

Well it's been an interesting and at times difficult year for us all, no matter which country in the world you live in. This is really our first trip away this year in Gloria apart from a couple of quick weekends away and we are really missing our travels. It was our intention to travel through France and on into Spain and Portugal in April, but a certain COVID 19 virus put a very abrupt stop to that about 10 days before we were due to set off.

Our trip will start on Thursday 17th September and our first stop is only a short trip to Bolton-Le-Sands, now I know that this is not Scotland. However our original plans for this weekend have been scuppered by the latest Coronavirus "rule of six". We were due to be spending the weekend partying with our second family the Hunter Armo Clan in Silverdale to celebrate Mick and Sharon's Wedding Anniversary. Unfortunately that can now not happen and we will really miss this weekend of friendship, food, booze and probably more booze with our extended family. We wish Sharon and Mick a Happy Anniversary, Barb and I can't wait until we can all be together again and it will have to be an extra extra long party.

As we had already booked a site for our first night and we have decided to keep the booking for Archers Red Bank Farm which is on the coast at Bolton Le Sands which is only a short trip from home and it looks good value at £20 a night all inclusive, I will give you a full report after our visit. Our next stop is planned for Dumfries on Friday 18th, however those of you that have read one of our blogs before, you will know that our planning is very loose and is always open to change, we will find out what happens on the 18th. Until the 17th keep safe and if anything interesting regarding our trip planning comes up I will let you know, otherwise I will update you on the 17th/18th

#### Thursday 17th

We depart number 53 at 11am which was the actual time we had planned to leave, that in itself is amazing as we do not usually manage to leave at our planned time. Our first night away is only 70 miles from home and we arrive at the campsite at about 12.30, we are soon booked in, at our pitch and Gloria is level and plugged into the electricity supply. We are staying at Archers Red Bank Farm in Bolton-Le-Sands, <https://www.archers-redbankfarm.co.uk/> this is a lovely site with level pitches and wonderful views of Cumbria over the estuary, spotless facilities, great cafe and on top of that it's £20 a night all in. We have no hesitation in recommending this site and we would have stayed another night to chill out, had there been any availability.

We spent the afternoon chilling out, sitting outside Gloria chatting and reading in the beautiful sunshine, in the evening we went for a walk along the coastal path, taking in the wonderful views and the glorious sunset. Our plan for tomorrow is to go to Walney Island which is just past Barrow-In-Furness, this is another short trip of less than 2 hours, so I expect us to be there mid afternoon. The weather is looking good so there may be an opportunity for some photographs to be taken and possibly some drone footage however there is an airfield on the island (god knows why) so I will have to check. That's about it for today, we are easing our way into this trip so there will be more to report as we move further up into Scotland and more photographs to share with you all.

#### Friday 18th

We awake to beautiful sunshine although it is a bit fresh, the view over the bay is wonderful with the Cumbrian hills in the distance, which are clearer this morning as the mist has lifted. We head off for the Lake District and a trip down the longest cul-de-sac that I know of in England, the A590 to Barrow-in-Furness, we are actually going a bit further than Barrow, as Barb wants to visit Walney island. We head off up the A6 and then join the A590 just over an hour later we arrive at Walney Island and check out the stop over locations that had been recommended on a couple of sites, to say that Barb was underwhelmed is a bit of an understatement. We decide that this is not the place for us, now we have a couple of options first is to ring Nick and see if he and Lyn are in or second head up the M6 and see how far we get. Now we both know that if we go and see Nick we will probably lose two days of our lives, one day drunk and the next one sobering up. We decide on the M6

North, Nick I will ring you on our way back and see if you are available for just the one Mrs Wembley.

As we travel north on the M6 through the Cumbrian hills, there is a roar in the sky above as two RAF Pilots practice their low flying techniques through the valleys and around the mountain ranges. We have a great view of them as they pass right overhead, then drop down into the valley and soar up into the blue sky until they are out of sight. We have planned to stop at my second favourite motorway services to stop for lunch and a cup of tea, oh the services are of course Tebay Services and we will be making our own sandwiches and tea, as you need a second mortgage to eat there and that does not include a visit to the butchers and farm shop.

We arrive at Tebay and just as Barb turns Gloria off, there is another roar in the sky above and not very far above as the RAF Lightning jets fly over the service area and through the valleys, they fly at only 100 feet above ground level which ain't very high and the customers sitting at the benches outside, duck down and nearly spill their precious coffee for which they have just paid a Kings ransom, I am only kidding it's not that expensive and the coffee is very good, I love the place, mad I know but I do. After a visit inside and a wander round the farm shop we return to Gloria for lunch, as I get close to Glo I notice that the n/s/r tyre looks it needs some air in it. Not a problem me thinks, we are at one of the best services in the country, after lunch we will put some air in it and be on our way, well that's what I thought.

After lunch and a bit of a chill out overlooking the lake and the beautiful countryside surrounding the service area we head over to the petrol station and find the airline. I am slightly amazed to find that the air and water are free, mind you they charge £1.54 for a litre of diesel so that probably explains it. So this is the point you have been waiting for when it all goes horribly wrong, how would one think that putting air in a tyre could go wrong, well let me tell you. As soon as I unscrewed the valve cap the air that was inside the tyre all 74psi of it shot out as did the centre core of the valve, I pushed it back in as fast as possible and screwed the cap back on, but as you can imagine lots of air had escaped and the tyre is now looking proper flat. I utter a few expletives and Barb asks what has happened, possibly not a good idea, I am slightly perplexed as in all my time in the motor trade every tyre valve I have ever seen the centre core screws into the valve and you need a special valve key to remove it, so how has this one shot out and just been pushed back in. So now we have a problem as Gloria like many vehicles today does not have a spare wheel, great idea I don't think, next before we can do anything I need to try and get some air into the tyre and see what happens. Time to remove the cap and get the air line on it as soon as possible. I set the pressure on the machine to 74psi and with a bit of jiggery pokery I get the valve cap off and the airline on the valve, only to find that the darn machine does not work, oh gosh I say that's a bit of a blow, as I look at the now even more deflated tyre. I fuff around for a bit longer and then admit defeat and contact the AA they tell me they will be with us in approximately one hour, now I have two concerns, firstly will it only be an hour and secondly what is he going to do when he gets here as I don't expect he has the equipment in his van to change a tyre valve.

While we wait we go into the services to sample the excellent coffee and start planning to stay the night at the services, we get back to Gloria and Barb says to me that there is a guy fixing a tyre on a wagon on the other side of the car park. Well I think the worst he can say is no, I wander over to the wagon and strike up a conversation and ask him if he fancies a bit of a cash job once he has finished changing the massive wagon wheel he is working on, he says ok I will be over and have a look, 5 minutes later he comes over and 15 minutes later the job is done and Gloria is ready to roll, he tells me that he does not want any money but after a bit of a discussion I gave him 20 quid which he was very happy with and which I thought was money well spent.

Off we go and we end up in a car park just outside Lochmaben overlooking looking Castle Loch, but not before we pop into the only pub in the village for a swift well deserved libation. It is nearly dark when we get back to the car park so there is not much more to report for today but I think there has been sufficient to be going on with.

Sat 19th

The only problem with this car park is that it is fairly close to the road and it's a noisy from the passing traffic, but for a one night stop over it does the job. As such we are up fairly early and after a quick coffee, we are back on the road and soon on the M6 with a plan of stopping at the first services to freshen up and have some breakfast, hopefully without any issues. We are soon at the services, breakfast and coffee consumed and we are off, thankfully without any issues, today's plan is to get somewhere along Loch Lomond and park up with a plan of staying overnight at the side of the Loch.

There are a few overnight stopover places on the west side of the Loch which are free to stay at but you are supposed to have a permit which you can get online, only snag is they are limited in numbers and there are none available for tonight, so we might have to play daft, which won't be hard for me. After a minor unplanned detour (don't ask) we arrive at Loch Lomond a little later than expected, we arrive at the first stopover location only to find lots of signs saying no overnight parking, anyway it was not really suitable as the whole car park was on a hill. We stay there for a sandwich and a cup of tea, while we are there we check out the other possibilities, one of which is only a couple of miles away so off we go. This is much better massive car park at Tarbet Bay overlooking the Loch, there are facilities and if you fancy you can go for a boat tour on the Loch, we pass on that opportunity. It is another beautiful day and we spend the afternoon chilling out while watching people water ski, jet ski, sail and even swim in the Loch. When we arrived there was a couple of wardens in the car park and Barb asked them if it was ok to stay overnight and they gave us the thumbs up, great we may even stay for two nights. When we arrived there were about 6 Motorhomes parked up and the numbers grew steadily all afternoon into the evening ending up with nearly 30 of the rascals including some massive ones.

After dinner the jetty and the surrounding area had cleared of people so I managed to get some drone flying and filming time in, I will post some footage and some pictures over the next week when I have edited them. Then it was time for a little g&t while I caught up with the blog and that folks is about it for today.

Sun 20th

Well folks today's blog is going to be a short and sweet as we have decided to stay put for the day and travel up to Oban tomorrow. We have made this decision as the traffic going towards Oban is extremely busy and by the sounds of the cars and motorbikes going past, it's race day something that Gloria is not interested in participating in.

There is another reason for staying put for the day as I want to watch a couple of video presentations from the Photography show which is being a virtual show instead of being the actual show at the Birmingham NEC that had been planned for March which Jennie and I were due to attend but was cancelled due to the COVID virus. The first presentation I want to watch is Canon Ambassador David Newton, I have had the pleasure of attending a number of David's training courses including a weekend that Jennie and I went on, in a place that Our family love, the Lake District. If you are into photography check out this guy, he is one of the most inspirational, knowledgeable and interesting trainers I have had the pleasure of meeting, oh and he also takes some seriously great photographs. Check out his website [www.photopositive.co.uk](http://www.photopositive.co.uk). At 10.30 I watch his presentation and even though it is a virtual presentation, David is his usual self, interesting and full of enthusiasm. Right that's enough about Dave, I watch a couple of other presentations which I have to say did not inspire me one little bit, one especially that after watching for 15 minutes had nothing to do with its Title, a tad unhappy bunny.

Later in the afternoon we have a couple of walks and very nearly go on the Loch Lomond boat trip but only nearly, then we just chill out for the rest of the day which to be honest for a blog is not very interesting so I will not bore you with it, well more tomorrow when we will head on up to Oban.

Monday 21st

We are up at about 8am and after breakfast we are ready to head off along the A82 which follows the banks of Loch Lomond until you turn left onto the A85 and head west to Oban. The sat nav is saying that it's an hour and half drive, which in Gloria along these roads is probably more like two and half hours. As you head further into Scotland the views and scenery just gets better and this is one of the reasons why we love the place. The timings suit us great as we can not get onto the campsite until 12 o'clock and can not pre-book, we arrive in Oban at around 10.30 which gives us plenty of time to get some shopping, go to the post office to send some material that Barb has sold, and then have a leisurely wander around the town before we head off for the campsite.

