

SALT *of* SCOTLAND

Follow in the footsteps of a song and meander some of the old trade routes to discover mountains, murals and mammals

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: Carol Kubicki



Trip summary

OUR MOTORHOME

2015 Devon Tempest on a Renault Master MWB 2.3-litre Energy DCI. The Tempest is our second Devon Conversions. At 5.3m, we think it's enormous and, with a bathroom, also luxurious



2015 Devon Tempest



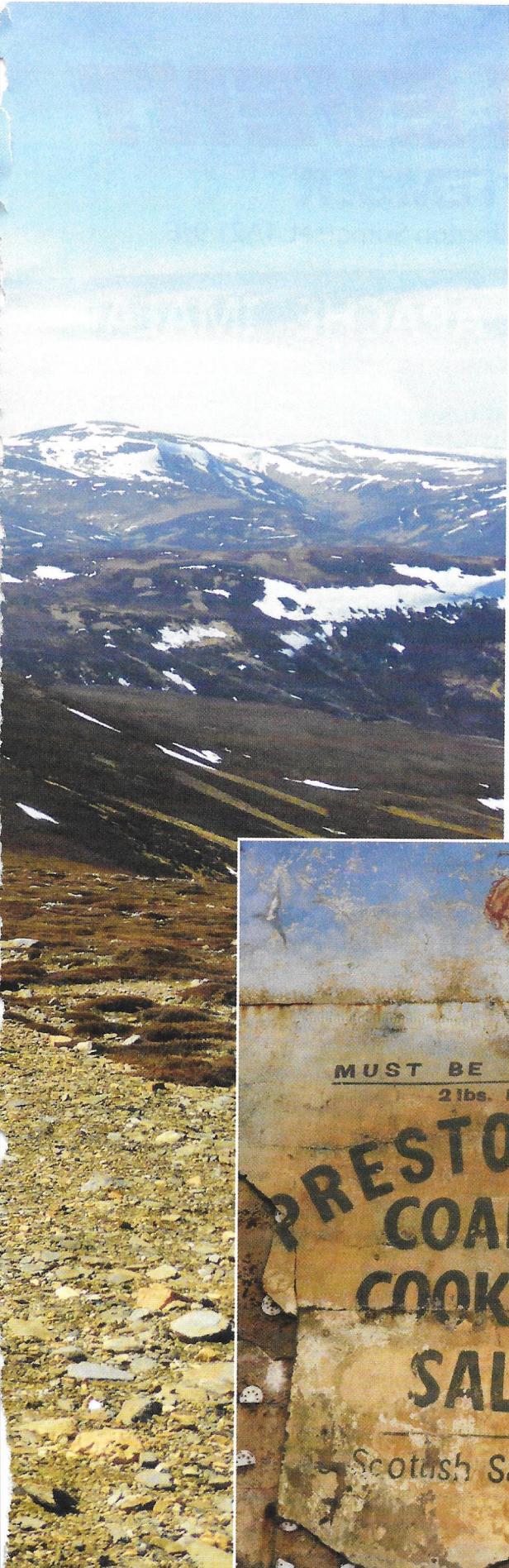
THE JOURNEY We travelled from **Salford** on the M6, A74(M) and the A702 and A720 to **Prestonpans**. We continued north over the **Forth Road Bridge** to **Perth** on the M90. We spent one night on site and five nights wild camping in April

THE COSTS

Fuel average 35mpg	£128
Site fees	£23.25
Entrance fees two adults: Montrose Basin Visitors' Centre	£8
	Total £159.25

