

THE ROSE GOES NORTH

Day One
THURSDAY

Sae I've begun to scrawl, but whether
In rhyme, or prose, or baith the gether
Os some hotch-potch that's right neither
Let time mak proof
But I shall scribble down some blether
Just clean aff-loof

Rabbie Burns

From this point of easterly land all that great bay, or inlet of the sea, reaching quite to the north of Scotland, is called Murray Firth; This bay is not in the nature of a firth, as that of Edinburgh or Tay; as the Humber or the mouth of Thames in England, but it is an open gulf or bay in the sea; as the Bay of Biscay, or the Gulph of Mexico are, & reaches from Peterhead to Dungsby Head, opposite to the Orkneys; the distance upon the sea twenty-six leagues one mile, or seventy nine miles

Daniel Defoe

OPENINGS

What defines a region?

It must bloom behind its border

But what defines a border?

Is it some natural fortification
Or the hearts & minds of men
 Penetrable only by blood

Even constant familiarity is powerless
When one is consider'd an outsider
But we travellers, are unique, special even!
Invited *in* to feel, to experience, to record

But never stay too long
Never stray too far from the paths
Ordained by centuries of local politics
But always keep on moving...

MORAY FIRTH

I love the sea on a sunny day
When horizon turns milky white
Obscuring ancient coastline

Waters envelop me,
Bubbling with Bottlenose & Porpoises
Minkes & a colony of sleek, Grey Seals

To the north the Cromarty Firth divides hoary cliffs
Like a wanton woman, legs wide apart
An oil tanker teasing her lips...

Behold! Magnificent! Martial Imperium!
Grand Fort George, first model in all Europe
Just a two-hour Truman's trot to Culloden
She slowly rose as Britain seal'd her empire
Quebec, Plassey & the passive tartan...



FORT GEORGE

Shorefall & the squall of gulls

Beyond this turf-topped demi-bastion,
My march march begins;
Through the fort & its classy barracks-blocks
& their neat, panell'd windows,
& the skirling pipes
& the great gates & deep trenches
& out into the open air...

Black watch helicopters hover overhead
Preparing for Afghanistan
& many a martyrful Taliban

In the distance a plane drops slowly
Toward the hot tarmac of Inverness airport
Melting like maltesers in this midsimmer sun

ARDESIER

A mile or so passes...

I reach a once-thatch'd village
Now only one true roof remains

I buy a newspaper for the midge forecast;

The Press & Journal
THE VOICE OF THE NORTH
Uk regional newspaper of the year
The risk of a midge storm is negligible

Tricky Rich arrives, driving from Inverness,
Victor Pope slouching in the back

While Victor's a rock n roller
Tricky's a scroll controller
Chief archivist for the Highlands
& the first host of my Keatsian tour

CAWDOR

Long straight road races t'wards a barren ridge
Reminiscent of the Lammermuirs of Lothian

Woodland closes vistas
Tricky drops me off at Cawdor Castle Gate
Then goes to make lasagna
Leaving me to my literary allusions

I walk through the estate,
Past the red-flagg'd pitch n putt
& all its fairy fairways

Teenage girls hover in a playpark
A sign outside reads NO DOGS
As I tell the lasses they're not allowed in
The buckfast bottle whizzing past my head
Says wit's unappreciated this far north

MACBETH

I reach Cawdor Castle
Half fortress, half houses
Ornately perch'd by an idyllic stream,
Yet ominous & moody in the evening gloom

Ah Macbeth! Thy reputation degenerates
Through generations of Shakesperians
Soul tarnish'd forever as another Dick the Third

The Thane of Cawdor lives:
"Why do you dress me in borrow'd clothes?"

My bardic heart muses on the bard
It has always amazed me
How a mind wean'd on Warwickshire backwater
With little Latin & less Greek
Could fashion the words the world would one day speak



RIVER NAIRN

Beside the rocky, river roll
Footpath leads me five fair miles
T'ward town & sea

I notice nature
Pink bluebells in family fanfare
Pebbledash beaches interspersed with sand
Bleeding alders in stiff procession along the path
Warm scent of sweet cicely sprigs of nasal aniseed
& dippers zipping rock-to-rock
Where silver salmon streaks seem sound asleep

& the ground...

.... Earth Music to a poet's ear
Whose lyrics bring these worlds to life!
Not quite tangible, but still...



GRAEME'S POOL

River slowly widens
Pathway wild & windy
The edge of Graeme's Pool
Still portion of riverflow
That half-a-mile back rushes

*On the 1st of April 2002 this pool was
renamed in memory of Graeme Moffat
who died suddenly at the age of 14
Graeme was a special lad
and this pool was his special place
now, for those close to him & everyone
who fishes Graeme's pool,
it will continue to be special*

Nairn Angling Association

NAIRN

Hawfords Bridge's steely mesh
Firhall Bridge's concrete usefulness
Jubilee Bridge's civic enthusiasm
Riverparks's picturebook bungalows
& Tricky's Suburban House

After lasagna & effortless formalities
We hit a County town 15,000 heartbeats strong
The sunniest & driest spot in Scotland
Mazy fisherworld & a noble High Street

Victorian fashion for sea-bathing
Envigour'd this 'Brighton-of-the-North'

Thus, if Brighton is the London of the south
Then, by proxy, is Nairn the London of the North?

We all have wee a gander about to find out



SEASIDERS

It's twenty degrees & approaching sunset
Victor Pope & I hit the sights
Twin Cinquecentisi down the local harbour
Empty now but for a few empty yachts
A wee walk away for fashionable quayside denizens

The quays once swarm'd with the Zulu class
Some Islandwana of merchant shipping

Back then, in 6 weeks of herring fishing
A man could make a full year's wages
To feed their fishwives & tiddlers
In their little dulkan cottages

Beach stretches beyond the posh caravan park
Wonderful sand dunes & wilderness vistas
Hands digging in the soft playdoh sands



WAR MEMORIAL

On a rainless day by a stainless bay
We wander down to a grassy links
Of elderly couples walking dogs
& holidaymakers in Rangers yops

A n obscure plaque reads;

WE CAME IN SILENCE

WE LEFT IN SILENCE

TO STRIKE A BLOW FOR FREEDOM

Back in World War Two

This coast was used to practice D-Day
& yes, the scene is somewhat reminiscent

Of Normandy's famous beaches
Like Sword & Juno & Bloody Omaha

But a whole heap safer

SUBURBIA

Trundling back to Tricky's
We raid his extensive drinks cabinet
& shroom to Kasabian on a sofa settee
Synching up with the Glastonbury vibes,
Zoning out in the moment & our minds

We settle down with & a DVD;

Resident Evil : Degeneration

The best animation I've seen in ages,

To hit the hay half-way thro the boring bit

I get a text in the middle of the night –
Michael Jackson is dead –it must be a joke

I flick on the news –

Its fucking true!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

That black fedora hat gone forever more

MICHAEL JACKSON

The billion-dollar beggar has danced his last dance

Paedophile, spendaholic, babydangler,
Face changer, moonwalker, fashion icon

You can call him what you will

But whatever anybody says

Thirteen minutes & forty three seconds later

Thriller is the best pop video ever

50 London shows must have pushed him oer the edge

Pills on pills on pills on pills on pills on pills

His last twelve hours spent scribbling dark poetry

High on Xanax, Prilosec & Vicodin

Paxil, Demerol, Dilaudid & Zoloft

Mountains of mibd-blowing medication

& a heart too heavy to handle

THE JACKIAD

An Aenead of hits

I want you back

ABC

Blame it on the boogie

Billie Jean

Beat It

Thriller

Bad

Smooth Criminal

Man in the Mirror

Dirty Diana

Black & White

Earth Song

I go to sleep singing....

Day 2
FRIDAY

BREAKFAST

Tricky wakes us with kippers & milk

So Wacko Jacko's dead
Every guest on GMTV talks about his life
Now he's up in Hollywood Heaven;
Elvis, Morrison, Hendrix, Cobain
So many memories, so many moves
So many turntables, so many grooves

I'd bought BAD back in '88
My first album – I'd learnt all the songs
& did the moonwalk down the school disco

As Tricky leaves for work
I set off like Leonardo
Pen & paper tucked in my belt
Observing this 'Umbrian' countryside

This rich country continues with very little intermission till we come to Strath-Nairn, that is the valley of the Nairn, where it extends a little further in breadth towards the mountains. Nor is Strath-Nairn behind any other in fruitfulness.

Daniel Defoe

TOURISTS

Victor Pope's a professional madman
Underpants on his head, pencils up his nose
& four hundred free pounds a week
Plus an amazing travel pass
All Scotland open'd up with a 'plus-one' bonus
Wallace's FREEDOM in stark reality!

We jump on a bus heading east
Thro Auldern, down a rolling plain

As the tyres turn
Spire's prick the distance
& a giant Tesco rises
Twin emblems of the modern town

"I'm guessing this is Forres?"
& we get off the bus, exploring

FORRES

Mercat cross, fortress clock,
& flags of our allies aline 'long the High Street
To celebrate six decades of RAF Kinross

Good looking ladies outnumber the grannies
All fair & fine with a 'fabulous' air
If central Milan scores ten out of ten
& Blackburn, Lancashire, two
Then Forres is probably an eight

"Bloody 'ell, its well pricey up here!"

Says Victor Pope,
"£6.07 for 20 Lambert & Butler!"

Beside Saint Leonard's remarkable church
A beautiful sweep of municipal park
Surrounds phenomenal toilets.

FORRES PARK

Britain in Bloom Winners

UK Winners Scottish Winners

UK Keep Britain Tidy 1979

Landscape Trophy 1984

WINNERS 1982, 86, 89, 92

Scottish Rose Bowl 1983, 85, 87

Scottish Linton 1979

Small town Scottish winners 1979, 80, 82

83, 85, 86, 87

91, 92, 93

B.S.I.B winners 04, 05, 06

BS winners 07

B.B Silver Gilt Award 05, 06, 07

BIB Gold Award Winners 08



FINDHORN

We flag down a bus to Findhorn

Flick through the Essential Q quiz book

Victor gets 11 out of 50 on the '90s

I win, scoring 14 out of 50 on The Beatles

Then a sudden burst of shimmering sea

By a sandy streak of golden bay

We find Findhorn beyond RAF Kinross

A village of white-wash'd cottages

By a riviera of continental yachts,

Clear waters & the scent of fish n chips

From this former fishing village

Zulu ships sail'd to & from the Balkans

As all breezy hair'd & sunny-naped

Imagining, we take the coastal trail

SEASTROLLERS

Across the Bay lies Cubin lands
Once a desert of drifting sands
Now brushwood secure
Stabilised & exposing
Prehistoric remains

Today the pines are thriving

We walk along the coast
Turn left at the edible plants

*FINDHORN FOUNDATION
&
Community*

Victor Pope's fourth British hippy haven
Seeming rather something of a caravan park
Still, breathing deep, we wander through the gates

EILEEN CADDY

She died two years ago
But back in '62 was truly alive
Wealthy bohemian upon her own chosen path

Inspired by a toilet-seat epiphany
She found this sandy land
Flung in handfuls veggie seeds
& pray'd for a miracle

Both horse & human manure get busy
As out of this marvellous micro-climate
A 40 lb cabbage brings her fame

Eileen claims it is the ley-lines
& the crackling of the local spirit

Thus, before too long, & one-by-one,
Fresh disciples had driven up to join her

FINDHORN FOUNDATION

From faith follows Foundation
Wee Auroville of the North,
Perched beside alien shoreline
Technicolor gorse & dunes

Quantum Science, Yin & Yang
Organic sewage, golden beaches
Carpentry, power points
& heaps of hippy politics

Victor Pope compares it to Townhead
Barnsley's very own bohemia
Bum-full of degenerate hedonists

*"But there's a better class of hippy here,
For example, those five birds in the dunes
Have obviously shaved their legs..."*

BEACHCOMBING

Thro heap'd up hillocks of heathery sand
Flashing regal purple
We follow the hippy chicks

They rest beside the narrow beach
Five hotties getting hot on the sand
Three topless, one wearing sunglasses
& the other straight from Milan

We sprawl nearby, spread beside the sea
Beach curling rightwise in perfect curvature
& the waves all surf & violence

*Hotties, hotties everywhere
& not a drop to drink*

Now, leaving with ham-acted lethargy,
We curse our inscrutable shyness



HIPPIES

We head back inland
Past the tri-pronged turbine triad
Enough power to cook three-bean-stew
& light up artist studios

Back in the Foundation we meander awhile
Disappointed with the distinct lack of hippiness;
Not a single batter'd van
Or tumbling dreadlock waterfall
Just this flaky Joni Mitchell
Strumming & singing to the dryads

I steal some venison salami from the shop
A posh place with even posher goods

I munch it on the bus back to Forres
For some reason as busy as Princes Street

FORRES MARKET

It's the bi-annual local fair
Suntans, fun-smiles, the heat of summer
Rows of stripy roofs & the jingle of change;

*pie shops * fancy fruit tarts
beauty products * hydrotherapy pool
book stores * handmade celtic products
stoves & oatcakes * all types of tea
buddhism * burgers
cakes & cookies & toffee apples
Candy floss * raffle
wooden toys * duck race
face painting * win a bottle...*

So have a pop & turn a key
& win us a bottle of malt whiskey



HOMETIME

Wielding an excellent take-away
We catch the bus back to Nairn

Tricky arrives ten minutes after us
Relieved he doesn't have to cook
Tucking into tasty Scottish stew & tarts
Plus that bottle of Benromach Speyside
Apparently a *'secret too good to keep!'*

We tell Tricky tayles of our reet braw day
Inspiring him to hit the road with us
&, even better, drive!

