

Walk Through the United Kingdom and Ireland. 2026

9/21/2026 through 11/15

Results of Week 2 9/28 through 10/04

During this week we collectively walked 519 miles and had 22 participants. Sources for photos and other images are given in smaller font near the image. You can click on images to increase their size for a better view. A magenta line on the map here and the map of England later in this week's report for the week, shows how far we walked this week.

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After finishing our visit to Inverness, we headed east to see the famous Culloden Battlefield. This site was where the final uprising by the Jacobites occurred in mid-April of 1746. The Jacobites wanted to restore the Stuart Kings to the Scottish throne but they were soundly defeated by the forces then controlling the Scottish government. The Jacobites were defeated in one hour and lost twice as many men than the government lost. The Culloden Visitor Center is beside the battlefield. There is a display of battlefield artifacts as well as a display explaining why the conflict between the two forces occurred. While the battle lasted only one hour, it affected the life in the Highlands permanently.



Memorial cairn erected in 1881, right. Culloden battlefield, memorial by Flying Stag, CC BY-SA 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons.

We continued our pilgrimage heading east and somewhat south, entering the beautiful Cairngorm Mountains where Balmoral Castle (left) stands. Mike McBey, CC



BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons Interestingly, although the Balmoral Estate is in the Cairngorms National Park, it is the private property of the King Charles III, who inherited it from his mother. Prince Albert purchased the land for Queen Victoria and it has become the summer home of the reigning monarch and family ever since. The land surrounding the castle, some 50,000 acres,

includes part of the River Dee valley and extends to the mountains, as can be seen in the photo right. Of course, we could not enter the castle since it is private property..

Herbert Frank from Wien (Vienna), AT, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons, right

We continued walking through the mountains to the east coast of Scotland heading for Aberdeen. As we approached from the west, we saw Royal Deeside, which runs behind Balmoral Castle. A large part of the Royal Deeside overlaps the Cairngorms National Park. It contains the third highest



mountain in Scotland, known as Braeriach. This mountain is where the river originates as it flows to Aberdeen.

One of the many sights we saw as we walked through this area was a herd of shaggy highland cattle. The highland cattle are distinguished by their straight horns and very shaggy coats which has two layers, one is a slightly curly, oily outer coat with a shorter downy undercoat. They come in a range of colors from white to black and some even have some stripes to their coats. The coats are the longest found in any breed of cattle and serve as effective insulation in cold weather, common in Scotland winters.

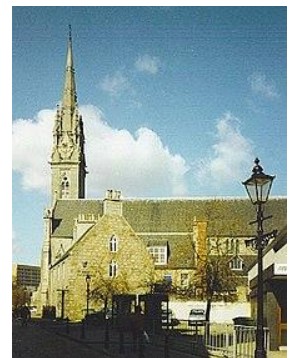


AgainErick, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, left. Although smaller in height than USA cattle, they can still weigh up to 1765 pounds for bulls and 1100 pounds for the cows. They have less cholesterol in their protein and butterfat content is higher than in other. The bulls can grow to a whopping 1764 pounds, and the cows up to 1100 pounds, and their milk generally has higher than average butterfat content of their milk is higher. They appear almost cuddly and as a result miniature versions are now being bred for family pets!

When we reached Aberdeen, we headed first to St. Peter's Church, below left, the oldest Catholic church in the city, circa



1804.. OEJUTILA, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons. After the reformation it was the first Catholic church built in Aberdeen but was closed when St. Mary's Cathedral was built in 1860. St. Peter's was re-opened in 1880. After attending mass at St. Peter's, we then went to visit St. Mary's



Cathedral, right. The church was originally a parish church but was declared a



Cathedral around 1878 and the spire was added around then. It remains the Aberdeen Cathedral at present. Colin Smith / St Mary's Cathedral, Aberdeen, right, AlasdairW, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, left. The interior is somewhat plain but beautiful still and the effect is quite calming.

The city of Aberdeen has the third largest population in Scotland. It was decreed to be a royal burg in the mid 1100's. It's current population is around 2 million people. It has a large seaport and heliport. And it has the fifth oldest University in the English-speaking world. The Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church are the two largest religions in Aberdeen. Aberdeen skyline by Ragazzi99, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, below.



