

Part 2 – Mull

Saturday 30th June

Having left HQ nice and early at 9.30am we very quickly got stuck behind a really slow driver at Loch Oich. We joined the massive tailback and sat back to enjoy the ride.....NOT! There was nothing we could do about it though because the road was narrow and winding, so with nowhere to overtake we just had to go with the flow. The driver behind had other ideas and decided that overtaking a load of us on double white lines and on the brow of a hill was a good manoeuvre. Our hearts were in our mouths as we watched a van coming the other way while he was still on the wrong side of the road but luckily, he managed to pull in just in time. What an idiot! We were already envisaging going back to Lochaber at some point, as it had been a cracking place and we were totally hooked, so we started to feel nervous that Mull just wouldn't be able to compare. Had we made a huge mistake, or would it be totally worth it?

It wasn't long before we were back at the Morrison's at Fort William and again, I went in to do the weekly food shop while Wendy stayed in the car with Lyca and all our stuff. I was limited as to what I could buy because we still had many hours ahead of us before we were going to be at our next HQ. With the temperature being so high we couldn't get any cold or frozen items, so I literally had to just get essential store cupboard stuff that wouldn't go off in the car and cross our fingers that we could pick up the rest when we arrived on Mull. Poor Lyca didn't have much room after I'd put the shopping on the back seat and she looked most put out at having to sit amongst a load of bags. After that we headed off to get the Corran Ferry as I'd decided to go on the south side of Loch Linnhe and use the ferry to get back to the north side rather than take the massively long detour around Loch Eil, which takes ages. When we got to the ferry it had just got to the other side, so we had to wait for it to come back.....Typical!



Typical!

It's really quick though, so we didn't have to wait very long at all and after paying £8.20 (one way!) we were off.

Five minutes later we were driving off and being the third car off I was glad we weren't going to get caught up in the traffic. Wendy then announced that she wanted a wee, so I had to make a very quick turn off to the WC's meaning that every single car was now going to be on the road ahead of us.....Urrghhhh!



Waiting for Wendy whilst cars board for the return trip

There were loads of Eiders in the sea and it was already 26.5c by the time we were in the familiar territory of Strontian in Ardnamurchan at 12.05pm. My first plan of the day was to revisit Ariundle for another shot at Chequered Skipper. Last time the bad weather had hindered our entire holiday, but we'd actually found one on our last day which was amazing seeing as it was also right at the end of Chequered Skippers flight period. This time the weather was more favourable and we were nearly a week earlier, so hopefully we stood a better chance.

We arrived at Ariundle at 12.12pm and it felt like 5minutes ago that we'd been there last. It was boiling, so we took our lunch over to a picnic bench to eat it in the semi shade. There were a few horseflies about, which was annoying, but we hoped there wouldn't be as many as we'd been used to. Just as we finished eating I spotted a female type Demoiselle, which seemed to have landed on the ground on the other side of the carpark :O. I was gobsmacked because as far as I knew you don't get Demoiselles that far north! I quickly went over to investigate but I just couldn't re-find it anywhere and had to give up before I'd ID'd it, which was gutting as I was thinking it would've been an extremely rare sighting for there. Back at the picnic table the horseflies were becoming a problem and Lyca was up on her back legs dancing and raring to go, so it was definitely time to make a move.

We set off through the Ancient Oak Woodland at 12.40pm and although it was just as impressive this time around, annoyingly the horseflies were just as bad as they'd been at Lochaber and our patience was wearing thinner by the day.



Ancient Atlantic Coast Oak Woodland

A Speckled Wood fluttered by and Lyca had a drink from the stream next to the path where we spotted an area of long grass that'd been well and truly trampled. Chequered Skipper like feeding in rough grassy areas, woodland rides and the outer edges of woodland, so we wondered if someone had found one there. It had been done recently and although there were no butterflies there we felt a bit more hopeful that we might catch up with one at some point. Yet again we were there right at the end of their flight season, which is mid-May – mid-June, so we knew it was a bit dodgy but still a better time than when we saw one two years ago. We stopped to chat to a couple with a dog and instantly had something in common.....horseflies! While we chatted they landed on their legs, arms and faces so they seemed to prefer them to us for a nice change. One had bitten the bloke and drawn blood but the overall topic was how sick we all were of them and how there was so many.....Grrrrr! They were very nice but none of us wanted to stand around for long so we all hurried off. There were Northern Emeralds flying around in the woods, which I never thought anything of after seeing so many the previous week, but found out from the County recorder that they was the first to be recorded at Ariundle for 15 years!! We also found a moth that we remembered was a **Spinach**. We turned off and walked along the boardwalk through a shaded area of willows, which led to the heath but even in the shade of the trees we were all absolutely boiling. When we got out onto the heath we looked around at the scenery and it didn't feel as though we'd ever been away.



Ariundle views

There were 3x Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries flying around and 4x Northern Emeralds, but Wendy wanted to take Lyca down to the river for a paddle because she looked really hot. We found a place where we could get down and Lyca was straight in paddling about and wagging her tail.



Swimming doggo

She looked eager and Wendy wondered if she was waiting for her to throw something for her, so picked up a stone and threw it. Lyca went chasing after it but obviously it'd sunk to the bottom so she couldn't get it. Wendy repeated the process a few times and each time she'd throw the stone a bit further out until Lyca was getting into the really deep bit. Normally she won't do that but today she was more than happy and even stuck her head under in an attempt to get a stone. Wendy thought she'd push it a bit further and threw a

stone even further out and Lyca went straight after it and then ended up swimming! She swam even further out than the stone but then realised that she couldn't touch the bottom, spluttered and came straight back in. Even so, for her to be swimming was a revelation and she even did it again! By then Wendy wanted to join her and had taken her shoes and socks off, so that she could also have a paddle.



Mad, the pair of them!

The water was just the right temperature and not the icy bone aching cold of that in the Loch at Creag Meagaidh. There were loads of little fish (I think they were Brown Trout) swimming around her feet and eventually I couldn't resist and joined them.



Little Brown Trout I think

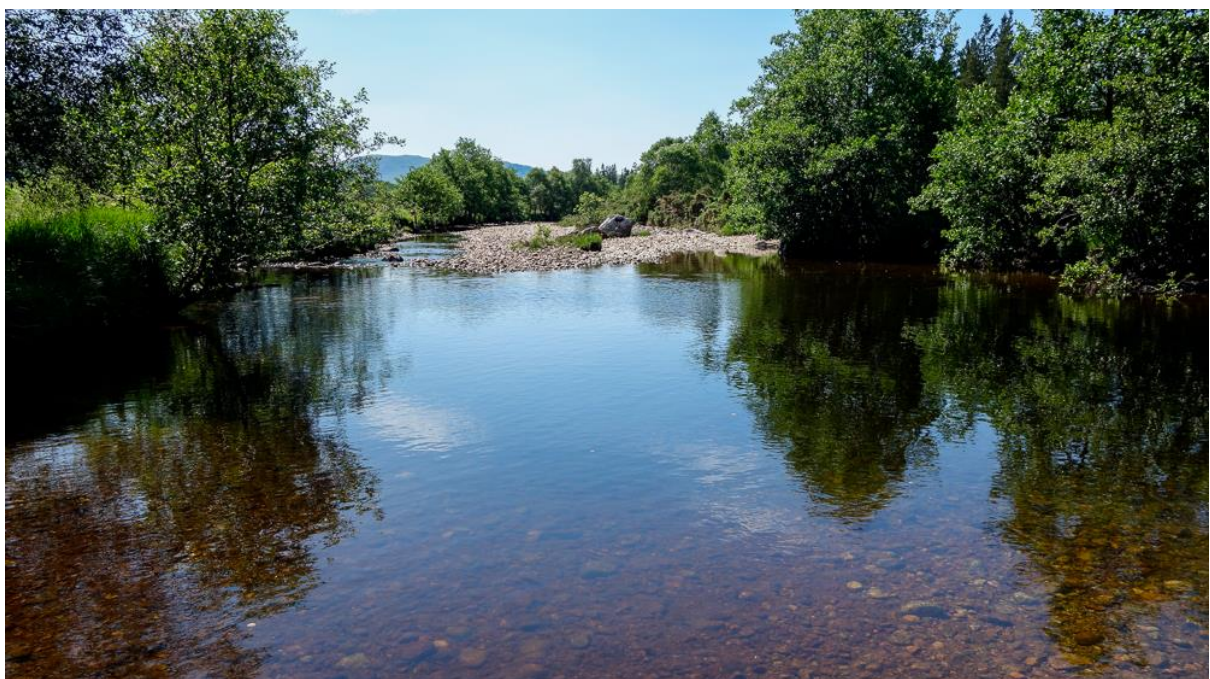
I found the exuvia of a Dragonfly floating next to a rock and Wendy reached out and fished it out with a stick so we could have a look. Since it was in a bit of a mess it was too hard to

positively ID but we think it is from one of the Hawkers but we can't even be sure about that!



Dragonfly exuvia

I then spotted another Demoiselle, so we watched it for ages. It turned out to be a **Beautiful Demoiselle**. We didn't expect a Demoiselle this far north and it turns out the population doesn't go further north than the Lake District except for a population centred around the mild Western Scotland area of Mull/Fort William. Basically, smack bang where we were! Another one flew in and I tried my hardest to get a shot of them, but they didn't land and were far too quick for me. There were also 4x Golden-ringed and a load of Large-reds, so it was a great section of river.



Water was still freezing!

I think Wendy and Lyca could've stayed there all day but eventually I had to mention that we needed to get going and they reluctantly got out. Lyca didn't want to leave and I can't say I blamed her but eventually I tore her away and we carried on. By then I was too hot and feeling grumpy and Wendy was dawdling behind us trying desperately to kick up a Chequered Skipper from the grassy edges of the path.



Should've been a Chequered Skipper in there somewhere!

I'd given up at that point and even when we got to the spot where I found our first ever (and only one) last time, I wasn't hopeful. There were hardly any of the more common Butterflies around or any Common Hawkets either, so I could only think that it'd been so hot that the Chequered Skippers had already expired or that they were lying low like everything else seemed to be. We found 2 more Beautiful Demoiselles by the path at the second bridge on the way back to the car park.

When we got back it was 2.41pm and the temperature was 25.5c, so it wasn't pleasant when we got into the car. I stopped off at Strontian so that Wendy could nip to the WC and shop, which brought back memories of our stay in Bramble Cottage just around the corner. It was as busy as ever and nothing had changed apart from the obvious presence of the sun. How different things could've been if we'd had good weather during our week there. Wendy had been gone for ages and I could hear her chatting in the shop and willed her to hurry up before Lyca and I cooked in the car. A bloke with a dog and huge rucksack, who we'd seen walking at the side of the road just after the Corran ferry, turned up and sat down on the grass under a tree. He looked as though he was homeless or something and his poor dog looked more than a bit hot, but he must've been a very fast walker to have to have got to Strontian so quickly. We wondered what his story was and by absolute fluke I found out about 2 months later. I was reading an article in The Guardian about a bloke who was homeless after leaving his position as a paratrooper in the Army. He was raising money for SSAFFA, a charity to help veterans get back on their feet, by walking the entire coast of the UK, which is about 11,000miles, with just his dog for company :O! For some reason the bloke we'd seen in Strontian sprung to mind and when I saw a photo of him and the dog I knew that it was them. When Wendy eventually came back she laughed and told me that it

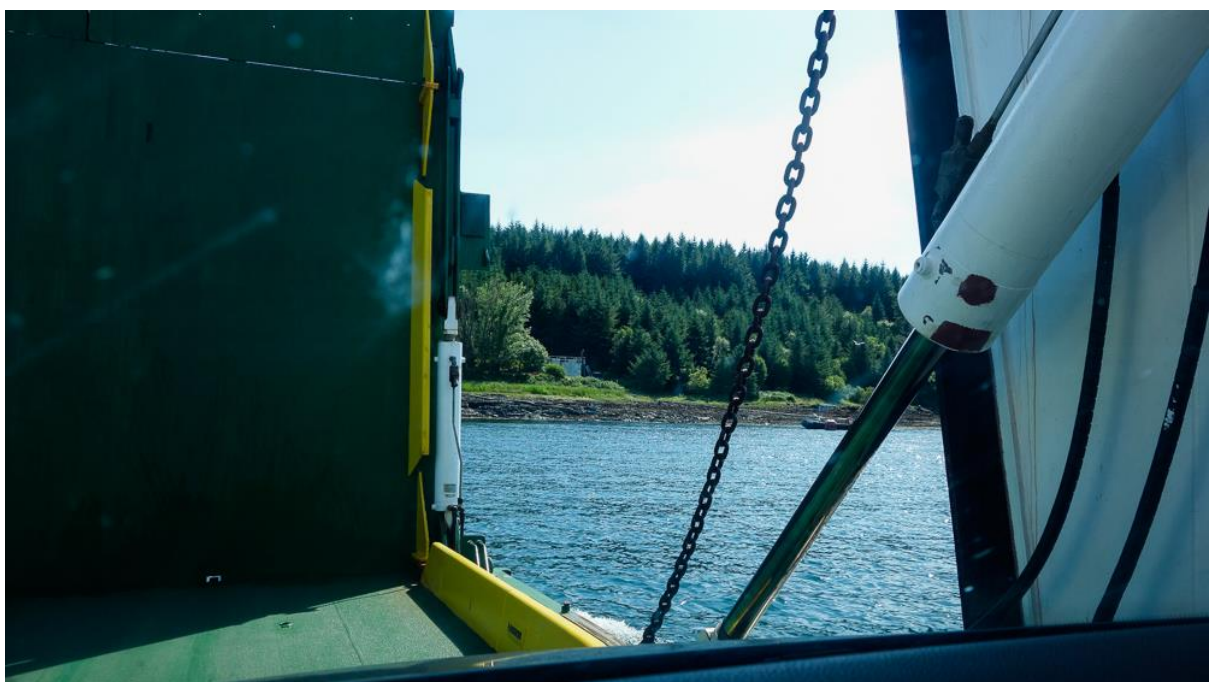
was the same friendly old guy serving at the counter, so she'd been talking to him about the Isle of Man and Mull. His wife was the total opposite and never smiles let alone speaks to anyone. She was just as grumpy as ever and had even failed to move the trolley she'd put in front of the counter to restock the booze shelf even though there was a queue of customers. Maybe she just hates her life of being a shop owner in Strontian?

