



Trip summary

OUR MOTORHOME

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



2015 Devon Tempest

THE JOURNEY We travelled to Kirkcudbright from our home in Salford in February along the M61, M6, A75 and A711, diverting to New Abbey via the A710. We spent three nights on sites

THE COSTS

Fuel average 35mpg.....	£55
Site fees	£52
Attractions Two adults: Sweetheart Abbey, Caerlaverock Wetland Centre, Caerlaverock Castle	£34.52

390 miles

Total £141.52

Bonnie Scotland

BLOWN AWAY BY THE COAST

After some sea air? Visit Dumfries and Galloway for an invigorating experience!

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: Carol Kubicki



Carol Kubicki...

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

Often in Scotland I find myself in places with names I can't pronounce. The harbour town of Kirkcudbright on the Solway coast in Dumfries and Galloway looks straightforward enough to say out loud. However, when I tried to tell the staff at Sweetheart Abbey where we were heading to next, she quickly corrected me and said something like 'Kir-coo-bree'!

We were visiting Dumfries and Galloway in the last throes of winter – or early spring, depending upon your outlook. This meant that we had the impressive red sandstone ruin of Sweetheart Abbey to ourselves as the rain was coming down in stair rods even 'inside' the mostly roofless abbey.

These heavy showers blew straight off the Solway Firth and were just as quickly gone, followed by sunshine and a rainbow. We felt as if it was winter and spring in the same hour, never mind the same day. Hoping for a few days' fresh sea air to drive away the stress of working life, in the heavy showers our tensions weren't so much blown away as drowned.

Our previous visit to Sweetheart Abbey, in the pretty village of New Abbe, just south of Dumfries, had involved sweltering weather and ice creams. This visit was a different, but no less enjoyable, experience – although I did wish a bit more roof had been left as my husband, Anthony, and I sheltered next to the stone effigy of Lady Dervorgilla.

Surely, you can't get a more romantic name than Sweetheart Abbey and it was constructed as a shrine to love. It was founded as an abbey in 1273 by Lady Dervorgilla, now immortalised in stone, as a memorial to her much-loved husband, John Balliol. ►



Rock pools at Brighthouse Bay

“We ambled along the beach, crunching over shells and clambering over boulders”



BELOW LEFT Looking over Brighthouse Bay Holiday Park

BELOW RIGHT Sweetheart Abbey in New Abbey



In her mourning she carried his embalmed heart everywhere in an ivory casket and was laid to rest still clutching it. I pondered if this would be allowed in the twenty first century.

We pitched our 'van at Brighthouse Bay Holiday Park, south of Kirkcudbright so that we could explore the beautiful coast.

We followed a 4.35-mile walk from the beach car park to Graplin Plantation, although you can join this path from various points around the campsite. The trees sheltered us from the strong wind and we spotted some bullfinches pottering around the bushes. Groups of snowdrops lulled us into thoughts of spring. Numerous paths leading down to the stunning rocky bay distracted me and I did a spot of beach-combing for driftwood and pebbles, while Anthony watched curlews feeding along the tidal edge.


Once out of the woods, we were on grassland dotted with pools. This area is protected for its wild flowers and in summer there would be lots of colour.

We turned the corner, leaving the shelter of Brighthouse Bay, and the full force of the wind hit us. Just walking upright became a challenge. I became a similar shape to the hunched hawthorn and gorse bushes that are the tallest things that grow along this exposed stretch of coast.

The spectacle of the waves crashing onto


INFORMATION

Caerlaverock Castle and Sweetheart Abbey

 historic-scotland.gov.uk/places



Caerlaverock Wetland Centre (Wildfowl and Wetland Trust)


 wwt.org.uk/wetland-centres/caerlaverock




Broughton House, Kirkcudbright

 nts.org.uk/Property/Broughton-House-and-Garden

Rockcliffe and Mote of Mark

 nts.org.uk/Property/Rockcliffe

Annan Shore Walk

 annanshore.org.uk

the rocks made up for the cold and, even on the cliff path, we were wet from the spray. It was exhilarating!

Near Borneess Point we turned right and followed the obvious path inland, relieved to be out of the worst of the wind. We could have made it a shorter walk of just over three miles by turning right by a pond and an empty cottage and following a track through the farm and back to the campsite. We were happy to continue past Cairniehill Loch, full of large spiky bulrushes and on to the final stretch of easy walking along country lanes.

However you pronounce it, Kirkcudbright is a charming and attractive town with a harbour and some fine buildings.

