



Looking along Loch Leven to the distinctive pimple of the Pap of Glencoe



Bonnie **Scotland**

Explore lovely Lorn – the Highlands in miniature

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: Carol Kubicki



Trip summary

OUR MOTORHOME

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



THE JOURNEY

We travelled from Greater Manchester via the M6/M74 and A82 along Loch Lomond, returning on the A85/A84 through Callander then the M9/M80/M74 and M6. We spent five days exploring in November; one night with hook-up, one night at Highland Arts and two nights wild camping

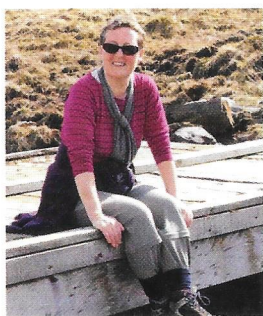
THE COSTS

Fuel average 34mpg.....	£111
Site fees.....	£29.90
Attractions two adults: Dunstaffnage Castle and Glencoe and North Lorn Folk Museum.....	£17

2015 Devon Tempest

710 miles

Total £157.90



Carol Kubicki...

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

Turning onto the single track road and peaceful idyll of Glen Orchy just beyond Tyndrum, I gazed around the achingly beautiful landscape and wondered why, in 30 years of visiting Scotland, I had never explored this valley.

Mist lingered along the river bordered by autumnal russet trees. Although it hadn't rained, everything dripped with dew.

At the Eas Urchaidh waterfall, I leaned over the bridge admiring the white water and was joined by a man from the northeast. I remarked on the splendour and he agreed it was a "fine river" with the confidence of a man who understood water.

We followed the upward track to find a hidden remnant of the Caledonian forest among the Forestry Commission plantations. I found mushrooms along the way and spiderwebs strung between branches, each drizzled in dew drops like diamonds. The atmospheric Allt Broighleachan pinewood laid bare the truth that plantation spruce is no match for the magnificent beauty of native Scots pine.

My memories of trips to Scotland are

precious things that I cherish. Sometimes I fool myself that I have seen it all, yet this autumn trip showed Scotland still has plenty of hidden treasures to discover.

We were exploring the ancient area of Lorn (aka Lorne), part of Argyll and Bute and packed with majestic mountains, long sea lochs, craggy coast, easy-to-access islands, plenty of castles and wild Rannoch Moor: a sort of Highlands in miniature.

We had crossed the 'Highland Line' at Tyndrum the day before. Remembering that we needed LPG, we were disconcerted to find that the petrol station didn't stock it. We hoped that there was enough in our Gaslow cylinder and found a perfect overnight stop in the splendour of Glen Lochy, arriving in time to enjoy a walk along the river in the evening sun.

Glen Orchy had put us in the mood to dawdle and so, despite many previous trips along the A85, this was the first time we stopped at St Conan's Kirk on Loch Awe. What a treat we had been missing!

This complex and unusual church, dedicated to the patron saint of Lorn, enjoys

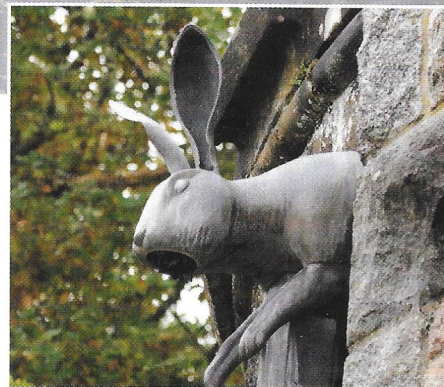


“Mist **lingered** along
the river bordered by
autumnal russet trees”

ABOVE Reflections of the Pap of Glencoe in Glencoe Lochan

RIGHT The small ferry from Ellenabeich to Easdale; the crafted hare gargyle on St Conan's Kirk

ABOVE FAR LEFT A bird's eye view of the village of Ellenabeich on Seil



a sweeping view over Loch Awe. The church is not as old as one might think; building began in 1907 by Walter Campbell who lived on a Loch Awe island with his family. His mother found the long drive to the church in Dalmally exhausting, so he decided to build one nearer.

Entering the church through the cloisters, I walked straight through to take in the panoramic view across the loch. My husband, Anthony, pointed out the playful leadwork hare gargyle on the outside of the building. I walked the ambulatory; stylish, tall windows to one side with the exquisite, semi-circular apse to the other.

We failed to find any LPG in Oban, so carried on to Seil with our fingers crossed. Seil Island is joined to the mainland by the handsome eighteenth century Clachan Bridge over a narrow channel, popularly known as the Bridge over the Atlantic.

