



The Trossachs Trip



Scottish Expo - October 2018





The Trossachs Trip 2018

With Southend Airport on his doorstep, Mike's idea of a jet setting expo was floated among expo members to see if it was just a flight of fancy or would it just be a pie in the sky. Initial suggestions of Manchester airport as a destination point for going to the Lake District did not seem to carry favour – there would still be a couple of hours car journey from Manchester to the Lakes. Another alternative destination suggestion was Carlisle but this airport turned out to be not quite ready for Expo customers just yet. According to one disgruntled potential customer ...

"I think Eddie Stobart have lost the plot. Why take on an airport with no transport links? There are no bus or rail links, no car hire facilities to Carlisle airport so you either walk or have to take a taxi. Seems like a good business plan...not."

Then some bright spark came up with a suggestion which was akin to solving the Northern Ireland border problem:

"How about Glasgow? Just south of Loch Lomond. It seems like an opportunity for a Scottish Expo to benefit from flying."

	07:30	—	08:50	1h 20m	£60 Gotogate
Flybe	SEN	non-stop	GLA		
	20:35	—	21:55	1h 20m	£60 Gotogate
Flybe	GLA	non-stop	SEN		
£60 Gotogate	£63 Opodo	Add a hotel with Expedia		View Deal	8 more ▾

The suggestion was met with immediate and unanimous approval:

"Aha! An alternative alternative! I agree with Andy's comment that it would be a better use of the expense of flying. It gets my vote." - S Webb

"The Trossachs (Ben Venue, Ben A'an), Ben Lomond, Ben Arthur. We could stay in the guest house we used on the bike ride." - R Lawrence

"Liking the sound of Scotland (accompanied by euphoric emojis)" - M Bryant 😊

"Don't forget we need another room to move the mattress into....." - M Mapleson (you will need to have read the previous edition, the Stonehenge Expo¹ to appreciate this comment).

¹ http://www.expo99a.co.uk/expo/2018_Stonehenge.pdf



The decision and all associated ancillary arrangements were soon made with only a remarkably long hot summer between us and our first Scottish hill walking Expo. Note that Roger's recollections above were recalling a previous cycling Expo in 1998 (Glasgow to Inverness)² some twenty years ago! – indicating that at least his long term memory was still intact.

Some Expo members were so excited that they decided they would stop on for another couple of days in sunny Scotland. This would be accommodated by a travel split incorporating two hire cars thus enabling independent travel arrangements for the two groups – (are you keeping up with this Mother?).

The long anticipated day of departure arrived. It was another pre-dawn Expo beginning and I tip-toed mouse-like downstairs. Maybe it should not have been mouse-like as I was trying very hard not to wake up Maisie our slumbering cat. If she thought someone was getting up then she would be meowing loudly for her breakfast two hours prematurely. Somehow I managed to sneak out the back door without waking anybody ... or any cat.

Not much traffic at 5:00 am meant that I was at Roger's in plenty of time to cloak the Brown mobile in Roger's drive and wait patiently for the planned rendezvous at 5:45 am.

Steve arrived right on time and we were soon heading down Wick Lane and then along Southend Road toward ... Southend. Luckily Steve asked Roger the usually unnecessary question:

"Have you remembered your photo ID?"

Roger shifted uneasily in his seat "Er ... no"

Luckily Southend Road is an alternative route to Roger's house by turning into Rectory Grove (before getting to Southend). We were soon back at 1 Glebe Road and a few seconds later we were on our way (this time with Roger's passport grasped firmly in his hand) down Wick Lane (again) - the identity crisis had been averted.

We arrived at Southend Airport in plenty of time; the car park is conveniently located right next to the terminal building. At this point, for some reason Roger left his house keys in Steve's car. Maybe like Mother he was not quite keeping up with the travelling arrangements (just to recap, he was in the long stay expo group and would be returning to Wickford on a later day by alternative transport (i. e. not in Steve's car)).

² http://www.expo99a.co.uk/expo/1998_glasgow2inv.pdf



We found Mike and Mick loitering near the luggage check-in. All but one of us had decided they could not squeeze their luggage requirements into the 10 kg limit for on-board hand baggage. By wearing a shirt, jumper, sweat shirt, fleece and walking boots I had managed to squeak in at 9.75 kg. You would not catch me paying the extra £22 each way for hold luggage!

