

It'd be the blue one, aye?

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Ni math sgriobhadh gan floghlaim – it is not good to write lacking learning

Ni math leightheoir gan tuigse – not good is a reader without understanding

From a poem by Felim MacDugall in Scottish Verse from The Book of the Dean of Lismore

A career is a funny thing. I imagine the events and accomplishments that make a career memorable are rarely what we anticipate when we are starting our professional lives. My career started at the Zimmer Nuclear Power plant and included several memorable twists and turns that landed me ten years later in the College of Engineering at UC. In the thirty years at the university I helped manage research projects, write grants, administer academic programs, create professional development offerings, teach courses, contribute to education research, train faculty regarding instructional technology well you get the point. The career took a number of branches that I never would have expected, but all provided opportunities to contribute to interesting work and gain skills and experience in diverse areas.

It was during Santa Ono's time as Provost and University President that there was an increased emphasis on international activities. In particular, there was a goal to increase significantly the number of students participating in an international travel experience. These often took the form of an academic semester abroad or a trip associated with a particular course. One of my jobs at UC had been creating professional development programs. I had collaborated with the College of Business to develop a program for engineers who were transitioning to management and leadership roles. I realized I could use the concepts taught in that program, add material related to cultural competence and I would have the foundations of a course that could provide an international experience for engineering students – now I just needed to add travel to somewhere outside Hamilton County (honestly some of our students haven't been to Anderson or Mason).

I have regularly attended the annual conference of the American Society for Engineering Education. As I recall, I earned my first rejected paper from that conference; much deserved I must note. At two consecutive meetings, one in Pittsburgh the other in Chicago, I found myself in the same session as Brian Dickson, a Chemical engineering faculty from the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow. We talked a bit at the Pittsburgh meeting and then when we saw each other again in Chicago it was like old friends,

warmly greeted. We had dinner and Brian mentioned if I ever wanted to do something with students in Scotland he could help make connections and even help plan the itinerary. That fall I saw a call for proposals for travel grants to establish new study abroad programs. I'd learned a lot about writing since that first rejected paper, most importantly know your audience, and it was then easy to write a proposal that was accepted.

The grant provided an opportunity to visit the intended destination, get the feel of the place and work on planning a trip for students. So in 2011 my wife and I made the trip to the UK. Our second son Aaron was doing a year abroad on a Watson fellowship and had made arrangements to meet us in London. Now those of you who are paying attention are thinking – this sounds like a family vacation, not work. I'll assure you though, the Ohio taxpayers' money was well spent. We stayed a couple of days in London and a few more in a small village with tall hedges and thatched roofs before taking a flight to Glasgow. Brian met us at the Glasgow airport – he had taken the bus so he could ride in the passenger seat of our rental and provide practical knowledge of how to drive in the UK. It's not hard to adjust to driving on the left or shifting with your left hand but navigating the signs on a double roundabout was a bit much for me. I was grateful for Brian's patient instruction.

Brian walked us around Glasgow indicating sights the students might like and appropriate places to stay. We talked through various industry visits that might be possible and developed a couple of scenarios for a visit to the University. Knowing I had developed a taste for the peaty whiskeys, Brian encouraged us to go to Islay. The trip is not long by US standards and afforded an opportunity to see a variety of sights that might be good for student visits. We took the high road past Loch Lomond – I will refrain from singing – and made a stop in Inveraray. This is a small town on the shore of Loch Fyne with a castle, more accurately a grand Georgian mansion, a dungeon museum, and All Saints Church and bell tower. You could be excused for overlooking the church but the bell tower contains the second-heaviest ring of ten bells in the world. I only know this because son Aaron, who you recall is along on this portion of the trip, had learned change ringing at Sewanee where he had gone as an undergrad. Sewanee had both a bell tower and a carillon tower and by his junior year, Aaron had keys to both and permission to play except during certain restricted hours. During his time on the Watson fellowship Aaron had sought out opportunities to play bells and yes, one of those had been in Inveraray where he was also called upon to play organ for Sunday services when the Bishop of Argyll was in attendance and the regular organist was out sick.