We are staying at Roseview caravan park and after reading a couple of reviews on various websites, Barb is not really looking forward to the drive to it as the reviews have said that the road is very steep and narrow. Well we are not sure what the people that wrote these reviews were driving but they must have been in an articulated wagon as Gloria with Barb behind the wheel negotiate the road with no issue. We are soon booked in, Gloria's water tank and washer bottle are topped up and are soon level and plugged into the mains supply. First job is to book our ferry to Mull as it looks to be filling up very quickly, this is done accompanied you a well deserved cup of tea. All the ferries for Tuesday are booked but there is space on Wednesday afternoon on which we book a one way ticket as we are not sure which day we will be coming back. After lunch we are going into Oban, now we have two well actually three ways of getting there, we can go on our bikes, walk or go in Gloria we decide on the walking option and leaving the bike option for Tuesday.

As we leave the site we check the directions into town as apparently there is a bit of a shortcut, we follow the directions we have been given and I am not convinced that the shortcut was actually any shorter than the way we came in, anyway it's a bit of a hike, definitely bike ride tomorrow. After a wander around we go to the Calmac ferry office to collect our tickets to the Isle of Mull, this was an easy task, no queue and tickets printed off in less than no time. It is a shame to see a fair amount of empty shops in the town but I suppose it is a sign of the times, mind you there are also other shops that could do with updating or possibly just cleaning if they want to attract customers. After taking some pictures from the harbour wall it's time for a little libation in Spoons which is situated on the harbour wall, we are impressed with the social distancing rules in the public house with table service only, with all drinks and food ordered through the Wetherspoons app, we didn't play the we are at table number ? in Wetherspoons game on Facebook as it can be very dangerous as we have found in the past. We opt for a taxi back to Gloria and are home before it's dark. Then it's a bit more of that chilling out time and checking out tomorrow's weather forecast, which to be honest is not looking good, before and early night, let's see what happens tomorrow.

Tuesday 22nd

The weather is not looking good this morning, 8am it's not raining yet but that's only because it's blowing a proper hoolie and rain is forecast to start soon and not end until the early hours of Wednesday morning. I think that our bike ride into town maybe off, in fact as it starts to pour down about an hour later there is no maybe about it, it ain't happening. In fact the forecast this morning has got worse from last night which means we won't be doing a great deal today which is ok with us but does not make for good or in fact any blog content.

So as not to bore you too much I will make this quick, the weather forecast is correct and it rains all day, so time is spent with Barb sewing and me saving photographs and drone footage to an SSD drive while charging drone and camera batteries ready for hopefully some action in the next couple of days. We also have a FaceTime conversation with Jennie and Antony who are in Poole, drooling outside the Ferrari and Maserati dealership, and a what's app family group conversation upsetting Phil a bit as he is in work and having yet another bad day due to the lack of staff, come on Inchcape buck up before you loose more good staff.

That's about it without boring you all senseless, tomorrow should be a bit more interesting, couple of hours to kill in Oban before our mid afternoon ferry (Cruise) crossing to the Isle of Mull. Hopefully a bit more content and some more photographs and some proper ones as well.

Wednesday 23rd

We awake to a beautiful morning the sun has risen but is still hiding behind the surrounding hills, so it is still a tad fresh out there, unusually for us we are ready to leave the campsite before the 11am thanks for your money now clear off time. That said plenty of others have already departed, they have obviously got places to go or are booked on an earlier ferry than us. As we had prepared Gloria for departure last night, unusually we did not have a great deal to do this morning and are ready to go before 10am. We have a plan to park in the long stay car park, go to Spoons for breakfast (without having a drink) go and explore Oban, do some food shopping and then make our way to the ferry terminal. The first part of the plan goes great we head down to the car park and there are plenty of spaces albeit they are coach spaces but as there are not many of them expected, one of them there spaces will do. I go and purchase a parking ticket for the astronomical sum of £1.10 for 8 hours, are they having a laugh, you could not park in Liverpool One for 8 minutes for £1.10 in fact it would cost more to drive in and drive out. After displaying the precious ticket in Gloria's windscreen I go round to Gloria's back door, not to find that we have left the bloody step behind Again!!! at the campsite. For those of you that don't already know we are currently on our fourth step as we keep leaving the darn things behind, well apart from the one that I drove over when Jennie and I where in the Lake District on a photography course, in my defence we did leave the campsite at stupid o'clock about 4am to meet up for the dawn photography shoot. I bet we woke everyone up on the campsite as the metal step got trapped under Gloria and the tarmac, oops sorry, there is also one in an Aldi car park somewhere in Austria and I have forgotten where the other one is. Anyway it's back up the hill on the one lane track to the campsite to collect the step that we actually purchased in Austria, I thought that we have got away without anyone noticing, well until the person on reception said "hi haven't you just left", Doh! Ok back to the car park and a few more Motorhomes have arrived but there is still spaces available. Now if we had been parked at Liverpool One we would have required another ticket, but fortunately there's none of that lark required here.

Next stop Spoons for breakfast and "Never ending Coffee", this always reminds of the book called the "Magic Porridge Pot" that we used to read to Jennie and Phil when they were very young, read it you will realise why. After breakfast and numerous cups of coffee, we are ready for a walk around town, it is apparent that the town has suffered along with many other places due to the current situation, with lots of shops closed and empty. We visit a few shops but unfortunately do not contribute a great deal to the economy. We head back to Gloria to collect some bags, now the car park is rammed with Motorhomes parked, no make that abandoned everywhere. After doing our food shopping we are ready to head for the ferry terminal, this time before driving off we remember to put the step in the van.

It's not long before our tickets are scanned and we on board, as the weather is beautiful we head for the top deck so that we can benefit from the best of views. We are not disappointed the Atlantic Ocean is flat calm the scenery and the sky are fantastic, I can not get over the beauty of the colours, light and the the cloud formations, it's just beautiful. The forty five minute Cruise sorry ferry crossing is over all too soon and we head off back downstairs to Gloria. The campsite is literally a stones throw from the terminal and after booking in we are soon parked up and plugged in, parked up not too far away a couple we met at the previous site in Oban, hey they may think we are stalking them. We have a cup of tea and a sit down outside Gloria while we take in the sights of the bay, and then go for a short walk along the side of the bay where we find a bus stop with buses going to Tobermory and to Fionnphort, two of the places we want to visit, we will check this out in the morning as it would save driving Gloria across the island in two different directions, not 100% convinced but we will see. Then it's back to Glo for a bite to eat, a little refreshment, blog writing, reading and a bit of a relax ready for tomorrow's exploration of the island, until then, that's all folks.

Thursday 24th

Well that's our first week away done, Gloria's odometer tells us we have covered 488 miles to date. The end of week one is ok, it's when you get to the end of weeks 2 and 3 that I find strange, as these are the times you are usually returning home from your holidays. When we were on our Oz trip I found these first weeks to be mile stones as I realised we were still going to be away for nearly 6 months. This trip is not going to be anywhere as long as our Oz adventure but it is certainly going to be longer than 2 weeks. Today is another beautiful but chilly morning and we have a bike ride planned to explore the local coast line and see what we can find, we have decided to wait for Mr Sun to show himself over the mountains so that he can warm things up a bit before we set off. As it warms up we set off to our first planned stop is to Duart Castle which dates back to the 13th Century and is the ancestral home of the Clan Maclean. We stop for a coffee at the tea rooms outside the castle overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, the view is stunning and for me as a none nautical person it's nuts to think that this is the same water (Ocean) that would take us to Iceland and beyond, Iceland is around 750 nautical miles North of us. We walk down to the waters edge for some photographic opportunities, then we follow the coastline around the castle and return to where we had left the bikes. On the way to the castle along the single track road we had passed some Highland cattle but due to a couple of cars passing we did not stop to take any photographs. So I thought that we would stop on the way back to photograph the wonderful beasts, however the cattle had different thoughts, and rather than standing looking over the fence to the road, they had all cleared off to the other end of the field and have a lie down. Message to self if a photographic opportunity presents itself, take it while you can. Anyway I am sure that we will see more of these wonderful creatures as we travel around the island and when we are back on the mainland. After a bit more pedalling Barb has had enough and we turn around and head back towards Gloria to complete our 10 mile ride 50% of which was uphill. We sit outside Glo in the beautiful sunshine although it's not exactly hot it is warm enough for shorts. We discuss our plans for tomorrow and decide that we will travel to Fionnphort and catch the ferry to Iona as foot passengers and have most of the day well the afternoon on the island, well you don't want to rush things and it will probably take us 2 hours to get there and that depends on what we find on route. Time to put the bikes back on Gloria's bike rack and charge bike and camera batteries ready for tomorrow as we are planning on wild camping tomorrow night and will be lacking in 240 volts. The rest of the evening is the usual stuff, food, Barb does some sewing while I do some route planning which does not take long as there is only one road to get there. Then it's blog creation and a chat while listening to the radio, it's great we have not watched TV for the last 7 days. Then it is time for bed to ready ourselves for tomorrow's exploits.

Friday 25th

We are awake and up early this morning and we had also been up much earlier, 2am in fact as last night Barb had said that she would like night sky pictures as the stars are beautiful in the clear night sky. So at 2am I am outside practicing my long exposure techniques, which to be honest I don't do very often. To be honest I was not very happy with the first results as the campsite was quite brightly light so as we are planning to wild camp tonight the night sky photography is shelved until we are out in the countryside tonight, It did take me a while to get warm and to get back to sleep. Anyway we are ready to depart before 9.30 and I enter the ferry port details into Sylvia (say nav) and she tells us that we will be at Fionnphort by 10.45, which even though it is only 31 miles away I think is a tad optimistic. The route takes us on the A849, well you don't have a great deal of option as there is only one road that goes there. Now you will have noticed that I said that this is an A road, which it is however this is for most parts single track with passing places, as you can imagine Sylvia's timings where more than optimistic as the pace is a bit slow to say the least due to meeting oncoming traffic and having to pull over or slow down while they pull over into a passing place. It is about 12 o'clock when arrive at the ferry, we had stopped for a coffee! I know how to spoil my wife as I am taking her on her second Cruise this week, I am not 100% sure that this classes as a cruise as it only takes 10 minutes to get to Iona, mind you I don't think the crossing no from Oban to Mull classed as a cruise

either. Barb is glad that it is only a ten minute crossing as the sea is a bit rough today as the wind is blowing up a bit of a hooley. We are soon on board the next ferry and pay the very reasonable £3.50 each for a return ticket, we go on to the top deck to take in the fantastic views, it's a bit blowy but the crossing only takes 10 minutes so we stick with the open deck. We are soon on the island, now I had thought that Mull was tranquil but Iona takes tranquility to another level which you feel as soon as you start the short walk towards the Abbey. We first visit the ruins of the nunnery which dates back to the 12th century, yes it is a ruin but the masonry that remains is amazing the sheer size of the stones used to build the place are stunning, I will post some photographs but if you can't wait Google will supply you information and images in seconds. Although the nunnery is very close to the village and the ferry port, there is a wonderful sense of tranquility surrounding the building. Then we walk a little further to the Abbey, unfortunately due to the current situation we are all dealing with, the Abbey is closed but the grounds are open so we wander around the grounds take in the amazing views and also the view of the building itself, which even from the outside is pretty spectacular. Again there is a sense of peace and tranquility which to be honest I find difficult to explain but also find very relaxing and thought provoking. In 2013 on one of our previous trips to Scotland, Barb and I visited the village of Torridon which is a fair bit further up the west coast, and to be honest I immediately fell head over heels in love with the place, it is stunning, now Mull and Iona are having the same impression on me, they are beautiful and calming in bucket loads.