From around the middle of the nineteenth century to the present day, artists have found Kirkcudbright a good place to work for the light and landscapes and for the company of other artists. There are many galleries and museums where you can view the work of local artists from the past and present.

As we took our 'van we were rewarded with an exciting close encounter with a sparrowhawk on the lanes along the bay. It had to swerve to avoid us and was so close that its distinctive markings were clear as it flew alongside.

I was keen to visit the garden of Broughton House, a smart Georgian ►

townhouse in Kirkcudbright that had been the home of artist Edward Hornel. The sheltered walled garden is free early in the year and so I had low expectations about what there would be to see.

It was, therefore, a pleasant surprise to find a beautifully laid out garden with Japanese influences and an abundance of colourful snowdrops, celandine, hellebore in different colours and tiny dwarf irises. As well as rugged stone troughs and charming sculptures, there were flowering pelargoniums in the greenhouse. The National Trust for Scotland has recreated a glorious place to wander here and we were lucky to have it to ourselves.

We drove east along the coast of the Solway Firth to Rockcliffe, a pretty village about seven miles south of Dalbeattie on a sheltered bay in Rough Firth. The coast here is an attractive mixture of woodland, heather-topped rocky outcrops and a beach deep with cockle shells. This beach is dotted with granite boulders and had plenty of rock pools to explore.


We had hoped to walk across to Rough Island, which is accessible at low tide, but the strong winds had brought in some high tides. Even a few hours after low tide, it would have been a paddle to get there. Instead, we ambled along the beach, crunching over the shells and clambering over boulders, buffeted by the wind.

It was more sheltered on the wooded

TOP TIP



If you want to walk across to Rough Island, you'll need the tide timetables. These are available from

 bbc.co.uk/weather/coast_and_sea/tide_tables

hillside and we warmed up climbing up to the Mote of Mark. During a sunny spell, this high point provided a splendid viewpoint over Rough Firth. From here, I could follow the line of the route to the small island.

Caerlaverock is another difficult word to say and spell. Its meaning is disputed, although some think it means fort of the lark. With its moat, twin-towered gatehouse and interesting triangular shape, Caerlaverock Castle is the epitome of a medieval castle. It's worth a visit as just crossing the moat is exciting.

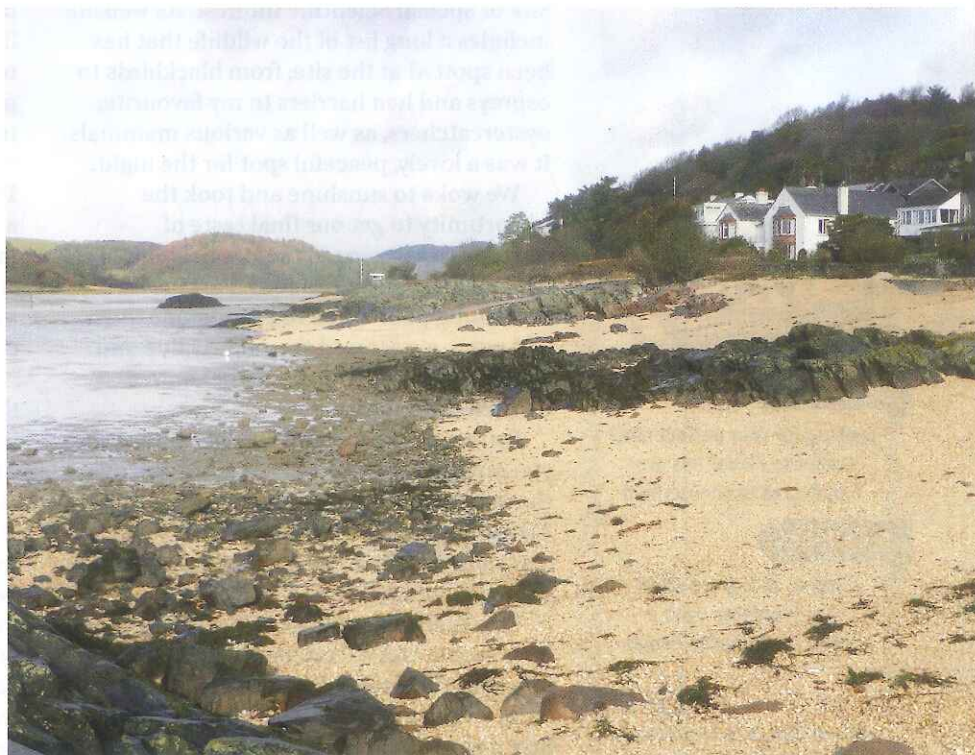
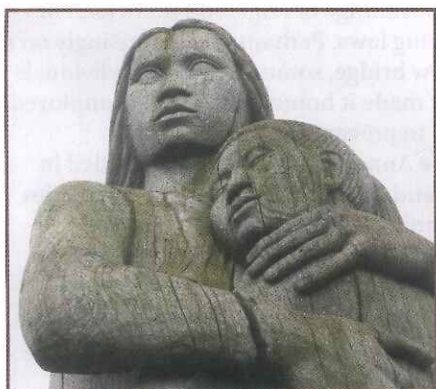
No one seems to know why the Maxwell clan built it in a triangular shape, rather than a square or rectangle. The castle was besieged many times; the last time in 1640 when the Protestant Covenanter army attacked Caerlaverock for 13 weeks because the Maxwell clan were Catholic.

