

Glimpses from the Highlands

Water – water everywhere

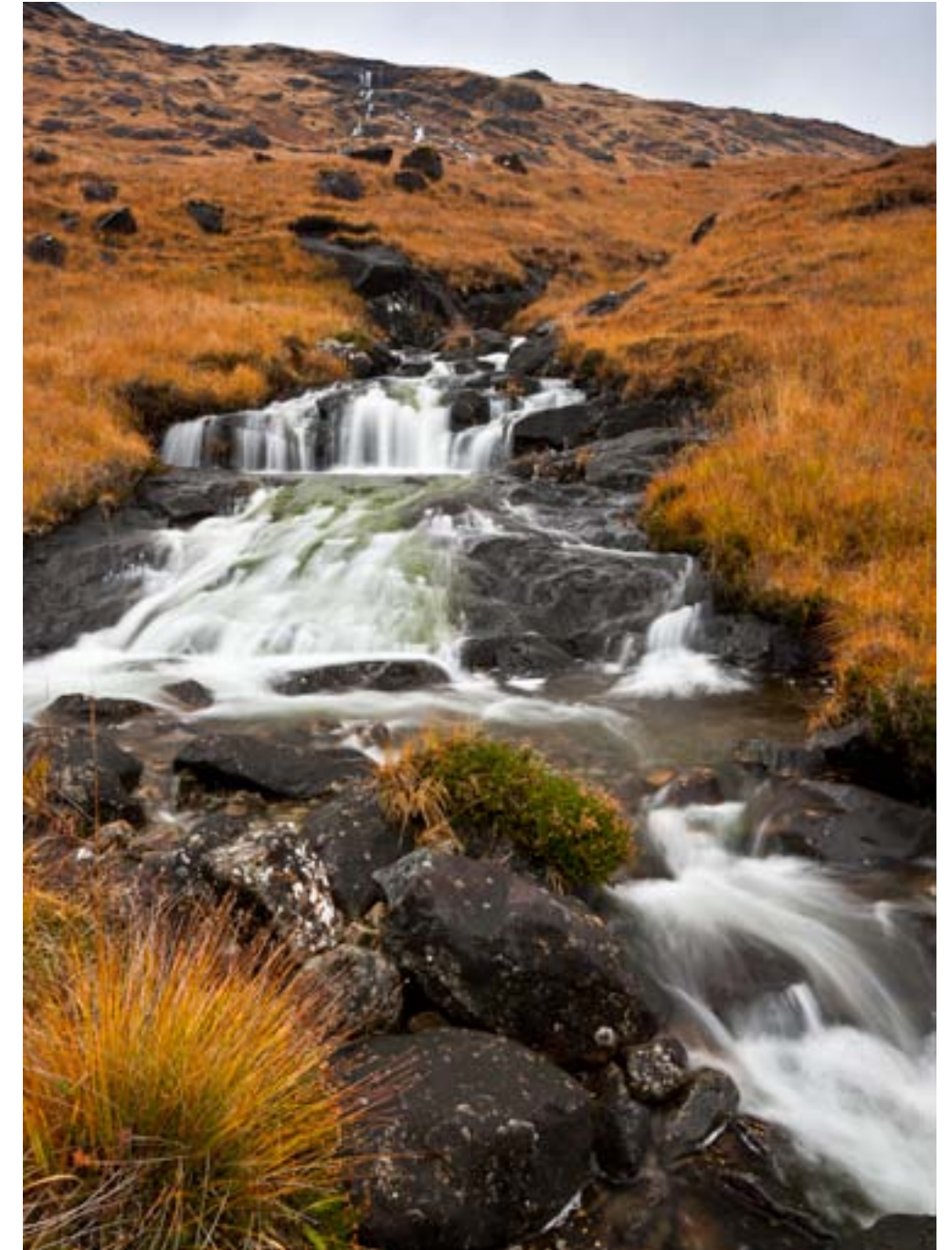
It's water everywhere. Pouring down from a leaden grey sky with the strong wind blowing it sideways into my face however I try to turn. The moorland is soaked by thousands of years of rain and my wellies sink down into the bog, where I expect it to be a firm turf to step on. The sea is not far away, breaking into the land in lochs, created by the glaciers from the last ice ages and making the islands neatly divided into smaller parts. And beside me is a waterfall, which I am trying to photograph. It's water everywhere. I see it, I feel it, I hear it and at least I imagine I can smell it as well.

