



# Friends News

June 2021

Keeping in Touch during the Covid-19 Restrictions

## Travels in Our Own Land

While most of us will be taking a staycation in the UK this year, John and Angela Strachan remind us that there are wonderful experiences to be had in our own country. Here are their memories of two special adventures which they had without setting foot on foreign soil.

Our thanks go to John and Angela Strachan for this month's contribution

Friends keeping in touch .....  
If you have an article to share, please email to [lynn\\_ellis@btinternet.com](mailto:lynn_ellis@btinternet.com)

To celebrate our 25<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary, Angela and I booked, through Goodwood Travel, a supersonic flight aboard Concorde. Not to some exotic destination but a two-hour supersonic flight across the Bay of Biscay and back to Heathrow – a Flight of Fantasy!

We arrived at Heathrow for a champagne reception where we met our fellow passengers before boarding our two coaches to ferry us to Concorde. However, one of our coaches broke down and we missed our take-off slot. The Captain told us he had asked for permission for an early take off and, to our astonishment, through the 'magic of Concorde', and its incredible take off speed, we were given permission to depart immediately. With an unbelievable surge in our backs, we raced down the runway

### *A Flight of Fantasy*

past all the waiting aircraft and soon we were in the sky. This was accompanied by spontaneous cheering from all our fellow passengers. Once we were clear of land, the after

### **A memorable trip on Concorde 17<sup>th</sup> September 1989**

burners came on and we felt another gentle nudge in our backs as we accelerated to Mach 2 – 1340 mph – and climbed to a height of 55,000 feet, nearly ten miles high. The information was displayed on indicators within the cabin. The aircraft by now had expanded ten inches and the sky became deep blue showing that we were on the threshold of space. We were really surprised

how quiet it was within the cabin.

The cabin of Concorde is comparatively small with two seats either side of the gangway and a total of 100 passengers in all. Once we had reached our cruising speed, the cabin crew served us a delicious lunch with another glass of champagne as we sat back and relished the experience.

On reducing speed, after an hour or so, we were invited by the Captain to visit the flight deck and from there we could see the Channel Islands mapped out below and bathed in glorious sunshine.

We arrived back at Heathrow with a beautifully smooth touch down and taxied back to our allotted parking slot. We all had an incredible experience and will never forget this memorable flight.

## By Steam Train to Scotland

Having great memories of travelling by steam train from Edinburgh to London in the late fifties and early sixties, Angela and I decided to treat ourselves to a return trip by steam from London Kings Cross to Edinburgh Waverley. We booked though 'Steam Dreams', one of the few 'Heritage' companies operating steam on the main line.

One of the attractions of the trip was that the train was being pulled all the way by the streamlined 'Bittern', an A4 Pacific and a sister locomotive to the 'Mallard' which held the world steam hauled record (126 mph) in July 1938. We decided to travel 'Premier Dining' so that all our meals were provided aboard the train. This was expensive but a lot cheaper than Pullman class. Imagine our surprise when, a few days before our departure, we were told that Rail Track required the train to leave Kings Cross at 7.16 am, precisely. Fortunately for us, although it was a Saturday, we managed to catch the first high speed train of the day from Ebbsfleet and within twenty minutes we were at St Pancras Station, only five minutes' walk from Kings Cross, and so we arrived with plenty of time to spare.

A good crowd of onlookers, including our son David and his eldest daughter Phoebe, were on the platform to see us off. As this was only the third time that 'Steam Dreams' had run a steam hauled train all the

way to Edinburgh, many of the stations en route were lined with people waving us on. This was the first time 'Bittern' had returned to Scotland since the sixties! After a glass of champagne and picking up more passengers at Stevenage, we were given a full English breakfast followed by as much coffee and tea as we could take. An excellent lunch was served before we arrived at York where the engine was replenished with water and coal. This resulted in a two-hour scheduled stop which enabled us to see this historic City. We were given an excellent brochure describing the journey and giving the expected timings as we passed

### A Very Special Rail Journey

May 2010

each station. After leaving York we were treated to cake and biscuits before enjoying a three-course dinner as we crossed the Scottish border. There were two stops of around half an hour each built into our schedule both before and after York where the train was held in sidings to let the faster expresses pass by and to take extra water for the engine. On one occasion we were held up by signals for nearly half an hour, so we sped past our next stop and caught up with the timetable arriving in Edinburgh within a minute of our scheduled time. A wonderful achievement for steam! We made a quick

trip to the engine to thank the drivers and firemen who were by now quite unrecognisable and displaying large toothy grins in blackened faces. How they had enjoyed themselves!

After spending Sunday with relatives in Scotland we returned on Monday and found to our surprise any spare seats of the twelve-carriage train from Edinburgh were filling up with people who had hoped to fly to London but were prevented from doing so due to the 'ash cloud' from a volcanic eruption in Iceland which had closed Scottish airports. On our journey between the Scottish Borders and Edinburgh the engine set off nine line side fires and Rail Track was reluctant to let us return to York. However, after modifications to the spark arrester system on the engine, it was agreed that we could be hauled by the 'Bittern', but we were assisted, by being pushed at the rear of the train, by a diesel locomotive to prevent the steam locomotive from working too hard. On arriving at York, the 'Bittern' was replaced by the 'Duchess of Sutherland', a Princes Royal class steam locomotive for the final leg to London. We were again served with a glass of champagne together with afternoon tea and a delicious dinner. The whole trip was a wonderful experience. We arrived at Kings Cross quite relaxed having had a fantastic time.

**John and Angela Strachan**