

A Classic Scottish Steam Weekend Tour

As a former Travel Agent Manager, how nice it is to have a friend make all the arrangements. As it involved a departure at 10-00am from Kings Cross, the night was spent at the Travelodge in Kings Cross Road. Travelling to London, we chose Victoria because of an excellent offer David had found on his computer. The worse part of the entire holiday was trying to purchase an Oyster Card at Victoria. In the end I joined a large queue waiting to speak to a human being! We met the Courier near the WH Smith bookstall for the *"Flying Scotsman"* to Edinburgh but one would not know it apart from the departure board and it was never mentioned as such with on board announcements. Train boarding was 20 minutes before departure. We could not board until the Courier arrived with the group ticket and seat reservations. Our class 91 locomotive was pulling about 10 coaches. It filled up during the journey and was standing room only between the coaches. We only called at 4 stations en-route and it was a nice feeling that I owned the railway company-East Coast Railways, as the Government had not given it to an Independent operator yet! We arrived 4 minutes early at 14.21pm.

Our group queued for the lift, whilst David and I ascended a short flight of stairs to wait for them. The 26 of us, fitted into the 31 seat coach for a brief tour of Edinburgh, with difficulty because most of it is dug up for the installation of a Tram system. It was a little prolonged as we toured the *"gear box"* of the coach and going up a road which led to a cul-de-sac for bicycles! Then we were off to the M8 and the outskirts of Glasgow before turning for the A82 alongside Loch Lomond which looked inviting. We continued the long journey turning off at Tarbert and heading to our base at Inveraray and the 5 star Loch Fyne Hotel for a 4 night stay.

I had visited Inveraray a few decades earlier having arrived on a Caledonian Turbine vessel on a day cruise from Dunoon. The Hotel was very comfortable, the food excellent although a few people opted to eat at the local pub in the village. The waitresses never knew who wanted what, but we survived! A glass of wine served by the waitress was £6.65 each including the carriage fee

between Bar and Restaurant. We only did this once!

On the Saturday we travelled all the way back down Loch Lomond to Luss for a convenient stop, before continuing to Helensburgh, a resort that has seen better days. Whilst standing on the pier in the rain, our ship the Paddle Steamer *"Waverley"* came into view. We boarded and departed for Tighnabruaich in the Kyle's of Bute in the rain. I have of course been on the ship many times, but not in her home waters. We returned on a scenic route along Loch Fyne back to base.

Sunday was early breakfast with a 07.45am departure, although we did not get away until 08.00am because a lady arrived late without any apologies. We headed north over Glencoe and spectacular scenery to Fort William and a steam train ride to Mallaig on the *"Jacobite"*. Our engine was a Black Five 4-6-0 and was fully booked. The views are stunning including the famous Glenfinnan Viaduct and a brief stop at its station. We arrived on time to wind, rain and it was cold. 4 postcards, 2 coffees and 2 chocolate cakes came to £6.68! We returned to Fort William at 14.10pm. Mallaig is the jumping off point for Egg, Rhum and Muck and the Isle of Skye. We took a different way back to base, this time via Connell Ferry, Lochawe and Dalmally. After Dinner at our hotel, we had a walk around the back of the village to the Pier and along the beach. The colours of the sky were wonderful and the reflection on the Loch.

Monday was the day we were looking forward to, as we were going to have a voyage on Loch Katrine and the 110 year old steamship *"Sir Walter Scott"*. We had a break in Callander, with the coach parked in what was the old station. We had to find any trace of the old railway. We managed a walk on a Foot and Bicycle path for a short distance before heading for the Trossachs. The old steamer is oil-fired now but retains much charm and atmosphere. Our only wish was for the cruise to have been longer than one hour. We got back via Luss to our hotel in just under two hours to do some packing.

Tuesday we departed for Edinburgh via the Falkirk Wheel which we were originally going to visit on

the day we arrived from London. It is difficult to describe this attraction, but the Falkirk Wheel is the World's first rotating boat lift climbing up to the Union Canal 35m above. As someone who does not like heights, I never got the feeling we were going up!

We departed Edinburgh at 15.00pm arriving into Kings Cross on time at 19.19pm. We both enjoyed ourselves, but felt that Inveraray was too far away from the places we visited. The coach could have had an onboard toilet, but the Driver George was very good, once he had mastered the gearbox!

It was a Guardian/Brightwater holiday.

Terry Creswell

