

OBAN SPRING SHOW & SALE

A trip worth taking.



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What on earth is a Ceilidh we pondered, before heading straight to Google to find out. We were enjoying our last week in Scotland and had just attended day one of the famous Highland Cattle Society Oban Spring Show and Sale when our new friends Queenie, Jon and Stuart from Cladich Fold insisted we join them at their table that night for a good old fashion Ceilidh.

Originally the word Ceilidh (kay-lee) descended from the Gaelic word for 'gathering' or 'party'... However, these days when people think of a Ceilidh, they think of a fun filled night of wild dancing, good music and great company!

For starters, I couldn't even pronounce the word correctly, but what the heck, we are Aussies, we can handle a party right.... Five hours later, after being dragged up on the dance floor for an hour straight of what Aussies would probably describe as a cross between the square dancing we were forced to learn at primary school, and The Macarena, only far more lively and with a lot more do-si-do'ing to the sounds of the accordion,

tin whistle, the fiddle and bagpipes....we slipped away and made the 500m hobble home to our accommodation with sore feet and knees. Yep, the Scots sure know how to throw a party.

In late January this year, Samantha and I headed to the UK, with the plan being partly to visit Sam's sisters in England and Wales, some Highland breeders and folds in Scotland, and to escape the relentless heat of summer on the Western Southern Darling Downs of Queensland.

When planning the trip, we dropped an email to a few breeders in Scotland and of course discovered that the Scots love visitors and pride themselves



ABOVE: Oban Spring Show & Sale ceilidh with crew from Cladich Fold

on their hospitality. Over the course of three weeks, we were welcomed into the paddocks, homes and kitchens of some of the most well-regarded breeders in the world.

We made new friends, saw folds consisting of up to 300 Highland cattle, listened, observed firsthand, and learned how Highlands are used for conservation on habitat where no other livestock would survive the weather let alone consume the plant species and weeds that exist there. We were blown away by the size and quality of the Highlands thriving in their traditional native homeland.

Aberdeenshire Highland Beef

After spending the first week visiting relatives in England and Wales, we drove north towards Scotland, after of course diverting to the Cotswolds for the obligatory selfie out the front of Jeremy Clarkson's Diddly Squat Farm. Having already been to Edinburgh some years ago, we headed straight to the north-eastern region of

Aberdeenshire and a great little town named Banchory.

Here, we got our first taste of truly welcoming hospitality from the Highland breeding community, when we were treated to a private evening tour of the impressive Aberdeenshire Highland Beef, witnessing firsthand the operations of a commercial scale beef supplier and agritourism operation with over 300 head.

Owner of Aberdeenshire Highland Beef, Grace Noble sells 100% pure pedigree Highland beef direct to the public and controls the entire process. All her cattle are reared and born on the property from Highland Cattle Society registered stock which includes bloodlines from some of the finest Scottish Folds including Balmoral which was located not far from Banchory. Grace has a butchery on site and the carcasses are hung and matured before being sold to the public through their farm shop on weekends or supplied to local restaurants.



LEFT: Aberdeenshire Highland Beef's Event Space **RIGHT:** Pollok Fold Glasgow

Grace took us through their event space, a simple but impressive set up in one of their large sheds on the farm where they have ventured into agritourism, hosting dinners prepared for up to 70 guests at a time by Executive Chefs and titled 'Tasting Aberdeenshire' Highland Beef Supper Clubs.

After touring their farm, we accompanied Grace and her husband to a local pub and had a great meal, to which they even very generously shouted. We left that night with great enthusiasm and appreciation for our first taste of the kindness of Highland breeders in Scotland.

Glasgow

From Banchory, we headed north-west through the Cairngorms to Inverness, toured the Culloden Battlefield at Inverness and over the following few days made our way south through Fort William (location of the Harry Potter Hogwarts Express railway bridge) and Glencoe, where we visited our Scottish Title blocks of land (okay, they may only measure one foot by one foot, but its true, you can from here on refer to us as Lord and Lady).

From Glencoe, we made our way south through the mountains eventually to Glasgow. I've driven some amazing roads in my lifetime, but that drive would have to be one of the best and most scenic drives in the world.

In Glasgow we took a drive through Pollok Country Park which is home to the Pollok Fold of Highland Cattle. The Glasgow City Council actually owns and runs this Park and Fold which is used to promote tourism, the benefits of Highland cattle to conservation and to ensure the bloodlines of this 200-year-old Fold established by the Maxwell family don't die out.

Killochries Fold

Located just out of Glasgow is Iain and Sheena Graham's Killochries Fold, consisting of over 200 head of purebred Highlands. Iain had kindly welcomed us to their home and introduced us to their manager Derek Wilson who took us for a tour of the property. When Derek pulled up in their Softrak ATV which looked to us like a cross between a snowmobile and a tank, we thought for sure it was overkill for the terrain we would be traversing across their farm. But when we headed uphill for about an hour to "the moor" we soon realised just how harsh the environment was and how no other vehicle could make its way through the bogs and heather clad hillside.

Upon entering the moor, we were greeted by the biggest herd of Highlands we had ever seen. It was a sight to behold as a couple of hundred cattle ran to greet us, knowing full well the treats onboard.



LEFT: Up on the moor at Killochries Fold **RIGHT:** With Killochries Fold Manager Derek Wilson

The size and quality of these Highlands was immediately noticeable with a structural thickness that made us envious.

A couple of hours later, we returned to the house where Iain and Sheena met us, with Sheena having obviously spent those hours cooking up a storm, including undoubtedly the best soup of our UK trip. Once again, the Scottish hospitality was being rolled out and we spent the entire afternoon in the Graham's dining room talking all things Highlands.

It was fascinating to hear of the work being undertaken by Killochries to advance the Highland breed and how they were using Highlands in conservation work and to benefit the environment, flora and fauna. There was evidence of the return of rare species of birds to the moor (we had seen ourselves, a large flock of lapwings which until recently had not been present on the moor for decades) and the control and reduction in weed species plus the return of native grasses.

Iain took us through the work he was leading through the Highland Cattle Society around performance recording and EBVs, something sorely missing for Highlands in Australia, but potentially able to be adopted as a result of the work and research he is undertaking.

The big takeaway from our time at Killochries was the level of absolute professionalism that exists and their commitment to caring for the breed as well as demonstrating how Highland cattle can be used in conservation efforts.

To be continued...

In the next Highland Fling edition, we make our way to Oban on the west coast of the Scottish Highlands for the Oban Spring Show and Sale.

But before the show, we briefly visit Glengorm Castle on the Isle of Mull (home of the Glengorm Fold) and spend a day at Cladich Fold where we see a couple of what may well be, the best Highland bulls in the world (one of them over 1,000kg on the scales). Oh, and at Cladich we meet quite possibly the most Aussie-like Scottish stockman ever!