Driving over Morven it was 27.5c and when we got to Lochaline at 3.42pm we found that the next ferry wasn't until 4pm, so we had to wait in the boiling hot car.



Lochaline

We didn't board until 4.05pm and after Wendy had paid for our £23.90 return ticket we set off 1 minute later.



Mull ferry

It was a bit of a choppy crossing over to Fishnish but we drove off at 4.23pm and I hoped that with Mull being an Island the temperature would've dropped slightly. I was NOT happy to see that it was still 27.5c and I was still far too hot.....Grrrrrr! As we past the Spa up the road at Craignure we looked to see if there anywhere to park to get the rest of our shopping but there were hordes of people outside and not a single space for my car, so I had to drive straight past. Hopefully the local shop by our HQ would be open though and it was probably better to wait until later anyway as we had a walk planned first.

I really wanted to try again for Marsh Fritillary and having been to Lochdon last time I had no difficulty finding the layby. Wendy just wanted to go straight to our HQ and get our shopping sorted but the walk was on the way and we wouldn't be going past it again until the day we left. It seemed too good an opportunity to miss, so I compromised and said we'd only do a short walk and not any further than the end of the first field.



Lochdon

The only spanner in the works was that it seemed a bit windy for them, but it was still worth a shot especially as it was miles hotter than last time we'd been there. I parked up in the layby at 4.36pm and we went through the gate and set off up the field. There were Small Heaths flying, so at least that was a start and we quickly found a Large Heath, which I stopped to get a photo of.



Large Heath

This was the spot where we'd found our first ever Large Heath two years before and now we'd seen a few in various locations. A Fritillary whizzed past us and then vanished, so we went in search of it with our fingers crossed that it was what we were after. We eventually re-found it and when it landed I rushed over to ID it. My heart sank when I saw that it was just a Dark Green Fritillary, so the hunt was still on, much to Wendy's disapproval. Wendy picked up on the call of a Reed Bunting and found it down in the field below us. A Dragonfly flew past us and I was certain it was an Emerald, but it was too quick to keep up with and it vanished. I wasn't expecting Northern Emeralds on Mull, so it was annoying to not confirm the ID. Wendy found a baby Whinchat sitting on the fence ahead of us and then what appeared to be a blue Dragonfly caught my eye. I followed it until landed and was very surprised to see a Keeled Skimmer sitting there. I took some record shots just to be certain and there turned out to be 2 of them.



Keeled Skimmer

This seemed completely mental, as we've only seen Keeled Skimmer in Norfolk and Sussex, so I'd always assumed they only occurred in Southern England. A **Painted Lady** flew past and then Wendy was onto a small dark Butterfly that flew across the path in went down in the long grass. I went after it but although she thought she knew where it'd gone there was no sign of it. A nice male Whinchat was sitting up on the mound ahead but that was as far as I'd said we go, so we turned around.



Whinchat

Again, there was Sundew everywhere and it was impossible not to step on it and when we had to skirt round the boggy bit (which had been nearly impassable last time) we started to notice that we were kicking up a lot of moths. We had a look at them and found them to be **Straw Dot** and a Golden-ringed Dragonfly whizzed past. It was a great area but although we'd seen 4x Large Heath, 3x Small Heath, 2x Dark Green Fritillary, 1x Painted Lady, 2x Keeled Skimmer and 1x Golden-ringed we'd yet again failed to see Marsh Fritillary :(. It was interesting that Large Heath outnumbered Small Heath but maybe one day we'll be in the right place at the right time to find what is becoming our bogey Butterfly :P. Last time we'd seen White-tailed Eagle and Hen Harrier, so it'd been a bit disappointing on the bird front. The views more than made up for the lack of birds though!



Lochdon

Back at the car it was 5.15pm and still 26c but I wasted no time in getting going seeing as it was getting quite late. We drove past Loch Na Keal but there was no sign of any Otters, having seen one there last time. We did see a lovely **Hen Harrier** though plus **Curlew** and we could hear the high-pitched calls of **Common Sandpipers** everywhere. They were all perching on rocks at the water's edge and flying around erratically and we even saw a huge fish jumping clean out of the water. Eventually we had our 1st view of our HQ for the week and we started to get slightly worried when we saw cars parked outside the other 2 cottages in the row.....Urrghhh!

I pulled up outside Seabank Cottage at 5.52pm and the setting with its view over Loch Scridain was picture perfect.



Cottage view

There were House Martins nesting all over it, so they were coming and going to feed their hungry chicks that were peeping out of the entrances in anticipation. Very nice :).



House Martin nest

We went through the front door and into the living room where we were greeted by a damp smell, but the building was old so we'd kind of expected that. Inside was what we'd class as 'Old School' but it was fine and the view more than made up for any of its shortfalls. Lyca certainly didn't mind!!



She's at home already

There was a bottle of wine and some shortbread on the kitchen table but unfortunately no milk in the fridge, so we still needed to go out to get some.



Kitchen

Wendy instantly gave Lyca her tea before she started to unpack our food into the huge fridge, which was nice after the tiny one at Lochan Torr. She then went into the huge bedroom, that resembled something from an episode of 'Miss Marple' to hang up our clothes.



Bedroom

After she'd done that she put all our toiletries in the bathroom, which was actually quite modern, while I tried to get an internet connection on the Mac but it just wouldn't join.....Grrrrr! Wendy discovered that her dressing gown was missing and the only thing she could think was that she'd left it hanging on the back of the bedroom door at Lochan Torr...Uh oh! She's never left anything behind at a cottage before, so was quite annoyed with herself and was pretty sure there'd be no clothes shops on Mull to be able to replace it. By then we realised that we wouldn't be able to get to Salen (on the other side of the island!) before the shop shut at 7pm either. That meant that we had no milk for the morning and no cheese to make sarnies with, so before doing anything we'd have to go there 1st thing in the morning....Grrrrr! Luckily Wendy had Oat Milk for her cereal, so at least she could have breakfast before we went out.

Having well and truly moved in we boiled the kettle for our very convenient tea of instant noodles. I'd got Wendy Itsu - Satay Noodles and Naked - Firecracker Chicken Noodles for myself and yet again mine was horrible and hers was nice. I wasn't doing very well for food on this holiday while Wendy seemed to be coming out better. While I was in the bathroom Wendy asked me to run her a bath, which I did. When she went in she was horrified to find that it was just about touching on lukewarm, but not wanting to have to wait for ages while the water heated up again she had to just grin and bear it. I read the visitor info booklet and it said there was a tap under the sink that you turn on for 30minutes if you needed more. If only she had more patience :P. There were some nice mini soaps, shower gels, shampoos and conditioners provided and also sewing and nail kits, so they'd thought of everything in case you'd forgotten something. The only thing missing was MILK!!!! Wendy phoned her Mum on the landline and then hung up so that she could get the house number to phone her back on. The 'Big button' phone was hilarious but a total luxury after the set up we'd had at Lochan Torr and she was able to lie on the very comfy bed while she chatted.



Size of those buttons!

We finally settled down to watch TV on the postage stamp sized screen in the corner of the room that was smaller than any monitor I'd owned for donkey's years!



Smallest TV on the planet

The settees were comfy but Wendy was chilly without her dressing gown and had to put her cardigan on instead, which was a poor substitute. The sun didn't shine into the room at all during the day, which meant it stayed cool but also that it was a touch too cold in the evening. It'd been a long day, so we headed off to bed at 10.25pm and went out like lights.

Sunday 1st July

When I woke up it was only 5.30am but all I could hear was Wendy throwing up loudly in the bathroom.....Uh oh! Lyca wasn't happy and ran in to see if she was OK, so I thought I'd better go and check too. She had no idea why, but she was feeling awful and didn't look well at all, so after she'd finished she went back to bed. I managed to go back to sleep until 7.30am when I had to get up and take Lyca out for a wee. After that I poured some cereal into a bowl, but it wasn't until I went to the fridge that I remembered that there was no milk.....Nooooooo! I don't like oat milk, so I made do with a cereal bar to tide me over while I had a look online to find our nearest shop. I discovered that there was a shop up the road on Loch Scridain but due to it being Sunday it was closed all day and the Salen Spa didn't open until 10am.....Urrghhhh! I'd expected it to be a difficult in Mull but not that bad! Wendy finally started to feel a bit better and got up, so I went outside to try and get some flight shots of the House Martins to fill in some time, but it didn't go that well because my lens was a bit too slow.



House Martin

She made herself a coffee thinking that the oat milk would do but it seemed to disappear and despite putting loads in it still looked and tasted like a black coffee and was poured down the sink.....weird!

We headed out to Salen at 9.45pm and when we got to the first corner from the cottage we spotted a woman standing in the road looking down at something. There were 3x small black furry creatures all huddled together looking a bit disorientated and it took our brains a while to kick into gear but then the penny dropped and we thought, "Baby Otters.....or are they baby Mink?" They were too dark to be Otters, but we didn't know if there were any Mink on Mull and sincerely hoped that there weren't. They quickly scurried into the hedge and were gone before we could even lift our bins and the woman was looking straight at us as we approached her. She was American and said, "Excuse me, I dunno much about these things but were they Otters or Mink?" We shrugged our shoulders and agreed that they had to be one of the 2, but later on when I checked I found out that there were indeed Mink on Mull, so we'd just seen our 1st ever wild Mink. Obviously, although they're really cute,

this is really bad news and they're having a devastating impact on the local ground nesting birds. It's not just a problem on Mull either, Lewis and Harris in the Outer Hebrides are also affected, so there are steps being taken to eradicate them before they do irreversible damage to ground nesting birds :(. To think that the animal rights activists that released them from fur farms in the 1970s thought that they were being kind gets even more ludicrous as time goes on.

As we descended down to Loch Na Keal we saw 3x **Wheatear**. The view was fantastic but there were low clouds hanging around further out.



Loch Na Keal

We just hoped that this wasn't going to be a 'thing' that would happen every day with it being so hot. We drove past a layby that had been taken over by Gypsies and looked like a very pro set up. They had their washing hanging out on lines and big sacks of cockles piled up next to the caravans, so they obviously knew what they were doing. There were loads more Wheatears further on and we stopped for another scan for Otter but although we didn't see one we weren't overly worried seeing as we'd just arrived and there was still plenty of time left.



No Otter out there :(

There was a **Shag** out on the sea but not much else until we turned off to Salen and saw a **Hedgehog** crossing the road. To see one out in the daytime isn't good and we knew that they were struggling because of the exceptionally hot, dry spell we were having :(. We eventually got to Salen Spa and the 16mile journey had taken us 45minutes, so we had to get the shopping right, so we didn't have to repeat it again in a hurry! Wendy went in with the list and just hoped that she hadn't forgotten anything, although she was sure there'd be something. The low cloud had lifted by the time we were heading back, so the view was much better. When we were driving past the forest near to HQ we could hear a raptor calling really close by. Wendy found a baby Buzzard, still without a tail, sitting at the top of a tree by the road and then the parent bird, which was calling to it. Dropping down into the bay where the cottage sits we got a nice view of its position. Although it doesn't look as nice with the tide out.



