lodge, we sit in the lounge and place our dinner order from the menu. Two things make it not as nice as at the other sites: (1) the lounge is small, and the one woman who is smoking makes it unpleasant for us all; (2) although our reservation is for 7:30 and we arrive on time, our order isn't taken until 7:50 and we aren't permitted entry to the dining room until 8:10. One other difference from the other hotels: we sit and wait and sit and wait without the benefit of a single malt to keep us occupied - after our excesses a couple of hours ago at Ardbeg, we decide that our tanks are full (actually past full). The meal is excellent (à la carte, but equivalent to a three course prix fixe). We finally finish at 10:00, having decided to have our coffee and dessert in the dining room rather in the lounge that is again being poisoned by the cigarette smoker. I had hoped to get a lot of book-reading done tonight, but the lateness of the hour militates against that.

Sunday, June 3

Breakfast is as excellent as yesterday's (everything hot is freshly cooked) and served with much greater efficiency by the woman from Toronto (see our arrival on June 1), who, as is the case at many of these smaller hotels, does many different jobs. We learn that she's here on a two-year work-travel visa, and when we ask if she doesn't have a severe case of "island-fever" after coming from a huge cosmopolitan city, she says "Not at all." Despite the rough decor and small size of our room, with very little space to move around in it, Port Charlotte is tied with Western Isles for "best flushing toilet," and it wins the competitions for "best breakfast" and "best coffee/tea/cookies service" (everything replenished the second day, nice new coffee pot, good assortment of teas and hot chocolate, sugar and ersatz cream).

We check out from the hotel at 8:20 and drive to Port Ellen for a 9:55 sailing to Kennacraig. We find broken clouds and sun, windy (but not as fierce as yesterday), with temperature ranging from 10.5°C at the start to 11.5°C by the time we boarded the ferry. On the way to Port Ellen, Lee becomes rather cavalier in her driving and comes oh so very close to harvesting a poor old sheep that is in the middle of the road. Only the eagle eye of her watchful copilot saves the ewe from being launched into the wild "blewe" yonder and going to sheep heaven. (Stupid beast - the sheep, not the driver - she should have known not to cross the road in front of a wild American female driver!) We pass many fields with cows (not the Highland kind) and sheep, living and grazing in apparent harmony and bliss. "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb ..." as the Good Book says; but who knew about cows and sheep?

We have a "ferry experience" similar to the one from Orkney to Scrabster (p. 25), but this time involving our car. Although we have arrived early at the ferry terminal, our lane of cars is the last to be permitted to board. As we drive on, the agent directs us to pull up very close to the car in front and very close to the side of the ship, so close, in fact, that Lee cannot open her passenger-side door. World-class gymnast and acrobat that she is, she manages to climb over the gear shift and under the steering wheel in order to exit on my side. When we reach the mainland, she reverses the process and gets to the passenger seat without rupturing any major tendons (hers or the car's). What makes this so silly is that very few cars came on behind us; thus, there was absolutely no reason to pack us in so tightly.

On the mainland, the weather changes to grey and cold and windy - my new jacket is getting quite a workout on this trip! We drive toward Glasgow, but stop in Helensburgh to visit Hill House, built in 1902 by architect Charles Rennie MacIntosh (1868-1928) for publisher Walter W. Blackie. [Neither my notes nor any web site explain the name Hill House, but that's the name that it was given when built for Blackie.] It's a fantastically creative structure, with furniture and wallpaper and lighting to match each room, very modern for its time, but quite far from my taste. This is the last place that we'll have to pay an admission, and once again I am a "concession" at £2.50 whereas Lee pays full price at £4. We enter the outskirts of Glasgow and stop at the University of Glasgow Art Gallery, arriving at 4:10, knowing that closing time is 5:00. The collection is only of moderate interest (some nice Scottish artists like Peploe and Cadell), one painting from each of Braque, Cézanne, Picasso, Gauguin, and Matisse. Throughout the afternoon there is light rain, but nothing too annoying.

