

# TRAVEL PASS TOUR

## West & North Scotland

Tuesday, 24<sup>th</sup> May to Saturday, 4<sup>th</sup> June,  
1983

John took a trip round west and north Scotland travelling by bus, train and ferry, and staying in youth hostels. He made notes in a diary with the smallest writing ever. I have transferred these notes into this "travelogue". - Paul

## Monday, 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 1983

Drove through to Glasgow and had tea with Moira and Paul. Left the car with Moira.

## Tuesday, 24<sup>th</sup> May, 1983

Out at 0700 for the bus into town. Would have caught a 61 no bother if someone hadn't moved the stop from the bottom of Amulree St along to the old school. Caught a red bus instead. Ample time at station. Rolling stock is antique. The engine makes more smoke than a steam engine. No wonder no-one travels on this line. However, off we go. Weather is dull but dry. Resist temptation to thumb nose at commuters waiting to go to work.

Up past Helensburgh, the trackside is littered with bluebells, gorse and occasional clumps of primroses. A patch of blue sky just before Arrochar, and the sun comes out before Crianlaroch. All in all a pleasant journey, and the train arrives on time.

Dump most of my gear in a luggage locker and saunter on to the MV Caledonia for the trip to Craignure. Mull looks a bit dull but improves as we get closer. Have to pay for the bus into Tobermory but so what. Nice place Tobermory, could have a couple more hours there, but not much longer. Wandered round to lighthouse at ...

Bus left at 1530 and I was on it. Ferry was a couple of minutes late leaving Craignure and slightly late at Oban. Met a man who had just missed the Glasgow train as a consequence.

No accommodation problems at YH. Washed and went out for a fish supper, with an ice lolly for pudding. Got back, wrote this load of rubbish, and went to bed.

## Wednesday, 25<sup>th</sup> May, 1983

A driech looking day. The warden decided that I looked big enough for the kamikaze chore – go round the dorms opening curtains and windows! Luckily no discontents. Left hostel 0830 and walked to railway pier, posting film en-route. Weather deteriorated – occasional drizzle and spots of rain. Cloud north and south of town about 200ft. Looked at the Lismore ferry boat – a converted landing craft with minimal shelter and no bar. Gone off the idea of a cruise to Lismore. Perhaps cruise to Craignure at 1000.

So into town and the tourist office. No, they don't have up to date timetables either, although they were assured they were sent 'overnight delivery' last Friday. Wandered round to Au Comunn Gaileadhach and paid deposit on Gaelic course for July in Stornoway. Weather no better, never mind cruise to Craignure. Walk up to McCaig's Tower and behold – weather starts to improve. In fact it becomes sunny periods without showers. Hand about waiting for cloud to clear on Mull but that seems to be asking too much. Down into town for a bar lunch (2 pints McEwans 80/- in the Lorne Hotel) then off to the RMS Claymore which departs on time at 1330.

As we sail up the Sound of Mull the weather gets even better but no sign of the Waverley. Have lunch – stewing steak £1.60 – good quality and plenty of it. Unfortunately I parted company with it and half a pint of Dryborough's Heavy half was across the Minch. I blame the beer. The weather is still good, the sea calm, but there is a slight swell and the bar has no

windows. Repair to the upper deck for the rest of the crossing to Castlebay which is a nice town but the castle is much smaller than I expected. Much impressed with the speed of off-loading, not to mention the speed with which the local shopkeepers pounce on their share of the fresh produce.

On to Lochboisdale, think of high tea but decide against it. Off the boat, into pub, pint of light and an ounce of Condor (thank God – down to last two fills). Ask barman price of bed and breakfast. ‘Something scandalous’ he said ‘but we’re full’. Tourist Info fixes me up for 40p, sharing caravan, rest of town full. Other occupant is 74 year old Londoner up for a week’s cycling tour for the tenth year in succession. Pleasant enough fellow but inclined to talk with his ears shut. Since he got there first, he gets big bedroom. I decide living room couch better than small cupboard which is the alternative. It (the couch that is) is longer than the cupboard! Landlady’s husband is the postman. Another lodger is from Northern Lighthouses, marooned by his ship to tend to local lights. He had planned to get a berth on ferry for the night but they were fully booked so he has to get up at 0600 to catch boat. Stay up late – till 2330! Nice night outside.

