

Scotland – 2019

This Spring I went with Marc and Tineke for a week to Orkney. They have been to Orkney several times; so they made perfect guides. They rented a cottage on Orkney, which had two bedrooms, a reasonably well equipped kitchen, and a living area.

I flew to Edinburgh on 25 April (my birthday), and we left the following day.

Friday, 26 April. It was a long drive to Scrabster, where we stayed the night. Marc and Tineke took me to dinner to celebrate my reaching 80. The Captain's Galley is an excellent restaurant with nice seafood. It was rather amusing that at another table was someone who lives just a few doors down the street from Marc and Tineke, and at another table people also from Portobello.

Saturday, 27 April. Up a bit early for being on vacation in order to be on time for the ferry at Gill's Bay. It brought us to St. Margaret's Hope, a nice little town on South Ronaldsay. The wind was blowing hard, as it almost always is on the Orkneys, and it seemed really cold, although not so cold according to the thermometer. A stop to see the coast and feel the wind <https://photos.app.goo.gl/BtiHH5phuCq1fyYE8>, and then on to the Italian Chapel, built during WWII by Italian POWs. Then stops at stores in Kirkwall to stock up on food for a few days, and on to the cottage, Corks Self Catering Accomodation (known to Google Maps), which is on Mainland sort of midway between Skara Brae and Birsay.

Sunday, 28 April. We went first to Skara Brae, a well-preserved neolithic village dating from around 3100 to 2500 BC. See photos at <https://photos.app.goo.gl/zGfuqez3sivt8smP7>. We also visited the nearby Skail House, a large manor house. Originally it was built by the Bishop of Orkney in 1620. His son became laird, and it was passed down and expanded by successive lairds.

After lunch back at the cottage, we went for a walk from Marwick Head up to the Kitchener Memorial. Cliffs, water, birds, and nice, sunny weather. See photos at <https://photos.app.goo.gl/j6Jj4d8EM6ZwNYrb6>.

Monday, 29 April. In the morning, being low tide, we went to the Brough of Birsay, an island reached (at low tide) by walking across a a causeway. (At high tide you just have to wait for low tide, also when you are on the island and want to get back.) There are remains from the Pictish period, confusedly mixed with the more numerous remains of a Norse farmstead (10th–11th century). See photos at <https://photos.app.goo.gl/kk25HoDw51orVmo7A>. Back off the island, we visited the near-by ruins of the Earl's palace (late 16th century) before going back to the cottage for lunch.

After lunch, we went back to the Neolithic, to the Ring of Brodgar, a Bronze Age stone circle on a fairly narrow neck of land between two lochs. See photos at <https://photos.app.goo.gl/zyAFGNZpqUKoBvsEA>. Originally there were 60 stones; now only 27, but still quite impressive. Not far away is another, smaller, circle: the Standing Stones of Stenness. And a bit further the Maes Howe (Great Mound), a Neolithic chambered cairn dating from around 2800 BC. We were shown through it by a guide from Historic Scotland. The tomb was discovered by Norsemen who stumbled

upon it by accident. One of them fell through the roof. They returned to carry off all the treasures—it took three days, and carved into the wall an account of it all. It is also recounted in the *Orkneyinga Saga*.

Tuesday, 30 April. This afternoon it was the Broch of Gurness, reached by a nice walk along the beach, although it was possible to drive much closer. There were actually a few people who went into the water—hearty souls those Scots. The Broch is an Iron Age village (around 500-200 BC) surrounded by defensive ditches and stone ramparts. See photos at <https://photos.app.goo.gl/H1GKF9MkYTjaZGy57>. It was in use up to around 100 AD, with modifications, of course, by the later inhabitants.

Wednesday, 1 May. In the morning we went to Stromness, the second ‘large’ town of Orkney (population about 2200). See photos at <https://photos.app.goo.gl/k5pEzFzBySYre8d56>. The Pier Gallery has a nice collection of modern art.

In the afternoon we took a nice walk along the coast at Yesnaby. See photos at <https://photos.app.goo.gl/D7iJPVM4Mj4izuRm6>. It was sunny and not too windy.

Thursday, 2 May. Today we went to Kirkwall, Orkney’s largest city (population about 6000) and capital; photos at <https://photos.app.goo.gl/UtzdsepcPstbdf5N7>. The cathedral, built between 1137 and 1152, is striking with its red stone, which is quite eroded by the severe Orkney weather. While Tineke visited craft shops, Marc and I took a tour of the upper reaches of the cathedral for which there was a whole list of warnings (confined spaces, heights, narrow passages, uneven stairs, *etc*). After reading the list you had to sign a form absolving them of all responsibility. It was an interesting tour. We also visited the ruins of the Earl’s palace (17th century) and Bishop’s palace (12th century).

Friday, 3 May. This was our last sightseeing day on Orkney, and we spent it on Rousay, the only ‘new’ sight for Marc and Tineke. A short ferry ride got us there, and Marc had hired someone to show us around the island. It was typical Orkney weather: sun alternating with rain and hail. The highlight was the Neolithic sight of Midhowe with its long chambered cairn, and the nearby Iron-Age Midhowe Broch from which the Broch of Gurness is visible across the water. See photos at <https://photos.app.goo.gl/EW36twuiqueJATdz5>.

Saturday, 4 May. And now it was time to leave. We had to get up early to catch the ferry from Stromness to Scrabster. Then the long drive back to Edinburgh. We broke the trip at Dunkeld, an old city dating back to at least 700. See photos at <https://photos.app.goo.gl/ae6PcaWNJMCKB2uu6>. The cathedral choir was built between 1315 and 1400; the nave and tower took most of the 15th century. But by 1650 the cathedral was in ruins, a result of the Reformation, and the surrounding town was burnt to the ground in the Battle of Dunkeld when the 26th Foot put an end to a string of Jacobite victories. Part of the town was rebuilt in the 18th century, and today much of that is in the hands of the National Trust for Scotland. Today the choir of the cathedral is in use as a parish church, and the rest of the cathedral is being slowly restored. We got back to Edinburgh in the early evening, and Gonda had dinner waiting for us.