Roger had reminded me that I needed to display any liquids in a clear bag for security check at the airport. Given this evidence we were surprised that Roger was then stopped at security when his water bottle showed up in the x-ray machine. He was pulled to one side and had to empty out his carefully packed ruck-sack and the contents of the water bottle (i.e. water – with no traces of Trinitrotoluene) before being allowed through to the departure area.

*Despite everything – we made it onto the scheduled Flybe flight bound for Glasgow – nothing could stop us now! **What about the fog?** No, not even fog! These pilots can fly these jets with their eyes closed. **What about the sophisticated navigation and aircraft sensor equipment?** Oh yes they need that too!*

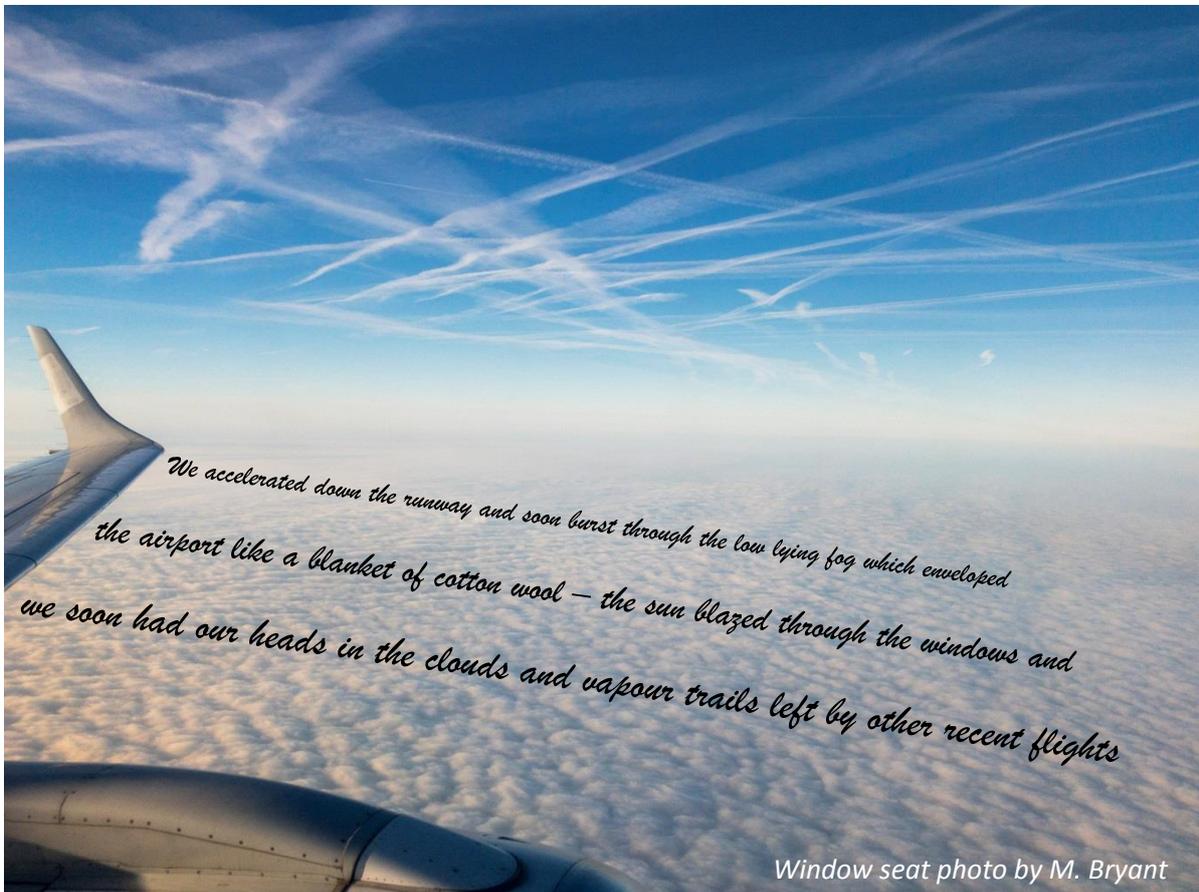


Mick manages a nappette while waiting to board an Embraer 195 flight BE6162 to Glasgow



A fairly foggy Flybe flight

We put our trust in the advanced aviation equipment supplied with this economy flight and hoped that they had not compromised any safety features for the sake of a few pound's profit. It was too late to worry about that now. The seats were reallocated as we boarded and I soon found that my seat was already occupied. Luckily there seemed to be some spare capacity and I was ushered to another seat by a helpful stewardess.



