

# Munros are a magnet for this Gaelic-speaking scrambler

The 26-year-old adventurer and presenter **Coinneach Rankin** on unearthing the clues hidden in place names and why rain ruined a shoot for his new BBC Alba series, *Dàna*

I grew up not far from Plockton in Lochalsh, so Skye was just across the water. My mum is a runner, my dad is really into the outdoors, so for as long as I can remember we'd be mucking about on rocky shores and scrambling up hills. It's a cliché, I know, but I only really realised how special all that was once I'd left home

to go to university. I love going back to the Plockton Inn. There'll always be some old guy on his fiddle who has been playing there for the past 40 years.

My earliest memory of proper mountain scrambling is on Sgùrr nan Gillean at the northern end of the Cuillins. You could actually see it from our house, so it had always been a bit of an ambition, I think. Then when I turned about ten, Dad took me up. It was pretty scary in places — on the most exposed section near the top I was on my hands and knees — but something about how rugged it was, all that continuous movement over rock, it kind of blew my mind. I distinctly remember standing on the summit, looking down at our house, and for the first time just really grasping the epic scale and grandeur of the Highlands and islands.

Being a Gaelic speaker definitely adds another layer of appreciation and immersion when you're out in the hills. Look at an Ordnance Survey map for anywhere north of about Glasgow, and it's littered with Gaelic place names. For most people they're unintelligible and unpronounceable, but for a Gaelic speaker they're an incredible patchwork of clues telling you what this landscape used to look like. There are so many place names that reference copses where there are no longer copses, eagles and wildcats where you don't find them any more. It brings you closer to the landscape, connects you with the history. It makes you feel you belong.

Spending so much time outside in the Highlands, wildlife encounters are inevitable. I worked a few years back for the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust and saw a humpback whale breach off Tiumpán Head on Lewis, and I've had amazing close encounters with eagles. However, the one that really got me was on Sleat on Skye. I was on my own down by the shore, and coming round a corner I came face to face with this magnificent fox. He was so big and red and healthy looking. We looked at each other for about 15 seconds, then he just sauntered off, cool as you like. I didn't even know there were foxes on Skye, so to see one so close, it was magical.

The series we just filmed took me to some incredible places. On Rum we camped out 1,500ft up on a ridge called Leac a' Chaisteil, where you get these incredible views of Harris, Jura and a row of mainland summits. Just as we got set up the sun started to set, turning everything these vivid golds and reds. I felt completely surrounded by water and mountains as far as the eye could see. It had



Clockwise from top: Rankin, right, with climbing partner Matt Glenn in Glencoe; Rankin with his kit; the show's drone operator, Kirk Watson

been such a long day, so we all just sat there soaking it up in a blissful, knackered silence.

Another superb moment from the series came when I was paddleboarding up Loch Lomond. I started right near the bottom of the loch at Balmaha and finished up at the top at Ardlui. It was a brilliant journey because you get such a sense of progressing from the Lowlands to the Highlands. We camped on one of the islands, and even though we were still so close to Glasgow, it

was just so thrillingly silent at night. It was towards the end of the second lockdown, so I hadn't slept out for months. We had a dram or two that night; it was so, so good.

Not everything went to plan, mind. On Lewis we went to climb this 1,000ft slab above Uig that has an almost mythical aura in climbing circles because it's so remote and so little climbed. Just as we got to the top of the first pitch the rain started chucking it down. No choice: we had to bale. Then, at the bottom

of our abseil, the sun suddenly broke through the clouds. Almost instantly the rock dried out, but it was too late: we'd run out of daylight. I remember walking back down, bathed in the most beautiful evening light you've ever seen — and absolutely raging.

**Coinneach Rankin was talking to Jeremy Lazell. Catch the first episode of *Dàna* on BBC Alba at 10.30pm on Wednesday. All episodes will be subtitled in English and are available on iPlayer for 30 days**

## Glasgow Cathedral and Provand's Lordship Castle Street

Across the road from one another, these represent the oldest part of the city, which was, as late as the early 18th century, merely a ribbon of streets to the river. Although established in AD543, the cathedral dates from the 12th century and is a fine example of gothic. The house, built in 1471, is a museum.

