

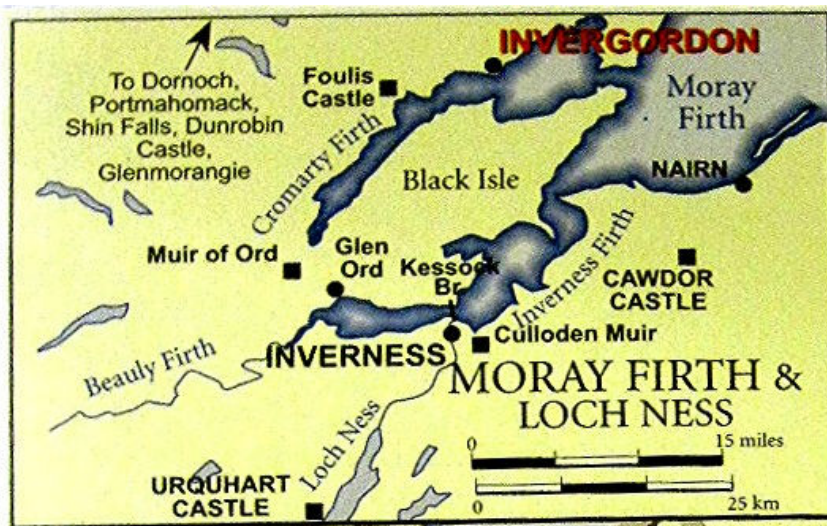
Day 15 Aug. 8 – Invergordon Scotland, Flowers, Life Boat Festival

Invergordon: Today started for us about 6am with the mournful sound of the ship's foghorn. We were moving slowly through the fog into the large harbor where the city of Invergordon, Scotland is located. The fog thinned a bit as we proceeded into the harbor and by 8am we were docked at the Admiralty Pier in Invergordon.

Invergordon is located in the United Kingdom near the northern end of Scotland, as shown in the map on the right.



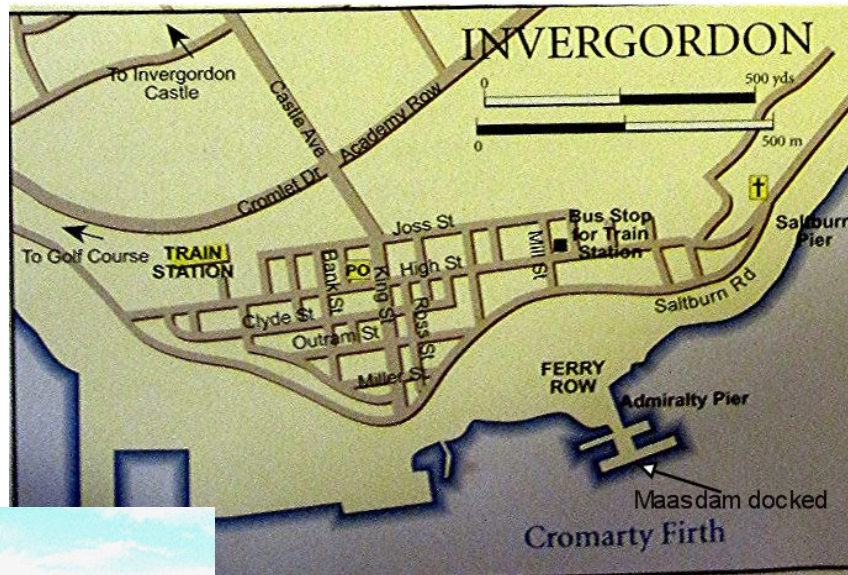
Invergordon is a relatively small city of about 5,000 people. The location in Scotland is shown on the map below.



The much larger and more well known city of Inverness (population 50,000) is located on the Ness River, 23 miles to the south of Invergordon.

The most famous attraction in this region of Scotland is Loch Ness and the fabled Loch Ness Monster, “Nessie”. There are also numerous historic buildings such as the Urquhart, Foulis, Cawdor, Inverness and Dunrobin Castles within a 50 mile radius. The city of Invergordon does not have any famous castles within the town. However, it does have a lot of charm and today it was the site of the Invergordon Lifeboat Festival. We had visited Loch Ness and some of the famous castles previously so on this trip we decided to just explore Invergordon and take in the special festivities they had scheduled.

A street map of Invergordon and the location of the Maasdam at the Admiralty Pier is shown on the map below.



The city of Invergordon has benefited



significantly from the commerce generated by drilling and extraction of oil in the nearby North Sea. From the deck of the Maasdam we could see two large sea-going oil drilling rigs that were anchored in the harbor and apparently undergoing maintenance. These gigantic rigs are towed to and from their worksites in the North Sea.



Also visible far across the harbor from the Maasdam were beautiful Scottish hillsides shown below.



Nearby was the city of Invergordon shown in these photographs.





The architecture of the small town is dominated by the huge black oil storage tanks looming over the downtown area. While the oil tanks detract from the beauty of the city, that is the price that the people gladly pay for the prosperity brought by the oil industry.

We left the Maasdam about 9am and were able to see the man who had welcomed the Maasdam by playing the bagpipes on the pier since we arrived.



We hiked from the ship into town on the long Admiralty Pier shown above. This pier must be one of the longest that is

used by the cruise ship industry. At the head of the pier we were met by a team of very friendly people from the local Visitor's Bureau. They gave us maps and suggestions for things that we might do today in Invergordon. They were most helpful and they obviously wanted us to have a good time while we were visiting. Later in talking with a resident in the downtown area we learned that about 30 cruise ships have stopped in

Invergordon this year. A concerted effort to make a good impression on the cruise ship passengers was indicated on a bulletin board in the city center where a notice was posted requesting volunteers to greet cruise ship passengers.