We accelerated down the runway and soon burst through the low lying fog which enveloped the airport like a blanket of cotton wool – the sun blazed through the windows and we soon had our heads in the clouds and vapour trails left by other recent flights

Window seat photo by M. Bryant



DAY ONE (Friday 5th October 2018)

5 head for Scotland – Ben A'an (3.9 miles)

We arrived on schedule at Glasgow Airport and once the hold baggage had been reclaimed by everyone (except me of course) we made our way to the car rental building to collect the two hire cars. Under the direction of the confident sounding lady from the Google maps Sat-Nav app, we headed off to a car park in the Trossachs for the start of the day's walk to Ben A'an. On the way Steve and I stopped at Loch Achray to take in a nice view of the Trossachs Hotel.



Tigh Mor Trossachs, formerly the Trossachs Hotel on Loch Achray

We continued on the short journey to the car park meeting point. Mike, Mick and Roger arrived and it was time for some last minute adjustments to walking gear. In particular Roger's walking pole was in need of assembly and he spent a while grappling with the ends in an attempt to reconstruct a fully functional stick.



*Roger McLawrence sorting out his walking stick – **ahem, excuse me, but this is the most unflattering pose I think we've ever had – you could at least ask him to smile at the camera – on second thoughts perhaps not -we'll just leave the reader to add their own caption***

A band of rain that had threatened to arrive in Scotland had ebbed southwards leaving some glorious weather for the Expo crowd to enjoy. Tranquil lakes were soon being viewed through focused camera lenses – soaking up the landscape reflections in the glassy water surfaces of Loch Achray.



Queueing up at Lakeside



Reflecting on Loch Achray



*Is it Bill or is it Ben or is it Gandalf? No, it's Roger McLawrence
... striding up steps from the bonnie bonnie banks of Loch Achry*



Route to Ben A'an

The path from the lake led us up toward Ben A'an; the blazing sun on our backs soon caused the walkers to peel off layers of clothing. I had already taken off one redundant layer worn to save weight on the flight. It felt more like a summer's day than late autumn. And it was only 11 am – the one hour twenty minute flight from Southend meant that we could fit in a full day's walking (the 420 mile trip would otherwise take 7 hours by car).

Our destination, the distinctive shape of the 'pointed peak' Ben A'an loomed in the distance. This Trossachs summit (relatively low at 461m or 1512 feet) has splendid views overlooking Loch Katrine and Ben Venue.



Welcome to sunny Scotland



Ben A'an beckons



Mike (Been-On-Ben-A'an) Bryant surveys Loch Katrine



Enjoying the views from Ben A'an



No lunch break for Mike's camera

After lunch we left Ben A'an behind and descended steep wooded slopes towards Loch Katrine. This was quite hard work for me as my hip started to complain about the strain. The path eventually joined a road next to Loch Katrine which in turn led to Katrine café where we stopped for a coffee break.



On the way down



A British Islet

And so it was time to head off and book into Callander Hostel.



Callander Hostel – the not-quite-five-star accommodation



We had advance notice that the Hostel heating had packed up, but apart from this and the door handle hanging off our bathroom door and the late breakfast the following morning – it was very comfortable, particularly as Steve and I were in a separate twin room and would not need to endure the nocturnal noise emanating from the other three slumbering snorers.

Fortunately the heating problem at the Youth Hostel did not extend to the showers which were on electric heaters. Also, electric fan heaters had been supplied in the bed rooms to ward of hypothermia.

Sleep for me would not be a problem – I had hardly slept the night before and with a long day of travel and walking followed by a couple of beers listening to Reece Hillis singing at the Riverside Inn - my body immediately shut down completely and was oblivious to the rest of the world.



