

Highland Fling...'For the Ride'!

(apologies for pinching the Triumph strap line!)

Maybe a Highland Fling is a description of what you do with a caber, maybe an elicit northern weekend away, maybe a secret Scottish martial arts move...but in our case it was an annual club trip 'up north' to enjoy big scenery, big hills and big breakfasts!



(Cairngorms)

Nine bikers (John, John and Avril, Stephen, Stephen, Barry, Martin, [REDACTED], and [REDACTED]) on seven bikes (two Triumph, two Kawasaki and three BMWs), from the relative 'flatlands' of Suffolk, all are members of Suffolk RoSPA Advanced Motorcyclists (SRAM). Early October is the favoured time, to avoid tourists and midges, but to catch the last of the good weather and remaining daylight. And it worked! Only a few downpours, sunshine and quiet roads awaited us. When there were clouds they only served to enhance the drama of the Scottish highlands and lochs.



(Triumph ahead of the pack!)

The itinerary in brief:

5th October – Suffolk to overnight at Village Inn, Brompton, North Allerton, via Humber Bridge and North Yorkshire Moors.

6th October – north to our destination Highland Moors Guest House, Grantown-on-Spey, via the new Queensferry Bridge and Dunfermline.

7th to 9th touring Cairngorms and west coast.

10th and 11th return to Suffolk via same route.

Total: 1600 miles.



(A Tiger loose in Scotland!)



(Loch Ness)

Surprises:

The first surprise went to BMW! John and Avril's K1300GT rear shock absorber 'gave up the ghost', leaving them 'pogoing' their way north! After some frustrated phone calls to local BMW dealers and the RAC they managed to 'repatriate' their bike back to a Suffolk garage, thanks to Britannia Rescue, and hired a BMW F800GT from Edinburgh for the rest of the 'fling'. That was about it mechanically, apart from a couple of blown headlight bulbs no other mechanical maladies were suffered.

[REDACTED]

GPS:

Well, I confess to having little idea of where we toured! That's the trouble with satnavs, I know exactly where I am all the time but in reality have no idea where I am beyond the electronic screen! I know we toured the Cairngorms, encircled Loch Ness, visited Shildaig on the west coast leg and crossed over the pass from Applecross in the clouds, but that was about the limit of my sense of direction! Only now when I look at a real map do I get a true sense of how far we travelled, and the lovely countryside we rode through.



(Sheildaig)

Some members of the group made out they knew where we were going, I'm glad someone did! The 'facilitator' of our trip had a satnav that kept wanting to send him west, when we wanted to go east. For example on the return trip to Yorkshire John and I travelled together following his satnav, but it was only when we passed a sign saying "Welcome to Cumbria" that I suggested we should follow my satnav instructions if we were to arrive in Brompton before supper!

Early evenings and just before breakfast were the times for sharing routes from 'someone's' laptop to your GPS. Sometimes it worked. Sometimes you had thousands of waypoints cluttering up your screen. Sometimes you had to agree to follow one rider because everyone's device wanted to go in a different direction! But it was great fun!

(Which way...?)



Haggis:

You know the saying: when in Scotland 'do as the Romans do', well we had left Hadrian's Wall behind us so we did as the Scottish do, we ate haggis! I had haggis for breakfast three times and once with 'neaps and tatties' for supper! The previous time I was in Scotland I had it battered with chips, in Mallaig.

Scotland:

What can you say? Stunning scenery. Lovely remote lochside villages. In Applecross, the fuel is dispensed through a community owned and run pump, with prices that put our supermarkets to shame! There is so much to see that when you are touring you sometimes do not have the time to simply stand and stare!

We also crossed the new Queensferry Crossing over the Forth River, that had only been open for a matter of weeks. Our satnavs showed blue water all around with no road or bridge under us! Surreal! But the view was stunning, if you dared take your eyes off the road long enough...the Forth Road Bridge, the Forth Bridge (rail), the estuary...all alongside each other!

Obstacles to progress:

Mud, water and hairpin bends all did their best to catch us out. We even helped to herd a flock of sheep! Filling up the road they ran around us being herded by the collie dog. The farmer on his quad bike just waved us on, so saving him the task of counting them through an open gate...one...two...threee...foour...fivvv...zzz...we **WOKE UP** just in time!

We also suffered from wind! Horizontal and always apparently coming from one side or the other, even when you thought you were heading into it! The Humber Bridge had a 30mph speed limit due to the high wind, but if you kept away from the edge and maintained space around you it was most enjoyable. But we were well blasted on both the Fens and the Hills. Good control required you to anticipate the blasts where you could and to ride through the unexpected blasts where you couldn't. It became an automatic reaction after a while.

Would we do it again:

We would!...it has justifiably been on the SRAM social ride programme for many years. This year a 'splinter group' arranged a west coast tour at the same time, but they had more rain than we did...serves 'em right, should have come with us!

We had a great time, and I must say a big thank you to John Morgan for organising the trip.

North Coast 500 anyone?



(John, John, Avril, Barry, Stephen [me], [REDACTED], Stephen, Martin)

Ride safe.

Stephen Worrall
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(Photo's: Stephen Worrall and John Morgan)