

Scotland 2007



My trip actually started the past Friday with a game of golf then a Men's Retreat up in the Santa Cruz hills. The topic was great, the band was great, and after the Saturday festivities, Nate and I left the retreat early and headed down the hill. I got home around eleven. I dumped the contents of my backpack, and then reloaded it with all the things I had set aside for the next trip. I went to bed.

Early next morning, Barbara drove me to the airport and dropped me off. I had some time, so I chatted with the gate agent. Nice guy. He got me upgraded to an exit row.

The flight was uneventful until we landed. We were a bit late and someone else had taken our gate. We sat on the tarmac for 45 minutes. By the time we hit the gate, I had to go to the bathroom really bad. I went, walked very fast to the next gate (which was mercifully short and in the same terminal), and walked right onto my next plan just as they were closing the door. The guy next to me (a Canadian) was fatter than I was. We were both very uncomfortable on the Dallas to Raleigh-Durham leg of the flight. Once we landed, I rented a car, found my hotel (nice hotel!) and chatted with the Russian foreign exchange student who was working the lobby while studying Economics. For the next two days, I worked at my company's "RTP" facility. It's too bad I didn't spend any time touring this place – North Carolina is beautiful – but work pretty much consumed my time, and I felt no great desire to go explore after dark on my own (Note: I did "tour" in the evenings on my next trip though, Awesome place!).

On Tuesday, I left work a little early so I could go visit yet another work facility as part of my "meet 'n greet" tour – in Glasgow Scotland! Alas, all my remaining flights would be on the domestic carrier Continental. Work has this annoying policy that you must take the cheapest flights (hey, free flights for me though, so I can't complain too much!). Though "free," I would not relish going to Glasgow on a domestic carrier. Also, for some reason, Continental didn't do pre-booking of seats on some of their flights. All my remaining flights would have an unassigned seat until I arrived. That's why I left work early – I did not want to fly across "The Pond" in a middle seat! My first two flights to get to North Carolina WERE in middle seats.

My seat to Newark was not bad, and not in the middle, but it was right by the engine. Fortunately, I had just bought noise-canceling headphones. They worked brilliantly.

When I got to Newark, I had a lot of time to kill. I started biding my time by having dinner. I made a bad decision on that. The Teriyaki bowl dinner was awful. I did have a nice view of NYC and the Empire State Building while I ate. After that, I walked through two terminals then tried to call Barbara. She didn't answer. She did finally call me later. After that, I watched CNN and read. When the gate agent arrived, I couldn't get a better seat (though I tried) – the plane was 100% full. And as advertised, the plane was packed, and very uncomfortable. The flight was also very long and boring. I had seen the movie so I tried to sleep, but could not. I read and listened to music.

Wednesday, 5/23

We parked at the far end of the Glasgow terminal (which is a long thin arc). It was a lot of walking to get through customs and to baggage claim. For the first time in 15 years, I told the customs agent that I was visiting the country on business. My bag must have been near the front because it was on the conveyor belt when I arrived. As a result, I was out of the airport quickly.

I had no problem finding the white taxi Andrew told me to find (Andrew is my Scottish friend and counterpart who has visited me on several occasions in California). The driver showed me some of the highlights of Glasgow as we drove. Andrew's directions got me right to the front door (for 19.20 pounds). I met Andrew at the front door of the Glasgow Design Centre, and then he showed me around.

The Glasgow Centre is a bit odd for a Semiconductor house, but it was a nice, old Georgian Architecture building. It had tall ceilings and lots of dark wood all around. The design room was in the old library of a charter house.



Andrew at the entrance



Hundred year old hand-painted wallpaper in the conference room

Andrew took me out to “Costa Coffee” to wake me up. I like this place much better than Starbucks. The locals seem to feel the same; it was busier than the Starbucks across the street. What I didn’t like was that Costa was at the bottom of a hill, and work was halfway up that hill and Andrew walks VERY fast (He’s 6’ 4”; I’m 5’ 8”). I was clutching my chest on the trot back to work, and I still had to climb a major flight of stairs to get to the layout and CAD room on the third floor. Once I recovered, Andrew showed me some of his tools and before you knew it, it was time for lunch. We went to a grocery in the pedestrian area and got salads – perfect right after a flight. Mine was a crawdad, mango and greens salad with curry, lime and coconut dressing. I really didn’t expect to find anything like this in a shopping center -- crawdad, Really? -- and it was very good!

