

The Knoydart trip - A journey to the remotest pub in mainland Britain.

It may not be quite up there with Jack Kerouac's 'On the Road' but for anyone interested in repeating the experience here are the details of Steve Gillon and Dave Kerridge three day trip at the end of May 2012, from Durham to the Old Forge at Inverie on the Knoydart peninsula.

The trip

Day One (Tuesday)

From Durham to Edinburgh, using cheap East Coast First Advance tickets, so breakfast on the train is included – by the time they reached us the sausages had run out so it was a bacon sandwich and a croissant and marmalade, but it filled a gap. A quick change of train in Edinburgh then on to the Glasgow train, where the trainee trolley steward poured us her first ever cups of onboard tea under the eagle eyes of her supervisor. She passed the test. Time for a pint in Glasgow in the Counting House, George Square. A Weatherspoons pub, but decent beer in a fine old bank building.



Then on to the Mallaig train. Scenery all the way, despite fairly low cloud – Ben Lomond, The Cobbler and Ben Nevis were there somewhere. The River Clyde at very low tide – very difficult to imagine large ships using it. Fresh air/tab break at Crianlarich to watch the six-coach train split, then four coaches across Rannoch Moor and on to Fort William, where we left another two coaches behind. The service slowed to a crawl over Glenfinnan viaduct and at Arisaig to allow Harry Potter aficionados to take photos and into Mallaig.

Discovered we were staying in the only place in town with a handpull, and had a couple of pints of Red Cuillin (later in the evening, once the barmaid worked out how to use it). In the meantime we had a wander round the sites –

i.e. we a look at the harbour, the Marine Bar and a fine fish supper. The harbour is interesting though - a proper working harbour plus new marina. We would have had a good view of the sunset over the islands had there been any sun, or any visible islands....so we went for a drink instead and listened to the local gossip (which was mainly in Polish, but there seemed to be some good scandal going on).

Day Two (Wednesday)

A decent breakfast, then down to the harbour to sort out the ferry journey. Eleven of us on the boat to Inverie, the *TSMV Western Isles* - eight tourists and two local women plus kid going home with the shopping, plus the mail and assorted internet and catalogue shopping deliveries. A flat calm sea, with visibility better than yesterday. Several of the people waiting for the return boat at Inverie in full midge protection gear – beekeeper type head cover. Wimps, we thought, until we stopped anywhere to take a photo. Locals working outside also in the full gear – must have been fun for the walkers and campers. A brief flurry of activity on the arrival of the ferry when the postman and others collected their deliveries, then Inverie returned to its soporific normality.



A walk round Inverie for an hour or so, (being good – no alcohol before noon) then to the Old Forge for a few pints of excellent beers, plus a lunch of fresh mussels and scallops that jumped out of the loch and straight on to our plates. Fascinating place. The Knoydart Estate (Inverie is the main settlement) was bought by the local community about 15 years ago and is run by the Knoydart Foundation. Despite its remoteness it has all the signs of a thriving community, which has managed to attract funding from a range of sources including the EU and the National Lottery to turn round the estate. The pier and slipway are new and hydropower has been installed. The pub has skilfully built up its trade by providing good beer, good food, good music, good PR (it's in the Guinness Book of Records as the remotest pub), providing moorings for yachts and so on. This is all despite the only ways in being by boat, or a sixteen mile walk over the hills from Kinlochhourn (which itself is in the middle of nowhere). There's a short stretch of tarmac road from the pier and a few miles of track to surrounding houses, so the only traffic is old bangers and Land Rovers, except for someone who has hired a boat to bring over a £55K brand new Range Rover to drive up and down the track. No

public car ferry but a landing craft type boat can be hired by the locals – we watched a septic tank arrive.

