

## TRAVELLERS' CLUB MEETING - 13<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2009

### SCOTLAND

The gathering on this fine spring afternoon included visitors from the UK, members with a Scottish heritage and some who, like our speaker Dr Raimund Pohl, an environmental scientist interested in vulcanology, water and human history, had travelled in Scotland. The photos we were shown dated from a comprehensive road trip a couple of years ago but the first minutes of the talk referred to Scotland 500 million years ago (not connected to England) floating from America towards Greenland until a huge collision about 450 million years ago triggering a series of volcanic eruptions and linkup with England as well as elements of the present-day landscape pointed out in the course of Raimund's address. He mentioned that when serving in the Air Force for a short time at a Scottish Air base (which he was not permitted to leave), he had a good look at Scotland from the air and had kept in touch with a friend at Edinburgh University who had similar interests.

Using a map of Scotland Raimund pointed to the route/places he had selected for our "tour highlights" – Edinburgh, Pitlochry, Newtonmore, Inverness, Oban, Glencoe, Glasgow, Stirling, Falkirk and back to Edinburgh.

Edinburgh Castle on a 70 million year old volcanic plug is a place "not to be missed" – St Margaret's chapel, an enormous cannon, the Scottish honours/sword and sceptre concealed from Cromwell's English invaders and discovered by Sir Walter Scott, mementos/portraits/crests of Kings, Governors and the heroes Robert the Bruce and William Wallace. Other notable places: - Holyrood National Park (cleanest water and Arthur's seat); Rosslyn Chapel – built by Sinclair family as a replica of Solomon's temple, used by Freemasons, mentioned by Dan Brown.

Pitlochry, geographical centre of Scotland is famous for trout fishing - its loch is actually a dam constructed in Victorian times and the local limestone with granite intrusions has yielded gemstones. Nearby is Killiekrankie where the local Jacobites lost the battle with the English and Newtonmore, surrounded by extinct volcanoes, filming site for "Monarch of the Glen". We enjoyed shots of the local fauna (stags and deer). Apparently Sir Walter Scott's Lammermoor is not a real place.

Inverness capital of the highlands on the River Ness boasts harbour, castle, charming churches and carboniferous geology; has coal fired electricity plants fuelled from local mines; was visited by St Columba in 565. In its region is Loch Ness, a glacial trough 400 feet deep and 23 miles long with a geological history too complex for our ears (but we were told that the weight of an ice sheet 2km

deep 10,000 years ago actually lowered the land level which rose again after the melt). No mention of the monster.

Urquhart castle, seat of the lord of the isles, visited by St Columba is in a red sandstone district (Australia has yellow, brown and tan sandstone) – red sandstone is a superb building material. At this point Raimund gave us a brief description of the clan system of social structure – his wife is a member of the McDonald Clan – and mentioned the busking pipers in this area.

Via Invergarry to tiny Oban: the departure point for Isles of Skye and Mull, it has a replica Coliseum built by a wealthy citizen.

Glencoe “took my heart away” – beautiful countryside, fertile volcanic soil and due to the collision lots of extinct volcanoes, a collapsed caldera, many glaciated valleys. At this point we were told about clan/family conflicts and massacres in past centuries (shades of the Lammermoor story).

Glasgow’s houses reflect the local geology – red sandstone, slate roofs.

Via Loch Lomond to Doune castle then onwards to Stirling on the river Forth - the strategic high point between highlands and lowlands midway between Glasgow and Edinburgh. The coronation of Mary Queen of Scots and baptism of James VI took place in Stirling castle, which is actually located on the flat below the highlands

Falkirk boasts a 2002 engineering masterpiece i.e. a wheel in a lower canal to raise vessels to the upper canal or vice versa. Linlithgow with its church spire representing Christ’s Crown of Thorns and fabulous coffee shops was the last photo opportunity before the return to Edinburgh.

Personally, Raimund’s technique of having captions/brief text next to his photos was helpful in the sense that seated at the back my faded hearing was less strained.

Sincere thanks Raimund!

‘Ela Taranto