We travelled on to the ferry port at Kennecraig and boarded the Caledonian MacBrayne bound for Islay, queen of the Hebrides. I tend not to do well on boats but this was a most pleasant two hour journey with calm seas, stark coastlines and a light rain. Son Aaron has always liked rain and he was standing on the bow of the ship in his rain jacket and Tilley hat. We were seated just inside where we had a similar, drier view. A toddler was adjacent to us and says to his mother: "Mommy, there is a man, in a hat, standing in the rain." "Mommy, why is the man in the hat standing in the rain?" "I don't know love" she says "now eat your lunch." But Mommy, I want crisps. Please Mommy, may I have crisps?" "No love, eat your sandwich." I now knew my son was no longer a boy and crisps were potato chips. I also recognized that "love" was essentially a common form of address, but we'll come back to that shortly.

We put in at Port Ellen, a small, picturesque village on the south of Islay. As you approach it from the sea, you notice white washed and grey stone houses, fishing boats and just to the east the distinctive roofline of a distillery. Islay has a population of approximately 3,200 souls (about a quarter of who speak Gaelic) and it has been estimated 30,000 sheep. No sheep were immediately apparent as we got off the ferry but we were greeted almost immediately by the local pipe and drum band who were preparing for an athletic event. Perfect way to be greeted to the Hebrides.

Islay is first mentioned in literature in a biography of St. Columba who visited before going on to Iona to establish the monastery there. There are a number of attractions that draw visitors: rugged coasts and sandy beaches, birding and marine life, solitude, a working woolen mill and well to be honest, whiskey. There are nine working (or soon to be) distilleries and several more planned: Laphroaig, Lagavulin, Ardbeg, Bowmore, Caol Ila, Bunnahabhain, Bruichladdich, the recently open Kilchoman, the to be reopened Port Ellen distillery, and planned for distilleries at Farklin, Port Charlotte and a rumored one at Bridgend. If you are a fan of the very peaty whiskies, Islay is the promised land. The island is largely covered with peat bogs, layer upon layer of spagnum mosses and other slowly decomposing vegetation. This decaying organic matter creates the compact black banks of peat which have been used for home fuel and for the whisky industry in the malting process. The winter gales drive salt spray far inland saturating the peat bogs which are then dried again by the salt and seaweed infused winds. In some measure, all of these characteristics go into the whiskies of Islay. The southern distilleries - Ardbeg, Laphroaig, and Lagavulin, also referred to as the Kildalton Distilleries - have the most pronounced peatiness and they are easily my favorites. Tasting notes for these three include; reminiscent of tar, brine, smoke, iodine, carbolic, like licking a wet campfire. If you are not a fan this all sounds like the talk of a crazy man; if you are a fan you are thinking "that sounds about right."

The southern distilleries are referred to as the Kildalton distilleries since they are in the region once served by the Old Parish Church of Kildalton which first gathered parishioners in the late 12th or early 13th century and served a worshipping community until the late 18th century. A short drive on the single-track road beyond the Ardbeg distillery brings you to the site. As you pull up you see that the walls of the church still stand but the roof is long gone. There is a fence around the church yard now to keep out a portion of those 30,000 sheep; people are allowed to enter using a set of steps that provides access over the fence. Within the church and graveyard are several impressive grave slabs from medieval times. The most notable artifact however is the Kildalton High Cross carved from a single piece of grey green epidiorite stone. It stands about 8 feet high with the arms of the cross extending approximately 4 feet. The Kildalton cross is closely related to the larger, but less well preserved crosses on Iona and dates to the last half of the 8th century. Still discernable after exposure to 12 centuries of hebridean weather are carvings of Cain and Abel, the sacrifice of Isaac and the Virgin and Child flanked by angels.

We left the church taking the road back to Port Ellen then headed north on the road to Bowmore where we had booked a room at the Lochside Hotel, a modest place with a dining room overlooking Loch Indaal, which is not an inland lake at all but a bay that opens into the Atlantic. Yes, Bowmore has a distillery, a fine one; also notable is the round church which we attended that Sunday morning.