The Caerlaverock National Nature Reserve comprises the mudflats and salt marshes around the castle and out to the Solway Firth. We visited the Caerlaverock Wetland Centre managed by the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust and ran from the different hides between hail showers.

We arrived at the Peter Scott hide at feeding time. Beautiful whooper swans, smart black and white tufted ducks and wigeon, with their distinctive musical whistle, jostled over the bird food.

The Saltcote merse observatory takes visitors right out to the flat tidal expanse ➤

BELOW CLOCKWISE Rough Firth, near Rockcliffe; colourful house in Kirkcudbright; sculpture in Kirkcudbright harbour dedicated to those lost at sea





ABOVE LEFT Annan Merse and the Solway Firth

ABOVE RIGHT Rockcliffe village and shore

WE STAYED AT

Brighthouse Bay Holiday Park,
Borgue, Kirkcudbright DG6 4TS



☎ 01557 870267 🌐 gillespie-leisure.co.uk

📅 All year

£ Two adults, pitch and electric: From £19.50

Broom Fisheries Camping and Caravanning Club CL, Broom Farm Estate, Newbie, Annan DG12 5PF

☎ 07749 426980/01461 700386

🌐 broomfisheries.co.uk 📅 All year

£ Two adults, pitch and electric: From £15



of the merse, the local name for salt marsh. From here we could watch a large group of the barnacle geese feeding. As the next hailstorm came in the geese rose together and wheeled through the sky and out to sea.

Broom Fisheries is a small Camping and Caravanning Club certificated location that we were attracted to because it is set in a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Its website includes a long list of the wildlife that has been spotted at the site; from blackbirds to ospreys and hen harriers to my favourite, oystercatchers, as well as various mammals. It was a lovely, peaceful spot for the night.

We woke to sunshine and took the opportunity to get our final taste of restorative salty sea air before heading back to land-locked Salford. Parking by the swimming pool in the red sandstone town of Annan, we crossed the railway line and turned left then left again to get onto a disused railway line.

Following the ramrod straight track takes you out onto the merse at Whinny Rig on the Solway Firth. It was from here that the Annan Viaduct crossed the Solway; built to carry iron ore from the mines in Cumbria to those in Lanarkshire.

This was a massive structure and a remarkable feat of engineering, 5,850ft long and 193 iron pillars, each nearly 33ft high. Scottish novelist and poet, Sir Walter Scott, wrote: "He that dreams on the bed of

The Solway may wake in the next world..." describing the dangers of the swift-rising tide across the estuary. It was the danger of falling off the bridge that became a problem after the railway line closed in 1921.

I recounted the tale to Anthony of thirsty Scots who would use the viaduct on Sundays to cross into Cumbria on foot to take advantage of England's more lenient licensing laws. Perhaps not surprisingly on a narrow bridge, some inebriated individuals never made it home. A guard was employed to try to prevent these fatal trips.

The Annan Viaduct was dismantled in 1934 and the old railway line now provides a stunning elevated position over the merse. We sat in the sunshine watching curlews and redshanks on the mud and tufted ducks, a heron, wigeon and a diving cormorant on the water.

We tore ourselves away and followed the line of the flood bank, with the merse to our left and farmland and Annan to our right. After the high tides and winds of the last few days, the flood bank was cluttered with seaweed, shells, driftwood and litter from the sea and the going was rough. We decided not to carry on to Waterfoot and the port of Annan, where emigrants left on boats for America, but to follow the lanes back to the 'van. All the fresh sea air had worked its magic and we were relaxed as we headed home. **MEMO**



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