



RON'S DIARY

BY RON MOON



Wind and 'Wilderness' in the sunny UK



Parked up at Land's End, Cornwall (top); old firepower exhibit at the Warwick Castle (centre); making the low-tide trip across to Holy Island (above)

This is sent from the far north west coast of Scotland. And there just happens to be an internet connection in the local pub where I can wing these notes and pics via email back to the 4X4 office. Ah, the wonders of the modern world! Surrounding us though is nature at its oldest, possibly its rawest and, many would say, at its best!

We travelled along this wild northern coast from John o' Groats, the most north-eastern tip of the British Isles. We even came across a few spots where there wasn't even a farm house in sight - remarkable in this country of 70-odd million in a land mass not much different to Victoria. A few weeks ago we were in the equally famous Land's End, at the south-western end of the country. There's even a club for those that have been to both points, but I'm not sure if they admit 'colonials' from the convict states. Still, you'd have to think that the club would be pretty big as there seems to be a near continual stream of pushbikes, fun runners and motorbike riders, along with a steady stream of normal motorhome tourists, travelling between the two extremities.

While a few degrees of Latitude and 876 miles (say 1400km) separate these two spots, there doesn't seem to be much difference in the ambient temperature - just variations in cold. But right at this moment, the sun is shining, the sky's a wispy blue and the wind is, for a change, just a zephyr. Of course we had a few days in London taking in the sights such as the Tower of London, Westminster Abbey, British Museum, Harrods and Trafalgar Square.

Now how does that Dorothea Mackellar poem start?
*The love of field and coppice,
Of green and shaded lanes,
Of ordered woods and gardens
Is running in your veins.
Strong love of grey-blue
distance,
Brown streams and soft, dim
skies,
I know, but cannot share it,
My love is otherwise.*

Then, more well known, the second stanza:
*I love a sunburnt country...
Geez, have those words been ringing in our ears for the last few weeks. After the heat, sun and deep blue skies of Africa - and of course Oz before that - Spring in England and Scotland comes as a bit of a shock. What passes as a 'blue sky' is, like Mackellar's poem hints at, a weak insipid blue, hazed by grey cloud. Or is that smog?*

Winter in our High Country doesn't really rate in comparison!

I've also found it doesn't take long to begin to feel a little claustrophobic here, especially south of the border. In England, there's no such thing as really wild country, while Scotland can at least boast of some, especially when the dark, blizzard-laden grip of winter spreads its mantle over the land. Winter in our 'High Country' doesn't really rate in comparison.

For the most part, their national parks encompass hedge-row lined lanes, stone-walled farms, manicured woods, crowded tiny villages and, if you are real lucky, a few acres of moor country. We did enjoy a few days in the New Forest, down in the south of England. Proclaimed by King Harold in 1079, the place was his private hunting reserve. A few hundred years later, King Henry VIII stripped most of the big trees for his new navy that set England on the way to rule the waves.

It's now the UK's latest national park and one of the biggest, covering about 42,000ha. With more than eight million visitors a year the place is crowded much of the time. By comparison, in Scotland we took in the delights of the Cairngorms National Park. At 436,000ha it's the country's biggest reserve. It still includes a few villages and farm land, but the great plateau and high peaks support a quarter of Britain's threatened wildlifespices, a quarter of Scotland's native woodland and

the park includes large tracts of sub-arctic tundra. No wonder it was cold there. Our convoy of two Ford F250s and my Patrol, that would hardly raise a glance in Oz, come under some close scrutiny here; photos are taken and people want to talk about what they are, where we are going... and what the fuel economy of the big beasts is like. At \$2.70 a litre (and dearer as you go north) you can understand their (and our) preoccupation with fuel prices! While dirt roads are hard enough to find here, let alone a 'real' 4X4 track, it's exciting enough travelling along a windy, very narrow, single-lane confined road

when on-coming traffic is met quickly and suddenly. Funny, they always seem to give way to us! But, as beautiful and enjoyable as this verdant green country is, I'm starting to miss red desert country, the wind sighing through of ancient rocky mountains tinged in blue... yeah, I love a sunburnt country.

Regards,
Ron and Viv



Facing the cold north from Scotland's windswept coast (top); Lord Nelson surveys visitors from above London's Trafalgar Square (left); Viv relaxes at our camp in a quiet corner of The New Forest (above)

