



# Going that Extra Mile can turn a journey into an experience

Laura Collacott and Alastair Sawday's book offers readers a chance to discover the joys of 'off piste' motoring

Roads less travelled – they are all around us. Yet we plough on down the motorway, however little we love it, forgetting how delightful it can be to go off piste and see more of this gorgeous country. Worse, we resign ourselves to having to stop at one of those grim service stations.

Let us encourage you to take a break from the strain, to turn your journey into something memorable. It may take an extra five or 15 minutes, but they are well spent. Just a few extra miles for delicious food, views across ravishing

countryside and places where you can relax. All it takes is a bit of planning, or spontaneity, to get away into the silence of rural Britain.

Those of us born in the 40s and 50s will remember what fun journeys used to be, with stops at pubs and ponds, and picnics in meadows. Car journeys were not as dreaded as they are now; they were often full of unexpected encounters, startling diversions, spontaneous visits to village inns, conversations with strangers to ask the way. Nowadays we plan ahead to avoid the worst of the traffic, and then grit our teeth. But

there are other ways. The sheer variety of these places "off the highway" still amazes me.

The first edition took me to a stunning, wild-life rich garden near Ancrum, then to a village café, numerous pubs, a National Trust house and even to a fair.

It has been fun, I have discovered parts of Britain we knew nothing of, and our journeys have been enriched.

These wonderful places are part of our campaign to enable people to escape driving convention and experience real food. They are run by remarkable people, many of them driven by a passion for



decency and origins when it comes to food and place. You will find no junk food, no grim commercialisation, nothing tacky and over-hyped. You will find organic breads and cakes, home-cured meats, sausages from nearby farms, superb coffees and fine vegetarian meals. But that is not all. There are places to bring a smile to the face and a twinkle to the eye: fun, unusual, original and colourful places for you to relax into.

Forget the ubiquitous branded coffee and flapjacks; follow us and be surprised by something more nourishing!

**Speyside Centre**  
Skye of Curr, Dulnain Bridge, PH26 3PA. [www.heathercentre.com](http://www.heathercentre.com). A9; 9 minutes from Junction A95

A local landmark, the Speyside Centre is tucked among the boughs of a pine forest at the edge of the Cairngorms. It was nearly devastated by a fire two years ago but, undaunted, the family have

shuffled the buildings around to accommodate the garden centre, antiques shop and café while work is completed on a glittering new build. The plant selection is excellent, antiques well worth a rummage and playground ideal for restless little ones.

Grandad's old workshop has been colonised by the tearoom, famous for its clottie dumplings, which can also be bought to take away. The lunches are equally good and the carrot cake is not to be missed. Grab a table on the terrace (known here as the 'sit ooterie') to watch red squirrels, butterflies and birds drift around as you eat. Magical.

**Scottish Deli**  
1 Atholl Street, Dunkeld, PH8 0AR. [www.scottish-deli.co.uk](http://www.scottish-deli.co.uk). A9; 1 minute from junction A923.

A grocer's store has stood on this spot since 1809 when the Duke of Atholl demanded a village store be built for the new crossroads. Today, behind the elegant façade and preserved signage, the shelves and counters of the Scottish Deli are crowded with an enormous array of artisan products, from oatcakes to smoked meats, haggis, chutneys and an enviable cheese selection. They are carefully selected by owners Sarah and Simon and supplied by producers nearby, wherever the quality is high enough: the smoked salmon and preserves scoop the prize for lowest food miles, made just 30 metres down the road.

Grab a spot at one of the handful of convivial tables

scattered through the shop to savour gourmet sandwiches, salads and soups at lunch or the delicious tapas menu in the evening, which you can wash down with a glass of wine. Service is relaxed and friendly, lingering is encouraged, and dogs and children are welcome.

**Loch Leven's Larder**  
Channel Farm, Kinross, KY13 9HD. [www.lochlevenslarder.com](http://www.lochlevenslarder.com). M90; 4 minutes from junction 8.

The scenery alone makes a diversion here worthwhile – set between rolling hills the Larder has a panoramic view of Loch Leven. In the food hall, shelves are stacked with a carefully chosen selection of goodies from local producers: cheeses, craft spirits and ales, preserves and confectionery. An artisan bakery creates delicious goods using high-quality local ingredients.

The Larder stands at the heart of the family's farm and crates of vegetables are delivery directly from the fields, where chefs transform them into imaginative seasonal dishes. The informal, family-friendly atmosphere in the café, where visitors can walk straight in from the Loch Leven Heritage Trail, makes it the perfect place to slow down and appreciate fresh local food. If you're in a hurry the Greenhouse Café is designed for express visits.

There's plenty of parking and the 1.5-mile path around the fields is suitable for buggies. There's also a play area, making it a great place to enjoy some fresh air.

**The Scrib Tree**  
1-3 Colliers Court, Douglas, ML11 0RX. [www.thescribtree.co.uk](http://www.thescribtree.co.uk). M74; 3 minutes from junction 11/12.

Cosy and welcoming in a honeycoloured, slate-roofed building by the Douglas Estate, the Scrib Tree is an enthusiastic champion of Lanarkshire farm produce and handcrafted gifts. If you're travelling between Glasgow and the Borders, swing in here for excellent coffee (roasted by hand in Glasgow by the Giambastiani family), great breakfasts, home-baked cakes and delicious lunches. The soups are a particular speciality.