I am in Scotland on the Isle of Mull. I arrived two days ago, flying to Glasgow from Exeter and then driving up. I stood a late afternoon in the queue to the ferry between Oban (on the mainland) and Craignure (on the Isle of Mull). We were reversing on to the ferry so the last car seemed to stand first in the queue. I was of course last to arrive, as always cutting it short, so standing at the head of the queue suited me fine. Reversing a rental car onto the ferry was another matter!

It rained already then, and had rained most of time driving up from Glasgow. Not the gentle drops of Devon but a downpour of an intensity I hardly seen outside the tropics. I sat in my queue waiting to reverse looking at pictures of Eric and Mikee on my Ipad (which Jennifer gave me on my birthday) and I already missed them after being away a few hours. The windows in the car steamed up, and I saw



Waterfall at Ailt Chreaga Dubha river, Ardmeanach, Isle of Mull west coast (1/40 sec).



A stream coming down the mountainside at Glen More, Isle of Mull (0.8 sec)



My first capture of the Highlands. Fishing hulks on the east coast of the Isle of Mull.

only our children playing and laughing, while the rain-drops smattered on the roof.

I was wondering while I had decided to go on a photo tour in Northwest Scotland instead of enjoying family life at Knightstone? But I have always been challenged by the Scottish landscape and wanted to capture it with its brooding clouds, windswept moors, with lochs hiding deep secrets (does the Loch Ness monster maybe exist?) and white stone cottages with a peat fire sending its warmth and scent through the drafty rooms. The challenge of catching a contemplating mood, a Scottish soul of bag-pipe and whisky and haggish in the landscape and still preserve and enhance the beauty of it appealed to me.

The first morning on the Isle of Mull I drove north from Craignure – not much more than a ferry station - when the sun broke through in the morning and lit up a couple of rotting fishing hulks healing over at low tide. I got out my camera and tripod and felt immediately happier. Maybe I had caught the soul of Scotland already with this first exposure? I continued north to Castle Aros, where the sun rays were blessing everything except the castle, which remained in darkness. I was standing there for maybe an hour, but the rays were illusive. To me they represented hope, the hope that God or Nature would choose to light up what we wanted to see. But it didn't happen. We cannot control Nature. And we cannot control God.

My picture is of a medieval Castle Aros, dark and menacing and falling to pieces by the decay of time, with the sun shining on something entirely different far away that we don't know what it is or why it is lit up. Not a planned composition, but neither is life.

I continued to Tobermory, the capital of Mull, but only a tiny village with our standards. Colourful houses with its reflections in the still water of the harbour and the



▲ The ruins of Castle Aros with a "Jacob's ladder" shining in the background. East coast of the Isle of Mull.

▼ Tobermory waterfront and harbour. Tobermory is the administrative centre of the Isle of Mull.





Jennifer on Iceland 2007. A grey cloudy sky provides wonderful light for running water or portraits like here. No such portrait opportunities were available (to me) in Scotland!

dark hills and clouds above. As I was walking along the waterfront, I saw the clouds open up and behind them some tiny specks of blue sky, where the sun could break through if I waited patiently. I grabbed my camera and tripod and prepared for the waiting game.

Waiting for the light. But this time God was on my side. It lit up just the houses I wanted to stand out along the waterfront. They exploded with colour and so did of course

their reflections in the dark harbour water. The composition was there, ready to be captured without the need to add or subtract anything from it.

But on day two on the Isle of Mull, the rain was back. With rain and a grey sky, the light was very soft. Not very exciting for wide landscape pictures, but ideal for running water and beautiful women, both of them motives that should have soft even light. I remember when we were in

Coladoir River near Loch Scridain on the west coast of Isle of Mull (0.3 sec).