Lee drives the final two legs from Hill House to the museum and from the museum to the hotel. Suddenly, for the first time in two weeks, we find ourselves in traffic. And we are negotiating our way on roads that are (gasp!) three or four lanes in each direction, with turn lanes and stop lights and buses and trucks. Oh, for the peaceful country life! Fortunately, the drivers in the city are about as good and courteous (if a little more aggressive) as those in the hinterlands, so we manage to arrive at the hotel in one piece.

We reach the Glasgow Hilton at about 5:15 and check into our room. It's a very large, very well-appointed room, king-sized bed, air conditioning, ample light, and (if it can be believed) a sink with a single-necked faucet! (The air conditioning is somewhat minimal, but necessary because the window will not open.) Before unpacking, we decide to return the car to the rental company whose office is only about half-a-mile distant; we already knew that we could return the car on Sunday because there'd

be a lock-box for deposit of the key. For several days, I had been planning to take a triumphant picture of the car, with its passenger-side mirror *intact*, right in front of the National Car Rental sign ... but when we get to the rental office, I discover that I've left the camera on the bed in the hotel room! What an idiot! I ask Lee if she's willing to run back to the hotel and get the camera. "No," she says. I ask if she'd be willing for us to drive back, get the camera, then drive here again. "No." So, as our friend Rrrrobbie Burrrrrns had said, "The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men/Gang aft a'gley." Sigh! We walk back to the hotel, I inconsolable but Lee in good spirits. The final tally for our transportation is: 1882 miles driven plus two long train journeys (the second one tomorrow) plus seven ferry trips. We have dinner in the casual dining room of the hotel - not bad.

Later in the evening, we decide on a brilliant change of plans for tomorrow. Because we need to get to Manchester (Delta Airlines having refused to send a plane to pick us up in Glasgow), we had looked at the train schedule, when still in the U.S., and had found only one reasonable departure, leaving Glasgow at 12:30 p.m. and arriving Manchester at 4:15. This would have given us only one morning to explore Glasgow, so we had decided to take a 5:00 p.m. train from Glasgow to Edinburgh, connecting to a 6:57 train that would reach Manchester at 10:51. Well, in the evening I sez to the wife, I sez, "Wife, I'm going to suggest a change. First, I'm tired of travel. Second, I don't know if I want to get to downtown Manchester (the scene of riots, you'll recall) so late at night. Third, it would take an additional half-hour (at least) to get to the airport Hilton. Fourth, there were those reports of vandalism (terrorism?) on the train line between Glasgow and Edinburgh. Fifth, from what little we saw of the city earlier today, I doubt that the sights of Glasgow will be so compelling that we'd feel bad about spending less time. So," sez I, "I propose that we scrap the idea of going via Edinburgh to Manchester; instead, I'd opt for taking the earlier train from Glasgow, getting to Manchester at a reasonable time, and taking it easy. The extra 4.5 hours we'd have in Glasgow just don't seem worth it." Much to my surprise, she agrees. (And in a sense it's a good thing that we do make this revision, because I hadn't picked up on the fact that the Central Train Station, near our hotel, would not have been the correct one for the Glasgow to Manchester train.)

Having disdained TV for nearly the entire trip, we turn it on this evening and get thoroughly confused by the report of a major cricket match between England and Pakistan (to be won, when the match concludes the next day, by Pakistan, which is pronounced pah-kee-STAN). Goodness knows, we watch and listen and discuss, and we watch and listen and discuss some more, but every time we think we're making a break-through, an incomprehensible event occurs, accompanied by incomprehensible words, that tell us that our first notions are wrong. But we don't give up, no sir! For further information about this match, see the newspaper account (p. 54-55).

Monday, June 4

In the morning, I finish reading *The Manticore* (I do love the novels of Robertson Davies) and start Joseph Heller's memoir, *Now and Then. From Coney Island to Here*. Breakfast at the Hilton is entirely self-service and excellent: an extraordinarily wide assortment of hot and cold foods, many choices to make, interesting rolls and bread, even a bottle of whisky alongside the porridge for them's what likes it this way. (You don't suppose that Goldilocks ...) We anticipate a rather hefty price for this meal, but we are amazed, at checkout, to discover that it is included in the already very low room rate of £62 (Bill's greatest triumph, given that the rate posted at the hotel was £170!). I had already awarded the "best breakfast" prize to the dining room at Port Charlotte, but this one at the Hilton is actually better in terms of its variety and quality. Nevertheless, I do not take the blue ribbon away from Port Charlotte, reasoning that they do almost as well and on a much smaller scale with only a fraction of the staff.