We had intermittent sunshine and wonderful shirtsleeve weather for our visit. We decided to take a walking tour of the city that was outlined on a map given to us by the greeters at the head of the pier. One of the first things we had to relearn was that, unlike the US, Greenland and Iceland, our British friends drive on the left hand side of the road. After a couple of startling surprises we began looking both ways before stepping off the curb into the street.



Flowers: The walking tour took us along Saltburn Road by well kept homes with the most marvelous flower beds and flower boxes as shown in the following photos.





Turning off Saltburn Road and walking along High Street into the town center presented more striking beauty of well kept flower beds and hanging flower boxes.





Barbara found the city library so she could record her library card visit and that building was also decorated with wonderful flowers. Unlike the public buildings in Greenland and Iceland, this building was well identified as we are used to.



The walking tour took us off High Street and onto Castle Avenue where the beautiful Church of Scotland was located.



We next took Cromlet Drive which led along the railroad tracks that cross through town. We left the carefully tended flowers behind but were treated to a wonderful array of wild flowers growing along the railroad tracks. Here are some examples of what we saw.



We thought these purple flowers might be heather. However a local person assured us that they were simply weeds and if we wanted to see heather bloom we would have to come back in October.

These yellow flowers along the road were also in abundance.



We needed to cross the railroad tracks and turn back into town. The map indicated that we should take a “Donkey Bridge” to get over the tracks. We were surprised the Donkey Bridge was actually a little pedestrian tunnel leading to the other side of the tracks.



Life Boat Festival: After crossing under the railroad tracks we turned back toward town on Saltburn Road. We were soon next to a broad grassy field where preparations were being made for the Invergordon Lifeboat Festival. We learned that the Lifeboat Festival is a money raising venture put on by a charitable organizations known as the Lifeboat Rescue Association. The Association is made up of a large group of civic minded individuals who volunteer their time and assets to help people who get into life threatening situations involving the oceans, bays or rivers. It sounded similar to volunteer Search and Rescue organizations that help people in the mountains, lakes and rivers in the US. A fun part of the festival was a contest where members could construct makeshift boats called “rafts” and race them across a short course laid out in the harbor. There is a parade and the raft judged the funniest gets a prize. Then they race and the one that wins gets a prize. There is a good deal of beer drinking and hilarity associated with the proceedings. The area we had just come to was the central Festival area where the rafts were judged and the race was conducted. A large covered area was being set up for a concert band to play and there were booths for the sale of crafts and food as money raising activities.

Speaking of food, this unfortunate pig was being prepared for sale at 2.50 British pounds per plate (about \$4.50 USD). It was a gruesome sight but it smelled wonderful.



We are always looking for souvenirs and the craft booths looked like fertile ground for such mementos. We found one craft booth that had yarn dolls for sale. The lady in charge of the booth was very friendly and we spent considerable time discussing the activities of the rescue organization and the festival going on while her male companion, looking on from the left, was busy getting the booth set up.



After a careful search of the inventory Barbara bought this little doll made of wool yarn and dressed in traditional Scottish costume.



Leaving the Festival grounds we walked back in to Invergordon along High Street. Here, as shown on the left, we saw more of the traditional architecture with roofs sprouting many chimneys from the stoves and fireplaces below.

Another prominent feature of Invergordon that fascinated us was the wall murals that decorated many of the buildings around town. This humorous one, shown on the right, was on the wall of the railroad station platform.



This more serious mural, on the left, was on the wall of the downtown fire station.

There was also an opportunity to check out the price of gasoline in Scotland today. This sign indicated that the price was 105.9 pence or 1.059 British pounds per liter. At the conversion rate of \$1.79 USD per British pounds and about 4 liters per US gallon that works out to \$7.60 USD per gallon (Ouch!). At this Mobil station the price of diesel and gasoline was the same.



About 2pm it was time for the Lifeboat Association to put on their parade of Life Rafts that had been assembled. The floats containing the rafts and the boisterous contestants lined up on High Street in the middle of town. We took a position on the sidewalk along with the locals and passengers from the Maasdam. The whole parade was rather amateurish but everyone was having a good time. It reminded us of the same small-town fun we have at our annual Christmas parade at home. The following are some photos of the better entries in the parade.

The official start of the parade was marked by a local police car followed by a bagpiper and the Lifeboat Association Mascot in his seagoing Captain's hat.



The following are some of the better floats we were able to photograph.

The driver of the float car shown on the right looked like he was 12 years old. He and his backseat friend were giving “low” fives to cheering people on the street.



The raft in this entry on the left was the white box with fake palm trees growing out of it. This was our favorite to win the “Best Decoration” category

but we doubt that it won the actual race.



These beer drinking revelers seemed more likely to win the race that was coming up.

When the parade was over we decided to return to the Maasdam and get ready to sail away. Earlier in the day the tide was very low and a gangway had been installed leading from an upper deck down to the pier. As the tide came in during the day the gangway became so steep that it was almost like a ladder that people had to crawl up. At that point a second gangway was added that was much more friendly for wheel chair users and us age enhanced passengers. The two gangways are compared in this photo.



About 5:30 the Maasdam got underway and we cruised out of the harbor. It had been a nice stop at Invergordon and now we were taking a southerly heading to South Queensferry, Scotland which will be our entry port for a visit to Edinburgh tomorrow.