I need to make a brief side excursion here, one that Dr. Freud would find amusing perhaps. We here are all sons and we likely remember some of those things our fathers did or said when we were lads that we did not understand, but as we grew and matured we found to be quite embarrassing. It seems more often than not though, as we grew we would mimic the words or behavior of our fathers so as to embarrass our sons. The seeds sowed by dear old Dad created patterns of behavior we could not easily escape as we perpetuate this behavior from generation to generation. Perhaps like your mothers, my mother was a saint. For putting up with three sons, certainly, but also for her selfless giving for all the years I was blessed to know the woman. When we were younger the kids would be at the breakfast table together and Mom would be cooking for us. Our father would arrive a few minutes later and Mom would ask "What would you like love?" So it was 40 years later – 40 years - sitting at breakfast at the Lochside Inn, the pretty young waitress asks "What would you like, love?" and it takes all that I have to break the cycle and not respond the way Dad would those long years ago with a gleam in his eye "honey - you know what I want."

Back to the story at hand. One of the other gems on Islay is the old woolen mill near Bridgend. It is believed that an operating mill has been on the site since the mid-1500s. The current mill began operation in 1883 using the local stream as a power source to operate the looms. The mill went into disrepair but was reopened in 1980 by a husband and wife team who continue to operate the mill with their sons and a team of weavers. Several original structures are still used and there are two restored Dobcross looms dating from the 1920's also in use. They produce a variety of tartans and tweeds of excellent quality which have appeared in films such as *Far & Away* (1992), *Forrest Gump* (1994), *Rob Roy* (1995) and *Braveheart* (1995). Everything about the place speaks of tradition, craftsmanship, pride of place and pride in work.

I took the first group to Scotland in 2013 and since that time I have led 6 trips for students and 1 trip for a small group of faculty. The trips include visits to Glasgow and Edinburgh to meet with industries and universities. They also always include a stay in a smaller town or village. I was concerned the first time I took students that they would find the small places dull, lacking enough of the “evening economy” to keep them happy. That concern was unfounded. Every trip students comment “I wish we could have stayed longer in Oban, or Islay or Ballater or ...” I will not give a report of every trip, rather I will share a few stories to illustrate the joys and challenges of taking students abroad.

I was preparing to lead the trip for the second time in March of 2014. We were all to meet at the airport at 11:30 for an early afternoon flight to Newark then on to Glasgow. Two of the students did not have easy means of getting to the airport, and as Uber was not yet an available service, I had offered them a ride. We made arrangements to meet in my office at 10:30 so that we could be at the airport ahead of the other students. At 10:25, the first student arrived in my office. When the other student did not show up at the appointed time, I pulled out the group contact information, found her cell phone number and dialed it. The call went to voicemail and I asked her to call me as soon as she got the message. I tried to think of alternative ways of handling the situation if she did not call, when my phone rang; it was the missing student. I asked her how soon she could be in my office or the parking garage with her luggage. Her response, “the trip is today?” I resisted the urge to yell and rather said, we will meet you at your apartment in 10 minutes. Pack in this order: your passport, your credit card, then anything else you have time for, clean or not. We made it to the airport on time and happily she was a model traveler the rest of the trip.

We took students to Oban the first two years of the study trip. Oban is a sea side town situated on the western coast of Scotland overlooking the isle of Mull. The ruins of the Dunollie Castle are an easy walk

from Oban city center, it has a first rate distillery founded in 1794, a picturesque harbor and a famous, perhaps infamous, structure known as McCaig's tower or McCaig's folly. The Romanesque structure sits prominently on the high point of the city. It is a public works project built around 1900 but never completed. It is a fine spot though to view the harbor and surrounding countryside.

On the trip in 2014, Brian was absolutely brilliant in helping with a local vendor. I had come up with the idea of renting bicycles so we could explore a variety of area attractions without needing a vehicle. I had done my research and identified a rental shop that said it was open. Brian and I went to the shop late Saturday afternoon to secure the bikes for the next morning but were told "oh sorry, we are not open on Sunday's in March" despite what was on the web site. Dejected, I concluded we'd just have to make other plans. Brian simply asked "would you be open if you could come at 8:30 am to rent 12 bikes and come back at 5:00 to collect the bikes?" Well yes, yes I could arrange for that, was the response of the owner.

