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YOUR FIRST VISIT TO SCOTLAND

As a first-time visitor to Scotland, there is so much to choose from it can be overwhelming. There are literally hundreds of unique and wonderful things to see and to do.

First step in the planning process: decide what you are most interested in seeing: Castles, gardens, small villages with lots of interesting history, distillery tours, arts and entertainment, sporting events, museums, some of each? Second: how much time will you be spending in Scotland? And third, will you be renting a car or depending on public transport, trains and buses?

Once you've answered these questions, you can start your list of where you want to visit. To help you get started, the following includes what I call the "biggies" (Stirling Castle, Culloden, etc.), with some of my favorite smaller venues thrown in for good measure. The list starts in Edinburgh and follows a circular route to the north and back down to Glasgow. This can be reversed if you will be arriving at Glasgow airport.

It is not a comprehensive list by any means, and obvious sites such as Edinburgh Castle are left out, but it should give you a brief overview of what Scotland has to offer.

Some simple guidelines that might help make your visit go more smoothly:

- Wherever you are going, it will take longer to arrive than you think. The miles listed on a map are definitely not an indication of how long it will take to get to that town or village. Travel might be on a winding single-lane road — and there's always the possibility of sheep in the road (I've been known to claim that if you didn't have to stop for sheep in the road, you really hadn't been to Scotland!). Or you might get side-tracked from your destination by a chance find of something on the way that piques your interest.
- Try to avoid cafés/restaurants that cater to "tourists". For local flavor, ask a shop clerk where they eat. Many of the larger National Trust and Historic Scotland sites have cafés and the food is good and at a fair price. Pubs are non-smoking and offer yet another slice of local color.
- Open and closing times are dependent on the time of the year, with some venues closed during the winter months. Always check their website for hours and for other information—such as special programs or events that might be going on. A phone call to confirm hours of operation is a good idea, especially at the smaller venues.
- When using public transport, the hours of operation may change seasonally. Always check.

I am always happy to hear from fellow clansmen. If you have specific questions, or need more ideas of places to visit, please don't hesitate to contact me at:

journeyhometoscotland@yahoo.com

Happy travels!

Yours aye, *Judy Hardin Harkin*

Note: *These are personal observations from my own travels and are given as suggestions to help you with planning your first trip to Scotland. They do not reflect endorsement nor recommendations of the Clan Donnachaidh Society.*

EDINBURGH

[Palace of Holyrood House](#)

Canongate, on the Royal Mile.

Entry fee

Information can be found at Visit Scotland,

www.visitscotland.com

Be sure to visit the Holyrood Abbey ruins that are at the side of the palace.

[National Museum of Scotland](#)

Chambers Street.

www.nms.ac.uk

Free but donations are welcome.

Visit the "Scotland Gallery" which features the nation's history from pre-historic time to the present day.

Chambers Street links the George IV Bridge and South Bridge. Hours 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

[John Knox House/Storytelling Centre](#)

43-45 High Street (the Royal Mile)

www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk

Entry fee.

The house dates back to 1470, making it the only original medieval building left surviving in Edinburgh. The Scottish Reformation preacher, John Knox, lived here before his death in 1572.

[Dovecot Studios](#)

10 Infirmary Street

www.dovecotstudios.com

A hundred-year old tapestry studio, housed in a renovated Victorian community swimming pool building. The viewing balcony where you can view the weaving floor and see the artists hand-weaving tapestries is open Monday-Saturday from 12 to 3 p.m. The building is open Monday-Saturday 10:30-5:30. Includes exhibitions, café and gift shop.

[St. Giles Cathedral](#) Located on the Royal Mile between Edinburgh Castle and Holyrood Palace.

www.stgilescathedral.org.uk

The Mother Church of Presbyterianism, it has a crowned spire which is easily seen from all parts of the city. Free but a donation of 3 GBP per person is invited. Volunteer guides will tell you the history of the church, which was founded in 1120 although few traces of the early building survive in the present building.

Be sure to see the Chapel of the Order of the Thistle (Scotland's Chivalric Company of Knights headed by the Queen).

And check for musical programs that might be on during your stay in Edinburgh.

There is a shop and café.

[Gladstone's Land](#) Royal Mile (National Trust)

www.nts.org.uk/Property/Gladstones-Land

Entry fee, free to National Trust members.

High-rise tenement (apartment block) living in the 17th century.

[Royal Yacht Britannia](#) Ocean Terminal at Leith, two miles from the city center.

www.royalyachtbritannia.co.uk

Entry fee includes an audio tour.

View five main decks

EASTERN BORDERS

[Abbotsford House](#)

www.scottsabbotsford.co.uk

Entry fee

Two miles from Melrose and approximately 35 miles from Edinburgh.