The day begins very overcast with a threat of rain, cool, somewhat windy. Hey, it's Scotland! We go for a walk around downtown Glasgow. We note fewer smokers here than in Edinburgh and, also, remarkably few cell phones. (I hadn't mentioned it earlier, but we did encounter an oncoming car on a single-track on Mull being driven by someone using a cell phone - not a good idea.) There are very few tourists (maybe we're the only ones?) among the business people in suits who are going to work at

about 9:00. (To my regret, we see nobody wearing a kilt.) Our first stop is at the Tourist Information Centre to inquire not only about vandalism on the trains out of Glasgow but about the consequences of a warehouse fire, last night, next to the north-south tracks that had disrupted train service; we are assured that southbound trains, today, will not be affected. We walk to George Square and then to the Cathedral, a beautiful and impressive structure (mostly from the 13th-15th century), the fourth church on this particular site. The rain that had been threatening never materializes; in fact, the sun comes out from time to time. Two hours later, we are back at the hotel in time to check out and take a taxi to the train station. (Two exposures are left on this, the 12th roll of film. I had left the U.S. with only five rolls (36 exposure) but over the weeks had bought another seven. By snapping more pictures than I normally do, I hope that we'll get some very good photos of the highlights, such as the Highland cattle and the sheep in the roads.) My two major regrets are that I screwed up my plan to take a picture of the intact side-view mirror on our car and I failed to get a picture of an ELDERLY CROSSING street sign (see p. 30).

We have a copy of *The Daily Telegraph*. I save the sports page so as to see if the written word will do a better job than the TV in explaining cricket to us. It doesn't! In fact, it just makes things worse. What we had learned, before we even turned on the TV yesterday, was that England were (note the plural verb!) behind by 370 runs in the fourth innings (note the plural) when play was suspended the day before. But were they discouraged? No, sir, they were not! Talk about your plucky spirit! As the author of the newspaper article explained, "England's best performance in a fourth innings of a Test was at Melbourne in 1928-29 when they made 332 for seven to beat Australia. Spectators should not head towards the ground today investing too much hope in an improbable victory. At the same time, knowing what these players have accomplished in the past year when all manner of odd things have happened, they can go to Old Trafford knowing that they may well see some remarkable cricket ... Pakistan's requirement is a full set of wickets. Neither party will fail for want of trying." Do I understand this? Of course not. But if I translate it into baseball terms, I think that its equivalent to saying that the game is in the bottom of the ninth with the home team losing by 10 runs. An unlikely, rally, but not impossible, given that the distant ancestors of this team had scored nearly 10 runs some 80 years before.

More details: The pitchers (I mean bowlers) for Pakistan are Waqar Younis and Wasim Akram, who seem to alternate when different batsmen came up. One of England's big boppers is Michael Atherton who plans to retire in three months (think Tony Gwynn or Cal Ripken). Quoting again, "Twice, in Wasim's opening over [say, what??], he pulled resoundingly to the boundary in front of the pavilion. When Waqar pitched short, he was swiftly on the ball, whacking four or more runs towards the popular side, where the Pakistan followers were blowing their bugles. [You following this?] In the middle Wasim and Waqar were also blowing, a force 10 gale. Wasim did not miss an opportunity to tell his friend and former Lancashire team-mate what he intended to do [Aha! Trash talk! This, I understand.], and the close fielders amplified his comments with some additional comments that one does not often year at the Woodcutter's Ball." [OK, now I'm confused again.] Then, describing what had already transpired, "England have certainly launched their second innings with commendable vigour. Marcus Trescothick [great name!] top-edged Waqar for six [Huh?] and, by driving and pulling the last two balls of the day from Abdur Razzaq [now where in the hell did he come from?] to the boundary, he ensured that they took 85 runs from the 22 overs they had to face, a potentially awkward hour and a half that they got through with few alarms after Atherton had survived the sound and fury of Wasim and Waqar." [It's not just the cricket jargon and the quaint **BritSpeak** that's got me confused - now it's the syntactically convoluted sentences of this writer. But fear not, boys and girls, we're about to learn who Razzaq is.] "Razzaq, who followed the two senior bowlers into the attack, was the one who felt hard done by." [Hell, that's what it says! I'm just copying it down for this journal.] "He thought that in successive overs from the Stretford end, he should have had both openers lbw [what in the hell is lbw??] and, in Atherton's case, when Razzaq struck him on the pad as the batsman declined to offer a stroke, he may have had a point." [Well, maybe he had a point, but I'm dubious about this newspaper reporter. I'll stop quoting (it doesn't get any clearer) but I did save the article, just in case you, Dear Reader, would like to learn more. Oh hell, I've got to share something else with you from a few