We stroll around for a while before heading back to catch the next ferry back to Mull, as the wind has increased we decide on the inside seating area for the return trip. We return to Gloria and while Barb makes a cup of tea, I go down to the beach to take some photographs of some highland cattle that are lying down on the beach and also some photographs of a massive boulder which is split in half (pictures on Facebook) I will post them on the website when able. We are planning on going to Tobermory tomorrow and wild camping tonight. As there are not very many parking opportunities on the single track A road back towards Craignure we head off to find one that is suitable and that Glo will fit into. After about an hour we spot the ideal space, although it is not very far from the road we do not foresee that there will be a great deal of traffic travelling down the cul de sac to Fionnphort during the night.

After dinner it is time for a spot more Astro Photography, as we are in the middle of nowhere, there is no light pollution so the shots can be taken at a sensible time. There is something about standing outside in the pitch black star gazing, as your eyes adjust to the darkness more and more distant stars that are not miles away but light years away come into view, to get a bit philosophical you realise how small we are and also wonder what else is out there. Ok that's enough of that, beam me up Scotty, tonight's shots are much better than the previous nights and will be posted soon. That's about it for today, on to Tobermory tomorrow morning, again Sylvia's timings are looking optimistic but hey we are in no rush and we will get there when we get there, it's not going anywhere.

Sat 26th

Well folks it's another beautiful morning with the sun shining although again it's a tad chilly, it will warm up as Mr sun rises higher in the sky and does his job. It's not long before we are on route to Craignure which is about a 30 minute drive from our stop over point, we are heading there to have breakfast and to use the facilities before we carry on to Tobermory, you may have gathered that navigation on Mull is not really a problem as there is only one A road on the island and that goes from Tobermory to Fionnphort so basically you turn left or right, there are other B roads but as the A roads are mainly single track, we are not too sure that Gloria would be well suited to them. We have breakfast overlooking the sea, now there is a surprise, after a walk along the beach we head off towards Tobermory, initially the road is much better, it actually has two lanes and at one point it went to a sort of dual carriageway, ok so the road split for all of 200yds, then we are back to single track with passing places and for the majority follows the coastline. At least on this road there are some parking places which enable us to stop and enjoy some of the amazing views and breathtaking scenery, did I mention that I love this place. On route we see two campsites and have a

plan to stay at one of them on Sunday night, as tonight we will be sleeping in the harbour car park in Tobermory, well we will actually be sleeping in Glo parked in the car park.

We park up in the car park right by the jetty overlooking both the village and the harbour, great spot and there are facilities including showers and even washing machines. After taking some photographs we walk into the village and have a look around which does not take long as it ain't that big. We stop for a coffee and chill out in the sunshine then we have a bit more of a wander around and then visit the Mishnish hotel for a little drinket, this place is fantastic and pictures of "The Tour of Mull" rally adorn the walls, this takes me back to my days at J Davy when Stan used to travel here with his son every year to compete in the event and one year our dear friend Dennis competed in the event. To be fair it's a bit of a hike all the way up here in today's transport, 40 years ago it must have been a proper mission getting here. It's then time to return to Glo for some food and then a couple of night time photographs of the village, considering that we are not doing a great deal there still do not seem as if there are enough hours in the day to get things done, hence I am a little behind with blog, well it's either that or I need to type quicker. Time is getting on and we need to discuss what our plans and a route for the next couple, so until tomorrow that's about it.

Sunday 27th

Well it's another bright sunny but chilly morning with not a breath of wind, perfect weather for a spot of drone flying and aerial photography, after breakfast and a coffee, flight preparations made the drone is up and photographs and videos taken, I have put a short version on Facebook but the rest will need a bit more time editing. Our plans for the rest of the day are to have a walk down to the ferry terminal to check which ferry we can get on Tuesday back over to the mainland well Kilchoan to be precise as I have tried on line but have been unable to make a booking and suspect it's just going to be a turn up and go affair. After walking to the ferry office our first part of today's plan falls at the first fence as the office does not open on a Sunday and there is absolutely no information regarding the crossings apart from the time schedule so we can forget about that bit of planning until tomorrow. We head back to our favourite coffee shop, well we have been there once before, while I go inside to order our coffee, Barb phones the campsites and when I return with the coffee and cake, Barb tells me that both the sites are full tonight, ok that's plan two scuppered as well, looks like we staying in the car park again.

We decide to make today an admin and sewing day, after our coffee we return to Gloria and I get my techie stuff together, laptop, iPad, iPhone, ssd drive, SD cards from camera's, drone, GoPro and dash cam along with all the required leads oh and a pen and paper so that I can remember where I am up to. I head off to sit at one tables overlooking the harbour it is one of those combined bench and table affairs made to accommodate 6 people, by the time I have got all my bits laid out, there is definitely no room for anyone or anything else on the table. One of the basic rules is that you should store your images and documents for that matter, in a least three places for them to be totally secure, I would normally use the cloud and a couple of external hard drives and the computer itself, but loading over 70gb of photographs to the cloud using a weak 4g signal is not going to happen so I will have to rely on just two places my portable SSD drive and a memory stick. Wow this is extremely time consuming which I think is mostly due to the ageing windows driven laptop, which ran out of battery life before being able to complete the tasks and need to be quickly returned to Glo and plugged in. Luckily Barb had brought me a cup of tea and stayed with the rest of the tech stuff while I popped back to Glo. I suspect it is unlikely that there will be a great deal of video editing done on this laptop while we are away due to the massive size of the video files, also the Raw images are also massive.

That done it's more chill time reading while Barb sews, even though we are in a car park it is still very tranquil overlooking the harbour, after our evening meal we have a FaceTime call with Mum and then a couple of phone and WhatsApp conversations. Oh and I had a phone conversation today and upgraded our phone SIM cards Barbs data has gone from 20gb to 80gb per month for the same price and mine has gone from 25gb to 150gb for Less than I am paying now, so if you are on O2 it may be



worth a phone call. Big day tomorrow yet another birthday and we won't be with Phil to celebrate his birthday but we will do something when we get home. One of the reasons we are staying here until Tuesday is that we have booked a table at a restaurant overlooking the bay and if we left tomorrow we would be in the middle of nowhere for a couple of days and have nowhere to go to celebrate or as the years go on commiserate, no no it's celebrate, anyway more tomorrow on our birthdays.

#### Monday 28th

Yippee it's birthday day, first job is to wish the elite members of the 28th September club Happy Birthday, especially Phil, happy birthday Son have a good one. Unfortunately it is raining this morning so not much is happening and it looks like it's going to be a bit of another admin day and also we need to get some clothes washing done so we may as well do it today as there are washing machines and tumble driers within the harbour facilities. We also need to find out what times the ferry crossings are going to be, as the information at the office yesterday and on the interweb are confusing to say the least, just before lunch time the rain stops and Mr Sun shows his face. I walk to Calmac ferry office to check the ferry times, to be honest I may as well of stayed in Gloria as the lady in the office although very helpful new about as much as I do. What is causing the confusion is that the company is swapping boats around and there is supposed to be a different ferry arriving in Mull but no one appears to know when or even if it is arriving. She tells me that the office will be closed tomorrow but there will be a notice n the window with the crossing times and the information will also be updated on the interweb, oh well I suppose we will find out in the morning. We spend the rest of the day strolling around the village and also perusing the menu for tonight's meal. There is a hardware shop in the village called Browns Merchants which was Established in 1830, the sign hanging outside say "Browns Est 1830 Ironmongers Wines and Spirits" the place is amazing it sells Everything from Fairy washing up liquid to Ukuleles, oh and 25 year old single malt, it's like being in Aladdin's Cave and I bet he has still got stock dating back to the day they opened, I don't imagine that his stock turn would meet the current ratio sweet spot, I also suspect that he does not know that there is such a thing and also doesn't give one anyway.

After a visit to our favourite cafe for a coffee sitting outside while we watch the world go by, it's time to return to Gloria for a little rest (well we have been busy you know) before tonight's celebrations. It's not long before we need to get ourselves ready to go out, I wear a pair of jeans, first time for over 10 days and even a shirt, Barb obviously looks wonderful and is actually wearing a dress, we are both a bit shocked. As we leave Glo we are pass a couple in a VW Transporter and they ask if it is ok to park here, we explain that this will be our 4th night and that we have not had a problem and also explain where the facilities are. As we head off they say that they might see us in the public house a bit later, we are soon seated at our specially reserved table by a window overlooking the harbour, the meal itself was very good although served a little too quickly. We head back into the bar for Just the One Mrs Wembley, while we are there our new friends from the car park who are actually from South Wales and escaped just before it was locked down, we have a nightcap together and possibly one more when we returned to the vans, hence no blog last night, but I don't supposed you where expecting one. Then it's time for bed, more tomorrow.

#### Tuesday 29th

Well we are leaving a Mull today at some time, I am not sure at what time, as the Calmac website is still a bit unclear on the timings, what I do know is that we are not getting the 9.30am ferry as we have just watched it depart. I think that the next departure is 1pm but there may be an earlier crossing, to be honest we are not too bothered what time it goes as long as we can get on one of them. The weather is lovely again so I take the opportunity to get the drone back up in the sky to get some more photographs and video before we leave. Then we ready Gloria for departure, remembering the step, we say farewell to our new friends and set off to the ferry terminal 1/4 mile away. There is already one van waiting and also two foot passengers, Barb parks Glo behind the first

van and while Barb goes into town for some last minute shopping I go to the ferry terminal to check out the departure times but hey guess what there is no information anywhere to be found. I go back to Gloria and ask the couple in the van in front of us what time they think the crossing is and they say 11am as do the two foot passengers, I think that they are being a bit optimistic as it is now 10.55, then a ferry comes into view so possibly they are correct, I phone Barb to let her know that we may be leaving sooner than expected. The ferry eventually docks and when everyone is off, I ask one of the crew what the next departure time is and low and behold it's 1pm the original sailing time. I give Barb a ring and tell her the news and that I will meet her in town, leaving Gloria in the queue to reserve our spot.