Unfortunately, the design team was trying to complete a big project, so I was left alone for the rest of the day -- no training or exchange of ideas. Good thing I had my own work to do.

Andrew and I hiked down the hill to the train station car park and almost ran through the station. Man, Andrew walks fast! The long ride home allowed my legs to heal somewhat.

Dinner was ready when we got to Andrew’s house (I would be staying with him, rather than at a hotel – how cool is that?!). I got to meet his family, and then we got to sit down to a chicken, potato, pea and gravy



Glasgow Train Station

dinner. It was good. The meal (called “Tea” here) was served on a smaller plate, and no seconds were offered or allowed. I met his wife, Catriona, a substitute teacher, Ross, their 16 year old, and Kristy (pronounced almost like “Kirsty”), 13. Just like my kids, Ross likes video games and Kristy loves animals. Gee, Andrew and I have a lot in common.

Ross only plays on a PC aircraft simulator. He sees it as training, since he is already in the RAF Cadet Program, and he intends to be a pilot. As a family, they are looking for a dog for Kristy, who has pet allergies. They have narrowed it down to a Labradoodle or a Schnauzer.

Andrew and Kristy are also learning how to play guitar. One of their guitars plays very well.

The evening was spent watching TV and drinking tea. The first show I watched was “Top Gear” (now in America!), where three hosts do odd things with cars. Today was comparing an Xbox racing game with a real car on a real track (Honda S2000 at Laguna Seca). It wasn’t even close. Another show showed how to “abuse” science. It was a riot, and not unlike “Mythbusters” in America (a show Andrew enjoys when he visits my house). We learned how to make purple smoke using iodine, aluminum and water. They also tested head gear (hats) by dropping an anvil on them, exploding them, and running over them with a steamroller. Only the US Army Kevlar helmet survived. Finally, they wanted to see how quickly someone could get out of work by strapping rockets on a chair. The chair went up 100 feet, and the dummy landed on its head soon after.

Right before dusk, the whole family went to the seaside town of Queensferry. We parked by the Firth of Forth to view two very famous bridges. One was a cantilever bridge (very fancy) named “The Firth of Forth Bridge,” and the other was a suspension bridge, like Golden Gate (except gray). Both bridges were just amazing.



The Firth of Forth Bridge

While we were there, a yellow Lamborghini Diablo parked across the street. It was apparent that the owner was American – she was driving on the wrong side of the street, and she parked backwards. The Scotts drive on the left.

We walked down the very touristy main street, but this late in the evening, there were no tourists. All the shops were closed. We found a pub, and Andrew and I had a pulled draft. Mine was dark & roasted. Andrew had a pine and apricot ale. As we sat, we watched Milan and Liverpool battle it out for the European Football Championship. Everyone in the pub was for Liverpool, but Milan won.

On the way back to the car, we stopped by the Lamborghini. Lovely. I began to go in and out of consciousness on the drive home. I had been awake for 47 hours. I quickly fell fast asleep at home, but I was up at three.



Thursday, 5/24

Lambo, Lambo, Lambo

Though I was up at three, I had fallen asleep again by six. Andrew had to “knock me up” (the phrase the Britts/Scotts use for “wake me up”). Breakfast was shredded wheat, O.J. and coffee.

As we piled into the car, I remembered my “brollie” (umbrella) but forgot my laptop. I remembered it around 10 miles into our 30 mile trip. Oh well.

The radio station we listened to was very funny. The D. J. had a pet mouse that was always getting caught in a microwave, or pipe, or laundry shoot, so every day, the D. J. would ask the people to “Free Bobby.” It went something like this: “Me Bobby got stuck in me ‘fridgerator an’ I c’not get it out. Will someone free me Bobby?” By the way, I should mention that a “Bobby” is also a nick-name for a penis, like “Dick” is here in America. The D. J.’s pet mouse is always going in and out of things and getting stuck. Every fifth car on the road has a “Free Bobby” bumper sticker on it. People around town have “Free Bobby” T-Shirts.

The other “sthick” they do in the mornings is the “morning work-up,” where the D. J. pretends to be someone else on the phone with the intent to get the other person really pissed-off. He’s good at it too.

Andrew took me through Glasgow this morning so he could show me the university where he and Catroina went. I also found out that Andrew was born in Africa and was raised in Glasgow. I believe his parents are Geologists (and devout atheists).