## Botanic Gardens & Kibble Palace, Great Western Road, Glasgow

Park close to River Kelvin, with riverside walks. Kibble Palace (built 1873; renovation 2006) is the distinctive domed glasshouse, with statues set among lush ferns and shrubbery from around the world. Carnivorous Plant House especially popular. A wonderful place to muse and wander.

## The Barras, Gallowgate

The sprawling street and indoor market area around the Gallowgate. More than 20 years ago the Barras was pure dead brilliant — a real slab of Glasgow life, and across the street the legendary Sarry Heid. Its glory days are over, but as with all great markets, it's full of character; still possible to find bargains.

**Taken from *Scotland the Best* by Peter Irvine (£15.99, HarperCollins)**

## Riverside Museum, by Clydeside Expressway

Across the Clyde from Govan, Glasgow's most recent big attraction is the Zaha Hadid-designed museum of transport. It's entirely at home here, with the Tall Ship berthed beside it. About 3,000 objects, from trains and trams to paddle steamers, are imaginatively displayed. It's world class. Not just for boys.

## Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Argyle Street

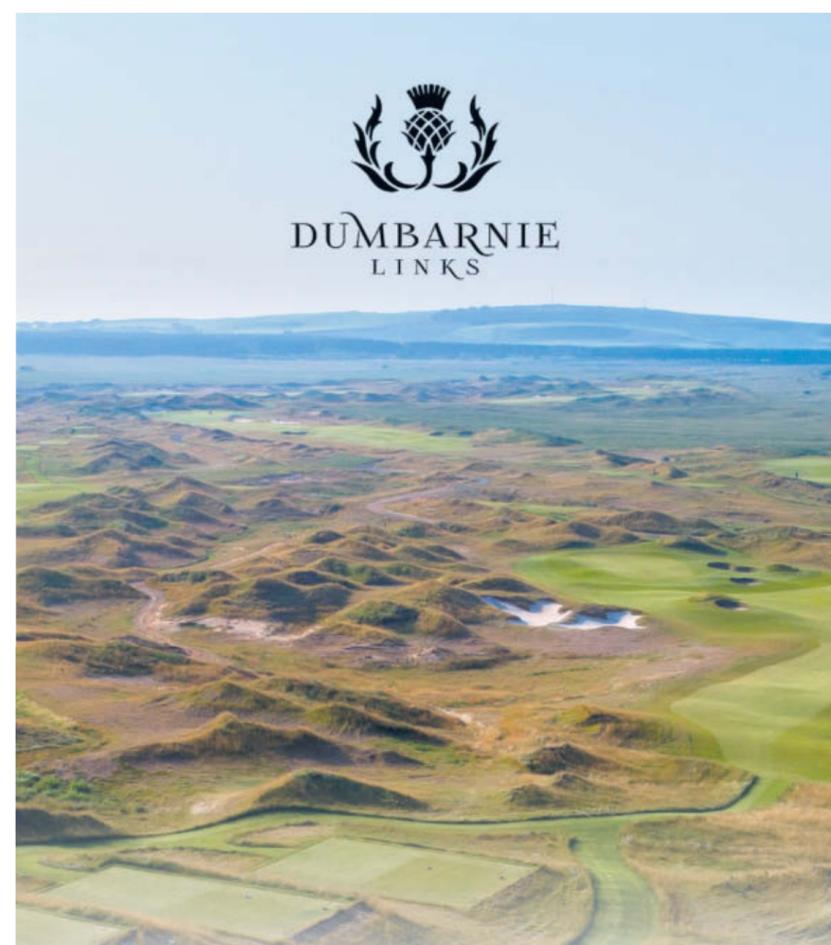
Huge Victorian sandstone edifice with awesome atrium. Natural history/Scottish history museum on the ground floor. The upper salons contain the city's superb British and European art collection. Temporary exhibition space (admission fee) downstairs. Millions of visitors since reopening in 2006 after refurbishment.