I had explored options for the bike ride and made a proposal to the students in advance of the trip. I was interested in taking the short ferry ride from Oban to Craignure on Mull, then biking to Tobermory, a distance of about 21 miles one way. If we took the 9:00 am sailing we would have 7 hours until the last return trip from Craignure back to Oban. Well before the trip I told the students that if they were interested in this option they should be fit and comfortable with a bike. Most students wanted to go with plan B, stay around Oban and not exert so much effort. Three were excited to join me on this adventure. Russel had completed several triathlons in times that indicated he knew how to push himself; Anna was a first year student who had competed in track and cross country through high school; Brittney was not as serious of an athlete but her weekly exercise regimen appeared to be rigorous. I encouraged all to continue to keep up with their exercise prior to the trip.

So it was that four of us enjoyed the ferry ride that Sunday morning. It only takes about 45 minutes but the views are delightful: the Oban harbor with McCaig's tower sitting like a tiara crowning the village; the green hillsides of the Isle of Lismore; and that morning, a rainbow over Duart Castle, the renovated home of clan MacLean. We disembarked from the ferry at Craignure, wheeling our bikes out on an overcast, misty morning. We turned right to Tobermory and followed the eastern coast of Mull passing through woods, farmland and coastal bluffs. The view would be better when the weather was clear, but even in the rain, well not the heavy rain, the scenery was delightful. As is common in Scotland we had a number of periods of precipitation, only heavy for short but uncomfortable intervals.

Something that I have learned is that even though many college students are thin, few are fit, despite what they think. Russel was an exception, he was in fine shape and handled his bike as one who had spent lots of time in the saddle. Anna, a mechanical engineering student, was struggling on the uphill grades. I pulled behind her on a long upgrade and noticed she never changed gears. I suggested that she might want to shift into an easier gear and she confessed she had never been on a bicycle with gears and didn't know how to shift. I understand she was a freshman but I couldn't help but wonder about a mechanical engineering student who didn't know what gears were. I asked Russel to teach her the basics.

The real issue was Brittney who after five miles was showing signs of fatigue. After her introduction to the use of gears, Anna was doing well and she and Russel had disappeared from view ahead of us as I held back to accompany Brittney. Just then, Brittney went off the road and fell with her bike back on to the blacktop. I was following close behind and did not have room or time enough to react. I ended up running over her left arm with my bicycle before I could stop my forward movement. Her knees and ego were bruised enough that she didn't even notice her arm. Honestly she was OK – nothing broken or bleeding. She concluded though that she could not go on or at least could not make it to our intended destination. What to do?

The other two were likely half a mile ahead of us at this point. I could sprint ahead to catch them and have us all go back. I could go back with Brittney leaving the other two to wonder what happened. I could send Brittney back and push on ahead to join the others. I did not voice any option, rather it was Brittney who insisted I go on and she go back. It had been a net uphill to that point so the terrain was favorable. I knew the ferry terminal was open and had a vending machine and rest room, I did not see if anything else was open that Sunday morning. I reluctantly consented to this plan and before taking off gave her half the food I had brought in my pack (students do not plan ahead). I told her about when and where to expect us for the return ferry ride back.

I then high tailed it up the road in pursuit of the others who had begun to wonder where we were. I explained the situation and all agreed the decisions made were the best given the circumstances. We had a pleasant but all too slow trip to Tobermory with far too many rest stops. Then came the wail of an ambulance coming toward us from behind as we got to the edge of town. My mind went straight to 'something terrible has happened to Brittney and I'm going to have to explain to her parents why I abandoned her on a desolate Scottish isle.' I thought about following the ambulance to the hospital to find out if it was Brittney but I also had another issue to deal with. We were so slow on the way to our

destination we had used well over half the available time; to get back on schedule we would have to be much faster on the return trip. If we did not push ourselves we were in danger of missing the ferry back to Oban. I let the ambulance go and focused on the other issue.

Despite my concerns over time, after getting drenched by rain I allowed for a quick stop at a local coffee shop on the quay that faced the Tobermory harbor. The village was built as a fishing port in the late 18th century and is the primary settlement on Mull. It features brightly painted buildings lining the main road along the harbor with high woodland-fringed hills surrounding the bay. The most prominent current citizens are white tailed eagles which have flourished since they were reintroduced to the island. We had coffee and a pastry and 5 minutes to enjoy the scenery.

