

The following is a fairly detail diary of our recent trip to Edinburgh. If you feel the need to purely see the important details, [pubs](#) and [beer](#), follow the links.

Seven intrepid members from the North West Wilts branch of CAMRA travelled by car, plane and train to Edinburgh in order to visit our old friend Molly, or Alice as she is known by our Scottish cousins. Whilst disappointed that only seven of our CAMRA branch could make it this number was just right for some of the small pubs we visited. As we arrived in three separate groups me and Stewart had the challenge of visiting certain pubs more than once! I'm sure my fellow travellers will forgive me if the hostelries visited do not always appear in the correct order!

Scott arrived first by train with Dave and Stewart arriving via Easy jet early evening of Thursday 12th June 2008. Within an hour of landing we had located [Thomson's Bar](#). Here we had our first sight of the [Scottish Tall Founts](#). The interior of the pub is traditional with plenty of wood panelling and mirrors depicting drinks and breweries long gone. We tried [Caledonians Deuchars IPA](#) (3.8%) and [Inveralmond's Ossian](#) (4.1%).

Moving swiftly on we met Molly, Owen and Scott at JD Weatherspoons [Standing Order](#). This is a huge pub with ornate fittings and ceilings originally a bank it was turned into a pub in 1997. It was curry night and a good curry with a free pint of Abbots ale (Scottish beer was sadly not part of the special offer) was the order of the day. For desert Owen recommended the [Cairngorm Wild Cat](#) (5.1%) which was a good choice. Just left out of the back door of the SO to Rose Street and into the [Abbotsford Arms](#) this pub with its Jacobean ceiling and Spanish-mahogany central bar is on the CAMRA National Pub inventory. Somewhat bemused we noticed that all the ales on offer were IPA, we declined the [Wadworth Henry's IPA](#) and chose the [Stewart Pentland IPA](#) (4.1%) & [Rebellion IPA](#) (3.7%) On leaving we spotted a notice advertising a four day IPA Festival which would see 13 English and 8 Scottish IPA's on offer during that time.

Close by is the [Café Royal](#) a magnificent Victorian pub its fine interior is on the CAMRA National inventory. The wonderful smell of sea food didn't stop us heading for the bar and ordering [Caledonian 80/-](#) ⁱ (4.1%) and the [Stewart Pentland IPA](#) (4.1%)

Just around the corner is the [Guildford Arms](#), which unfortunately had called last orders just prior to our arrival. Undaunted we set off back towards our B&B with Molly, Owen and Scott in tow, and headed for the [Oxford Bar](#). This is a bar you either love or hate and we loved it!! Small bar area but with a large room at the back. It was late so the bar was fairly empty, on a subsequent visit it was packed with friendly locals. Beer was limited but we had the award winning [Trade Winds](#) (4.3%) from the [Cairngorm Brewing Company](#) as a night cap. The Oxford bar is apparently the favourite bar of [Ian Rakins](#) [Inspector Rebus](#).

Friday and a tired Abi and Claire joined the throng having flown up from Bristol on the early morning flight...would they last the pace?



Being in Scotland's capital we felt it churlish not to have a photograph with the Piper. However Owen was still adjusting his hair when a friendly American tourist took the picture and Claire was very nervous about the Pipers Elbow!

Taking advantage of the fine weather we had brought with us we decided to take the Vintage bus open top bus tour, good value at £10. An informative hour later and

we are thirsty so we head for ...the pub!

Feeling a little peckish Molly suggested the [Half Way House](#). Words cannot really describe this little gem but I'll try....warm and cosy atmosphere, good ale, knowledgeable staff and good basic food. I think we visited at least four times and between us had great Scottish fare such as Haggis, Neeps and Tatties, Cullen Skink, and Black Boar sausages. Oh and of course the beer!!!

Inveralmond	Laifail	4.7%
Houston	Cascade Crystal	No info
Isle of Skye Brewing Company	Young Pretender	4.0%

Suitably refreshed we set off to have a look at Edinburgh Castle which was swathed in scaffolding poles and seating ready fro the Tattoo. We walked the Royal Mile on a gloriously sunny day listening to busking pipers and a strange looking kilted woman singing whilst using a spinning wheel and demanding payment for photographs!

However on the way we passed a sign about a hidden street which intrigued us so much we investigated further and took a very interesting tour under the streets of Edinburgh and visited the [Real Mary King's Close](#).

Emerging into the bright sunlight we had a quick look and the castle and its scaffolding before setting off down wide steps to an area of old Edinburgh called the [Grass Market](#). Sadly this area looked like a building site so we moved swiftly on, had we looked at the link above before hand I'm sure we would have explored more. Whilst Claire and Abi looked at



the shops Molly tipped us off that there was a pub not far away so we made a beeline for the [Bow Bar](#). In the GBG every year since 2000 the pub seemed popular with all types of clientele. I think we had time for a 'Double Vision' but as I can't find details on any website I suppose I must be mistaken! What wasn't a mistake was the view of the tenements sticking to the hillside; I presume these houses had a cellar as well. Folk must have been very fit to walk up all those flights of stairs!