Soak up the sun on the little terrace or eat in the lofty café. Here you can also browse the emporium of fresh produce and crafts – hand-thrown pottery, hand-turned wood and homespun woollens are all made by local artisans. Meat, game and vegetables come from the estate or neighbouring farms. Chefs in the kitchen use the same ingredients so if you're impressed by the flavour, fill your shopping bag before you leave. Parking is plentiful and it's worth popping in to Douglas itself – with origins stretching back to medieval time – to visit St Bride's church whose clock is rumoured to have been a gift from Mary, Queen of Scots.

**The Main Street Trading Company**  
Main Street, St Boswells, TD6 0AT. [www.mainstreetbooks.co.uk](http://www.mainstreetbooks.co.uk). A68; 1 minute from St Boswells's junction.

A magical combination of books, gifts and food, the Mainstreet Trading Company should be factored into every journey through this part of the Borders. Make time to browse the fabulous bookshop, then refuel on food that draws inspiration from the cookbooks on the shelves. Try the tomato, cumin and fig soup or hand-cured gravdax with labneh and bread, or pastrami and leek jam sandwiches. Cakes are all baked in-house by a small team: the gluten-free Tunisian cake is particularly good. The café is dog- and child-friendly; we loved the understairs book burrow for kids where they can listen to audio books among piles of cushions. In the courtyard out the back, a former barn has been developed to add a home shop and deli. The shop, in an old wine cellar, is stacked to the rafters with woven baskets, enamelware, French soaps and beautifully illustrated stationery; the deli stocks all manner of goodies from independent food producers, with cheese as the star of the show.

It's a 200 mile route taking in Kintyre, Knapdale, up to Loch Rannoch and along Loch Linnhe. "The part of the programme I think I enjoyed the most was finding out more about one of Scotland's finest Gaelic poets – Duncan Ban MacIntyre – and walking in the shadow of Ben Dorain in Argyll, the great mountain his long poem praises, in what is recognised as one of the finest achievements of Gaelic literature – a rich, rhythmic, unsentimental appreciation of wild landscape which was first published in 1768.

"It was also so interesting to meet people and learn about the little places we so often

## Taking the quiet route can lead to some interesting people and places

Cameron McNeish presents a two part Adventure Show Special: Roads Less Travelled – Scotland's Atlantic Way, starting tonight

Cameron McNeish is one of Scotland's national treasures, and he is back on our television screens this Christmas presenting a two part series of the popular Adventure Show Special – Roads Less Travelled, for BBC2 Scotland.

Cameron will explore "Scotland's Atlantic Way" – the route from the Mull of Kintyre with its 12 mile views across to County Antrim, up through the Crinan Canal and over to Mallaig, meeting and chatting with people along the way who can interpret the history, legend and culture.

He travels on foot, by bike, on the water by packraft, and in his camper van. "I'm on a mission to explore the history, legend and culture of Scotland in these two Adventure Show specials," says Cameron. "I will be rethinking what I know about music, discovering secret glens where our Commandos trained for the Great Wars, and putting my feet in the footsteps of St Columba at Keil Point."

Food is also on the menu and he tastes the bounty of the sea on board a 1947 herring ring netter fishing vessel with young skipper Ross Ryan at the Crinan Canal – it's not fish and chips, but lobster, mussels, and scallops. Another highlight is a walk accompanied by author Jenni Calder to discuss the works of prolific author Naomi Mitchison who was a vocal feminist campaigning in particular for birth control. Her novels included The Corn King and the Spring Queen, and contemporary political fiction including We Have Been Warned – her most controversial work, due

pass by without knowing much about them, such as the ruined house at Loch Ailort."

Cameron points out the ancient cup or ring marks, seen all over Scotland, on old slab stones – what are they about? Some kind of astrological connection with the stars, or where blood might have been deposited for some kind of ritual our ancestors carried out? – and visits burial chambers and many many standing stones.

He meets musician, Bob Pegg at Kilmartin Museum to explore what sort of instruments our ancestors might have played, including scraping together scallop shells, playing a bone flute



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and a drum made from deer hide, as well as spending time exploring myths and reality with storyteller Patsy Dyer.

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Her novels included The Corn King and the Spring Queen, and contemporary political fiction including We Have Been Warned – her most controversial work, due

to its explicit sexual nature. She died aged 101 in 1999, in the village of Carradale in Kintyre.

Cameron McNeish was born in Govan in 1950. As a teenager he was a competitive athlete, an international long jumper coached by John Anderson of Gladiator fame. But he grew up dreaming of earning a living from the great outdoors, and at that time he was drawn to the hills and did a bit of hillwalking. In his early career he did a variety of jobs, including a stint as a Glasgow copper, selling insurance, and working as a ski instructor. But when the opportunity arose for him and his wife to be wardens in a Highland Youth Hostel, his love of climbing mountains and the great outdoors really took off. He has written more than 20 books about the great outdoors and walking especially.

He first met the Adventure Show television producer Richard Else, of Wainwright's Way fame on Mount Elbrus in Russia where he was filming with Sir Chris Bonington. McNeish was leading a trek with a group from the UK. They got talking and when the opportunity came up to make a BBC programme about the author WH Murray, Richard invited McNeish to present it. A long working relationship began, with Cameron presenting many Adventure Show specials over the last 25 years.

● *Adventure Show Special: Roads Less Travelled – Scotland's Atlantic Way is on BBC2 Scotland tonight at 7pm, and tomorrow night at 6:30pm. It's available on FreeSat and Sky and later on iPlayer to watch back.*



↑ Cameron McNeish, left, samples seafood at Crinan with Lesley Banks and Ross Ryan



● *Extracted from The Extra Mile by Laura Collacott and Alastair Sawday (Printsinger, £12.99). Readers of the Scotsman can get 25 per cent off by entering the code SCOTSMAN at <https://theextramile.guide/product/the-extra-mile-guide>*