

# Travel Outlook

## Take the high road to the Scottish Highlands

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Herald Special

The following article is the third in a four part series on Scotland.

Leaving the big cities behind we find the heart of Scotland - in the highlands and islands, the beautiful North Sea, the castle and the whisky trails, the port cities of Aberdeen and Dundee.

Heading north from Prestwick and Glasgow, the route takes us by the grey-gold beauty of Loch Lomond, famous in song and memory and surely one of the most romantic of the romantic lochs in the country. There can be few experiences as evocative as walking along the quiet shores in the evening and hearing a piper playing in the hills. The essence of Scotland captured in a silvery moment.

The road to the Highlands is simply stunning; steep hills, green countryside, flowing burns, few people. Oban is the big centre on the north west side, heading up to Inverness. Oban is picturesque but extremely crowded; it is a tourist town without a first class hotel or restaurant. The crowds can jar in an area where isolation is the norm. There are ferries playing the islands from Oban, and it is a required stop if you plan to go to many of the islands of the Inner Hebrides.

Further north is the preferred gateway to Skye, the Kyle of Lochalsh, where a four minute ferry ride takes you to Kyleakin. Skye is a magnificent place, rainy and misty much of the time, but this only adds to its mystery and primeval appeal. The black and red peaks of the Cuillin hills are often hidden in clouds, but they loom over the centre of the island, and Sligachan is the perfect stopping place for any attempted conquest. (Not for the out-of-shape or amateur walkers.)

Portree is the very pretty capital of the island, with a lovely harbor surrounded by pastel colored houses and shops. An evening in the Portree Hotel was one of the most entertaining I've ever spent. We went in to hear Bathtime, a snare-drum and guitar duo we had heard before and admired greatly; however, we found more than music to entertain us.

Local color included Stuart's (the guitarist) story of his visit to the garage in the town, where he spent fifteen minutes talking to a fellow who assured him a leaky windshield would be 'nae problem' to fix, and cheap as well. When Stuart asked if he could bring his van in the next day, the fellow said 'I don't know mate, I don't work here, do I? Do you mind moving your van, there's a hearse coming in,' and sure enough, there was.

Or how about 'Socks,' a local bartender? In his late fifties, Socks is so named because he likes to 'wear his pants high and tight and stuffs a pair of socks down them. And he's been known to steal ladies' underwear off the clotheslines; so we call him Socks the Knicker Knocker!' Pauline, the pint-sized drummer told us this in her lilting accent. Och, there are no secrets on a small island.

Dunvegan Castle is a most worthwhile stop on the island. On the western side, it is the centuries-old home of the MacLeod clan, and the oldest inhabited castle in Britain. Billed as 'Romantic and Historic Dunvegan Castle,' it is certainly that and more. Set in a fairy-tale location, the castle is still the residence of the MacLeod chieftain and his family.

Fort William is the home of Ben Nevis - the most well-known peak

in the Highlands; it is again a touristy town and limited in its appeal. Inverness is the big centre of the Highlands, and quite a pretty place. More than the scenery though, it is the people in this area, and the history, that make it so special.

This is the land of the clans, of Bonnie Prince Charlie, Flora MacDonald, Culloden, Glencoe, the clearances. Glorious and terrible, Highland history draws you in, makes you feel part of something tragic and beautiful. Men still wear kilts at dinner up here; whiskey flows faster than wine. (Not that there's a lack of the grape.) You are not a tourist in the Highlands; you're a guest, and a welcome one.

Leaving the Highlands, very reluctantly, the trail heads to the North East, to Aberdeen, the 'Granite City.' Don't let this name put you off; Aberdeen is a scenic

to pass time, touring malt distilleries, including the world famous Glenfiddich, which also is the most visited of the distilleries. The best thing about this tour is that you can sample a 'wee dram' at each stop.

The Castle Trail covers nine castles, some in ruins, but many lived in, including the fairytale Craigievar Castle. The splendid Fyvie Castle boasts several ghosts.

Moving south we come to Dundee, the 'City of Discovery.' The Discovery was Scott's ship; it was built in Dundee and sailed to the Antarctic (although it was not the ship Scott used on his last, fatal voyage). Now it is back at its birthplace and it is a majestic sight; what an emotional experience to walk around the decks, sit in the dining room, see Scott's cabin. It's a beautiful ship, but a small place to spend two years trapped in ice. Moving down the coast to Angus,

the castle was built.

Glamis is part of the Grand Tour of Scotland, which features six castles, including Scone Palace and Hopetoun House. Aside from seasonal tours of the castle, visitors can arrange for dinner parties and banquets in the beautiful dining room. We lunched in that room, which features beautiful woodwork and a gorgeous ceiling.

The castle holds many photographs and mementoes of the Royal Family and it is quite fascinating to follow the Queen Mother's life in pictures and keepsakes. A 90th birthday celebration is being planned in her honor next August. Glamis combines graceful rooms, history, and medieval atmosphere, making it one of the finest castles in the country.

Places to stay on this route include Craigmorie Hotel in Inverness, a pleasant old house in the

town. It offers spa facilities and a very genial host, Derek Moffat. In Aberdeen we stayed at the Skean Dhu Hotel, Dyce, which was new and near the airport, but very comfortable. If the country appeals to you there is the impressive Pitodrie House Hotel, which dates to 1490, and offers beautiful food and lovely grounds, and sports facilities. It is only 17 miles from Aberdeen. Nearing Edinburgh we stayed at Nivingston House, in Kinross-shire. Parts of the building date to 1725, and the 17 bedrooms are decorated in Laura Ashley fabrics. The food is excellent and the fireside bar a welcome sight after a hard day's touring.