As we head south from Aberdeen, we visited Dunnottar Castle. This castle is perched on the sheer headlands making it easily defensible. The buildings that we saw are primarily from the 1400's and 1500's. The original fortifications are probably

from earlier times, perhaps as early as the 5th century. Dunnottar, left, had served as an important fortification in the defense of Scotland at least up until the Jacobite uprisings of the 1700's. Its location was very strategic in terms of warding off invaders. However, because the owner sided with the losing side in the Jacobite rebellion, the castle was deserted and left to fall into ruins after that rebellion. It was partly restored in the 20th century. During the 1700's the Scottish Crown Jewels, known as the Honors of Scotland, were hidden there when Cromwell's army invaded Scotland. Dunnottar Castle by Mike Pennington, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons, left. The image of the castle left shows how difficult it would be



on a higher piece of land.

Then we headed south and a bit inland to visit Crathes castle, left, near Banchory. The castle replaced the 14th and 15th centuries version. Construction of the current tower house of Crathes Castle was begun in 1553 but delayed several times during its construction due to political problems during the reign of Mary, Queen of Scots. It was completed in 1596. It was donated to the National Trust for Scotland in 1951. Lucas Kendall / Crathes Castle 2025, left.



We also stopped at Drum Castle, right, which was nearby. habiloid, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons, right. It is considered to be among the oldest tower houses in Scotland. Surprisingly, it



has not been altered much over the years. While we were there, we visited the walled garden, pictured left.

Watty62, CC BY-SA 4.0, via

Wikimedia Commons. The

gardens are extensive and beautifully maintained.



We continued south after our visit to

Dundee, Scotland's fourth-largest city. It is in the

eastern central Lowlands. Dundee is located on the north bank of the Firth of Tay. Dundee became a town in the late 1100's and because of its location was important in coastal trading. During the Industrial Revolution it grew rapidly and in the 1800's was the world center for the jute industry. Today, the jute industry is jute about dead but the city has become known for its technology, especially AI, medicine, and life sciences. Dundee is also a leader in international research.

Our first stop was at St. Andrews Cathedral, which was built in Victorian Gothic design in 1836.

St Andrew's Parish Church, Dundee by Douglas Nelson, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia

Commons. It is the oldest Catholic Church in Dundee. The church was elevated to a cathedral in 1923. The sanctuary area was added later by knocking out the back wall and building on top of the clergy house. As a result, the altar area is significantly higher than the body of the cathedral. Another unusual



feature is that the floor slopes from the entrance to the sanctuary. On A92 approaching Dundee by Stanley Howe, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons, above. left.

Dundee is located on the north bank of the Firth of Tay. The hill in the picture above is known as the Dundee Law and it divides the city. There are lots of castles in the area. Here are pictures of three we visited., Claypotts Castle, below left by Douglas Nelson, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons, Mains Castle, below center, Gwen and James Anderson / Mains Castle, center , both dating from the 16th century and Broughty Castle, right TimVickers, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons, dating from the 15th century.



From Dundee we crossed over the

Firth of Tay and headed south to Edinburgh.

As Scotland's capital city, Edinburgh is a lovely city with a mix of medieval buildings and a newer Georgian section. The city is quite hilly as we certainly noticed while touring the city. The newer section has many pretty gardens. Built on what appears to be the highest hill is Edinburgh Castle. The hill is the result of volcanic activity. Castle left, Kim Traynor, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons Fortunately we were able to tour the castle and see the crown jewels and the Scone of Destiny, which are kept in the Castle. The Scone of Destiny is comprised of red sandstone. It is a fairly large block of stone that I think is about 24"x16"x10" (although I admit to not being the best judge of size). used in the coronation of Scottish Kings from the mid 1200's. to 1296 when the English captured the Scone and began using it for the coronation of the British Royals. The kings originally sat on the stone during the coronation but later a chair was devised with a space beneath the seat to hold the stone . in 1996, the stone was returned to Scotland but was transported to Westminster Abbey for King Charles' recent coronation.



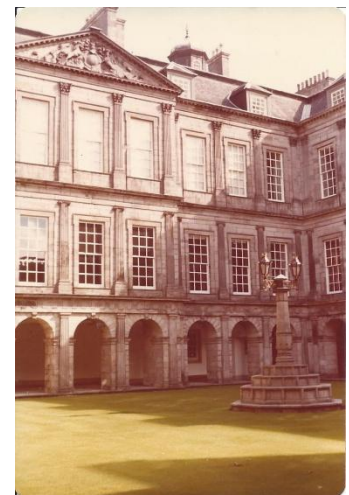
We then visited Holyroodhouse Palace where the United Kingdom monarch stay when on official business in Edinburgh. @kscharer, 1974, courtyard of the Holyroodhouse Palace, right, and view of a park from the hilltop, below left.



