



# Newsletter

September 2016

## **...its late September and I really should be...**

...stripping the clutch on the Commando. Not quite as Mr Stewart had it, but close enough. While I wouldn't go so far as saying its been a *great* Summer, there has been enough blinks of good weather to make it a pleasurable one. Since the last newsletter we have had several meetings including a splendid evening near Aberdeen with Bill as our host, our Applecross weekend and the three branch camping weekend in the Borders. Ann and I also had a week visiting Caithness and Sutherland where the Commando once again proved its status as the best and original Adventure bike.

## **Bikes at Bills**

Bill invited us to join him at his home near Aberdeen, the original idea being to collect JPN Commandos (inspired by Paul Williams work and the fact we have allegedly two in the Branch and a third nearby). We met at the Clatterin' Brig cafe for lunch and adjourned to Bills for an excellent barbecue and an evening of talking nonsense.



*The throng assembles*

## **Applecross by a less direct route**

We decided not to take the 'bikes abroad this year and instead take a trip round the North of Scotland. Ann was once the district nurse covering the North-East corner of Caithness and so was familiar with that coast, but hadn't seen much of the opposite shore. In fact, her last 'bike trip consisted of days of mist, high winds and horizontal rain. This year we thought we would try again. We didn't want it to be any kind of marathon trip, it was going to be short rides, long stops and the luxury of not camping. We discussed a possible route and set about finding accommodation only to find that many of the places we tried were fully booked, or at least they appeared to be when checking on the internet. Surprisingly, calling hotels & guest houses direct soon had us sorted out.

The Saturday of our departure did not look good - heavy rain and even heavier traffic made for some grim riding, but turning east at Spean Bridge both the weather and the traffic improved. By Kingussie the roads were dry and the old A9 (now the B9152 which runs beside the main road) was a

delight. When we arrived at Granton on Spey for our first nights stop, the sun was out. I always have trouble adjusting my journey estimates and timings when I holiday at home - Granton would normally be a day trip for me, so we arrived at the hotel mid-afternoon. Luckily the landlady was very helpful and our room was soon ready. Sunday was a warm and bright day so we only rode as far as Loch Garten and spent the rest of the day walking.

*Greetings from Scotland*



Monday was another short ride past Inverness and cutting off the main road at Skiach Services for Bonar Bridge. This is a very enjoyable road, but it later joins the A836 which goes round the Dornoch Firth and I was really surprised how busy it was. We discovered later that the main road was shut so all the traffic was coming round this route.

If you are taking this route remember to stop for petrol at Lairg. Ann's Ducati Scrambler has quite a small tank so we stopped and topped up rather than risking running low. A lunch stop at Poppies cafe in Golspie (recommended) and on to our overnight stop at the Royal Marine Hotel in Brora. It's a nice spot, built at the turn of the century with some nice Arts & Crafts features preserved like the leaded glass and some of the internal woodwork. Also has a nice restaurant, bar and handy for a stroll along the beach. It would make a good base for visiting further North as two or three interesting "circuits" could be made from there.

Tuesday was to be a slightly longer riding day and what a stunner! Just up the coast to Helmsdale then Glen Naver, Syre, along the side of Loch Naver to Altnahara. We had hoped to fill up at the pumps by the hotel but they are now shut. We didn't want to go up

to Tongue on the coast as that would increase our time on the main road (beautiful though it is, I didn't want to be doing any more battle with caravanettes than necessary) but the Ben Hope road does feel quite remote and the next petrol stop is Durness. In the end we decided to just chance it knowing that if the Scrambler ran out, we could drain enough out of the Commando to get to the pumps. Good decision. Its not often one gets to see Scotland in such glory.

A couple of nights in the Scourie Hotel gave us a chance to visit the bird sanctuary of Handa Island. Its a short journey by rib to the island where you can spend the day walking round the cliffs watching the birds and sea life. We were too late in the year to see the large colony of puffins, but there are plenty of other species to see.

We wound our way down the West coast to Ullapool, and stopped at the Poolewe Hotel. Good food, friendly staff and an entertaining bar. From there it was just a short hop through Gairloch to Shildaig and stayed on the main road to Tornapress and over the Bealach to Applecross. There we met up with usual ne'er-do-wells and had an enjoyable weekend in their excellent company. 'Sure you can guess how that went!





*Can you tell what it is yet?*

### **Borders camping weekend**

This weekend seems to be growing in popularity each year and with good reason. The Kirkfield campsite in Town Yetholm is well run and maintained, its conveniently positioned in a beautiful part of the country and has a friendly pub and tea room nearby. Unfortunately the instigator of the event, John Powell, couldn't make it this year but a Saturday run was organised in his absence by Bob and Alan and was enjoyed by all who

joined in. The delights of Kelso and Wooler were also sampled by those looking for a less energetic afternoon.

The Norton count this year was higher than ever - I counted five Featherbed twins, two singles (one featherbed Inter, very unusual), seven Commandos and an interesting selection of "other brands"

### **Events**

September

SCMCC Autumn Classic Gathering  
Sep 18, 2016 from 11:00 to 16:00  
The Four Seasons Hotel, St Fillans

Grampian Transport Museum  
Autumn Jumble Sep 25, 2016  
Grampian Transport Museum,  
Alford

October

Peebles Autojumble Oct 2, 2016  
Drill Hall, Peebles

TVNOC Autumn lunch meeting Oct  
23, 2016  
Tullybanocher café, Comrie