Next week - Ghoulies and Ghosties and Things That Go Bump in the Night.

### ASK KATHY:

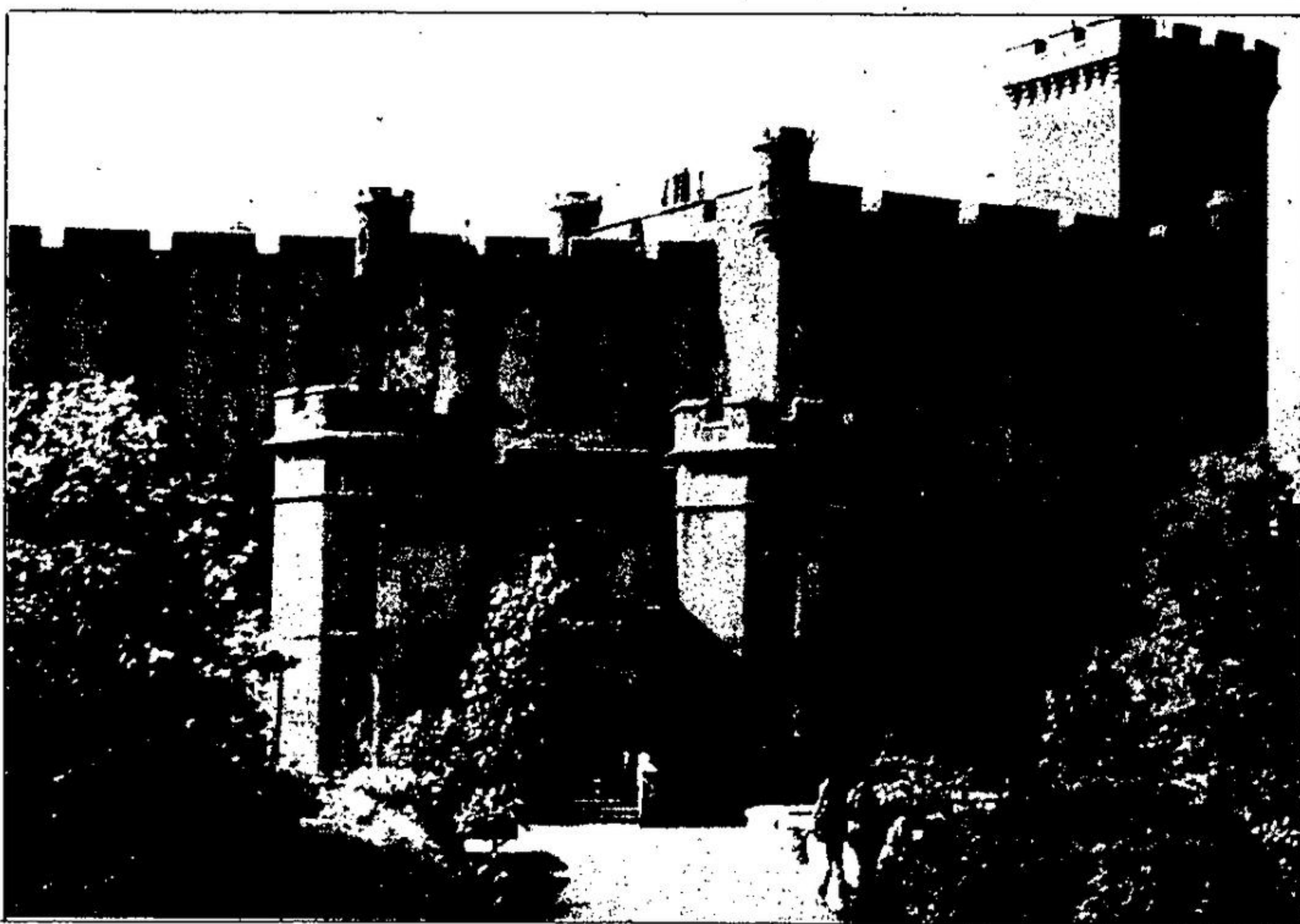


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Dunvegan Castle, home of the Clan MacLeod since the early thirteenth century, is one of the most well-kept castles in Scotland. Located on the isle of

Skye, Dunvegan is, one of the most popular tourist attractions in Scotland. (Photo submitted)

town. It is the headquarters for offshore drilling in the North Sea; this makes for a busy airport and harbor, but it still leaves an unspoiled beach right outside the town. The university is old and the campus attractive, and the old town of Aberdeen is extremely quaint and picturesque. Duthie Park is an interesting place; it features a splendid botanical garden complete with budgies and cockatiels flying about the greenhouses. Aberdeen itself boast 25 miles of roses and the most sunshine hours of anywhere in Scotland.

In the Gordon District around Aberdeen there are several 'trails' to be followed; the Quality Trail, the Whisky Trail, and the Castle Trail. The Quality Trail involves stops at several manufacturers, such as Crombie Woollen Mills, and Baxters of Speyside. Baxters is famous for their soup and jams and features tours and a nice shop. Crombie's is Scotland's largest woollen mill.

The Whisky Trail is a jolly way

we arrive at one of Scotland's most beautiful castles, Glamis. Home of the Earl of Strathmore and Kinghorne, Glamis was the childhood home of the Queen Mother, and Princess Margaret was born here. The castle was given to the family in 1372 by the king of Scotland; Shakespeare set Macbeth there, although that king lived a couple of centuries before

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