paragraphs deeper into the article.] "Inzamam was set fair for his second hundred of the match when he clipped Hogard to mid-wicket. It was a good wicket for the Yorkshireman, and he didn't half enjoy it. Whereas Inzamam had pulled Caddick for six when he under-pitched, Hogard had hit the master batsman on the helmet, a triumph of sorts that encouraged him to try again, rather too often, if truth be known." [My students accuse me of writing incomprehensible exam questions; maybe I should subject them to *The Daily Telegraph*?]

Enough! Oh, by the way, we learn on that evening's TV news (in Manchester) that England managed "only" about 80 runs and fell far short of what was needed. The TV showed, but the officials never saw, that on several occasions Wasim and Waqar (remember them?) released their pitches (bowled their balls?) after having stepped a good foot or two over the equivalent of our pitching rubber. I don't know what the penalty is for such transgressions, but the foul should have been called.

Is it time to chastise Prof. Dr. Dr. Maitland Jones, Jr. for some horribly inaccurate information? Well, why not! First, he claimed that at low tide one can drive from Islay to Jura. Although we decided not to visit the ISLAND of Jura, all of the tour books and web sites say that ferry is the only way to get there. In fact, *The Rough Guide* cautions "The ferry from Askaig [a ten-minute crossing] occasionally fails to run if there's a strong northerly or southerly wind, so bring your toothbrush if you're coming for a day trip." Jones also said that "it's a short ferry ride" between the mainland and Islay - in fact, the passage takes 2 hr 10 min! He also said that the food is awful in Scotland (we certainly did not find it so), that Glasgow is better for walking around than Edinburgh (what a weird conclusion!), and that The Tomb of the Eagles (on Orkney's Ronaldsay) is an absolute must-see. All five of these claims are in an e-mail message from Feb. 1, 2001, so there's no chance for him to deny making them. Of course, only the first two are factually wrong; the other three are matters of opinion on which honest and well-intentioned men and women of good breeding and manners may choose to disagree. But mjjr is not one of these "honest and well-intentioned men and women of good breeding and manners" as evidenced by his lifetime of cheating (at games like *Diplomacy*, at scientific claims such as *Who named bullvalene*, and so on). Quite by coincidence, a very minor character in *The Manticore*, the Robertson Davies book that I was reading on Islay, is named Maitland Quelch (great name!). The narrator describes him as "a two-bit crook and opportunist ... fiddled trust funds which somehow lay in his clutch ... is in trouble with the Securities Commission ... Oh Matey, you bastard, why couldn't you have kept your nose clean?" So, Dear Reader, you can well understand my reasons for mistrusting what Prof. Dr. Dr. Maitland Jones, Jr. (a.k.a. Matey Quelch) told us.