View from the bridge near the Hostel



DAY TWO (Saturday 6th October 2018)

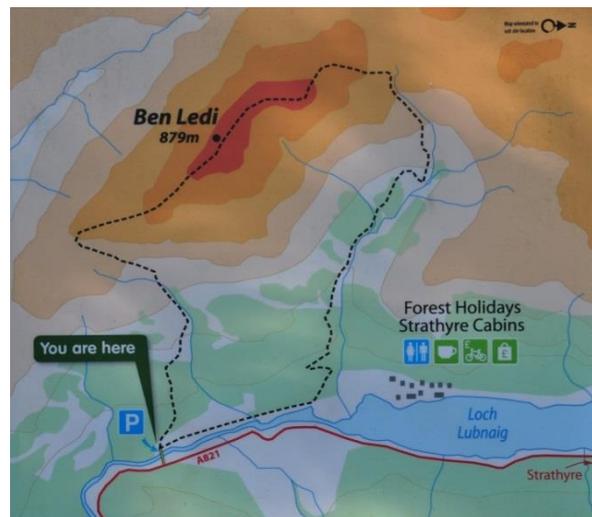
Ben Ledi (7.8 miles)

The fine weather was holding up for a second day. After a good night's sleep in the Brown & Webb suite and a less good night's sleep in the Lawrence-Bryant-Mapleson quarters (apparently Roger became frozen after insisting on sleeping next to an open window – it was either that or suffer the possible effects of obnoxious fume inhalation) it was decided that the next peak to be conquered would be Ben Ledi. We all trooped down to the Hostel's café which was advertised as opening at 8:00 am. We were greeted by a cold and empty café – the cook had not turned up. Just as we were beginning to think of making alternative arrangements the Hostel lady arrived and offered to take our orders.

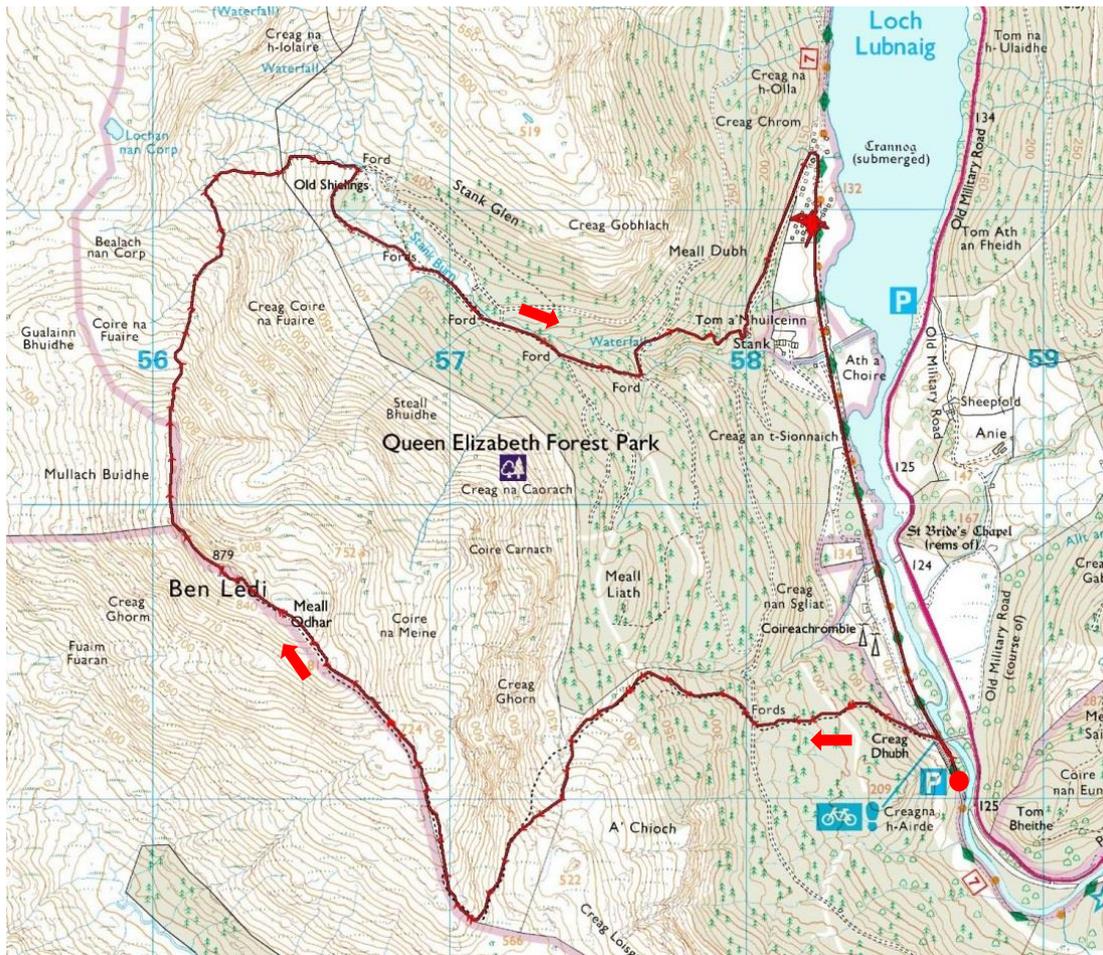
Fortified with agreeable breakfasts, we set out in search of more Scottish scenery. We eventually found a free parking space. Route master Rog was having trouble locking on to GPS satellites needed for his Sat-Nav. With his unbelievable vision he was able to locate a spare one and we were then ready for Ben Ledi.



