

SCOTTISH ACTUARIES CLUB

Alternative Report on

2006 Outing, 29 September – 1 October 2006

The Alternative Route Home

In the afternoon 4 Mt Stuart Garden Refuseniks (that's refuse, not refuse) took off for Gleddoch via the scenic road round Bute. The suspicion soon dawned that the locals want visitors to miss it and get to the shops ASAP, as all the road signs point to Rothesay and it takes determination not to get whipped straight there via Loch Fad, where the Highland Boundary Fault just about cuts the island in two.

The trick is to ignore the signs and steer by compass, and it's worth it for the magnificent views down the Firth from Garroch Head, of Arran and over Inchmarnock to the Mull of Kintyre, from Scalpsie Bay with its resident seal population, and from St Ninian's Point (hadn't known the Galloway laddie was turning the heathen that far north). Finally from Ettrick Bay, its yellow sands hemmed in by caravans. Hate meeting the things on the road but can't blame them for coming, lovely spot.

Back at the Kyles by pretty little Port Bannatyne, with Scotland's only 13-hole golf course (you play the first 12, then the first 5, then the 13th-ever tried it, Tom?) the A886 runs north to Rhubadoch, where a bit of a CalMac overkill in marine engineering terms, given the scale of the sea-loch challenge, wheechs cars across the narrows to Colintrave in 3 (alleged) minutes. Hmm... 'ra boat is named 'Loch Dunvegan': perhaps a retiree from the Kyle of Lochalsh run after they built the bridge? Whatever! As it does not move until a car comes aboard, arriving when it is on the other side can mean a bit of a wait: but watching the plentiful sailboat traffic skimming past kills the time nicely. A life on the ocean wave....

Once across the not-so-treacherous channel the B886 in Cowal rises up the side of Loch Riddon, giving a truly breath-taking view of glittering water and green hills past the aptly-named Buttock Point (the Kylie of Bute?) down to the Elbow of the Kyles. A last regretful glance before the B836 swings eastwards from the head of Loch Riddon up past Ballimore farm overlooking Loch Striven, with solitary second-home (?) cottages staring down the deep firth... are we talking £100k + here?...

Scotland's varied beauty never fails to captivate the visiting ex-pat; eat your hearts out, the Tors of Dartmoor! Last year the Club luxuriated in the tame, rich, pasture and forest lands of Perthshire, where the salmon are hunted in the silent waters of the Tay sweeping swiftly by. Cowal, by contrast, glories in its savagery: quiet as we passed through but evidencing a character shaped by wild gales and heavy rain. Not that such lofty thoughts bothered the cock pheasants pursuing hens in the ratio of 4:1 with Taliban-sized suicidal zeal right in front of our wheels every 10 minutes or so. Birds bothering birds...

A pause by Tarsan Loch, its Tarzan-strength Dam walls, hunched up against the weight of water, providing 'heart nan gleann', or power from the glens as the Scottish Hydro Electric notice board says. Blue sky over black water jumping with brown trout nestling north 'mid heathery hills....don't want to leave...reverie spoiled by the triumphant clatter of a cock pheasant rising up into the wind... no prizes for guessing what he is so pleased about.. wouldn't bother getting his fat frame off the ground for any other reason.....

Now the plunge downhill towards ceeveelisation. The Clachan of Clachaig passed en route might not qualify 100% for that description, and some might hold that the (un) Holy Loch does not do so at all. A Yankee Polaris submarine based there was the first ship in history to have its own tartan, or so its Captain, Walter F Schlech -would that be of the clan MacSchlech?-claimed. Don't know if there ever was a second one to do so.

But there is no arguing with Sandbank, it is too posh not to qualify. When we were weans just after the war wur uncle had a hoaliday hoose there-mind you, he was a heidmaister-smoked a pipe and had a wee car too-CRIVVENS!

Disdaining the services of Western Ferries from Hunter's Key-we are of the CalMac faith-we were the first car in the park for the Dunoon/ Gourock ferry. Not too surprising as it was 16.51 and we were watching the 16.50 put to sea. The helpful attendant suggested we go via Hunter's Key "*they have 3 trips per hour we only one-don't tell CalMac I told you*" (helpful chap, no wage slave he), and he took some persuading that we were not of the WF persuasion, that it was the 17.50 we had come to catch.

Next a birl up the High St with shop after shop snapping shut as they saw us coming, but refuge found in a tartan/ tourist trap open all hours, just about. Emerged quite pleased, clutching some miniatures of Dunoon usquebaugh, a blue tie smothered in tiny white outline saltires and a wee tin shield thing with the Scottish Standard on it to glue onto your walking stick (keeps falling off). I do love shopping.

Back at the car park, the *bagnole* behind us was an open-top antique TR something-or-other of the Classic Car Club driven by the Other Refusenik, he of the motor-bike persuasion while in Edinburgh. When the dear old Jupiter pattered back in from Gourock (we had all crossed from Wemyss Bay to Rothesay in the morning on her sister ferry, the Juno) car engines fired up and the wooden planks of the pier rattled with the boarding of traffic. But no sign of the TR! I enquired of a matelot, whose reply, punctuated with oaths, was that "*it could'nae stert and was haudin' us a' up*". Not for long, 'though', as it soon trundled on board with he of the motor bike persuasion at the wheel..... and his lady wife heaving away, shall I say (wo)manfully, at the rear of the vehicle.

The offer of Dunoon usquebaugh having sensibly been declined on the grounds that the wrong kind of AA might get involved, the TR suddenly came out of its sulk and without further ado Glendoch was reached in time for the Club dinner in the Campsie suite.

Anon.