We parked at the train station and hiked up to Semtech. Andrew takes a different route every day, and today, he took me left, then up so he could show me some fancy architecture. Today’s building was some sort of tea or spice building. It was a fine example of Glasgow red rock Georgian with a Scot and an Indian (from India) statue over the door.

Why must Semtech be half way up a hill? I was really sucking air by the time I reached the door. My calves hurt too.

Everyone in the building was trying to get a massive project out the door, so no one had time for me. I was able to get on another computer, so I was able to work. Steve from Swindon was also here today and tomorrow so he could spend time with us. This project, being two weeks late, really killed Steve’s & my plans.

We did all go to lunch together at a “Curry” (Indian food). I think I made two social *faux paxs* there. I asked for a mango lassi, and I filled my plate. I’m thinking that maybe the mango lassi is considered a girl’s drink here. When I ordered it, the waiter laughed at me. Andrew had one too (maybe so I could save face?) and really liked it. Filling my plate was bad too because the first course should only be the appetizers. Everyone went back for their main course but me. I already had mine. Oh ya, all the other guys had a lager, which I guess is traditional with curry. I love a good lager too, but I was still a little tired, so not much in the mood to drink if I was going to survive the afternoon.



Andrew's Desk



The Layout and CAD room

Still... the afternoon really dragged on. Steve and I had nothing to do, and Andrew had to get to a certain spot in the project before he could leave. Steve and I understood this, also being layout managers, but two of Andrew’s crew did not. They left on time, but without finishing their work. Andrew was just livid by the time we left (around 6:30). He didn’t walk, but instead practically ran to his car, cursing their names as he went. I tried my best just to keep up, but my little legs just don’t go that fast! Andrew calls them his “pensioners.” On the way home, I tried to memorize the location of things I wanted pictures of. Tomorrow, I would shoot pictures as we drove.

Neither of us were hungry when we got home. We were still full from lunch. Andrew had stopped off for gas on the way home (\$100. fill up!), then over to a grocery store where we got a \$40. bottle of “good” Scotch: Bruchladdich. Andrew said that he would educate me on Scotch, which is, according to him, more complex than wine. Being in a wine region in California, and my parents in another in Upstate NY, I was well-acquainted with the complexities of wine. If this is even more complex, then I’m really excited about learning. I have loved Scotch from the first time I tried it as a 14 year old boy in Taiwan -- discovering that one of the statues in our temporary apartment was filled with the delicious amber liquid. I was hooked from that first taste, and I can still remember that particular complex taste to this day. Truthfully, learning more about Scotch was one of my goals for this trip, so let the education begin!

First though, Andrew wanted to take me to the top of a mountain not far from his house; right by the kid’s school. The hike to the top should have been easy, but I am so out of shape, I nearly passed out. The view at the top was totally worth it though; even with the cold, whipping wind. Andrew showed me the Livingston valley, Edinburgh, various volcanoes, and “bings” – piles of rocks – mountains really – of spent shale after oil extraction. This extraction had been going on for 150 years or so and now these bings were everywhere. Nothing grew on them because they naturally kept hot. They are an environmental hazard.

Slowly, these bings are being removed, but the larger ones remain, looking like that big orange mountain in the middle of Australia (same color too) – sort of out of place in the surrounding countryside.



People aren't allowed on them either because they can have unexpected hot spots. Apparently, some boy went into a cave in one of these bings a number of years back, got lost, and eventually poked a hole in the roof to try to get out. The rush of hot gas and air released through the new hole burnt him up immediately. Ever since then, there has been no trespassing.

When we got back, we drank a lot (in the name of education!) and watched multiple episodes of Top Gear. I was still buzzing when I went to bed. Awesome Scotch though.



Me on a hill. Above, a Bing

Friday 5/25

I felt a little dry when I got up, but Andrew had more of a headache. I guess this is one of those rare instances where having an extra 50 pounds is an advantage.

The news this morning (and every morning) was of Darfur, new taxes on waste & recyclables, and a missing English girl in Portugal. I didn't forget my laptop this morning. I had hoped to get a picture of a church on a hill on the way to Glasgow, but it came out blurry.

The hike up the hill to Semtech seemed less bad today. Maybe the aspirin I was taking had something to do with it. At work, the story was the same. They were all super busy. Andrew had to do some of the layout his crew had neglected to do yesterday. Steve was busy with Richard and Ivor. I was left alone to draw.

