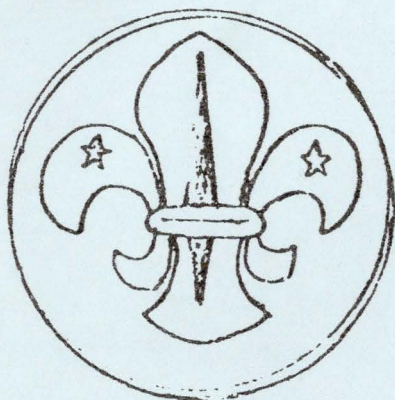


VENTURE

44



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NUMBER

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(Sir Thomas Rich's School) V.S.U.

NUMBER 69

SEPTEMBER 1991

"THE DIARY OF A MacNOBODY"

This issue contains an edited version of the diary kept by the members of the party from the Unit that visited Scotland this summer. All of the party contributed, but to avoid legal action the authorship of the various entries is not given.

PREFACE

The Scotland '91 expedition was the twelfth time that a party from the Unit had visited Scotch pie land. The group consisted of the V.S.L., Kev Snow, Nick Cambridge, Brad Salter, Matt Wilton and myself, was smaller in size than was expected. The original plan involved travel by train to Edinburgh, and a rather different cycle route. However, thanks to the V.S.L.'s knowledge of decent campsites, a very suitable route was agreed by the party a few weeks before departure. It should be noted that no hard and fast plan was constructed, which gave us a certain degree of flexibility. For example by good fortune we got to the Skye ferry in time to roll straight on, and we also "gained" a day during the early stages of the bike journey.

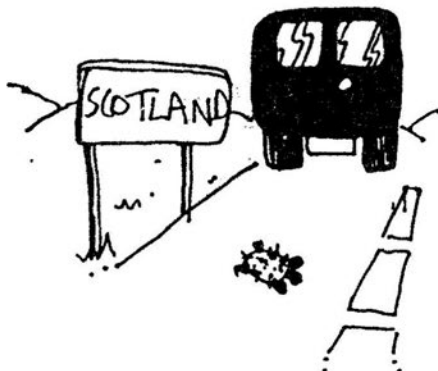
The group seemed more prepared bike-wise than for Norway. There was a spate of new bike buying with six bikes totaling about £1900! Even I was more prepared, and instead of a 5 speed Raleigh Marauder, I had my sister's 18 speed Raleigh Lizard!

Paul Kingsbury

Saturday 20th July

(Van miles 385)

The party assembled between 7.45 and 8.15 a.m. A short detour to collect Brad's karrimat, and we were away on the M5. Mind and bottom numbing hours later and we were over the border and shopping in Locherbie. At 5.50 p.m. we were in Crieff indulging in Scotch pies or haggis and chips. After that it was but a few miles to our destination, Gilmerton, where we were welcomed by Alan and Heather Robbins. Whilst the V.S.L. filled Alan in on latest developments at S.T.R.S the tents were erected on the estate. In true scottish style it started to bucket down with rain, with thunder thrown in as we bedded down.



Sunday 21st July

(Van miles 198)

The rain had ceased but it was overcast as we packed and said our farewells. We were heading north by 9.00 a.m., armed with a computer produced route plan, courtesy of Robbins Timber. The road across to the A9 was bestrewn with dead rabbits, and hardly a car was seen until we hit the main road at Dunkeld. By mid morning we were over the top and in the Spey valley. At Aviemore we stopped and shopped before continuing the trek, bypassing Inverness and turning west.

At last the "new" road ended and we were on "single track with passing places" and we were over the spine of Scotland.

We stopped for lunch looking down on Loch Maree, and descended, visiting the Beinn Eighe visitors centre where we learned that deer stalking in the area didn't start until mid August. By 4.00 p.m. we reached our destination, the village of Gairloch, and booked in at the campsite and had tea before unpacking and assembling bikes and cycling back to the harbour where Phil Cecilia and Rachel had just arrived.