View of the cottage

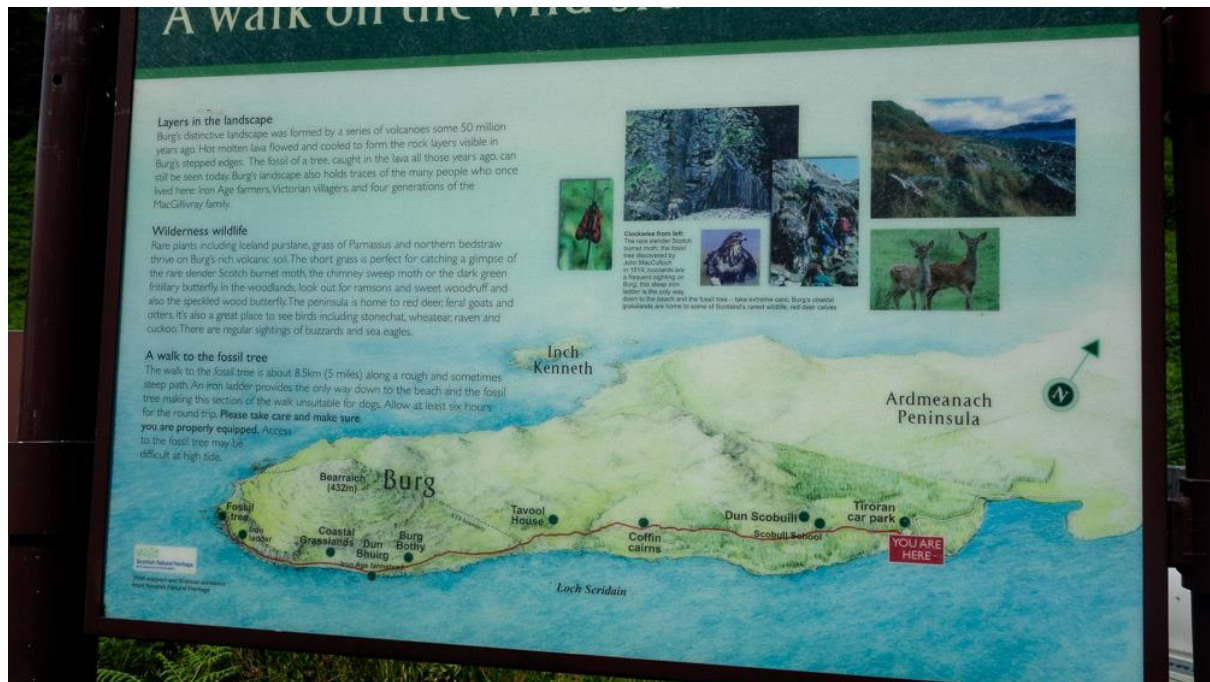
By the time we got back to HQ it was 11.27am even though my sat nav had given me the eta of 10.55am. It obviously hadn't taken the narrow winding roads of Mull into consideration....Hahahaha! There was no point going out before lunch, so Wendy put the shopping away and then made use of the time and made some food. All she had was a tin of tomatoes, an onion, some red lentils, curry powder and garlic olive oil, so Lentil Dhal it was. While that was cooking the whole house stank of curry, which made a change from damp I suppose. She then made some sarnies and we sat down to eat our lunch. Wendy had only been able to get Spa cheese, as there was no other option and she turned her nose up with her first bite. She reckoned that if that was the only cheese in existence she'd be put off it forever, as it tasted like cow. She'd even debated as to whether to get the vegan cheese they had but knew she wasn't keen on it, but she really wished she had. It was low tide and Wendy spotted 2x Waders feeding down on the Loch from the kitchen window.



Loch Scridain

I had a look with my binoculars and was pleased to see that they were **Greenshank** and we wondered what else we were going to see from the house. We had every chance of Otter or White-tailed Eagle, so we'd have to keep our eyes peeled.

Keeping up with tradition I'd found a local walk from HQ to kick off our first day and this one looked really good with White-tailed Eagles breeding up there as well as Scotch Burnett Moths, which would be a lifer for us. There was a fossil tree at the end, which we weren't going to see because it's a walk of 11.7 miles just to get to it.....Holy moly!! It's also described as, "A remote and challenging walk, which is no place for those with a fear of heights", so it was out of the question!



Fossil tree walk

We set off at 12.50pm down the road alongside the Loch and then turned off and started climbing up a steep road towards the Hotel grounds. It was then that Wendy realised that something was missing and then noticed that she didn't have her bins.....Doh! We'd already gone quite far, so being the kind person I am, I offered to run back and get them for her. She didn't take much persuading and stayed put with Lyca, while I went to get them. As we carried on up the hill we kicked a moth up and when it landed on the side of tree we ID'd it as **Mottled Beauty** and there were Dragonflies whizzing around.



Golden-ringed Dragonfly

They were too quick to say what they were though and didn't land once, so we gave up. We walked past the entrance to the Tiroran Hotel, but it was surrounded by trees, so we couldn't see it from there. We heard a **Blackcap** singing and near a shed we saw a **Spotfly**

with food in its beak. Walking along the singletrack road we went past a house's gate with what I reckon is a very old sign!



Bit old this gate :O

Further on we had to go through a gate into the car park of a tearoom/gift shop and there were 2 huge Labradors behind the shop doorway. Having not found anywhere to get any pressies yet it looked like a good contender but going in for a look was going to be impossible with Lyca. We walked round the Hotel grounds and finally could see it, but it looked weird, like a bunch of cottages together :-\.



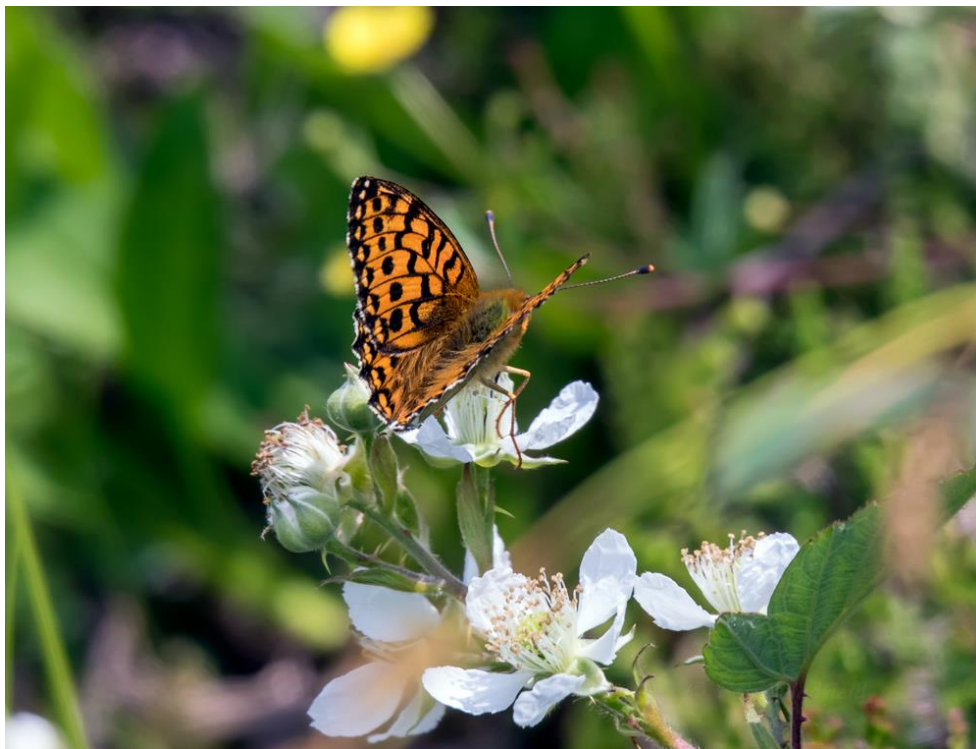
Tiroran Hotel

We went through Berg car park and still feeling really tired from her drama earlier Wendy wasn't impressed to see another steep hill ahead of us. It was boiling too, so it felt like hard work even for me but when we got to the top it looked pretty flat from then on.



Fossil tree walk

We had to keep our eyes peeled for Scotch Burnett plus Chimney Sweeper and Dark Green Frits on the short grassland areas and when we found such a spot we went to investigate. There was no shortage of Dark Green Fritillaries flying around and we even found some Chimney Sweepers but no Burnetts at all.



Dark Green Fritillary

There were also some weird above ground graves up there too.



Above ground graves?

What a spot to be buried! Shame whoever it is can't see the amazing view! Further on we found a pair of mating Dark Green Fritillary's but then we found a load of sheep up ahead on the path and Lyca started to go nuts, so we decided not to go any further. We were hot and tired by then anyway even though we'd had our laziest day so far, but we started to head back anyway. There were Wild Strawberries growing on the bank and loads of Sundew and then we kicked up an interesting looking moth that I took a photo of to ID it later. It was either a Common Carpet or something much better like Balsam Carpet, so we couldn't wait to have a look in the book when we got back. A bit further on we came across something that resembled the set out of the film Misery. I hate to think how many dead bodies are dotted around the place :O.



The photo makes it look a lot nicer than it was!

The tearoom/gift shop was still open, so we decided to go back later on in the car, so we didn't have Lyca with us. When we got back down to the shed the Spotted Flycatcher was still there with food in its beak, so I went to investigate.



Spotted Flycatcher

When I peered round the corner I spotted 4-5 babies under the eaves, so after Wendy had seen them we left them to it.



Spotted nest

Back at HQ it was 3.15pm and our only walk of the day had been just 7.12km, 10,600steps and had taken us 2hours 20minutes. I suppose we deserved a bit of a break though and even Lyca didn't look as though she'd been short changed.



Very tired

We dropped our stuff off, then got into the car and I drove up the road to the shop. We left Lyca in the car while we went to see if there was anything that we could pick up for presents but there wasn't much at all. Wendy picked up some handmade chocolate and spicy chutney but apart from that there wasn't much apart from loads of bottles of Gin. It was actually the Tiroran Estates own Gin made from botanicals sourced from around Loch Scridain, although it was a London Dry Gin. It was called "Whitetail" after the Eagles that nest on the Estate and Wendy was tempted to buy some. At £38 a bottle she dismissed it as an unnecessary luxury but wished that she could sit outside in the garden and sample some in the sun. There was no way I was going to leave Lyca in the car or hang around while she did though, so it just remained a nice idea. I got her to buy some Lemon Drizzle Cake that was on the counter and the women in the shop commented that they knew that the chocolate and chutney was nice, as they'd made it.

By the time we got back to HQ it was still early, but it gave Wendy a chance to cook the broccoli for Lyca's tea. By 4.40pm Lyca couldn't wait any longer and was becoming too annoying to ignore, so Wendy gave it to her early. We also had ours just after 5pm and yet again Wendy enjoyed her Dhal but my Chicken Jalfrezi ready meal was horrible! What was going on? I just wanted to have a nice tea for a change, but Wendy just laughed and said that I should've had what she'd had. I mulled it over in my head and then suggested that I'd give it a go, which made her nearly fall off her chair. After tea we'd planned to go up the road to the Eagle Watch Hide but we were just too tired and couldn't find the motivation to do anything else. Wendy went off to run a bath and yet again it was cold, so she boiled a couple of kettles to try and warm it up. It didn't really work, so she had another cold bath, so I put the switch on and went over the road to try to get some photos while it heated up....Clever :P.



Fieldcraft-tastic

The Common Sandpipers weren't playing but a nice Rock Pipit came and had a look at me.



Rock Pipit

When I came back in I ran my bath, which was lovely and hot and made Wendy very jealous....Hahahahaha! We watched some TV and at high tide we looked through the kitchen window and noticed 3x Red-breasted Mergansers out on the Loch. They were really close in and ended up hauling out to roost just outside HQ. The wind had really picked up by the time we went to bed at 10.15pm, so seeing as we needed a decent night's sleep after last night, I didn't see the point in putting the moth trap out.

Monday 2nd July

We were awake at 7am and it was another very sunny start to the day, so we were keen to get out to explore as much as we could in the shortened time we had on Mull. I'd found a walk that wasn't for anything in particular Wildlife wise but it was to an abandoned village called Shiaba on the Ross of Mull (SW end of Mull). It was one of the 1st villages on Mull to be evicted when the kelp market crashed and landowners started the Highland clearances to turn their land over to sheep farming. It used to have a population of 110 but within 40years everyone had been forced out and had gone, mostly to the new world. It looked like a nice walk, but it also had a bit of History behind it, so I was shocked when Wendy agreed to go. Wendy made the sarnies and as usual we plastered on the factor 50 and smidge before leaving at 8.55am. Loch Scridain looked very nice in the morning light, so Wendy took a photo looking back at the cottage.



Lovely

We heard a **Greenfinch** flying over and saw our 1st **Sedge Warbler** of the trip as we drove alongside the Loch. Looking back towards the mountains gave a great view of Beinn Mhòr the highest mountain on Mull.



Beinn Mhòr

A Hen Harrier floated over and we heard a couple of **Reed Buntings** just before we stopped for a scan, hoping for an Otter or Eagle to put in an appearance.



Bottom end of Loch Scridain

Unfortunately, we had no such luck and we started to have our 1st niggle that we might be going home Otterless. With only 3 full days left we didn't have much time and my mate Andy hadn't seen any during his week on Shetland. We carried on and just after Pennygael Stores Wendy spotted something out in the Loch that dived, so I pulled over and we waited for it to reappear. We both got out of the car but whatever it was wasn't in any hurry to come back up and we waited for ages before a brown head popped up for air. It was miles out and although initially it did look very Otterish it was motionless and not behaving like one at all. Some Common Terns were flying around noisily and eventually it dived again,

revealing itself as a Seal.....Urrghhhh! That was very disappointing, but we'd been so lucky with everything else that there had to be something a bit more challenging.



No Otter :(

We heard a Whitethroat and Mull seemed to have been good for Warblers so far. We turned off the “main” (single track) road and the scenery changed into flat fields with Lapwing flying around and crofts dotted about. The road eventually turned into a rough stony track and I apologised to my car as it bounced along it.....Bleurrghh! It was already having problems with the crunching noise when I was pulling away, so it probably didn't need any additional issues to deal with. We heard our 1st **Yellowhammer** of the trip and then saw it on the fence ahead of us, which was great. We kept going and even Lyca wasn't enjoying the bumpy ride very much and had started puffing and panting loudly behind us. We spotted a Wheatear with a juvenile and the pulled up in the layby by an old graveyard at 10.03am. This is where I was pretty sure was the car park for the walk.