Ferry trip back via Tarbet (two houses), to deliver the mail and pick up a German walker, then a cruise round Loch Nevis, past the scallop diver, visit the onboard toilet (interesting) and back, in sunshine, to Mallaig. A quick pint in the pub there, then 30 minutes on the train to Lochailort and the Lochailort Inn. Another civilised evening - a walk down to the loch (it was rhododendron season which adds to the beauty) then into the hotel for a few drinks (not enough demand to keep real ale well, so Guinness it was), plus venison burgers – basically a stag on a bun. The nearby fish hatchery is being rebuilt by labour imported from Glasgow, Romania and Sri Lanka, so chatted to some of the workers. Poor sods – no one told them about the midges and they are working and sweating, wearing hi-vis jackets, in a low area with stagnant water, in other words midge heaven.



Day Three (Thursday)

Another good breakfast, then back to Lochailort Station, dodging the drizzle and midges. Stopped the train (it's a request stop) and retraced our steps to Glasgow, including the tab break at Crianlarich. Four hours in Glasgow so plenty of time to eat and drink. Straight on to the Subway from Buchanan Street to Kelvinhall (where there's a Subway next to the Subway), and into the Three Judges at Partick Cross which always has a fine selection of beer. Then to Mother Indias Café for tremendous Indian tapas. Mmmmmm – have a look at the menu and salivate. Jumped on a bus back into town and, since it dropped us close by, we had to have a pint in the Horseshoe.

The evening went very enjoyably downhill from there – we caught the Edinburgh train just then changed at Haymarket, where there was just enough time for a pint in Ryries. Free food and drink again on East Coast so we obliged by having their sandwiches and drinking their remaining supply of Grouse, and poured off the train at Durham. And barely a midge bite between us.

The details

Day One (Tuesday)

Train	
Durham Dep	0823
Edinburgh Waverley Arr	1020

Train	
Edinburgh Waverley Dep	1030
Glasgow Queen St Arr	1119

Train	
Glasgow Queen Street Dep	1221
Mallaig Arr	1743

Overnight Chlachain Inn, Mallaig

Day Two (Wednesday)

Ferry	
Mallaig Dep	1015
Inverie Arr	1100

Ferry	
Inverie Dep	1500
Mallaig	1730

Train	
Mallaig	1815
Lochailort (request stop)	1847
Overnight Lochailort Inn	

Day three (Thursday)

Train	
Lochailort (request stop)	1042
Glasgow Queen St	1530

Train	
Glasgow Queen St	1930
Edinburgh Haymarket	2016

Train	
Edinburgh Haymarket	2043
Durham	2258

Practicalities

- * The **train times** above are for Monday to Friday until September 2012. However they haven't changed by more than a few minutes for many years. Saturday is very similar northbound, but the last train southbound from Edinburgh is two hours earlier, which limits the eating and drinking time. Sunday avoid northbound – from south of Edinburgh the only option arrives Mallaig 2335. Southbound on Sunday is possible until the end of October only, with the last departure from Edinburgh at 2000.

- * The **ferry** journey operates on Monday to Friday from May to September. No Saturday or Sunday journeys. From October to April it runs on Monday, Wednesday and Friday only, and the Wednesday journey does not call at Tarbet.
- * **Train fares.** We did the trip with cheap advance first class tickets from Durham to Glasgow with food and/or drink included, then a Glasgow- Mallaig return. At certain times of the year, people aged 55 or over can get a return ticket between any two stations in Scotland (plus Berwick on Tweed and Carlisle) for £19. Check with Scotrail.
- * Note that **Edinburgh Waverley** is a building site and will be for some time. Our train arrived in platform 19 and the Glasgow train left from platform 12. Perfectly doable in 10 minutes if you know the station, and not a big issue anyway, as there is an Edinburgh-Glasgow train every 15 minutes.
- * On the **Glasgow – Mallaig** journey most of the best views (but not all of them) are from the left hand side in the direction of travel. Change seats at Fort William where the train reverses, so that you are still on the left hand side.
- * There are **buffet** trolleys on the Edinburgh – Glasgow daytime trains, and between Glasgow and Fort William, with a limited choice. We stocked up with food before the journey north, and had a big breakfast before the trip south (but we were ready for the beer and curry by Glasgow).
- * The **accommodation** in Mallaig ranges from the West Highland Hotel to B&Bs. We stayed in the Chlachain Inn – rooms above a pub, which was fine, for £70 for a twin room. In Lochailort the only option is the Lochailort Inn, which is also fine (no TV) and cost us £80B&B.