That evening we ate a leisurely meal before a visit to the beach. The insidious midges made their presence felt and caused all of us problems.

Monday 22nd July

(Cycle miles 27)

Cooked breakfast was devoured around 8.45, with local sausages provided by the nearby butcher's shop. Today we planned a gentle bike ride to the lighthouse at Rubha Reidh there to meet Phil who had the lunch and maybe do some rock climbing.

The narrow road generally hugged the coastline, but after 9 miles we found that "authorised" vehicles only were allowed on the final stretch so we rode on to the lighthouse for a photo call with a distant mountain backdrop.

Retracing our "steps" we met Phil and the car as the rain started. Luncheon was taken further along the road where we seem to have dropped in on a midges convention. Halfway through a Ham and Crab paste sandwich it was decided that these insects have the extremely annoying habit of existing - do they have any actual use? We developed a special tactic of eating whilst walking alone to confuse the beasts. A swift departure was made to the harbour to catch some fish for tea then back to the Black Bedford Base

Hake(*) was skilfully prepared by the V.S.L. and proved to be a tasty alternative to cod. Now we don't believe in cod!

A second visit to the harbour was planned for the evening and everything except Japanese drift nets was taken along. Kev, having observed tidal flow, feeding patterns, shoal movement, etc picked the spot. Two rods and a crab line were brought into the attack. Kev pulled small fish out like a day at Bejams. Brad gutted a pollack. Frank wrestled with a crab. Nick caught nothing. Everybody thought fishing was a good lark and knew that more bait would be dropped as the expedition progressed.

(* The Hake were, we must admit, bought from the local fishing company and not caught by us!)



Tuesday 23rd July

(Hike miles 11)

The day started with a substantial bowl of good scottish porridge each. Conversation at the 'breakfast table' included Matt informing me that in the night I sat up and blurted out "Bloody Hell, I'm in Norway!" However I was not the only person overcome by midnight madness as the 'Wilton Kid' seemingly in a stupor informed Nick and myself that he believed he was some other place on the planet other than Gairloch, Scotland.

Today Frank and Matt decided to climb Slioch, a nearby 3000 ft mountain, whilst the rest of us decided to go fishing. This didn't start too well as Kev soon lost 15 yards of line and some ledgers and a hook. But things got better, and to cut a very long story short, Kev (a.k.a. John Wilson) proceeded to clear the harbour of fish - most of them tiddlers - but two substantial pollack were battered to death to supplement the next days breakfast.....

Whilst the crabbing company had gone to play in the rock pools the real lads went off to scale a mountain. The peak to be blessed by Frank and my presence was Slioch (3216ft). It was quoted in a guide book as being an 8 hour trip, so we were prepared for a slog. I was praying that my left foot would hold out as I had recently injured it whilst jumping a vast relentlessly deep and fast flowing brook in Longlevens.

We stopped for lunch at about 2000ft in a corrie occupied by a herd of goats, before the final steep climb. We casually took a bearing on the next Munro in the thick mist that had descended, but were too casual and discovered that we were well off course. As time was running out we decided to call it a day and headed back to Loch Maree, and the long trek to Kinlochewe. Back at the van we consumed cans of coke and felt thoroughly contented with a good day on the hill

Wednesday 24th July

(Cycle miles 44) '

The gang rose at 7.45 a.m. Matt had promised the night before to wake everyone at 7 a.m.. typical! Breakfast included a treat in the form of "black pudgy". packing was rather leisurely and we finally said goodbye to Gairloch at 11.30. Brad began in the way in which he intended to carry on (at 110m.p.h., and would certainly have put

Greg Lemond through his paces. we passed through Poolewe and carried on to Laide. the weather was very misty on the higher ground, hiding some of the spectacular scenery. We met up with the advanced party at the jetty. Luncheon consisted mainly of jam sannies with a special treat in the form of Paul's mum's Victoria Sponge, then it was back to the grindstone (or roadstone). Brad was off again leaving the rest of us for dead.