We hit the Friday night pubs
To try & get laid, but as I've often found
Straight birds often notice your shrooms

Never the best way to advertise a genetic match

BIG NIGHT OUT

We find ourselves on a Burnley-style pub crawl
From yer Fred Perrys to ya Fat-bottomed girls

Coked-up neo-Nazi confronts me...
"Get oot o' toon..."

I stand up for myself... The moment passes...
Yet tensions remain... giving the night an edge

I don't mind – we've only got a wee bit of psilocybin
& a little adrenalin always boosts the groove

There's something afoot in the good town of Nairn
99% Ned;

*A loner in a black Megadeth T-Shirt
A Lesbian with a pink punk hairdo
A cackling hen party in fancy dress*

& everyone headin for Callys'

RAVERS

We stroll inside Callys just in time
For a wee midnight raveling
The best dancin' gets up these parts

As the shrooms make their reappearance
Me & the neo-Nazi make friends
Doing splits across the dance-floor
Where lads all lean & mean-looking
Worship the local MC

All around us jig Nairn's top girls
I've never seen so many thunder-thighs
Only one in twenty less than size sixteen

After an hour music stops, lights spring on
& we all head out into the bantering street
Heading home to our private after-parties

Day 3 SATURDAY

Here is a stately stone bridge of seven large arches over the River Ness, where it grows narrow between the sea & the lake; when you are over this bridge you enter that which we truly call the north of Scotland, & others the North Highlands. One will soon come to the Cromarty Firth, noted for being the finest harbour, with the least business of, perhaps, any in Britain; 'tis, doubtless, a harbour or port, able to receive the Royal Navy of Great Britain

Daniel Defoe

WAYFARERS

Clouds cover this celestial sphere
Cinctured with pagan-blue sky

At the onset of our own mini-glasto
Boot fills with bongos, guitars & camping gear

With Ben Wyvis beckoning us forward
We follow the trail of an English army
En route to Culloden & its forlorn moor

The Highlanders had tried a night march here
To turn back on the outskirts of day-lit Nairn
Retreating exhausyed & hungry to Drumossie

Past Kilvarok's impressive viaduct
We burn the long straight road
Twyx hill-heather & seawave
To park up at this grand grave of the Clans

CULLODEN

Giant flags mark out the battle-lines
Drawn across the bog in invisible ink

The visitor's centre is grander these days
I mean, Her Majesty will be here on Monday
The first Hanoverian since Cumberland

Inside, a computerised account of the melee
All echelon & multi-coloured polka dots
& sounds of cannon & death-cries clanging

Out on the field the clan stones cry murder
Cameron, Maclaughlan, Mackintosh & Athol

*"Shaoil leis gun do mhaolaich
Seo Faobhar Gaidheal Tapaidh!"*

& afterwards so many butchers laugh'd into their ales
On the bloodied dreich heather which today seems dead

CLAVA CAIRNS

Beyond Drummosie's eternal desperation
There is another place of death

Two miles from the Jacobite jaundice
A deeper history stands
On dolomite haunches, upright

Cairns musing on the mysteries of time
Standing stones placed when Achilles slew Ajax

Three heaps of grey rock
Two great graces & a central pyre
Plus a little antechamber off to the right
Red, pink, & white in alternation
Ring'd by trees with ravishing overhangs

We seem lost, like three Semi-Presbyterians
Overawed & confused by the Wailing Wall



SHOPPING

At the edge of Britain's newest city
Tricky's new car has excellent upholstery

Tesco, Borders & other urban paraphenilia
A plastic penitentiary for humanity
How Clava's druids would have wondered!!!

We pick up supplies in the seething aisles
Three cool guys doing the barbecue thing;

Sausages, burgers, crisps, water, rolls, pop,
& two crates of beer for sixteen squid

Into my hoodie'd front pocket
Pate slips, & ham & three Turkish Delight

Then its time to go camping
& bridging the mighty Moray Firth
We breathe the air of Arcady

BLACK ISLE

Rolling downland,
Am I riding the London to Brighton?

We pass Munlochy's adorable bay
Then Aucch & its memorable vista

Roving the coastal road
Sea stretches on our right
Forest climbing to our left

We pause at Fortrose & her fingerslip beach
The furrowing Firth some Michigan panorama

Rosemarkie is a much finer affair
Thomas Hardy houses & cute sturdy cottages
& a decidedly elegant museum
Where picture-etch'd Pictish stones
Energize mysterious histories



CROMARTY

Leaving the village & its idyllic little inn
We roar the high ground unto another firth
& down into Cromarty itself

We breeze along Shore Street,
Enslaved by tranquil maisonettes
So door-open safe

We pull up on the links as a wee blue ferry
Carries cars to Nigg on a turquoise wave

Setting up camp we tune into the BBC;
Andy Murray winning at Wimbledon
Interspersed with Glastonbury gigs

After reading Tam O Shanter in a Lancashire accent
We eat & drink & dance & make music
Three men ever merry in a non-gay way

FIRTHSIDE

The Cleopatra
As she swept past the town of
CROMARTY
Was greeted with three cheers
By crowds of the inhabitants
& the emigrants return'd the salute
But mingl'd with the dash
Of the waves &
The murmurs of the breeze
Their faint huzzahs seem'd
Rather sounds of wailings
& lamentations
Than of a congratulatory
Farewell

CROMARTANIANS

This is a township bless'd with a quiriness
Whose ambience has enter'd its famous sons

This is the land-lair of Thomas Urquhart
The grand eccentric, eccentricly grand
Whose Universal Language stole his soul

& did Macbeth once wander these woods
It's elegant Thane, before his stiff demise

As wander'd George Ross, fully determined
To make it worth an Englishman's while
To come up all the way from London

& poor Hugh Miller, suicide,
Literary genius with a smoking gun
Who eked out these fishing legends
From the deepest waters in Britain

Hugh Miller's
LEGENDS OF CAITHNESS

The Spectre Ships
Macculloch's Courtship
The Storms of the Five Winters
Macleod the Smuggler
Donald Millers Wars with the Sea
Sandistone's Spluzie
Morrisson the Painter
The Itinerant Sculptor
The Fions of Knoch-Ferril
The Gudewife of Minitarf
Hossack's Pledge
The Charm of the Egg
The Legend of Morial's den
The Story of Sandy Wood

STREET-STROLLERS

We wander a wonderful town
Of romantic, cat-quiet streets;

Busy pubs, galleries, antiquerie
A better find than Findhorn
& a perfect place to write a book
Or set up some Crowleyian cult

Above the Carnegie library
We find a view-heavy Gaelic church
All ruin'd & grassy by the graveyard

As we move down to the beach
I find a recent razor shell, still closed
& open it up like some American serial killer
To analyze its contents as an amateur scientist

"Who's up for Beach Olympics then?"

BEACH OLYMPICS

Swim to the buoy & back
Bikini Volleyball (*women only*)
Underwater Breath holding
Rock Throwing Triathlon *
Synchronised rock throwing
Wet T-Shirt Contest (*women only*)
Sand-Castles
Donkey Derby
Body Surfing
Suntan Contest (*women only*)
Sand Burial
Surf Sprinting
Beach Cricket (*commonwealth only*)
Beach Football

- * (i) *Toss the rock*
(ii) *Hit a rock with a stone*
(iii) *Knock a rock off another rock with a stone*

FIVE SENSES

I took a walk through nature by the bay
& felt five things as yet to me unfelt
First was a narrow column of cloud-grey
Unleashing showers in a heavy pelt
This sense was touch, & later on I heard
How batless woods can sound like a machine
Insectoid tonnage humming as a bird
Whose joyous song fills up the woodland green
Alas I turn'd away from this in fear
& dozed awhile, & then I stirr'd from sleep
& saw a mother 'mang her young, red deer
Which gambol'd close with dash & flashing leap
Then at the fire I lost myself in scent
Cooking good wood-pluck'd mushrooms by my tent

MINI GLASTO

We watch the sun go down
Silhouetting scatter'd oil-rig repair-works
Like red giants wading through the waters

We relax around an instant barbecue
Banging drums & singing songs
Sharing especial spontaneous

At the edge of my space-seeking journey
As the boys fall asnore in their tents
I take stock of a turbulent few months

A 'cid-soak'd Raj-return did not help my love-life at all

'I want to write,' I said
'You need a job,' she said

Harmonious existence seldom embraces conflicting opinions
& so I wander north to find an answer in my soul

MIDNIGHT MUSINGS

In the gathering of mankind's highest thoughts
Our moods are as important as the muse

As cricketers view rainclouds despondent
Poets despair at an infertile spring

Or as the monk renounces mortal joys
To solitary dells do thinkers fly

Or as a Turkish galley parts the waves
The poets summons Shelley in a rave

These images three minor liebmotifs
Of Psyche's mighty range, & each oft used
To guide the rowan branch across the page

But when they are condensed into one sense
As Shakespeare fills his visions with such life
This is the meaning of the poet's voice

Day 4
SUNDAY

Here we found the town of Tain, and some other villages tolerably well inhabited, and some trade also, occasioned principally by the communication with the western islands, and also by the herring fishing, the fishing boats from other parts often putting into these ports; for all their coast is full of loughs and rivers, and other openings which make very good harbours of shipping; and that which is remarkable, some of those loughs, are infinitely full of herrings, even where, as they tell us, they have no communication with the sea, so that they must have in all probability been put into them alive by some particular hands, and have multiplied there as we find at this time

Daniel Defoe

AU REVOIR

I wake up groggy
Stumble into town
Bacon & coffee
The Mail on Sunday
Pregnant with Michael Jackson rumours

The courthouse museum opens;
Wax models, recorded trials
& cute baby seagulls gawping from the roof

Walking slowly back to camp,
We quicken our pace at the site of the ferry
Now two full minutes out of Nigg

Breaking camp in a flash of canvas & beer bottles
I bid goodbye to the boys with affectionate hugs
& make the ferry with a gasp to spare

CROMARTY FIRTH

Unloosening friendship's water-wings
I cross the King's Ferry to antique Nigg
As did King James IV those countless times
He made sacred pilgrimage to Saint Dutchac

Chatting with two cyclists on deck
We watch Cromarty spread behind
All gorgeous & Georgian,
& so rich in comparison
To the ugliness of Nigg
& its unpleasant factory
Building Norfolk's wind-turbines

Landing, I take the road north
Sweltering under a blazing sun
All alone on an open road



LUNCH

I envy Ben Wyvis
Surging over this sandy estuary
Accompanied by pretty peak & pine

This is the Tain peninsular
Particularly nondescript

5 miles in, by an empty house
I pause beside my surviving supplies,
Mirroring Italian wayfaring fare;

Pomodori Secchi = antipasta pepparoni
Hamburger Relish = tinned tomatoes
Beetroot = antipasta jardini
Roast Ham = Salami
Game pate = pate
Bread = panne

TAIN

Back on the road I join the A9
City-link to Wick goes <<<WHIZZING>>>> past

+St+Beatus+Duthacus+

Welcome to
The Royal Burgh
Of
TAIN

Baile Dhubhthaich

Golf – Children’s playground – Bowls
Tennis – Historic Interest – Fishing

Tain was made a royal burgh in 1066
& declared Sanctuary by Malcolm III
Some tax-exempt haven protected by Heaven
& Saint Duthac’s memorial auspices

SEAFORTH HIGHLANDERS

As this was once Viking country
Now the Seaforth’s train their blades

Kenneth Mackenzie’s ‘*Sword of the North*’
The Jacobite arm of the Hanoverians
Who brought low the Tyger of Mysore
& march’d to the skirl of the Kaiser’s War

From Givenchy & Ypres, thro Vimy & Cambrai
& even dusty Mesopotamia
8432 souls fell in silence
Dying for the auld alliance
In a modernized, mechanized world

Leaving Tain I pass the old academy
Where Highland captains were educated
Before they bled for empire

GLENMORANGIE

Another firth expands
Open mouth of the Strath River Valley
& another hike – at least 8 miles
My destination Dornach
Across the glassy mane
Beneath those shadow mountains

Clouds thicken to the west
Is that rain?

I pass Glenmorangie's distillery
Perfected by the sixteen men of Tain,
In this big meadow'd vale of tranquillity,
On the nectar from the Tarlogie Spring

One can tell by the sweetness & the crispness of the air
This is Scotland's biggest selling single malt

DORNOCH FIRTH

Crossing the bridge at eight PM
Along the longest cast-ironers in Europe
I float over water
Like an albatross gliding for food

Dornoch drifts closer every stride
There's a strong side wind
Perhaps a 4 on the Beaufort Scale

SUTHERLAND

The fourth firth of my tour so far
The first was the forth
This fourth should be final

White bubble streak zig-zags the waters
Mysterious – a fishing trawler in the distance
Just might hold the key...