### Thursday, 26<sup>th</sup> May, 1983

Breakfast at 0845. Apparently Tobermory pier is now closed so Waverley will not be calling there today. Wander downtown for the bus to Benbecula.

As I got on, there was a woman on the bus who opened her mouth and did not shut it again until we reached our destination. Mostly complaints about ferries not meeting trains or usually vice versa. Also amazing number of rapacious landladies who don't give value for money. Arrive at airport and shoot off quick, manage to lose her. Tea and sarnies - 20p for tea, 45 for sarnies - not too badly filled. RHF are loading a "heve?" outside - very slowly. Wander out for next bus about fifteen minutes before time. Five minutes after time (with all P.O. vehicles gone), begin to worry about it. Check timetable. Ask airport official. Don't worry, usually late.

It turns up five minutes later. That woman is on it. Luckily she latches on to another couple. Same incessant drivel. Gentleman behaves like one. His daughter makes occasional vane attempts to interrupt flow. They get out of bus before terminus. I did too! Congratulate gentleman on his forbearance before we part.

Down the pub for a few pints (3 Tennants Lights) won't see the woman there. Don't you believe it. She comes in looking for the ladies toilet. Studiously ignore her. She is directed elsewhere. Local says he said good morning to her in the street and was caught for 20 minutes. Pub shuts at 2.30. Down to the tourist office to ask if anything to do in Lochmaddy. She is there! Poor lass behind the counter is being asked all sorts of questions about post busses in Kishorn. I ask my question and like a hero, run.

As I wander meet daughter from bus. She says, knock on door, father will make tea. No thanks, as on my way to view a footbridge which, were it not unsafe, would lead to the seaweed factory. On the way back, father comes out and twists my arm. Spent a pleasant hour drinking

tea, eating scones, and slagging the woman on the bus. Couple are from Paisley, up to sell grandfather's croft, he having died in April. Nice buddies.

Watch ferry approaching. Apparently it is an impressive sight on winter evenings, lit up like a Christmas tree. However, I'd better move and catch it, which I do. Note this deviation from schedule. Lochmaddy is pleasant enough for a few hours but I've already seen the high spots and would have nothing to do tomorrow morning, especially if it rains. Weather still good but wing northeast and cold. Across to Uig. Think of tea and head for cafeteria. The woman is there. Lose my appetite.

Off the boat and a forty minute hike uphill to the hostel. Ouch. No problem with beds. Have a shower - 10p for 4 minutes but full instructions on how to optimise the time, i.e. take clothes off before inserting money. Discuss plans with a few punters then retire. Man in next bed apologises in case he disturbs me getting up at 7. Don't worry, I'm getting up then too. Goodnight.

### Friday, 27<sup>th</sup> May, 1983

Up at 7 nae bother. So is almost everyone else. The 0915 ferry for Tarbert seems quite a magnet. I set off about 8 to walk down to the pierhead for the bus. Encounter the first spots of rain since Oban. Decide to put jacket on but rain goes off before the order reaches my legs. Have a horrible thought – what if that woman gets off the ferry and on to my bus? In that case, I'll get on the boat. However, no sign thank goodness.

Bus goes to Glasgow but change at Portree to the Inverness bus to ensure catching train. Driver shifts along so plenty of time at Kyle. Still overcast, occasional patches of blue sky but sun is elsewhere. More cloud going east except for brief spell of sun around Garve and Strathpeffer. Get off at Dingwall. Spend afternoon wandering around town and admiring view of Dornoch Firth from the cemetery. Northern train timed three minutes after I expect. This could have interesting implications for tomorrow.

Pleasant journey to Helmsdale. Peace of mind rudely shattered when getting off train. Umpteen million kids get off too. Could the hostel be full? There can't be anywhere else they might be going in such a small place. Sprint up the hill to the hostel. Gasp, gasp, any beds? Yes, still a few to spare but expecting 12 kids anyway. This could be a noisy night.

