

## **Falkirk to Edinburgh and Return over 7 nights**

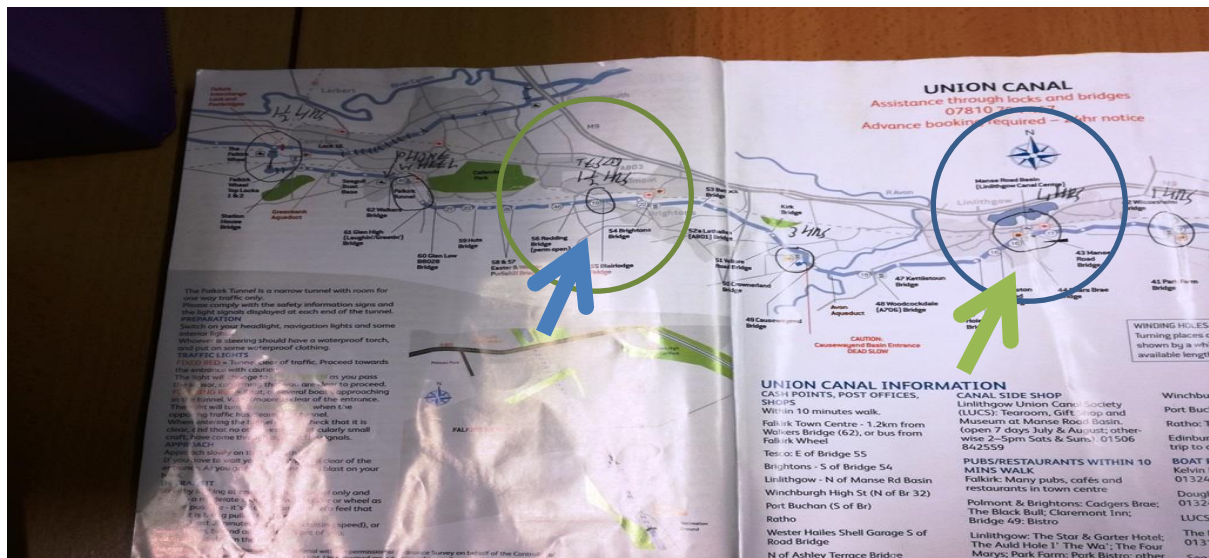
**July 2017**

### **Day 1**

We've decided to take the plunge this year and go for something a little more adventurous - the long drive up to Scotland and the prospect of the Falkirk Wheel and a wide canal has always seemed a little daunting but there is a boat available so we're going to go for it.

We set off from Worcester in the Midlands at around 9am and we think it will take us around 6 hours to get there including a half hour break. It's pretty straight forward mundane driving until lunch when we reach Tebay services on the M6 at Orton <http://www.tebayervices.com/> (no ordinary services these, but freshly cooked food, a farm shop on site) where we have a very tasty lunch but the remaining drive is absolutely spectacular! Driving through the glorious Lake District is really giving us a taste of the lovely scenery to come. Although the Union canal takes us from Falkirk through to Edinburgh in the Lowlands we are still excited for something a little different.

We arrive at almost exactly 3pm and park in one of the designated car parks which are well signposted and walk down to the reception area to meet Gail – who enthusiastically greets us and advises us to bring the car down to the wharf side and unload our luggage onto the little trolleys provided – we then wheel those down to our boat 'Lochan Ora', one of the Capercaillie Cruisers boats and unload, my husband Simon (there are just the 2 of us this year) then takes the suitcases back to the car, drives the car back to the car park (we are provided with a card to say we are a hirer so we don't get charged) and then re-joins the boat where we have a very comprehensive handover by the lovely Allan. He gives us a very useful map called the Skipper's Guide – all boats departing from Falkirk are given this map and whoever does your handover will very kindly write on it where certain points are and times between certain points too – see photo below



Of course the thing that concerns us the most is the Wheel, we don't want to make a mistake! But it turns out to be really straight forward – we start the engine and Allan stays on board as we turn the corner into the first lock – we are on our own through this but slightly surprised that though it is quite late in the day now – around 4.30pm and starting to rain, there is still quite a large crowd gathered watching the proceedings! We try to appear as nonchalant as possible – once we're at the Wheel Basin level the lock gates are opened for us and we have to cruise straight into the bottom gondola. Simon is driving and I'm on the front taking pictures so I get the easy bit – until I realise we're moored up next to the Falkirk Wheel trip boat and have about 40 people staring at me!! Not a time to feel self-conscious we all studiously avoid looking at each other while the Wheel gently rises.....