At lunchtime, Andrew decided to take me on a walking tour of Glasgow. We flew past the train station and on to the Modern Art Museum. This is where that "conehead" statue is. We didn't go into the museum, but we did get to see the statue. Today, the horse had a traffic cone on its head in addition to its rider. (Around the time the building became the Modern Art Museum, someone put a traffic cone on the statue. The police would always remove it, only to find it put back on the next day. Eventually, the police gave up, and the horse & rider now always have a cone on it.) Next, we went up a hill to the oldest two buildings in Glasgow, and to the Glasgow Cathedral in the old section of the town called "The Tron." Andrew didn't know what "Tron" meant. Gee, I think we did that two miles in half an hour. We took a taxi over to the pedestrian grocery. I had a turkey and bacon sandwich today.

After lunch, I spent individual time with Steve, Richard and Ivor. Late in the day, all the computers were tied up, so the gang began to play cricket in the main aisle. I was in the outfield, but I didn't know what to do with the ball. Eventually, Andrew was at a place where he could stop, so we went out on the balcony and said good-bye to Glasgow (at 7PM). I would not be back again on this trip. We talked to Grieg about his favorite Scotch (Oban), then I shook everyone's hand and left. I got a picture of a cemetery and purple sheep on the way home (different sheep owners paint their sheep so they can recognize them. There are both pink and purple sheep on the way home.)

Catroina had cooked haggis just for me so I could have a "cultural" dinner. It wasn't half bad (or half good), and better than the description. After dinner, we watched "Casino Royale" on PPV while drinking the rest of the Scotch. Andrew and I were both amazed how physically fit this Bond was. I really liked this new "blonde" Bond. Andrew fell asleep before the movie was over.

Saturday 5/26

Today, we all woke up early so we could go to Edinburgh. I had to tell Andrew and Catroina how Casino Royale ended. At 8AM, we all headed out to the train station. When we got near, we saw we could catch the 8:15, so we ran onto the train just before it took off. My ticket was double in price because I didn't get it at the station. The family's was cheaper because they also didn't get it at the station. Can anyone explain this to me? I guess family tickets are cheapest when purchased onboard, and single tickets are cheapest when done at a vending machine.

On the train, I learned a little more about the family. Ross was already doing cadet stuff and was spending this summer at Fort Dix in the US with the 82nd Airborne (my brother's old outfit, I think). Kristy loves animals and hopes to be a veterinarian some day.

When we got to Edinburgh, we had to go up a big hill through a "close" to get to the Royal Mile at St. Giles, where John Knox started the Presbyterian movement. We went past it and headed up to the observatory. The observatory was new for the family, and its roof offered a great view of the city. The camera obscura inside was fun to see. The rest of the building was a hands-on optics museum. It was great fun.

Next up was the castle. Catroina and I stood in line while Andrew and kids got ice cream. The entrance to the castle was guarded by two statues of the local heroes: Rob Roy and William "Braveheart" Wallace. The bathroom at the beginning of the castle was modern and very nice. We saw the "One O'clock Gun" on the way to the Military Museum. The Military Museum was more extensive than I had imagined, and well-planned. After that, we went up to the top of the castle and saw the crown jewels (long line; few jewels), the chapel,



Scenes from Glasgow walk

the old prison, the new prison, and the new military museum. Of the group, it was the two prisons that were worthwhile. We found a fantastic balcony view of the One O’Cock Gun, but the gunner didn’t show up on this particular day, so no gun. In a way, this was “special” because the old gunner, who had recently retired, fired the gun every day for 41 years, never missing a day. Alas, he recently died, and they are still working on reliable replacements. Word on the street said that today’s gunner got drunk last night and didn’t make it to work. OK... We hit one more gift shop, the modern bathroom again, then left. On the way down the hill, we saw a “Braveheart” actor – very touristy and campy.

There are three large churches on the Royal Mile, but only St. Giles is still in use today as a church. This says something about current Scottish (and English) society. One church is now a government building, and the other is being transformed into a food court. Very sad. We went into St. Giles and I am happy to report that Andrew did not catch on fire. This was the first time I had ever gotten him into a church. I got a picture with a statue of John Knox, and then saw where he was buried under parking space #22.



