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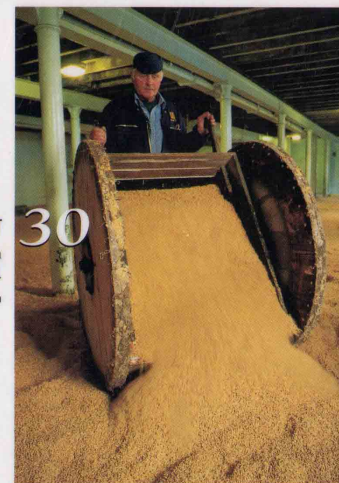
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Find out why this small Massachusetts town had one of the world's most exclusive book clubs.

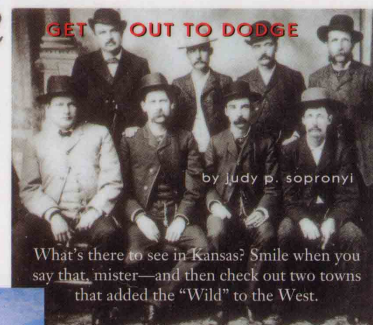
by steve boisson

SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL SPIRIT

There's a reason they call it Scotch, and you can find historic distilleries throughout Scotland.
story and photographs by randall hyman



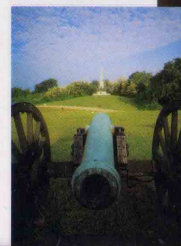
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GET OUT TO DODGE

by judy p. sopronyi

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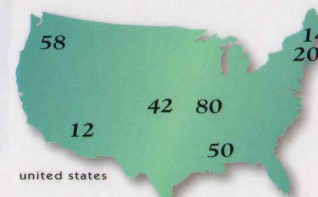


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Visitors to Vicksburg, Mississippi, can learn why both sides in the Civil War wanted control of the city.
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ON OUR COVER

When people think of Scotland, they often hear bagpipes. Pictured is a member of the British Legion Pipe Band of Inverness, formed in 1919 and the oldest pipe band in the Highlands.



© RANDALL HYMAN

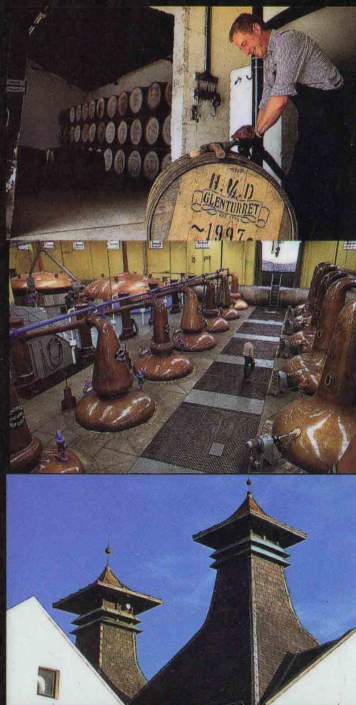


scotland's **national** spirit



story and photography by randall hyman

"It's nearly the year 2000 and we're still wearing the tartan and throwing sticks about," proclaims David Horne, dressed in a kilt and muscle shirt. Horne's "sticks" are poles averaging 18 feet and 120 pounds. Scotsmen call them cabers and take pride in tossing them around like matchsticks. Cradling the half dozen bottles of whisky he has won after a day of competing in the Inverness Highland Games, the six-foot-tall national champion is beaming. He is a walking ad for Scottish traditions. ¶ Like caber-tossing and tartans, whisky is part of Scotland's essence. Kings, armies and taxmen have all tried subduing it, but the "water of life" has endured the ages hand-in-hand with Scottish nationalism. In my quest to savor Scotland's national spirit, I am traveling by car and ferry to some of its most noteworthy distilleries that make pure, unblended single malt whisky.



Expensive single malts comprise only a tiny fraction of the Scotch whisky trade, but their smoothness and distinctive bouquets have won an avid worldwide following that has mushroomed in recent years. With over 80 distilleries to choose from and a taste more for history than spirits, I narrow my search to six: the smallest, the highest, the best known, the northernmost, the most isolated and the oldest.

