

Cosy cottage with view over Blair Atholl

Several years ago, Milton of Kincraigie was a dilapidated farm cottage. Not now, the stone-built property, just outside Blair Athol in glorious, undulating Perthshire, was reduced to a shell, but has been transformed.

Skip loads of rubble were cleared, the cottage was insulated, new plumbing and electric circuits introduced, and a heat pump installed. Painters and decorators were brought in and estate staff had fun choosing the colour scheme and much of the furniture.

The garden, overlooking a river, was landscaped and a tasteful holiday cottage created. Shades of the past remain, like a deep Belfast sink, but the kitchen is superbly equipped with a microwave, induction hob, plus substantial fridge and freezer. It took us a few anxious minutes to discover how to work the hob with the aid of YouTube, mind you, but we got there, part of the getting-away experience.

The two upstairs bedrooms – one double and one twin – are reached by a wood panelled staircase. The heavy floral wallcovering might not be to the taste of everybody, but the rooms are superbly finished and two hot water bottles were on the beds on arrival. A nice touch.

The sizeable downstairs bathroom has a shower in the bath – a

tad difficult for those over 5ft 9in – and toiletries by Sea Kelp Scottish fine soaps, and the heating hovers between 19c and 22c, ample for the property which also has a warming log burner in the lounge.

Almost forgot, don't worry if you have forgotten to bring a phone charger, they are built into the plug sockets.

The land around the cottage is farmed by the Blair Atholl castle team. It is an organic, regenerative farm, primarily focused on native Aberdeen Angus cattle, black-faced sheep and Highland cows.

While waiting for the kettle to boil pre-breakfast, we noted a huge hare out one window and a beautiful pheasant out the other. Lots of smaller birds were heard and they are apparently attracted by the hedge planting programme across the estate.

Walks are available from the front door. Glen Tilt is over the hill from the cottage, sadly our walk was curtailed by forestry work, but nearby there are a number of circular trails, including a native woodland scheme in Glen Fender which has recently been planted.

You could also opt to step out on signposted paths dotted around the local area and, you can, of course, walk round Blair Castle, the home of the Atholl family for over seven centuries. Incidentally, the earliest known part of the present castle dates from 1269 and entry is free with your stay.

Try to time your visit to link with the piper, a great favourite with foreign visitors, and the castle grounds host a well-appointed children's play park.

For those who like to bag Munros (Scottish mountains over 3,000 feet), there is the option of Beinn a Ghlo, a range with three Munro summits including Carn Liath and if you are of a

more active persuasion, Nae Limits at Ballinluig, offers canyoning, white water rafting (weekends, June to September) and quad biking.

Of course, there is also a bunjee jump (40 metres, 132 feet) above the River Garry in nearby Killiekrankie.

Landmark Forest Adventure Park at Aviemore and the Highland Wildlife Park at Kingussie, Activity Kids at Stanley (outdoor adventure park, indoor soft play and family-friendly animals), and clay pigeon shooting at Dunkeld are within reach.

So is the Highland Chocolatier shop, home of Master Chocolatier, Iain Burnett, at Grandtully, which boasts a month-watering selection, and also interesting information on chocolate production.

Soldiers Leap at Killicrankie, an 18ft leap across the fast-flowing Garry River, Dunkeld Cathedral, Pitlochry Dam and Visitor Centre, where there are displays on hydro-electricity, dam history and salmon breeding, plus a café and gift shop, are accessible.

Atholl Country Life Museum, once a village school, with artifacts in three small galleries relating to local area life, plus a lovingly reconstructed post office of the 1930s, is also popular, but don't miss the Blair Atholl Watermill which is still producing stoneground oatmeal and flours and dates back to the 1590s. The attraction, just behind the station, also houses a café with fab fruit scones made using their own flour and a range of warming coffees, including lactose-free options.

Segway and bike hire is possible at Blair Athol and you can indulge in equestrian sports.

Blair Atholl, Pitlochry and Dunkeld all have golf courses and there are local cinemas in Perth and Aberfeldy. The Birks at Aberfeldy, kept alive by community funders, loyal customers

and volunteers, do live screenings and special events and the busy café has a varied selection. Home-made tomato and herb soup was our pick and it was delicious.

The well-known Pitlochry Festival Theatre, described as the artistic heart and soul of Highland Perthshire, is close.

Back at the well-quipped, dog-friendly, cottage, which also boasts a laundry room with Bosch washing machine and tumble dryer, there are games including chess, draughts, dominoes and cards, and a good wi-fi connection. The TV has Disney, Netflix, Prime Video and Rakuten (video-on-demand) TV options.

An extremely helpful welcome book is provided with information on what to do if things go wrong at the cottage during your stay and useful telephone numbers for the local hospital, doctor, dentist, vet, chemist, opticians, garage and car repairs are listed.

Grocery shopping is available in Blair Atholl including The Larder, which is primarily organic, in the caravan park reception building. A Spar shop and a local store are also available and bakeries, butchers and delicatessens outlets are listed along with breweries and distilleries, restaurants, spas and gyms.

The hugely popular House of Bruar, a family-run business, sometimes described as the Harrods of the North, houses an upscale department store plus classic Tweed and cashmere clothing plus outdoor wear, as well as gifts.

There is also a fishing section and an extensive food hall with butchery and fish departments plus a fish and chip shop – you can buy lobster and chips, by the way – and it is minutes away by car.

Talking of food, our welcome pack included eggs, mouth-watering Lazy Ploughman cheese from the Isle of Kintyre – cheese is combined with home-made caramelised onion – crunchy

Clearspring organic Scottish oatcakes, vegan, high in fibre and with no added sugar, lightly-salted organic butter packed for Calon Wen and from Carmarthenshire, and an extremely tempting unsliced loaf of bread plus tea, coffee (rich Italian ground) and sugar. Linen is supplied, including dish cloths, along with plenty of pots and pans and dishes.

The accommodation is several miles up a steep, single-track road, but, sitting on the patio, overlooking a forest and hills stretching far into the distance, and listening to the water rumbling over rocks in the nearby river, it was hard to beat.

Atholl Estates also offer a wide selection of holiday accommodation for couples, families and groups and you can choose from Highland Lodges, cottages and luxurious Shepherd Huts. Woodland Lodges and a range of options in the caravan park in the Blair Castle grounds are also available.

Atholl Estates: 01796 481 355: enquiries@atholl-estates.co.uk

Blair Castle and Gardens: 01796 481 207: bookings@blair-castle.co.uk

Blair Castle Caravan Park: 01796 481 263: bookings@blaircastlecaravanpark.co.uk

Highland Lodges and Shepherd Huts: 01796 481 355: stay@atholl-estates.co.uk

PICTURE: Visitors to Blair Castle enjoy the piper.



BLAIR CASTLE: selection of weapons



WHEELY GOOD ATTRACTION: a look at some of the machinery at the Blair Atholl Watermill



COMMUNITY CINEMA: The admirable community-funded cinema and cafe at Aberfeldy



COSY: The lounge with wood burner in the cottage