

Day 6 – Connel – Balloch

I grabbed a bite to eat on the ferry from Craignure to Oban, macaroni cheese and chips to make up for missing lunch. As a result when I arrived at the hotel I wasn't all that hungry but was told at reception that if I wanted to eat I would need to make a reservation immediately, to eat by 9pm when the kitchen closed. I booked a table for 8pm, which was the latest they could manage and went upstairs to do the usual offices and start thinking about my day for the blog. I duly presented myself and had a pint of Bellhaven and a very pleasant dish of smoked haddock in a light mustard sauce with mash and "seasonal" veg which always seems to consist of carrots, peapods and broccoli but was well cooked. That was enough and I retired to write the blog and ensure that the clothes were dry courtesy of a hot radiator.

The day dawned dull, rain was forecast and I went down for breakfast at 0800. The waiting staff in a traditional Scottish hotel such as the Falls of Lora



named after the rapids that form beneath the Connel Bridge at certain points of the tide, always seem to be of a type, elderly ladies who buzz about efficiently, tending to several tables and making sure that the punters are well looked after. The food was unremarkable; cooked in advance with rather leathery scrambled egg and dry sausage. It filled a gap and I went back up the

two flights of stairs, with no lift, to pack up. My room was small and had ensuite loo and wash basin but no shower so I had gone down the corridor to wash myself the night before.

I lugged the panniers downstairs and paid the bill and my bike was round the back where I had left it the night before. As I loaded up the luggage it started to rain heavily and by the time I was five minutes down the road I was feeling wet. I was on major trunk roads all day and I was concerned about the traffic, especially as, in several places, I knew the roads were not wide. However the A85, which is the main road from Oban to Tyndrum, was mercifully quiet and once the rain had settled to a mixture of scotch mist and spits and spots I enjoyed the ride along the side of Loch Etive



and later, Loch Awe. Loch Awe has an excellent smokery and its produce is world renowned. It also has an amazing bit of heavy engineering hidden inside Ben Cruachan that towers over the Loch. In 1959 work was started to build a hydro-electric station that could pump water in both directions. Use of electricity is intermittent and it was realised that if you built a dam high on a

mountainside, water could fall down pipes and generate electricity through turbines. In times of low power demand, water could then be pumped back up to the dam, using electricity that could not be stored, ready for the next surge in use: a simple but very effective concept that is still in use today. Cruachan was not the first of its type but, despite early problems, remains one of the most efficient and 50,000 visitors a year see the huge turbine hall built inside the hollow mountain.

I had no time to stand and stare and continued along the A85 as it climbed up



to the moor above Tyndrum. The slopes are fairly gentle and I made good time with very little traffic. The weather improved a little and I stopped to take some pictures.

At Tyndrum the A85 joins with and becomes the A82, and I stopped at Brodies mini-market, which has been catering for weary travellers since the 1930s, and bought a packet of Jaffa cakes, a banana and a bottle of orange for immediate

consumption



As I continued towards Crianlarch the rain came down more heavily to the extent that I stopped for shelter in the bus stop by the Crianlarich Hotel. My timing was impeccable in that as I restarted the rain ceased and I had an exhilarating ride down towards Loch Lomond.

I was now retracing steps I had taken in the opposite direction when cycling from Lands End to John O'Groats in 2014, but had forgotten just how far it is from Crianlarich to Tarbert on Loch Lomond. The road starts off well but narrows down and twists and turns, getting steadily worse as it winds along the Loch shore. The traffic was heavier and there were a few moments when I cursed inconsiderate drivers.

53 miles into the journey, cyclists and pedestrians leave the main road and take to a dedicated path of varying quality both in width and surface but at least you are away from the heavy traffic. It was then a further 17 miles during which I again got soaked by a shower, before I arrived at the Lomond Park Hotel in Balloch where I am staying the night. It's been miserably wet at times so far from enjoyable but, at least, the climbing has been easy and the Hotel

has a good radiator to dry my clothes for tomorrow.