While in town I have to pay another visit to Browns, as one visit is not enough to take it all in, we get a take away coffee and sit overlooking the harbour taking in our last views of Tobermory. Then it's time to get back to Gloria and get ready to board the ferry. When I was watching Motorhomes disembark before most of them bottomed out as they came off the ferry, so I have pumped up Glo's rear air suspension up to the maximum to give as much height as possible to the rear, so we should not have the same problem getting on and off. As this is only a small ferry, probably takes 10 to 12 vehicles, unfortunately we have to stay inside Gloria for the complete crossing due to Covid 19 rules and are not able to enjoy the views on offer. We have decided to park for the night at one of the campsites close to the ferry terminal and are soon parked up and plugged in overlooking the sea with Mull and the highlands in the distance, it's a beautiful peaceful spot, pictures will be provided later.

After dinner we go for a walk to take in the sights and see if we can find the Sea Eagles that are reportedly here, but it's fairly windy and there is not much chance of them flying in this weather. There are also supposed to be otters but they seem to be in hiding as well and I don't think that we will see any in the morning as the weather forecast is not very good. Just time for a bit of route planning and to catch up on two blog days before bed. We will be heading up towards Mallaig tomorrow not sure how far we will get, that will depend on what we find on route, until tomorrow that's it.

Wednesday 30th

Newsflash Newsflash

Wow what a night, stop it not that type of night, you will remember that I said yesterday that it was blowing a bit of a hoolie, well at about 9pm the hoolie turned into Gale force winds of up to 50MPH (according to BBC weather). We parked Gloria side on to the sea which with hindsight (what I would have changed with a thimble full of that stuff) was not a good idea and we should have parked her heading towards the sea and the prevailing wind but then we would not have had the fantastic view. Now at 9pm the 50MPH winds are battering Gloria side on at full force, to say that the vans a rockin may be a bit of an understatement. The weather worsens during the night as at about 1am the howling winds are joined by torrential rain that sounds like it is trying to drill through Gloria's skin, to say that we don't get a great deal of sleep is another understatement. Finally at about 5am the winds start to slow down and by 6am it has stopped and we are just left with the torrential rain. When it gets light everything is ok, well apart from the wind has decimated the expensive but actually useless Fiamma bike cover which is in bits. I remember a statement that was made to me many many years ago by a salesman of an expensive product and he said "You only cry once when you pay for quality" well in my opinion the Fiamma bike cover is expensive and crap, we have had two and both have disintegrated after a very short period and very little use, ok last night was exceptional but it had already started to rip in a couple of places the other day and was being held together with gaffer tape, but hey that's only my opinion but I will not be buying another. As it looks like the rain is in for the day we will be packing up putting our reserve Aldi bike cover on the bikes and moving on this morning to see what other interesting places we can find, more later.

The rain does not look like it's stopping today and in fact it gets harder as we ready ourselves to leave the campsite, there is not going to be any chance of seeing the Sea Eagles this morning and

even the otters that should not be bothered by the rain are being conspicuous by their absence. Sylvia is telling us that although the journey to Mallaig is only 57 miles it is going to take over 2 hours to get there. As we know she does have a tendency to underestimate the time required, even though she knows we are in Gloria and not a car. Progress is slow as we travel along the single track road that weaves its way up, down and around the west coast mountain ranges. We also stop a couple of times to take in the views and at about the half way point it's time for a coffee and a cup of tea. In the end the journey takes about four hours and we do not get to the campsite until late in the afternoon. After setting up with have a cup of tea, while we plan the next couple of days, to be honest until tomorrow morning we are still not sure on which route we will take, as we are trying to get tickets to travel on the Jacobite train but have not had a reply from the booking office yet, so I am not getting my hopes up too much. If we don't manage to get tickets for the magical steam train I will have to make do with photographing it crossing the Glenfinnan viaduct. We are currently about 7 miles away from Mallaig which we will visit tomorrow morning and then make our next route decision. Not much else to report other than we go for a walk along the coastline and spend some time photographing the sunset which although it is not the best weather conditions, we are both happy with the results, in fact Barb likes the so much she will not let me post them online until they are reduced in size and watermarked. That means they will have to wait for another admin day before I can show them to you, Barb is getting precious and protective about my photographs. Well we will let you know tomorrow which route we have taken and until then which is the 1st October that's about it.

Thursday 1st

Pinch punch first of the month and it's that time again, a fortnight away and normally it would be time to be packing to go home, but are we, are we heck, apparently Liverpool is going into lockdown again so we are staying put. It's not long before we ready ourselves to leave the site which I have to say is not the best or the cheapest site we have stayed at and I have left my comments which were not particularly glowing on the Search for Sites Website reviews section. Before we leave we need to wash some of the mud off Glo and also fill her water tank which ran out last night, we had thought it strange that it was empty as we had not used much and it was full yesterday. After washing the worst of the mud off the front doors (from the wheels spinning) I start filling the tank, very soon I realise why it is empty, the water is coming out nearly as quickly as it's going in. When I look underneath I find that the drain pipe has detached itself from the tank, hence free flowing water out of the tank, we assume it happened as we drove into the site as Gloria did bottom out lightly. Time to climb under a wet and muddy Gloria and refit the drain pipe, job done and water tank filled we are on our way to Mallaig. After about 5 miles on the single track road we join the A830 a wide two lane road with a smooth surface pure bliss, it is not long before we are parked up and on our way into town. First stop is the railway station to see if there is any chance of getting tickets on the magical Jacobite train, first problem is that Western rail who run the Jacobite don't have an office at the station but the lady in the BR ticket office gives me a leaflet from Western rail that actually has the booking office phone number on it, which up to now I have been unable to find. I am soon talking to a lady who tells me the same information as the website and that the next availability is the 12th October, which really isn't much use to us, a little deflated I ask if they have any cancellations and after a while she finds availability for two on this Sunday mornings train, wow we will have them, they are soon booked, yippee we are actually going on the trip, which is listed on the Internet as this.

"Described as one of the great railway journeys in the world this 84 mile round trip takes you past a list of impressive extremes.

Starting near the highest mountain in Britain, Ben Nevis, it visits Britain's most westerly mainland railway station, Arisaig, passes close by the deepest freshwater Loch in Britain, Loch Morar and the

shortest river in Britain, River Morar, finally arriving next to the deepest seawater Loch in Europe Loch Nevis”.

Now that ticks some impressive boxes, I can't wait, that job done it's time for a walk around the town grinning from ear to ear, after a wander around it's coffee time and now we need to a little bit of planning for the next couple of days, I check the ferry availability for Skye while Barb checks out local campsites, Barb gets on much better than me as all of today's ferries are now booked up, there is availability for tomorrow but there is not much point in going for one day. Barb has found a site overlooking the sea and a short walk to the beach, she has phoned them and we are booked in, I have also found a site between Fort William and Ben Nevis and we are booked there for Saturday and Sunday night, right result. We are soon at the campsite and it is stunning, considering that it is only £2 more expensive than last night's site it is light years ahead and will get a glowing review. After Gloria is levelled and plugged in we head down to the beach for some photographic opportunities before it goes dark, not much chance of a decent sunset opportunity due to it being far too cloudy. Then it's back to Glo for food, a spot of reading and blog creation while listening to the radio, we have now been away for two weeks and we have not had the TV on once while we have been away and it's been great, I don't miss it one bit, more tomorrow folks.

Friday 2nd

After I had finished writing the blog last night, we decided that if there was a space available here tonight we would stay and just chill, so I am up early (ish) to walk down to the reception to collect our freshly baked Pain au Chocolat that they sell every morning and also to see if they have any availability. We are in luck they have a pitch available so I book it pronto and also order a couple of pain au chocolat as they smell marvellous. As we are having a chill out and admin day the blog is not going to be that long today also in rains for most of the morning so we are staying put inside Gloria. In the afternoon the sun comes out and it's fairly warm so we head off for a walk down to the beach more photographs to be taken and possibly some drone flying depending what the wind is like when we get down there as the Drone Apps that I use are both saying that the wind gusts are too much. When we get to the first beach the wind speed is too much for safe flying so it's camera photography time. We then walk round to the next cove which is more shielded and the wind speed is much lower. Time for some aerial photography which should be ok as long as I don't fly it too high, I get a couple of shots but the wind gusts are still too much for safe flying, the Apps both say that the wind speed will drop later so we will have another go later, time to revert to the camera. The beaches are only small but they are beautiful and the views across to the Isle of Skye are stunning, then it's time to return to Gloria for a bit more R and R, after all we have been busy you know. With dinner in the oven I check the weather and the wind has dropped considerably, so I head over to the far end of the site which is empty to get some flying time in and some aerial photographs and videos, I am looking forward to getting the shots and the videos home so that I can edit them probably on the computer as there looks to be some decent shots and this aerial photography gives everything another dimension and you see things that you just can't see from the ground, I love it. Then after dinner there is just time to back up all the photos and videos that have been taken and then it's just the usual so not much to report, other than tomorrow's plan is to head to Fort William and stop off at the viaduct to recce the area for a good spot to hopefully take some shots of the Jacobite crossing the Viaduct on Monday morning, Barb may be taking some photography lessons on Monday while I get some drone shots, but we will see tomorrow what spots are available, as it's fairly popular location for photography, so until tomorrow that's about it.

Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup>

We make a leisurely depart from this wonderful site and promise ourselves to revisit it in the future, hopefully in the summer months, our destination for today is a site just outside Fort William and very close to Ben Nevis. First stop is to be the Glenfinnan Viaduct to recce the area for Monday's

planned photographs of the Jacobite train crossing it on Monday morning weather permitting. It is not long before we are off the single track road and we are on the A830, it is a pleasant change to be on a smooth tarmac road, it makes it much easier for Barb to drive on, is much more comfortable and you cover the miles much quicker. Again the views are stunning and a new photo opportunity lies behind every bend in the road, you could stop every couple of minutes to take a shot, but you would never get anywhere, as with every time we visit I am lost for words to describe the beauty of Scotland and it does make me wonder why we travel abroad, when there is such a wonderful place a few hundred miles from home, well apart from the weather, I will never tire of the west coast and western isles.

We arrive at the Viaduct and first visit the Prince Charles monument which is at the head of the Loch and is where the Prince raised his Standard in 1745 which began the Jacobite rising, 70 years later the 60ft monument was erected. Then we return to the visitors centre for a coffee before I head up the hillside to get a better view of the Viaduct, the first route takes me under the viaduct and over to the far side eventually raising above the viaduct but it is very far away and not the shot I am looking for. However from this vantage point I can see where I need to be, I return to Gloria to tell Barb that I am going up the other side of the viaduct and also to don some walking boots which would have been more sensible to wear in the first place, Doh! I head off again up the other side of the hill, it takes me about 30 minutes to hike up the hill and check out the various vantage points taking snaps and reviewing them until I find the place that I want to be. I take a number of test shots to make sure I am happy with the position while imagining the train crossing the viaduct. I go up to the top of the hillside where you get a different perspective, I could probably come here a number of times and take shots from various positions but as you only get the opportunity twice a day you could be here a while and we are just getting one crack at this time around. While I am up there I meet a young couple from Finland who ask me if I would take a photograph of them with the viaduct in the background, after I check they are happy with the result we chat for a while about travel and Scotland, I suggest a couple of places for them to visit and then say farewell and safe travels. Time to head back down to Gloria and tell Barb about the views and show her the test shots, after looking through the test shots she agrees with me on the location I have chosen, on-route back I have also been back to the monument to get a few more photographs of Prince Charles for Barb to send to Linda.