Roger – looking for those elusive GPS satellites



Roger (shades) Lawrence and Andy (where-are-we?) Brown: You are here



Route to Ben Ledi



Not a cloud in the sky – got the sun in my eye and I won't be surprised if it's a dream



Look! Loch Lubnaig literation



Look! There's that strange man with the sunglasses following us again – always getting in our photos



Bein' led to Ben Ledi



Ben Ledi summit

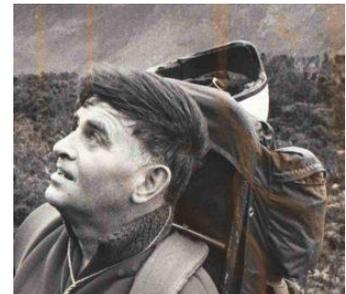
Memorial to "Sgt Harry Lawrie B.E.M. [British Empire Medal]. Killed on duty with Killin Mountain Rescue Team Feb 1st 1987 - I love the hills – Erected by his family and team members"

Adapted from a BBC News Report dated Feb 2012, 25 years after the event:

On the day of the accident, the Killin team had been called out to recover the body of a climber who had collapsed near Inverlochlarig. They were then diverted to Ben More to help a woman who had apparently slipped on the steep northern slopes of the snow-covered Munro. A Wessex helicopter from RAF Leuchars picked up two more team members - including team leader and local police officer Sgt Harry Lawrie - to drop them near the top of the hill. As the helicopter attempted to land, its tail rotor hit a rock, causing it to crash and slide 1,000ft, narrowly missing members of the team already on Ben More. The two men had apparently unclipped from their straps. Harry Lawrie fell about 200ft. The second rescue team member, PC Ian Ramsay, was only saved after his ice axe loop snagged and prevented him from falling.

Steve tells us that Harry Lawrie was Lisa's assessor for her Gold Duke of Edinburgh's Award Expedition in the Trossachs in June or July of 1986.

His son Gary Lawrie who was 19 at the time has also written about this event recently (2017).



<https://heartofscotlandancestry.co.uk/i-love-hills-importance-recording-tragedies/>



The cracks are beginning to show





Ben views from Ben Ledi



Can't keep up with Steve, Mick and Mike - I'm just a shadow of my former self



Striders Steve, Mick and Mike set a brisk pace on the way back. When there was a choice of two paths by a river the group splintered into two. Steve was off like a whippet – eager to get to the converging point before Mike and Mick.



Sorry sad Steve - this route is closed



Wot no access?



Just after Mike went off to get some more Lakeside shots we stopped at a café on the Lakeside path and sat by a window so we could wave to Mike who was unaware of this unscheduled stop. Unfortunately however, somehow Mike missed us and went striding along the path towards the car park. By the time we contacted him it was too late to come back.

We got back to the hostel a bit later than the day before. Mike took the precaution of booking the Waverly in Callander for the evening meal as it would probably be quite busy on a Saturday evening.

Two excellent day's hillwalking was celebrated in the Waverly.



Steve thinks about having a Waverly Whiskey night cap

Weather prospects for the morrow were looking less favourable and weather warnings were being issued for Sunday evening. Did I mention that Steve and I were going home while the going was good? 😊



DAY THREE (Sunday 7th October 2018)

Edinburgh – Royal Yacht Britannia and Calton Hill (2.4 miles)

With wet and windy weather forecast to move in from the west during the morning there were several options on the table for the Sunday outing. In a bid to outrun the weather we decided to head east to Edinburgh where the rain would not hit until later in the day. Among the possible destinations at Edinburgh it was decided to take a look around the Royal Yacht Britannia.



Royal Yacht Britannia

This was a very well organised tour; each person had their own audio guide to provide detailed information about each area on the Yacht.