# 5 of the best

Glasgow attractions for locals



DUMBARNIE LINKS



We look forward to welcoming all visitors to Dumbarrie Links this year

- Host of the 2021 Women's Scottish Open
- Golf Monthly Top 40 in the UK
- Golf Inc. magazine, Development of the Year 2021
- Scotland Resident rate - £125 (booking restrictions apply).



dumbarnielinks.com • 01334 845945

• info@dumbarnielinks.com • Upper Largo • Fife • KY8 6JQ



Knights Kitchen owner Christine Longstaff with Kenyan sambusas, left. Above: Greek orange cake

## The world served on a plate — in the middle of Edinburgh

Where can you follow up Kenyan sambusas with Greek orange cake? On a Leith Walk food safari, discovers **Jeremy Watson**

We are sitting at an African pavement café, gently baking under a fierce overhead sun. The guide, who has led us here on foot, is resplendent in a smart safari shirt with leopard-print epaulettes and matching pumps, and amuses us with tales of exotic finds. A cheerful Kenyan woman serves us delicious African-Indian bhajias and sambusas, which we attack like cheetahs devouring their prey.

If it weren't for the tram works just yards from where we are eating, it could be downtown Nairobi. Instead we are on deepest Leith Walk on an Edinburgh Food Safari. If there's a jungle out there, it's distinctly urban.

The walking-tour safaris are run by Nell Nelson, an engaging former food writer in southeast Asia who now takes hungry tourists and curious locals on round-the-world voyages of foodie discovery on her doorstep.

"During lockdown I decided I would like to do food tours," Nelson says. "On Leith Walk I was struck by how many different cuisines I could try out and how many different languages I was hearing. There are new places springing up all the time."

Nelson's backyard is the wide stretch of tenement-lined road that connects the centre of Edinburgh with the port of Leith. In pre-Georgian times this was a path through fields, but it has evolved through the horse-and-cart era into a busy thoroughfare flanked by shops, cafés, restaurants, pubs and historic sites. Its latest incarnation is the route for the northern extension of Edinburgh's tram line, with work due to be completed in 2023. The green transport project is gentrifying parts of Leith Walk that were until recently pretty run-down.

At noon sharp our peckish party of eight — six Brits and two Americans — arrives at Joseph Pearce, inset, a wine merchant turned Swedish bar near the top of the Walk. First up, Swedish meatballs (vegan versions available) with lingonberry jam and mashed potato. Very Scandinavian and a very satisfying start.

Moments later we are safari-ing down the Walk past signs announcing Middlefield and Orchardfield, old place names that recall a pastoral past; partially hidden Georgian mansions are overshadowed by more modern buildings. Crossing over the old boundary with Leith, we dive into the cool recesses of Kukina, a Turkish bakery and café so small that if you blink you will miss it. We tuck into olive boreks (savory filled pastries made from a flaky dough), with hummus and tahini and a divinely lemony baklava.

With Turkey behind us, we wander down the Walk to Casa Amiga. Time for my favourite: pastel de nata, or Portuguese egg custard tarts, which take me back to childhood holidays on the Algarve. Perfectly crisp pastry surrounding a delicate and creamy filling topped with a sprinkle of cinnamon. *Delicioso*.

We could stop there and I would be deliriously happy, but a short stroll away, Kenyan street food and those sunny outside tables beckon. Bellies filling, we shuffle down past the old James Allison vinegar factory to Candersons, an old-fashioned Edinburgh sweetie shop where soap ploom, Irn-bru jelly babies, Moffat toffee and Berwick cockles provide a saccharine-coated dose of nostalgia. We all depart with a poke of traditional treats.

Two hours in, our sixth and final stop is under the umbrella shades of café/bistro Qupi, where the Cretan owner, Poppy, delivers a huge slice of Greek orange cake — "No one leaves an Edinburgh Food Safari hungry," Nelson says — accompanied by dense and treacherous Greek coffee. Being Greek, it isn't long before Poppy cracks open a bottle of aniseed raki as the perfect digestif.

It's not just food knowledge that Nelson imparts. At the bottom of the Walk she points out the former Leith Central railway station, where heroin addicts went to shoot up among abandoned platforms in the 1980s. It's where Leith's own special meaning of the phrase "train spotting" comes from, she explains.

Edgier traces of the area remain. As Nelson talks us through the local history, an outwardly respectable gentleman in a jaunty hat steps up to offer his greeting in *Trainspotting*-style language. "Ah, it's the f\*\*\*ing bourgeoisie," he intones with a curled lip. "The unspeakable in search of the inedible."

He couldn't be more wrong. By the end of Nelson's tour we all have plenty to say about one of the most digestible experiences in town.

### Need to know

**Jeremy Watson was a guest of Edinburgh Food Safari (edinburghfoodsafari.com), whose Eat the World Leith Walk tour costs £49pp**