NEW TRAILS

Across the bridge
A host of local anglers
Hug the Ross-shire shore
Good fishin' round these parts
&, I bet, good eatin' too

Lovely coastal path
Breaks off the A9
Should save me half-a-mile
Where slowly flowering heather
Surpasses Culloden's skeletal shrubbery

Into the glowing gorse
A rabbit leaps sleepily
While this soft lapping firth
Lulls me into loveliness

POACHING

Just as I'm recognizing to myself
The tour's first proper spot poetic
Strolling upon a pebbledash beach
17 miles into a 20-mile march-a-thon
Seabreeze cooling my hike-hot bones

I find three eggs in a shell-nest on the stones
Still warm....

Then put them down & leave

Their mother has grown agitated
Chirping incessantly across the surf
She follows me up the beach
Constant sounding warnings
& a dozen gulls soon circle overhead
As Hitchcock's *'Birds'* comes swooping through my mind



HARRASSMENT

As the beach turns sandy
Mother gull flies back to her brood
I guess her eggs are easy to disguise
Amidst a smattering of bright pebblerie

Silence...

... & I rest awhile....

.... noticing

The mother has gather'd a gull army
A hundred or more poised in the surf
Like some fascisti military parade

Intimidated I turn inland to the right
Step waist-high into an overgrown stream
To hit the road, squelching, by Camone Wood
& carry on moving....

DORNOCH

Making Dornoch at last
I sense death in the air
Or is it me? Am I dead?
Did those gulls slaughter me on the beach?

All the shops are shut this Sunday night
People in pairs pepper the town
Aglow with red sandstone
Warming me in its placebo effect

I bathe in an early Christian site
Saint Finbarr, in the sixth century,
Once here, devoted, pray'd & ponder'd
Inspiring Scotland's smallest cathedral
Today's sung masses willow outside, filling
Spacious, status-screaming streets & squares



THIS IS MY EPOCH

I was sat by my tent
Half-dreaming, playing with my hair
Staring at the air
& there, legs crossed
I found Homer
Or rather he found me
Close your eyes, he said, & see...

We surveyed a range of great mountains
As each was en era
Each era had a summit
& there the greatest poems peered out
On fellow eras & local slopes below
& I, striding this boiling lava flow
Thou uncool'd volcano of my times

Day 5
MONDAY

All this country beyond this river, & the loch flowing into it, is called Caithness, & extends to the northernmost land in Scotland. Some people tell us they have both lead, copper, & iron in this part of Scotland, & I am very much inclined to believe it : but it seems reserved for a future, & more industrious age to search into; & should a time come when these hidden treasures of the earth should be discovered & improved, this part of Scotland may no longer be called poor, for such a production would soon change the face of things, bring wealth & people & commerce.

Daniel Defoe

MONDAY MORNING

"We are alive but no longer feel the land under our feet!"

Osip Mandelstam

I stretch & yawn in the muggy morning
Dornoch slowly waking to a working week
Where Tricky picks me up on his way to Wick

Hoary hills rise to the north
& beyond Loch Fleet's watery reprise
Stands Golspie's fine collection
Of houses & hearths - how different
From the windswept Welsh valleys

I don't think I've seen a single rough tenement
Since setting foot upon awesome Fort George

Beyond boring Bora & haughty Helmsdale
We enter Caithness, corner of our country
 Like Cornwall, Kent & Cape Wrath
 & John O Groats just half a day away

CAITHNESS

Tricky's Honda Civic evades various villages
Curious hamlets & sparse, spurious parishes
Like dull Dunbeath & lazy Lotheron,
Lacklustre Lybster, Occumster's emptiness
Measly East Clyth, lovely Ulbster & then Thrumster
Ending the grand scatter'd sea-city of Caithness

Blue skies over Wick
We reach its edge-of-town
Superdrug, Lidl, Argos, Homebase

I bet they've got colour TV as well!

There's something unattractive about the place
 Not quite as bad as Holyhead, but still...

& so, as Tricky cleans books from Thurso, al fresco,
 A-wandering around old Wick I go....

PULTNEYTOWN

The meanest of man's towns
The boldest of god's bays
Come sense the decay...

As an eponymous river slides sluggishly
A quarter mile upstream from the mouth
I sit at the point where it meets the sea

Two bodies of water, one glassy smooth,
The other rippling happily,
All framed by a seaweed shore

Wick drips in dreariness
For even beneath a cloudless sky
The gulls have left her

But people remain with hearts just like ours
& I ask them a single question...

WHY WICK?

It is definitely not Liverpool
But I guess it is bearable, liveable
Home to hardy bunches of fishermen
& a single cockney woman in Boots

I guess Wick is wild
If ya like this kind of thing
Boats, seabirds & the auld grey stone of Kendal
A council estate on the pleasant promontory
& even a wee pedestrianization
In Thomas Telford's town centre

But the hustle & bustle of a once great port
Europa's busiest, herringwise, is gone

& now tis some soul-less consumer ghetto
Like the dog-stray streets of Soviet Tallin



MOVING NORTH

I pass thro town
& another of those edge-of-town Tescos
Incessantly sucking out town centre souls

Beyond, shaped by timeless seas,
Sinclair's Bay, the last in Britain,
Delightful against the flatlands

& in the distance
Is that a glimpse of Orkney?

Across a treeless plain
Keiss sits in the distance
Crowning the cliffy Caithness shore

Alright, this is no Glencoe,
But there's space, & lots of it
Blowing love-hurt lockets from my mind

KEISS

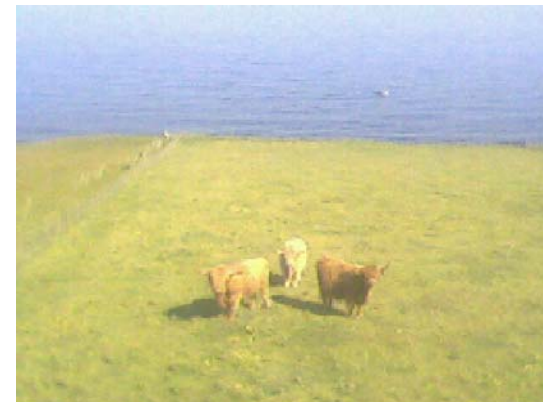
Noisy birds chuckling in the marshlands
All about, their limb-long beaks
Nature's gangling angling rods

I enter Keiss (pronounced kiss)
Stood on the ridge like a Viking shield wall
Half-a-mile long

I skim thro Hugh Mac Dairmaid
Rousing out his militant poesis
That sparkl'd inside his awesome soul
& raged like the Spanish Civil war

I look back on the hike behind
Those yellow sands of Sinclair's Bay
Streaming miles in the sweep of an eye

Then going on I venture to the northern shore



RAMBLING

I meet a local farmer
Obviously Northern Irish

"I love the space" I say
"Thatta boy" he winks

Further on I pass by a crofter's curve of road
Nybster & Auckengill form a homely horseshoe

Entering spacious silence
I love the open road
Grass almost golden in the sun

Orkney portions appear up ahead,
White towers of the Pentland Skerries,
O happy archipelago!

From Ponza to Andaman, these, my hearts desire,
Urge my hot feet onwards

JOHN O GROATS

This is it, the last lap, the final corner
Timeless mill-stone of Roman cartography
O far-flung portion of these ancient isles

A broken necklace of crofts & sea-beat parishes
Like Freswick & its a little micro-firth,
& Skirza scatterd over sand & cliff

I get a lift off an amiable old Aussie
All the way to Duncansby Head
Thankfully bypassing boring John O Groats

I stand below a Conan-Doyle lighthouse
Gazing on Orkney, all glorious in mirror-still seas
Not the 'Hell's Mouth' of the days of sail
Or the Spanish Armada's Tierra Del Fuego

But archipelagic vision of Arthurian beauty....

876 MILES

I meet a young English couple
In the joy of vernal fitness
All matching bikes & kagools

They'd cycled from Land's End
Satnavs perch'd on handlebars;
Penzance, Polcaris, Dartmoor & Somerton
Chepstow, Marden, Bishop's Castle, Christleton
Blackburn, Windermere, Kirkpatrick & Lanark
Culrain & then Bettyhill this morning

Like some visiting Indian dignitary
I share their celebratory whiskey
Shaking hands vigorously
Then bid them a safe journey home
For their train south leaves in the morning



ORCADIAN DREAMS

At 58 degrees 38.6 N
& 03 degrees 01.4 W
I gaze on the Orkney islands
& her vaginal Scapa Flow
Crowning the Pentland Firth
All welters, eddies, races & overfalls

O distant Dunnet Head
Fara & Flotto
Switha, Swana & Stromo
Torness & Hoy
South Ronaldsay & Copinsay
& the marvellous 'mainland,'
Thou Viking land of horses
First wonder of our jagged British Isles

WISHFUL THINKING

I get out George Mackay-Brown
Another brother to speak to when I'm lonely
I'd watch'd a BBC4 documentary
To celebrate the changing of the guard –

*A lesbian's now the poet laureate,
I mean, there'll be a black president next*

& heard 'Heerenveen' & immediately knew
I must absorb its poetic faculty

But when you're living off three quid a day,
Plus a spot of intelligent shopping with mi hat,
A forty quid return is a real no go

So I sit gazing on the islands, & imagine,
Like a child outside a football ground
Who'd spent his ticket money on sweets

DUNCANSBY

I take the coastal trail heading due south
Past seabird colonies making great sounds
In the old, red sandstone cliffs

Kittiwakes & Razorbills
Guillemots & Puffins
& Shags on the low ledges

I amble back to the lighthouse – the sun
Seems suspended, setting so slowly
As if time has no effect here in the far north

Sheep bleat restlessly
Munching furiously at the lush grass
But a friendlier flock than most
Sooth'd by this endless flow of tourism
That I, here, have happily join'd



NORTHERN SUNSET

As times have swung again to strike the road
My eldritch muses glean a glint of gold
Perhaps a mile away, perhaps abroad,
Shall I be searching still when I am old?

How gorgeous is the red sun as she sits
Upon the haunch of Hoy, the Pentland Firth
As glass tonight, no epic pitch of wits
Twyx oceans girdling all this happy earth

A bannock moon hangs over John O Groats
& Dunnet Head summons us to a path
That leads down from this pinnacle of sorts
Along the sea-bashed coast to wylde Cape Wrath

Where I shall seek out rosaries once more
Tomorrow, yon the dreich Duncansby bore



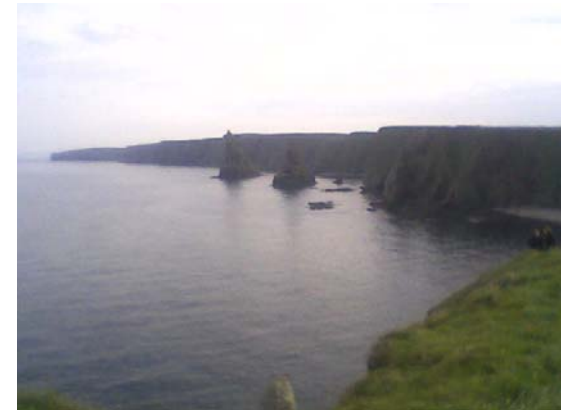
HAPPY CAMPER

I make camp perch'd clifftop tall
A wee rollover from the edge
Pure serendipity & poetical adrenalin
Negates my mild vertigo

With the twin stacks of Duncansby
Back'd by hoary, red Leicester cliffs
& Stroma all glorious to my right
Tis perfect place to dream away night's dreams

Today was a good day to die
So close to the edge – I could still leap
But don't....

Couch'd on soft grass
All alone at the ends of the earth
But for smoothly swooping gulls



Daniel Defoe

MISTY MORNING

As Gulls wail Dantean lamentations
I'm awake before five
Drops of moisture crowd my tent
Like zombies scenting blood
& outside...
...midsummer sea-mist

The stacks of Duncansby
Half visible in a flash of fog
Disappear completely...

The first real test of smeddum on this road
Donning my coat slightly lightens the load
Passing scatter'd houses still asleep
Middle-aged Cockney jogs past smiling
Today should be a good day

DAY 6 TUESDAY

Dungsby Head, which is the utmost extent of the land on the east side of Britain, north, & is distant from Cromarty eighteen leagues north. Here the land bears away west, leaving a large strait or sea, which they call the Pentland firth, & which divides, between the island of Great Britain, & the isles of Orkneys; a passage broad & fair, for tis not less than five leagues over, & with a great depth of water; so that any ships, or fleets of ships may go through it. But the squalls of wind so frequent, that very few merchant ships care to venture through it.



HAPPY HIKING

I feel like Ian Botham
Not in the '81 Ashes, but hiking the country
For Cancer Research, step-by-driven-step

North & West Highlands Tourist Route

Ullapool 170 Miles

That's one hell of a long way....