Light supper, phone home, and retire – having found out everyone else in the hostel is going to Orkney too. Apparently there is a folk festival there this weekend. Life could be about to become very interesting. Towel still in Uig.

### Saturday, 28<sup>th</sup> May, 1983

What a night. Two kids were sick (eating too much during the day). Finally settled down about 2 in the morning. Get up sharp to avoid the crush in the kitchen. Chore is to dump some small branches on nearby waste ground. Keep head down and hope no-one sees me.

Off just after 8 and wander down to harbour to pass the time. There used to be a castle but it was removed to make way for a bridge. Train on time. Kids are going to Orkney. One of the teachers thinks it's Stromness but not sure.

Travel at rear of train on assumption of a reasonable split at Georgemas June, then notice goods for Wick in guards van. Just before GJ, move up train. Communicating doors already closed. Train stops outside station. Front coaches detach, go in and reversed on to waiting engine. Original engine comes back for Wick train and pulls it in to platform. I, and two others, leap out and rush along, leap into guards van. What a way to run a railway.

Next problem is roughish crossing to Stromness. Captain decided to go the long way round through Scapa Flow. Calmer and much more interesting. Arrive Stromness 15 minutes late.

Make a run for YH. Notice on door says 3 beds left. Another fellow waiting. I'm not hanging around for two hours so write name on notice, dump sack and trot off to museum. Wander up and down main street, buy food. Return to hostel at 1630 to find it open, and a different party of schoolkids going in and out. Warden's opening remark is 'I should have stayed sober today'. He doesn't know whether he's coming or going. There are no beds available – I have been gazumped by one guy who had booked and two 'squareheads' – the warden's word for it – whose four female companions are going to sleep on the floor. Pick up my bed and walk.

There is a private hostel in town where I get a bed for £2. Rolls and cheese for tea. Go out and check beer in 3 local hotels, decide Stromness Hotel is best. Go back and write postcards. Inspect schedule for Go Orkney tours. A German tells me I should go on the Sunday tour except he thinks it is fully booked. An Australian lass says no, they have put an extra bus on. I could get this tour from Stromness and get off at Kirkwall. Phone up and book. Three Aussie girls going to Stromness Hotel for dance. I join them in the bar. Amanda, Leone, Ann. Dance doesn't start till bar closes (about 12) and finishes just after one. I dance twice. I must be drunk. Back to hostel and crash.

### Sunday, 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1983

Late start today. Don't get up till 0830. Rolls and cheese for breakfast. No sign of Aussies.

Wander down to harbour to await tour. Girls appear at 1030 looking for somewhere to eat. No chance. Busses turn up at 1100. Almost 25 tourists in all. Tour goes to Yesnaby (sea cliffs) for fossils (blue greens), flowers (primula scotica) and accidental short eared owl. Marwick Head for nesting fulmar petrels, kittiwakes, razorbills and guillemots. Also arctic terns, skuas, and some rare variety of guillemot.

Apparently Kitchiner drowned off the coast here when HMS Hampshire struck a mine and sank in 1916 with few survivors. There is a memorial at the Head which the tour ignores. Davis Lea (the guide) mutters about suspicious circumstances surrounding the sinking. Islanders were positively discouraged from going out to look for survivors.

Leane gets almost back to bus, realises she has not got bag, rushes back up Head to look. We reach bus, bag in bus. Round to Broch of Gurness, still standing 'about 8'. Two of Aussies turn out to be rabbits – burrowing into every conceivable corner. They are last back to bus, though I am not far in front. Little old lady enquires whether I've got central heating in my shirt. Tour now running very late, so skip the Click Mill and straight to Scara Brae. Interesting. Aussies go burrowing while curator tries to keep warm in hut.

First use of A.M. season ticket. Down to ring of Brogar, dull, past Stones of Sterness, to Maeshow. Spot new roof right away. Picts didn't use whitewash. And so to Kirkwall, about 50 minutes late (but no one minds). One little old lady who had hoped to go to church decides to feed body instead (café closes at 1830). Seek out YH. Plenty beds. Discover kids from Helmsdale plus even bigger group of American kids. Only three real hostellers in the place, one being another English septuagenarian cyclist just up from Lands End.