The city is located on the Firth of Forth. A firth is an enlarged exit of a river into the ocean or a place where the glacial has cut a channel for the sea to encroach upon the land. Thomas Nugent /



The Forth bridges from the air, center,



After visiting the castle, we went to see the nearby chapel. St Margaret's Chapel, right, is the oldest surviving building in Edinburgh, Scotland. It was constructed in the 1100's. Restoration of the Chapel was done in the 1900's. Jonathan Oldenbuck, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons After the reformation, the chapel was no longer used. St. Margaret (1045-1093) was an English princess. She and her family fled England after the Normans invaded when she was 22 years old. Two years later she married the King of Scotland. Maragret did many charitable deeds such as having a ferry built across the Firth so that people could visit Dunfermline Abbey more easily. Pope Innocent IV canonized her in 1250. The chapel was built by one of her sons, David I of Scotland in her honor.



We also climbed Arthur's Seat, right. Kim Traynor, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons This hill is also the result of volcanic activity. It is 822 feet tall but we were able to climb it from the east side, which is known as the easiest side to climb. There was a developed path to the top. There are legends and tales suggesting the name came from King Arthur and was possibly the site of Camelot.



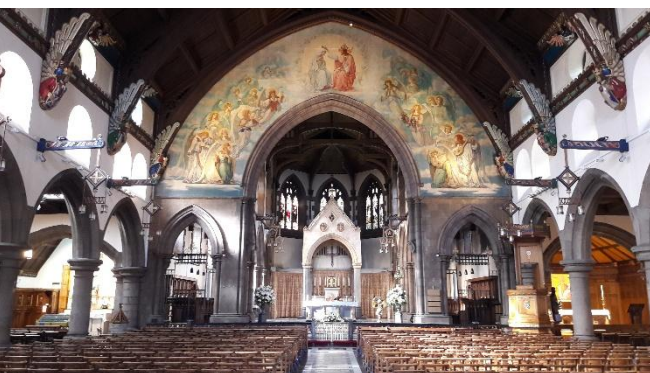
Next, we visited the National Monument of Scotland. This monument has been built on Calton Hill and honors the Scottish military men who died during the wars with Napoleon. Saffron Blaze, CC BY 3.0, via Wikimedia, left.

Of course, we also sought out the Metropolitan Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption, AKA St Mary's



Metropolitan Cathedral, right. It is the mother church of Scots Catholicism. Michael T R B Turnbullderivative work: Georgfotoart, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons, exterior view; Cardofk, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, interior.

In 1814, a chapel was built, known as the Chapel of St. Mary, (note the is not the same building as the original St. Mary's Chapel we visited by the castle.). Over many years the chapel was enlarged and



renovated into a more substantial church. In 1878 the Catholic hierarchy was restored in Scotland, this chapel was elevated to a pro-cathedral for the newly established Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh. By 1886, it was elevated to the Cathedral for the diocese. At that time, it was consecrated as the Metropolitan Cathedral. We attended Mas while we were here.

We also had some free time to visit the shops and we went to a restaurant serving typical Scottish food. We had some great Scottish Aberdeen Angus beef and also a variety of seafood (Salmon and shellfish), an advantage of being on the coast. And for dessert

we tried a Cloutie Dumpling; the dumpling is a sticky dough made of flour, suet, dried fruit, molasses, spices, eggs, and milk. It is then wrapped in a cloth and tied up, placed in boiling water for several hours and then dried in the oven at low temperature until dry. It slices like a cake or bread. It was good!

Then we turned south and headed for Melrose Abbey, built on the site of another abbey known now as Old Melrose Abbey. St. Cuthbert (died 687), who grew up nearby, trained at Old Melrose Abbey.

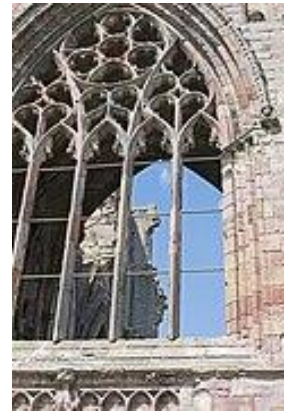


The new Abbey was built in the same site on a much grander scale. The Abbey is now partly in ruins, but it was founded by the Cistercians. The abbey served as the main house for the Order until the Reformation in the early 1500's.