Iceland three years ago. I have a lovely picture of Seljalandsfoss as it tumbles over a former sea cliff. It is shot from inside the fall through the water to the surrounding countryside. I have also captured Jennifer glowing on a hilltop in the Icelandic weather. Jennifer's face can brighten up any dull day for me, and she and the waterfall are my two best pictures from Iceland.



But on Mull there were definitely more exciting waterfall opportunities than there were beautiful women. Actually, there wasn't a soul in sight! Apart from sheep, I couldn't find any living thing. So I photographed streams and waterfalls. The water was swirling around my wellington boots, as I was standing in a stream trying to catch the depth and the movement of the running water.

A picture has two dimensions. Real life (according to Einstein) has four. Any photo has length and width. But there is also depth. And there is time. The fast moving flow of water can be shown in many different ways. A lot of photographers like to blur the water. This is a representational technique born out of necessity. A landscape photographer wants to use a small aperture and is therefore forced to expose his pictures during a long time. The consequence is that the water is blurred and smooth. But the soft blurred running water fits the Scottish mood – or at least my vision of that mood. So I was happy not to freeze the water droplets but to let the blur represent time or maybe rather the absence of time. Action, but an action where nothing changed! A constant movement turned into softness. A flow becoming a path!

Walking over the bog, I saw those paths everywhere, treading down the mountains to the bigger burns and rivers along the valleys. They connected the sky to the sea lochs doing their part in recirculating the water, relentlessly falling down on me as I got soaked both from above and below. Man's capacity to appreciate beauty even in the most adverse conditions never stops astounding me. I felt the same adrenalin kick climbing the hills in South Georgia in sleet and heavy wind, when we sailed aboard Adèle.

◄ *Waterfall south of Tobermory, east coast of Isle of Mull (1.0 sec)*

Next page: *Kinlochaline Castle northeast of Mull in the western Highlands. The castle is from the 12th century and is built of sandstone blocks around 10 feet (3 metres) thick. It was abandoned around 1690 but reconstructed in the 1990-ies, and is now a private residence again. It is situated at the head of Loch Aline. The bridge over the mouth of River Aline was built in the late 19th century.*



The Old Man of Storr

Long ago the Hebrides were filled of volcanoes exploding and pouring their lava over the older basalt rocks. Both the Isles of Mull and Skye were covered with lava flows. But over time it has broken down and on the northern part of Skye, the Trotterish Peninsula, the mountains of basalt and lava had cracked and big chunks had fallen down creating the most bizarre formations. I had moved to the Isle of Skye the day before and was climbing up one of those broken down escarpments to reach "The Old Man of Storr".

Storr is the big mountain, about 700 metres above sea level, on the north side of Skye. Towards the east the mountain had collapsed and an escarpment had formed a large black wall a couple of hundred metres tall with a rumble of rocks below. The Old Man of Storr is a 48 metres high rock, very narrow, standing tall just below the main mountain of Storr, looking over the east side of Skye towards the mainland. To me The Old Man represents everything the Highlands stand for: Pride, beauty, decay, failed aspirations, tough work (to climb up to) and being in the shadow of something even bigger (I hope my Scottish friends will forgive this slightly ironic interpretation of the Highlands).

Lots of photographers had been there before me. I just wanted to see him myself and to photograph him. My father used his rifle and his gun as an excuse to get out and get close to nature. I think I use my camera in the same way. I had to experience it myself and try to share my experience with you.

As the Old Man is looking towards the east, he should be caught by the rising sun, ideally early morning when the rays are still soft providing long pleasing shadows that give the picture a third dimension, and when they are warm, creating a glow to the Old Man. I therefore had to rise early to start my climb more than an hour before



◀ *The Old Man of Storr captured from Loch Leathan. The Old Man is the narrow very tall rock standing below and to the right of the high mountain (Storr). The soft mountain has fallen down and created landslides, where the Old Man is a remnant of the big original mountain.*

I walked up from a starting point to the right and below the picture.