Anyway pressing onwards and back towards Waverley station and on to the [Guildford Arms](#), which was closed last night. The wonderful interior can't be done justice with my photographs so why not take a look at their website? The choice of ale was satisfactory with at least 6 hand pumps [Isle of Skye](#) - [Skye Light](#) was particularly good.

We then set off for uncharted waters to the New Town Area. [The Cask and Barrel](#) is a large pub and was very full tonight. Plenty of ales to try (10?) Unfortunately it was too noisy and although we managed to find a table for us all we quickly moved on to the [Barony](#). Good classic interior and again a little busy, it was Friday night after all, we managed to find some tables on the pavement and enjoyed Galley IPA (Sadly this is another beer noted where I can't find details on the www.) [Theakston Old Peculiar](#) (5.6%) and [Broughton Broughton Special Bitter](#) (3.8%). Feeling a little peckish Molly took us off to a Chinese Buffet, all you can eat, restaurant. Now from a drinking point of view this could have been a disaster but although the food was tasty and plentiful we managed to save some space for more beer. Abi and Claire were looking decidedly tired at this stage but still having in there! Our final bar for the night was the [Oxford Bar](#). We managed to find some space in this relatively small pub and enjoyed [Cairngorms](#) award winning [Tradewinds](#) (4.3%) and [Inveralmond Independence](#) (3.8%).

It was now fairly late and Abi and Claire had managed to stay awake so far but desperately needed sleep so we left the local element of our group to it whilst we jumped into a taxi and headed off to our B&B's.

Saturday



Although it was a real ale trip we decided our bodies probably couldn't take three full days of drinking, although I have heard some other CAMRA groups do just that, so Molly suggested a walk in the country. Hopping on a bus we set off for Holyrood and on disembarking from the bus I was looking at a very high cliff face but was assured we'd take the easy route.

It then transpired we were heading for Arthur's Seat, one of the seven hills of Edinburgh. It was a fairly gentle walk with some steep elements, especially towards the end but we made it to the top (250m above sea level) and were rewarded with fantastic views west over Edinburgh with the skies being so clear we could even see the Forth Bridges.



Arthur's Seat



Dave, Abi, Stewart, Molly, Claire and Fraser rest at the top of Arthur's Seat.

The descent was probably as difficult as the ascent with some limbs not used to such exercise! However we made it to the bottom and popped into the Holyrood café for a cup of tea. Some of the team had cream teams whilst others were offered cheese scones with cream and jam!!! Reasonably refreshed we, we caught the bus back to Waverley station and headed for the Half Way House.

Dave and Rachel had arrived in Edinburgh by now, despite a wrecked exhaust system, and met us at the Half Way house for lunch. The small booths becoming increasingly cosy!

More decent ale was the order of the day:

Strathaven	Trumpeter	4.2%
Harviestoun	Gold Rush	3.9%
Broughton	The Reviver	3.8%



Cosy booth at the Half Way House



Stewart Matthews was delighted to discover that the Café Royal has coat hooks for little people.

After lunch Abi, Claire Molly and Fraser were determined to pace them selves and went off to look at museums. Whilst Stewart had indicated that he would join them some invisible force held him back, OK it was me holding onto his jacket resistance was futile, not that he offered much of it! We took Dave and Rachel for a small walk to [Guildford Arms](#), and tried the [Dark Island](#) (4.6%) from the [Orkney Brewery](#) (Champion Beer of Scotland 2007).

Just next door was the [Café Royal](#) and halves of [Stewarts 80/-](#) (4.4%) and [Stewarts Pentland IPA](#) (4.1%) were ordered.

Not so far away was the [Abbotsford Arms](#) where we tried [Strathaven Clydesdale IPA](#) (3.8%) amongst others. Just to prove it's a small world we bumped into a group of CAMRA members from Wigan up on a train day special.

After taking an eventful short cut, large dogs and a busy main road, I managed to redeem myself by leading Stewart, Dave and Rachel to safety and with a little help from the friendly natives we found ourselves outside the [Sizzling Scot](#) where the rest of the group were already established on a large table. The lack of real ale in the Sizzling Scot was more than made up for by the wonderful food and great service given by the staff.