Old graveyard

It'd taken us ages to get a short distance again, so we got the impression that we'd just have to get used to it.



Interpretation board for the area

We set off up the path and had only been going for a couple of minutes when a white minibus full of people came towards us and stopped. A bloke stuck his head out of the window and said, "There's a Golden Eagle on the hill around the corner, it's been there about 2 hours." Get in! We thanked him and headed off with an extra spring in our step hoping to catch up with it but knowing our luck it'd fly off just before we got there. Something caught my eye at the side of the path and when I got closer I could see that it was a dead **Adder**! Sadly, it looked as though it'd been run over by some kind of vehicle or other and was already dried up and a bit crispy, so we couldn't feasibly tick it off.....Haha!

We now knew that they were around though and that we'd have to keep an eye on where Lyca was sticking her snout! We followed the path along the side of the hill where we reckoned the Eagle was and Wendy was 1st to stop for a scan. She found it straight away sitting on a ledge but could only see it from its shoulders up and it was so well camouflaged that if we hadn't been told about there was no way we'd have seen it.



Golden Eagle

It was great to see a Golden Eagle on the ground for the first time ever and it was definitely our best ever view. A Buzzard came in and started mobbing it, which was very brave considering the massive size difference. It gave up, but it was obviously not happy with the Eagles presence and returned a couple of minutes later for another go. The Golden Eagle must've got sick of the harassment in the end and took off, which gave us amazing relatively close views of it in flight. The Buzzard carried on mobbing it and we watched them performing what looked like an aerial acrobatic display including the Eagle going completely upside down, so I lifted my camera and started to fire off some shots. I wasn't particularly happy with what I got and felt that I should've done better but a few of them were passable and at least they gave a good idea of the size comparison.



Golden Eagle and Buzzard

If the Buzzard wasn't brave enough we were then shocked to see a Lapwing come in to challenge it too. Whaaaaat? We watched it fly along the coastline with the tiny Lapwing in tow until they both disappeared and were gone. WOW!!!! We already loved this walk :). Next, we found ourselves having to go through a farm and there were sheep roaming freely all over the place, so Lyca was pulling like mad to get to them. I led Lyca into the farmyard, hid behind a tractor and told Wendy to go up to the holiday cottage ahead to see if she could get them to run back down the hill past us. This plan didn't work and instead they all gathered at the gate we needed to go through, so I suggested swapping over. Wendy came over to take Lyca from me and luckily the sheep all ran down the hill, so we were free to carry on. There were more sheep after we'd gone through the gate as far as our eyes could see, so it wasn't going to be plain sailing.



Looking back at the farm

We walked up the hill with Lyca being a right pain and with the heat of the sun beating down on us I wasn't the most comfortable I'd ever been. There were loads of Wheatear along the way and especially on a fence surrounding an overgrown field full of wild flowers. We wondered if the field had a fence around it to protect the flowers, as it looked similar to the Machair on the Hebrides.



Machair restoration?

We heard a Raven overhead and Lyca eventually stopped trying to chase the sheep.....Phew! It was so hot as we walked across the top of the hills, but we could see some ruins in the distance, so knew we were heading in the right direction.



Chief scout Lyca

We started to head down the hill and came to a stream at the bottom where we found a Golden-ringed Dragonfly flying about. Lyca had a drink and cooled her paws off before we carried on.



More water to dawdle in

We kicked up a Silver-Y from the grass but eventually got to the old settlement, which consisted of around 20-22 derelict stone houses. There was a nice view out to sea there and it looked as though it'd been an idyllic if not extremely remote place to live in its heyday.



Shiaba clearances

One of the buildings looked in much better condition and we learned later that that there'd been a shepherd living there when it was turned over to sheep farming. There was a sheep inside, looking at us through the window, so Wendy couldn't resist getting a photo.



Sheep boss

We wandered around the buildings and wondered how many ticks we'd end up with by the end of the day. Looking down at the cove below us there were cows down on the beach at the water's edge and a Painted Lady flew past.



Paddling Cows

Wendy kicked up a small moth and on closer inspection it looked like a **Pyrausta Purparalis**, so I grabbed a record shot to check later.



Pyrausta Purpuralis

It looked as though it might've been an *Ostrinalis*, which would've been a lifer but because we didn't get a view of its under-side to ID it, we had to stick with the more common *Purpuralis*. It was strange that there was no info board at the site considering its interesting history and we thought it'd be a nice addition. Having explored as much as we could we turned around and started to walk back. When we got to the stream Lyca stopped for a paddle and refused to get out, but she must've been a very hot dog by then. While we waited for her we spotted another Dragonfly, which confused us when we noticed that it was blue like a Skimmer. I went off for a closer look and to get a photo just to be certain but it was definitely a Keeled Skimmer, so I put the record in on irecord as soon as I could. It wasn't to the best of my knowledge an area where they'd been reported from before. A while after we got back I got an email confirming that we'd found a new 10km sq. site for them :).



Keeled Skimmer

There was also a Four-spotted Chaser, but we couldn't hang around all day and I finally managed to tear Lyca away from the water to carry on. When we got back up to the top we spotted a Large Heath and then another. I was still in need of a good Large Heath pic, so I followed one of them until it landed but they seemed to really like landing deep in the long grass.



Large Heath

Eventually there were 4 of them and 2 were mating, so I put them into irecord as well. While I was doing that Wendy spotted something, it was the Golden Eagle back again.



Golden Eagle

It was circling in the thermals above us calling and as it got higher the Buzzard came back and started mobbing it again! You'd think that a Buzzard was no match for an adult Golden Eagle, but you have to respect them for trying :P. A little further on a Painted Lady landed in front of me so thought it'd be rude not to take its photo!



Painted Lady

Back down near the farm we stopped to chat to a lovely elderly couple who were from Birmingham. The bloke asked if the birds he'd seen were Sand Martins, which I didn't think would be there, as there didn't appear to be anywhere for them to nest. We hadn't seen any either so couldn't really comment. We were really shocked when he told us that they'd paid £100 each to go on a Whale and Dolphin watching boat trip at Tobermory! That seemed a bit steep by anyone's standards and just to rub salt in their wounds they didn't see anything either! As we chatted I noticed that the bloke had been right all along and that there were Sand Martins flying around, so there must've been a nest site somewhere nearby.

It was 12.58pm when we got back to the car, so we had our lunch and I had a look to see how far our walk had been. It was 6.69km and 11,000 steps, which wasn't much at all, but I reckoned that in the heat it'd felt much longer. As usual we didn't hang around and set off at 1.18pm for our next stop and driving through Bunnesan we spotted some **Rock Doves**, which were new for the trip. Driving into Fionnphort the landscape changed again and there were a lot of areas covered in Yellow flag Irises that looked great for Corncrake.



Fidden

I'd read that they'd be heard calling from the area and we couldn't help but wonder why they weren't resident considering they are on the island of Iona, which was just a stone's throw away. For our next stop I'd planned to walk to an old derelict observatory on Erraid Island which was not far from Shiaba and I reckoned that the tide would be out so we should be able to walk to it. On the way we noticed how busy the campsite was, so it was a good job for them the weather was being so kind and we saw another Hen Harrier.

I parked up in the car park at 1.54pm but by the time we'd got ready and headed out for our walk it was 2pm. Wendy suddenly looked at me and said, "Did you pick up the poo bag before we left?" I groaned and realised that we'd completely forgotten to pick it up, so we were now going to have to endure the horrible bumpy track again to go and get it after we had had our walk here. My poor car.....Grrrrrr! It's never somewhere easy to get to either!

We started to walk down a rocky track that led us down to a lovely beach which with the white sand, turquoise sea and blue sky looked almost tropical.



Walk down to Erraid Sound

Wendy spotted a Burnett type moth, but it flew past too quickly to ID and kept going until it was out of sight. Walking along the beach Lyca was pulling to get to even more sheep, so for me it was quite stressful. The tide was out, so my plan of visiting Erraid Island had worked a treat and if it'd been in we couldn't have gone there.



Low tide

We just crossed our fingers that it didn't come in really quickly while we were over there and leave us stranded! The tiny tidal Island has been part of the Findhorn Foundation for over 40 years and the families that live there live off the land and sea and you can even stay

there if you fancied it! Although it looked idyllic at that point, I'd hate to see what it's like in the winter during a storm!

According to the map the track was right in front of our noses, but we couldn't find a path up to it for the life of us, so we walked back on ourselves and just took a guess by wandering up a vague track in the grass that'd probably been made by sheep rather than humans. The walk up the side was really boggy, so we squelched our way over the top where it was much drier. We spotted a lovely male Hen Harrier, which we just had to stop to watch. I don't know why but we were surprised to see that the small cottage ahead of us looked as though it was lived in.....Doh!



Erraid Island

At the time we didn't know about the connection with the Findhorn Foundation, so must've presumed it was uninhabited. Further along we found a long row of terraced houses with long gardens that were all growing their own fruit and vegetables.



Findhorn foundation houses

There was one that didn't have anything growing in, so Wendy laughed and wondered if that person wasn't included in sharing produce when it came to harvest time. Maybe they knitted jumpers for everyone instead with wool from their own sheep or something? Looking back, it was probably just that nobody wanted to take up residence and the house was empty, but who knows? We had a great view of Iona and Ffionphort from up there and Wendy couldn't resist walking up to stand next to a flag on a hill to get the best view possible. Up until then there'd been no sign of the observatory and we'd started to doubt it existed but at the end of the terraces I finally spotted it. It was up a hill, so we decided not to bother walking up to it. Keen to get back before the tide came in, we headed back along the beach where we found this funny sculpture perched on the hill.



Lol!

We also couldn't help but envy the residents of the view from their front windows.



Not far to the mainland!

When we came off the island the tide was still miles out, so we walked down to the sea across the white sand. Wendy had decided that she was going for a paddle and Lyca obviously wasn't going to argue with that. Lyca was straight in with her tail wagging and looked very excited that Wendy was just about to join her. They both paddled about and Wendy said she wished she could get in for a swim but it was so shallow she'd probably have to paddle for $\frac{1}{2}$ mile until it was deep enough :P. She said it wasn't that cold either, which for her to say that was really saying something. She started kicking the water and Lyca was leaping about trying to chase it, so they looked as though they were having great fun.



Nutters!

Eventually they had to get out, which posed Wendy with a slight problem. How was she going to get her socks back on without all the sand that was stuck to her feet going in as well? After thinking about it she walked over to some rocks, sat down and washed it off her feet with the bottle of water she had before putting her socks on.....Sorted!

It was 3.54pm when we got back to the car and according to my fitbit the walk had been 5.1km and 8,000steps.

Heading home we stopped at the huge Ffionphort Visitor Centre to see if we could find more pressies but although the sign outside said it was open every day except Tuesday it was closed! Having poured her remaining water on her feet earlier Wendy needed a drink and I fancied an ice cream, so I stopped at the next shop we came to, which was near the Iona Ferry Terminal.



Looking towards Iona

We both went in for a look and picked up a couple of pressies, some drinks, a banana for Wendy and a Feast ice cream for me.....Om nom nom :). While we sat in the car eating our treats the Ferry came in and all the passengers got off and started walking up the hill, which looked like a scene from a zombie film.



Zombie apocalypse

It was obviously a very busy Ferry but then I noticed that some people had dogs with them. I was gutted because we would've loved to have visited Iona, but for some reason I'd always thought it had a no dog policy.....Urrghhhh! We weren't going to be in the area again, so had missed our chance, but it was good to know for next time, if there's a next time. It was getting quite late, so all that remained was to go back to pick up the poo bag before heading for home. I had to do a double take when I saw a woman out in her front garden hanging up some washing with a tiny little micro Donkey next to her. I commented about it to Wendy, but she hadn't seen it and was so gutted that she told me to go back. Obviously, I didn't so she was annoyed but I just wanted to get the horrible bumpy track out of the way. It was just as bad as we remembered it and Lyca was puffing and panting twice as much as the 1st time around, so it wasn't pleasant. We couldn't have picked a worse place to leave it if we'd tried! Luckily it was right at the start of walk, so I didn't have to walk far at all to get it, which was very lucky, as I wouldn't have fancied walking all the way back to Shiaba for a bag of poo. On the way back we saw a Pheasant chick and a couple more Yellowhammers, one of which was right next to the car on the fence. All of a sudden, my car started to make some awful noises and I realised that I'd acquired a stone in my brake disc from the track. I got out to try and remove but couldn't, so the sound effects carried on for the entire journey back to HQ.



Looking towards the Burg that we were at yesterday.

We arrived back at 5.53pm and I stopped to count how many House Martins nest were on the cottage. There were 9 in total, which was more than we'd initially thought and for a small cottage was pretty impressive :). We'd done 24,000 steps during the day, so after Lyca had wolfed down her dinner we shared the pizza Wendy had bought the day before. I'd only had 3 nice meals since being away and every single one had been pizza.....Hahahahaha! After that Wendy went for a bath and this time it was hot enough, so she was finally happy.