After more ups and downs we reached the shores of Little Loch Broom, arriving at Camasnagaul where we thought we might camp. However we saw no campsite, and as it was quite early in the afternoon we continued to Dundonnel, only to find again no suitable area. It was decided to push on and the support team headed by road to Ullapool whilst we were to take a short cut to Aultnaharrie Inn to get a ferry.

The disasters started here, namely Kev's chain snapping and Matt having a puncture. We made a hairy descent down the rough track to the Inn to catch the ferry only to find that the small boat could only take four bikes and people, and there were two folk with bikes in the queue in front of us. Paul and Kev were sent across first as the three budding Ron Fawcetts had spotted a nice crag to practice some climbing skills. One particular traverse protruded out to sea, and Matt, being Matt, had to try it out - only to come to a hilarious (for Brad and Nick) and mouth-watering (literally!) conclusion.



WELL, AT
LEAST WE HAVE
GOT ANOTHER
'CRAB'!

The ferry arrived so we boarded and soon arrived at Ullapool. The captain for the crossing was a bit of a character! We were soon at the campsite beside Loch Broom with Spaghetti bolognese for dinner. the evening was spent walking around the town, whilst you know who went fishing off the pier.

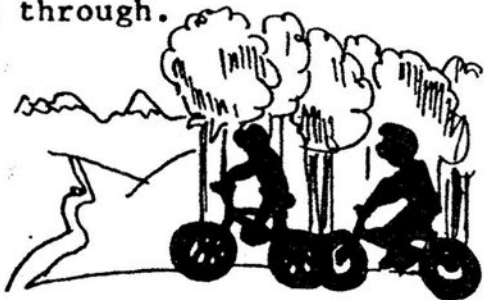
Thursday 25th July

(Cycle miles 40*)

The party, awoken anew, had no idea of the "action packed" day ahead of them as they were "porridged". The gang were off on the road (to hell)

For kickoff Kev's "quality" Marin chain which had caused problems the previous day packed up again on the straight 400 yards into Ullapool. A vital screw was missing from the gear change mechanism, but with a bit of tinkering around it was found that a couple of gears were feasible, namely the top ones. Matt was having trouble with a soft tyre, and also gear troubles. It was necessary for Kev to retire at Knockan geology centre. This proved a good site for luncheon and brain food for the geologists.

The next section to Lochinver (the so called mad little road of Ross) saw us joined by the V.S.L. who took many photos of the spectacular scenery that we were pedalling through.



At Inverkirkaig, due to the uncanny weather of burning sunshine, we decided to have ice cream

and a cool drink. there was also a well stocked book shop out in the wilds where Frank bought some books - a pity none of them were about the complexities of the Scottish economy - e.g a glass of Lilt costing 95p, whilst Paul noticed the bottle it came from was 89p.....



Soon after that we were in Lochinver where Phil, Cecilia and Kev were assembled. another drink stop (not Lilt this time) and we were off to the camp site at Achmelvich - except for Brad who missed the (only) turning and did approximately 20 miles extra. A search party set out for what seemed another 20 hours, with the help of Chinook choppers, infra-red satellite scanning and a black Bedford, Brad was discovered talking to some apparently friendly strangers who looked rather like the Birmingham 6, except there was about 3 of them (Were they the Lochinver 6 minus 3?)



It was a late meal at about 9, and our troubles were not over as Rachel managed to get Peter Pointer (1st finger) stuck in a penny whistle. Eventually a phone call to the doctor was made by Cecilia (Achmelvich consists of 3 cottages and a phone box!) but fortunately Frank and Nick with the help of the magic washing up liquid released the phalange from the blowing implement. Quote "Now you shouldn't do that again! - Frank. This obviously upset the tear stricken Rachel who had undergone hell for twenty minutes!