852 miles

Total £159.25

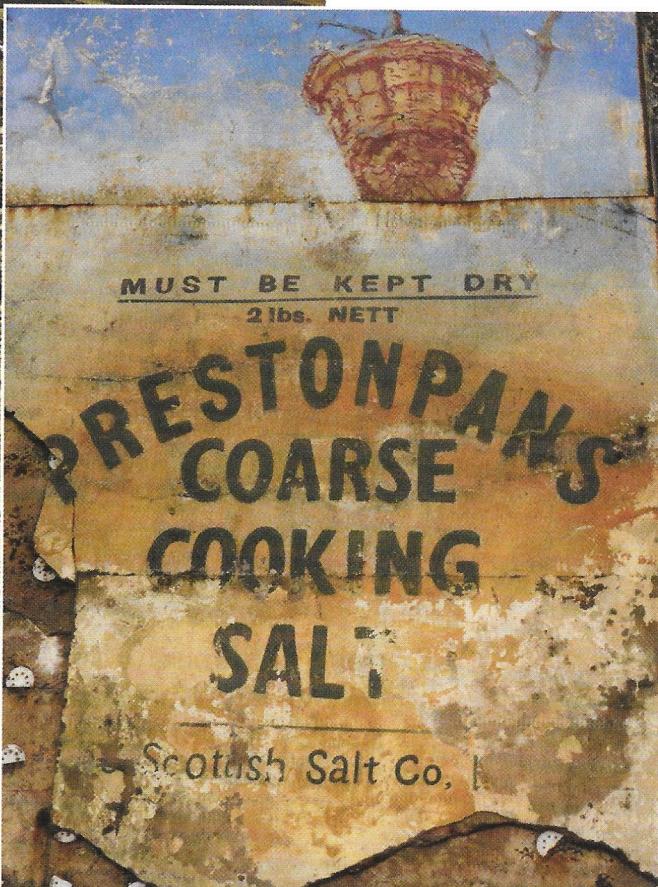


Carol Kubicki...

...and her partner, Anthony, use their Devon Tempest to pursue their hobbies of walking and cycling while exploring historical and natural environments

LEFT Descending from the summit of Morrone

BELOW Prestonpans Coarse Cooking Salt mural by Kate Hunter



It all started at a Karine Polwart gig – this wonderful Scottish folk singer performed her beautiful song, *Salter's Road*, referring to old trade routes from the village she lives in near Edinburgh to the coastal town of Prestonpans.

'For miles and miles she'd roam
Down Salter's Road to Fala Dam and all
the way home.'

This got me musing about salt and how valuable it used to be and wondering about its associations with Scotland. My long-time partner in travelling adventures, Anthony, knows that look in my eye and I soon had a trip around eastern Scotland planned.

We headed first for Beecraigs Country Park near Linlithgow and, after pitching up, we walked some of the park's tracks.

Beecraigs has a farm and we passed belted Galloways and Highland cattle before finding our way to the woodland lochan where we stopped to watch a pair of little grebes shrilling and a cormorant repeatedly diving. We followed the forest tracks, climbing Cockleroy with an excellent viewpoint over the Firth of the Forth. We could see Edinburgh, with Arthur's Seat bathed in the evening sunshine, as well as the road and railway bridges.

That evening, we spotted a badger from our 'van. This was timely as, only the day before, I had downloaded the first-rate Mammal Society app for recording sightings and was able to add my first observation.

There are many Salter's Roads in this part of Scotland, all associated with Prestonpans and the salt panning activity of local Cistercian monks. Salt was produced on the Forth shoreline at Prestonpans from the thirteenth century thanks to the availability of the easily mined coal.

The importance of this industry lives on in the name, adding 'pans' to the original village name of Preston. This refers to the large pans the seawater was heated in to produce the salt. By the fifteenth century there were 10 works in Prestonpans, producing salt for preserving food and for local glass and pottery industries. The last saltworks in Scotland was in Prestonpans and it closed in 1959.

Following our own Salter's Road to Prestonpans, we parked opposite the Edwardian pub, The Prestoungrange Gothenburg, and were immediately distracted with the abundance of waders and wildfowl on the shoreline of the Forth. We spotted merganser, velvet scoter and more familiar species. The view was tremendous; on our left, along the rocky shore, we could see the bulk of Arthur's ▶

TOP TIPS



Whitefield Castle can be reached by a three-mile circular route from Kirkmichael, following the track past Dalnagairn and continuing through the farmland

The Mammal Society's Mammal Tracker app is available for android and iPhones and allows you to record sightings in the field and help build up a comprehensive record mammal.org.uk

Seat in Edinburgh and, to our right, the soaring twin chimneys of the now-closed Cockenzie Power Station.

I had come here inspired by salt panning and a song, but found much more. Setting off to explore some of the town's colourful wall murals, we descended steps to the shore and the mural of the pioneering conservationist, John Muir, who was born in Dunbar. Along the seawalls, a series of striking murals show local industries. On the walls of the supermarket is one that tells the story of the salt-making process.

Away from the coast, this small town has even more attractions. Preston Tower was built as a home for the Hamilton family in the fifteenth century. The incongruous top two storeys were added when the family needed more space. The stone tower is set in pretty gardens with a restored dovecote.