Evening view over the Loch from the front garden

Wendy had bought a can of G&T, since developing a taste for it recently and sat down with it to watch some TV. Wondering what all the fuss was about I asked her if I could try it, so she handed it over and I took a sip. "Bleurrghhhhh!" It was absolutely disgusting and I can't

understand how anyone can say otherwise! Unbelievably, none of us had picked up any ticks after our walk at Shiaba, which was a very pleasant surprise :). I decided that I'd put the moth trap out for the 1st time, so after that was all up and running and Lyca had been out we went to bed, very tired, at 10.15pm.

Tuesday 3rd July

I don't know why we woke up so early but at 6.15am we were awake and wondering what we'd caught in the moth trap. It was another very sunny and warm start to the day and when I took Lyca out I could already tell that our haul was miles better than at Lochan Torr. It was so good that Wendy even came out to help speed things up a bit, so I wasn't out there all morning. There were loads of midgies and we got eaten alive but with hindsight we should've caked ourselves with Smidge before even going outside.....Doh! As usual we let some of them go and potted up the interesting ones to ID or get photos of later. There was a Peacock Butterfly Caterpillar right next to the front door and we just hoped it wasn't going to pupate there, as it could easily get knocked off either accidentally or on purpose.



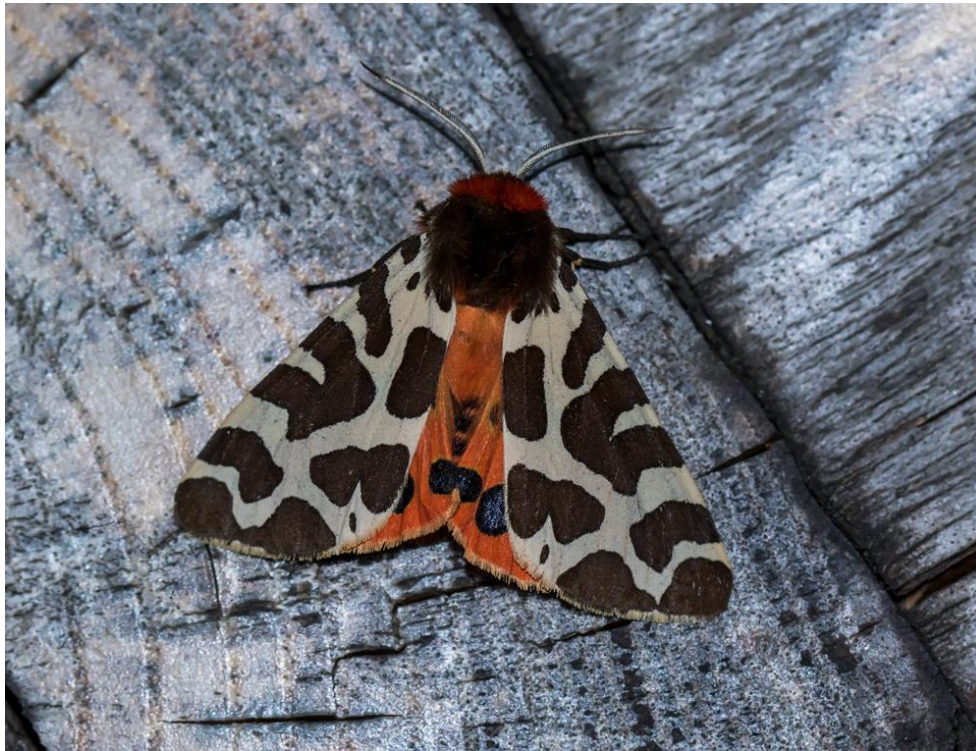
Peacock butterfly caterpillar

We went through the Moths while we had our breakfast and our list is as follows:-

Flame Carpet x2
White Ermine x16
Snout x1
Mottled Beauty x5
Triple-spotted Clay x20
Common White Wave x1
Garden Tiger x9
Northern Spinach x1
Small Phoenix x1
Middle-barred Minor x2
Grey Arches x2

Buff Ermine x1
Double Square-spot x10
Buff Tip x1
Coxcomb Prominent x2
Small Angle Shades x1
Bright-line Brown-eye x1
Purple Clay x1
Light Emerald x2
Green Carpet x1
Knott Grass x1 (tbc)
Dotted Clay x2
Eana osseana x1
Cherry Fruit Moth x1
Unidentified micro x1

Total = 86 moths (x25 sp)



Garden Tiger



Knot Grass



Cool Micro

By the time we'd done that and got ready we didn't leave until 9.22am and it was already 23.5c! There was a paddle steamer out on the Loch, which the neighbour in the other end terrace was out taking photos of with her kid.



Paddle Steamer

We planned to go to Tobermory this time, as we hadn't had time to go that far north last time. When we got down to Loch na Keal Wendy noticed that it was like Jellyfish soup and neither of us had ever seen so many before.



Loch Na Keal

A Common Sandpiper flew over the road calling and looking agitated and Wendy spotted that it had a tiny chick that was in danger of getting run over if it didn't keep away from the road.....Uh oh! There was a Farmer unloading his trailer of sheep to bring down to graze on the beach, which seemed to be the thing to do over there. The Gypsy camp had moved on apart from just one caravan and there was no sign that they'd even there, which meant that a **Ringed Plover** had been able to move in. We stopped in Salen, so Wendy could use the WC's before our walk and when she came out she had her hands cupped around something,

which could only mean one thing. She'd found some moths and was releasing them back outside, but she brought one over to show me first. It was a **Wainscott** of some description, so I got a quick photo to ID it later and there was also a **Spectacle** and a **Snout**.



Wainscott

Unfortunately we failed to ID it, as Wainscotts are pretty tricky. Yet again toilet block nothing had featured in the holiday but our best results from that had been during our Cornwall trip in 2014, so we can't wait to see what it's like in October this year. Hopefully there's not a D&V bug doing the rounds while we're there though because that would put us right off....Hahaha! After our detour we set off again and started to see signs of life in the areas of cleared forests. Foxgloves had taken over what would've been a bare forest floor before the clearance, so there were bright pink squares dotted about the place, which would be great for the Bees :).



All of a sudden, I became aware that the car behind us was getting impatient and was itching to overtake. The problem was that there was a huge lorry in front of me, which was holding us up. He couldn't get past that as well on single track roads with just passing places but in the end I got so sick of him being right up my backside so I pulled into a passing place and let him past. He then proceeded to tailgate the lorry and was swerving out and back in again, just as a subtle hint to the lorry driver! He even nearly hit someone standing at the side of the road, so we started to wish the lorry driver would pull over to let him past. In the end we got onto a 2-laned road, so he overtook the lorry as soon as there was even a hint of a straight but turned off at the next turn off for Aros Park anyway, so after all that, he'd added 0 seconds onto his journey. What an absolute idiot!

We arrived at Tobermory at 10.32am and I parked up in a car park next to the harbour. The view of the town was just as nice as Wendy had hoped it would be. Even I, who hates towns and cities had to agree so it didn't disappoint.



Tobermory

Even though it went totally against my grain I offered to go and do some touristy stuff with Wendy by taking a wander along the main street. It was relatively quiet and there wasn't half as many people as we'd imagined, which being such an iconic place surprised us. Wendy's first stop was a handmade chocolate shop, which, in such high temperatures, I reckoned should've been her last stop instead. Sure enough, within minutes the chocolates had fused together into one solid lump, but like she said, "They'll still taste the same!" I spotted a book I wanted displayed in the window of a bookshop, so Wendy went in to get it. It was called 'Wildlife watching on Mull' which I thought might come in handy for some new sites for Otter or something. Wendy couldn't find it anywhere and had to go and ask but when she gave it to me it wasn't what I'd hoped it'd be. It was a very simple book and didn't have anything interesting in it at all, so was of no use to use! Dohhh. We walked down to the end of the harbour and although we'd seen a few dogs, we'd managed to dodge them all really well, so Lyca didn't know they were there. We even managed to get

her past a Cat that was right under her nose without her noticing...Hahahahaha! It was so hot that I took Lyca down the slipway at the car park for a paddle while Wendy went into a clothes shop, to see if she could find anything to replace her dressing gown.



Tobermory paddle

She came back empty handed and we headed off at 11.20am for a short drive north to a walk to a hide on the coast that I'd found in my birdwatching sites in Scotland book.

Six minutes later I parked up in Ardmore car park but there was a white van from the Netherlands already there with 'Border Collie Frisby Team' on the side. Noooooo! That was the last thing we needed with Lyca hating Border Collies but all we could do was cross our fingers that we didn't come across them. The track was dry and dusty and led through the forest but having thought we might get some shade from the trees the sun was so high in the sky that there was no getting away from it. Worse still was that there were tons of Horseflies there as well.....Urrghhhh!



Ardmore

There were Ravens circling high up in the thermals but with the intense heat it felt as though we were in a foreign country and it'd be more fitting if they'd been Vultures! We passed some caravans parked up next to a clearing, where there were Common Hawker Dragonflies and Common Blue Butterflies everywhere. The only thing I could think of was that they were forestry workers and they stayed in the Caravans as it was cheaper or something. The path started to head down hill and we found a stream, which Lyca was straight in for a drink and paddle.



Nice views!

Wendy found a dead Golden-ringed Dragonfly next to the path and we carried on down towards the coast, where we hoped it'd be a bit cooler. The path became even steeper near the bottom and we didn't see much apart from another Painted Lady and loads of Dark

Green Fritillaries. The view out to sea was really nice and there were 2 elderly couples already standing around and admiring it, but they didn't stick around for long. It reminded me of the rocks at Port Mooar and looking around it was equally as dead.



Totally dead

Having walked all the way down there we knew that the rest of the walk was going to be uphill, which given how hot it was, wasn't a very appealing prospect. I checked my map and found that we could do a loop back up the hill and it might be cooler as part of the path was through the trees. We eventually found the hide, which we didn't go in due to there being nothing to look at as well as it being pretty dilapidated. I'm not sure what it's there for really.



Stupid hide

We were already way too hot and tired before we'd even started to climb back up the hill and although it didn't feel much cooler the shade provided by the trees was nice respite from the sun's rays. It was relatively dark under there and we added some new moths to the trip in the form of **Green Carpet** and **Northern Spinach** before we got to the end and came back out into the open. It felt like there was someone with a blowtorch above us and Wendy started to worry about Lyca again. She didn't have much water left and it would have to do us all until we got back to the car. The forest track felt much longer on the way back but occasionally there was a slight breeze that was just enough to cool us down for a moment. We saw another Painted Lady, but Wendy commented that it'd been the worst walk of our holiday, which I had to agree with, although all the others had a lot to live up to. We were so tired and hot by then that it felt as though we'd never make it back to the car. We dragged ourselves along the rest of the path like a scene in a film where the characters are dying slowly in the middle of a desert! When we reached the last stretch I looked up and casually said (even though it was our first on Mull), "Errrr Wendy, White-tailed Eagle." She looked up to see it circling in a thermal above us and we watched it spiralling upwards until it was so small we couldn't see it anymore. Wendy had to eat her words about it being a rubbish walk but although we'd struck it lucky with Eagles on this trip, unfortunately the same couldn't be said for Otters and we were running out of time!

We were so relieved to get back to the car at 1.33pm and Wendy poured Lyca a drink and cracked open another bottle of water. We'd done 10,400 steps and 7.25km, which had felt like much more in the ridiculously hot temperatures! It was like an oven in the car even with all the doors open but we had to have our lunch somewhere. There was a Raven sitting on top of the bank at the side of the car park, which seemed to have a really deep voice. It sounded much deeper than any we'd heard elsewhere, so we wondered if it was a Mull thing or generally just a Scottish thing. By the time we'd finished lunch and were heading off it was 2.01pm and my car was reading just 24c, which was weird because it felt much hotter than that. I'd planned to visit Caliac Point along the north coast next for its seawatching for want of something better to do but from what we'd seen so far there wasn't much out there to watch. We drove back past Loch Meadhoun where there was a **Little Grebe** and then I remembered that there was supposedly an Iceland Gull somewhere in Tobermory, which we'd forgotten to look for....Oooops! We checked through the Black-headed Gulls around the Loch as a token effort but we weren't even in the right place, so it was totally pointless....Hahahaha! We came across some new and really nice big houses as we drove through Dervaig, so that must be THE area to live in. It would make sense being so close to civilisation unlike where we were with it's a 45minute drive to the nearest Spa! I drove up a track but when we got to Caliac Farm I found that the gate was shut, so I stopped the car to scratch my head. I didn't know if we could go any further or not, so we looked around to see if we could spot any clues. There were some grit boxes further up, which suggested that it was a public road and there were no 'PRIVATE' signs anywhere, so I took a risk and opened the gate and drove through.



Is it private?

We followed what looked like a farm track (although it was tarmac'd) and I finally found Calaich Point car park and parked up next to another car. There was a bloke wielding a camera with what looked like his parents heading back towards it. When they got to the car he shouted over to us, "There's a pod of Dolphins over there." We thanked him and had a quick scan with our bins only to see a large pod of **Bottlenose Dolphins** putting on a brilliant display. I grabbed my camera and Lyca and headed off to see if I could get any closer, hoping that they'd come further inland because they were too far away for me to get any decent shots or video.



