

Gourmandising on Skye

or "Cueillez dès aujourd'hui les Roses de la Vie"

(loosely translated "Gather ye Rosebuds while ye may") - Ronsard

Donald Hawksworth

It's gratifying that the Cairngorm Club now caters for older members by arranging occasional 'Daunders' (or is it 'Danders'?). However, this gratification does not extend to the traditional Easter Meet which now seems a thing of the past. It used to be an annual weekend stay in a comfortable hotel - something of a social occasion, gathering together members from far outwith the Aberdeen area - remember the heroic cycle runs the sadly lamented Louis Fussell made from Bedford? The undoubted joys of bunkhouse living appeal less as one grows older, but I suppose one must accept as inevitable and proper that times change and the Club must cater for its more active members.

However, a small group of older members, unwilling to 'rough it' in Knoydart 2009, arranged their own post-Easter Meet on Skye. Alan Bell from Nottingham, Gordon and Leonora McAndrew from Edinburgh, Sheila Murray and I foregathered at a luxury Bed and Breakfast near Portree. From the lounge we had splendid views of the distant Cuillin. We were fortunate in hitting some glorious weather - endless sunshine and the country looking magnificent in its spring freshness.

Our first day found us driving north to the Quirang, where three of us ascended Skye's most northerly hill - Meall na Suiramach (543m.). The steep initial climb from the bealach proved challenging, but the summit panorama made it worthwhile, stretching from the mainland hills round Loch Maree, to the whole length of the Trotternish Ridge. We visited Kilt Rock on our way back to Portree, where we discerned tiny figures rock-climbing up its basalt columns. The evening found us sampling a wonderful gourmet banquet at Kinloch Lodge, stately home of Lady MacDonald of cookbook fame. The menu included such delights as 'Warm Isle of Skye crab mousse with seared west coast scallops', 'Roast butternut squash and sage risotto, parmesan crisps and crispy pancetta', and 'Rich dark chocolate and orange pudding, white chocolate and berry fudge'. After such a feast, we were still not too comatose to enjoy the magical drive back to Portree as the sun went down on the hills.

The next day was cloudier and, at times, showery. We drove across to Neist, enjoying the cliff scenery and seclusion of this remote corner of Skye. Further self-indulgence, I regret to say, at lunch time, for, even here we were able to sample gourmet eating at the famous 'Three Chimneys'

restaurant - amazing to find such a place in the middle of nowhere. I had heard (with some incredulity) that some folk flew there by helicopter for a meal, but it's true - a helicopter was 'parked' across the road when we arrived! After a main dish of red deer, I tried the 'famous' Marmalade Sponge Pudding - marvellous! On our way back to Portree, we digressed briefly for a visit to Glenbrittle. We wandered along the beach reminiscing about a holiday Alan and I spent here in 1956, when we wandered up the Inaccessible Pinnacle, onto the Cioch, over Sgurr Alasdair's 'bad step', finally traversing the Dubhs from Loch Coruisk. Oh for the joyous, carefree days of youth! I recall our sleep being disturbed in the early hours by a thudding of hooves - we had inadvertently camped on a cattle track! Our tent remained intact, but the animals ate a sack of potatoes we had left outside under the awning!

In 2008, four of us enjoyed a post-Easter Meet on Mull, leading on from the Glenorchy Meet (notable for mountain rescue activities!). If we arrange future 'dauner-style' Spring Meets perhaps they may grow into something like the good old-style Easter Meets. Maybe other more senior members might wish to join in, although I fear that the excessive amount of five-star feeding which we enjoyed in Skye might well be a 'one off' - I won't quote the considerable cost of our gourmet meals! However, to adapt the words of a TV ad: "We're worth it"!