Blue sky grows over me like a hole in the O-zone
Sun blasting a path through the clouds
Watered-down lazar beams projecting phantom-shadows

169 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles til Ullapool
6 days at 30 miles a day
9 days at 20
Or one lazy, lucky pick-me-up

STROMA

Wee Stroma sits sadly out at sea
Midst scenes of nature's renconquista

Abandoned for fifty years
Phonebox with broken windows, pretends
To service dilapidated, sea-beat houses

It was once so simple & free
A children's playground
With not enough hours in the day

Whelks boiled in rusty tins
Picked out & eaten with darning needles

Then, the last of 300 families
Leaves in two heaving boats
With no glance back

& the Gulls cried throaty happiness

MODERN CROFTERS

I pass pretty Canisbay's whitewash'd Kirk,
Lock'd up in polish'd quietude

I trawl the headstones, soil full of graves
Nothing too poetic, just name-on-name
Heaped upon each other like the coffins underneath
 Forming an orderly queue to Judgement Day

I ask a bonnie lassie for water,
Nice ass – a sailor's wife
The Navy had stationed him here
& they loved it so much they bought land
Built a house & a flock of sheep
Plus a nearby croft for fruit & vegetables
Acolytes of the haelan' lebensraum
& neo-modern farmers in a Viking field

CASTLE OF MAY

Beyond rocky Gill's Bay
Sea & sky merge as one

I pass the Castle of May
Britain's most northerly citadel

The Queen Mother fell in love with this place
50 years previous, visiting every August
For the Highland Games in the Big Field
Enjoying a wee tippie in a local hotel
Gordon's gin, with a couple of cubes,
A box of black magic & the racing on TV

Her grandson follows in her footsteps
Our once-bonnie Dauphin, Charles Windsor
He's nice, muse the locals, always stops his car to chat
But Camilla's a apparently too snooty

DUNNET HEAD

Dunnet rears its head
& a mile to my right, Skarsferry,
Strung out like a string of pearls

Energized by the ever-growing sun
Tis lovely to feel strong
Rightwise rolls a gorgeous sandy bay,
Beach climbing green cliffs
& out to sea, OCEANUS DEUCALEDONIUS

Further along sits Saint Johns Loch
A splodge of blue paint dripp'd from god's canvas
Lingering like Averno

Single boatmen plys the mane
Perhaps even Charon himself
Come upside to gaze on the Orkneys

DUNNET BAY

I think I'll laze the down by the Bay
Peewits & Curlews surrounding
Notable holy men once served Dunnet Church
Like Timothy Pont, first man to map all Scotland

I hit the beach to ease these concrete clubs
Tween windblasted sand dunes & sea-ribbed sands

This is a place to come & muse
Poesy pending in my woosy mind
Shells crushing barefit
& big-toe-balls pile up the sand

I gauge half-way by the size of the houses

Leaving the beach at a derelict mill
I chat with a derelict gypsy woman
Collecting dandelion leaves for her rabbits

CASTLEHILL

Squatters delight
Empty windows of unreviving industry
Built from famous flagstone
Once, this relique harbour shipped worldwide
Her flaggy metatonnes

Caithness was once capital of the Nordic '*Flaga*'
That old red stone flooring Westminster Abbey
& Edinburgh's Royal Mile
& Glasgow's Sauchiehall Street
& Dundee's Discovery Point

Today all is quiet
Solitary geezer fixes his fishing net
& a wandering poet
Searches for poesis

CASTLETOWN

Someone should rename Castletown

COUNCIL TOWN

Or better still

COUNCIL HOUSE TOWN

I'm back in an Estonian Ghetto,
Before independence & the euro

I lunch on the pitch of Castletoun FC
Founded at the turn of last century
& absorb a little of its poesis

Now fed & cheerful in the summer haze
I resume my way happily, where
On the five mile road to Thurso
On a line with Dunnet Head
I pause once more & wonder

MUSINGS

Is this Scotland?
Far from its capital,
Sectarian shirts & melange of accents

Scenery akin to Lincolnshire, Swansea & Bray
Nae hardy heather, nor mardy weather
But Britain still
The land of our forefathers
Land of our lives
Rising from Arctic waves in sloping hope
First buttress of the European host!

As my feet boil after 20 miles
Oer the green ridge another vista won
Scabby Scrabster underneath the quarry cliffs
& Thurso tumbling up these treeless fields

THURSO CASTLE

Built by George Earl of Caithness

In 1684 seawing added by the

Right hon'ble Sir John Sinclair

Bart of Ullbster in 1835

Original castle rebuilt by

Sir Pollemache Sinclair

Bart M.P 1871

Partially demolished 1925 by the

Right Hon'ble Sir Archibald Sinclair

First Viscount Thurso

While the local MP's in London answering
His expenses scandal I pitch tent in his garden
By the wonderful gothic shell of a castle -
Some Palmerston's folly overlooking the bay



THURSO

I follow the fortress wall into town
By a young seal sunning itself on the beach
Seagulls scream overhead
Sea laps on the right & the sun
Growing hotter, & out of the mist
The Old Man of Hoy

I cross the Ellan Bridge...

*Opened on first October 1960
By John Mackay, Stonedresser
Who for fifty years cross'd this
River to the flagstone works*

...& enter the hometown of Baden-Powell
For, like the Boys Brigade, Cubs & Scouts
I still love a lad's adventure

THE CO-OP HOP

The only supermarket for miles
Its time for a heavy shop

Three packets of Nik Naks (*nice' n' spicy*)
2 for price of 1 Jaffa Cakes
Fruit chutney – truly irresistible –
mango*plum*apple*onion*ginger
& a tin of Heinz curry beans
Plus yer very pious bread & water

I indulge in some intelligent shopping
A fivers worth of premium meat
Hidden under my floppy hat

They say a million dollars per minute
Is stolen around the globe

I bet the truth is at least twice that

LORD THURSO'S GARDEN

What a way to end a day
Shore-side, watching setting sun

Two Grecian Statues guard my campsite
One in pensive thought
The other, a fisherwoman, clearly distraught
Blatantly Clio & Calliope

The time reads after ten, second sunset in a row
Drives a butcher's blade into the days throat
The purest skies I have ever seen

Imagining pirates in the pinksea harbour
I listen to Kasabian's new album on the radio *
All psychedelia & dance-rock summer sounds

I wish I could spend a month in every place
Not these few short moments of muselight..

* West Ryder Pauper Lunatic Asylum

Day 7
WEDNESDAY

We were now in the particular county called Strathnaver, or the Vale on the Naver, the remotest part of all the island, though not the most barren or unfruitful; for here as well as on the eastern shore is good corn produced, & sufficient of it at least for the inhabitants; sometimes also they send it over to the Orkneys, & also to Sutherland.

Daniel Defoe

CHANGING NATIONS

Change, change us, its time to make changes
For the country is going to pieces,
With the members that treat us like strangers
Growing fat on our cash as they fleece us

Sing, sing out, for a general election
Combining our song in one civilised shout
Rely on the natural laws of selection
Let good leaders remain, drive the dishonest out!

New Labour left us two bloody warzones
Draining coffers kept for a rainy day
Then the storm broke, the world floods with unknowns
Recession has found us, so lets have our say

Voters! Support us, stand up & be counted
Form the sum of our problems surmounted!

THOR'S RIVER

More early morning sun
I pack & leave my landlord a postcard
Plus a sonnet I etched a few weeks ago in London *
While Burnley were winning the playoffs at Wembley

Hitting the tolerable town centre
Hundreds of guys in day-glow vests

I blag a lift west in the back of a red van
"You don't have a bomb" they ask

For the next ten years, ten miles away
2000 drones decommission Dounray

They drop me off by a nuclear golf ball
& up ahead, a first hint of the highlands

"Enjoy your holiday," shout the guys
Afore driving off quite sullen-faced into that working world

* see previous sonnet – Changing Nations

HEATWAVE

I enter the sparse, triplet hamlet of Reay
& trees, yes, trees!
& in the distance, a wood even!!!!

Through this gateway to Gaelic grandeur
The world is emptying upon higher ground
Just blooming gorse & the long grass of paradise

My back begins to sweat in 22 degrees
Every cloud lusted for
& I know now I wouldn't last five minutes
All alone in after some Saharan plane crash

& then, with a colourful relish, a sign;

Welcome to
The County of
SUTHERLAND

MELVICH

As the river beach loops around Bighouse
So too curves this long, thin road
Up to mickle Melvich & its melted bay
Strathalladale's salmon-waters wilting in the sun

Weather changes in an instant
Dark pregnant clouds & a chilling wind
Then passes as I rummage for my coat

Poetry falls like snowflakes through my mind

Beyond Melvich
Amid dreich, treeless wilderness
I think of its antithesis

Oxford Circus aibling in the January sales
Blowing people to & fro in wild consumer gales
& everybody complaining about the trains

PLEASING SCENES

Clan country
I can smell the blood

Ridge-mounting I see three mountains
One Rajasthani, one Appenine
& the other too far away to tell

Thro a series of savage unattractive hamlets,
Plateaux-surfing, up & down Gaelic glens,
I go, too proud to hitch (but not to ask)

Another bay beyond another ridge
Armadale's green toes dipping in the deep
This beige A-road snapping at its heel

A lovely spot to spend the night
But still I got good walking
As onward, onward, onward move mi legs.

BETTYHILL VIEWPOINT

Gorgeous ascent
Road thrusting into panoramas
Hills all surrounding, a fly on my page
& the sheerest joy of here-being

Mountains draw closer
Dark shadows to translucent pale
Beckon me hinterwise

Ben Loyal (2507) Ben Hope (3046) Arkle (2580)
Foinaven (2986) Beinn Spionnaidh (2537)
Cranstackie (2630) Ben Tongue (976)
The Watch Hill (1009) Beinne Ceanna (1257)

& now, a slip of quicksilver
Loch Meadie's mercurial glimpse
Glistening leftwise

SUMMER SHOWER

Rain starts roaring two miles from Bettyhill
I hole up in some random bus-stop
Servicing the middle of nowhere
Follow Andrew Murray's latest triumph
Uniting the country's listeners
From Bognor to the North Sea rigs

Within twenty minutes blue skies wink
Teasing me from my haelan haven
Like some Numidian whore in the Dam

As the rain slowly eases into peace
All becomes lovely & shower-fresh
Celebrating this fabulous First of July,
Devolution's tenth birthday, but way up here
Scotland has always been free

BETTYHILL

Failte do
Am Blaran Odhar
Welcome to Bettyhill

To reach the Betys Y Cowyd of the north
Down dramatic gorgefall I go
Sun breaking out, the road all golden
But, in the distance, black lines of rain
Hang like silken threads of unfinished webs

O wonderful all-weather world

Passing the professional campsite
I make the shop, ten minutes to spare,
Dine, & enter the local swimming pool
Where its time to bathe...

Roman style

DAMO ROMANO

I have the pool to myself

One week since my last immersion

In my poetical oasis

I do a few lengths & then a few more...

Outside rain falls again

Inside I do jacuzzi

While reclining poolside, studying Burns,
Three bonnie lassies join the steamy scene

Two hours on I take a shower

Scrubbing my armpits a pimple appears...

...No its not – it's a fucking tick!

It must have crawled in when I was sleeping!

Plucking it out I leave the pool, refresh'd,
& glistening like the Sancy diamond

MEETING THE WEEGIES

At the bus-stop out of town

Two wobbling weegies leave a nearby pub

Drunk as skunks

Hitching & drinking through summer

They use the same bus pass as Victor Pope

But today their tent is miles & miles away...

"Do we go west, east or just kip on the beach?"

They try a car or two with a cat in hell's chance

Physical energy maxing after three hours dipping

Following a little banter I tell 'em I'm movin' on

The Weegies exchange some intelligible words

& now we're best of friends they decide to escort me

"No worries lads," I tell them
After all, they're too wanker'd to mug me

PEDESTRIANS

We are a dying breed
Prehistoric dinosaurs upon the druid paths

*Trundling downhill
We espy an especially beautiful bay
Men call it Torrisdale but I'd call it Paradise
Strathnaver emptying its emerald waters
Into a jewell'd sea
Kept quiet by sleeping headlands
Crests foaming where sand meets sea
& beyond, a little Orkney -
Neave Island, a fraction of gold beach
& yonder, Eilean Nan Ron*

We are kindred spirits, lost to the road
On the run from car culture & all that crap
Far from shitty cities & anonymous lives

HONESTY BOX

Gypsy caravan
Two black cats watch over proceedings
One brushes against my leg
Then goes & sits by the honesty box

*Please feel free
To look around
The caravan*

*This little business
Depends on the honesty
Of its guest & is what
Makes the highlands unique*

*May the Spirit of the Gael
Travel with you*

Brief goodbyes leave the Weegies rummaging...