Caliach point

Wendy followed us but she reckoned they were going further out, so stopped and sat on a rock to watch them. By the time I'd got to the end of the point they'd gone miles out, so I was gutted but grabbed a record shot anyway.



Bottlenose Dolphin

Dolphins are always an unexpected bonus and we watched them for ages, so it'd certainly been worth our while going to Caliach Point. The only other thing we added to our trip list was a **Black Guillemot** but there was a juvenile Wheatear hopping about nearby and a Kestrel flew over.



Juvenile Wheatear

Eventually we managed to pull out a **Guillemot** and **Razorbill** but the Dolphins were miles away by then, so we called it a day even though it was so nice to be somewhere with no flipping horseflies for the first time! As we got nearer to the car Wendy noticed that we had

a slight problem. There was a Highland Cow with her 2 calves standing around the car licking it.....Uh oh! Why they found it so tasty was anyone's guess but neither of us were feeling particularly brave and Lyca would've gone nuts if we'd let her see them.



Errrr

I told Wendy to take Lyca up onto the road while I walked over to the car to hopefully shoo them away like I was a brave hero! Highland cattle are supposedly docile, so I had nothing to worry about, but it didn't feel like it at the time, I can tell you! Luckily the plan worked and I managed to get them to move away before I got there, so I jumped in and sped away up the road to pick Wendy and Lyca up...Phew! In my head I flung open the door and screamed, "GET IN GET IN!" and Wendy and Lyca dived in and we zoomed away like in a Bond movie.

My next plan was to head home around the northern coast taking in the famously picturesque Calgary Beach (another one claiming to be the best beach in Britain), so at 3.15pm we set off.

We arrived at 3.28pm and I parked up in the extremely busy car park. The amount of people there said it all but unfortunately Wendy's dream of walking on it and having a paddle with Lyca went out the window due to there also being loads of dogs running around off the lead. She was gutted, as it looked really inviting but Lyca would've been totally freaked out by it all. She got out of the car and wandered off to get some photos looking longingly down at the white sand and turquoise sea.



Calgary beach

She was standing next to another fenced off field which was full of wild flowers that were caked in Bees and Butterflies, just like the one at Shiaba, so we started to wonder what it was all about. We found out later that they were in fact a 'Machair Conservation Areas' which was absolutely brilliant :). While she was busy I tried to plan the route back to HQ but the holder for my sat nav snapped in half, so I now had nowhere to rest my phone to follow it. This was going to be a total disaster for our journey to Heysham but there wasn't much I could do about it with there being no shops on Mull that would sell them :(I planned to go home via the scenic coastal route, which would be a new road for us although it'd take longer. Wendy came back to the car and I asked her if she'd go and get me an ice lolly from the little kiosk, so she trotted off to see what she could do. The young guy serving was really friendly and really Scottish but all he had was ice cream and drinks, so she got me a single scoop honeycomb with a flake and a bottle of orange juice for herself. I couldn't grumble at that and it was very nice and gone before it had a chance to melt....Om nom nom :). We set off on our journey home, which started off on a single-track road that skirted around the bay. There were loads of people at the camp site there too and it looked lovely, so it was a shame we hadn't been able to go on the beach.



Best beach in Britain? Errrr nah

We spotted some Rock Doves in the middle of nowhere and a Whinchat perching on a fence. The scenery was amazing, but it seemed to take an absolute age to get back to familiar territory.



Lovely drive back

We also got stuck in a Mull style traffic jam!



Psycho cows

When we finally got to Loch na Keal I pulled over for another scan for Otter but yet again there was no sign.



Loch Na Keal

We now only had one more full day left, so our chances of seeing one were looking extremely slim. Wendy spotted a family group of 3x **Peregrines** flying around the top of a cliff, probably on a juvenile training lesson like we'd seen at Warton Crag in Cumbria last year.

It was 5.30pm when we got back to HQ and still 24.5c and Lyca was starving, so Wendy sorted her dinner out before anything else. There wasn't much in for my tea, so Wendy suggested I had some of her lentil dhal and rice seeing as I hadn't had much luck so far. She

didn't think for a second that I'd enjoy it, but I actually did! We ID'd the remaining moths that were in the fridge and then went for our baths before sitting down to watch TV. Wendy was horrified to find that the Football was on again (the world cup was on for crying out loud!!) but England were playing, so I couldn't miss that. It was a very eventful match and they only ended up winning the match, so I had a celebration with Lyca, who looked just as excited about it as I was. Wendy raised an eyebrow and looked at me as though I was mad, but what would she know? :P. I let all the moths go and then took Lyca out for a wee while Wendy put the dishes away.



Evening view from the kitchen

It was going to be our last full day on Mull tomorrow, but we were starting to feel the strain of our 2 weeks by then and had no idea what we were going to do. We were really tired and headed off to bed at 10.35pm hoping to have a bit of a lie in after our early start that morning.

Wednesday 4th July

Unbelievably we didn't wake up until 8.50am and we hadn't even heard a squeak from Lyca, so even she must've needed the extra hours of sleep. Peering through the curtains it was a bit cloudy outside, so I hoped for a cooler day for a change. Lyca was very reluctant to go out and took some persuasion but my heart sank when I found that despite the clouds it still felt very hot out. The Peacock Butterfly Caterpillar had decided to pupate by the front door, which wasn't the best place for it to do so. We could just see someone knocking it off in order to 'clean' the house for the next guests or something but crossed our fingers that they'd know better and leave it alone. Having got up late we didn't leave HQ until 10.45am and it was already 24c....Urrghhhh! My first plan of the day was a walk to Loch Ba which I wanted to do 2 years ago but we couldn't find the car park then. As usual we had to drive past Loch na Keal on the way, so I thought I would trundle along to try for the last time to look for Otter. We could hear a Peregrine screeching overhead and there were some **Canada Geese** grazing down on the shore of the Loch. We also spotted a bloke with a big lens crouched behind the wall looking at the Loch, so our hearts started to race. I pulled up

next to him and Wendy quietly said, "What you got?" which always makes us giggle. If you've ever watched the TV series called 'Detectorists' you'll get it but if not then I strongly suggest you do. The bloke turned around looking a bit annoyed and said, "There's an Otter out in the bay" which were the exact words we'd wanted to hear. YES! He said it was quite a way out though but we didn't care, an Otter's an Otter at any distance. Wendy told him that we hadn't seen any all week and apparently nor had he until that point, so we thanked him excitedly and I drove off to find a layby to park up in.

Typically, there wasn't anywhere and in the end I had to use a passing place or risk being too far away to see it. We scanned and scanned but there was nothing out there at all until we saw a dark blob. We watched it but instead of diving it was just sinking and coming up again, so it definitely wasn't the Otter and we eventually had to give up and get out of the passing place before it was needed by somebody. Right down at the bottom end of the Loch we were approaching the grassy area where cars can park. Somehow, whilst driving on the single-track road, I managed to spot a ripple in the water out of the corner of my eye, so I pulled in and parked up. We both got our bins on where the ripple had been and all of a sudden a Shag popped up followed by another.....Urrghhhh! Great....not! We looked at each other and shook our heads in sheer disappointment but for some reason I looked back and saw another ripple just a few feet away from the Shags. I watched the water again but then my eyes nearly popped out of my head when I spotted an **Otter** pop up, so I quickly called it to Wendy. We could hardly believe our eyes and I almost forgot to get a shot of it while we enjoyed watching it. It was pretty far out so I could only grab a record shot but it was better than nothing.



Otter!

It was just brilliant to see and we could've watched it all day but when 2 blokes started walking down to the beach nearby the Otter was straight onto them and it vanished. Within those brief couple of minutes our holiday had just been made and we'd finally seen an Otter and completed our 'most wanted' on Mull list. If I hadn't seen the 2x Shags and stopped the car we wouldn't have seen it at all, so we'd been so lucky. There was nothing we hadn't seen now, so we could finally leave happy. We still had a whole day to go and although we couldn't beat anything we'd seen already we wanted to make the most of it regardless and we carried on. The last caravan at the Gypsy camp was still there and a bloke

with an old rib pulled up to have a chat with the occupant. He was Irish too, so maybe he was part of the group as well?

When we arrived at the Benmore Estate car park it was 11.44am and there were loads of cars parked up. We hoped it wasn't going to be busy but felt better when we saw a sign saying, "Dogs MUST be kept on a lead!" We'd have to see it first to believe it though, but we live in hope :P. We followed the footpath towards Loch Ba and saw loads of White Butterflies but none of them landed so it was impossible to tell which type they were. We'd been commenting about how few 'whites' we'd seen during our trip but all of a sudden there were more of them than any other type. Lyca had a paddle in a stream and then refused to get out then she nearly pulled my arm out of its socket to get down to the Loch.



More paddling

She then spotted some sheep on the path ahead and pulled like a Tram Horse to get to them, so ended up being told off. She'd certainly got out of bed on the naughty side today! There were Sand Martins flying about and Lyca's behaviour just went from bad to worse as did the amount of Horseflies.....Aarrghhhh! By then we had totally had enough of them and were sick of them following us and buzzing around our faces constantly. At the beginning of the trip the Smidge seemed to be doing a good job of keeping them at bay but now it didn't seem to be doing much at all. All I could hear from behind me was Wendy shouting, "Get out of my ***** face!" and "Go Away!" not that it was helping at all. The view was really nice but with Lyca pulling me to get to the sheep and the constant harassment from the Horseflies I can't say I was enjoying it as much as I should've been.



Horsefly zone

I commented that having seen so many Common Sandpipers I still hadn't bothered to try and get a shot of one yet, so when we spotted one at the water's edge next to us, I handed Lyca over to Wendy and went to try for one.



Common Sandpiper

I was a sitting duck, so the Horseflies became unbearable and when one actually had the audacity to bite me I gave it up and didn't bother again.....Grrrrrr! I would hate to think what would happen if you sprained your ankle and couldn't move. You would be covered by 100 Horseflies in about 1 minute, it would be horrific :O. Our patience was wearing

pretty thin by then, but we carried on anyway, as Lyca needed a walk and I didn't want to give up until we'd got to my target which was a house at the end of the Loch. On the way we came across a weird contraption by the side of the loch. It looked a bit like a Salmon farm but they are normally massive and are in the middle of Lochs so we weren't sure what this was.



Some sort of fish farm

We had to cross a bridge over the river and there were sheep under it, so Wendy started quoting lines from 'The Three Billy Goats Gruff' to try and lighten the mood but it didn't work. Lyca nearly ripped my arm off again and the house was fenced off anyway, so it'd been a waste of time going to it.



Nice place for a cottage

There were quite a few of these houses dotted around the area, so I'm guessing that one was a seasonal fisherman's house but it's anyone's guess what the others further up in the valley were there for. Seasonal Shepherds houses or something? None of them were derelict.



Very nice

We turned around and started to head back but it was so hot and there were so many Horseflies that we just wanted to be back at the car as quick as possible.



Even more horseflies on the way back :(

Lyca was pulling so much to get to the Loch that I ended up having to give in and let her walk back in the water....Urrghhhh!

It was 1.43pm when we got back to the car and I don't think either of us have even been as glad to get in and close the doors. The walk, although pleasing on the eye scenery wise, had been a very unpleasant 10,500 steps and 7.56km of being far too hot and in constant battle with horseflies. I'd skillfully managed to park in the shade, so we ate our lunch in relative comfort for a change. After that I stopped off at Salen Spa so that Wendy could get some bread for our sarnies for tomorrow and we headed back to HQ feeling very annoyed.

Loch na Keal was really choppy when we went past it, so it would've been impossible to spot an Otter on it, so we'd been very lucky that we'd seen one earlier. I drove past the cottage and up to the Tiroran tearoom/gift shop so that Wendy could indulge herself by buying herself a bottle of Whitetail Gin and a matching glass. When she was in there she asked the woman if she was anything to do with our cottage. It turned out that she was Katie, the owner and she thought that Wendy was asking with a view to staying there. Wendy had to introduce herself and then tell her that we were leaving tomorrow and not Friday just in case they wanted to go in to clean early. She was really friendly after that and they chatted about the wildlife in the area for ages while I sat in the boiling hot car waiting. All of a sudden, I got a warning that my car was out of oil, which considering we'd just driven through Salen, the only place I knew there was a petrol station, was really bad timing. I didn't even know if the place would sell my type of oil though. Eerrrk! Why hadn't it told me an hour ago? Grrrrr! I checked the level with the dipstick and sure enough it was below minimum, so I was going to have to go all the way back to Salen tomorrow morning (45 minutes away!) before we left because I knew it wasn't going to last until we got to Fort William.....Nooooo!

I drove back down the road to the layby near the Spottfly shed and parked up as I'd found out we could park up there to get to the walk behind the house. There was no way we wanted to walk all the way up the hill from HQ.. I'd wanted to visit the Eagle Watchpoint since we'd arrived, but we'd never had the chance and were always too tired after tea, so this was our last opportunity. It'd be nice to see the spot where the local White-tailed Eagles were nesting seeing as it was just behind where we were staying. There were RSPB guided walks twice a day to it, so we reckoned it must've been a reliable site. We went through a gate with a rules and regulations board on it, which made us feel uneasy and like we shouldn't be there without a guide. There were horseflies every step of the way, which added insult to injury with the blistering heat of the sun beating down on us. To top it all off we were absolutely knackered and the walk to the watchpoint was all uphill, so we were going to have to use up the last remaining dregs of our holiday energy.