On the more rugged Atlantic edge of Seil is the village of Ellenabeich, with Easdale Island across the channel. Seil, Easdale and nearby Luing were known as the slate islands that roofed the world and this

industry has shaped the landscape.

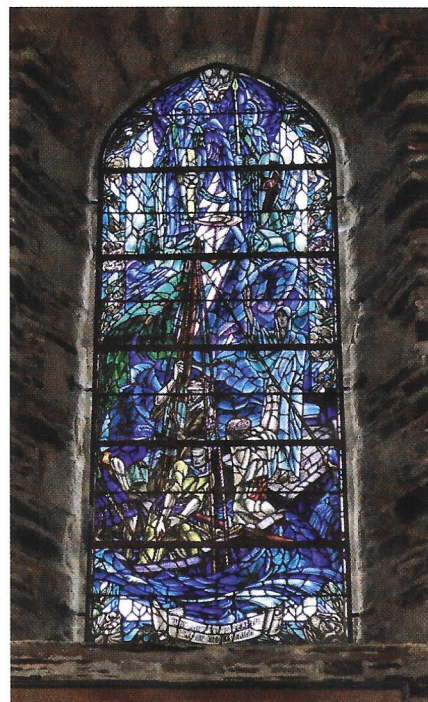
We had time to visit the Scottish Slate Islands Heritage Centre in the row of charming white cottages. With few visitors at this time of year, the volunteer was happy to leave her knitting and chat about the practicalities of life on Seil. I found the displays about the slate industry interesting and I also spotted photographs of some stunning stained glass windows that we got instructions for finding the next day.

With a leaflet from the museum, we followed a walk around the village to learn more about how the slate industry forged the geography.

Examining what appears to be a bay, we could make out the line of the sea wall for the former quarry, which was breached in an autumn storm in 1881, flooding the quarry and making 240 workers redundant.

On the pier we watched the small ferry shuttling back and forth to Easdale before taking the steep path up the hillside to appreciate the bird's-eye view over the village and the Firth of Lorn. The pattern of the cottage terraces is clear from here and ►

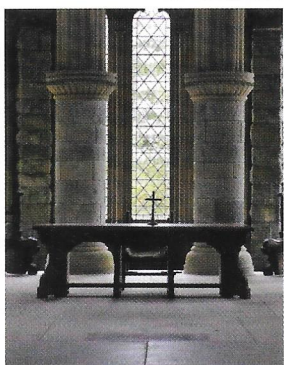




ABOVE LEFT Victoria Bridge near Bridge of Orchy


ABOVE RIGHT The vibrant colours of Kilbrandon Church's stained glass windows in Seil

TOP TIPS



For **Kilbrandon Church**, there is parking in a layby and a car park next to the church up the sloped drive (not available Sunday mornings)

The **Walk Highlands** website has instructions, maps and photographs for many low-level as well as mountain walks

 walkhighlands.co.uk

we gazed across the sea to the bigger islands of Jura and Mull. We finished our walk in the comfortable Oyster Bar with a pint of local ale before retiring to our night stop on the car park of the Highland Arts Exhibition.

Kilbrandon Church was worth the detour, another hidden gem that gives nothing away from outside. Step inside and the five strikingly colourful stained glass windows take your breath away.

Given to the church in 1938, the windows are the work of Douglas Strachan, an influential twentieth century stained glass artist who left the world around 340 windows, from St Magnus' Cathedral on the Orkney Islands to The Peace Palace in The Netherlands. The colours of the windows are deep and vibrant and the design harmonious. Here are many images relating to the sea; I could pick out the muscles on the arms of the fishermen hauling up nets in the storm and the charming design of an ark illuminated by the sun.

Back on the mainland, we stopped for morning coffee overlooking Loch Feochan. Another 'van had wild camped in the layby and the owner appeared in his pyjamas while Anthony watched the pochards bobbing on the loch. Looking up I spotted a huge bird circling in the sky; this golden eagle seemed to survey the entire loch before disappearing over the hills.

We meandered up the coast road, stopping at Dunstaffnage Castle, one of Scotland's oldest castles that guards the Firth of Lorn and is still an impressive

defensive building. The highlight is walking the battlements and enjoying the views over the rocky peninsular, the harbour and beyond Connel Bridge to the mountains.

Further north, we left the main road to find the sheltered village of Port Appin and what was once a sea arch leaning against the cliffs, now high and dry as sea levels have changed since the last ice age.