FREEDOM

As the day closes over God's ain country
The spirit of the Gael rides with me
This freedom spilling effortlessly
Onto untouch'd canvasses of memory

Early morning walking, late night hiking
Tis all the same for a soul shining free
Pumping blood from his bleeding heart

*Where the Strathnaver trail leaves the A386,
115 miles from Ullapool,
I pitch my little tent*

This is the way our ancestors lived
Bread, cheese & a haystack bed
Cooking open fires in endless woods
& the beauty of the body's liberty

EVERY CAMP SITE HAS A STORY

- 1 Chased by a herd of bulls at *Quatra Bras*
- 2 Tripping in my tent amid a *Glastonbury* monsoon
- 3 Blair Witch hurricane hitting the *Connemara* coast
- 4 *Salzburg* sidings after jumping the Orient Express
- 5 Fucking Fern at the cliff edge near *Fairlop*
- 6 Fucking Jane a wee stone's throw from *Stonehenge*
- 7 Philosophizing where the *Danube* meets the *Wesser*
- 8 Poeticizing beside the *Abbazia de Montecassino*
- 9 Druggy Artist's Camping at the *Wickerman Festival*
- 10 Waking up by the Med on the beach of *San Remo*
- 11 Viewing *Venice*, sliver'd across a vino rosso Lagoon
- 12 Sleeping in the middle of *Naseby's* roundhead lines
- 13 Romance in the woodland near *Castlerigg's* stones
- 14 *Barga* the night before we moved into a pallazzo

DAY 8
THURSDAY

MORNING ROADS

Awoken by blazing sun
Several midgies milling in my tent
& a shoulder full of bites

Pack'd up & back on the road
Too hot, too hilly

I swallow my pride & four thumbs later
I'm hitchin' a ride

She's a Kaffer, he's from Thurso
She's gorgeous, his driving atrocious

They are heading to the Queen of Scottish Mountains
Awesome Ben Loyal
He proposed to her on its summit 12 years ago
I think they're trying to rekindle something

"Have you been loyal?" I mused

Tis worth observing to you that here, in the month of June, we had so clear an uninterrupted day, that, though indeed the sun does set, that is to say, the horizon covers its whole body for some hours, yet you might see to read the smallest print, & to write distinctly, without the help of a candle, or any other light, & that all night long.

Daniel Defoe

105 MILES TO ULLAPOOL

After a semi-alien landscape
Of azure pools & scintillating greenery
Ben Loyal growing ever dominant
They drop me in Tongue
It's Rabbit Islands hopping cross the Kyle

I have to wait an hour for the papers
So, stashing my bag in a hotel,
I hit the nature trail to Castle Varrich

Four finger'd peak to my left
Sweeping estuary to my right
A little Norman Castle up ahead

I cross the burn & climb a wooded steep
Hear a soft '*see-see*,' repeated '*teacher-teacher*'
& the deep '*Prruuk*' of guardian Ravens

CASTLE VARRICH

Above the tongue-shaped Kyle
In the cool shadow of the keep
I stand, intoxicated

As Beruvik & Thorfinn
Tied bloody masts together
The valiant Mackays
Cross'd the Kyle warlusty
To fight the Battle of Druim na Cub
& rout invading Sutherlanders
Brave was their skill, & moral their courage

I gasp in the immeasurable view before me
Satisfied in my mind
While solid stones stand beside,
Broken but not bowed.

CROSSING THE KYLE

I collect my bag from the plush Hotel
Stock up on supplies for an overnigher
& walk onwards, reading the Daily Mirror -
The best for English Football in Scotland -

Burnley bought Stephen Fletcher yesterday

This is good poet country, eagle-strewn
Crossing the lake-like Kyle, heart of a dream,
Sands stretch & mountain gaps yawn
In tender scenes of perfect curvature

Rainbows, sparkling arcs, moonbow borealis
Varrich on my left keeps undesirables out,
& behind, Ben Loyal's castellated tops
Beside high-flanked Ben Hope, most northern munro
Stood like royalty at the Gates of the Highlands



SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

I am a soul survivor...
...All alone

Bahia Bakari in shark-infested waters
Clings to crack'd wreckage of a plane crash
Surrounded by corpses near the Coromos

Francesca Lewis huddles under the wing
Of a crashed single-engine in Panama
Neath torrential rain, terrifyingly incessant

Vesna Vulovic falls 33,000 feet
Lands fractured in the snowy slopes
& hobbles between mountains in agony

Mine art is the separating disaster
That parts us from society & leaves
Men wandering strange & lonely places

HORSEFLIES

25 degrees
Year's hottest day

So the Highlands have begun,
Emptiness, & a long beige road

Harassed by two angry wasplings
Buzzing about me like bats at sunrise
With brilliant turquoise eyes
Some Andaman ultramarine

As Indian mosquitoes plague men's tours
I am distracted from all this divinity

A rock splats the first one landing on my shoulder
The second still makes strafing attacks
Like a miniature Japanese kamikaze

Til splattered in a book snapp'd shut

TRAVELLING

Little peat houses drying in the sun
Or a street for Pixies?

Higher now, & by a roofless house, can see
The north coast stretching to infinity

Massive mountainscape
Silver & yet snowless
Saturnine denizens of fable & fear

I break out in a spot of shadow dancing
Human beat-box & funky moves
Til an Oz bird breaks my groove
Smiling as she passes on a bike

How wonderful to walk towards great mountains
The Alps of Austria, Switerland & Italy
Know nothing quite this pure

MOUNTAIN MUSIC

I walk along monstrous & marvellous roads
Grey underfoot, then beige as they go
Keltering into the sweltering distance -
Or black as pitch in pelting rain

Here nature seems some Viennese opera
Her music sublime & older than whale song

The melody is in the brooks & the burns
& the landslides & the whistling wind
It is the bark of deer & the fall of leaves
& the buzz of myriad insects
It is in the hum of blooming flowers
Imperceptible to the human ear
The rhythm is in the rainfall & peals of thunder
& all the silent spaces in between



NORTH-WEST HIGHLANDS GEO PARK

Iar-Thuath na Gaid healtachd

WELCOME

Failte

www.northwest-highlands-geopark.org.uk

Meal Meadhonach slopes impressively
Above the silvery glimpse of the sands of Loch Eriboll

As I'm attacked again by another horsefly posse
I sprint into the distance, hounded incessantly

At the top of Loch Hope a cluster of houses
A free bottle of Buxton & a butty

This is Cleg country – or the horsefly locals call it
& quite a bad year for those Caustic, bloodsucking fuckers

*“But when yer in a midge storm,” an old man says
You would wish you were with the clegs!”*

ERIBOLL

Road inclines sharply this thirteenth mile
& ahead loch Eriboll lies

Behind me, peeping above green ridged 'rison
The tops of Ben Loyal,
Like an island rising from the sea

Over Ben Arnobol I go
Greenery receding to rocky scalp

Eriboll comes into view – so stunning -
Glittering, grandiose & ringed by giants
Some brimming, silver chalice of godhead

Below me I see a peninsula
Two beaches & a wee green causeway
A white house & a litte harbour
Far finer than Scopello



ARD NEAKIE

I reach my 'island'
The only inhabitants flocking in fleeces

I scramble through a window
The house is empty, but clean
Plastic chairs the only furniture
& the whole of it mine

I bless my muse & pick a room to camp in,
My tent my mattress by an old open fireplace

Who lived here, who visits here?

A carton of stinking milk
& a single sheet of newspaper

October 3rd 2008 – pages 5-8

P5 - The Easter Ross spinning group in Achmore village hall
P6 – Dingwall is being invaded by Japanese knotweed

SQUATTER

I find a great desk on which to muse
Overlooking the only road
Guerrilla poetry at its finest

I spread out my supplies;

Two bottles of water,
Three bread rolls & a bag of spicy transform-a-snack
One tin of princes sardines with tomato sauce
One small tin of Heinz beans & sausages
Half a jar of chutney
One tin of princes chopped tomatoes
& a packet of Maynard's white pastels

As thunder scowls & growls outside
I lay me down to doze my hike away
Strange dreams of love-loss plaguing sleep

THE BEST OF GEORGE MACKAY-BROWN

Hamnavoe
Hamnavoe market
April 16th
Buonaparte
Farm labourer
The Poet
The Abbot
Culloden
Shipwreck
Haddock Fishermen
The Old Women
Roads
Tea poems – Chinaman
Tea poems – Afternoon tea

SUNSET

After taking evening succor
I potter about the island -
The quarry & lime kiln catacombs
& a low loch cloud

I go to the seabirds & read to them
Sensing this was the right thing to do

Burns, MacDairmod & Mackay-brown
Three of Scotland's finest poets
I do not think they had ever seen here
But would have loved it if they did

& as the day nears dying I wash my clothes
Hang them out to dry
Then snuggle in my happy nest,
O tent of tents! O poet's happiness!



DAY 9 FRIDAY

No wonder the ancient mariners, be they Phoenician or Carthaginian, or what else you please, who in those days knew nothing of the motion of the heavenly bodies, when they were driven thus far, were surprised at finding they had lost the steady rotation of day and night, which they thought had spread over the whole globe. No wonder they talked much of their Ultima Thule, and that the Elysian fields must lye this way; when they found that they were already come to everlasting day, they could no longer doubt but heaven lay that way, or at least that this was the high way to it;

Daniel Defoe

PREPARATIONS

Four walls
Wake up call
Running short on water

I walk a mile by the serene loch
Knock on the door of a lobster pot cottage
A nice guy fills my nigh-empty bottles
A fine way to start the day

On the way home I pass a gurgling brook
Another source of fresh water

Back home I sit at the table & compose
Poems about Burns as he would have himself
No power, running water, or wikipedia

Just me, my books, a pen & empty papers
& a whole summer's day to fill them with

GETTING ONE'S BARINGS

Warm & windy day
Just me, the zephyrs & the sheep
Watch'd over by ancient mountains
I scramble along little cliff-tops
Of seaweed, thistles & limpet-dappl'd rocks

I stumble on a rust dump
Bits of chain & tools & stuff
Nuts & bolts & pipes & screws
& other paraphernalia
All melded in one red mess

I circumnavigate an island
Of pools & rocks & mini-coves & clear water
& a feeling that my soul is at peace



DRUID

Stood upright on black rocks
Land & loch all-surrounding;

*"I AM THE SILVER ROSE
YOUR SERVANT & YOUR FRIEND
YOU HAVE BIDED ME WELL
THESE YEARS OF POESY PAST
& AT ALL TIMES HAVE LOVED YOU DEEPLY
LET US HERE COME TOGETHER
FLESH, EARTH, SKY & OCEAN
HARMONIOUS, ETERNAL & NOW!"*

I finish with a bow
& carry on my circuit
Strong, rested, re-energized
Ready & raring for tomorrow's early roads



FOOTBALL FANS

If *George Mackay-Brown* supported Ross County
Because it was his nearest professional club
Then *Wordsworth* supported Carlisle United
Ted Hughes supported Halifax Town
Rabbie Burns supported Ayr United
Shelley supported Brighton & Hove Albion
Dante supported Fiorentina
Lord Byron supported Aberdeen
Virgil supported AC Montova
Shakespeare supported Coventry FC
John Keats supported West Ham
Dylan Thomas supported Swansea City
Goethe supported Eintracht Frankfurt
& *Coleridge* supported Exeter City

GRAFFITI

I reflect on those two blue plaques
Hung like medals this far north –
Compared to London's 800
Just one in Wick & the other in Cromarty

I love those haiku-like blogs
A perfect length for passing cyclists;
Name, date, career, year of residence

So I write one on blue wallpaper
Like Burns with his diamond stylus

DAMO

POET

Squatted Here

July 2nd to July 4th
2009

ADVENTURE

Outside again, disturbing sleepy sheep
I am disturbed myself by the sound
Of a jeep pulling onto my peninsular

Scrambling up a hillside I look for cover
This is 'boys own' adventure stuff
Like seeing a German U boat surface

I remember my train jumping days
Sitting tight in my giant island toilet

Epiphanies as the jeep disappears
This place has so much party potential
Enough space for stages & dance tents
& a harbour to ferry in supplies

Now knowest I why life had driven me
To this Yeatsian tower, before my future self
Shall make this place his slice of paradise



REAFFIRMATIONS

Poetry gives me spirit
Modus operandi, vivandi vis animi

She brings me to places like this
Far from labour's insipid dullness

I am misunderstood
People think I write for fame or success
This is not true
I am poet, nothing else, nothing more
Success, to me, is being here

Not winning slams or publishing chap books
But watching this slip of land, pen in hand
Admiring the curvature of the twin beaches
In the same way literary critics admires new slant
On a worn out theme



FIVE LEAF CLOVER

With a big heap of poesis blowing through my restless mind
I found roadside oasis for to let it all unwind
One-by-one mimeses storm-moulded my maelstrom thought
As rolls a poet's madness when a catalyst is sought

& so, as I sat gazing at the clover-carpet floor
Old fancies fishwife phrasing, searching for the leafy four
I saw something amazing, yes the luckiest alive
A moment well worth praising, not four clover-leaves but five!

