

rannoch moor



Britain's most extensive wilderness. But first, a backstory ...



My pal Richard was doing the Way: Milngavie on the northern edge of Glasgow to Fort William. Join him? Sure. I hadn't time for the full ninety-six miles but we walked the first fifty together in three days.

I'd feared my legs mightn't be up for carrying me, plus 14kg of camping kit, twenty miles on day one, fifteen each on days two and three. But they done good.

Tender soles were an issue though. At Invernarnon on Lomond's eastern shore I'd thought to quit. Richard's back-up sandals, blister patches and ibupro saved me.

Inversnaid bunkhouse helped. We'd camped Tuesday & Wednesday nights but heavy rain on Thursday was set to worsen on Friday. Striking camp in a downpour didn't appeal. The bunkhouse hot tub, by contrast ...

Richard is one trusting dude. Does this married man not know what mischief a Photoshop wiz like me could get up to with such a shot?

But the tub experience *is* climactic. The more so for: our having walked thirty-five miles in two days with heavy packs ... rain enhancing one hundredfold the joys of hot water outdoors ... the total incompatibility of midges with steam.

Richard got out first. I stayed in an hour, taunting the black insectoid columns glowering at me in impotent rage from a dank touchline.

In the distance, like some Japanese painting, soft white cloud met mountain, forest and loch in a seamless meld of heaven and earth, Scotland and scotch mist.





Speaking of art, ninety-six years earlier the burn at Inversnaid had inspired that brilliantly innovative

Jesuit odesmith, Gerard Manley Hopkins, to pen these darksome evocative lines ...

THIS darksome burn, horseback brown,
His rollrock highroad roaring down,
In coop and in comb the fleece of his foam
Flutes and low to the lake falls home.

A windpuff-bonnet of fáwn-fróth
Turns and twindles over the broth
Of a pool so pitchblack, féll-frówning,
It rounds and rounds Despair to drowning.

Degged with dew, dappled with dew
Are the groins of the braes that the brook treads through,
Wiry heathpacks, fitches of fern,
And the beadbonny ash that sits over the burn.

What would the world be, once bereft
Of wet and of wildness? Let them be left,
O let them be left, wildness and wet;
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.

Inversnaid, 1918



Next day we were soaked by mid morning – goretex be damned: what rain doesn't, perspiration does – but

happy. As children we knew, then forgot, how good it feels to go into the wild: sodden, warm and carefree.



The afternoon was brighter. North of Lomond, headed for Crianlarich, a swollen Falloch saw me extracting my

so far underused camera from a dry-sack in otherwise damp pack. Powerful water does it for me every time.



Our goal? Crianlarich hostel. Beds, yes, but a firm *niet* to Duchie, Richard's labrador. Too tired for the six mile

walk to Tyndrum, we took the last train. An ace site – ace drying room! – is next to Tyndrum Lower Station.

Tyndrum Lower

Taigh an Droma Iarach



Yes. This strategically placed hamlet, population half that of Diddly-on-the-Wold and a third your average Hampstead mews, has not one station but two. Tyndrum Lower serves the Glasgow to Oban line. I'll get to Tyndrum Upper in a moment but neither, alas, are pronounced as in the Gunter Grass novel.

It's *Tinedrum*.

Friday night, July 4th. Richard and Duchie would press on next day to Bridge of Orchy, a seven mile stroll. I had to be in Glasgow midday Sunday.

No Sunday train would get me from Orchy to Glasgow in time but I'd gladly do a few more miles with such agreeable companions, then train down from Bridge of Orchy Saturday teatime.

In the event two factors argued instead for a second night at Tyndrum: dream weather for photographers on the Saturday, and a train journey from Tyndrum Upper by way of Rannoch Moor which two years running has been voted the world's most scenic.

How could I resist?



We parted on the morrow: R & D for West Highland Way to Bridge of Orchy; me for Tyndrum Upper. I was moon

walking with Jacko's ghost, my pack a featherweight without tent, s/bag and gubbins.







Twice I saw deer but you don't get award winning wildlife shots from moving trains.





At Rannoch the driver has a fag. From the platform I could frame a more composed shot of Loch Rannoch.



The railway across Rannoch Moor *floats*. I kid you not. Felled trees laid over the bog support the rails for the

once daily steam train (summertime only), the more prosaic diesel and, of course, the Hogwarts Express.



Destination Corroon, highest railway station in Britain.

There is no road to this place of ...





... rustic harmony.







Wild camping is allowed. But better to forget sleeping bag and tent than midge repellent.



What I said about Corroun Station isn't quite accurate. It does have a road – isolated, unmetalled and a few miles long – to Loch Ossian. At foot of loch, a youth

hostel; at head, the laird's house: he who funded the railway from Clearance-tainted coffers.
Even in July the hills have snowy patches.





Ossian freezes in winter. Hostel warden Peter Trowell, 29, wintered alone there in 1979. He failed to report in as scheduled and was declared missing.

His body was found when the loch thawed in spring. It's assumed he was working on the old boat house and plunged through the ice.



Run-in with one of Peter's successors ... At 5pm folk were waiting in time-honoured fashion (tho the sunshine marked a break with tradition) for the hostel to open. I'd picked up a discarded milk bottle at the lake shore, thinking to find a bin outside. No bin, so I left it by the door. *Excuse me!* A tall forty-something Englishwoman accosted me. *Did you leave this?* I explained: wasn't staying or I'd have waited for opening time to bin it indoors.

Better, surely, to do as I did than leave on the shore? She had no answer to that but seemed peeved. To be fair, any gratitude on her part might have foundered on the prickly way I tend to respond to perceived hauteur. I would later learn this warden can be a bit of a madam but, to be fair again, she did right to challenge me.

We need people like that, though it's generally more productive to give the accostee a face-saving way out.



But who could remain irked by so miniscule a tiffette in
such a place on such a day?







Back at Tyndrum my tent and sleeping bag awaited. My last night in Scotland.

Which, next time I come, may be a nation state, though I won't be betting on that outcome.