Inverie

Other bits

- * Some **train buffery** – The northbound train splits at Crianlarich with one section going to Oban, the other to Fort William and Mallaig. There is time to watch this from the platform – take bets on how many people have to change sections at Crianlarich despite announcements and ticket checks. Tyndrum must be the smallest place in Britain with two national rail stations. Watch out for the Horseshoe Curve between Tyndrum and Bridge of Orchy. Corrour is the only station in Scotland (and one of three in Britain) with no road access. Lochailort (and several others on the Mallaig section) is a request stop. In the bar of the Lochailort Inn there is an original 1902 Ordnance Survey map of the area with the railway line marked as ‘under construction’.

- * There is a regular **steam train** service in summer between Fort William and Mallaig. It’s a tremendous journey but is expensive, has to be reserved, and isn’t possible on a short trip like this. On our timings, on the outward journey, the steam loco should be in the sidings at Fort William, just after it has returned from Mallaig. On the return journey the service train passes the steam train at Glenfinnan station.

- * **Boat-related buffery.** Lots to see on the Clyde – boats at Bowling where the Forth and Clyde Canal enters the river, good views over to Greenock and Port Glasgow, the Faslane submarine base near Garelochhead, Neptunes Staircase where the Caledonian Canal reaches Loch Linnhe at Banavie, Corpach harbour, and plenty of activity at Mallaig.

- * A couple of **alternatives at Mallaig** are a day trip (non-landing) by the Calmac ferry to the Small Isles. Depending on the day of the week (no Sunday sailing) it calls at some of Rum, Eigg, Canna and Muck. It’s possible to catch a morning train or bus from Mallaig to Morar then walk along the north shore of Loch Morar (about 3 hours) and over the hill to Tarbet to catch the afternoon ferry back – you have to let Bruce Watt know to expect you at Tarbet. Both of these options mean you miss the Old Forge, which was the objective of our trip, but are possible with an extra day in Mallaig.

- * Bruce Watt’s ferry is the public transport route to **Inverie** and carries the mail and other goods, and is the most interesting. There are other bookable water taxi and rib services between Mallaig and Inverie, if the ferry times don’t suit. Links to them are on the Old Forge Inn website.

- * On the return journey via **Edinburgh** we had 27 minutes to have a quick pint in Ryries at Haymarket. An alternative is to change at Waverley where there is slightly more time for a quick one in the Halfway House in Fleshmarket Close – leave the station by the Market St exit and up the steps opposite.

Photos by SG and DK

Links:

East Coast Trains www.eastcoast.co.uk

Scotrail www.scotrail.co.uk

Mallaig – Inverie Ferry (Bruce Watt Cruises, Mallaig)
www.knoydart-ferry.co.uk
01687 462320
brucewattcruises@aol.com

Old Forge Inn, Inverie www.theoldforge.co.uk
01687 462267
info@theoldforge.co.uk

Chlachain Inn, Mallaig (book by phone)
www.westscotlandinn.co.uk
01687 460289
chlachaininn@yahoo.co.uk

Lochailort Inn (bookable online)
www.lochailortinn.co.uk
01687 470208
stay@lochailortinn.co.uk

Mother India's Café, Glasgow
www.motherindiaglasgow.co.uk
1355 Argyle St, G3 8AD
0141 339 9145
Open all day from noon, daily

Calmac www.calmac.co.uk

The Jacobite Steam Train (Fort William – Mallaig)
www.westcoastrailways.co.uk