Melrose Abbey by Richard Sutcliffe, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons Currently it is considered a historic monument by Scotland because various Scottish Kings and other nobles were buried there. The remaining portion of the Abbey has lovely carvings depicting not only saints

but also dragons, plants and even some gargoyles, see photos right and below

Ymblanter, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, right; Graham Hogg, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons, below left



There is a small museum located there now that contains many of the statues and carvings that have been removed from their original sites to prevent further damage from erosion by the elements. The abbey became the mother church of the Cistercian order in Scotland. It was a wealthy Abbey. Many of the monarchs and nobles who were buried there made major contributions of land and other sources of income, such as the exclusive right to fish in certain areas. The Abbey and nearby town were attacked in 1322 by the English

army. Much of the area was destroyed. King Robert, the Bruce had the abbey restored but it was attacked again in 1385 by England. The abbey was burned by the English in part because the Abbey supported the Avignon Pope Clement VII, Over the next 100 years various restorations were made.

Once again, this time In 1544, war raged between England and Scotland because the English wanted to marry the infant Queen Mary of Scotland to the son of Henry the Eighth. As a result, the abbey experienced major destruction and was never fully rebuilt. The last remaining monk at the Abbey died in 1590. Later on, a portion of the abbey was converted into a parish church for the town. It is now considered a national historic monument.

Continuing south we crossed the border into England in the Northumberland region. The point where the east coast border between Scotland and England begins just about at the river shown by the blue line on the map below. Nearby is the famous early monastery founded by St. Aidan of Lindisfarne, known as the Holy Island. St. Aidan was trained at the Iona Abbey that we visited last week.

The Holy Island is surrounded by the sea but close to the shore. It can be driven to or walked to from the mainland during low tide periods. The causeway lists the tide tables and when crossing is permitted on both sides of the causeway. Our timing was good. Tides are normally about 12 hours apart and take about 6 hours to change between high and low tides. However, there is an explicit timetable that lists the safe crossing times for the Holy Isle and the times for the day we visited were from 10:30am until 5:30pm. Since we arrived at low tide, which gave us 6 hours to explore the Holy Island. We were able

to cross over the causeway, have time to explore, and then return to the mainland safely. PAT is free software.



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Why did we want to visit the Holy Isle?

During our visit to Iona in Scotland, we discovered that St. Aidan had been sent from the Iona Monastery to the Holy Island to evangelize the population of the Northumberland region in northern England. PAT is free software. Copyright © 2010, 2013 by Ian Macky, map of England

St. Aidan lived from 590–651 A.D. He was from Ireland but was educated for the priesthood at the Iona Monastery. St. Aidan worked among the people in North Umbria meeting them in their daily lives face to face. He was kind to the people of the region, tried to help them with their problems and needs, gave practical advice as well as spiritual advice. He tried to exemplify Jesus' teachings and by his behavior drew others to Catholicism.

Aidan also built a huge monastery to train monks as well as laymen to live Catholicism. Then he sent these disciples out to evangelize new souls, train them to evangelize and send them out to follow the same path. St. Aidan thus created a

continually growing band of evangelizers who live well beyond St. Aidan's time on earth. Lewis Clarke, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons, below left. Nigel Chadwick, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons, church below, right.



The monastery was destroyed during the Viking invasions in 793 but was later rebuilt in 1093 as a priory after the successful Norman Conquest of England. Over the centuries, not only the priory which was dissolved in 1536 along with the others in England but also the castle and other buildings declined into ruins. However, the parish church of St. Mary the Virgin parish church



which was built in 635 AD and later destroyed by the Normans, was restored in 1860 and serves today as the church for the islanders. The population is small; only about 150 people inhabit the island year-round. After exploring the various ruins and the church with its Gospel Garden, we recrossed the causeway and headed southwest to Hexham.

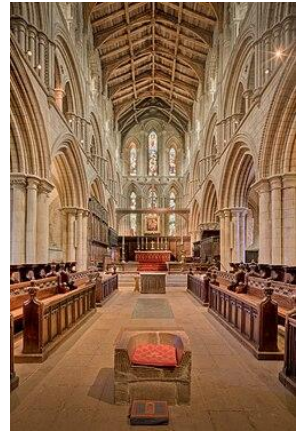


When we arrived in Hexham we were still in Northumberland. Hexham is on the south bank of the River Tyne. Bob Castle, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons, left. Michael D Beckwith, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons, below right, interior in 2014. Our goal was to find Hexham Abbey which originated as a monastery founded by Wilfrid in 674 AD but was enlarged during the 1100's and further additions were added in the early 1900's. Of course, various other renovations occurred throughout the centuries. The crypt of the original monastery still survives and incorporates many stones taken from nearby Roman ruins. After the monasteries were dissolved in 1536, the building was used as a parish church and then was

taken over by the city and used as the city's court. However, in 2014, the Abbey purchased back their building and developed it as a permanent exhibition. We enjoyed seeing the beautiful stained glass in the Abbey as well as a large tombstone from the Roman ruins.