Me and Knox



Observatory view; Castle; Me with One O’ Clock Gun



The Heaney family goes down a “close” / “Food Court” church / A lovely locals-only garden by the Museum

Rather than go all the way down the Royal Mile to Parliament and the Palace (Holyrude), we headed down a close that led to the underground tour. Unfortunately, the earliest tour was at four, and my host family didn’t want to stay that long. We went to McDonalds in the mall by the train station. This was a special treat for the kids. It was a predictable meal for me. After lunch, we snuck into a whisky store. Andrew and the shop owner educated me on various whiskeys. Alas, the store did not have a complete set of the “Islay Malts,” which Andrew and the shop keeper considered to be the best of all the Scotches, so we left empty handed.

Ross almost got killed by a truck running a red light while on the way to Scott’s Monument. If Andrew hadn’t pulled him back, he’d be dead. Nice Monument; needs cleaning. From what I understand, access to the monument is now closed because too many people have jumped off of it. Well, on to the National Museum of Scotland. What a fantastic museum! Rick Steves said it was a major museum, but I had no idea it was this good. I found myself saying “ooh” or “wow” around every corner. My favorite painting was in the Scottish section in the basement. It was a painting of the Scottish Highlands dappled with sunlight. As I explained to Catroina, the subject of this painting was light. The darkened fisherman in the painting was almost an afterthought.

I had forgotten there was a Vermeer here. Another down; four to go (Buckingham palace, Berlin, Vienna and Prague). In one room, there was a bronze of a man beating another man with the jaw of some animal. Ross asked if I knew who he was. I said Samson or Cain, since both were known to have beaten people with jawbones. The plaque said “Cain and Abel.” Ross asked me who they were, so I told him the Bible story. It made me sad to realize that Ross and Kristy knew absolutely nothing about the Bible. I hope America doesn’t follow Europe’s lead in this respect.

We got out of the museum and walked the garden path back to the train station. It was nice to only see locals in this area. At one point, Ross playfully jumped on Andrew’s back and Andrew came very close to sending Ross down a hill. There is some tension in this family. Ross is very much a “physical touch” guy and Andrew is “acts of service” guy. These guys don’t speak each other’s love language.

We tried to get into the “Terror Tour” near the station, but they were full for the day. The family had no interest in going to see the Britannia, so we went home.

The evening was spent in separate rooms. I guess each family member needed their space. Andrew and I watched “Underworld” on a DVD in the music room. We also raided the kid’s candy collection.

Sunday 5/27

Today was our Sunday drive. Ross had something “military” to do so he didn’t join us. Kristy did not want to come, but Andrew and Catroina were unwilling to let her stay at home (She wouldn’t anyway – she’d sneak off to a friend’s house. Both girls are closet Goths.). Kristy was often vocal about not wanting to be here during the day.

The drive up the Forth got hillier and hillier. It began to resemble Upstate New York. The lakes looked “lonely” and the surrounding area somehow looked familiar. The trees began to disappear, giving way to grasslands. Eventually, we stopped at Loch Katherine. The place we visited had just opened last week. None of us had ever been there before. The coffee was awesome, and we all had scones, cream (whipped butter) and jam. These scones were like nothing I had ever tasted. They sure weren’t Starbucks. What a treat!

After that, we traveled through the “Trossachs,” then on to Queen Elizabeth’s Forest Park. We were now back in the wooded part of Scotland, and it was lovely. The road within the park was rough. Towards the end, we came within a meter of some Highland Cows (pronounced “coo”). Cool! Andrew didn’t want us to draw their attention, lest they scratch the car with their massive horns. Eventually, they did begin to approach, so Andrew bolted.



A loch at Forest Park; A Highland Cow

A little beyond the park, we found a wool manufacturer. I bought a sweater for Barbara (still smelling of sheep), a stuffed Highland Cow for Courtney and a Scottish flag for Jeffrey.

As we began our journey back, we thought we saw Nessy on a Loch, but it turned out to be a wooden model at a Boy Scout camp. Someone had “manufactured” Nessy.

Soon, we were at some tourist town. What made this place special were the fish and chips. This was Andrew’s favorite place for “chippies,” as he called them. He also knew that the town had the best whisky shop around so we went there first. The owner was very knowledgeable. Before you knew it, I was out of the shop with six mini-bottles of the seven (or eight) Islay Malts. I had considered getting an Oban as well, but it didn’t come in a mini like the others. Andrew thought that perhaps I could get an Oban at the airport’s excellent whisky shop.



The fish and chips were the best I have ever had, and probably the best I will ever have. I ate them as the “natives” do with “salt & sauce.” The sauce is “HP” sauce; sort of a weak Worstershire. Yummy. For the first time, it began to rain, though not enough for me to open up my umbrella.