Perhaps I should elaborate a bit more on "The Tomb of the Eagles"? "The Maitland" had written, "... a mom and pop archaeological site. A little old lady guards this self-dug up site (of course she must have done lots of damage) and the name is hokey, but there is in fact lots of interesting stuff there. One just borrows some boots and hikes out to the back of her farm and works through it. I loved it. The weather is beastly, which is just right. This gets the MJ 200 star award." With this sort of ringing endorsement, how could we possibly have passed it up? Well, first of all, the Michelin *Green Guide*, which tends to include everything, ignores it. *The Rough Guide* is generous in its praise: "one of the most enjoyable and memorable of Orkney's prehistoric sites"; although the "thrill" of getting a guided tour of a "burnt mound, which is basically a Neolithic rubbish dump" is not overwhelming, nor is the walk to "a chambered cairn by the cliff's edge, where human remains were found." What does appeal is this "... to enter the cairn, you must lie on a trolley and pull yourself using an overhead rope" but is this compelling enough to invest time (and money) in a visit? Hard to say, Dear Reader, hard to say, but what finally dissuaded us were the testimonials of six British tourists, all of whom had taken the long hike followed by the crawl through the tunnel into Maes Howe (see p. 20), and all of whom characterized "The Tomb of the Eagles" as a colossal waste of time and money. So even though they were total strangers to us, we trusted them more than we trusted our old old friend from the U.S. (Jones was right about one thing: "The weather is beastly, which is just right.")

The train to Manchester makes nine stops, one of which is in Locherbie(!), and passes by fields with lots of cows and sheep, so we conclude that "the foot-and-mouth" is not a problem in this region of Great Britain. We had bought first-class tickets, but this doesn't protect us from the incredibly loud kids

(big ones running down the aisles, younger ones sitting just a few seats from us, and screeching continuously in their games). Beyond the human noise pollution, there is the incessant ringing of cell phones, each with its own "cute" tune. Maybe this isn't a first-class car, after all? [Is it possible that I've actually become accustomed to country life, so much so that the hustle and bustle of the city puts me off? Unlikely, but even stranger conversions have been known to have occurred.] We arrive at Manchester's Piccadilly Station about 20 minutes late, but the good news is that the next train to the airport leaves from this very track. The computer-controlled voice on the airport-bound train keeps announcing the next stop as "Manchester Airport - everybody must exit" even though we make a total of five intermediate stops before getting there. At about 5:30, the Hilton airport bus picks us up and takes us to the nearby hotel. This is our twelfth hotel on this trip.

The room is similar to that in Glasgow (well, they are both Hiltons) but more down-market (some mildew in the bathroom, poorer lighting, smaller); Hilton had taken over an existing hotel, but still ... There are fewer floors (four here vs. 15 in Glasgow) but the good news is that the air conditioning is far better. The sink has a return to double-neck, but the coffee/tea/cookie service is fine. England takes great pains to say that it is not part of Europe, but this is belied by a room feature that we saw in none of the hotels in Scotland but that is present here and also is common in all of Europe: the hotel window is one of those terrific contraptions that, first of all, can be opened and, second, is hinged both on the side and on the bottom so that it can be opened either vertically or horizontally. (Another coup by Bill: the posted room rate is £150 and he got it for us for only £70. Unlike Glasgow, however, breakfast tomorrow will not be included in the rate.) We have a buffet dinner at the casual restaurant of the hotel. The service, when one needs to order something, is poor, probably because the staff are young, inexperienced, and not well trained.

[This will be of no interest to anyone but me and my steadfast traveling companion. I manage to wear just a single pair of Dockers cotton slacks (with Lee's grudging assent, day by day) from the evening that we arrived in Edinburgh (May 15) until dinner at the Manchester Hilton (June 4). This is unlike last summer's travels through heat and humidity (with no air conditioning in most of the hotels), when Lee insisted, quite rightly, that I change out of my sweat-soaked slacks before they could stand up by themselves. In contrast, the cool (cold!) days and low humidity of Scotland allow me to remain fresh as a daisy (more or less) for three full weeks. This is all the more amazing in light of our substantial outdoor treks through bogs and swamps and rain forests and jungles (OK, I exaggerate a bit). At least I do take a shower every day, but next year I'm resolved that, wherever we decide to go, I'm going to try to get away with only one shower for the entire journey - after all, if the French don't feel compelled to bathe]