As I was paying the bill I spotted a card for the local taxi company and concluded discretion was the better part of adventure. I explained to the man who answered we were three tourists with bicycles who needed to get back to Craignure before the final sailing to Oban. Could he accommodate us? Well he said, glad you called when you did, it was quiet and I was about to close up for the day. Yes - If you fit I'll take you. I was confident that if only two fit I could make it back in plenty of time not being held back by engineers who don't know gears or who can't peddle for more than an hour. (My wife has long told me I'm a bit of an exercise snob). I reported my plan to the students. It was as if spring had just arrived after a long, cold winter. Both were thrilled with the plan and both were happy to part with a 20 quid note for the convenience. With some maneuvering, all 3 bicycles and passengers fit.

On the taxi ride back to Craignure I kept a keen look out for Brittney's bike hoping not to see a pile of twisted metal along the roadway. Just before the ferry terminal I spotted it in a parking lot; Brittney was fine and she had discovered that the neighborhood pub was open. It was the smallest such place I've seen with maybe 10 seats total. But it had a log fire, 5 taps, plenty of whiskey and a 2 piece band badly covering US pop songs. The modified travel arrangements gave us time for a pint before we boarded the ferry back to Oban.

The other students met us back at the bicycle shop at the appointed time. They had had a good day but with less drama and none in their party got run over by the group leader.

The visits to universities and industry in Scotland made it clear that most everyone in Scotland, from students, to industry execs, to elected officials and the man in the pub, considered climate change to be an urgent matter. This was reflected not only in their sentiment, but in their actions and national policies. I had learned long ago as a nuclear engineer that decisions around energy were based more on

politics and public will than on science so I was particularly curious as to how the people of Scotland had approached this issue so differently from the US.

Here was another opportunity to do something interesting; I looked into creating another course around energy and society that would include a trip to Scotland so students could compare and contrast energy policy and attitudes. A seminar course for honor's students seemed to be a good approach as it would allow for more discussion and should attract intelligent, engaged students. I was concerned because my knowledge on many topics is quite limited so I asked fellow literarian Richard Gass to co-teach the class with me. You have heard of some of Richard's travels to glacier covered parts of the world; he has reported first hand the alarming decrease in the ice fields he had visited in the past decade. Richard was both interested in the topic and agreeable to co-teach the course with me. Richard was familiar with climate models and is easily one of the smartest people I've known so if I ran into any students who asked questions I couldn't answer, I had Richard to bail me out.

Richard and I also share an appreciation for single malt Scotch whiskey so I was hoping to identify a (reasonably) legitimate scenario wherein we could take the energy and society students to Islay. After some research, I learned that Islay has a small but dedicated group working to bring renewables to the island. They have a couple of essentially failed or yet to be implemented attempts at tidal and wave power but they also have wind. To be more precise, they have plenty of wind supply and they have one wind turbine. And in a major case of national "spin" the island has an abundant supply of a slow renewable energy source – peat. That was enough to justify the trip.

In the spring of 2017 we took a small group of students, only 7, but that makes logistics a bit easier. With my previous experience on Islay I knew how to navigate the island plus in March traffic would be sparse. So with an eye toward economy, I made arrangements with a local outfit to rent a large passenger van that I would drive. We left Cincinnati on a Thursday afternoon and arrived in Glasgow early Friday morning. We spent the first day in Glasgow walking and sightseeing to get the students over their jet lag. On Saturday we had hired a coach to take us to the ferry port at Kennicraig where we sailed to Port Askaig. The ferry ride was as enjoyable as the earlier one, though this one took us to the north part of Islay where we had good views of the barren hills of Jura contrasted against the green of Islay. The channel between Jura and Islay experiences significant and predictable tidal variations and currents and is the site of one of those yet to be implemented tidal power installations. There are only 5-6 structures in Port Askaig, so we had no trouble finding the car hire company. I was handed the keys

to a light blue, well broken in, VW mini bus. It had seats for 9 and we were 9 individuals eager for adventure.