We are gestured out of the gondola first by the trip boat and so we make our escape and complete the aqueduct that joins the top of the Wheel with the Union canal via a short tunnel and as we emerge from this the sun comes out again! There are then 2 locks in quick succession that are manned – we stop at the waiting point and hold the boat in using the middle line and receive our instructions from the Scottish Canals staff – they are really pleasant and friendly and the instructions are clear – if you do as they say you won't go wrong. Both locks are deep and leak quite a bit – see photo below but we get through them in no time at all and are away – no more locks now until we return which is a bit of a novelty for we English people with our multi-locked canals!



### **One of the top locks.**

The next thing up is the Falkirk Tunnel – this takes around 10 minutes to get through – make sure you read the instructions before entering and give a long blast on your horn before doing so.

It's quite wet inside – very drippy, so we're glad we still have our waterproofs on – but it's also strangely beautiful in an eerie sort of way, and the multi coloured lights add to the air of mystery.



The end is in sight here



Emerging from the tunnel it's about an hour and a half to where we plan on mooring tonight which is by a large Tesco and a restaurant/pub called the Canalside Pub and Grill – I can say we ate there on our way back and it was lovely. But going, our aim is to eat on board, stock up on the few items we have forgotten (we *always* forget something!) at Tesco and relax on board with a DVD.

## Day 2.

We plan on going to Linlithgow today – only a couple of hours cruise away but we've heard its pretty and interesting so want to visit it properly. We cruise through really lovely countryside – as well as a Prison just outside Reddingmuirhead!



Yes we're definitely in Scotland!



Everything is so green!



Very quiet and calm here



The Hidden Basin



**Is that the Hogwarts Express I see in the distance!**

**The views from the Avon Aqueduct**





## **We're here!**

We moor up in Linlithgow just after lunchtime and after having a bite to eat we wander into town.

Linlithgow is a Royal Burgh, (in England this would be Borough) steeped in history – Linlithgow Palace is where James V was born and Mary Queen of Scots was born here too as was, much later of course Alex Salmond. Surrounding the Palace is a large and pleasant green area known as The Peel and beyond that is the Loch where you can fish for Rainbow Trout, or try windsurfing, kayaking and canoeing and even a spot of sailing. There are numerous water fowl around – coots were building their nests when we were there and I imagine it would be a fantastic spot for the keen ornithologist.

Today (Sunday) there is a bit of a 'do' going on up at the Palace and apparently, if you've bought a ticket, which of course we haven't – you can enjoy '[Spectacular Jousting](#)' and have a picnic. Sadly we have to give it a miss but enjoy a windy walk around the Loch instead.



**The Fountain and Loch**



**Moored up in Linlithgow**





[The Honey Pot Dovecote](#)

That evening, having passed several promising bars and restaurants we decide to eat out and we plump for [The Four Marys](#) – we are cold and hungry and they have a log fire!

We have a delicious meal – I had the Peterborough Fish Pie and Simon had the Macaroni Cheese topped with crispy leeks and bacon – I would thoroughly recommend it. Then it was back to the boat and a game of scrabble before bed.

### **Day 3**

We plan to cruise a full day today and get to Edinburgh in around 8 hours. We set off at around 10am after a good breakfast and are soon back in the countryside again. Today the weather has improved and although still windy and cool, the sun is attempting to come out and that puts a whole new perspective on everything. The last 3 photos at Linlithgow were taken this morning so you can see what a gorgeous day it was.

We cruise slowly along passing though wooded areas and open fields and passing Shale Bings which are enormous, varying in height from between 30 and 90 metres. These are left over spoil, the waste

material left over from the process used to make crude oil.