Tuesday, June 5

Breakfast at the hotel is similar to that in Glasgow, but nowhere near as enjoyable because it costs £15.50 each. We take the airport bus to the terminal and, after answering numerous insulting questions about our personal habits, posed by Delta personnel, we make it through security. Lee goes into the duty-free shop while I sit in the waiting room; I make a note that this Manchester Airport departure lounge is new and well-kept, only to be told by Lee that it's neither. Well, I'm right and she's wrong! We find our way to the Business Elite Lounge, which is rather small (it's actually shared with Cathay Airlines, as Delta is a minor player here) and quite crowded. Many of the waiting passengers have cell phones with those "cute" familiar melodies as signals. The air conditioning is quite good, but that's about all. We are seated much too close (but can't avoid it) to three American men (mid 30s?) who had played 90 holes of golf at St. Andrews, Carnoustie, Turnberry, etc. How do I know this? Because they are loudly boasting of it to an American married couple, in their late 50s I'd guess, who exhibit terrific one-upmanship by countering their bombast with the fact that they had played 135 holes at the same famous places. Each "team" then tried to top the other with tales of the fierce winds, torrential rains, how little time they actually spent in their hotel rooms, the alligators on the course [OK, I made that one up], but the older couple finally triumphs when they counter the young group's "Weren't

the Scottish caddies terrific?" with "Well, we believe that the feel of the game is better when one doesn't hire a caddy." Game, set, and match!

Our plane is scheduled to depart at 11:55 a.m., but horrible weather in Atlanta has delayed its arrival in Manchester. Thus we are now scheduled to leave at 1:45, with an estimated arrival at 5:00, a good 1.5 hours late. It's pretty clear that we're going to miss our 5:45 connecting flight to Knoxville. During this long wait, the three young men fall asleep, while the older couple discovers that they can go to a much better lounge with some decent food for about £10 each. Alas, after a while the young men awake, and so we also have to "share" their reminiscences of having played Ireland's great golf courses the year before. Two of these guys are married - I wouldn't be surprised if their wives are delighted to be rid of them for these two-week European jaunts. One of the guys shares this *bon mot* with everyone within earshot: "I'm so tired now that all I want is to look at a naked women with big breasts." Well, who wouldn't? But we don't usually broadcast our fantasies to total strangers. It occurs to me that this is the same sentiment that I expressed with regard to visiting art museums (p. 5), but the context was different. Yes it was. It was! I may not know what good art is, but I certainly do appreciate it.

In the *London Times* that we read at the Manchester airport, we see a picture (on p. 007, of course) of Sir Sean Connery campaigning for the Scotland National Party in Inverness, standing right in front of the very Tourist Information where we had stood, just 16 days earlier.

Our "good luck" continues, as the three men are seated right behind us on the plane. Two are in the center section, but the third (one of the married ones) is seated directly behind Lee, next to an American woman who is a sucker for his pitch. He spends most of the flight chatting her up, telling the same stories that we had already heard in the departure lounge. (I think that he might have left out the line about the naked women.) His voice is loud and insistent, even over the drone of the plane's engines. I say a small prayer of thanks when he dozes, but then I curse Morpheus when he awakens after just a short snooze. I think, but I can't be sure, that he is making arrangements to meet her somewhere in the U.S., presumably where his wife won't find them.

The Heller memoir that I'm reading is OK, but he displays a cranky streak that doesn't sit well with this reader, usually one of his biggest fans. He boasts about never having voted a second time, after his first vote (for FDR in 1944); he is lazy about his research, saying "I seem to recall [such-and-such] but you can look it up if you want details." The writing also tends to be repetitious, chronologically confused, and poorly edited. (Many people have made the same accusations about *Catch-22* but there it was used for effect in the telling of the story.) Whenever he lands a "zinger" that's supposed to be wry or droll, it comes across, instead, as the mean-spirited musings of a bitter old man. But, given his reluctance to get on the Internet or go to the library to check some details (e.g., when a school was built, where a restaurant was located, etc.) he still claims an extraordinary recall of other details: exactly what his salary was on every part-time job he had as a little boy; of what things cost at the candy store or grocery store or movie theater or amusement park or subway; of the names of every co-worker and supervisor on these jobs; of the names of every teacher he had; and so on. It's hard to know how this book could be of general interest, but because I grew up in the neighborhoods he describes, I maintain an interest in his rambling tales: eating at Lundy's or Dubrow's or Nathan's, riding his bike in the median of Ocean Parkway (trying to gauge his speed so as to approach each traffic light just as it turns green), spending time at the main branch of the Brooklyn Public Library, taking the subway to "the city" (i.e., Manhattan), and so on.