This lucky five leaf clover has arrived unto my dreams
Like a shamrock supernova setting forth its pentabeams
& I still shall roll a rover, wandering street, field & mane
'Til poetry be over with the draining of the vein

O! once I holed with just one swing, but then nobody saw it,
But this time I shall press the thing & prove that I'm a poet



DINNER

In this northernmost portion of Britain
Far from Westminster's empire
Thought flies free
As when the Pitcairn women
Achieved universal suffrage in 1838

Yet, with a bread roll, ham slice & chutney
The last of my food is gone;
No more til Durness, 16 miles away

It is a fine balancing act this life of ours
& must lie with other dogs, catch their fleas
But far from civilisation's multiple distractions
Unbow'd by television (tho' missing Eastenders)

I am content, & yet still yearn to learn
How Murray did in his first grass semi-final

MUSINGS

I sit on a rock & muse
Radio crackling to nearby lightning bolts
Both air & Wimbledon taut with tension

*I have been a poet for many years
& many more, god willing, shall I be*

Another bolt - will poetry kill me
Like the guy who invented rentokill
Experimenting amid inadequate ventilation

These are the tales we'll tell our children

The poet has a tranny in his head
Tuning out of everyday frequencies
Listening in to that special vibe,
Writing down those secret transmissions

"...& Andy Roddick slams his match point!"

HIGHLANDER

What defines the highlands?

Lovely Loch Eriboll this weather-eclectic day
Low clouds rumble over beaches
Horizontal winds make rapid forays
Oer a quicksilver sea by this golden sand
& the shooting summits all silver
& the woods carve dark patches in the slopes
& not one soul

Britain's only north deep water loch
Good practice for the sinking of the Tirpitz
The German U boat arm surrendered here
All predicted by the Brahan seer

I love it when history & scenery combine
In these far flung corners of the earth



THOUGHT SPACE

I roam the headland pen in hand
Noting down the images
Like ewes & t-shirt lambs in primal partnership

How amazing when scenes change in weather
First dull & then glorious in the sun

About, the Bens seem busy
With misty spaces inbetween

Little flashes of sand skirt the loch
Where, incessant urgency of tide-on-tide
Invokes hard-bitten seafarers

I sit beside the salmon-leaping sea
& wonder upon my fading lover
She shall soon be with me, sweet Glenda
But things between us feel so very strange

GLENDAS KISS

What is more beautiful than Paris in the Spring?
More lovely than the thrill the morning chorus brings
Dancing, perchance, beyond life's most precious thing
Sweeter than sensual, fairer than faerie rings,
Deeper than heart sublime, tender than all of this
I fade & pass the time til Glenda & her kiss.

Ah! Glenda & her kiss, the taste still lingers long
Moment of perfect bliss, of lips & teeth & tongue
Some night Olympian as spirit centres meet
Land of lustful fusion, how can life seem so sweet
Complete, & in my mind, behind the half-closed eye,
Calm waters as I find forever passes by

When sun & moon eclipse, when the flowers petal,
When graced by Glenda's lips, what is more beautiful?

BEDTIME

The sun has set & I am settled
Chicken-neck nude

Listening to Radio 3
& the pitter-patter of rain
Exiled like Trotsky in Coyoacan

This poem is like an epic twitter
Vers libre my modus scribendi

"Every life has a theme!"

Mused Isaac Rosenfeld

Mine seems to be broken of cities
Their low-lying effluence...

...High-rise affluence

For here, making music with the matter of the mountains
I am reconciled to His glory

DAY 10
SATURDAY

UP WITH THE LARK

I wake with the insects
Seal-grey sky untroubl'd by rain

Durness lies sixteen miles away
Time swung to hit the road again

Mountains invert on a still, mirror mane
I fill water at the stream, deliciously clean

O military manouvers of the mind
The French marching to Moscow
Or the Romans to Mons Grapius
Yomping, drinking, camping, fighting

There are no Cossacks here
But the clegs are out & biting
So I zip up my hoodie ike Kevlar

& continue on my way...

Here are few towns, but the people live dispersed, the gentry leading the commons or vassals, as they are called, to dwell within the respective bounds of their several clans, where they are, as we may say, little monarchs, reigning in their own dominions; nor do the people know any other sovereign.

Daniel Defoe



ERIBOLL EDGE

A woman walks her sheep dog
A sly Yorkshire accent, she works for the estate
Apparently Ard Neakie is part of it

I bid her adieu & continue my walk
Easy at sea level, round Eriboll's giant rim

Just two cars pass me in well over an hour

I reach the loch head
Glorious peaks above me
Hugged by rugged woodland

The road begins its swing around
Turning me south, east, west & then north

A car approaches... I try to hitch... they pass me by
Yet, rarely getting the chance to stride so beautiful
I walk on happily just as the sun breaks out

LOTTE GLOB

On Eriboll's quartzite side
I reach a little hamlet

LEATHAID

L A I D

CORAIDH CROFT tea room – one mile

It harbours a surreal space

LOTTE GLOB

Ceramic arts

www.lotteglob.co.uk

A deserted alien villa
A paradise of unusual arts

Strange birds, spheres, rocks & ceramics
Doorstoppers of unusual shapes
& a loch-view to inspire any soul



CORAIDH CROFT

The tea room is closed

I step up to the house beside
& ring its dingling bell

A bearded Yorkshire croppie opens the door
From Pontefracht apparently

"I'll just be five minutes mate!"

Ten minutes later I'm tasting tea & a treacle tart
A hint of civilisation in this poetical sabbatical

A carful of young Italians burst in
All sunglasses & bravado

After swapping a few Italian verbs
I hit the road & am soon picked up
By a friendly couple – she's hot, he's not -
Their classy camper van up from the Isle of White

DURNESS

I am driven to straggling, sea-sprinkl'd Durness
Past beaches & crofts & the famous Shoo cave

I pick up supplies at the cramp'd, quanit old shop
Own'd by an old lady call'd Iris
She used to play with a wee John Lennon
Up north with his Aunt on their long, summer holidays

I absorb history in the local museum
This is North West Sutherland
Torridonian erosion, arrival of electricity
Sigurd the stout's suorland
& the Mackay's Duthaic 'ic aoidh

Today, there's only 14,000 in the whole county
No break-ins & no violence
Yet cannabis factories everywhere

SANGO SANDS OASIS

I visit the last pub in Eurasia
Grand finale of an epic pub crawl
Aromatic restaurant, pool & darts
A busy barmaid & warm atmosphere

*Epic views of sky & sea
Banded by elfin greenery*

Out in the car park a rich, drunken machairich
Gets in his Mitsubishi & drives into the distance
Acutest problem for men-who-should-know-better

A school pipe band breaks seagull silence
Sutherland tartan - green & navy blue -
Snares, bass drum, a dozen pipes
& a hundred tourists in tow
Filling up plastic buckets with change



SIGNPOST

*Cardiff 848 km
N pole 3507 km
Cape Wrath 18km
Amsterdam 1152 km
Tokyo 10688 km
Montreal 5187 km
London 886 km
Lands end 1018 km
Dusseldorf 1158 km
Zurich 1743 km
Oslo 1363 km
Brussels 1101 km
Rome 1926 km
Land's End 1018 km*



BALNAKEIL

With Cape Wrath impressive across the bay
I feel born anew

Balankiel is basically an old house
An ivy-ruin'd church - where I pitch my tent -
& the fairest sand dunes in the highlands

The car park is full of campers & caravans
The graveyard is full of corpses & kirkstones
Those flagstone biographies at my feet;
Inverness, Newcastle, Golspie, Lerwick
& even Mina Morrission
Who died at Saskatchewan, Canada
& sail'd Atlantic foam to rest her bones

I think I would love to live in Ard Neakie
Knowing my ain body would sleep here too



BEACHCOMBING

These sonnets are about people & places
& books getting damp in the rain

I set off along a Benidorm beach
McDairmod in hand
Wondering how these towering dunes
Stand steadfast against the North Atlantic swell

I look back
The white house, Saint Maelrubha's church
The swerving beach & the barn
& behind, a host of white mountains

So soft are the colours as the gentle lapping
Of golden waves roll a heart beat away
So I pause to sketch this subtle scene
Sat in the sands, with the best of intentions



DUNE-RUNNER

I enter the sands
Heliochryse, spiky grasses
& heavenly late-day glow

O metropolis of embankments!
Britannia's buttress against merciless Atlantic

I swear I see merman on some sharp rocks out to sea

Wandering these dunes feels like marching on the moon
But for these dancing bird-songs in mine ears

Here is gorgeousness, incarnate
Saharan sweeps of sand tip-topped by Celtic hillocks
'Neath a wonderment of Odin & not one soul

This is the edge of the world
Next stop mysterious Geirfuglasker
Where the last great Auks were born



INVOCATION

This world awaits the poet within
Not for verse or station
But something older than tradition
Beyond the Sumerian bible & Ba'al
There was only one god...
The SUN

Just four short centuries since Galileo
Moved it to the centre of man's thought
As he or she flirts easy from the clouds
I see a disc to die for, or at least go blind

I scream to this ancient orb
Summoning its life-giving energy

*"Awake, awake, O poet within me,
& let us try a line or two of rhyme*



SHANGRI-LA

Eurasia, Eurasia, from tip to toe
Men may wander thee forever in vain
From the sensuous sierras of Spain
To the towers of spangling Tokyo
They have stumbl'd thro' Siberian snow
To the jungles where the Ganga parts plain
Enough to send a troubadour insane
For Shangri-La a myth most never know.

Yet here lie the shores of Arabia
& the fjords of the Skull-helms of old
Here, an angel-throne'd high Himalaya
& a castle of Prince Leopold
For here be defining Eurasia,
Reminding us with weathers manifold.

SCRAMBLING

Returning to my church-bed
I stick to the shore-side cliffs
Sidling sideways across sheer black rock
Slippy & slanting at sharp angles

Hampi-scampering by the glory of the waves
Tiny snails crack beneath my feet

In a galaxy of foot holds
Grows lichen & wild flowers

At an impassable overhang
I look up... forty foot to safety

"Ok boy, lets do this..."

Hands, knees, speed & sheer assurity
Heaves & weaves & *"Woah! I've fucking made it!"*
Arms spread wide atop a Viking sea

BALNAKEIL CHURCH

I return to my kirkyard sanctuary,
Filling with mist as if living dead abroad

Frenchman appears through the smoke like a ghost
I share my beer as he makes us spliffs

We are two rolling stones passing at the crossroads
I'm headin' south as he's heading east
Reading Jim Morrisson along the way

We sit on the tomb of Donald MacMurdo
Murdering Rob Roy of the north
Vasil to his friend, Var to his foe
In 1619 he paid one thousand pounds
To be buried in this private vault within the church
Protecting his remains from vengeant enemies

When the Frenchman leaves & I sleep with the dead

DAY 11
SUNDAY

We therefore turned our faces to the south, and with great satisfaction after so long and fatiguing a journey; and unless we had been assisted by the gentlemen of the country, and with very good guides, it had been next to an impossibility to have passed over this part of the country. But I would propose travelling with some company, and carrying tents with them, and so encamping every night as if they were an army.

Daniel Defoe

HEADSPACE

I went to sleep in the burial ground
But didn't like it much, thought I'd move on
You can't make a man die for his beliefs
 Unless he wants to;
 Well I sure do not
Feeling like some mephadrone in my coffee
 Could keep me awake a little longer

Am I a boy or am I now a man?
Facing this question cruising desert roads
Perhaps it takes a waking holiday
To realise one's soul;
 I'm young I guess
Jobless, wifeless, childless – but still content
 Knowing I have much poetry to write



POSSIBILITIES

Is this my last day alive?
It could be
Better make the most of it
Call up an old relative
Settle an old score

Nothing is impossible

The Hardanga stitch was thought lost forever
Til an old seamstress from Westmorland
Remember'd it in her dream
& in the morning applied a needle
To the bodice of a plain blue linen dress
& beheld the stitch, dragg'd up from oblivion
& few hardraga from the land of lost stitches

For the greatest things are ever possible

CRAFT VILLAGE

Packing up & back on the road
I pass Balnakeil Craft Village
An early warning centre of the cold war hijinks
But post perestroika more a capitalist commune

The Wee Gallery
Ceramic & silk
Printmaker
Digital painter
Oils & watercolours
Woodwind Workshop
Green Aura
Cocoa mountain
The Chocolate Bar

& Kevin Crowe's café-cum-bookshop

KEVIN CROWE

I secure a cup-of-tea interview
Kevin's a gay manc – his partner's Simon
They form'd a business plan ten years ago
Simon does the food, he does the books

He sells what he thinks might interest people
Covering as many bases as possible
& it turns out he's a fellow sonneteer
Brought up on the bubblegum of Roger McGough

I browse awhile thro his Scottish section

*Donald Smith * Kathleen Jamie * Liz Nevin*
*Alistair Findlay * Matthew Fitt * Anita Govan*
*Angus Calder * Violet Jacob * Des Dillon*
*Anna Maclean * Edwins Muir & Morgan*

A peer-drunk way to start a poet's day

LEAVING DURNESS

Its 26 miles & a bit to Scourie
That's a marathon – my first
So I set off with my back pack
Like one of those wacky runners down London
Dressed as an egg or a chicken or both

Leather clad biker boys pass me by
With a wave & a wink & a tilt of the head

The Kyle of Durness opens, all yellows & greens
Sandbanks & hill-slopes & beaches serene

At the Cape Wrath ferry point
There's a little boat & a longer queue

A little further on two twitches search for Turns
Refined English accents & powerful binoculars
Now gasping at a Sea Eagle's gorgeousness

COUNTRY ROADS

Turning south every step brings sunset closer

Shaggy sheep & fluffy ferns
& silence all surrounding
A herd of elephant mountains rise ahead
& the sky alive with cloud

I fill the emptiness with song

Beiin Spionnaidh & Cranstocks rise on my left
By a coven of silvery sisters
Epic edifices of long lost stone
Where eagles nest & wolves once roamed

Cranstocks stands jagged with slash wounds
As if whipped at sea for stealing rum
The once bloody flesh turned granite in the sun
The grey grizzled flesh-back of a one eyed mariner



WARPATHS

Fuck!