Down to chip shop by harbour. Ignore International takeaway. Wander round harbour eating fish supper (95p). Quick pint in Royal Hotel, and back to hostel. Into quiet room to hide from kids. Wrestle with timetables for coming week. No good ideas. Leave it till tomorrow.

### Monday, 30<sup>th</sup> May, 1983

Up at 7. Too late. Mayhem in the kitchen. Have breakfast, finish yesterdays entry. Sweep passage, shake mats and into town.

Cloud more broken than yesterday, with blue patches. Might even see sun today. Wander into town, visit St Magnus Cathedral. Very impressive inside with a beautifully carved road screen and some fine stained glass. Then Earl's and Bishop's Palaces. Another 40p saved. The period and style of these give the lie to the belief that the north was barbarous. Off down to Italian Chapel on Lamb Holm on the 1130 bus. That allows about 1.5 hours before bus back to Kirkwall. The chapel is beautiful. It was restored in 1960 by the original artist. The effect is unreal. When I walked in the door I actually saw tiled walls and even when I know they were painted it still seemed tiled.

Wandered around the Holm. Very curious cattle they've got here. Whole herd rushed across field to stare at me through fence (I'm not daft!). Walk back across Churchill Barrier No1 to St Mary's, known locally as Holm pronounced HAM to await bus. Pass the time talking to an elderly local who offers me a fill of Bogey Twist. Politely demur. Back to Kirkwall to examine the Tankerness Museum. Interesting. I'm sure there is something missing from their exhibit on kelp making. Buy provisions. Wait for half an hour for sun to shine on St Magnus so I can photograph. No joy. Off to pub for a quick two pints. Sun shining when I emerge. Rush back to cathedral. Cloud blots out sun. Get on bus to Burwick en route to John O'Groats. Bus stops for 10 mins at Italian Chapel. Don't bother getting out.

Ferry tries to demolish pier at JoG. I wasn't even wearing my Waverley teashirt. Large lump out of bumping board (JoG pier is stone!) Now for a two mile walk, but first, fortify myself for the ordeal. Into the pub. Come out and off.

A quarter mile up the road, sign says hostel 3.75 miles, and it's nine o'clock. Shouldn't have wasted time in pub. Might have no time for tea now. Reach hostel forty five minutes later. Over five miles per hour with pack! Don't believe signposts. English lad and two Danish girls in kitchen. Warden is out watching a film. Start tea.

Warden arrives so book in. Told to find bed in dorm B, which actually has D on the door. Warden is a looney. Over tea, warden invites us all to stay up as late as we like. No one wants to. Warden asks for someone to take a shower to run off excessive hot water. Danish lassie says OK. Warden says use men's shower for best effect. Lassie decides to leave it till morning.

Everyone but me does chores since they are all off sharpish in the morning for 0800 bus to catch Orkney ferry, and warden none too keen on getting up at that time. Have I already said warden is a looney – well I'll say it again. Two English bikers take half an hour to get into bed. Disorganised berks.

## Tuesday, 31<sup>st</sup> May, 1983

In spite of their early rise, I'm the first to finish breakfast. They rush off for bus, I drink more tea. Clean up kitchen, write this log, pack up leisurely and wake warden at 0930. Asks me to clean kitchen. I'm not daft.

Outside and wait in sun for bus. Pass the time of day with passing locals. Bus arrives. Got to pay fare. Bother. About an hour to wait for train in Wick. All trains on this line retimed to run later. Ideas of detour to Ullapool vanish since bus leaves Dingwall 6 mins before train arrives. Might as well go to Inverness and then decide.

Train churples on. A woman who was on the tour on Orkney (she who fed the body rather than the soul) gets on at Lairg. She is off home to Keith. Buy provisions at Inverness.

Decide to go to Kyle. Train departs at 1755, and five minutes later I realise I should have gone to Fort William. That would have allowed a cruise round Eigg, Muck and Rum on Wednesday. A bit late for bright ideas. However, a pleasant run down to Kyle. The evening trains cross at Gawe rather than Achnasheen. Hoof it round to hotel. Can of mince for tea. Should have stuck to beans. Small English group in. Two kids, mother, grandmother I think. On bikes! Amazingly disorganised. They seem to have expected cutlery to be supplied. However, they rake around and find enough to get by.