As we head off to Fort William it starts to rain and rain heavily, we did stop in the town with a view of having a look around although we have been here before it was a while ago. We decide that we will leave exploring the town until Monday after we have been to photograph the Jacobite. Instead we head to the campsite and to our already allocated pitch, with Ben Nevis towering above us, well we think it is but because of the rain and low clouds we can not see most of it. We are soon parked up and Gloria is level and plugged in, the time is then spent with Barb sewing while I ready camera gear to take with us on the train tomorrow, making sure batteries are charged, SD cards have enough space and the correct lenses are placed in my camera bag, flippin crank!. Then it's time for food and a bit of a relax after that we listen to John Lennon at 80 on BBC Radio 2, great show can't wait to listen to part two tomorrow night when return from our trip n the magical Jacobite express. After that it's time for bed as the alarm has been set for an early start tomorrow, alarm and early start now there's two things that haven't happened before on this trip. In tomorrow's blog I hope to be able to fully relay to you the experience of our journey on the Jacobite, until then that's all for today.

Sunday 4<sup>th</sup>

Before I get to today's experience, there is something I missed out of yesterday's instalment, some of you may have seen the video I posted on Facebook yesterday and if so you will already know

about it, if not I will give you a quick run through what happened. When we were at the viaduct yesterday and I was returning from my trip up the first hill I could hear the engine sounds of what where obviously high performance cars. Returning to the car park I found a selection of exotic cars including, Ferrari's, Lamborghini's, an Aston Martin, Porsche GT3 RS and a Mercedes AMG GT. The Boys with Toys have decals on their cars saying Trio Rally, these guys are obviously skint and suffering much hardship in the current world we are living in, not.

I had set the alarm for 8am but it wasn't needed as we were both awake before it sounded Reveille, we had also both been awake at about 5am as all the rain in the sky or so it seemed fell on Fort William. We read in morning news that other parts of the country have been effected far worse with reports of wide spread flooding, when we look outside there is no sign of any flooding or that it had even been raining heavily. We head into town and do a spot of food shopping before heading to the station and boarding the Jacobite, we all know that COVID 19 is causing havoc across the world but for once it has a slight benefit as the Jacobite is only running at half its passenger capacity and we have a table for four to ourselves. The reviews and reports I have read about the journey have set some pretty high expectations and even though the weather is not fantastic, the views and scenery are just stunning there are no more words needed to explain them, they are just simply stunning. The top trump card of the journey is about to be upon us, the crossing of the Glenfinnan Viaduct, I head towards a door as on these great old carriages you can actually open the window the only bad part is, that when you do the ash and hot embers being emitted from the smokestack, hit you in the face, ouch. I imagine that pre and post Covid this spot would be very difficult to get, unless you wanted to stand there for the whole journey. Luckily it has stopped raining and it's a bit brighter, I manage to film the whole crossing and also get some photographs as well. The rest of the journey still has lots of stunning scenery to offer us and there are lots of gasp's and wow's as you struggle to take it all in, the journey takes just over 2 hours and when arrive at Mallaig we have just under 2 hours before we do it all again in opposite direction. As we visit Mallaig a few days ago we are back on board the Jacobite readying ourselves for the return trip and soaking up the atmosphere these old rail carriages offer and I wonder how many people they have carried since their first use in 1951. The trains whistle blows and we are off, we are sitting in different seats which are on the other side of the carriage for the return trip so as to give all the passengers a different view travelling in each direction. The camera is in use again and it is earning its keep today, I hope the battery lasts but if it doesn't, it's ok as I have another with me, camera that is not battery. The journey back to the viaduct is longer than when leaving Fort William and as we approach the top trump of the trip, I head back to the carriage door, darn it, it is occupied but there is a vacant space at the next door, the problem with photographing the locomotive on the return trip is that it is running in reverse and does not make a great photograph, so if you are planning on going on the trip make sure of your space at a door on the outward bound trip to be able to get the best photographs. The views on the return trip are no less stunning but as you have seen them, although not all of them on the outward bound trip, you do seem able to absorb more of the scenery on the return trip.

We arrive back at Fort William and we have both enjoyed the trip immensely and would recommend it if you are planning a trip to Scotland, if you have planned dates for your visit make sure you book your tickets well in advance to avoid disappointment, we were very lucky to get a cancellation at such short notice especially in the terrible times. After leaving the Jacobite and just one more photograph of the Locomotive as we walk past it, we walk into town for a look around, as it's Sunday and just after 4.30pm there are not a great deal of shops open we decide to head back to Gloria and then back to the campsite which is only two and half miles away. We are soon back at our pitch with Gloria level and plugged in, time for a bit and I do mean a little bit of planning out the next couple of days. While we can do all the planning we like the things we want to do are heavily weather dependant and at the moment the weather is very changeable at the moment, so if it's not raining in the morning we will head back to Glenfinnan to get a photograph of the train crossing the viaduct, if

it is raining we won't be going as I will not be climbing half way up a mountain, ok I it's a big hill, to take photographs in the rain while getting myself and my camera equipment soaking wet, sorry David it won't be happening, I must just be a fair weather photographer.

After food it is time for blog creation while listening to Radio 2 playing three hours of music and interviews dedicated to John Lennon at 80, great show so far, oh by the way it didn't take three hours to write the blog update, there is plenty more of the shows that we will listen to before we go to bed. Tomorrow morning we will check what the weather has decided to do and then make our decisions based on rain or no rain, you will find out what happens in tomorrow's blog, until then that's it, more tomorrow.

Monday 5<sup>th</sup>

I had set the alarm last night for 8am this morning however there was no need as I am awake well before it has a chance of going off, I have woken with a sense of excitement and trepidation, excitement at the possibility of seeing and photographing the Jacobite crossing the viaduct and trepidation that the weather may have different ideas. I have a look outside and the Scottish weather has yet again defied the weather forecasting computers and boffins, which last night at 10pm said that it would pouring down with rain this morning, well it's not, it's dry a little cloudy with Mr sun trying to show himself, this means that the photo shoot is on, and we are soon on our way back to the viaduct for the forth time in as many days. When we get there the visitor centre is closed which is a bit of a bonus as we don't have to pay the £5 parking charge, it's still a tad damp under foot so walking boots are required today. I head off back up the hillside with plenty of time to get up there and set up, as I approach the top of the hillside there are already lots of people there waiting for the train to cross the viaduct, luckily the spot I had recced the other day is a tad muddy and is still available. I have done a bit of forward thinking and taken a couple of bin bags with me, to put my stuff on a save it getting wet and muddy. I check the time and there is still approximately an hour to wait before the train arrives and the hillside is full of people waiting to see the train, when I think that most of these peeps where here before me, I realise that I am not the only nut around. Time to get set up, main camera to take still photographs, smaller camera set up on tripod to video the crossing and a GoPro on a monopod as a back up video, guess I wouldn't like to miss it then!! After checking composition, settings and taking a few test shots there is still over 30 minutes to wait, more and more people arrive and keep arriving, it's all a bit nuts really as it takes less than 2 minutes for the train to make the crossing, but it does show the popularity of the train, oh and Harry Potter has, and listening to the accents around me, people have travelled from all around the globe to take in this spectacle, I shudder to think how many people there must be up here in the summer months. I keep checking the time and going by the time we crossed the viaduct yesterday the train is running late, on our way here we had seen railway staff working on the line and I wonder how late it may be. The answer is not long, very soon we can hear the locomotive in the distance, just after the sound of the whistle, the Jacobite arrives in the distance, you can hear cameras going off all over the place and even flashguns firing, a little optimistic me thinks, then less than a minute later is gone, all that anticipation and 60 seconds later it's time to check that you got the shot, pack up and head off back down the hillside. I take a few more shots of the mountains and the viaduct while everyone else make the mass exodus down the hill before I start my way down.

I get back to Barb and Gloria before our arranged time which is good as I had left my phone in Gloria and I did not want to worry Barb if I had been late, right that's another thing ticked off the bucket list, it's time to head back towards Fort William and beyond. We stop off in Fort William to fill Gloria's go go tank and to get a couple of free coffee's from the big yellow M. We head off towards Glencoe, a place we have been to before and absolutely adore, it is yet another stunning place to visit. The weather is now beautiful, the sun is shining, there is very little wind and for me it's "T" shirt

weather, rather than driving further we stop at a campsite we have tried to stay at before but then it had been fully booked, as it is late in the season they have space and we are soon parked up, level and plugged in overlooking Loch Leven and the surrounding mountains of the Glencoe area. We head off for a walk and spend a couple of hours having a great walk by the Loch, through the village and after a coffee we head off through the forest and back to Gloria. We sit outside in the sunshine and discuss the days events until it goes dark and gets a bit fresh, then it's much of the usual food, blog creation, check through the photographs to make sure I got the shot, luckily I have a few in the bag that will do the job, well I think they do, we will have to wait and see what our friends think before they go on general release. That's about it for today and I don't want you getting too excited about tomorrow's report as we have decided to stay put and as the weather is not looking good, we will probably have an admin and film making day, hopefully be able to get the film out to you all tomorrow, until then, that's your lot.

Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup>

I hope that you are next expecting a great deal this evening, as it is going to be what is known as slow news day, as it has been raining all day and we have only ventured out of Gloria a couple of times and only to have a look at the Loch and the clouds clinging to the mountains that surround us. We have a full duvet day and spend our time chatting, reading, film editing and production, we have released our latest block buster regardless of the lack of peeps going to the cinema, we didn't want to disappoint our audience, so it is out there for you to watch in the comfort of your own home or anywhere for that matter. We have done a little bit of route planning as while we are up this end of the country I want to go and revisit a place that I used to go to as a child with my beloved Auntie Rose and her fiancé Albert. It is called Kimelford bay and is about 20 miles south of Oban, I have vivid memories of Rose and Albert picking me up from my mums house on Woolton Road. Albert had a Mini traveller and it was loaded to the gunnels with a massive tent, a camp kitchen, camping equipment for three, clothes, two weeks of food and anything else you can think of or would fit in while still leaving space for the three of us although only just enough. This was not the end of the equipment this little mini managed to drag the 330 plus miles from Liverpool and this is in the days of travelling over Rest and be Thankful, and none of this M74 lark, in fact there was not that much of the M6 heading north. This little Mini also had a tow bar fitted and attached to it was a fourteen and half foot GP14 sailing dinghy which was also loaded with sails, life jackets, fishing rods, and anything else Albert could fit in it, but this was not the end of it, the Mini also had a roof rack and on this was yet another boat which again was about 14 foot long and a bit like a wind surfer but bigger, it could take two peeps and one mast and a sail that had 80 sq foot of sail area, it also went like the wind, oh I forgot about the outboard motor and fuel tank, god knows how the poor little mini managed to do the journey but it did, and we had some great times.