Because Hexham is fairly close to the Scottish border it often suffered during the various border wars between Scotland and England. It was burned in 1297 and then after rebuilding was threatened again in 1312 but the Abbey and the town paid a large ransom to avoid that fate. In 1346, King David II of Scotland sacked the monastery during an invasion.

In 1464 the Wars of the Roses occurred. There was a battlefield during that war somewhere near Hexham, called the Battle of Hexham. After the battle, the Duke of Somerset, who was the losing commander for the Lancastrian army was executed in the town of Hexham's marketplace.



Next, we sought out St Mary's Roman Catholic Church, left. It was built in just two years beginning in 1828. St. Mary's is in Gothic Revival style. Peter Brooks / St Marys Catholic Church, Hexham. We attended a daily Mass here before seeing more of the city.



We also saw the Old Gaol, right, It was one of the first jails specifically meant to be a jail in England. Steven Fruitsmaak, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons . Before that jails were often re-purposed buildings or just rooms in a building serving another purpose. The Hexham jail was a place to hold prisoners until they went to court. It was built around 1333 on the order of the local archbishop. Currently there is a museum in the building.

Since the 1800's, Hexham has been noted for its fine leather work, especially gloves. There were four tanners in the city . Currently, the major employer in the city is a chipboard manufacturer.

Then we continued to Newcastle upon Tyne, which is the first major city in England coming south from Scotland. It is named after the castle built by the eldest son of William the Conqueror who is called Newcastle (Surprise!) And the town was on the River Tyne. The city was first occupied by the Romans and remnants of Hadrian's wall can still be found there. The town and later as a city were often caught up in the border wars between England and Scotland and sometimes there were other invaders such as the Danes. In order to provide some protection for the town, which was really England's most northern fortress, a 25-foot wall was built made of stone to encircle the town.

In 1530, the city received a monopoly of coal which helped it prosper and become a major city. The phrase "carrying coals to Newcastle" (meaning a pointless behavior) reflects the city status as a major supplier of coal.

Perhaps a more dubious distinction, in 1767, Newcastle upon Tyne opened a regional lunatic asylum. Prior to that individuals with major mental health disorders were often sent to charitable homes for the ill or sometimes religious based facilities. As early as the 1200's such places were used to contain the mentally ill and sometimes to get rid of unwanted females. Until 1891, men had complete control over what happened to their wives and any females under their guardianship. Sometimes men sent their unwanted females to places that confined the mentally ill (mostly there was no real treatment) in order to get rid of females who were not insane but no longer wanted or because the woman had property or funds the man wanted for himself.

Newcastle on Tyne officially became a city in 1882. Removal of the protective wall allowed expansion of the city. During the 1800's it was known for shipbuilding and heavy engineering. Newcastle developed even further during Industrial revolution. The city is known for its two bridges over the Tyne River Shown in the photo below left. JimmyGuano, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

While we were in Newcastle, we saw both bridges, pictured below left.



JimmyGuano, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, 2 bridges. Of

course,
we went
to see
the local



cathedral known
as the Cathedral of St. Mary. As often happened in England,
a church would start as a parish church and then was
elevated to the cathedral and that was how St. Mary's began
also. Garcheva, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, right above. The building
is in Gothic Revival architectural style and opened in 1844.
The parish church was elevated to a Cathedral in 1850. Michael
D Beckwith, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons Nave in 2017, left.

An interesting note is that the church was financed
primarily by parishioners who donated through halfpenny
subscriptions to the building fund. The parishioners were
poor immigrants who needed a Catholic Church. While we consider pennies practically worthless, in the
mid 1800's, a halfpenny could buy a loaf of bread, or a ticket for local rail transportation or a candle. We
were able to attend Mass here. The Cathedral is the sixth tallest structure in the city We ended our week
here by attending Mass at St. Mary's.

Thanks for participating, Your Tour Director
Kathy Scharer