Warden comes in at 2250 and ostentatiously starts to clear ashtrays etc. Take hint and retire. Canadian and Englishman talk about constitutions and legal systems. Pair of balloons.

## Wednesday, 1<sup>st</sup> June, 1983

Awakened about 0430 by sun. I've picked the worst bed in the room for that. Doze until seven, get up. Sun still shining. In fact, there's not a cloud in the sky and the wind is very light. After breakfast, fetch in coal for warden, and collect card. Warden is doing his books. Asks if I am an accountant. No, a programmer. He produces a blinking calculator. I tell him that means battery is flat, and move out.

Down to quay, photograph ferry. Cross to Kyleakin and photograph ferry. Return to Kyle to await Inverness bus to travel to Urquhart Castle. Cloud starts to appear down Loch Duich and is fairly complete by Clunie. By the time we get to Invermoriston, visibility has diminished to about a mile, but at least it's not raining.

Castle quite interesting. Walk into Drumnadrochit with a 45 min break at Lewiston Arms Hotel. Visit the Monster Museum. A rip-off at £1.35. Next bus to Fort Augustus. Just miss boat coming through locks. Wander round town. Not impressed.

Bus to Fort William. Sign at Nevis road end says hostel 3 miles. Takes 37 minutes. Another 5 mph run, but I still don't believe it. Office closed till 2030. Warden must be watching match.

Hostel is overheated and full of foreigners. I should have stayed at Loch Lochy, but too late now. Beds allocated by number. Luckily mine is bottom. Decide to have a shower. Water is cold. What a dump. Roll on tomorrow. What should be a 'quiet room' is a TV lounge. I still don't like grade 1 hostels. It has come on to rain. I don't like Fort William. Half the hostel seems to be going to Mallaig tomorrow. Perhaps I'll go to Broadford. Or even Uig. I could collect my towel there.

## Thursday, 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 1983

Up at 7. For the number of people in the hostel, there are very few early risers. Running out of food so roll and butter for breakfast with the last of the cheese I bought in Stromness. Sugar supplies low, but I don't want to buy two pounds.

There is a bus from the hostel just after 9 so I take that. It's better than walking in the rain. Hang around waiting for trains to Mallaig. They announce that train from G is 13 minutes late and Mallaig train must wait. After a while they announce it won't arrive till 1040. Can I do something else with my time? Not really. Australian girl ask if Kyle ferry will wait. Suggest she ask ticket office. They say yes.

Train finally arrives at 10.42. Find set. Joined by Aussie. Uneventful journey. Do my tourist guide for Aussie. Train arrives an hour late. Boat leaves half an hour late. Could be tight at Kyleakin. Aussie girl off to Inverness. Armadale bus waits for ferry. Full of people doing Mallaig – Kyle – Armadale – Mallaig circuit. When I say full, I mean full. Have to balance sack on my knee from Broadford to Armadale. 80 mins to wait for ferry.

Change mind and decide to stay in Armadale. Could catch up with schedule tomorrow, but why not try something different. Spend an hour studying the timetable and decide on Ullapool vis Inverness. Nip down pub for a quick four pints for supper. Quite a pleasant pub.

## Friday, 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 1983

Another early rise. Cloudy but dry. No chores cos I helped the warden tidy the kitchen last night (Actually I just washed my tea things and put away a few extra cups that had been left on the draining board).

Wander down to Armadale pier for the bus, and encounter the first midges of the year. Vicious little tykes. Wish bus would hurry up. Arrives on time. Shelter at last.

Bus empties pillar boxes on way to Broadford. Buspost? Visit Kyle post office to replenish coffers. Train journey to Inverness is becoming boring. Cycling family, from Kyle YH going to Inverness or Edinburgh. Still disorganised. Mother admits to being nervous on account of first time she has brought kids with her.

Have a pint for lunch and buy milk before boarding bus for Ullapool. 5 other passengers. A good run through to Ullapool. Watch ferry arriving late.