Our first stop was the ruins of the Finlaggan Castle. For a landmark with such rich history, it was not well marked. The site has been the home of rulers of Norse and Gaelic settlements on the island and was the residence for a time of the Lord of the Isles. This title refers to various rulers who controlled the western isles of Scotland from about the 12th centuries and gave allegiance to the kings of Norway rather than the kings of Scotland. It was also the seat of Clan Donald for a time. Remains of the 13th century castle can be seen as well as remains of a chapel that likely dates to the 16th century. There is also a fine scotch from a local distillery named for the site; a scotch whose producer is a closely guarded secret.

Since the weather was particularly good, we drove past our hotel in Bowmore toward Port Ellen, then traveled west on single track roads to the point where you can pick up the trail to the American Monument. The monument is situated on a solitary spot on the Oa peninsula overlooking the Atlantic. It was erected in 1920 by the American Red Cross as a memorial to two troop ships that were lost during WWI near the site, and in gratitude for the Scots for the grim work they performed in retrieving the dead. The Tusconia was brought down by a torpedo from a German submarine while the HMS Ontario collided with another ship during a heavy storm. Between 600-700 lives were lost in those two tragedies.

To get to the monument, you enter private land through a small gate and follow an easy trail over moorland, grass, and along rugged cliffs. My recollection is of colors – auburn highland cattle under stunningly blue skies; of green grass and gray cliffs. After a pleasant walk we reached the monument. It is shaped like a lighthouse and sits solitary, bearing witness to tragedy and hospitality. There are no structures in sight, only the hills, the cliffs and the sea and of course, a subset of those 30,000 sheep. Inscribed on a plaque facing the sea are these words penned by Theodore O’Hara to first commemorate those who died in the Mexican-American war:

On fame’s eternal camping ground
Their silent tents are spread
While Glory keeps with solemn round
The bivouac of the dead

The next day was to be one of exploring local culture. We had a late morning visit to Laphroaig distillery arranged and a peat cutting outing in the afternoon. There was plenty of time that morning for another visit and the Kildalton church was a good choice given its proximity to the distillery. The morning was cloudy and cool with intermittent light rain. We passed the distilleries where the road gets noticeable narrower and less well maintained. About 3 ½ miles in I carelessly let the van drift a little too far left and the tires immediately began to sink into the soft ground of the ubiquitously moist island. I tried to steer all 4 tires back on to the asphalt but it was as if we were being pulled down into the moor. The van came to a soft but solid stop with the left wheels in mud up to the axle and the van sitting at about 20° to the road. We had to all climb out of the doors on the right hand side of the van. Happily no one was hurt and no one panicked.

We talked through limited options of how to recover from this difficulty. Richard led the group of students back down the road toward civilization as I stayed with the vehicle. Cell phone coverage is non-existent and this was a dead end road. The only reason to come this way was to see the Kildalton church or because you owned one of the, perhaps, five dwellings further down the road. Richard would check in at houses they passed to try and call for help. If things went particularly bad, once they walked to the distillery he would call taxi's to care for the transportation needs for the rest of the day. As it turned out, someone passing by that way knew the farmer who lived up the road and assured me he would be coming by later on his rounds. Sure enough, a big tractor came about an hour later and as he was figuring where he could attach a chain, a van with two men from Port Ellen arrived having heard of the trouble. I steered, the tractor pulled, and the two men hung on the right of the van as counterbalance so we wouldn't just plow the mud with that blue Toyota minivan. We got the van out and the farmer pulled it the half mile to his place. He fired up his pressure washer and cleared the mud from the under carriage and wheel wells. I started it up and drove around his lot a bit testing the brakes – all was in good working order. Remarkably I could find no dents or scratches on the left side of the van. The farmer would not let me pay him no matter how much I insisted.