If this wasn't enough Kev proceeded to gash his leg, tripping up in an excited frenzy as he saw a six pound ling being caught by a fisherman. Paul was then rescued in the dying light by Matt from the rocks, as "death thursday 13th/25th" came to an end.

P.S. It was a good idea Frank's disallowing us to swim - someone would certainly have drowned.

(* Cycle miles for Brad c.60)

Friday 26th July

(Hike miles 16)

"A view of a day from a cripple"...K.S.

I awakened to the pleasant vision of exposed dermis through the gash in my left shin. After the standard breakfast the party split up into three categories; Frank, Matt and Paul decided to venture up the local mountain; Brad and Nick declined that idea and decided to stay put. The third category involved a visit to the doctor, the sole participant in this activity being me. Stitches were not feasible, which relieved me, but the wound was treated and I was banned from cycling for two days. After saying farewell to the doctor the Browns and I visited a quaint little cafe for coffee and cake. This was much appreciated, and I am sure the rest of the party share the feeling of appreciating all that Phil

and Cecilia did to help with the expedition. When I got back to the site I was regaled by stories of exhilarating crags and skinny dipper couples by Nick and Brad. after recovering from the news I decided to indulge in the worlds favourite sport, fishing. After losing several quids worth of tackle to a measly total of some nought fish I decided to retire.

Nick and Brad found the area uninteresting so retreated to their tents to sleep for some 4½ hours. this didn't appeal to me so I headed for a rematch with the FISHES of the SEAS. This time, 2 cod 2 pollack and a coley, but not of sufficient size for human consumption.

The mountaineers arrived back at sevenish, and after dinner I, surprisingly, went fishing - a couple of cuckoo wrasse and a dogfish. this was followed by a pinch of traverse rock climbing, which gradually became impeded by lack of light. The day tailed off with a sociable gathering in the van, and under the flickering light of the gas lamp we reminisced on the day's events and wondered what exciting adventures lay ahead.

Paul, Frank and I decided to climb the nearby shapely mountain Suilven. We parked near the cafe where I was recently ripped off - even Frank agreed that 95p for a glass of Lilt is a massive con.

It was a five mile walk until we really started the steep climb. The attack was launched from the south side, and the weather was kind to us. It had taken us 4 hours to gain the summit, and a further 1½ hours to traverse the ridge, with a bit of rock climbing at the end. We then had the long slog back. the trek was made interesting by the flora and fauna, as we saw plenty of frogs and a slow worm. We even saw a stony faced crocodile on the ridge, of which a photograph will be winging its way to "High" magazine



Saturday 27th July

(Cycle miles 36)

On the road again, leaving the grotty campsite. Kev, not allowed to cycle, very kindly offered to buy our vital provisions and so was sent to the shops of Lochinver with a list of sweets and drinks as long as his gash. the weather was very bad (i.e. wet) and so we all kitted up in water proofs. The rain eventually died off and we realised that our wet weather gear was a bit over the top for the amount of rain. we took it all off, and it then bucketed down.

At the tiny village of Stoer a sweet toothed member of the party spied a post office claiming to stock the full range of Cadbury's and Wall's products, and of course Mother Dean's good old fashioned Scottish shortbread.

We had earlier voted to do a 25 mile stretch in the morning, and we found the terrain much the same as usual, i.e. lots of steep ups and downs. There was on hairy 1 in 4 descent with a bridge and a sharp bend at the bottom where Matt found that his all weather brake blocks weren't. The miles soon passed and we were at Kylesku to meet Frank before we knew it. we were too wet and cold to stop for a full blown lunch, so we had a quick snack and then had an uneventful ride to Scourie. This was an oasis in the scottish highlands, no golden sands, no palm trees, or even scantily clad women, but that one thing desired by all smelly camping Venture



Where we stayed:

Day 1. Gilmerton ●

Days 2,3,4. Gairloch ●

Day 5. Ullapool ●

Days 6,7 Achmelvich ●

Day 8. Scourie ●

Days 9,10. Durness ●

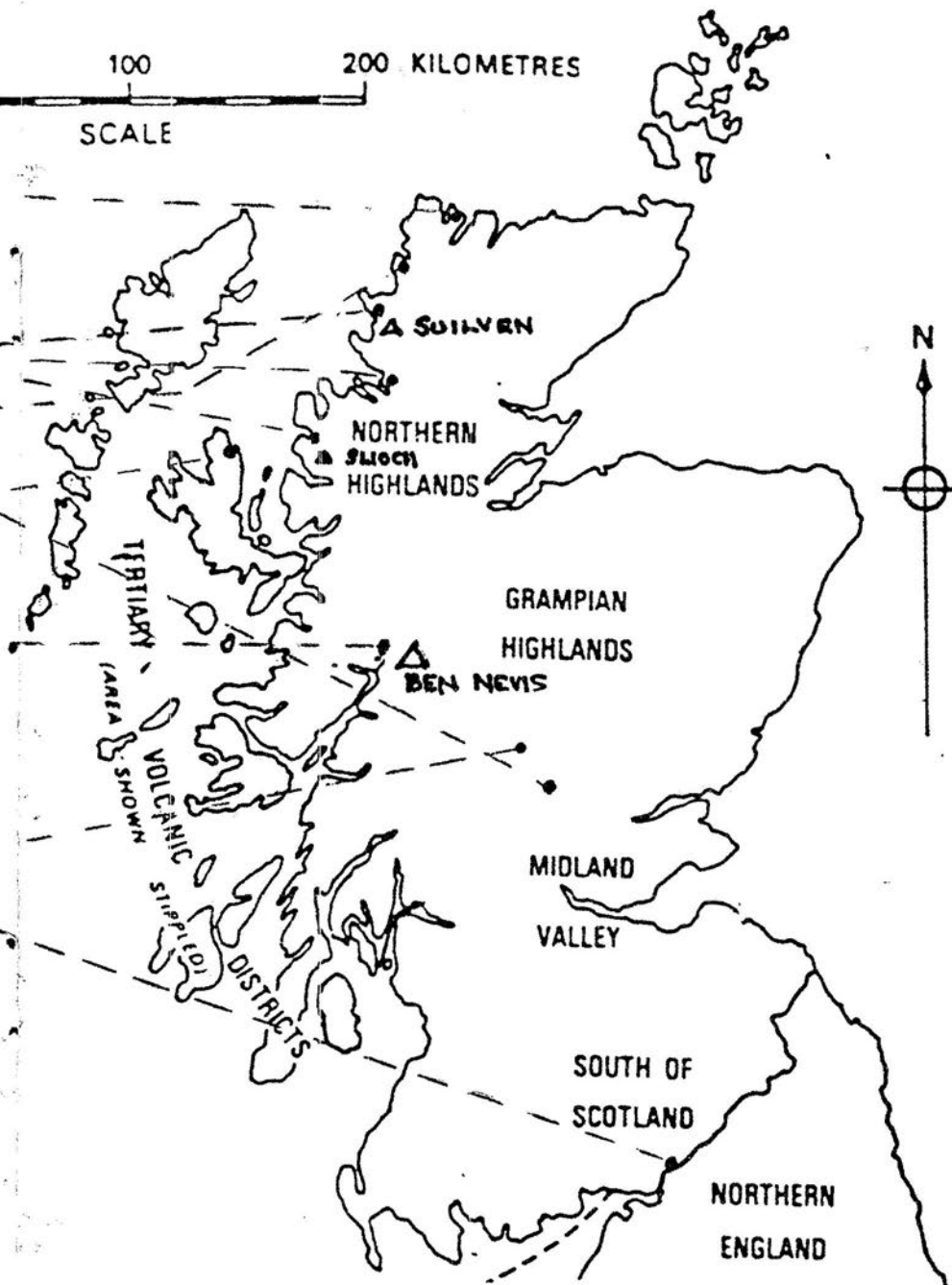
Days 11,12. Staffin ●

Days 13,14. Fort William ●

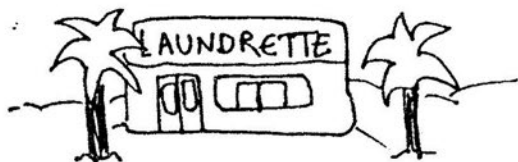
Day 15. Gretna ●

Site of Historic Interest

Aberfeldy, where a haggis was abandoned by M*ke Ch*sh*re way back in 1990. ●



scouts - showers. We showered so long the tiles were dissolving. There was also a laundrette with a drier that didn't dry, and a washer that didn't wash (no not Dot Cotton). after tea Kev decided to....go fishing. Then Phil and Frank disappeared to the "Nag's Head" (an abattoir) while we went and pigged out at the on site cafe



Sunday 28th July

(Cycle miles 26)

We reluctantly left our **** campsite for the 26 mile trip to Durness, to be made without a lunch stop. the weather was reasonable with the wind behind us (at least it was for Matt). Kev was back with the fab four, and we were told there was a three mile downhill stretch at the end.

we expected a hard climb up a steep hill, but this wasn't to be, instead it was an unnoticed uphill slope, probably for 4 or 5 miles, then the big free wheeling slope took us to within 2½ miles of our destination. Terminal velocity was reached within 15 seconds, and all went well until we fell in with a jeep loaded with four or five youths with combined community service hours longer than it takes Pluto to orbit the sun. anyway, there was an attempt to push Nick off his bike, and Matt could hardly refrain from verbal abuse. Luckily Brad wasn't near or there would have been shrapnel flying! At the site Frank was surprised by our speedy arrival. Kev was still getting used to pedalling and made up a course on the site involving ramping over steps and German caravanettes. Meanwhile the climbers "bouldered" on the nearby beach whilst Paul watched ruefully wishing he had spent more

time at Castle Rock.

