

Commentary... Hiking Under the Scottish Skye

By Susan Waymire
Columnist

How many of us can say we actually find it fun to work out? As someone who is active and adventurous, I can say that I am one who has to find that eye on the prize when I exercise, so that is the primary reason I incorporate travel with my fitness goals. What better way to find a purpose to that treadmill than an active vacation?

This year my daughter and I were both on a mission to shed a few pounds. I offered her an active adventure and we agreed on a hiking trip with Backroads to Scotland, one of their more strenuous trips, which included famous trails within the Scottish Highlands and the Isle of Skye.

With this goal set months ago, the real work had begun. I enlisted the help of my personal trainer, Andrew Loscutt, at Sisters Athletic Club, to see that I was fit and in great shape to handle the rugged Scottish trails. We have a good understanding of my strength and abilities, so I left it up to his judgment to take my training to the next level.

Andrew states, "In a dynamic activity like hiking where Sue needed to step up, over, around and through a variety of different obstacles; balance, stability and lower-body conditioning were important aspects of the program."

Once on the trails in Scotland, I was thankful I had paid Andrew for those painful lunges, squats and stairs. Our first day out

hiking was an easy six-miler. I'm thinking: "This is easy."

Day 2 then hit like a ton of boulders... literally. We looked up the mountain ahead of us and I asked, "Where's the trail?" Alex, our Scot guide replied "It's right in front of you!"

What appeared was a never-ending boulder stairway straight up. I envision some long-kilted Scotsmen designing these trails for people with much longer legs than myself. As we ascended over rocky paths, steps, and jumps, I found myself "billy-goating" my way to the top of the mountain where we found a gorgeous loch and waterfall set beneath one of the Monroe mountains of the Highlands. Our guide, Christian, said it was some "Gaelic name we can't pronounce." So, at the foot of Can't Pronounce Mountain we ate our lunches with a spectacular view of the remote Beinn Eighe Wilderness. With no other groups in sight, my daughter and I gave each other a high five... we had led the pack and finished on top.

Trekking up the mountain was probably easier than down. As I opted for the longer trail with gentler slopes down, I felt the burn in my legs of lactic acid as the trail extended out before me. Given what we had scrambled up, it came as no surprise that I should start feeling the burn. With a few stretches and stops, I pushed through the mild pain and rubbery legs. The reward was the incredible views of lochs, rivers and waterfalls.

As we descended, Alex appeared just at the right time with some hot tea and with a dash of whiskey to keep us "nourished."

This certainly helped.

As I arrived at the van, 12 miles later and fully fatigued, our attentive guides had a cooler of chilled libations. Any pain was forgotten in the joy and "hiker's high" we each felt. This was only the second day, and we had pushed our bodies fully, yet felt the mental exhilaration that comes from pushing both mind and body through the tangible obstacles.

Subsequent days would be more of the same, but as Alex said, "a little less rocky." Not really, but it sounded good. We learned to define miles in "Christian miles," as he would always encourage us with "just a little further now... another quarter of a mile." Actually it would end up being three miles, but we were too fatigued to argue.

Besides incredible scenery and hiking, our evening reward was incredible lodging, food, and activities. The lodging, a combination of castles and hunting lodges, were simply gorgeous. The food at these locations was a combination of local cuisine with a gourmet touch. Haggis in phyllo, as an example. Everything was farm fresh, as some of these properties had their own gardens. This was quite



PHOTO PROVIDED

Susan Waymire is an adventurer.

different from what I had heard about Scottish cuisine.

As for activities, one evening we had a whiskey tasting, another a local Highland music concert just for our group. Toward the end of the trip we found ourselves on the Jacobite Train (the Harry Potter Train). All of the logistics would be difficult to organize on your own, but with two guides and an extra service person, Backroads operates an efficient program. No waiting or worrying about the next event. There is never a dull moment with their program, and any downtime is welcomed.

I returned home with both mental and physical

renewal and revitalization. I have re-organized my goals with sights on other active adventures.

While I'm still strong, fit and able I have several active bucket-list trips: gorilla trekking in Uganda, biking in Vietnam, and hiking in New Zealand.

What is on your bucket list?

Contact me for more information. As an active and adventure travel specialist, it's my job to explore and participate in my suggested programs so I can offer great advice for different tour operators.

Susan Waymire, CTC
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