The same family also erected the impressive Mercat (market) Cross after the town was granted permission to hold a weekly market in 1617. I've never seen a market cross so monumental, with a high

platform for making proclamations and a lower chamber for prisoners.

The Hamiltons eventually outgrew even the extended tower and moved to Hamilton House, a seventeenth century turreted house that is now owned by the National Trust for Scotland (not open to the public).

The Prestoungroane Gothenburg (aka The Goth) has many arts and crafts features and is the heart of the mural project; its restoration included a ceiling and wall murals. The building's run on the Gothenburg principle, whereby 95% of the profit is invested in local art projects.

With a good weather forecast and a meandering spirit, we headed north towards Perthshire to find a suitable spot for the night. We've found that, in Scotland, considerate wild camping is tolerated.

We were early enough, the next morning, to find space in the limited parking area at Moulin, on the edge of Pitlochry, to join the throngs walking up Ben Vrackie for the excellent view. This is a steep walk, particularly for those of us who haven't ➤



climbed a mountain for a few months.

From the 2,760ft (841m) summit, we were rewarded by breathtaking views of snow-covered peaks and the orientation table stopped us arguing about what we could see. Pitlochry was below us and the sinewy River Tummel threaded down the valley. Despite the sunshine, enough snow remained for a snowball fight before we sauntered back down for a thirst-quenching drink at the Moulin Inn.

The Cateran Trail is a 65-mile circular route between Blairgowrie and the Spittal of Glenshee that uses old drove roads and tracks. It's named after local cattle thieves who roamed here in the Middle Ages.

We planned a circular walk from the small village of Kirkmichael using part of this trail. The 1.86-mile section of the trail along the River Ardle to Enochdhu is a lovely, tranquil walk passing through fields and woodland.

We passed a picturesque loch, tripping over frogs in the spring sunshine and chatted to a stetson-wearing shepherd on a quad bike. We also spotted a red squirrel high in the trees – another one for the app.

If you visit Enochdhu between June and August, you could spend a few hours exploring Dirnanean Garden and

INFORMATION

For Salter's Road

 coast-alive.eu/content/salters-road

Prestonpans murals trail

 prestoungrange.org/arts-festival/html/murals/murals.html

Prestoungrange Gothenburg

 thegoth.co.uk

Cateran Trail

 caterantrail.org

Glenlivet Estate

 glenlivetestate.co.uk

Scalan Association

 scalan.co.uk

Montrose Basin Nature Reserve

 montrosebasin.org.uk

Montrose history and downloadable guides

 montrosesociety.co.uk

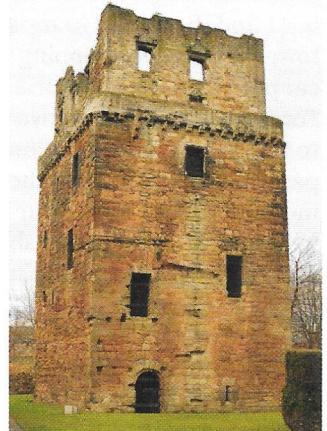
then return to Kirkmichael. Our route took us across the hilly moorland to the atmospheric ruin of Whitefield Castle. To the melancholy background tune of curlews, we watched a group of red deer and a pair of brown hares chasing across the fields – more mammal sightings to record.

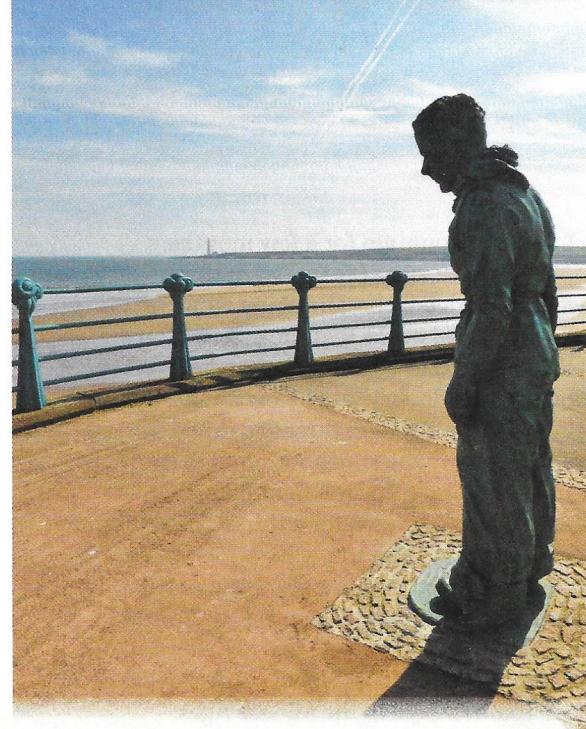
We drove into the Cairngorms National Park and, after an undisturbed night, headed to the Glenlivet Estate. This has more to offer than a whisky distillery; it's part of the Crown Estate and has many waymarked trails.