We spent some time watching a porpoise, (or was it a small whale? - it was difficult to see through the windows of their porpoise built rock shelters..) out in the bay, then set off to visit the famous Smoo cave. A "44VSU" sign in stones was created by Nick and Paul on the hill side next to others like "Sharon & Viv". The day ended with absurd card tricks

Monday 29th July

(Cycle miles 28)

The day started fine, and after a leisurely breakfast we set off to ride to the far north west, Cape Wrath. We had to ride a couple of miles to take the ferry across the Kyle of Durness as Cape Wrath is on a peninsula only accessible by crossing the Kyle. The narrow road along the north coast to the lighthouse is plied during the summer by two minibuses. Getting over is a bit of a hit and miss affair, but we negotiated with the cyclist-friendly ferryman to get across before some of the folk waiting before us. He told them that they would have to wait for the bus anyhow, and they might as well wait on the mainland and let us get on with our ride. We agreed on the boat to meet him again at 3.p.m.



Once on the other side we climbed the first of four steep hills, and exchanged pleasantries with some Telecom engineers sentenced to spend several days in the wilds. It took about an hour and a half to reach the lighthouse, the only hazard, apart from the switchback road, being avoiding the minibuses. We passed through the M.O.D. firing range with some trepidation, and when we reached the lighthouse we had our lunch before walking to the edge of the precipitous cliffs dropping 350 feet into the restless waves. The route back presented no problems and we were met by the ferryman and received some dirty looks from "ordinary" passengers who were left to wait for the next crossing. As the tide was now at its lowest we ended up unloading bikes on slippery seaweed!



That evening the party split and the climbers set off to the Smoo Bay laden with gear to climb on some of the large boulders near the cave. The major hazard reported was not the rock but the midges. Meanwhile Kev and I followed the track to the "town dump" and scrambled over the rocks to.....fish. Tonight real success, and hereturned in the dark complete with 3 good sized mackerel and the obligatory 2 pollack.

