

Walk Through the United Kingdom and Ireland. 2026

9/21/2026 through 11/15

Results of Week 1 9/21 through 9/27

During this week we collectively walked 413 miles and had 22 participants. Sources for photos and other images are given in smaller front near the image. You can click on images to increase their size for a better view. The blue line  on map of Ireland and the United Kingdom indicates the places we plan to visit on this pilgrimage. A magenta line  on the map for the week shows how far we walked that week. **Note: This document is copyrighted by K. Scharer, 2026, except where other copyrights are noted.**



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Dotted lines on maps represent air flights or ferries taken.

To give you an idea of size, the state of Alabama has roughly the same amount of land as England while the state of Oregon is approximately the same size as the United Kingdom as a whole, but not including the Republic of Ireland, which is approximately a fourth of the United Kingdom.

We began our pilgrimage by traveling to Charlotte Airport for a flight to Glasgow, Scotland. Like Ireland, Catholicism was at one time the primary religion in Scotland, but King Henry VIII of England changed that. Briefly after the end of his reign, Mary Queen of Scotland ruled and she was Catholic, but she had a short reign and gradually Protestant religions became more popular among the Scots. However, some Catholics always remained, although many of them could not openly acknowledge their religion for many years. Now Catholics can practice their religion freely, but fewer Scots practice any faith, just as has happened elsewhere.

We visited Glasgow first since it was our arrival destination. Glasgow is the largest city of Scotland. In the past, Glasgow was widely known as an industrial city due to its heavy focus on shipbuilding; now it is known for its University and research, finance, industry, and commerce. In 1990 it became the European Capital of Culture due to its many cultural advantages. Running through the city and serving as a divider between the north- and south sides, the Clyde river used to be home to several



dockyards. In more recent years most of these ports are history and Glasgow has become more known for its adventurous nightlife and its witty, outgoing inhabitants.



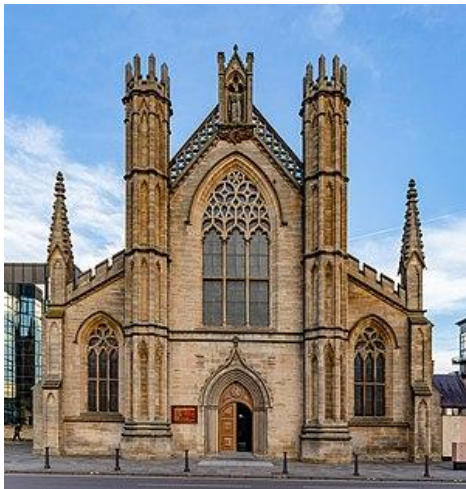
Panoramic view of Glasgow Left

Glasgow's more modern cityscape is

pictured left. 瑞丽江的河水, CC BY-SA 4.0

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Our first stop here was to see the Metropolitan Cathedral Church of Saint Andrew. It is the mother church of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Glasgow. The Cathedral, which was designed in the Neo Gothic style and completed in 1816; it lies on the north bank of the River Clyde. St Andrew's Cathedral is the seat



of the Archbishop of Glasgow. Saint Andrew is the patron saint of Scotland, left. No machine-readable author provided. Finlay McWalter assumed (based on copyright claims)., CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons, left. Michael Beckwith, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons, interior view.

The church building is modest in scale, without a steeple or bell tower. This was due primarily to continuing restrictions on



the prominence of Catholic places of worship under the Relief Act of 1791, that were not ultimately repealed until the later Catholic Relief Act of 1829. In the wake of the Restoration of the Scottish hierarchy 1878, the church of St Andrew was eventually raised to the status of pro-Cathedral in 1884 and was also extensively renovated at that time .

See page for author, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons, below.

Next, we visited the Cathedral of St. Mungo which is shown left. It is also called the old cathedral. St. Mungo is reported to have founded Glasgow in the 6th century. Mungo is a nick name, given to him by St. Serf, who helped raise him as a child.. Mungo's birth name was Kentigern. In Latin, the word means prince.

After exploring Glasgow, a bit - we discovered it is known for its music scene and art - we departed for Carfin a historic small mining village to see a Lourdes shrine. It was built in the early



1920s, when parish priest, Fr. Thomas N. Taylor, engaged the unemployed miners of the village to build the shrine. It was built using the template of the Lourdes Grotto at Massabielle; France, allowing people in Scotland to venerate the Blessed Virgin without having to travel to France. We spent some time here praying for those he knew were ill. Rosser1954, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons, shrine below, left.



From Carfin we headed to Motherwell, a bit larger town to see the Cathedral Church of Our Lady of Good Aid (left, below) which opened as a Roman Catholic parish church in December 1900. It was elevated to the status of cathedral in 1948. The cathedral is of Gothic revival style. The name of Motherwell comes from a well, the Lady Well, formerly dedicated to the Virgin Mary. A sign on Ladywell Road indicates the location of the well.

Anne Burgess / Motherwell Cathedral Via Wikimedia. The church



was elevated to the status of Cathedral in 1948, when the area became a diocese.

Next, we headed north to visit Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park. Mimihitam, CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons. Loch



Lomond is the largest fresh -water lake in Scotland, made famous by a ballad, “The Bonnie Banks o’ Loch Lomond”

From Loch Lomond we headed west to Oban on the west coast and then took a ferry to reach the Isle of Iona. St. Columba had his monastery there. What is known about St.