We cruise in a large horseshoe shape so that eventually we can see the bings we passed earlier in the far distance.





The view from Almond Aqueduct



The Bridge Inn at Ratho 0131 333 1320

Four hours after starting we cruise into Ratho and moor up for some lunch. There is a pub here if you fancy eating out which looks very nice and has good reviews. We eat on board today though and are soon cruising onwards – we are now approaching the outskirts of Edinburgh – we are starting to see many more houses and roads – even the surrounding noise becomes subtly different and we are leaving countryside behind for a while and seeing large apartment blocks appear. Soon we will be approaching Harrison Park where we plan to fill up with water and it is here that we need to phone Edinburgh Quay to tell them we are half an hour away and will need the Leamington Lift Bridge raising to get into the quay. We moor up and while Simon stands with the water hose – I phone the Quay Master at Edinburgh – he is very laid back and says “Yeah, yeah I’ll look out for you – just come on in and moor up wherever you see a spot” And that’s exactly what we do – easy as pie!



The Big Smoke



Harrison Park

The Lift Bridge in the distance



Getting closer

Edinburgh Quay

The Quay is buzzing with atmosphere and it's a lovely sunny evening so we sit on the front deck with a glass of wine and watch the world go by for an hour or so then wander over to Zizi's to have our dinner.

Next morning unfortunately it's pouring with rain so we decide that the best thing to do is head for the castle and centre and get on one of the Tour buses – this way we get to stay dry and warmish and also see most of Edinburgh – we can hop on and off as we like throughout too.

I would highly recommend this as even on a nice sunny day it's an ideal way of getting round and learning a bit too – you can choose a recorded commentary that you listen to using head phones but we preferred the live commentary done by real natives of Edinburgh – it's always interesting as well to move from one bus to another and hear from different guides – they all have their unique point of view!

A ticket for 24 hours costs £15. This one just does the city – but there are others which cost more or last longer and take you out further and also include fast track entrance to the Castle, Palace of Holyrood House and the Royal Yacht Britannia. We spend a fabulous day in Edinburgh – walking the Royal Mile, seeing the sights, having Haggis and Neeps for lunch, getting wet, buying whisky and tartan scarves and generally doing the tourist thing!

That night we sleep brilliantly due to all the cold Scotch air, no doubt, and Wednesday morning we start to wend our way back to Falkirk. Wednesday night we spend at Linlithgow again and then leave on Thursday lunchtime to moor up at the spot near Tesco again which is where we eat at the aforementioned Canalside Pub and Grill. Friday morning therefore we set off in time to be at the Falkirk Wheel for 10 o'clock. You telephone the Wheel 24 hours before you are due to be there and then again after you emerge from the Falkirk Tunnel – it

was all very straight forward and we come down the wheel (again with an audience!) and then through bottom lock to take the boat down to Lock 16 on the Forth and Clyde to turn the boat around to end up back at Falkirk Marina to moor.

I should point out at this point that we did very much take our time over this trip – on the Friday after arriving back we drove down to the Kelpies to see them (definitely worth a visit, very awe inspiring)



But that was because one of the locks leading down to Grangemouth where the Kelpies are was broken. Under normal circumstances we could easily have come back to Falkirk on the Thursday morning, having booked our passage down to the Kelpies and then cruised back again on the Friday – there would have been plenty of time.

Here are some timings you may find useful -

It's 3 ½ hours cruising from Falkirk to Kelpies - 1 hour to transit Wheel and Top Locks - 1 ¾ hrs to Tesco from Top Locks or 4 hours from Top Locks to Linlithgow - 4 hrs from Linlithgow to Ratho and finally another 4 hours from Ratho to Edinburgh Quay.

Also bear in mind that we didn't have the best weather unfortunately so more time was spent on the boat moored up and in pubs than maybe we would have spent with better weather!

Having said that we thoroughly enjoyed our week, have already made plans to come back to visit Scotland and would recommend this trip and Falkirk to anyone.

See you next time!



Approaching the Gondola to descend the Wheel



View from the top

And it's Goodbye from us!