We passed Monty Python’s “wedding castle” from “Holy Grail” and the Wallace Monument. We then took a brief stop at a Wal-Mart-type

Wedding Castle / Viaduct

store so Kristy could get a present for a friend. I found stickers for Courtney and a couple of things for Jeff.

We passed the Sinclair Castle, and then took a side road to get a picture of a viaduct. The family had never been on this road, so it was fun for them too. I took my pictures, and then we headed for home, which turned out to be not so far away. The evening was spent watching several “Top Gear” episodes while eating Cadbury chocolates.



Monday, 5/28

Time to leave. My flight wasn’t until 12:40, but I was packed by 7:30. Catroina and the kids had school. They said some quick good-byes and left. I wonder if I’ll ever see them again. After that, Andrew and I basically stared at each other while listening to Pink Floyd. At 9:30, Andrew dropped me off at Edinburgh Airport. Lines were long, so I’m glad I got there early. Both my flights were completely

full, but I got an “F” and a “D seat (Window on leg 1 & Aisle on leg 2). Once I got through security, I stopped at the whisky store. They had all kinds of whiskeys, but on Oban. I liked the way they arranged them: Highland, Lowland, Islay, and Collectables. This is pretty much how Andrew had arranged them when he spoke to me. The lowlands were only OK, the highlands were better, Islay was tops, except for some (but not all) of the very expensive collectables. Almost all my US-known “top shelf” whiskeys were lowland malts (Glenlivet, Glenfiddich, and Macallan). I wondered if all the good stuff stayed in Scotland.



Andrew’s House

Hours later, I got on my first flight. My seat was ahead of the wing, so I took lots of pictures of Scotland and Ireland. None of them came out because my camera focused on the window. Sigh. Both movies were good: "Freedom Writers" and some Denzel Washington movie.

My time in Newark was not pleasant. Passport control was predictably slow, and my luggage was last off the plane. I was able to offload my stowed bag almost immediately upon exiting international, but then I had to go through screening again to reach domestic. Then I waited. My next flight was shorter than my previous flight, so only one movie. It was good, but I don't remember what it was, so it mustn't have been that good. I also listened to their pop Divas channel and was shocked that all three singers; Pink, Christine Aguilera and Avril Lavigne all had to be "bleeped." Not very classy Divas if you ask me.

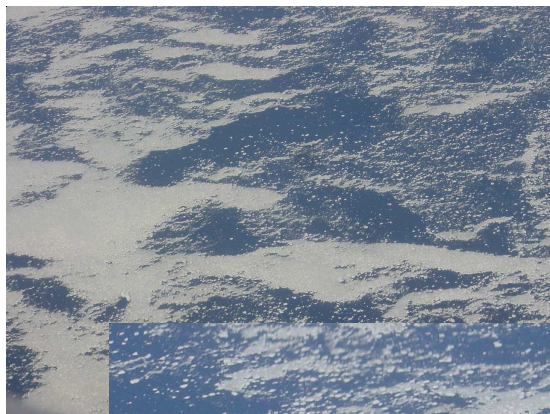
I got to San Jose and Barbara had not yet left the house. NOW my bag comes off first. I waited outside, smelling the California air. It seemed wonderfully familiar. By the time I left the airport, it had been 20 hours since Andrew had dropped me off. I had no trouble going to sleep. Tomorrow is work.

6/2

One week later, I'm hiking in the hills and I can hardly believe it's already been a week since the trip. One week ago today, I was hiking up a hill to a castle. Now, I was hiking up Mt. Hamilton.

After the hike, Barb and I went to Bevmu. They have some Islay Malts. They also have a space for Oban, but they are out of stock. I bought an American mini whisky and a few of the lowland whiskeys so I could compare them to my collection Islay Malts. I bought: Glenfiddich, Glenlivet, Macallan and Jack Daniels. In a blind taste test, my former favorites, which I had just purchased, all scored well below the Islay Malts. Andrew was right – these are exceptional Scotches; making the lowland brands taste like bathwater. My new favorites are Audbeg and Laphroig. Bevmu has the Audbeg for \$50. and the Laphroig for \$29. (\$10. more than they were in Scotland).

Hopefully, Andrew can come here again to visit (and he did five months later). Hopefully, this won't be my only trip to Scotland (it definitely was for work --10 months after my visit, the Glasgow facility was shut down).



A sea of icebergs near Canada from 40K feet in the air