Columba comes from the writings of the ninth abbot of Iona, Adomnán, who wrote about the life of St. Columba. Columba arrived in Scotland in 563 AD. The saint settled with the Gaels who lived in the coast region. After the Gaels began converting to Christianity, they granted Columba the Isle of Iona as a site for building his abbey. He is considered to have brought Christianity to the Scots, although not all at once. The Picts of northern Scotland were more resistant to converting than the Gaels.

For the Gaelic kings, St. Columba’s monastery served to educate the kings’ sons and St. Columba also served as an intermediary between the Gaels and the Scottish Picts as well as with neighboring Ireland. In turn for his blessings and service, St. Columba was given land for the abbey and protection by the kings.

We have all heard the story of St. George slaying the dragon; St. Columba was reported to have chased away the Loch Ness Monster who was attacking one of Columba's companions who was trying to cross the loch. Columba made the sign of the cross and commanded the monster to make a speedy retreat; the monster complied with this admonishment and the Picts who were there were astonished and began to glorify God. They had recently lost one of their men to the monster. This encounter of St. Columbo is one of the earliest recorded accounts of the Loch Ness Monster. The wub, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons, stained glass image, left.



After his death at the end of the 6th century, the Columban monks continued to spread the Good Word. They began establishing other monasteries throughout Scotland, Ireland, and even as far as northern England. We will visit a monastery when we visit northern England which was built by a monk educated in the Ionian monastery. As Columba's works were spread by the new monasteries, pilgrimage to Iona became more numerous. Even kings wanted to be buried near Columba. As a result, a pilgrimage and processional routes developed and were marked by a Celtic crosses. One of the most important achievements of the Iona Monastery was the Book of Kells, which I hope we will see in Dublin where it currently resides. It is a masterpiece book of scripture with gorgeous illustrations done during the Dark Ages.

The Vikings raided Iona in 794 AD and eradicated the Abbey. In 849 AD, his relics were collected from the site and distributed to Ireland and Alba, Italy which is near Turin.



The Monymusk Reliquary, left, from around 750 AD, is thought to contain a relic of St Columba. It became a powerful symbol of nationhood and was carried before the Scots army as it marched into war. This reliquary is thought to be the Brechbennoch which was carried by the Scots at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314. National Museum of Scotland, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons, left.

After learning about the Iona site, we ferried back to the mainland to Fort William, taking in a huge variety of scenery, from countryside fields and forests along the shores of the loch to open moorlands to rugged mountains.

We briefly stopped at Fort William on the beautiful



untouched sands of Loch Eil and Loch Linnhe, two smaller lochs before Loch Ness.

Clement The P Adventure, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, view of Fort William. Fort

William is second largest city in the Highlands and the commercial center for the area. It is known for the range of activities associated with three mountains: Glen Coe in the south, Ben Nevis east, and Glenfinnan west. Ben Nevis is the highest peak in Scotland. All three mountains serve hikers and mountain climbers.

Then we continued north to Fort Augustus, a settlement at the south-west end of Loch Ness, Scottish Highlands. Its economy is heavily reliant on tourism. Peter Glyn, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons, image of



Fort Augustus. The image shows a canal connecting to Loch Ness. We went to mass here at St. Peter and St. Benedict's Church, shown right. It is a pretty grey stone church with red trim which gives it a festive air. ©k.scharer, 2007 Then we headed north along the



Great Glen Way, a footpath that runs from Fort Augustus to Inverness. This recently opened 'high route' offered us fantastic views of the Highlands and down to the lochs which dominate this part of Scotland.

As we walked north along the Great Glen Way, we all spent some time looking for the Loch Ness Monster but to no avail! We did visit a local museum which explained the various attempts to find the monster and described what people may have been seeing.

Loch Ness extends for approximately 23 miles and flows from southwest to northeast and connects via the Ness River to the North Sea. It is the second-largest Scottish loch by surface area after Loch Lomond. However, it is much deeper than Loch Lomond so it has the largest volume of water in the British Isles. As we walked along the Loch, we saw the ruins of Urquhart Castle, right, Daniel Kraft, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons. The castle dates from the 13th to the 16th centuries, This castle played a part in the Wars of Scottish Independence in the 14th century. Urquhart was partially destroyed in 1692 to prevent its use by Jacobite forces, and subsequently decayed.



In Inverness we visited the Church of St. Columba for Mass, shown below, right. St Columba High Church, Inverness by Bill Harrison, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons..

Inverness is generally considered to be the major city of the highlands and serves about 51% of the entire



Scottish landmass. It is the most northern city in the country. It is also the fastest growing city in the country and contains about one fourth of the Highlands' population. In 2024 it was rated as the happiest city in the United Kingdom!

Mike McBey, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons, cityscape. The picture (left) shows the Ness river running from



Loch Ness to the Firth leading to the North Sea.



We also visited St. Mary's which is right beside the river and went to Mass there. Kitgehrke, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, St. Mary's right and interior left. It is simply furnished but has a beautiful altar and lovely stained-glass windows.

We explored the Inverness Castle ruins, pictured below left, Daniel Kraft, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons.



After exploring these various sights, we enjoyed a nice evening at a pub. While local foods were available few of our group were willing to try the local specialties, such as haggis or neeps!

Thanks for participating in our walk this week!
Your Tour Director,
Kathy Scharer