Britannia was launched from the John Brown & Company shipyard in Clydebank on 16th April, 1953. For over 44 years she served the Royal Family, travelling over one million miles. She was decommissioned on 11th December 1997 and ended up here





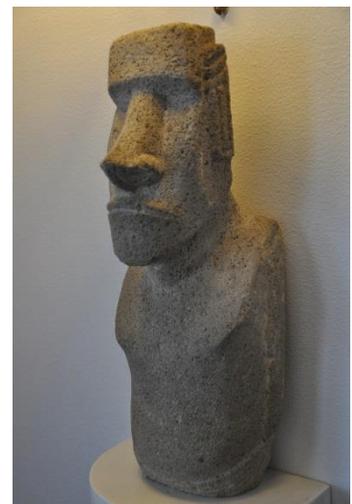
His and HRHs bedrooms



You could almost hear 44 years of Royal conversations... “Philip – it’s your turn for washing up!”

All the rooms were laid out to create the impression of what life was like on board (even the royal bedrooms were on display). Some items collected on the various voyages were also on display.

There were three galleys, a launderette, and a medical room, as well as Officers quarters and a living room. Some of the cabins had two triple bunks – sounds like typical Expo accommodation.





“Excuse me sir – please walk this way” – “Sorry I can only walk this way since I got up this morning”



“Tickets please...”



“... Two for Royal Class – by the way this phone is not working”

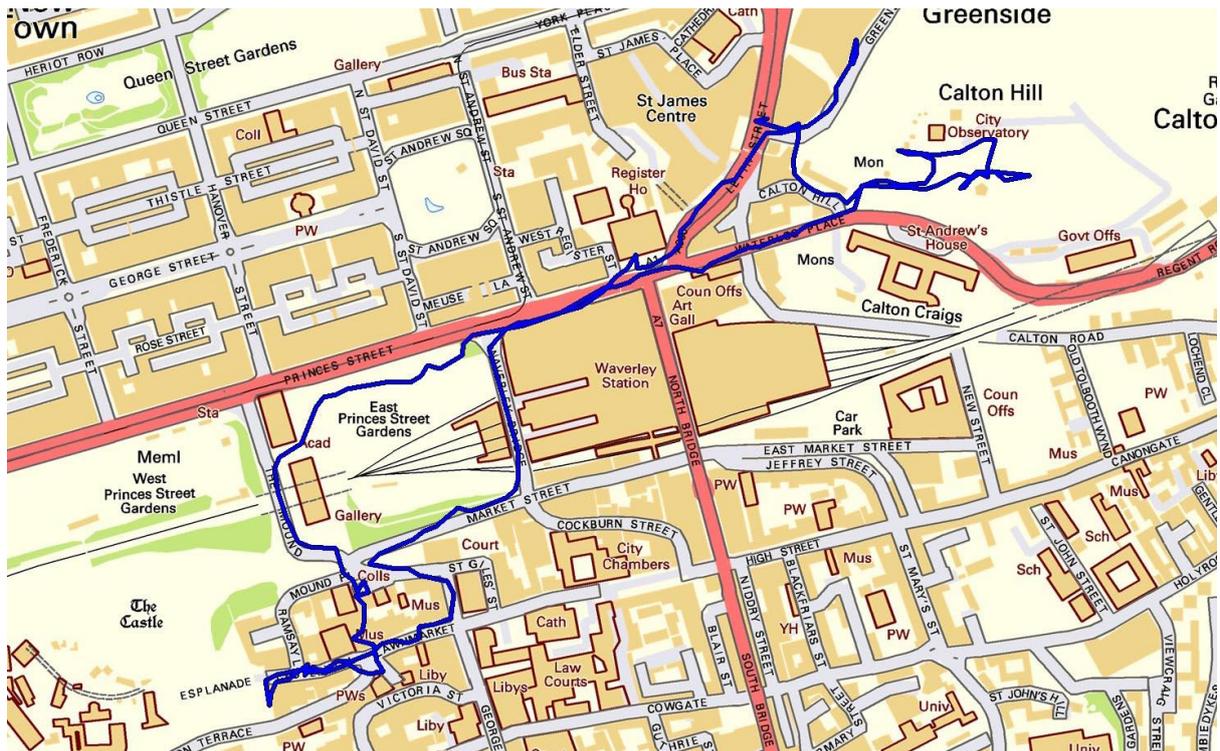


*Engine room: 2 Pametrada steam turbines, 12,000 hp (8,900 kW),
Speed: 21.5 knots (24.7 mph); Range: 2,400 nautical miles (4,400 km)*

*Tonnage: 5,769 GT; Length: 412 ft (126 m); Beam: 55 ft (17 m); Height: 123 ft (37 m) to top of mainmast
Capacity: 250 guests; Troops: 1 platoon of Royal Marines; Crew: 21 officers; 250 Royal Yachtsmen*



Wot no more voyages? – farewell Britannia



Princes Street Edinburgh at about 3:30 pm I think

There was just enough time left that Sunday afternoon for the weekenders to climb up Calton Hill to get some good views of Edinburgh (when there wasn't someone blocking your view!)



