



A side trip to Scotland

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Topic: [Alternative energy](#)

Tags: [department of energy and climate change](#), [light rail](#), [trains](#), [wind farms](#) [[list all tags](#)]

The rains in the Southwest of Scotland, at the end of last week, had an unfortunate consequence relating to the use of a car, beyond Dumfries. With all respect to Alan, as one moves away from the population centers, up from London, past Newcastle and Carlisle and then up to Dumfries, one runs out of viable public transport, and thus a car becomes critical to go further, at least in this day and age. Time was when one could have relied on buses to penetrate into the Land of the [Southern Upland Way](#) but they no longer run with useful regularity. And so I shared my rented car (there not being enough to go around because of the rain) with a young lady now working just outside the village on the installation and operation of wind farms [in these parts](#).

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Having noted on an earlier trip the local opposition to wind farms, I was a bit surprised to find the number that have already been installed. And talking to my aunt, who attended the [start of the local enquiry](#) in the village, most of the objection seems to come from those [Sassenachs](#) who don't otherwise belong. Relying just on the [hydro \(pdf\)](#) is not a viable option, and with the dreams of Scottish independence now [swallowed](#) in Prime Minister Brown's nationalization of the once great Scottish banks, this part of the world must have something. Nuclear power is apparently not an option.

I suppose that wind is an inevitable step, solar not being a real option this far north, where the weather patterns that have brought the rains (and concurrent clouds) of the last few days are not that uncommon, and where power is still vital. (Digging peat, as I did in my youth to help provide for the winter has, one gathers, become *infra dig*).

The fates of small communities such as this are going to become more tenuous. Even in the best of times the tourism trade was barely sufficient to keep the two hotels in the village viable, one is already defunct and the other changed hands again this summer. We were one of two tables at the restaurant down the Ken at New Galloway for lunch, repeating a pattern of diminished customers that I had seen as we drove up to Maine, earlier this summer. Communities have become dependant on a tourist trade that may, for a while, have faded away. One wonders where the jobs may be. The folks that sold the village hotel moved to Florida to try over there, but I suspect that the only thing that will improve in their lives is the weather. Thus the arrival of a business, however small, that is likely to be around is a welcome sign.

Train travel in the UK, despite the higher prices since my last visit, is still very popular, and for short trips (from Dumfries to Carlisle for example) provide an easy public service. On the main

line over the weekend it was almost impossible to find a seat, so popular have the trains become as a way of getting around. So even though it took most of the day to make a trip that wouldn't have taken much more than an hour (foregoing getting there early, checking in, sitting around, and then getting everything together at the far end and travelling back into the center of town) it was much more relaxing to just sit, sip my coffee, and watch the world glide by. And one of the advantages of a train is that I have more than enough room to sit and type this on my laptop.

The Sunday papers were talking about the quiet merging of the energy folks with the environmentalists to form [the Department of Energy and Climate Change](#) – pitting those who worry most about global warming against those that worry as much about keeping the nation warm and with sufficient power to work in the same department. With rumors of this winter being colder than in recent years and, as Euan has remarked [in the past](#), with the energy shortage in the UK likely to become more evident every year, one wonders how public the disputes in the new Department will become?

Which, of course, brings us back to the original topic. I did not go and visit the site of the new wind farms up [around Dalry](#), though the web have travelers reports from the [hikers](#) on the Upland Way that show the turbines up (though not necessarily turning) and the new ones are in the 2 MW range (the 5 MW machines are offshore) so they are hard to miss (though unless you are close they will become easy to ignore). But by themselves they will not be enough to provide for the shortfall. (Note this is not the Dalry in Ayrshire that has its own [windfarm](#).)

And this brings me back to one of my themes of the last post. We are still in the stage of global considerations of economy, The way in which the European banks have apparently started working together, and along the same path, to help resolve the current financial debacle is evidence of that. The trickier problem of the distribution of scarce resources is less likely to find such a solution. Thus the nations on the end of the line (Ireland and Greece come to mind) won't be as able to call up help from those further up the pipeline and the arguments about “proper share” may become more nationalistic, particularly with the arrival of harder winters. Thus places such as Dalry will need to find these alternate sources of supply, which may, in the process, also slow the loss of young folk from the villages.

But to end on a positive note, I took the train back south, reliving my schoolday travels by train to [the Royal Grammar School at Lancaster](#) sadly, but typically, hidden in the mist as the train rolled by. And so on to Nottingham (for a conference that is decidedly off-topic for this site) where I found that not all its investments had disappeared into the Icelandic fjords, but rather that some 4 years ago they had put in a light rail system that has [already](#) carried over 38 million passengers. To show the impact there are some before and after pictures [here](#). I will probably take it back to the station when I start my journey back to the States on Friday. Until then I am off learning about how oil rig tools might be used [in surgery](#) and in [fire fighting](#) and other fascinating stuff.....



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