

Letter from Scotland



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Stormy days are here again.

We are being wind-blasted, soaked, flooded and otherwise assailed by Storm Callum, the third storm of the season. And we are only half way through the autumn. The stern warning we got this week from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was indeed well timed. I can't believe there are still people who think it's all a "hoax" by pesky environmentalists.

As I write, Storm Callum is sweeping towards the west coast, bringing with it 80mph winds and a month's worth of rain. Already this week, we've seen flooding in Oban. The A83 in Argyll was closed because of yet another landslip at the Rest and Be Thankful. And seven other flood warnings were issued in parts of the Highlands, Moray and Tayside.

The Scottish Government says it's going to review its climate change strategy in view of the warning from the IPCC that the planet is currently heading for a 3 degree rise in temperature, as opposed to the "safe" target 1.5 degrees.

Already Scotland is doing better than most countries in cutting its carbon footprint. The Climate Change Bill now going through parliament talks of a 90 per cent reduction in emissions by 2050. But for all its ambitions on wind power, electric cars, well insulated homes, more forest cover, the government stands by while car use and air travel rocket ahead.

As mentioned last week, we have been through another stormy season of political conferences. The SNP's wild west wind came breezing through Edinburgh last Saturday with a march of between 70,000 and 100,000 people, flag-waving for a second independence referendum. Over in Glasgow, Nicola Sturgeon told the party conference they had to be patient and wait for "the fog of Brexit" to clear.

But she sent a chill wind through Westminster by saying the 35 SNP MPs there would be voting for a second referendum on Brexit if Theresa May doesn't keep Britain in the EU's single market and customs union.

Child Abuse

In common with so many countries in the world, Scotland has its own child abuse inquiry. This week the judge in charge Lady Smith published her interim findings on two of the 86 institutions she is investigating. She found that some children at Smyllum Park near Lanark and Bellevue House near Rutherglen were emotionally, physically and sexually abused in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. The regime run by a Catholic order of nuns, the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent De Paul, was one of "fear, threat and excessive discipline." The two homes have long since closed and the Daughters of Charity have repeatedly apologised. But if this is the pattern of Lady's Smith's findings, there are many more horrors to come.

There's been more trouble on the trains this week. An empty train became derailed south of Aberdeen, blocking the line for

a couple of days. And just before that, the inaugural journey of the first refurbished 125, from Aberdeen to Edinburgh, suffered a break down at Ladybank in Fife. It limped into Waverley station half an hour late.

It's the first of 26 "new" trains Scot Rail is bringing into service to cope with the increasing number of passengers. They may be 40 years old, but we're told the trains have been totally refurbished and will glide along at 100mph...provided there are no more breakdowns.

Breakdowns? Poor old Scotland lost 2-1 to Israel in the European Nations League on Thursday night. The players were booed off the pitch by supporters who had gone all the way to Haifa to witness an expected easy win.

No heroes there. So this week's hero's award goes to 17 year old Kieran Fairbairn who has become the youngest lifeboat volunteer in Scotland. He'll serve under his father Gary who is the coxswain of the Dunbar lifeboat and a winner of the RNLI's bronze medal for bravery. Dunbar High School, where Kieran is a final year pupil, has given him permission to leave the classroom whenever his emergency pager goes off.

With the storms rolling across Scotland, that could be quite soon.