To help us walk off the brilliant food We set off for a final night tour of the pubs. First up was the [Athletic Arms](#), known locally as Diggers due to its proximity to the local cemetery. We took advantage of the wonderful [Stewarts 80/-](#) (4.4%) before setting off to [Thomsons](#) where we stumbled across 'Davina' aka Dave on his stag night. A group photo was too good to miss. Some what scary but we did get the chance to try [Elland's Bargee](#) (3.8%) and SIBA Scotland Supreme Champion 2007 [Edinburgh Gold](#) (4.8%)



The gang met the delightful 'Davina'

from [Stewart Brewing Ltd](#) and award winning [Brewers Gold](#) (3.8%) from the [Pictish brewery](#). Still more walking and we eventually reached [Bennets Bar](#) This listed building has kept many original features, such as stained glass windows and an ornate back bar. The welcome was a little cold and with only two beers on the choice was limited. Our disappointment was soon forgotten when we travelled the short distance to the [Cloisters](#). There is a distinct lack of information from our notes about exactly what ales were available in the cloisters which has every thing to do with the discovery of [Cairngorm's Black Gold](#). This wonderful jet black ale has a gorgeous

creamy tan coloured head and tastes delicious. Any thought of going to the [Blue Blazer](#) were swiftly forgotten and we stayed until closing. Unable to resist spreading the word we sent text messages to real ale friends who replied with envy. So rare is this ale on draught, even in Scotland, that the bar staff told us they have to use had written pump clip as they don't know when it will turn up....bliss. Molly couldn't resist and went straight onto pints!!



Molly, Stewart and Dave rejoice in finding 'Black Gold'

Sunday

The last day in Edinburgh for most of the party. We met up at the Waverly Bridge and set off for a gentle stroll taking in another of Edinburgh's hills, this time the smaller [Calton Hill](#), some 95m above sea level. Once again the weather was very very kind to us so we spent time enjoying the panoramic views of the city from this vantage point.

Walking down the hill and into the old part of the city we turned left into Canon Gate and almost immediately found a Turkish cafe where we stopped for coffee, Molly trying strong Turkish coffee for the first time.. Highly recommended, some of the ladies 'snacked' here which was very dangerous: a) because the food was very good and b) we were on our way to the [Half Way House](#) for lunch!

Arriving at the pub some of us were disappointed to discover the boar sausage where not being served, them being a daily special the last time we were in. Fortunately other choices were available and of course the beer was superb. Those of us travelling home that night had decided not to spend all afternoon in the pub and after a few pints and a smashing lunch we set off on our own individual quests to see some of the touristy bits of Edinburgh, I did the city museum, highly recommended.



"Group photo in the Blue Blazer, Scott is in there hiding at the back"

Meeting at the [Blue Blazer](#) for a final beer late afternoon we tried [Houston Killellen](#), amongst others and then bade a sad farewell to Molly, Fraser and Owen. We had a great time in Edinburgh and try as we might we didn't visit all the pubs however this [Google map](#) will give you somewhere to start should you make the journey North of the border. Although we visited 14 pubs, many of them more than once, and tried over 30 different ales, we walked passed many that

could have been as good as the ones we visited.....so rooms for more on our next visit!

Finally thanks to Abi, Claire, Dave, Fraser, Molly (Alice), Owen, Rachel, Scott and Stewart for a wonderful stress free four days and remember we all agreed what happens in the pub stays in the pub ☺ .

Extra special thanks to Stewart for keeping tally of the pubs visited and beers he and I tried.

Dave Maloney
June 2008

Links:

A [map](#) of the pubs visited.

A [gallery](#) of photographs from the trip.

For those interested in joining us on distant or local trips please send your e-mail to realalesocials@btinternet.com.

List of Pubs/Bars visited.

Abbotsford Arms	Cask and Barrel
Athletic Arms	Cloisters
Barony	Guilford Arms
Bennets Bar	Half Way House
Blue Blazer	Oxford Bar
Bow Bar	Standing Order
Café Royal	Thomsons

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List of some of the beer we tasted and the relevant breweries.

Brewery	Beer (the ones we can remember)
Broughton	The Reviver , Broughton Special Bitter ,
Cairngorm Brewing Company	Black Gold , Tradewinds , Wild Cat
Caledonian Brewing Company	Deuchars IPA ,
Elland Brewing Company	Bargee
Harviestoun	Gold Rush ,
Houston	Cascade Crystal , Killellen ,
Inveralmond	Independence , Laifail , Ossian
Isle of Skye Brewing Company	Dark Island , Skye Light , Young Pretender
Orkney Breweries	
Pictish Brewing Company	Brewers Gold
Rebellion Beer Company	IPA
Stewart Brewing Limited	Pentland IPA , Stewarts 80/- , Edinburgh Gold
Strathaven	Clydesdale IPA , Trumpeter
Theakston	Old Peculiar ,

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ⁱ *Shilling Ales' were named after the amount of excise duty levied on each barrel in the 19th century. The beer's flavour reflect the natural, local ingredients available to Scottish brewers. They tend to be darker, sweeter and less heavily hopped than other British beers. The traditional, classic styles are 60/- (Light), 70/- (Heavy), 80/- (Export) and 90/- (Strong Wee Heavy). [CAMRA](#)*