No problems at YH. Seems a well run place. Usual pot of tea before fish and chips followed by several pints for supper.



## Saturday, 4<sup>th</sup> June, 1983

Bus is late leaving owing to late arrival of ferry. Does this ferry ever run to time? Bus is almost full this time. Hurtle across the moors and again I miss the place where we left the car when we went to Fannich Forrest last year. An hour or so to kill before the Glasgow train leaves so wander around the town before pint in station bar. That's the third time I've been in there.

Uneventful journey to Glasgow. The Strathspey Railway train was standing at Aviemore as we passed. Must travel that sometime.

Bus out to Tollcross. Mother not in. Father and I have tea and soup. I bathe (boy, I needed that). Mother returns and we get fed. Phone Moira and demand car. She fetches round, I run her back. The occasional rattle from front offside wheel much worse. Paul compounds problem by hearing the exhaust starting to go. Set off for Edinburgh. Exhaust blows before I get there. Reach Keys at 2305. March in anyway and proceed to consume normal Saturday night rations. This won't get me to Glasgow tomorrow!

## Sunday, 5<sup>th</sup> June, 1983

Got up too late to get public transport through to Glasgow. Get bus down to Keys for lunch. Linda says I should phone my apologies or they might think I have had an accident.

# Original Itinerary – Page 1

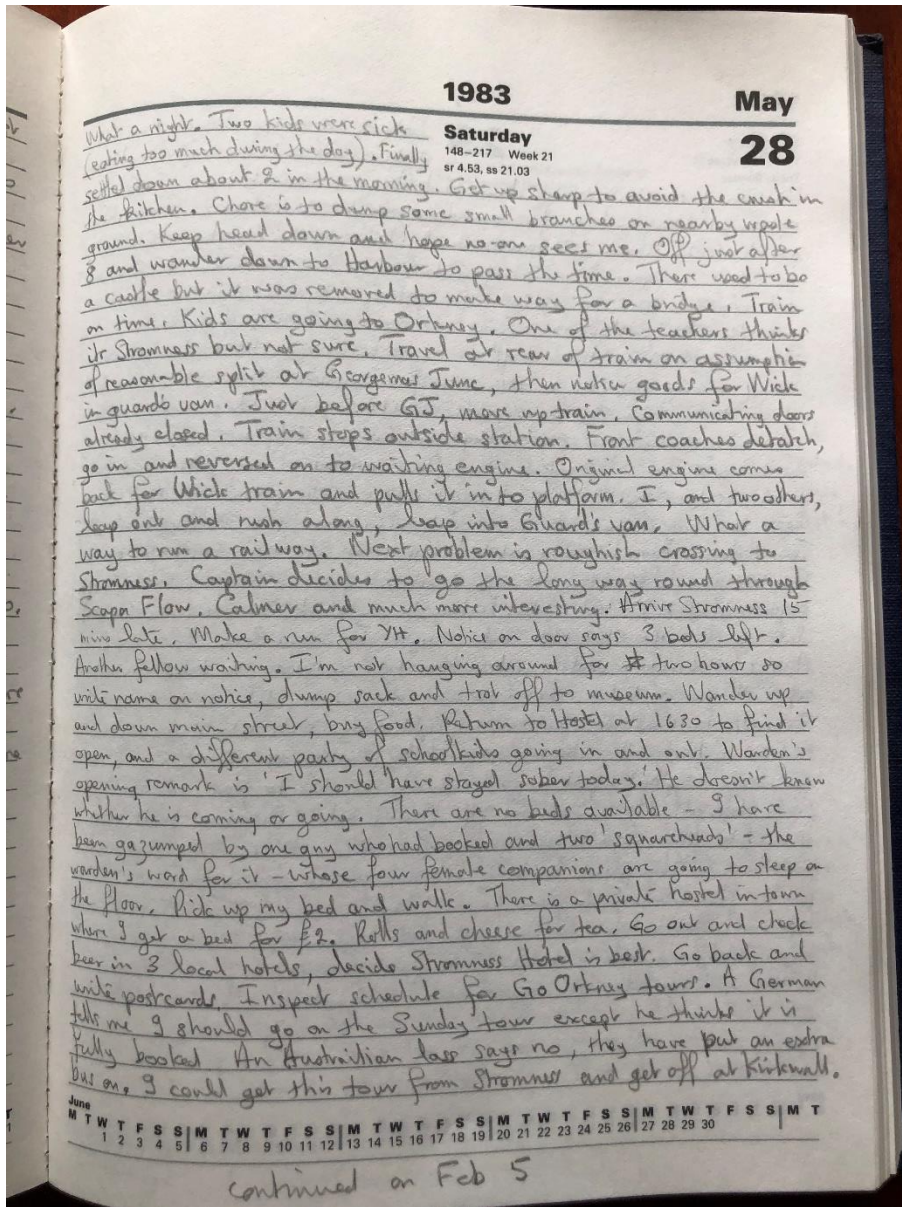
## 12 Day Itinerary

Tuesday 24 May	Edinburgh	d 0700	d 1130	train	
	Glasgow	d 0804	d 1255	train	206
	Oban	a 1116	a 1559		
		d 1200		ferry	334
	Craignure	a 1245			
		d 1250		bus *	558
	Tobermory	a 1335			
		d 1530 ?			
	Craignure	a 1635		ferry	334
	Oban	d 1700			
	a 1745				
	stay at Youth Hostel (0631 62025)				
Wednesday 25 May	Oban	d 0900		ferry	333