Tuesday 30th July

(Van miles 203)

Mackerel for breakfast courtesy of fisherperson Kev. We packed up and stored the bikes in the van then said farewell to Phil, Cecilia and Rachel who were heading southeast as we headed southwest.

It was no ordinary journey as we made a number of stops to look at some geology. Brad was unaware of all this as he seemed unable to keep his eyes open. He did wake up, however, when we stopped to see the spectacular Corrieshalloch gorge and the Falls of Measach. A suspension bridge at the highest point of the gorge proved irresistible to the wreckers...reminiscent of Elverum in Norway, the lads (i.e. Brad and Matt) couldn't pass up the chance of turning the bridge into a swinging death trap. After this diversion we returned to the van and continued our journey towards the Kyle of Lochalsh through more spectacular scenery. Brad was asleep, but was woken by Matt to be told that Chris Peters had travelled on the railway line we were going parallel with.

We timed our arrival at the Kyle of Lochalsh to perfection and after a wait of several seconds we were on the ferry and before we knew it had crossed to the Isle of Skye. Our immediate goal was Portree (Port reagh) - we were surprised to see that all the road signs had gaelic names in green below the "english" version. Passing the Coolins we reached our destination but found the campsite both tatty and full, so we kept going north to Staffin where a much nicer, if rather steep site was located.

Wednesday 31st July

(Cycle miles 30)

(Fish c 50)

Another sunny morning. I decided to take my last chance to get some boat fishing and made some

enquiries at the campsite office. I finally found a suitable "captain" after disturbing various householders in the village, who strangely insisted that no payment was needed for the trip

I met the fisherman down at the slipway and we set off to unload all of 58 lobster pots spread around 5 square miles around the immediate coast they yielded lobsters, crabs, conger eels and rock cod. The many lobsters meant it would be a profitable day..



finally we began to fish properly, and between us we reached the handsome total of 60+ fish, including haddock, cod, rock cod, mackerel and pollack. the majority were to be used for bait for the lobster pots, but the rest were for human consumption, and we eventually made a few bob flogging them down at the beach.

That evening Frank cooked us some of the haddock and I cooked some crabs, and we fed well on my catch, as did many other people on the campsite who had bought fish from me!

Meanwhile the bikie boys biked off on their bikes on a 30 mile bike ride around the north of Trotternish. Onboard computers were set, and we headed through Staffin and turned up the steep road across the mountain towards Uig.

We rode off road over very rough ground and then abandoned bikes at the foot of a very weird hill

called the Quiraing to walk up to the needle and the prison (not ancient instruments of torture, but rock formations). Frank brought enough rock down to sink a battleship, while Nick got lost. Unfortunately, I found him again, and the united party returned to the bikes to tear down the rest of the hill only to meet a daunting ascent on the road. Reaching the crest of the ridge we then had a long easy descent to Uig. Dinner was taken in what must be the ferryman's equivalent to a transport cafe. Scotch pie and chips and ice cream took about an hour as we watched one of the ferries to the Outer Hebrides setting off. The journey continued via Flora Macdonald's birth place (who?) where we paused to stare at rusty ploughshares and old thatched buildings in the company of French and German tourists. Then on through stunning countryside to the top of the island and back to Staffin and the campsite where we were reunited with the human trawler. Kev had caught more fishes than a person who catches lots of fish.

As the evening progressed we made a visit to the nearby viewpoint at Kilt rock where we looked over massive vertical cliffs to the sea below, and even later we pondered on whether Yuri Geller could bend a spaceship..or was it Yuri Gargarin?...What party do the locals vote for - is Syke blue or red? Were the lazy campers next to us loitering within tent???

Thursday 1st August

(Van miles 138)

Off south again. We soon reached the ferry and after a bit of a wait we wre back on the main land. We lunched above Loch Duick and then contiued through the Glens. Brad was woken when we reached Loch Ness, but no monster was spied. At Banavie a site used by the 44th on several previous occasions was found to have disappeared

but another good site with an excellent view of Ben Nevis was soon located. That night, it rained...