Walk behind the cottage

We were going to need to sleep for a week when we got home just to get over it! There were 3x Keeled Skimmers flying around the path and landing on the bank and of course the horseflies were still following us. When we came out of the trees we came across a herd of cows on the path ahead of us, so Lyca started to pull again. My poor arm! It was a steep climb and far too hot, so we didn't need the extra stress, but the cows just slowly plodded along as if they were showing us the way.



Come back friends!

Lyca was being a right pain and we'd both lost the will by then and Wendy would've been happy to have just turned around and gone home. I wasn't giving up until I'd seen the Eagle Watchpoint though, so we dragged ourselves up to the top of the hill until we reached a dead end. Eh? So, we couldn't go any further but there was nothing to even give us a clue

that we'd got there! There was a trodden area of grass, which looked out over the mountains, so we reckoned that must be the spot and started to scan the ledges and trees.



Worst viewpoint ever

If that was the Eagle Watchpoint then I don't think they could've picked anywhere further away if they'd tried! This seems to be the case at all RSPB watchpoints and I suppose it's good to put the welfare of the birds first but this hadn't been worth the effort even if we'd seen them at such a distance. There was still absolutely no sign of any Eagles, which considering they nested right behind HQ had baffled us for our entire stay. You'd have thought we'd have seen them flying over or even coming down to the Loch but there'd been nothing.....Weird! We wondered if the massive deforestation of the plantations going on had caused them to move on? We turned back and headed down the hill feeling far too hot and really annoyed at the horseflies, the view from up there nearly made up for it though.



Looking down on our little bay

We couldn't get back to the car quick enough and at 4.33pm we slumped into the seats and sighed in relief. We'd done 20,400 steps over the course of the day and it was 24.5c in the shade, so no wonder we were tired.

When we got back to HQ it was 4.33pm and lovely and cool inside the cottage.....Phew! That was the only good thing about not getting much light on it during the day but that must make it a horrible place to be winter. I had a look at my fitbit and it reckoned we'd done 129,301 steps and 89km during the last 7 days, which was good going given the temperatures we'd had to endure. Wendy gave Lyca her dinner, who then went straight to sleep and then we started to think about ours.



ZZZZZZZZZZ

I was OK because I still had a pouch of Bolognese sauce and some dried Penne but Wendy had nothing left apart from ½ tin of chopped tomatoes. She quickly chopped the last piece of onion and fried it in the garlic olive oil and added the tomatoes to make a pasta sauce. It was basic but it did the job and I have to say that for the first time during our holiday I came out better than her for a change...Hahahaha! Before putting the dishwasher on Wendy made our sarnies to keep us going during our long day tomorrow and then she went for a soak in the bath. After that she started to pack our stuff up, so we could make a quick getaway in the morning. I then had to google where sold oil on Mull and it was a good job I did. It turned out that the petrol station I was planning on going back to didn't but there was a repair garage in Salen as well, so that my only choice. Tobermory was about an hour and a half away so I was never going to get that far. I also checked the midge forecast and found that everywhere was scoring really low at 1-2, which matched what we'd seen, apart from Fort William, which was at a whopping 5! We'd only seen them early in the morning or last thing at night and hadn't seen any at all during the day. It must've just been too hot for them like the man at the petrol station said up near Loch Marree, which was great, but the heat seemed to have caused a massive explosion of the horsefly population, which had actually ruined the majority of our walks! We couldn't decide which was worse. Mass

clouds of biting midges or hundreds of biting horseflies? We didn't want to think about what it was like for the farm animals out in the fields all day :(. While Wendy was drying her hair she saw something crawling very slowly on the carpet but she didn't have her glasses on and couldn't see what it was. It stopped moving, so she decided that she must've seeing things and carried on drying her hair. When she'd finished she put her glasses back on and saw that it was a horsefly, so there was no escaping them, not even in the house.....Grrrrrr! Needless to say, it was despatched of quickly! We watched TV and felt really sad that we had to leave in the morning. We had so much to fit in that we couldn't hang around on Mull and needed to get off as soon as possible. We'd become so involved in the House Martins that were nesting on the house as well as watching the Pied Wagtail, Willow Warbler and Blackbird that were all feeding young nearby that we didn't want to leave. It's not every day you can watch so many things going on outside your kitchen window while doing the dishes! Although we didn't want our holiday to end we needed to get a good night's sleep, so at 10.35pm we admitted defeat and went off to bed.

Thursday 5th July

It was 6.45am when we woke up and although it was Tynwald Day back at home and everyone else were probably having a lie in and relaxing we had a busy day ahead of us. I took Lyca out for wee and noticed that it'd rained overnight and the grass was soaking for the first time during our holiday. It'd been lovely not having to dry Lycas paws every time she'd been out and her towel had gone unused over the entire fortnight, so we'd been really lucky. There were 3x Lapwing and a Greenshank down on the marsh and the Blackbird came down to the front garden for the leftover bread that Wendy had put out. We had our first **Siskins** in the garden, which were 2x bright yellow males and we felt gutted that we had to leave that view over Loch Scridain.



Hard to beat cottage view

I left to go and get oil from Salen at 7.50am and didn't get back until 9.15am, but at least that was one worry off our minds. Wendy had done most of the packing, so with the car topped up with oil and petrol I started to load our stuff into it. This time she double

checked that she hadn't left anything behind after leaving her dressing gown at Lochan Torr.....Doh!

It was 9.57am when we waved, "Goodbye" to Seabank Cottage and Wendy didn't dare to look back.



Seabank

Having been disappointed that we couldn't extend our holiday to go home on Monday we felt relieved that it hadn't been possible. We were so tired that we don't think we'd have lasted the extra days especially with all the horseflies, that we certainly weren't sorry to leave behind. We stopped for a last scan of the Loch for Otter but there was nothing, so at least we'd seen one when we did and we weren't leaving without. It was a shame that we never saw one on "our" Loch though.



Bye bye cottage :(

I pulled over at Pennygael Stores, which had it been open for our stay would've been our local shop and Wendy went in. It's a good job it wasn't our only local shop because she said there was literally nothing in it apart from some local handmade gifts and a few very basic food items, so god knows how they stay in business! There was a herd of Highland Cattle down in the Loch and we reckon that if we ever had the misfortune of coming back reincarnated as a Cow or Sheep then Mull was definitely the place to be.



More paddling cows

Further along we saw a couple of blokes in hoodies standing on the marsh, as though they were waiting for something. They had scopes, tripods and big lenses so I reckoned they were photographers waiting for a Hen Harrier to float in from somewhere. A while later we saw another bloke with a scope staring up at the hills and another further on, so they were probably waiting for Eagles. Wendy spotted a big bird circling around the top of the hills, which was more than likely a Golden Eagle, but I wasn't going to stop to check. There were more birders in that area too, so we'd seen more birders/photographers in the space of an hour than we had all week. I'd planned a walk before we left so that Lyca would be tired for the long drive we had ahead of us.

Croggan was on the South east corner of Mull so sort of on the way round to the ferry terminal. On the map the drive didn't look that big to reach it but yet again it took absolutely ages.



Drive to Croggan

We arrived at Croggan at 11.18am but when we started to walk along the path yet again there were sheep wandering around and Lyca was being really naughty. There were of course horseflies too and with our patience having already worn out, it was all getting just a bit too much and we'd had enough! We wanted to enjoy our last day as much as possible, so we carried on regardless and tried to ignore them as best we could, which was easier said than done. There was an Inverlussa Mussel Farm out in the loch and we eventually managed to skirt around and pass the sheep without Lyca ripping my arm off. We spotted another Golden-ringed Dragonfly that we were now practically ignoring, as they were common as muck, and some more Keeled Skimmers on a bank. One of them was missing half a forewing but still seemed to be able to fly OK! :O



Keeled Skimmer

We couldn't decide if the Butterfly we were looking at was a Large Heath or Small Heath, but we went with Large heath in the end.



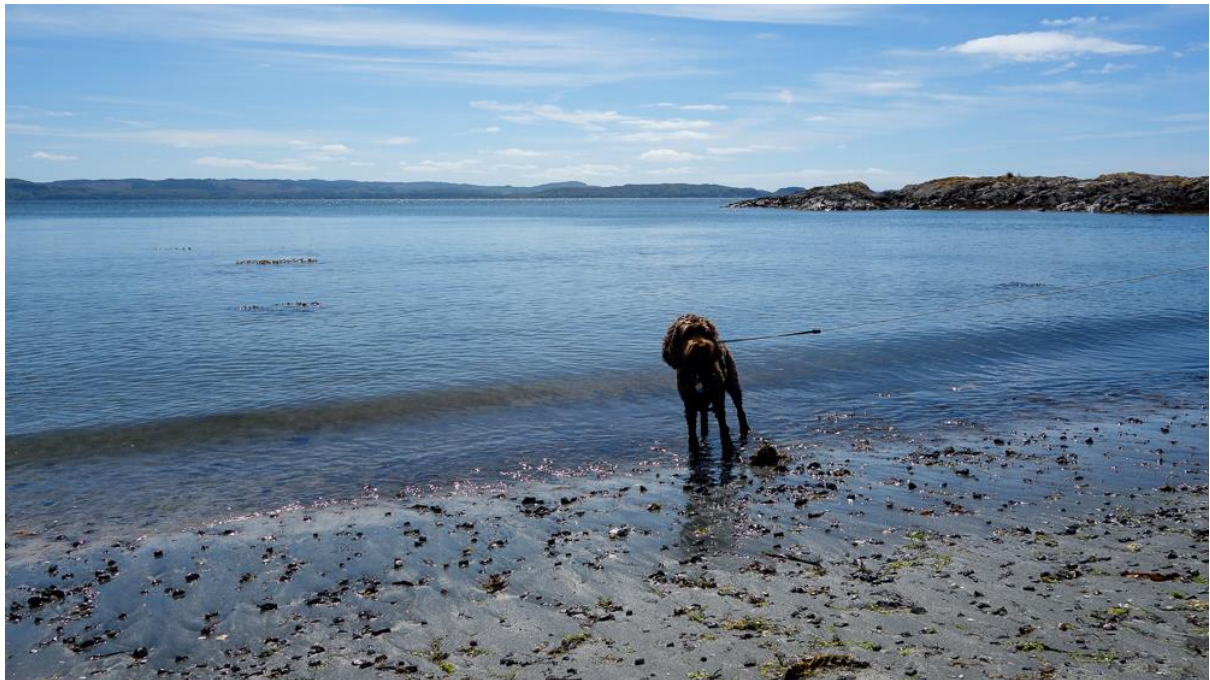
Large Heath

The view from the coast out over the sea was really nice and when we turned a corner and found a white sandy beach we headed straight down there.



Almost tropical

Again, it looked almost tropical in the sun and Lyca made a beeline for the sea to have a paddle. Wendy started throwing shells for her to chase and she was going deeper and deeper to try and get them but seemed a bit apprehensive of going out of her depth again.



One final paddle

It looked so inviting that Wendy was gutted that she couldn't join her, but we just didn't have the time :(Lyca didn't want to get out again and Wendy didn't want to leave but time was ticking and we had to get going as soon as possible. On the way back Lyca went for a dip in her pool again while we watched 4x Keeled Skimmers in a ditch at the side of the path, which I stopped to try and attempt some shots of. Heading back towards the Loch we groaned when we saw that a herd of Cows had come down and were wandering around on the path. Obviously, we had to work out a way of getting past them with as little stress as possible for all concerned.....Urrghhhh!



Flipping cows again!

I led Lyca off the path and down to the edge of the Loch and Wendy followed behind us. The ground was quite boggy but my plan worked and the cows didn't look at all bothered that we were there and Lyca was kept suitably distracted while we skirted around them. A plane flew over the Loch and just out of interest I got its registration number, which was G-SNMPb but on searching for it later I found that it doesn't exist! :O. Must've been a drug trafficking plane :). We hurried back to the car to get away from the horseflies and when a van came up behind us I wished that I'd driven down to the beach to save us from the stress, but I didn't know you could. It was probably the Estates Gamekeeper or something but Lyca had needed a walk and we'd been to another lovely beach, so it'd been worth it I suppose. Two other people were just setting off on the walk and we realised how few people we'd come across over the past couple of weeks. Everywhere we'd been we'd practically had to ourselves, which we hadn't expected at prime summer holiday time especially on Mull and considering nearly all the holiday cottages were booked up for this week. By the time we got back to the car it was 12.39pm, so we had our lunch before setting off. We'd done 4.15km and 6,482 steps on that walk, which wasn't much, but better than nothing. I wanted to revisit Grasspoint again as it was on the way to the Ferry, so that was our next plan sorted.

It was 1.38pm when we approached Grasspoint and remembering it from 2 years ago I headed down to the car park, so we could get out for a wander.



Nice and welcoming....not!

Unbelievably there was a 'No Parking' sign up, so I carried on to the end where the holiday cottage we reckoned would be great to stay in was. When we got there we were really annoyed to see another 'No Parking – Residents only' sign up, so I had to turn round.....Grrrrrr! There was literally nowhere to park unless you were staying at the cottage, which didn't seem fair to us. So much for getting out of the car to admire the lovely view we remembered so well before we left Mull completely :(I pulled into a passing place and Wendy went off to get some photos while I had a scan of the area with

my bins. Wendy couldn't get to the spot we'd sat at and seen the Eagle last time because it was beyond the cottages, so she went down to the beach instead.