	Lismore	a 1000			
		d 1010			
	Oban	a 1110		ferry	335
		d 1330			
	Castlebay	a 1900			
	d 1930				
	Lochboisdale	a 2130			
	find B and B				
Thursday 26 May	Lochboisdale	d 0945		bus *	696
	Benbecula	a 1115			
	(Airport)	d 1200		bus	691
	Lochmaddy	a 1300			
	stay at Youth Hostel (08763 368)				
Friday 27 May	Lochmaddy	d 1445		ferry	387
	Tarbet	d 1730			
	Uig	a 1930			
		stay at Youth Hostel (047042 211)			
Saturday 28 May	Uig	d 0855		bus	508a
	Portree	a 0925			
		d 0940			
	Kyleakin	a 1055			
	Kyle	d 1110		train	208
	Dingwall	a 1320			
		d 1808		train	207
	Culrain	a 1909			
	for Carbisdale Castle Youth Hostel				
Sunday 29 May	Culrain	d		????	
	Helmsdale	a			
		stay at Youth Hostel			

## Original Itinerary – Page 2

Monday 30 May	Helmsdale	d 0909	train	207
	Thurso	a 1041		
		d	bus	637a
	Scrabster	a		
		d 1200	ferry	396
	Stromness	a 1400		
		stay at Youth Hostel		
Tuesday	Stromness	d	bus	700
	Kirkwall	a		
		stay at Youth Hostel (0856 2243)		
Wednesday 1 June	Kirkwall	d	bus	
	Burwick	a		
	Burwick	d 1900	ferry	398
	John o'Groats	a 1945		
		stay at Youth Hostel (2 miles)		
Thursday 2 June	John o'Groats	d 1000	bus *	642a
	Wick	a 1100		
		d 1150	train	207
	Inverness	a 1600		
		d 1715	bus	565
	Fort William	a 1935		
		stay at Youth Hostel (0397 2336)		
Friday 3 June	Fort William	d 1003	train	204
	Mallaig	a 1138		
		d 1236	ferry	357
	Kyle	a 1430		
	Kyleakin	d 1520	bus	665
	Armadale	a 1629		
		d 1800	ferry	353
	Mallaig	a 1830		
		d 1840	train	204
	Morar	a 1847		
	stay at Youth Hostel (3 miles)			
Saturday 4 June	Morar	d 1131	train	204
	Mallaig	a 1138		
		d 1235		
	Fort William	a 1413		
		d 1822		
	Glasgow	a 2228		

Sample Diary Page



"Continued on Feb 5<sup>th</sup>" – No space left on this one page per day diary, so he continues on a previously unused day cross-referenced from here.