Friday 2nd August

(Hike miles 9)

"The big one"

Friday brought an early start - for Brad at any way! Breakfast and washing up were endured, and this was followed by a quick change of clothes, and it was off to the car park at Achintee. The walk started at 0930. Spirits were high, but the altitude low. We were going up the tourist path, and stopped every half hour. A fair number of other walkers were on the track with us, most of them wearing nothing more than shorts, T shirt, and trainers. Kev found the going rough, as we were getting further and further away from fish. He complained of headache and dizziness at about 2000ft, and as the weather looked as if it might worsen, it was decided that he should retrace his steps to the van.

The five remaining slogged up the zig-zag path over a patch of snow, and after 2¾ hours we were on the summit. Luncheon was taken there in the form of nuts, raisins, Club Orange, and Maryland cookies. the summit area looked much like a desolate scene from WW1. this feeling encouraged by the presence of a war memorial. Nearby two plaques contained stones from Everest and Mount

Kilimanjaro - except that they didn't - as some selfish s*ds had nicked them!

It was decided to descend promptly so as not to desert Kev for too long. the descent was tedious with a few short cuts, one producing a cry from a young boy of "Dad! Why didn't we go up that way?" There were great numbers of people coming up as we went down. It took just over two hours to get down, and then we hit Fort William for a shopping spree. Every outdoor shop in the High Street was visited, Brad remaining in one for about half an hour glued to a rock climbing video - where was Matt?

We eventually returned to the campsite and then enjoyed a relaxation period of nearly 9½ minutes before starting to prepare dinner, Haggis with tatties and neeps.

SCOTS



HAGGIS...

AUSTRALIAN



HAGGIS...

IRISH



HAGGIS

Saturday 3rd August

(Van miles 198)

A day of travelling and hard Bedford seats. Frank had bought a new alarm clock that worked, so we had almost an early start. (Why he has never ever had a watch is a mystery). It was decide to stop off at the Leisure Centre at Fort William to inspect their indoor climbing wall. This had the climbers in a bedazzled trance. Before you could say anti-jamming-device, cruxes were being eyed up, pockets were chalked, and overhangs cleared. Later in the Bedford an event was discussed; when Brad "Hubble" Salter felt that he was about to fall off the face he shouted "crash mat!" and the nearby climber

casually replied "Yeah!" In desperation the cry "CRASH MAT" came again, but the response was the same until Matt realised the graveness of the situation and his misunderstanding and quickly slid the safety mat underneath the airborne Brad What Matthew had though was that his fellow climber was simply expressing his excitement on the wall with the expression "Christ, Matt".



Whilst all this was going on in the hall, outside Paul, Kev and Frank were battling out the Fort William Open golf Tournament. A hole in one on the 16th by Paul resulted in a draw between the two younger players.

After the sporty morning it was back to the road A brief history lesson in Glencoe, Brad's relentless yawning (like a killer whale writhing in an oil slick at Bournemouth), scotch pies for lunch relieved the boredom of the journey. A visit to Paisley for a toilet stop was interesting as we saw our first real town centre for ages.

We stayed that night in a field at Gretna Green, just a few yards from England.

Sunday 4th August

(Van miles 254)

Got up. Rolled up the tents. Unrolled the one that still had Brad in it. Packed up. Got in the van. Went home..

CONCLUSION

Having visited most Western European countries, this was my first visit to Scotland - I hope it will not be my only one. It really is a most beautiful part of the British Isles, a very large part, at that! I imagined it would be like Wales, but the spectacular scenery is on a much larger large scale. luckily the weather was extremely good (only three rainy days) which made riding in the Highlands even more enjoyable

On behalf of all who went, thanks must be given to the V.S.L. for pampering us, spoiling us, and putting up with us and our idiosyncrasies. Many thanks also to Phil and his Browns who made the great effort to support us in full flight, and entertained us with some penny whistle playing!

Paul Kingsbury





Suilven 2399A