That's really about it for today we will be travelling for a couple of hours tomorrow so may have some more to report and hopefully the weather will be a bit better although the forecast is not good but that can always be wrong. Until tomorrow that is all for now, sleep well and keep safe.

Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup>

We are ready to depart at about 10.30 but first I need to go and pay for the extra night, all of the other sites we have stayed at would have wanted payment first, but the owners are fairly laid back and when I went to pay, he had actually forgotten that we still needed to pay. We set off and part of the journey is retracing our route to Oban and then our route takes us along the A816 which is very picturesque, very bendy and very hilly this makes for fairly slow progress, oh and we did have to make the obligatory coffee stop, it's less than 20 miles so actually does not take that long. The actual campsite I used to stay at has long gone and has been replaced by a marina that is full of expensive



yachts, it's a little sad that a place which I have such fond memories of, is no longer there, but hey things change over time (a long time) even on the west coast of Scotland and I will always have the memories which are more precious than a grass field. We had planned to stay at a boat yard that also advertises itself as a Motorhome stop over point but when we get there, now how do I put this, well let's just say it was not for us and we will probably park up anywhere. I pop down to the Loch to get some drone flying, filming and photography time in, and when I return Barb has found another stop over site in Craignish overlooking the Sound of Jura. Barb has phoned but got no answer so we head off to the site anyway as it is not that far away, when we get there, the sign says full but there is only one other van on the site, so we pick a pitch and place our payment in the honesty box. The view is fantastic and we head off for a walk which includes a quick stop off at the local pub for a Diet Coke.

Then we return to Gloria for some food which is followed by the now usual reading, chatting and blog creation, still no TV and by Thursday that will make three weeks without tv which includes one night when there was a certain football match that I am pleased to have missed. Tomorrow's plan is to head towards Inveraray stopping off at Lochgilphead on route and then finding somewhere to stay, it might be a wild camping night depending on where we can find to park up, until then dear fans that's about your lot, more tomorrow.

Thursday 8<sup>th</sup>

Well last night I had hoped that as we are in the middle of nowhere overlooking a Loch, surrounded by mountains and there absolutely no light pollution, that there might have been a chance of getting some astronomical photography shots. However the weather has a very different idea, the cloud cover is thick and low, you can not see any stars at all, even after standing outside Gloria long enough for my eyes to adjust to the darkness. Then it starts to rain, so that definitely puts a stop to the photo shoot idea. After breakfast we are ready for the off, our plan today is to visit a couple of the small towns that are on our route heading back South, well that is after we have traveled towards every other points of a compass, to say this road has some twists and turns may be a slight understatement, it ain't straight or flat that's for sure. Our first stop is Lochgilphead, it is a pleasant village and after a walk around which does not take very long, we set off again, we find a parking spot overlooking yet another Loch well to be fair it may be the same body of water we past before but I have lost track. We then travel to Inveraray, we find a Motorhome parking area and Barb manoeuvres Gloria into one of the designated bays and then we head into town. Again this is not a massive town but it does have a Castle and a Jail, after a walk around the town we find the jail, we do contemplate having a look around the jail, well that was before we saw that the entrance fee was £11.50 each, they are having a laugh, needless to say the visit stops outside. It's now mid afternoon and we need to find somewhere to stay this evening, we see that Loch Fyne the fish restaurant chain have a restaurant overlooking the Loch and have a Motorhome stop over point which is free, well it's sort of free, they ask that you eat there. It's not far so we head off to have a look, when we arrive we have a look around, as well as the restaurant there is a shop, a garden centre and they also do take away's. However there is a bit of a problem, due to the new Covid rules the restaurant has to be closed and empty by 6pm and the take away closes at 5.30pm, as we did not have lunch until late neither of us are going to want to eat before 6 o'clock also the weather has worsened and it the car park is not looking that attractive. We have a look for different places to stay and find that we are only 40 minutes from the site, well car park, overlooking Loch Lomond that we stayed at on our way up. We are soon there and parked up, the view of the Loch is still as wonderful and after taking a few photographs I contemplate putting the drone up to get some aerial shots, but the weather interferes again as it starts to rain and rain and drones don't mix especially when flying over water, well if you don't want to loose your expensive investment that is.

Well the fish and chips we were planning on having from Loch Fyne has gone out of the window, luckily we still had a home made Bolognese sauce in the freezer which was taken out earlier. I had started the blog creation this afternoon so it did not take long to complete after we had our spagbol. Which means I can post it earlier than usual and that gives us plenty of time to chat and relax this evening. Today marks our 3<sup>rd</sup> week without watching TV, it has not even been turned on once while we have been away, it's so good to just be able to relax and listen to music while we chat about what we have seen during the day, including the Red Squirrel that ran across the road in front of us this afternoon and no we didn't, it made it safely across the road and up a tree. We do some route and stop over planning for tomorrow and amazingly we have even phoned up and booked in, it's another freebie night in a pub car park well again it's free in disguise as they would like you to make purchases inside the pub. Now this would obviously not usually be a problem for me, but as I am partaking in sober October (not sure if I have mentioned it before) I am not sure that "I will have a Diet Coke please" will impress them much. So we have checked out the menu and booked a table.

Well that's about your lot, we have a couple of hours to chill out listening to some great music before it's time to get some sleep as tomorrow is another day and hopefully the weather will brighten up, but according to the forecast that's not happening until Saturday, if so we will be getting the bikes off the back of Gloria and going for a bike ride. Until tomorrow that's your lot, I am going to give my brain a rest.

Friday 9<sup>th</sup>

After I had completed the blog last night, even more Motorhomes arrived to park up for the night, a few of them left earlier this morning but there are still plenty of them keeping us company. Our journey today will see us cover the most miles in one day than we have in ages, Sylvia is saying that our destination is 125 miles and will take us just over an extremely optimistic 2 hours, it will also see us cross the border back into England. We head off down the A82 which follows the west banks of Loch Lomond, it's not long before we get a bit of a shock well actually a few, first we get to 60 mph and Gloria ain't done that for a while, then there's the traffic, traffic lights, roundabouts and that's before we get onto a motorway with five lanes of traffic, eek. Once on the motorway we have a quick pit stop and then we continue on towards Gretna Green, about an hour or so later we arrive at the Gretna Green Outlet Village, which after having a look around we both decide has a lot of expensive tat that we don't want and judging by the lack of shopping bags being carried, no one else wants either. Next stop the Blacksmiths shop, as we are pulling into the car park there is a couple having their wedding photographs taken in the sunshine, after a wander around and a coffee we are just about to head back to Gloria when the heavens open and it pours down as it does not look like there is any chance of it stopping we make a run for Gloria and dry interior. As we are leaving, another couple have just arrived for their wedding, I am not sure that they will be having their photographs taken outside after the ceremony.

Next stop is the public house car park that we are staying at tonight and although it is only 4 miles away they are an important 4 miles as during the drive we have left our much loved Scotland and crossed the border back into England and we didn't even notice. Don't worry Scotland we will be back tomorrow for a quick visit as Barb want to make a purchase at the Famous Blacksmiths Shop before we head for Keswick for our stop for the weekend, which I have booked this afternoon. When we arrived at the Metal Bridge Hotel there is only one other van in the car park but the numbers steadily grow as time moves on, and by 7pm there are 12 vans parked up. We have a meal in the pub accompanied by a Diet Coke, I don't know why I am pushing my luck mentioning it as I still have another 21 days of the month to go. Then we return to Gloria for a spot of blog creation and some time to relax before bed, tomorrow will see us travel to a site just outside Keswick, that's after we pop back over the border to Scotland. Might get some time for a walk tomorrow afternoon if the

weather plays the game, if not Sunday's forecast is looking good so we may even get a bike ride in, but until tomorrow that's your lot for today, keep safe everyone.

Saturday 10<sup>th</sup>

It's not a very early start this morning as we woke up at about 6.30am and decided that was definitely a silly time to get up and amazingly we both managed to get back to the land of nod and the next thing we know it's 9am. After breakfast we head off and as Barb wants to make a purchase at Gretna, our first stop is back across the border into Scotland it doesn't take long as it's only two miles away and Gretna is less than two miles from there. Purchase made we set off and retrace our steps across the border into England, in a lot less than an hour we started in England went to Scotland and then back into England. Our next stop is going to be Carlisle to search out a material shop, now Carlisle is only 20 minutes away and we are soon there, finding the material shop is a different matter and when we do actually find it, they do not have what Barb requires Doh! Next stop is Keswick which is less than an hour away, well it would have been if we had not taken an unexpected detour, double Doh! As it's mid afternoon and as we have already done a spot of vittles shopping earlier we decide to head straight to the site rather than going into Keswick as we can go there tomorrow or Monday. We are soon parked up at the top of the site with a fantastic 360° view of the surrounding mountains, great pitch but might be a bit exposed if the weather turns. The site has laundry facilities and while our stuff is spinning around in the much needed soapy water we head off to the café for a well deserved coffee oh and cake.

We return to Gloria with our cleaned clothes and watch the ever changing weather from our 360° view, the storm clouds are moving quickly so the rain that is forecast later may not actually happen. After dinner we have what is becoming our usual evening routine, no TV, listening to some great 1980's music on Radio 2, while we chat, make some very loose plans for the next few days, a spot of blog creation, accompanied by a little g&t for Barb and a blind tonic for me. That's about it for today, the forecast is good for tomorrow so we should be able to report on a bike ride or possibly a walk, let's keep our fingers crossed that the computer has got the forecast right, but until then that's it folks, keep safe everyone.

Sunday 11<sup>th</sup>

I am awake bright and early this morning and so is Mr Sun, it is a beautiful morning with the sun rising behind Gloria and lighting the brilliant blue sky and clouds with wonderful hues of pinks and reds. As the sun rises higher in the sky it's brilliant rays, light the mountains in the distance and to show their beauty, it is breathtaking and I will never be able to get enough of it, or be able to put into words how much pleasure I get from looking at these amazingly views. This would have been a fantastic morning for the David Newton Sunset and Sunrise photography course that Jennie and I came to in Keswick a couple of years ago, great course even though it rained persistently, I nearly used another description for the weather that weekend but I managed to refrain. That was the weekend that I drove over the step at about 4.30am and probably woke everyone on the campsite, I certainly destroyed the step that's for sure.