Next page: *The early morning sun hits the Old Man of Storr. In the background is the Sound of Raasay, the waters between the Isle of Skye and the islands of Raasay and Rona.*

Page 9: *Another viewpoint and perspective of the Old Man. The original mountain (before any landslides) can be seen to the left in the picture.*





sunrise. I was totally alone and used my torch to find the path, but it was well worn and easy to spot.

Especially the last part was a steep climb, and I slipped a couple of times in the darkness, and although it was near zero degrees centigrade, I was still sweating profusely with my backpack with five lenses, camera body and tripod and lots of other equipment. Maybe I am too old to climb more than 300 metres before sunrise just to catch a photograph? But man creates his own challenges and I loved mine – both to set them and to achieve them!

I reached The Old Man and had scouted out a position and set up my tripod just as the sun rose above the horizon – but in a cloud. I had to wait nearly half an hour before it broke through and lit up the Old Man just as I was dreaming it would be. In a few seconds the landscape was transformed. The darkness was gone, replaced by hope and aspirations. Even an Old Man could reach out to the Sky(e), and the rays of golden light engulfed him and made him glow. He was magical in his pride standing tall among all the other rocks lit up by the rising sun. Below him was the rumble of lava rocks and stones and further away were hills covered in the autumnal colours of yellow and red and on the horizon beyond the sea between Skye and the Mainland were the Western Highlands.

The wind was blowing hard. They had forecasted a force 9 (severe storm) and up on the mountain it felt even more. I had to hold on to the tripod to make sure it didn't fall over. Several pictures were blurred because the wind had shaken the camera and I did my best to protect the setup with my body to prevent any camera shake. I stayed nearly three hours and was alone all the time with a few sheep and rabbits. I walked around finding new angles and positions to pay my respects to the Old Man. Sometimes he stood out commanding the mountains and the seas below, sometimes he was dwarfed by the other bergs beside

him and I felt: There is no real truth. Is he the commander or the commanded? It is all in my interpretation! I sat down in the howling wind, contemplating the wisdom of this. The sheep approached me sensing that I had a great philosophical issue to address, but they didn't really contribute anything to my thinking! Also the rabbits became braver and jumped along bringing their paths closer and closer to the contemplating photographer.

I was woken from my reflective mood by a telephone call from my mobile. Modern technology surrounds us! I was in another world alone surrounded by all this beauty and was startled by a ringtone so far away. Especially my ringtone. My phone doesn't ring. It barks like a dog, to remind me of Chucky.

It was my daughter Susanne calling to tell her father that she had just changed job and got a more challenging assignment within the company. Her enthusiastic conversation brought me back to reality, and I packed away my equipment and started climbing down the mountainside and along the well-worn paths of many walkers. On the way down I met the first humans of the day. A proud father came the other way with his two young kids jumping from stone to stone, chatting happily along the way. I looked at them and remembered my own children, when they were young and doing adventures with me like that. And now I have Eric and Mikee and can soon go trekking with them along mysterious paths leading to dreams and aspirations. Mikee is already old and strong enough to take part in my adventures.

I spent the whole day and lots of the next one exploring the Trotterish Peninsula of Skye. The weather had changed. The rain was gone and the sun was intermittently shining on me and my motives.



Kilt Rock and waterfall on the east coast of the Trotterish peninsula, Isle of Skye. The waterfall is 200 feet (60 metres) high (4.0 sec).

The Three Chimneys and The House Over-By

The first time I went to Scotland was before my first marriage. We went on a trip with lots of expectations and very little money. I remembered even now, more than 40 years later, how bad the food was, and I was this time prepared for the worst. But I was very pleasantly surprised!