I met Richard and the students at the Laphroaig distillery. As a holder to a “deed” for a square foot of Laphroaig land, I collected the dram owed me in accordance with that deed. I never enjoyed one more. The students piled in the van – though I was still driving they didn't seem to hesitate - and we took the high road toward Bowmore. To get to our peat cutting event we were told we should park the car just past the road to Laggan's Farm, find the small wooden bridge over the ditch and walk to the booth about 100 yards east of the road. There it was and there were Cheryl with whom we had arranged the

outing, Robert a distillery man from Lagavulin who cut peat and still burned it at home, and an old codger named Smudger. As best I could figure, Smudger was along to give him something to do and because he was a good story teller. Robert talked about how peat was formed, how it was used and showed us the tools for cutting and lifting it. Before using the tools though they passed out cups and poured everyone a small portion of Lagavulan. This is what Grace, one of the students, would refer to as “culturally appropriate drinking.” We were given a demonstration on use of the tools and we each took turns cutting and stacking peat. It is quite wet when cut and therefore fairly heavy. The tools are not cumbersome but experience matters and your shoulders would begin to ache soon if you had to do this all day.

After stacking the peat we went back to the booth where Cheryl pulled out sandwiches and sweets and, well this is Scotland, a whiskey they simply refer to as the black bottle. We all had a nip of that. Smudger told stories and taught us a song about Islay. If Nico has supplied Richard with a generous pour this evening, perhaps he will sing it for you? - No? Okay, on with the story. Cheryl then pulled out another bottle and distributed a bit to all from that one. Richard and I looked at each other in wonder; this was perhaps the finest Scotch we had ever tasted. It was an Aardbeg product that went under the name Dark Cove. This was an exceptional whiskey for those who like the heavily peated malts. Later in the trip, we both looked into buying a bottle. Neither of us did however, as it was well out our price range. Why they served this to a group of college students, most of whom certainly did not appreciate it, I do not know.

Richard and I planned a walk for the morning before we were to meet with the renewable energy group. We needed to drive about 10 miles to get there so we headed the other way on the island toward the Bruchladdie distillery. We turned off the main road heading west, came to the first junction where we were to turn right and had to pull off because a pickup truck was on the one lane road just ahead of us. As I pulled to the side - on solid ground thank you – the van stalled. I put it in neutral and turned the key. Nothing. The farmer driving the pickup had stopped and came to check on us. He looked over the engine, suggested a few things, but had no more luck than we did. He was headed toward Bowmore and asked if he could take us. We had no real option and were glad not to be stuck again. As we rode he told us of how he came to Islay, of the various markings on the sheep, and of the peculiarities of island life.

I called the rental company when we got back to Bowmore, told them the issues and where we had left the van. Given our itinerary and our need to get to the ferry at Port Askaig late that afternoon I told her

it seemed best to me to have us take taxis and not try and work out a way to get the van back. The woman on the line gave me instructions as to what to do with the keys. And then she asked, though only five other locals new the story, if I had been in a ditch the day before? I told her I had and that the van had no apparent damage. She must have agreed because I was never billed.

We finished our visits on Islay and went to the ferry port in two vehicles. I was relaying the story about our trouble with the rental van to my taxi driver. He looked over at me and simply asked “it’d be the blue one, aye?” Apparently the van was well known to the residents. Maybe now I am too “that’d be the yank who ditched the van twice, aye?”

One final thought before we finish. I appreciate President Dehner’s call for our writing to better reflect the club’s literary tradition. I have not accomplished that in this paper. Rather than focus on the literary aspects, I tend to highlight, and celebrate, another feature of this club that I suggest is equally important – community and camaraderie. Yes, I created the course on energy and society because I was interested in the topic, but the foundational reason was to create an authentic mechanism to get Richard, my sponsor to the club, to Islay. I was certain he would enjoy going but was also fairly certain he would not go without intervention by another. When I created the class I recall the associate dean asking me “why are you doing this class, what’s in it for you?” What he did not know, but I did, was that this community of men is worth our emotional, intellectual and physical efforts. Richard and I have taken memorable trips to Inverness, Islay and Skye and have provided opportunities for students to learn while experiencing the beauty of Scotland and its people. And yes, we have managed to sample a fair number of single malt whiskeys along the way.

And so gentlemen, I raise a glass of single malt – this one a product from Talisker called aptly – Skye – to your health and to the health of the club. Slàinte Mhath (Pronounced Slanj-a-va)

Islay Info www.islayinfo.com Kildalton Church and Cross | Finlaggan

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