After breakfast we ready ourselves for the hike into town, we had thought yesterday about going into town on our bikes, however I spoke to Phil last night and Andrea and Phil are coming to meet us in Keswick and then we are going to go for a walk, so walking boots are the order of the day as we will be using the public footpaths that are likely to be a tad muddy after the last few days rainfall. Not far from the campsite we leave the road and head down the footpath, and when I say down I mean down it's like descending the North face of the Eiger, ok I exaggerate a bit, well a lot actually, but the path is steep and muddy. After a couple of miles we arrive in Keswick and we have about an

hour or so before Andrea and Phil arrive, we have a wander around the town a place we have been coming to for, well for as long as I can remember and that Jennie and Phil have been coming to for all of their lives because we have brought them both here since their births and hope that is what has made them both love the outdoors. We have seen some changes but that is only to be expected over all of those years, lots of the original shops are still here, of course the outdoor stalwarts George Fisher who opened his first shop in the town in 1957 and in 1967 moved to the premises they have been in ever since. The shop is known all over the world and receives post, you know the thing that people used to write on paper, oh a letter that's it, then put it in an envelope, address it, put a stamp on it and then put it in a post box. It's amazing that they ever received some of these letters as the addresses that have been used have been sketchy to say the least, e.g. George Cumbria, Fisher Cumbria and amazingly the good old Royal Mail knew where to deliver them to. It's a great shop that sells high quality outdoor goods and is part of Keswick's history, George was a Team Leader of the Keswick Mountain Rescue team and always felt that anyone that ventured out onto the fells should be properly equipped, he also received an MBE for services to mountain rescue. There is also Barb's favourite shop in the town 'Maysons' this is an amazing shop that sells, how do I put this, ok a vast range of bohemian stuff including jewellery, there is also a gallery upstairs selling some great Lake District photographs, let's face it there is a lot of photographic opportunities to be had here. Anyway in the forty plus years Barb and I have visited Keswick this shop has always been here in some form, it also used to have our favourite restaurant which itself was fairly bohemian and always reminds of a similar restaurant that used to be in Matthew Street Liverpool. It is not possible for us to visit Keswick without visiting this shop and needless to say we pay the shop another visit, and yes a purchase is made, well two actually and Barb did negotiate a discount for a multiple purchase, hey you have got to help the independent shops and the local economy if you can.

We meet up with Andrea and Phil, and we go for a walk around the lake, well ok it's more like a walk around a bit of the lake as the walk around the lake is ten miles and that ain't happening this afternoon, obviously due to time constraints not the fact that it's 10 miles. The weather is fantastic and there are lots of people about, not as many as in the summer months but hey it is mid October and we are also in very different and strange times, that unfortunately I think we will be in for some time to come, as I don't see much light at the end of the tunnel yet. Anyway let's not go down that route of conversation as I don't think anyone in world has an answer, well other than not going out full stop and that is not a great answer. Time for something to eat in one of the socially distancing venues, ok they are very informative when we arrive, but after a member of staff taking a great deal of time explaining the operational rules they have put in place that we and they have to observe, completely ignores them, completely nuts. Apart from the service which if I described it as unorganised chaos, would be being kind, the food is good and the chaos gives us something to giggle about between ourselves.

We head back to Gloria luckily in Phil's car so we don't have to hike back up the North Face, as Sam is waiting for them at home we say our farewell's and Phil and Andrea head off back to Liverpool. We contemplate sitting outside to watch the setting sun but that thought quickly passes and we watch the sun go down from inside a cosy Gloria while having a cup of tea. There is no need for food this evening, so it's the usual chatting, listening to the radio, blog creation while Barb watches some stuff on her iPad then it's just time to post this before bed, as I can't add anymore to today's blog after it's posted, guess what, correct that's your lot, more tomorrow.

Monday 12<sup>th</sup>

Last night before bed we checked the weather forecast and as it wasn't looking good for today we had planned on staying put on the site and have a bit of a chill out day. After breakfast I head down for a shower and go to the office to arrange our further nights stay. Debit card in hand I go into the

reception area and say that we would like to extend our stay, this is where our plan falls over as they are fully booked for tonight and only have the centre field spaces available. I think about the field option for a minute or so but as it has been raining most of the night the field is a bit boggy and we watched a couple of people struggle to get their Motorhomes off it earlier this morning. I phone Barb and give her the news, when I return Barb has found us an alternative site for tonight and tomorrow. Next job is ready Gloria for relocating to our new location, it's not long before we are ready for the off and our first stop is into Keswick for a spot of food shopping at BOOTH'S don't you know, won't be going there to often, it's like legalised mugging eek, then we head back into Keswick for a walk around and a coffee stop. We head off to find tonight's site, which is a working farm and a Caravan and Motorhome CL site, it does not have a road name, just the name of the Farm and the postcode, now you may have encountered the next problem, out in the country postcodes cover a fair area and the satnav does not take you to where you actually need to be. Well on this occasion Sylvia is pretty hopeless at getting us to our destination and has us on a wild goose chase down an extremely minor road. Next plan is to phone the farm and get some directions, next slight problem no phone signal, we retrace our steps with Sylvia turned off before she got thrown out of the window. When we are heading back along the main A591 I spot a tiny sign with the name of the farm, now why didn't we see that when we went past it at 50MPH, let me think. We turn in and eventually find the farmer's wife who explains where we can park but we have to wait for a couple of minutes as the farmer is moving the bull across the farm yard and he is a big rascal, while we are waiting she explains that the cows are noisier than usual as the farmer has taken the calves away from them. Both the cows and the calves are calling out to find each other, they are making a proper din and it's a bit sad really, but that's the way cattle farming works apparently, not the place for vegetarians. We have booked here for two nights but if the weather is bad again tomorrow we may move on to another site as there is not a great deal to do or see. The rest of the afternoon and early evening are used for a spot of admin time saving photographs from camera x 2, GoPro, Drone and dash cam to the SSD drive, no chance of saving them to the cloud, while Barb does some sewing, there is absolutely no radio or phone signal and therefore no internet, this means that we will have to wait until tomorrow to see what Boris and Downing Street have in store for the country and Liverpool in particular, I obviously don't know the answer to slowing the spread of Covid but at the moment, it looks like stopping people mixing freely is the only answer we have, looking back a couple of months it did slow the spread, but now that the doors have been opened and people have mixed freely, the second wave that we were told would happen is low and behold is happening. It is very worrying that we and by the way the rest of the world have no other answer, it is also very worrying for the whole World's economy and the damage it is doing to the mental health of the population. Lots of businesses have already failed and more businesses will follow, I feel for the independent business owners that know all their staff personally and have put their life and their life savings into their business and are struggling to keep it afloat, I, sorry we fully understand the mental anguish and pain they are going through, on the other hand the big boys get stronger and the rich get richer, that's it I am stopping now. We will have to wait until tomorrow to see the extent of the measures that are put in place, but hey on the bright side we might not be allowed back home, oh boy take me back to the West coast of Scotland, good job I packed a couple of jumpers.

As we have no internet connection we can not do a great deal of planning for tomorrow, not that we do usually, other than looking at the map and thinking of places we might go to, but we can't check out any sites or book anywhere, oh well we will have to do that tomorrow. After dinner we chill out listening to some music and chat, Barb has a little g&t while I have a Diet Coke, have I mentioned that I am doing sober October, It's not that late but to be honest there is not a great deal more to report so until tomorrow that's your lot, well you won't actually get this until tomorrow anyway due to the lack of tinternet.

Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup>

The farm we stayed at last night was in a valley surrounded by the fells and miles away from the nearest town and such suffered from very little light pollution, I had thought I might be able to do a spot of astronomical photography, before bed time I checked outside and although it was as dark as a dark place could be, but as there was complete cloud cover there was not a star to be seen, so I did not leave my camera and tripod at the ready which with hindsight was a mistake which will be revealed later. There is not a light to be seen or a sound to be heard, well there would not be a sound if the calves had not been taken away from their mothers, as the cows and the calves are still calling out to each other, we are far enough away for them not to disturb our sleep. Let's get the photographic opportunity out of the way as we haven't even started on what we did today yet. As said earlier I did not leave my camera or tripod at the ready due to the cloud cover, but I awoke at 5am and when I opened the window blind the clouds had gone and the sky was alight with stars which I watched amazed at the display before closing the blind and returning to the land of nod, it was a beautiful display but one I did not catch with a photograph, Doh!

As the shower is, well let's call it rustic, we both decide to give it a miss, after watching the farmer, his wife, son and working dogs close the A591 while they moved a large flock of sheep from a field on the other side of the road into a field at the back of the farm, it's time for breakfast, then after paying for our nights stay and purchasing some fresh eggs, we ready Gloria for departure. It's not long before we are waving farewell and we head off down the A591. The weather is not sure what to do one minute the sun is out and the next minute it is pouring down, I think it's described as changeable, one thing is for sure we ain't going walking or cycling anywhere. We head into Ambleside and the first car park we pass is completely full, we head to our usual car park which is by the rugby ground and has more space to park Gloria. When we get there it is closed as it has been taken over by a film crew and is full of film production vehicles and stuff, Barb being of the Acting profession notices a little sign that shows the acting types where to go. We head into town and find a space for Gloria down one of the side streets and it's free if you display a permit, just like not exactly like the one I threw away last time I cleared unwanted stuff out of Gloria. I head into town to collect a permit which is free and gives you 1 hour parking for free. Ok let's go for a walk around town which again has not changed a great deal since our last visit, although there are some shops that have closed and some having closing down sales which unfortunately is a sign of the current situation we are all in. That said there are plenty of people in the town and judging by the amount of traffic on the roads, tourism in Cumbria is alive and well, after a little stop for a coffee we return to Gloria and head off back down the A591 towards Windermere. We had thought of going into Windermere but number one it's started to rain, it's just more shops and more stupid people so we decide to give it a miss and head straight to the Camping and Caravanning club site that we have pre-booked on tinternet. It's nuts to think that this club site that has all the facilities you could shake a stick at is only £3.05 more expensive than the farm we stayed at last night which in part is due to our membership discount and the current VAT reduction. As we have booked in and paid online we are shown straight to the available pitches and offered our choice, Barb picks her favourite space and we are soon parked up and plugged in. I could probably pad this out for a fair bit longer but being honest there is not much more to report other than us chatting, food, blog creation, sewing, still no TV, a little g&t for Barb and a glass of Tango for me, have I mentioned, no ok I won't go there. Until tomorrow which may have a couple of surprises, that's your lot, keep safe everyone.

Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup>

We awake this morning to a beautiful blue sky and sunshine, which is a bit nuts as the weather forecast had said it was going to be raining and raining hard, after breakfast we ready Gloria for departure and as we are about to leave, the weather forecasters show that their computer system isn't completely useless, as the sky darkens and the rain starts to fall. The weather has been like this

for the last couple of days and it has made it difficult for us to do a great deal, so no bike rides and only a few short walks and even then they are just popping into various places for coffee's. Last night I promised you a surprise and here you go, we have decided to go home today and couple or at least a day early than planned, it was the weather that actually made the final decision for us to return home as it has stopped us doing stuff. Anyway after all we have been away for 3 weeks and 6 days, which is a while by most people's standards, we have been known to be away for longer but they have usually been in warmer climates and certainly not in these strange and difficult times. Even though we are only a couple of hours away from home we are planning on a stop or two on the way, this is not like us but we do have the two stops planned out. The first one is Bowness, well it was but the weather has a different idea as it is pouring down and neither of us really fancy walking around in the pouring rain, that's part one of the plan out of the window. The next planned stop is Kendal and hopefully as the town is a bit further away, the weather may improve, well we can hope. We arrive in Kendal and hey at least the rain has stopped now all we have to do is find somewhere to park Gloria, after a quick road trip around Kendal we find a suitable parking spot in a town that does not seem to cater for Motorhome parking which is a bit strange considering it's location. Amazingly the weather has cleared up and unbelievably the sun has come out, our first stop is to find a fabric shop that I found on tinternet for Barb to visit, while Barb is immersed in all the stuff with which the shop is filled, I pop and have a look at a camera shop which is not far away, I only window shop as entering the premises could prove dangerous. Barb and I meet up in Poundland well you know how much things are in there, we have a stroll around and walk past a jewellers wow wait a minute look what they have in the window, as most of you know I love watches and unfortunately expensive watches and in the window of this shop is in my opinion the current star of the year it is also very difficult to get, and hey here we are in Kendal and there is one in the window. We have got to go in and have a look, and possibly do a bit of leg wetting (it's an old motor trade term, think about it for a while) we discuss the price and the value of my watch in part exchange, this deal was actually never going to happen for two reasons, firstly they are asking for twice the retail price for the watch, and I would never even if I could afford to pay that, and secondly well that's the same as the first. We return to Gloria and head off for the M6 and our next stop Lancaster services for some lunch, our own sandwiches made by my own fair hands, after lunch we head back on to the M6 for now what is just a short trip back to number 53. As we head down the M62 I am surprised not to find any gates across it and border control guards checking passports or is that happening next month, before we go home we stop off at Barbs mums to surprise her as she was not expecting us home until tomorrow, it's great to see her and she is surprised to see us, before anyone calls Uncle Joe we did socially distance ourselves which is such a shame because all you actually want to do is give your loved ones a big hug. After a chat with mum we say bye and we will see her over the front garden wall later in the week, then we arrive back at 53, the first job is to see if Eddie the Insight will start or if he has a flat battery, well he starts and is soon off the driveway to make space for Gloria. When we go into the house it's a bit strange as it seems empty, uncluttered and big compared to living in Gloria for nearly a month, but that doesn't last long as we start to decant the stuff we put into Gloria a month ago back into the house, trust me you soon can't move in the place, we really will have to start taking less stuff with us.

Even after what seems an age Gloria still has more stuff that needs to come out but that can wait until tomorrow as can cleaning her, we have enough to do sorting the inside of the house. After a number of trips up and down stairs things are starting to thin out, well they are just being spread out in different rooms. After being away for nearly a month we do have some things that we need to do and there actually quite a few things that we have go to do, so it's list time, even though we had put On Holiday notices on our website and eBay stores we still have had some sales and we need to sort them out first, so they are on top of tomorrow's list followed by cleaning Gloria and giving her some TLC as there a couple of jobs that need sorting out. That's about it for today apart from oh I yes after 3 weeks and 6 days the TV is on, I could definitely live without it. The rest of the evening is spent

planning tomorrow's jobs, having something to eat, chilling out and that TV thing, now you may think or hope that this is your lot, but if you have read one of these before, (not sure anyone has), you will know that there is one more to come, it will probably be tomorrow or possibly Friday and I call it the Epilogue. In this I will give a couple of facts and figures from the trip, fill in some things that I have forgotten to mention and tell you about what we are thinking of doing next, now given the current situation that may be a bit difficult but you have got to have a dream, until the Epilogue that's your lot for today.

Friday 16<sup>th</sup> The Epilogue

Before I started typing "Friday" I checked the blogs word count and it said 20,446 words, now that's nowhere near as long as the Oz blog but hey that was over five and a half months. Over the last two days I have been thinking of what would go into The Epilogue and to be honest my mind has been running away with itself (some may say it's been doing that for a while) anyway the things that I have been thinking of adding to it may overtake the 20,446 words that have already been written. If you are going to read this you may be here for a while as I only type slow, the old ones are always the best, anyway before you start I would get a cup of tea, no actually I would get a drink you may need it, and as I won't be having one, have I mentioned, oh yes I think I have, you can have a drink for me. Ok are you sitting comfortably then I will begin, firstly let's get the facts and figures out of the way, we have been away from number 53 for three weeks and six days, according Gloria's trip odometer we have covered 1255 miles, our, well Barb's actual driving time has been 41 hours and 15 minutes with an average fuel consumption of 28mpg, all driven by my amazing wife.

While we were away we had discussed a fair few times about the amount of stuff we both had loaded into to Glo, dragged around for 1255 miles, oh and not used apart from the amount of space this stuff used, it will also have effected Gloria's MPG figure, we have made a new rule for our next trip that before we put an item in Gloria we need to ensure that we actually need it and will actually use it. Today I have removed the majority of this stuff from Gloria and it took for ever, to give you an idea here is some of the items and I have to say a lot of the stuff was mine. I will start the list of stuff with my full portrait photography back drop including two stands, ok there was a reason why it was in there as we were initially meeting up for the first weekend with our adopted family the wonderful Hunter Armitage Clan, there was going to be some dressing up which needed a photo backdrop to make the most of the photographs, but the weekend was cancelled because of this horrible situation we are all in, but did I take it out of Gloria no I took it for a holiday to Scotland. The list then goes on, why take four jumpers and don't wear any, but it gets worse, if I give an explanation for each item we will be here for ever so I will just list them, however this list is not all inclusive, ok off we go, 5 hats, a brand new collapsible linen basket, 5 umbrellas, enough shopping bags and backpacks to sink the QE2, more coats and clothes than actually required, now we get to the really stupid stuff, 2 yes 2 toilet brushes and a bow tie, don't ask as I have not got a clue, oh and a TV, no tv for 3 weeks and 6 days, it was great. Anyway none of this stuff well apart from the TV will be making it's way back into Gloria unless it is 100% necessary for that particular trip, and by the way Barb was as bad as me.

After removing all this stuff from Gloria, next job is to give her the well deserved wash that she desperately in need of, a hosepipe is not enough for this job it requires the jet wash to get her clean. The car gets a wash first and then it's Gloria's turn and this takes a fair time but by the time I have finished Gloria is looking lovely and clean. I have also noticed that after removing all that stuff she has risen an inch or so on her rear suspension and that was without adding any more air to her rear suspension airbags. While away we did a todo list for Glo as she does need a bit of TLC, first on the list was wash, empty and clean inside, that job is 75% done and we will finish that over the weekend, the external awning light which is about 24 led's and at the moment there are about 5 working, to



replace it will cost over 40 quid which seems a touch expensive for less than 18 inches of led's I still have half a roll of the the little rascals in the shed which I purchased from eBay for less than a fiver, time to see if my idea of fixing it rather than replacing it will work. Ok here we go nothing ventured nothing gained, I have removed the light strip and cut the wires so there is no going back now, after a little work and some use of a soldering iron, it's fixed and as bright as bright thing can be and also saved 40 squid. A few more of the smaller jobs will be done over the weekend and will probably take a couple of hours but it will depend on the weather, the more expensive jobs like a service and 4 new tyres and possibly new brake pads will wait for a while as winter is approaching and we will probably not be going anywhere to far away especially Wales until next year.

Next what where the high points of the trip, for me it's all of it, I love Scotland and the west coast it's absolutely stunning, if you haven't been you don't know what you are missing and if you do go you will go back time and time again. There are a couple that stand out for me firstly the Isle of Mull a place I have wanted to visit for many many years and getting there on this trip ticked a big tick on my bucket list, I am not telling you how beautiful it is because you will all want to go and I want to keep it to myself. Then there was seeing the Glenfinnan Viaduct for the first time, another place I have wanted to visit since I first saw a photograph of it a long time ago, which was before it became even more famous thanks to Harry Potter, the last couple of times we visited Scotland we haven't managed for one reason or another to get to see it. On this trip we made up for it seeing it four times, the first time you see it, the sheer size of it takes your breath away, for me the stonework of the bridge can not be described as pretty but as a piece of architectural engineering it is stunning. On our first visit the train is not due for about 2 hours so I have to make do with photographing it without the train crossing. The next real big tick is being able to get tickets to actually travel on the train, this was an absolutely amazing experience and one I will remember forever, then there was photographing and filming the Locomotive crossing the viaduct what can I say other than Wow, I am not sure how many ticks I can put on my bucket list for this experience but it quite a few.

As I start to bring this to a close there are just a few more things to say and people to thank, the first ones are the people who had to cancel their trip on the Jacobite which enabled us to get tickets for the train, then there are the people we met on the trip not that we met many but we had some great conversations with the ones we did meet. Mostly I need to thank Barb my wonderful wife for doing all of the driving and putting up with me as I am possibly the worst passenger in the world, actually I need to thank her for putting up with me full stop. Then I need to thank Scotland for being there, being so beautiful, peaceful and a place that we both love, I also have to thank Cumbria which is another place we both love and have visited many many times since before we were married and the place we have thank for Jennie and Phil's love of the countryside and outdoors, something that we think is invaluable. Oh and then there's you dear readers (if anyone does read it) for reading my endless ramblings, I hope you have enjoyed it. Now what's the next plan, well I think the next plan is already well and truly parked up and won't be happening next year, the plan was to travel to Norway through France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Denmark and Sweden but we can't see that happening due to you know what. At the moment our plan is to return to Scotland via the Lake District, well that is if Scotland don't follow Wales in closing the borders before then. That said, at the moment none of us know what is going to happen and where we will be able to go, one things for sure we won't be doing any long haul trips. I have lots of photographs to show you, but these need sorting and editing so they won't be ready for let's say a week but that might be a tad optimistic, when they are ready I will post them on my website and send you a link to them.

Thank you again for your time and I hope that you have enjoyed my ramblings, we hope to see you soon when we are able to visit each other again until then keep safe and don't forget to wear pink on the 23<sup>rd</sup> I will be. I will let you know as soon as the pictures are ready and we will let you know what our next trip is going to be when we are able to arrange it wherever it may be and wherever it

is we will make the most of it. The blog is now up to 22,500 words which makes The Epilogue 10% of the blog, I did say you needed to get comfortable and get a drink and I wasn't wrong, until the next trip keep safe and take care and that's about your lot, well actually it is your lot, bye for now.