Lots of small seafood places appeared in the countryside. I could stop and with my love of shellfish rest assured that the mussel soup or the scallops would warm my body and brighten up my day. On the second day on the Isle of Skye I drove 45 minutes from my hotel to a restaurant I found in Guide Michelin. It had the simple name of "*The Three Chimneys and The House Over-By*". It offered a great evening experience, well worth the long drive. I had a seven course dinner, of which five were elegantly prepared small pieces of seafood served in a charming house that once was a crofter's cottage. The freshly caught mackerel and the scallops melted in my mouth, but at occasions like this I miss my Jennifer.

My hotels and restaurants were mostly simple and run with great Scottish charm. The evenings ended with a glass of single malt from the well-stocked bars. I love my Armagnac, but for two weeks my habits changed into whisky, and I was educated into the world of single malts by knowledgeable bartenders eager to share their experience.

But the very last day of my two week trip I stayed at Inverloch Castle just outside Fort William. A typical Scottish Baronial pile, very elegant, although a little pretentious. They had a star in Guide Michelin and were a world away from the hotels I had stayed in earlier on my journey. The food certainly lived up to its star.



▲ *The escarpment on the Trotterish peninsula on the Isle of Skye at the Quiraing a few miles north of the Old Man.*

Next page: *Neist Point Lighthouse at autumn sunset. This is the most westerly point on the Isle of Skye and situated near the restaurant, where I had such a gorgeous meal, The Three Chimneys and The House Over-By.*



I woke up in the morning and was prepared to drive up to Glen Coe. When I looked out from my window, I could already see that it would be a glorious day. In front of my window was a little lake or pond, far away were mountains with their tops sprinkled with snow and between them and the lake was a layer of morning fog creating a dreamy surrealistic landscape.

I grabbed my camera equipment and tripod and set up my "camp" on the lawn in front of the castle, waiting for the dawn to arrive. Soon the first sun rays hit the distant mountains announcing the beginning of a new glorious day. I cuddled and pressed my cable release like Eric is cuddling Buzz (his Toy Story toy) and pushing the buttons on him. And it felt like my camera was flying just like Buzz: *"To Infinity and Beyond!"* But soon after sunrise the fog, instead of melting away by the sun rays, started to spread and enveloped all of the landscape including myself. I could immediately feel the change in temperature and rushed back into "my" castle and a great breakfast. What a difference from the climb up to Storr a morning ten days ago!



▲ *Early morning view from Inverlochy Castle, near Fort William.*

Next page and page 15: *Sunrise at Inverlochy Castle*





From Island Solitude to Highland Team

After the Isles of Mull and Skye I turned back to the mainland and drove north along the sea lochs to Torridon and Gairloch. Very beautiful, but the rain had returned and many times when I just had set up my equipment a new shower came before I had captured any picture. I took out a big protective bag to cover camera, lens and filters and waited patiently for it to stop. Sometimes it did after just a few minutes, sometimes I got drenched without any relief in sight. I had to admit defeat and pack up my equipment again with an unfinished photograph in my mind, but not on my memory card.

I was driving to Gairloch to team up with a photographic group under the leadership of Lee Frost, a well-known landscape photographer. I wanted to learn from his approach to landscape photography and also hoped his and others experience would guide us to locations I couldn't as easily find myself. Actually it turned out that I learned from every one of the dozen in the group, not just from Lee. The collected talent and experience from the group was very inspirational and the enthusiasm contagious.

I learned about a "ten-stopper". A ten-stopper is a very dark neutral density filter that slows down the exposure ten stops, that is instead of say $\frac{1}{2}$ of a second, it would be 8 minutes. All movements, also by the clouds, would become a soft blur. I never felt the attraction to these special techniques, but it was still interesting to see their approach. I am more drawn to the landscape as such, the composition and beauty. David Ward, another famous landscape photographer, said that a picture should have at least one and ideally all three of his criteria for a good picture: "Simplicity, Mystery and Beauty". I find that what attract me to a motive are just those criteria as well. The "ten-stopper" is of course a technical method of achieving simplicity and creating mystery, but for me it all sounded



A snow-covered Ben Eighe seen from Glen Torridon.