Oh no! Not him again!

We thought we had finished hill walking but Calton Hill turned out to be quite a few steps of ascent. At the top it was very blustery – the weather was definitely going down hill, so we decided to do the same and walked along



Princes Street. We found a café for our last break before heading our separate ways: Steve and I to Glasgow airport, and the Brauehearts Mike, Mick and Roger to sit out the severe weather warnings for Monday and Tuesday.



Well-trodden Edinburgh steps

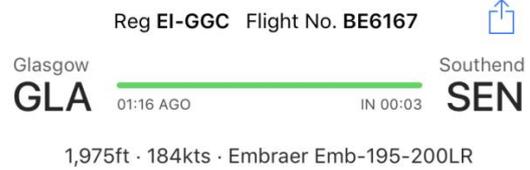
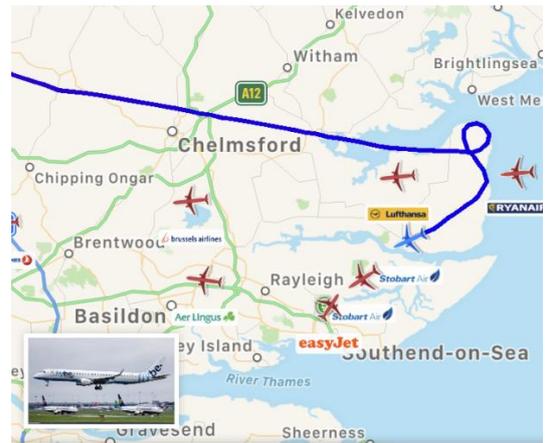
It took a while to escape the Edinburgh traffic, but once we were on the M8 we made rapid progress with plenty of time for checking in.

*What would become of the splinter groups? Who's photos would Roger now ruin? How would I be able to resist sending the trio a photo of sunny Chelmsford the following morning? Would Roger have any more mishaps in the Scottish independence party? Read on if you dare and I will reveal more information than you probably want to know. *I do hope it's not like the Dorset episode...**



The flight home for Steve and I was straightforward. It was dark when we headed southwards toward drier climes and we could see patterns of lights around towns and cities. Steve noticed an island and thought it was Canvey, but back in Scotland Mike was tracking our progress and sent us the track of Flight BE6167 showing our approach to Southend Airport.

From this track it is evident that the island we saw as the jet banked would actually have been Mersea island – the ancestral home of the Brown clan.



DAYS FOUR & FIVE (Monday&Tuesday 8th & 9th October 2018)

Weekenders back home at Chelmsford & Brentwood – Bravehearts Kelpies and Waterfall

I got back home at about 11 pm on Sunday night, which was a rapid transfer considering the Flight got into Southend on schedule at 9:55 pm. Mrs B was surprised to see me so early.

On Monday morning I could not resist sending the Bravehearts a sunrise photo from our bedroom window. The Braveheart bedroom window view that came back in a reply from Mike was similar (they had the same roof!) but I could not help noticing that it may have been manipulated slightly – well he only had 2 minutes to annotate his photo. This fake news was fooling nobody.



Chelmsford 8:00 am



Callander 8:02 am



The Bravehearts set off to take a look at the Kelpies; 30-metre-high horse-head sculptures featuring kelpies, standing next to a new extension to the Forth and Clyde Canal.



The Kelpies

These massive sculptures were designed by Andy Scott and were completed in October 2013. The work uses 600 tonnes of structural steel and is held together with 10,000 special fixings. The Kelpies name reflected the mythological transforming beasts possessing the strength and endurance of 10 horses.





The Nightmare Scenario (rated PG)

Now I'm afraid that we have to report on a rather unfortunate incident that night at the Scottish Hostel, so if you are of a nervous disposition you may want to leave the room and go to the toilet now.