Another Cleg assault - massive cloud
My hood pull'd up like some Jedi Master
Hands hidden under sleeves
I'm safe like the man in the moon

Flies cover me head-to-toe
But it's a turkey shoot
Like when the Iraqis fled Kuwait

I'm getting better now - a killing machine
Trained in the beach huts of Kerala
Picking them off one by one
Constantly swatting thro the storm
SPLAT – twirling down to the ground
Like a Messerschmitt over Poplar

PERMO-PRAISE

I reach a well
Rusty bucket set in stone
Yellow plaque screwed into it

*18 As a mark 83
Of gratitude & respect
To the inhabitants of
Durness & Eddrachillis
For their hospitality
While projecting this
Road this inscription is
Placed over this well by
Their humble servant
Peter Lawson
Surveyor*

REACHING RHICONIC

I lose those devilish horseflies as I rise
To once again muse on my life alone

Two & a half hours have flashed by
& as I reach a ridge
A mountain-tip peeps iceberg atop a nearby slope

Two valleys stretch before me
Stunning in scope & glacial spaciousness

As I descend nothing but hills fills the vista
A mad rolling moorland of streams, drops & outcrops

Over the ridge Rhiconic joins the slopes
 An iconic highland hamlet
 Of a few detached houses
 Staring at me like windy death
Almost sad to stand in such a stark place

HALF-MARATHON

These scenes are not what I expected
Transgressing all thoughts of barefit bravehearts

14 miles into my marathon
& 56 from Ullapool
I lunch in the Rhiconic hotel
A pint of lager & a phone call
Glenda's in Liverpool
But will meet me in Lochinver tomorrow

Back on the road it's all pools & lochlings
Rocks & ravines, like a green Arizona

I reach Loch Laxford, glimmering green
Beneath sunblaze & a clear blue sky
Filling me with pleasure & lifting my heart
From the barren wilderness behind

HIGHLAND VISTA

If you should ever drive up from the south
To see the northern portions of these isles
If weather clear, see mountain & a sign
Reading, "*Loch Laxford shell fish limited!*"
Then round a bend shall eyes feast on a scene
Fairer than all the views of Cumberland
& even those from Keswick's druid stones
Or better still; standing on Anglesey,
Gazing on old Glendower's legend peaks,
Or walking among gods on Rannoch Moor
& peering into Glencoe's gorgeous heart
Tis rare for aught in Britain to compare
With fair Foinhaven & her silver brood



RADIO ONE

After Federer beats Roddick in the final
I switch to the Top Forty
Tho' Cascada came in straight at number one
Michael Jackson dominates the charts

*(2) Man in the mirror (10) Billie Jean (12) Thriller
(13) Smooth Criminal (19) Beat It (25) Black or White
(26) Dirty Diana (33) Earth Song (40) Bad*

He came in from all directions
From the land of ever young
& built a nineties neverland
From the songs that he had sung
& those songs we all have sung now
Are resounding around the world
Sing along to Michael Jackson, boy & girl

MACKAY-BROWN'S LEXICON

I'm reading on the road as I'm walking

Seapink
Rasps of rock
Gash of the dawn
Barbarous gulls
Gull-gaunt tide
Fleece-drown'd fields
Suns radiant shawl
Seven sounds of the sea
Crab eaten corpses
Ewe-shiver (winter)
Lair-rich
Cities drunk on diesel

I would use them myself but they stand alone so well

SCORIE

Eight & a half hours after first setting off
I complete my first ever marathon
Crossing the finishing line like a chariot of fire
Arms spread wide

Scourie seems scatter'd in a wide Tuscan bowl
Straight past a campsite I perch by the harbour
Set up my tent next to some brown picnic tables
& invoke my right to roam

The bay is evening busy
Couples walking kids & dogs
Teenagers jump into the sea in boxer shorts
So-call'd '*mates*' nicking their clothes

A middle aged Northumberland couple arrive
We get chatting & arrange a lift come morning...



DAY 12
MONDAY

HITCHIN'

6 AM, tapping rain & flapping birdsong
I spin to the campsite, sneak a shower
& wide awake nip on to the shops
There given an extra tenner in my change!

Back at camp, all packed up & ship shape
The Geordies arrive in a massive people carrier
To whisk me away between lochs & crags

From boarding kennels on Northumberland's coast
They feel ready to retire
Searching for a villa in the heart of former holidays

We enter a new range of stunning mountains
Greenery, pine trees, water falls & lillies
Til eventually, 23 miles from Lochinver
They bid me bon voyage with a beep

We could understand nothing on this side of what the people said, any more than if we had been in Morocco; and all the remedy we had was, that we found most of the gentlemen spoke French, and some few spoke broad Scots; we found it also much for our convenience to make the common people believe we were French.

Daniel Defoe



HIKING HAPPINESS

Pedestrian again
Scenery surpassing all that's gone before
Lochs Glendou & Glencoul
Ben Strome & Glas Bheinn
& other peaks beyond & between

Yesterday's blisters tweak
Yet mind I not
For this is steadily heaven

Riding beside a grand sealoch
With hills in happy company
Landscape begins to change
Woods & fast wee rivers
Banking a ferny roadside
The ancient signature of Britannia

SNACKS

Two cockneys pick me up
Up & down amazing roads
In & out if Drumbeg
Wee jumble of white houses, overlooking
God-glorious archipelagos

I'm dropped off outside Stoer Village Hall
Three women busy about inside
Where I'm greeted by photographs
So much local history upon four walls

"Would you like any refreshments?" old lady asks,
Snack shop just open'd for the six-week season
To raise money for the old folk's feast

I'm the lucky first punter of the year
Where a wagon wheel & can of tizer to the good
I amble amid memories munching my good fortune

FEBRUARY FIRST 1993

*Today with your help, we have
Created history as we take over
Our croft land & embark upon
The great challenge of managing
Our resources free from the burden
Of absentee landlords*

*Your support has been vital to our success
& the Assynt crofters will never
Forget that we are creating a register
Of support to be placed in Stoer
P.O to let everyone know you supported us*

I stand & read this, moved by emotion
For man still can seize on his destiny
As I am writing many miles from home

THE ASSYNT CROFTERS TRUST

*Who owns this landscape?
Has owning anything to do with love?
For it & I have a love affair, so nearly human
Norman MacCaig*

This is crofter country
Fences, walls, potatoes, sheep & cows
Symbols of a real human triumph

This part of the 21,000 acre Lochinver estate
Was once owned by a Swedish corporation
They might as well have been from the moon
For they sent no-one to tip your hat to

So the crofters came together
& clubbed together
& bought their rugged birthright
Tending the land as their ancestors did

Not many would or could, you know,
Upon this mist-ravaged western wilderness
But they did, for this was the land their souls sang

PARADISE

Hemm'd in between craggy hills & kraken coast
Is this a vision of Valhalla?

How much more can my poor soul take
This tantric love-aching for my native isle
Drawn out over darling days
Each vista's opening hinting at orgasm
& Britain my beautiful bride

These mountains I adore
So individual, so distinct
So proud & alive
& the grasses in the lake
Bowing their heads in respect
As tho they were illiterate clergy
& the mountains were Norman Macleod



NORMAN MACLEOD

"Children look to yourself the world is mad"

In the nineteenth century
As inland townships cleared
Man, woman & child were forced
Onto rugged rocky crofts
To barely eke out existence
& there rose Norman Macleod
Who gather'd in these dauntless folk
& led them from their homelands forever
His theocracy planted in Canada & Ohio
& then fair Melbourne at the height of the gold rush
Before Waipu & Auckland in distant New Zealand
To settle midst the Mauri & the kauri trees
Great odyssey of faith far beyond this broken coast

STOER

I walk down into Stoer village
Past the big house
The boxes post & phone
& the ruined church
Desolate against a desolate landscape
Gravestones blending with rocks & drystone walls
As if to be one whole

Clachtoll hangs below
By the sea-rock hewn in two
A section missing, so smooth & square
That the gods must be responsible

Community amid the crags
Great place to write a bestseller
Great place to fall in love

CLACHTOLL

How happy is a rambling poet
With seven miles & half a day to fill
Stopping for craggy seacoast scrambles
Or hiking up an eagle haunted hill

At Altan na Bradhan's ruined mill I feel
The wet-cut-corn still processed by axe

Clegs & crags & fleecy rags of sheep heaped on fences,
I love the way they run wild up here, primeval lives
Calculating dangers of approaching gangly meat-eaters

The road hard lefts thro the rocks
Mazy lakes & craggy isles
& a rumble of stone-faced hills

Here, you could spend a lifetime exploring
& never get the same view twice

HIMALAYESQUE

There's a lot of space in Scotland
Open roads & wider vistas
But it's nice to be closed in by hills
Each rock could hide a bandit
That in half-a-second slits yer throat

The greatest five-mile-hike in the country
If only Wordsworth had checked it out,
He would have left Ambleside in a flash

Such strange perspectives
Hills appear very Himalayan
Yet mere hillocks in reality

Real romantic peaks now peep out of distance
Unusual in alignment like tombs of Pharoes
Or a pearl-string married in immortality



ACHMELVICH

I take a right turn
The end of a glorious glen
All hoary & open
All phantasie lilypad land

Here the council tax is massive

I reach Achmelvich's remote emptiness
A ramshackle farmhouse, a friend of a friend
Decrepit caravans & overgrown allotments
No hamely answer to my long door bell

This day's journey needs a second end

Luckily a there's guy from the Water Board
& I hitch a lift down into Lochinver
Past a river's rushing cascade
To an open speedboat-scything bay

LOCHINVER

What a lovely spot
Houses cluster round a bay
Heavy with civic amenities
& a semi-bustling harbour

I sit at a river mouth
Sun splintering into starry shards
Pure white

I see a wee cemetery, across the spacious waters
& yachts in the far harbour
The open sea obscured by juttings of land –
But just a rowing boat away

I go for a drink at the other side of town
Hear fisherman chit-chat in the Wayfarer's Bar
From Royal National Mission to deep sea devotees

LOCHINVER HARBOUR

INS 155 docks
All crank & clanking violence
Unloading unhappy fish
Seagulls flocking & flapping all about
Hoping for an easy meal

A grand ice box whirrs into freezing life
All white & cubic by the boats
Storing up the catch

A lorry arrives
LA & SO Fish Limited
Come to collect the nation's favourite

It's been 150 years since a thirteen year old lad
First sold battered fish with a bag full of chips
Now 1% of British food budgets feed the chippies

HAMPI CAMPING

I camp behind the leisure centre
Beyond 'mountains' of quarry stone
Travers'd like the hills of Hampi

I steer up a steep, soft slope
Tearing handfuls of moss on the way

I reach a flat spot,
Trees all surrounding my woodman's soul
Two years of Whittinghame in my smile

I begin the fire, to & fro-ing the quarry
Arms bearing large rocks up the slope
To ring the wood that's lying all around

My moss-bedded tent is up moments later
Where on the comfiest mattress I've ever known
I dream of Glenda's imminent arrival

DAY 13
TUESDAY

Our geographers seem to be almost as much at a loss in the description of this north part of Scotland, as the Romans were to conquer it; & they are obliged to fill it up with hills & mountains, as they do the inner parts of Africa with lions & elephants, for want of knowing what to place there.

Daniel Defoe

DRUIDICAL

I wake up in a strange world
Massaged by green sponginess

I sense them, the trees
& they sense me
High in my promontory
Back with the trees where I belong
For I speak druid

Outside, where all is grey,
A little spitty rain
As tho' God has spilt his paint
Or shook off a few drops at the loo

Still, it's a nice place to waken
With soft sea-rush & bubbling birdsong
A damn sight better than the radio

OUR FRIENDS THE BIRDS

"Birds fu ' fechtin spirit, & o' fun"

Hugh MacDairmid

Birds on the water, birds in the heavens,
Birds on the wood-branch, perch'd on the rooftops,
Parrots in cages, gulls on the ribb'd sand,
Swans by the lakeside, white owls claim the keep.

Birds before morning, birds after evening,
Ducks in the grasses necks nestl'd backwards,
Noises at night-time, songs in dim dawnlight,
Chattering falcons, red robins abounce.

Birds giving battle, birds by the kerbside,
Birds in the mountains between mighty seas,
Eagles amazing, Emus amusing,
Birds for all seasons, all contrees, all climes.

Birds will follow us, birds have flown before,
Withdrawing wings to a world without war.