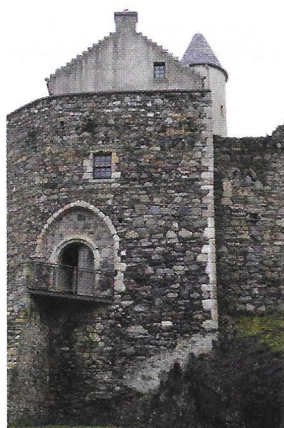
With an almost empty cylinder, we finally found LPG in Onich before pulling into Bunree C&M Club site; its stunning location is impossible to resist. Here, we sat on a bench drinking tea and enjoying the view across the stillness of Loch Linnhe.

The next morning, with rain forecast, we opted for a sheltered walk and the Forestry Commission's Glencoe Lochan proved to be another hidden treasure. This lovely woodland and lochan were created over 100 years ago by Donald Smith (later Lord Strathcona) for his wife who was homesick for her native North American forests.




Donald met his wife, Isabella, when he was working in Labrador; she came to live on the Glencoe estate and Donald planted this forest of redwoods with love. Unfortunately, the woodland didn't help Isabella settle, but I was enchanted by both the story and the magnificent trees and picturesque and otherworldly lochan.

In Glencoe village we visited the folk museum, a splendid example of a community museum full of local stories. My favourite tale was of the miller's wife whose son, a sailor, sent his mother the first tea ➤

INFORMATION



Dunstaffnage Castle and Chapel

-  historiconvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/dunstaffnage-castle-and-chapel
-  glencoe-museum.com
-  ice-factor.co.uk
-  stconanskirk.org.uk
-  slateislands.org.uk

ABOVE Dunstaffnage Castle's defensive walls are still intact

BELOW LEFT Dawn light over the mountains of Glencoe

BELOW RIGHT The beauty of the stonework and heather that at the Glencoe and North Lorn Folk Museum

leaves to reach Glencoe with instructions on how to make tea. The miller's wife followed these instructions, strained the tea and then threw away the liquid and put the tea leaves between a slice of bread and butter!

The road along the banks of Loch Leven took us to Kinlochleven, tucked away at the head of the loch. Although the aluminium processing works closed in the 1990s, the associated hydro-electric plant is still operating here.

Water is channelled to the generating station in Kinlochleven from Blackwater Reservoir high in the mountains down six huge parallel pipes.

Standing in the rain, overlooking the village and the loch and surrounded by woodland in autumn colours, we talked about the navvies who had built the dam and pipeline. If you follow the pipeline along its length of over four miles, you will find a graveyard to these workers, many of them in unnamed graves.

Back in the village, we dried off in the handsome former aluminium smelter building, which is now an ice climbing centre. It was buzzing and we sat with hot chocolate in the café watching lithe climbers on the routes. We left with a couple of bottles of the River Leven Ales that are brewed in another of the old industrial buildings here; another lucky find for those of us who love dark, malty beer.

It was beyond dusk as we pulled into our overnight stop in Glencoe and, in the morning, the rain had moved on, the sky


was clear and the mountains were glowing in the dawn light.

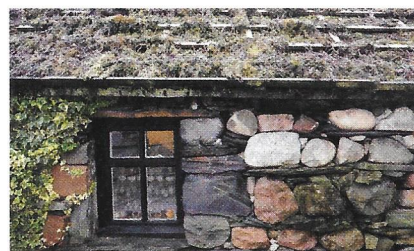
We drove back to Loch Leven to gaze at the views that had been hidden by cloud the day before. The sun created a spectacle I felt privileged to witness. In the crystal-clear air every crease and bump of the Ardgor mountains across Loch Linnhe were highlighted, creating an otherworldly scene.

We followed the road south through Glencoe, joining other photographers near Loch Bà on Rannoch Moor to take in the views of this vast, wild, boggy moorland and reminisced about our youthful backpacking holiday when we spent an unforgettable day hopping over the bogs on this remote and featureless landscape.

Reluctant to leave, we drove on to the picturesque Victoria Bridge along the single-track road from Bridge of Orchy to walk along our favourite section of the West Highland Way which follows part of Telford's early nineteenth century Parliamentary Road.

After taking in the views over Loch Tulla and Rannoch Moor, we followed the valley track towards Loch Dochard along the beautiful river. Sitting by the river, we spotted the antlers of a red deer emerging from the soft-russet long grass. The deer watched us guardedly.


The sun would soon be setting and it was time to head home. As we left the Highlands, I counted up the new treasures we had found in this beautiful area of Lorn and stashed the memories safely away. 




WE STAYED AT

Highland Arts Exhibition, Ellenabeich, Isle of Seil, Argyll PA34 4RQ


 01852 300273  highlandarts.co.uk


 All year

 Two adults and pitch: £10 (no electric)

Bunree C&M Club Site, Onich PH33 6SE

 01855 821283  caravanclub.co.uk

 17 March – 6 November

 Two adults, pitch and electric: from £20.60