Rubbish beach anyway.....harumpf!

Someone, probably the privileged ones that were staying there, had built a load of sandcastles on what was probably their own private beach. It's alright for some! I became uneasy about being in a passing place so drove further up the road to a layby, so Wendy wasn't very pleased when she came back and found that I'd gone....Hahahaha! Just after we'd set off Wendy spotted an orange butterfly at the side of the road, flying over the long grass. I stopped the car and it landed out of site, so with this being our last chance for Marsh Fritillary I got out to go and investigate. Wendy gave me directions as to where it'd gone but when I did re-find it my heart sank when I saw it was just another Small Pearl-bordered Frit.....Booooooo! With that we left and back on the main road we had to laugh when we spotted a random bloke wearing a kilt walking up the side of the verge.



Mad kilted man

He must've just got off the ferry and was heading somewhere. When we got to the Fishnish ferry at 2.10pm we found that we'd have to wait for 40minutes until the next one...pretty much the maximum wait possible..Urrghhhh! It was pretty choppy and looked as though we were in for a bit of a rough sailing, so we were glad it was only short.



Oban ferry heading past

With so much time on our hands Wendy started to regret not going for a paddle with Lyca on the lovely beach at Croggan. We hadn't bargained on being so quick at Grasspoint though, so there was nothing we could've done. I was almost going to go back to the Marsh Frit spot we'd visited when we'd arrived but didn't think we'd have time either, so it'd all gone pear shaped. It was boiling in the car and we sat watching the group of people sitting outside the pub drinking beer and being very loud.

We finally drove onto the ferry at 2.48pm and there were only 8 cars on it, which was really quiet. Wendy pulled out our return ticket from her purse and handed it over, 2 minutes later we were off. Luckily it wasn't choppy at all, so it was a pleasant 15minute crossing.

We drove off onto Morven at 3.06pm and it was only 18.5c, which was cooler than we'd seen it for ages. There were 3 young people at the side of the road picking Elderflowers, which is the kind of thing you definitely wouldn't see at home. With my sat nav holder having broken I was having to charge my phone down by the gearstick, which was really inconvenient. I couldn't follow the route very easily at all and had no idea where I was going, this wasn't helped by the fact that I had the stupid idea of driving through Morven on the scenic route which we had never done before. We were in the middle of nowhere and we were getting nowhere fast.....Urrghhhh!

There was a really run down dump of a house sitting totally on its own in the valley and when we drove past it Wendy looked to see if anyone actually lived in it. She wished she hadn't when she spotted an outdoor compound full of Hunting Hounds :O! It wasn't that big, so they didn't have much room and there were no home comforts for them at all :(I suppose people who go out hunting animals aren't going to care much for their dogs either....Grrrrr! I drove down the south coast of Morven, which with its amazing scenery was very impressive on the eye but the roads were narrow and winding, so it was very slow going.



No wider than a cars width!

Wendy was already getting sick of being in the car and we hadn't even got to the Corran Ferry yet! She just wanted to get the drive over with and aim for the pub to chill out until the sailing home, but I had another plan up my sleeve. I wanted to spend as long as possible in Scotland and arrive at Heysham as late as possible, which didn't go down well with her at all. I'd read about a place that was meant to be one of the best spots for all the resident Butterflies of the area including Chequered Skipper, so I was keen to go and check it out.

When we got to the Corran Ferry it was 4.05pm, so it'd taken us absolutely ages and was much later than even I'd expected. It was over on the other side so at least we wouldn't have too long to wait. Wendy nipped to the WC's while she had the chance and was very impressed at how clean and modern they were.



Corran Ferry

It seemed to take forever for the ferry to get back over, but we finally got on 4.24pm.

It was 4.30pm when we drove off and I headed along the Argyll Coastal Route, to Oban and around Loch Linnhe, which Wendy thought took ages. We arrived at the car park for Glasdrum Wood NNR at 5.09pm and we got out. Neither of us felt particularly energetic by then but it was too good an opportunity to miss, so we set off up a steep hill through the woods.



Glasdrum Wood

Firstly, we spotted 3x Speckled Wood Butterflies and carried on climbing upwards but there were no more Butterflies at all until we found a Large White. This was meant to have the most different species and we'd found just two! Wendy was protesting by then, which wasn't helping matters in the slightest. Apparently, there were clearings in the trees that we had to check but every single one of them was in the shade due to it being so late in the day.



Nowt in there

Maybe it would've been a different story had it been earlier but the entire place was dead....Typical! The view from the top was nice though.



Cracking view over the Loch

The path down was just as steep as it'd been on the way up, so Wendy's knee started to kick off again. It seemed to be getting worse since it started last October, so she promised that she'd make an appointment at the Drs when she got home.

Back at the car it was 5.49pm and time for tea, so Wendy sorted Lyca's out first and then we had ours. I wanted something for pudding, so Wendy got out and rummaged through the food bag that was in the footwell behind her seat. All of a sudden, she caught something out of the corner of her eye glistening on the cover on the back seat. She looked at it only to find a tiny tick crawling towards Lyca.....Bleurrghhhh! She then found 3 more, so she freaked out, ran to the glove box, pulled out a tissue and quickly caught them in it before they could get to her. After she'd done that she unclipped Lyca from the seatbelt and pulled her out, but the poor dog didn't have a clue what was going on and in this case ignorance was indeed bliss. Wendy was now standing bent over holding onto Lycas harness, so she asked me to get her lead, so she could stand up again. She then got me to take the seat cover out and give it a good shake in case there was more, while she gave Lyca a brush to make sure there were no more lurking anywhere. Aarrghhhh! Lyca hates being brushed at the best of times and in a random car park in the middle of nowhere was no exception. We'd been really lucky not to have had a problem with ticks during the whole trip up until then! Horseflies are bad enough but ticks, they're probably worse...Yuk! We were thoroughly fed up by then and now our skin was crawling and itchy, so we put everything back in the car and headed off for Heysham at 6.12pm.

We knew that we wouldn't be stopping again until we got to the Heysham terminal, so Wendy sat back to endure the boredom (lucky for some!!). It was briefly broken by the sign for 'Benderloch', which made us giggle but then I realised that my sat nav was losing its charge really quickly.....Uh oh! Up until then I'd been able to balance it on the dash but with it plugged into the cable it wouldn't reach that far, so I had no choice other than to put it on my knee. As if me having to look down all the time wasn't bad enough it suddenly decided to have a breakdown and I had no idea what it was doing.....Aarrghhhh! It wasn't making any sense at all but luckily, I still knew where I was and didn't need it just yet. When we got to Loch Lomond and The Trossachs NP at 7.05pm I turned off to avoid that entire area and getting stuck behind slow moving caravans for miles on end. I stopped off at Crianlarich at 7.12pm and tried to fix my sat nav, while Wendy nipped into the huge public toilet block. When she came out she said that she had no idea what was going on in the Men's side but judging by what she'd heard I was glad I didn't need to go in! My sat nav had charged sufficiently so I unplugged it and put it back in a more favourable position before we set off again. Having been making good progress on the A84 I was annoyed that it decided to take me off it and put me onto a stupidly narrow country road instead, so that slowed us down again. It was 8.20pm when we finally saw Stirling Castle and now I was back on the motorway I breathed a sigh of relief that it should be all plain sailing from then on.



Stirling Castle driveby

This was the first time that I'd driven up to Scotland and back again in nice weather, as usually it's torrential rain and the visibility is dire, so I certainly wasn't complaining. We past the 'Welcome to Dumfries and Galloway' sign at 9.20pm and knew that it wouldn't be long before we could stop for a break. We passed our first dead Fox in the road just before turning off to Annandale Water Services. I parked up at the far end of the car park at 9.32pm and we went for a wander around the lake with Lyca, so she could have a wee.



Annandale Water services

It felt like 5 minutes ago that we'd been there on our first day and our holiday seemed to have flown by :(It was starting to get a bit dark and with it still being so warm there were midgies out around the lake, so we hurried back to the car.

After that Wendy made a quick visit to the WC's and seeing as we were both feeling peckish and she didn't have any other option she went to McDonalds. All she wanted was to get some chicken nuggets for me and some fries to share but instead of the usual queue at the counter she was faced with some self-service screens.....Uh oh! Being a bit tech-phobic she nearly turned around and walked out but suddenly she felt brave and just went for it.....O! She said it was dead easy and all she had to do afterwards was collect her food and go, so it'd worked really well. She wasn't so impressed when someone else walked in and got served at the counter instead and realised that she could've saved herself the extra stress.....Doh! Back at the car I enjoyed mine while Wendy's not a fan of McDonalds at the best of times, so this was no exception. Lyca had 3 fries and then a huge drink, which is a sort of indication as to how much salt is on/in them! When we'd finished Wendy phoned her Mum quickly and then noticed a bloke from the Isle of Man walking past the car. Small world! When I set off my sat nav went into total meltdown, so I decided that I knew the route well enough not to need it and switched it off saying, "Huh, who needs tech?" Wendy just shook her head and pointed at me and to be fair I don't actually know what I'd do without it :P. It was 10.47pm when we saw the 'Welcome to England – Cumbria' sign but then we noticed that the M6 was closed at junction 36-34, which I reckoned was going to affect us.....Boooooooo :(.

Some weird mist had descended, making visibility poor, so when a **Barn Owl** flew out across the road in front of all the traffic my heart was in my mouth. If a lorry had been ahead of us then it would've been a gonna, but luckily it decided to turn round and flew back the way it'd come from....Phew! It all happened so quickly and with the mist it would've been easy to have not even noticed it! We were glad we had though, as it's becoming really hard to see Barn Owls and we can't remember the last time we'd seen one before that :(.

Eventually we hit the junction closures and had to turn off at Kirby Lonsdale/Skipton, so I was now in unfamiliar territory, which stank of farmyard poo.

Friday 6th July

We had no idea where 'Over Kellet' was, so being nowhere near anywhere we'd ever been before, we started to feel a bit lost. The road was narrow and winding, so it was hard going not to mention slow! Without the sat nav I just stuck to the vehicles in front and hoped for the best! When we spotted the turn off to Lancaster and were finally on the bypass we were both more than a bit happy to say the least.....Phew! We got to Asda at 12.23am and I filled my car up again before we got to Heysham at 12.35am, couldn't have asked for more perfect timing than that. Wendy nipped to the WC's in the terminal first to avoid having to go through security. After Lyca had barked at the person in the ticket hut we parked up in the queue at 12.41am. I switched the engine off in preparation to relax but then realised that Lyca would need to be let out for a wee before we boarded. Luckily, she performed quickly and then ran back to the car...Haha! There was caravan parked up in the row next to us and it was full of dodgy looking blokes who seemed to know the dodgy looking blokes in the car behind them. They looked as though they were going over to the Island to work or something and although you shouldn't judge books by their covers, we didn't like the look of them :/. The foot passengers were called at 1.05am and cars shortly after at 1.11am but I was told to park next to the green stairwell, so reckoned we'd be one of the last cars off....Grrrrr!

We wasted no time in climbing into our beds as soon as we got to the cabin and all three of us were really tired and slept all the way through. When the announcement came that we were arriving at Douglas we woke up and got ourselves ready to go. The cars started to

drive off at 5.58am and we were pleasantly surprised that we were one of the first off at 5.58am.....Yey! We were home by 6.04am and Wendy and Lyca went straight back to bed while I stayed up and unpacked. Wendy wasn't happy to have been woken up at 9.30am by me wandering around but we had a Tesco order booked between 10-12pm anyway, so she'd have been woken up by that. It was cloudy and overcast, which was a typical Manx welcome home.

I'd driven 1596 miles over the fortnight and who knows how many we'd walked! It'd been our best summer holiday to date and the only thing we'd dipped on was Chequered Skipper. Having seen our first ever at Ariundle 2 years ago when the weather was so against us, we felt pretty confident that we'd see one this time. It was warm and sunny enough, but we didn't even come close, so we just hope that the population is still there and hasn't been wiped out due to a bad winter or something. The only possible lifer we'd failed to see was Marsh Fritillary, but we just don't seem to be able to time our trips right for their flight period. We'd had our best ever view of Golden Eagle, had seen White-tailed Eagle and Otter, but more importantly had got the big two Scottish speciality dragonflies, the Azure Hawker and Northern Emerald. The way Climate change is going I can't see either of them hanging on in Scotland for much longer.

Both cottages were in great locations and for different reasons. The gamble on Lochan Torr had come up trumps by providing us with our 2 lifer Dragonflies on our first day just down the road. Our local walk to Loch Loyne had been the best walk to date and we know it'll take some beating. Seabank on Mull had the most lovely view over Loch Scridain and with 9 House Martin nests to watch it will also be hard to beat. The only downside was that it was 45 minutes away from the nearest decent shop but that wasn't insurmountable. We'd seen every lifer we'd hoped to apart from Marsh Fritillary but we certainly couldn't grumble at that.

Lifers
Northern Emerald
Azure Hawker
Mountain Ringlet
Argent and Sable
Northern Eggar

Map

