

**AVIEMORE AND THE CAIRNGORMS –
AN ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND FOR ALL THE FAMILY
By James Quinn**

My wife wrapped the bag of frozen peas in a tea-towel and placed it on my lower back. She said it would help ease the pain. I wished I was back home instead of being flat out on a hotel bed in Aviemore.

It had all started out so well. The plane to Inverness was on time and even the children had behaved during the flight.

It was loading the bags into the hire car that did it – a sharp pain in the lumbar region and my plans for a week of walking in the Cairngorms lay in ruins.

Oddly, my wife seemed to enjoy my predicament, proposing that I take it easy looking after the children while she pampered herself.

I had to admit the irony of this role reversal. It was usually me who skipped off to play among the mountains, leaving her with the children, who hated fresh air and exercise.

I was sure to have the last laugh though. Her idea of holiday exploring usually meant reducing our joint account to zero in a shop. Well, she would have a hard time in Aviemore, I thought, where the height of retail expenditure was a top-of-the-range waterproof jacket.

How wrong I was. By the end of day one she had already discovered the Aviemore Highland Resort, a new purpose-built holiday and leisure complex. She returned to our hotel looking relaxed, pleased with herself and sporting newly-waxed legs and a manicure, with a massage booked for later in the week.

Meanwhile, I had wrestled the children away from the Funhouse at the Hilton Hotel in the nearby village of Coylumbridge. They had played mini bowls, adventure golf and clambered all over a playframe. Luckily, I had monitored events from the safety of a glass-fronted quiet room.

The week went on in a similar vein and, apart from the odd back twinge, I started to relax while the children entertained themselves.

There was the Strathspey Steam Railway and the Highland Folk Museum while the Highland Wildlife Park at Kincaig took two trips – gawping at the bison took up so much time that a second visit was demanded.

To my surprise the little couch potatoes I knew and loved were enjoying being outside. If they were distracted enough they did not have time to moan about their wellies getting dirty. I pursued this theme.

After a guided wildlife tour and fishing lesson amongst the scenic beauty, nature and history of Rothiemurchus Estate, our next stop was the Landmark Forest Theme Park where they rode the flumes, saw red squirrels and even had a dabble with rock climbing.

She with the credit card, meanwhile, kept us up to date over dinner on how she had swam every day and even managed to squeeze in a sauna and Jacuzzi between golf lessons and fishing. Golf? Fishing? Was this the woman I married?

It was towards the end of the week when she discovered why there was a Cairngorms National Park, the newest and largest in the UK.

Now, my wife had always thought mountains were fine to look at but best kept at a distance. I did not want to change this view. I regarded the mountains as my territory and I enjoyed my time among them as an escape

from the stresses of family life. For those selfish reasons I had kept them to myself.

Her enlightenment happened during a massage where she met a woman who had done one of the many courses offered at Glenmore Lodge, Scotland's national centre for mountaineering and any other outdoor sport you could care to think of.

My wife, the woman who thought Gore-Tex was an American politician, had her interest awakened and made a date the following day with a mountain-walking instructor who took her for an excursion onto the Cairngorm plateau.

That evening she was flushed with excitement. "Now I know why you were so content to go off into the hills with your friends," she said accusingly. The next day she was at it again, this time hiring a mountain bike and heading into Rothiemurchus Estate.

While she pedalled around the ancient Caledonian Pine forest I took a chance to get some fresh air and views by tempting the children with the promise of another train trip.

With the lure of crisps and drinks I took them on the funicular railway up to the Ptarmigan restaurant near the summit of Cairn Gorm mountain itself. They loved the views, the scenery and the idea of being so high – without the effort!

On our return we were met with a tired but happy mum. She had enjoyed her mountain biking so much that she wanted to buy one as soon as we got home. My bank account and I winced in unison.

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

For further information on what to see and do and where to stay in Aviemore and the Cairngorms check out www.visitaviemore.com.

- To book Aviemore Highland Resort, T: 08451 255 455, www.aviemorehighlandresort.com, info@aviemorehighlandresort.com
- The Fun House, at the Hilton Coylumbridge Hotel, near Aviemore, T: 01479 813081, www.hilton.co.uk Reservations: T:01479 811811
- Strathspey Steam Railway, Aviemore to Boat of Garten, T: 01479 810725, www.strathspeyrailway.co.uk
- Highland Folk Museum, Newtonmore and Kingussie, T; 01540 661307, www.highlandfolk.com
- Highland Wildlife Park, Kincaig, T: 01540 651270, www.highlandwildlifepark.org
- Rothiemurchus Estate, by Aviemore, T: 01479 812345, www.rothiemurchus.net
- Landmark Forest Theme Park, Carrbridge, T: 0800 731 3446, www.landmark-centre.co.uk
- CairnGorm Mountain, T: 01479 861703, www.cairngormmountain.com
- Cairngorms National Park, T: 01479 873535, www.cairngorms.co.uk
- Glenmore Lodge, near Aviemore, T: 01479 861256, www.glenmorelodge.org.uk

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