A Ghairbhe River at the eastern part of Glen Torridon



Sunrise over Loch Tollaich, northeast of Gairloch in the north-western Highlands. The sun rose in clouds and was soon completely hidden behind the grey duvet in the sky, but in between, for a few seconds only, the sun broke through and painted the distant hills red with its morning rays.

a bit too technical. But so it is of course with everything we don't quite master ourselves. The technique is so overwhelming we fail to see the simplicity in what we create.

And the rain continued to pour down, at least for the first of our days in the Highlands. The mountain tops were already covered in snow and further down we sank down in the boggy terrain as soon as we moved away from the trodden paths. But the wind made the clouds run along the sky and sometimes the sun broke out lighting up a distant mountain top or a nearby copse or rock. To be a landscape photographer is to be "waiting for the light". But often I found that it was also "chasing the light". I set up the camera in front of a waterfall or a river to find that the gorgeous light was developing just behind my back, and I had to move the equipment around chasing a new opportunity before that too disappeared in a grey mist.

Think of being a photographer in a studio, with two or three assistants setting up and directing the floodlights, reflectors, soft boxes and whatever you have in the studio. But one day your assistants decide to go crazy. Instead of following your instructions they just swing their beams and reflectors around in a haphazard way. And you cannot control them; you just have to catch the opportunity and try to get a photo, where there is an attractive combination of light and motive that tells a compelling story. And the moment you are there with the camera and have attached the right lens, your assistants decide to switch off the light and have a cup of coffee and you wait, and wait again.



Loch nan Dailthean

One afternoon Lee slams the brakes of the car we are driving. Through the trees he has spotted the autumnal colours being reflected in a still lake. We try to squeeze through between the trees and find a spot safe and dry enough to stand on admiring the landscape and feeling the stillness creating such a contrast to the howling winds that had chilled our bodies on the previous days. We don't see one landscape but two: the lower one being a perfect reflection of the real one above. The only thing telling us that one of them is a reflection is the reeds shooting up through the mirror/loch.

This is the other Scotland. The sky is blue, it is warm and calm, the colours are vivid and the story is there for us to tell. But how to limit a composition, when everything is so beautiful? In the end I decide to stitch a panorama together. If you cannot make up your mind, catch it all! It is a glorious panorama, but of course far too wide to fit anywhere. Maybe I will have to ask the Swedish Church to provide another wall for my landscape? But I don't think a Scottish landscape has quite the same attraction to the Church as my coastal panorama from the West Coast islands of Sweden. So the decision I couldn't quite make, when I took the photograph, will have to be made in the computer instead, when I crop the picture.

This last full day of our photo adventure together has offered blue skies and white cotton wool clouds. Earlier in the day we spent hours at a beach of Loch Ewe watching the receding tide and its pools of calm water with the breaking waves filling the air with music.

Would I have found those places myself? I wish I could say yes, but I know that Lee's eye and experience probably gave me several shots I never would have been able to see alone. And the great company was such a contrast to the solitude on Skye and Mull.



Previous page: Loch nan Dailthean northeast of Poolewe. The stillness on the loch made the reflections surreal.

◀ Receding tide at a beach at Cove, western side of Loch Ewe. We spent hours at the beautiful beach catching small details as well as the grandeur of the landscape. The tripod sank down in the wet sand, while I tried to get sharpness in my pictures from nearby details of small stones or algae to the far-away hills on the other side of Loch Ewe.

▼ Rocks and algae at the beach at Cove.

Next page: Ripples in the sand at Cove beach.





Battleground and massacre

The last two days of my Highland tour, I spent again on my own returning south, but this time inland. I travelled again through the Torridon Glen and saw the Isle of Skye, but this time from the mainland. I passed the Eilean Donan castle, arguably the most photographed castle in Scotland. It stands on a tiny island in a loch about ten miles inland from the Isle of Skye, but it is still at a sea loch. The indented coastline of the Highlands makes it difficult to know if you are at an inland lake or a sea loch. But in this case it wasn't difficult. It was low tide and the kelp around the shore disclosed immediately that this castle had a direct access to the sea.