SCOTTISH BARDS

My blanket - day
My pillow - this grassy bank
My dreamcatcher - the shape-shifting clouds;

I flick through Hugh MacDairmaid
& am moved for his bathos

*"I was better with the sounds of the sea
Than with the voices of men
& in desolate & desert places
I found myself again*

*& Scotland, better than all your towns
Was a bed of moss to me!"*

& tho' the rose of England that I am
I feel this Scotland too, it's stirring soul
Quite Burnley born from Britain's beating heart

LOCHINVER LEISURE CENTRE

I break camp & make
A stash of firewood

Below me the leisure centre throbs its local hub
A perfect place to relax & cool my aching feet

*Sofas * squash * internet points,
Cafe * gym * charity shop*

While kids on their summer holiday play x box
I surf the web
Check e-mails & do my Footie Manager
& catch up on a little TV
Hope Springs & Big Brother
Before I exorcised it from my life

Then shit, shower, shave
For my lady's imminent arrival

SOUL MATES

As seventy percent of road accidents are caused by particularly pretty pedestrians
I first saw Glenda driving in the other direction along the duel carriageway of life
& almost fainted, realising the next turn off was not for another twenty miles
& noting by the time I got there & set off chasing her vapour's sexy stream
She would be long gone forever... as for every maharaja theres a maharajaraja
& the key to winning women's hearts is to feed them exiting slices of melodrama
Risking incarceration, skipping three lanes, smashing thro the central reservation
Some Copernicus shocking the world with avant garde theories of geocentricity
I follow her for fifty vibrant miles of traffic, where by some fabulous coincidence,
She arrived in my county, my town, my district, my street, my building, my door
Some cosmic puzzle kept kicking in as I parked my car right up her exhaust
Joining that ravishing neckline I considered spending many lifetimes with her
"Can I help?" I'd asked. *"I had a dream,"* she'd said, *"That destiny awaits me here!"*
"How do you take your tea?" I asked & led her thro my door.

BACK TO ASSYNT

I meet Glenda in the pub
Wearing that lovely blouse she wears
She's brought her friends dog along
A scruffy scampering terrier called Sam
She wants to drive North a few miles
Back thro Assynt to its cetacean sea
We turn left at Stoer village hall
A sheep-speckled, checker-board peninsula
Monopoly houses marking each plot
After Mexican stand offs at each passing place
Open expanses, another Anglesey
All lochlings & rugged ridges
Framed by a three-sided sea
& behind, epic peaks all fluffed up with cloud

STOER POINT

Peninsular ends
Lovely light house
Perches lonely aloft a barren outcrop
Above incredible marine-haunted coast

*Basking Sharks * Minke * Killer Whales
Rissos * White beaked * Bottlenose Dolphins
Otters * Grey * Common Seals*

Back in the war the light house hunted Nazis

CHAIN HOME LOW

Its nissen huts in perfect isolation

As Sam scampers in & out the outhouses
I love the enthusiasm of little dogs

Today the lighthouse still works
As thro' french crystal & fresnal lenses
Shines the brightness of 800 000 candelas

CLIFFTOP

In the misty distance dim shadows of Lewis
Rise from Nordic waters
Another archipelago, another poet's tour

We pass a snack shop with a rainbow of hikers
O windy world!
Sam straying too close to the epic cliffs
& their the scream-sheer drop

We walk 29 meters inland for safety
En route we meet a German mum
Towing a toddler, a baby on her back
Struggling through the boggy peat

We all come to the Old man of Stoer
Technicolour climbers clinging on furiously
To a Duncansby stack-esque skyscraping scimitar



WHEN WALKING LOVESICK

Thou art to me my moist & nearly bride,
No longer must I roam the countryside
Searching for perfect springs of nature's art,
For you are all those things that win my heart;
& yes, I must admit, at times I'm blind,
For this is how the male has been design'd,
But when I see you in a certain beam
In one wild wink do Cupid's tingles teem;

Kiss me, kiss me again, & hold my hand,
These are the softest strings of love's demand,
Cuddles, caresses, kisses, blisses, sighs -
The sweet dust of divinity's reprise,
All these are ours, & them all in a whirl
When walking lovesick, once more, with my girl



CULKEIN DRUMBEG

We return, refresh'd, to the car
& drive through lovely Assynt
Searching for a serene spot to spend the night

Everywhere too busy this time of year

After a few miles
Our instincts share a tingle
So we turn off the road
At Culkein Drumbeg

Energized by brisk breezes
Above a stony beachling
& a couple of lonely shored boats
We perch by choppy sea loch,
Scatter'd houses up behind
& us camping on their headland



BY THE SEA

Ocean-girdled
Our voices drown in vastness
Tho' gull & petrel song
Heard always shore-side

Water without, water within
Thou many-mask'd ambrosia
Milk, honey, wine

We look on the water & are affected
By memories of the flood
Or further still,
To when our scaly ancestors
First stepp'd out of slime

Now sighing we look to the future
& rising waters consuming man's works...

ROBERT'S ROCK

We hit the South African red
& rename our headland after it
I'm studying Robert Burns after all;

Years ago there lived a man

Known on the Oaail Valley

Simply as Robert

*He was a humble man, but was
Admired far & wide for his knowledge*

& almost uncanny instinct when

It came to winemaking

2008

Cinsaut. Ruby Cabernert

South Africa

RR

MEMORIES

"Do you remember the good old days?" asks Glenda

"The good old days were SHITE!" I reply,

"Just four television channels

The pubs shut at eleven

TV over by midnight

ZX spectrum games taking ages to load

& all that poverty & austerity

'We were happy,' people said

But we weren't really,

Just ignorant & oblivious to progress!"

"I meant me & you," says Glenda

& I think I see a tear in her eye

"I do," I say, *"I do very much!"*

& hugg'd her as a lover & a friend

ARGUMENTS

The spirit of romance is with us

A man a woman & a dog

Listening to sea-girt violin concertos

The weather turns all unsettled

Full of gallivanting gulls, Atlantic waves

& this single black eagle...

Senses shatter'd by a drunken Doonhamer

I mean... Glenda plus PMT plus alcohol

Equals hell-sent banshee hell-bent on fury

Relationship psychobabble pierces our nirvana

"Its a long way to drive to have a row!" I say

But she keeps on scowling...

I slink to the tent, leave her staring out to sea

A fisher-widow searching for her long-drowned love

Day 14
WEDNESDAY

RELATIONSHIPS EH?

I wake with first light
For two weeks I've been happy in my mind
& now my mind is buzzing with plague-flies

"I'm off," I say, & pack up the tent
"But its 5 AM," says Glenda
"I don't care, I'm off..."

The tent soon packed & on my back
With Glenda hungover & grumpy
But not as grumpy as me

Just as I'm about to set off walking
Warm wave of tiredness succumb me
So I fall asleep in the car
With Glenda asleep outside, by the door,
Hidden in her duvet like a pale, closed orchid

It is all one undistinguish'd range of mountains & woods, overspread
with vast, & almost uninhabited rocks & steeps fill'd with deer
innumerable, & of a great many kinds; among which are some of those
ancients called harts & roebucks, with vast overgrown stags & hinds of
the red deer kind, & with fallow deer. Here are also a great number of
eagles which breed in the woods, & which prey upon the young fawns
when they first fall. Some of these eagles are of a mighty large kind, such
as are not to be seen again in those parts of the world.

Daniel Defoe

MORNING DRIVE

COIGACH

We wake this time in slightly better moods
& hit the road at ten in the morning
Robert's Rock the tombstone of our love

Observe a stag
Guardian of the heights
Perched royally hill-top
Observing the world

The store at Drumbeg deem'd very useful
The best village shop in Scotland 2006
All beside a lovely bay;

Mountains rise & mountains fall
Gigantic volcanoes of old

*These thirty five islands of Eddrachillis
Fine forests & a beautiful blue sea loch
A low tide revealing bearded black rocks*

Entering the crude Coigach moor
There are no crofts to speak of
A place to wild to eke in

We continue over trippy wee roads
Between peaks lovelier & lovelier
Bringing soul mates closer together

Over a ridge our souls soar to the scene
Of Summer Isles sundering the sea
In elegant archipelaglory

Now following a river, Sam panting on my lap
We enter rugged Ross & Cromarty

"Let us find a place to camp down there,"
I bubble, in poetical excitement

OLD DORNIE

As road signs often indicate a settlement
We turn off to explore
Discover middle-class chalets,
Mobile libraries, mobile banks
& viewpoints more like phewpoints
Such glorious islands
Unreal to us of woodland soul

We park the car at this harbour,
See speedboats & dinghies,
A scattering of lobster pots
& a trawler coming in with its catch

As Glenda finds a spot to snooze by the sea,
I go searching for a suitable campsite
Along the coast, wee Sam bouncing by my side



NEW-AGE CROFTING

At the end of a beautiful, rocky bay
Beyond the strange tree-house sea-house
Hacking tracks through forests of fern
I find a fairyland of peaceful loveliness
Where a perfectly ruined red cottage
Looks out across the radiant islands

Rushing back I wake my sleepy Glenda
& tell her of our good fortune

Soon we are human mules;
Firewood, food, tents,

Sam carries a tennis ball between his teeth
Paws thundering bass over the ground

As we reach the ruin Glenda beams delighted
& sets up camp while I head back for the duvets



SEASIDE FUN

Far from broadband & digi-box
We chill with the waves
Watching Gull TV

They land & skip & land again
Then launch & glide & swoop
Then turn & swoop & land again
& skip again & land again once more

Such curious patterns
Are they hunting?
Is it a mating dance?
Or some ancient saturnalian bird festival

Sam scares the gulls, chasing ball from rock to rock
Hurtling midst corpses of crabs & sea urchins
Until his tooth-chewed ball it too lies dead

SURVIVAL

A boat passes us - UL339
Otherwise, this is an empty shore
It is hard to imagine a crofter's life
What they ate, how they ate it
& where did they gain firewood
From this bleak & treeless world

Yet... I guess there is peat & fish plentiful
& man can survive in all manner of states
Especially with a good woman nearby

Glenda stirs to action
Gets the fire all going, brews up coffee
& makes a fine sloppiness -
Red pesto, garlic sausage, sardines, smoked cheese
& when we're full we wash the pots with ferns



THE END

Chit-chat turns serious

Love is like water

All graspless when a lovers' palm untightens

It seems our bond is snapping

Tho great poetic love still burns so bright

Like Aberlard & Heliose, destined to be apart

It is then, as the sun fades

To the sounds of Scottish fiddle on my little radio

I am calmly dumped

No more slanging matches

No more hurt nor blame

& Glenda retires early,

Leaving me to write my valedictions

Through this short midsummer night

LUNA

Moonrise

Like a fire in the distance

Shimmering

As an island gives birth to it

Like a baby's head

Slowly being born

The shimmering stops

& the moon inches higher

Til' becoming bright & brilliant

In the vast night sky

Selene is with me,

Moon-goddess of mine argent art

Inspiring, as brimming with poesis

I wander the headland pen in hand

POET'S LOVE

There is a time, as love & lyric fuse,
& poets pass a moment with their muse,
When soft, erotic melodies are aired,
A special sense of tender feelings shared -
& so, my love, what words have come to me?
As from our soul I form'd sweet poetry
Bouyant as a heart-beat grows enraptured
Swollen on delightful fancies captured;
Cacaphony of blisses that did spark,
Divinity of kisses in the dark
O! days amazing, days tumultuous,
When Cupid spray'd his love all over us,
These moments loving poets must record
 For memory by poetry restor'd.

LEAVES OF LOVE

Without love what are we but merely leaves
 Autumnally dead, mud-trampled & torn
 But when love comes to life all a-flutter
Then these same leaves, full-flushing green, may thrive
 For, as all nature bound to nature's change
 The whirling seasons flow & so does love
 From moments past, tender eternities,
From whence cold winter sparkles into spring
When rising thought by scented flowers bath'd
& songbirds beckon forth the verdant spears
 To blanket earth with air & thus with life
 Still tree-top tall all our late Novembers -
 Blood-red kisses by Venus bless'd herself
 Before the barren winters of our years.

LOCH BROOM

I am the keeper of the stones
Songs once sung here
Seem to be sung once more
O memories! O melodies!

My soul twinkles with starlight
In its brilliant renewal

*So, a love & a life is over
My muse has now departed
& left me broken hearted*

But here,
After a long night's reminiscing
& as the sun rises over the Summer Isles
I stand & face the future
My former partner snoring far behind...

AT HOME

This land so very different from the map
Whose shades of green & grey fail to divulge
The beauty of this place I now call home
I now call home, these words unreal to hear
How many times I sing them to my mind
If this is so, I must now be prepared
For all eventualities life keeps
But balanced in my years let fear subside
My body following its shining soul
For she has led me safely here thus far
Where now I feel a Caledonian
Sent here by love, by love deposited,
& sense I have a while yet to remain
For on this place & time three things converge
An art, its artist & his ain hearts surge

WEATHERBREAK

*“The gold road’s sure a long road
Winds on thro the hills for fifteen days”*

Sang the Stone Roses, those gorgeous avatars
Singing ‘Fools Gold’ upon the fifteenth morn
Of this sweet mission, with my soul reborn,
I sense this is what man must always do
If spirit in his soul is to renew
When ended are our dreams of love-life long
Come brothers, come & join me in a song

*“Don’t let life get you down
I know a happy man
He’s let go of all his pain”*

Then leaving Glenda breathing in the tent
I set off on the path to Ullapool