Oh no – is this about Bravehart Roger? Yes I'm afraid so. Go on then ...by the way was that a spelling mistake near the beginning of the last line? Er...no ... Oh... please continue.

Well it was late. How late? Very late. We are talking about 2:00 am in the morning late. My goodness that is late!

Yes - it was a time when all weary expo members should have been tucked up in bed dreaming of how they should have taken that last photograph. But on this particular occasion other events would transpire. Bladder storage capacity had reached its tolerable limit and it was Mick who answered this nagging call of nature; he plodded off to the en suite facilities. Roger's eyes flickered open at the sound of Mick's movements: "Hang on" thought Roger to himself "something does not feel quite right, something feels... different". An audible gurgling noise from his lower abdomen signalled the start of something ... ominous. He sat up in bed – yes that something was definitely amiss. Did you mean amess? No not yet – but it was on the move.

A sudden urgent call of nature which could not possibly be ignored caught poor Roger by surprise - he was only a few paces from a toilet – but this was already occupied! There was only one thing for it – a dash to the communal toilet down the corridor. Now trying to dash when your body has other ideas is not that easy. Not sure if I should ask this, but did he make it? Well, I'm afraid this part of the recollection is not suitable for public viewing. Can I just say ... almost. Oh dear. Oh dear indeed.

Roger was in deep doo-doo. Is that a metaphorical statement? I'm afraid not. The showers were not working and the only rags he could muster in order to "leave the facilities how you would like to find them" were his pyjama bottoms. No!

Eventually after much time spent polishing the facilities – it was time to sneak back along the corridor to his sleeping quarters. Without his pyjama bottoms? Afraid so.

Just then, quite by chance, unbelievably a young lady stepped out from one of the other bedrooms and ... screamed. You made that bit up didn't you? Afraid so. The real end to the nightmare story was that Roger made it back undetected (well let's hope the CCTV was not working), and fished out a relatively pristine pair of underpants from his laundry bag.



He spent the following day feeling somewhat drained and confined himself to pottering around Callander for the day while Mick and Mike went off to some local waterfalls.



The Braveheart Brexiteers - or is it the Krankies – Fan – Dabi – Dozi

*That night the Bryant Braveheart party returned safely with no further incidents to report. **Thank goodness the sniffer dogs did not look too closely at Roger's luggage!** Or perhaps they did and just waved him through.*

At Southend airport, they went their separate ways: Network Rail had decided to put on a rail replacement service for Roger. Mick having suffered this service in the past decided to ditch Roger and take the much faster X30 bus service to Rayleigh station (note that senior citizen bus pass is not accepted on this service). After a short walk, Mick was unpacking by 10.50 pm, whereas poor Roger in his strained body had to walk home from Wickford station.

Mike was taxi-ed home for £10 (which included the rants of a disgruntled taxi driver), unpacked, showered and in bed by 10:50 pm, possibly snoring, but we would need to ask Mrs Braveheart Bryant to confirm that. Possibly the swiftest Expo return trip on record.

Good Night

(oh - looks like they've all fallen asleep already)



Expo Diaries: Behind the scenes

(To be read in the voice of David Attenborough)

You may think that taking Expo group photographs is easy. Well in a way it is – a simple click on a ten second self-timer usually does the trick. But on some occasions getting the desired result can be a challenge. This can be particularly so when faced with an unco-operative non-photogenic reluctant group of hill walking specimens such as these. You may think you have a privileged uninterrupted view of the target group, but in these instances there will always be a rival predator trying to muscle in on the action. So it's here within the majestic mountains and voluptuous valleys of the Trossachs landscape that we find two such alpha male adversaries both staking their claim to the limited vantage point – a coveted rocky outcrop. It reminds me of an episode I produced on seals competing for a place in the sun on a small slab of rock. Listen carefully and you can hear unhelpful technical advice being given to each other in a brazen attempt to gain the predatory upper hand. And then when everyone is least expecting it a primeval yelp is heard as the two contenders scramble into position to take up their place within the Expo ensemble. A belated second command to raise hands is met with half-hearted compliance resulting in the capture of this the rarest example of a Scottish Expo summit group gathering ...





The finished article – Farewell from Steve (no-legs and no-arm) Webb, Mike (I'll-take-my-hat-off-to-you) Bryant, Mick (two-sticks) Mapleson, hAndy (don't-shoot) Brown and Roger (I've-not-been-framed) Lawrence

The End