Eilean Donan, or the island of Donan, was probably named after an Irish bishop and saint that came to Scotland in the sixth century. It was originally built in the 13th century and around 1720, it took an important part in the Jacobite uprising that took place in Scotland. A small Spanish garrison supporting the uprising was stationed at the castle and the English bombarded it with three ships, but due to its very thick walls they didn't succeed and had to storm it and blew it up.

The castle wasn't rebuilt until the beginning of the 20th century, when a new owner of the island reconstructed it after 200 years of decay and neglect. It was built up based on the available original drawings into its former glory and looks very mysterious. I had to stop like so many photographers and sightseers before me, but without any sun brightening up the menacing walls and with the low tide preventing any extensive reflections from the loch, this photo would never make it into the National Geographic Magazine.

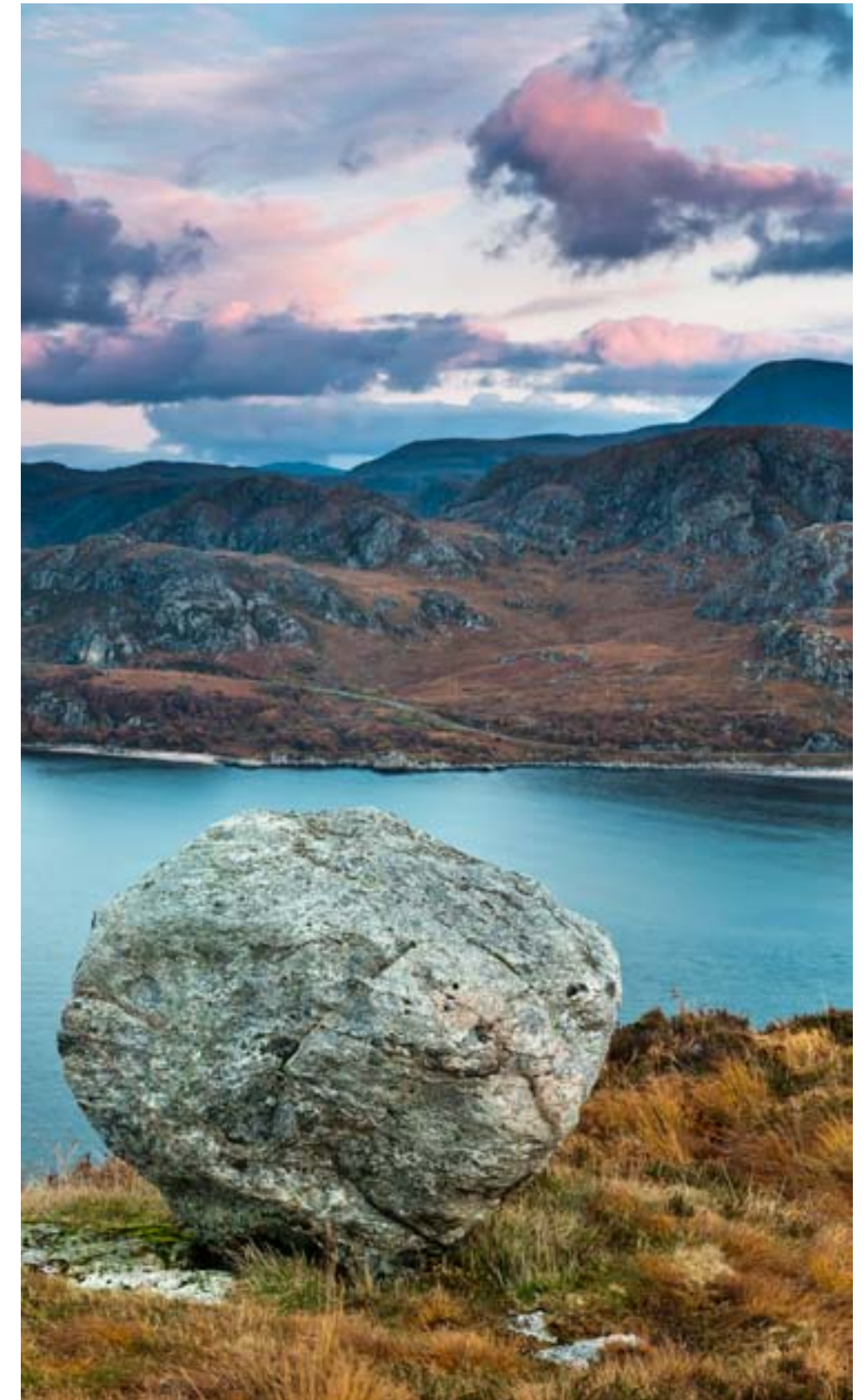
I ventured into the nearby village to get a bite to eat and found an inviting pub. The bar area was filled by locals