The home of Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), poet (*The Lady of the Lake*), and author (*Ivanhoe*, *Rob Roy* and others).

Amongst the many items Scott collected are Rob Roy's broadsword, dirk, sporran and purse; Flora MacDonald's marriage contract; and weapons and armour from the Battle of Waterloo.

Over 7000 volumes, many rare editions, are in the library.

Melrose Abbey (Historic Scotland)www.historicscotland.gov.uk

Entry fee (includes audio tour)

Historic Scotland members free

Founded in 1136 by King David I, it was the first monastery of the Cistercian order established in Scotland. Most of the rose-stoned buildings you see today date to the post 1385 rebuilding.

The exterior is highly carved: showing demons and hobgoblins, lute-playing angels, cooks with ladles, and a pig playing the bagpipes!

PERTHSHIRE**Black Watch Memorial**www.visitaberfeldy.co.uk

On the A827 in the village of Aberfeldy

The memorial was erected in 1740 to commemorate the muster of the famous Scottish regiment.

Wade's Bridge

At Aberfeldy.

Built in 1733 and still in use today, it crosses the beautiful River Tay, the longest river in Scotland.

The Birks of Aberfeldy

Robert Burns wrote a poem (later set to music) about the Birks (birches) of Aberfeldy in 1787.

Follow a circular path along woodland gorges, waterfalls and rapids on the Moness Burn.

Car park.

Croft Moraig (Mary's Croft)

On the A827 between Aberfeldy and Kenmore

Stone circle having three phases of construction, the first phase was wooden posts dating to perhaps 5000 years ago. The stones are from the Neolithic period dating to 3000 BC. Explanation plaques tell the whole story.

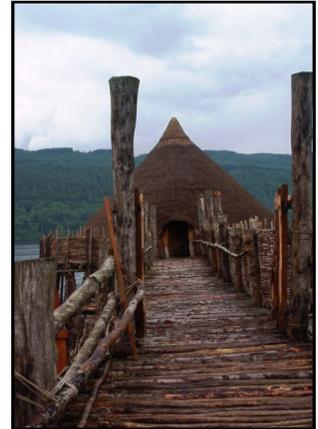
On a working farm.

The Scottish Crannog Centrewww.crannog.co.uk

Entry fee. Open March to October 31.

On the A827, about 5 miles from Aberfeldy. The authentic reconstruction of Oakbank Crannog that dates back to 500 BC. A crannog is a type of ancient loch-dwelling found throughout Scotland and Ireland, the earliest being about 5000 years old.

Entry fee includes a tour of the crannog dwelling, an exhibition area, outside ancient crafts and technology area. Gift shop.

**PITLOCHRY AREA****Pitlochry:**www.pitlochry.org

On the main A9 trunk road. Transportation options include National Bus Coaches (www.citylink.co.uk), from Glasgow, Edinburgh and Inverness as well as local buses. Highland main line train (www.scotrail.co.uk), with a direct link to London Kings Cross and an overnight sleeper service to Euston.

Pitlochry Festival Theatrewww.pitlochryfestivaltheatre.com**Pitlochry Dam and Fish Ladder**

A viewing room where you can watch the annual migration of thousands of Atlantic salmon past the dam wall.

Edradour DistilleryE-mail: edradour@btconnect.com

Entry fee. Tour includes a wee dram and video.

A single malt distillery, it is the smallest in Scotland.

Located in the village of Moulin just outside of Pitlochry. Open May through October.

Clan Donnachaidh Museum**www.donnachaidh.com**

15 miles north of Pitlochry.

Follow signs off the A-9 to the House of Bruar.

Note the statue of the Lone Piper, which honors all of the Scottish Regiments.

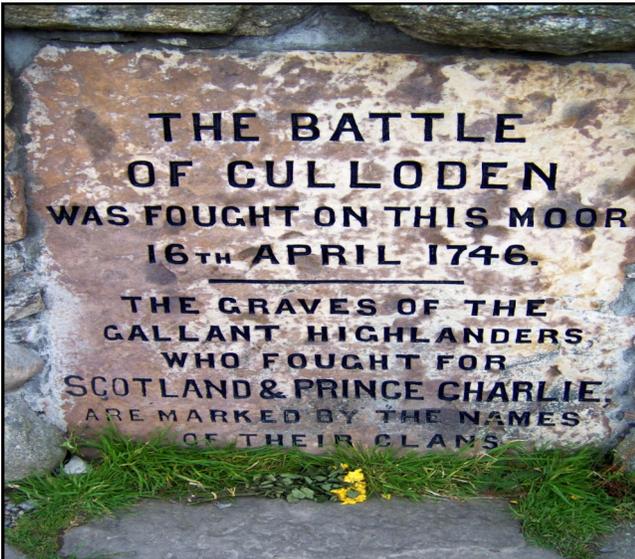
LOCH NESS AND THE NORTH**Urquhart Castle (Historic Scotland)**

Near Drumnadrochit on the A82.