We turned off the B9008 for Scalan, where a small car park is the starting point for the 2.8 miles to Scalan Seminary. Set in an isolated position, but now open to visitors, this simple, two-storey building was home for young men training as Catholic priests during the eighteenth century. As I wandered around the rooms, catching glimpses of the heather-covered hills through tiny windows, I thought about the men living an austere and disciplined life in this remote spot.

Tomintoul and Dalwhinnie compete for the title of highest village in Scotland. Pretty Tomintoul certainly has the highest bowling green and, for a few pounds, you can pitch up on its car park for the night. Here, ➤

BELOW CLOCKWISE View from the summit of Ben Vrackie of Loch a'Choire; Preston Tower, Prestonpans; mural by Wei Luan, The Prestoungrange Gothenburg





WE STAYED AT

Beecraigs Country Park, nr Linlithgow, W Lothian EH49 6PL

01506 844516 beecraigs.com

All year £ Two adults, pitch and electric: £19.50



Glenlivet Estate (two areas where motorhomes can stay overnight)

01807 590207 (Glenlivet Village Hall CL) 01807 580201 (Tomintoul Bowling Club)

glenlivetestate.co.uk/accommodation-food/camping-caravans

All year £ Two adults, pitch and electric: £5

you'll find the Whisky Castle, which claims to stock over 500 bottles of malt!

The words 'spectacular geological formation' might not stir the hearts of all, but I find them hard to resist. So, we drove towards Delnabo, stopping at the small car park for Queen Victoria's Viewpoint. Forgoing the viewpoint, we walked down to the River Avon and followed the track past the lodge and up to the surrounding moorland. The spectacular sight we'd come to see was the staggering six-mile-long and 295ft (90m) deep Ailnack Gorge.

Once we had climbed high enough and left the Scots pines, we had views across the heather to the Cairngorm Mountains with the rugged silhouette of Ben Avon distinctive on the horizon. We left the track to look cautiously down the gorge's steep sides, magnificent in the evening sunshine.

Another sunny day encouraged more hill walking and we chose Morrone, a conical-shaped corbett above Braemar. Corbett is the categorisation of the smaller, but often just as challenging, cousins of munros in Scotland. Whereas munros are over 3,000ft (914m), the 221 corbets are between 2,500ft (762m) and 3,000ft.

Most walkers use the parking by the ponds at the top of Chapel Brae in Braemar but, as this has a height barrier, we used the village parking. The route was easy on

a good well-graded path; the views back to Braemar encouraging us to rest frequently.

The summit of Morrone offers a panorama over the Cairngorms and Lochnagar. We took in the surrounding mountains, their snowy tops brilliant against the blue sky, before descending on the track to the southwest to make a circular walk.

Our trip around this part of Scotland had been somewhat haphazard but, culturally, it came full circle when we discovered saltworks at Montrose Basin, a large tidal basin that provides food to over 50,000 birds during the winter. Below the visitor centre are former salt pans. Salt was important in Montrose to preserve the locally-caught salmon. Montrose town centre is set back from the sea and we wanted to drive to the beach. The main car park has a height barrier, but we were lucky enough to find a space in front of the café which sold excellent, local Rizza's ice cream.

Opposite the café is the thoughtful William Lamb sculpture of a life-sized minesweeper. Lamb was a local sculptor and Montrose has a trail of some of his work. The minesweeper commemorates the work of men who searched the dunes for stray mines during the war. I sat, enjoying my cornet, with a view across the sandy bay to Scurdie Ness Lighthouse. **mmm**

ABOVE CLOCKWISE Kate Hunter's mural of industrial activity of the harbour; *The Minesweeper* by William Lamb on the seafront at Montrose; salt making process painted by Kate Hunter

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