▲ *Eilean Donan Castle, situated at a sea loch near the Isle of Skye, was originally erected in the 13th century.*

▼ *Upper Loch Torridon on my return journey south, now with snow on the top of Sgorr a Chadail.*

Next page: *Glen Torridon nr Upper Loch Torridon with Liathach mountain to the right*



▲ *Sunset at Gruinard Bay, Northwestern Highlands.*





▲ *Glen Coe, near King's House Hotel. It was in this glen that the infamous massacre took place 300 years ago.*

Next page: *Loch Linnhe, south of Fort William.*

having a pint and speaking in a dialect I had to work hard to understand. Arriving with my Ipad, I was like an alien from another world entering a place, where time stood still. But I had a great lunch and a friendly chat and the Ipad remained unopened on my table.

The last morning (after my shots at Inverlochy Castle at sunrise that I described before) I drove along Loch Linnhe

towards Glen Coe. It was very cold – minus 3 degrees – and a heavy frost covered the car in the early morning, but at Inverlochy Castle I had entered another world and a footman started the car, warmed it up and placed it warm and nice just outside the front door to the castle. There was an absolute stillness and along Loch Linnhe the mist that had enveloped me after I captured the sunrise at the castle melted away and gave me the reflections I craved for.

Further on was Glen Coe, well known to all Brits because of the bloody massacre that took place in the Glen a little more than 300 years ago. In 1691 King William III offered the Highland chiefs pardon if they swore an oath of allegiance to the crown. However Alastair MacIain waited until the last day and failed to arrive in time to swear the oath. This was later used as a pretext for the massacre that was to take place the following year.

A regiment with soldiers from the Argyll estates and the Lowlands were billeted with the MacIains (part of the clan Donald) at Glen Coe, and while the regiment were guests of clan Donald, they murdered their hosts one day. Around 40 people were killed that morning and another 40 died of exposure to the cold February weather after their homes were burnt down. The blame was ultimately placed on the Secretary of State over Scotland, John Dalrymple at an inquiry after the massacre. It can probably best be described as a conflict between Highlanders and Lowlanders, where the rules of hospitality were pushed aside in the (failed) ambition of wiping out a Highland clan.

When I entered the valley and started the climb it was calm and peaceful but probably equally cold as it had been that February morning in 1692, when the massacre took place. Glen Coe is a valley through high mountains separating the Highlands from the area to the south with Loch Lomond and further on to Glasgow. Nearby is Ben Nevis,



the highest mountain in Britain. But none of the mountains looked that impressive to be honest. They are very old, geologically speaking, and several glaciers had polished and rounded the mountain tops. The ragged tops of the Alps or Andes were absent here, but the grandeur of the landscape with its vast moorland in autumnal colours still filled me with awe and respect. Driving up the glen, which now is the artery bringing goods and tourist to the

Western Highlands and back again, I imagined the cottages burning on the massacre day and men and women fleeing the soldiers to be shot down in the river or along the mountain sides.

That smoke had long ago blown away and the air felt as clear as in Antarctica. The cries had silenced and the stillness enclosed me during my walk. The memories of

cowardice and treason remained in the history books and in tales still told in the Highlands. A history of clan fighting and changing allegiances in a setting of snow covered mountain tops and vast moorlands. This was the Highlands.