Entry fee. Free to Historic Scotland members.

Majestic ruin of one of the largest castle complexes in Scotland. Video tells of the 1000 year history (580 AD to 1692), and the castle's role in Scottish history.

Café and gift shop.

**Culloden Battlefield (National Trust)****www.nts.org.uk/culloden**

On the A96, East of Inverness

Entry fee includes a PDA tour.

Free for National Trust Members.

A new visitor center tells the story of the battle and the events that lead up to that fateful day of April 16, 1746.

THE TROSSACHS**Loch Katrine (KAT rin)****www.lochkatrine.com**

Just off the A821 between Callander and Aberfoyle.

Eight miles long by 2/3 mile wide, this loch was home to Rob Roy MacGregor. It also provided the inspiration for Sir Walter Scott's poem *The Lady of the Lake*.One or two-hour tours of the loch are available on the 1899 steamship *Sir Walter Scott* or on the smaller *Lady of the Lake*.

Open April – October. Charge for parking.

Restaurant and gift shop.

STIRLING**Stirling Castle (Historic Scotland)****www.stirlingcastle.gov.uk**

Entry fee. Free entry to Historic Scotland members. Charge for parking.

Located in the heart of Stirling itself, the castle has played a part in Scotland's history for centuries.

Entry fee includes a tour of Argyll's Lodging, the most splendid and complete example of a 17th century town house of a wealthy nobleman serving the royal court.**Bannockburn Visitor Centre (National Trust)**

Entry fee. Free to National Trust members.

Two miles south of Stirling.

The two-day battle in 1314 changed the fate of the Scottish Nation forever.

The 700th Anniversary celebration of the Battle of Bannockburn is scheduled for June 28-29-30, 2014.

WESTERN BORDERS

Robert Burns Birthplace Museum

(National Trust)

www.burnsmuseum.org.uk

Entry Fee. Free to National Trust members.
Located on Murdoch's Lone in the village of Alloway, on the outskirts of the town of Ayr.

Complex includes the cottage where Burns was born, a museum featuring items owned by or relating to Burns, gardens, the Brig o' Doon and the Auld Kirk (where his parents are buried.)

A café and gift shop.

GLASGOW

Glasgow Cathedral (Historic Scotland)

www.glasgowcathedral.org

Free, but donations appreciated.

The first stone built cathedral was dedicated in 1136.

The present building was consecrated in 1197.

Check the website for special musical programs, organ recitals, etc.

Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum

[www.glasgowlife.org.uk/museums/](http://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/museums/kelvingrove)

[kelvingrove](http://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/museums/kelvingrove)

Located on Argyle Street, entry to the Gallery/Museum is free, with free tours every day at 11 a.m. and 2:30 p.m.

If you will be visiting several Historic Scotland properties, check out membership benefits at:

www.historic-scotland.gov.uk

If time is short, an Explorer Pass might be a better option.

www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/explorer

The National Trust also has a money-saving membership option:

www.nts.org.uk

If you are 60 and above, be sure to ask for Concession rates — on buses, trains, entry fees, etc.

Clan Donnachaidh Society's 2014 Annual General Meeting Plans include attending the Bannockburn 700 Celebration

Scotland is planning another Homecoming celebration in 2014 and the big news is the opening of the new Visitor Centre at Bannockburn in time for the 700th anniversary of the pivotal battle that changed Scotland's history forever.

Just as Clan Donnachaidh stood with Robert the Bruce during that epic battle, Donnachaidh clansmen will once again meet on Bannockburn soil, but this time in a peaceful gathering with other clans and visitors from around the world.

The following information is from the clan's website www.donnachaidh.com

“The Clan has ordered a tent space for the 3 days, 28, 29 and 30 June 2014. Our members decided that they would like to have our AGM events the 3 days before that, i.e. June 25, 26 and 27.

A coach trip will be arranged to Clan country with a tour leader on 25 June. The AGM, Chief's Reception and dinner on 26th June, and Kirk service at Struan on the morning of 27th June. This then leaves time for people to go to Stirling if they are going to stay there and prepare for the event.

The Bannockburn event will open at 10am and close at 5pm each day. Please check out the website for more information but it looks to be exciting. I believe the Clan was very influential in how the battle went.”

For further information:

www.bannockburnlive.com