The second half of the book is far more interesting, as he describes being stationed at an air base on Corsica during World War II. It's clear which of his comrades were the models for some of his most memorable characters in *Catch-22*. One man, Edward Ritter, was the epitome of Orr. Like Orr, Ritter loved to take mechanical things apart and put them together. Like Orr, he installed a gasoline stove and fireplace in his tent. Like Orr, he had three crash landings and survived. Like Orr, he ditched a plane in the Mediterranean, but made it back. Heller writes, "Remarkably, through all his unlucky series of mishaps the pilot Ritter remained imperviously phlegmatic, demonstrating no symptoms of

fear or growing nervousness, even blushing with a chuckle and a smile whenever I gaggled around about him as a jinx, and it was on these qualities of his, his patient genius for building and fixing things and these recurring close calls in aerial combat, only on these, that I fashioned the character of Orr ..." Well, we aficionados of *Catch-22* had come to that conclusion some pages before Heller admitted it. Heller is equally up-front about who served as the models for Yossarian, Nately, McWatt, and the rest of the rich cast of characters. He does confess that a pet dog in Corsica appears in the book as Huple's cat because he wanted to protect its privacy.

[Bad news: at this very point in writing my notes, my pen has run out of ink. Is it possible that I've displeased the gods? Lee, bless her heart, has "liberated" several pens from our many hotels, so she bails me out.] I spend most of the flight reading, but Lee (as she always does) succumbs to the movie offerings. She watches the mindless "Miss Congeniality" for which, having sampled only a few scenes over her shoulder and without the benefit of sound, I successfully predict the outcome to her. After finishing the Heller book, I catch up on news that we had missed by reading *The International Herald Tribune*. I see that the Dow went up 114 points yesterday to 11175, probably in honor of the Magids' return. I then begin *World of Wonders*, the final part of the Robertson Davies *Deptford Trilogy*. During this time, Lee watches the equally mindless film, "The Wedding Planner." After letting her brain turn to cottage cheese, she discovers that she can play games on the electronic contraption that controls the movies - she gets hooked on Solitaire and plays 1,743 consecutive losing games. Ah, the wages of sin.

Over the U.S. mainland, now, the estimated arrival time in Atlanta is 5:28. It would take a miracle to make our 5:45 flight, unless it is, itself, very late. Also, Lee has done a calculation that suggests that we (meaning she) have exceeded our \$800 allowance by a good \$400 and that we'll have to pay duty on the excess. (Let the record show that about \$2.45 of this total is for items things that I've brought back. Once again, the difference between a buyer ("the man of us") and a shopper ("the woman of us") is apparent.)

Ah the heat and humidity of Atlanta! How we missed it! NOT!! We go through passport control quickly, and customs doesn't seem even remotely interested in our profligate spending, but the luggage is painfully slow in arriving and the Delta agent informs us that we have, indeed, missed our flight. We are rescheduled for an Atlantic Southeast flight at 8:20. What to do during this time? Well, I "sweet-talk" our way into the very comfortable Business Elite Lounge (Delta is a major player in Atlanta) where we enjoy scotches (we didn't have enough, did we?) and snacks.

Relatively sober and very tired, we find our way to the most distant terminal at Atlanta's airport for the flight to Knoxville. It and we and, best of all, our luggage arrive in Knoxville at the same time.

SUMMARY OF BOOKS READ:

England, England by Julian Barnes; *Ravelstein* by Saul Bellow; *Fifth Business* by Robertson Davies, part one of his *Deptford Trilogy*; *Waiting* by Ha Jin; *The Manticore*, part two of the Davies trilogy; *Now and Then. From Coney Island to Here* by Joseph Heller; and *World of Wonders*, part three of the trilogy, (finished in Knoxville on June 19).