The art of distilling arrived in Scotland as early as the fifth century, but aqua vitae, or *uisge*

In 1745, the Highlanders' seething resentment of the crown escalated into a doomed armed rebellion. As punishment, the English king banned Scotland's cherished national dress, the tartan, for nearly four decades. It was not until nationalist writer Sir Walter Scott cajoled George IV to visit Scotland in 1822—stuffing the king-sized king into a kilt and a pair of pink tights (to hide the royal knees from public gaze)—that things Scottish became fashionable again. Legend has it that Scott kept the

Far left: A bagpiper in Scottish plaid (sash) and tartan entertains at the Inverness Highland Games.

Center left, from top: New whisky goes into a cask. At Glenfiddich in Dufftown, rows of



(wis-gee) *beatha* in Gaelic, was not officially noted until 1494, when Exchequer Rolls recorded "eight bolls of malt to Friar John Cor wherein to make aqua vitae." By the late 1500s, farmers were using so much barley to make whisky that it was blamed for food shortages. In 1725, only 18 years after Scotland became part of the United Kingdom, the British parliament introduced draconian malt taxes, leading to riots in Glasgow and Edinburgh and eventually driving many distilleries into bankruptcy. Rather than lose their lucrative sideline, Highland farmers took to the hills to set up illicit stills. Reviled royal excisemen followed them, prowling the countryside with muskets.

king happy with bottles of illicit Glenlivet malt whisky during the visit. A year after the king's goodwill tour, parliament slashed malt taxes, and whisky production boomed for a century until Prohibition in the United States seriously diminished Scotland's enormous whisky export industry.

Edradour, the smallest commercial whisky distillery in Scotland, symbolizes the rebirth of legal whisky-making in the nineteenth century. Set outside the town of Pitlochry in the Highlands 90 miles north of Edinburgh, Edradour was founded in 1825, along with hundreds of other distilleries, after malt taxes were axed. With a production crew of just

copper pot stills fill the main room of the still house. Pagoda-like chimneys, from the days when barley was malted on site, have become a distillery symbol in Scotland. **Above:** On the west coast, Loch Laxford and purple lupine give a taste of Scotland's stunning scenery.



three, Edradour makes in a year what most other distilleries produce in one week.

The quaint row of whitewashed, slate-roofed stone buildings trimmed in red is straight out of Brigadoon. Guides in kilts walk beside a sparkling burn, or brook, and the postcard-perfect scene seems to have materialized from another century. Under one small roof Edradour gives visitors a quick look at nearly all the stages involved in making whisky (see sidebar, page 38). Its two stills are the smallest allowed by law, the rationale being that smaller ones could be hidden too easily from the exciseman.

Before going legal, Highland distillers had ingenious ways of concealing their operations. Some stills were wedged at the bottom of chasms, camouflaged beneath roofs covered with foliage and rock. Distillers took the telltale leftovers from mashing the malted barley, called draff, and fed it to cattle in the dark of night.

AT DALWHINNIE, THE HIGHEST DISTILLERY in Scotland (1,073 feet above sea level), I cross one of Wade's Roads, a vestige of the crown's futile efforts to infiltrate the Highlands and control the flow of whisky. Initiated in the 1720s by General George Wade of the British army, the carriageways were built to move the king's troops and materiel deep into the trackless Highlands. Instead they facilitated Bonnie Prince Charlie's Jacobite rebellion of 1745, enabling an anti-English Highland army to wrest control of the Dalwhinnie region and beeline along the "high road" to Edinburgh to hand the Redcoats a series of stunning defeats.

Heather and peat dominate Dalwhinnie's treeless landscape and also its whisky, which is renowned for a "heather honey" taste. Single malts, unlike mainstream blended whiskys, have a richness and smoothness akin to liqueurs. Connoisseurs insist that each single malt has a distinctive taste linked to the peat, water and air in its region. Though my palate is about as cultured as a fake pearl, even I can taste the light peaty bouquet after sampling a "wee dram" at the conclusion of a tour.

Like many distilleries, Dalwhinnie's visitors center is open all summer, but production is suspended in July when the burn runs dry. The Sumo-sized manager, George Cameron, uses some of this time to toss cabers at Highland Games. When I later spot him in his kilt at the Inverness Games after a losing day, I reckon he can't be too upset about missing out on a few bottles.

Meandering downhill from Dalwhinnie into the Speyside region, cradle of Highland single malts and home of over 30 distilleries, I make two disheartening discoveries. One is that Highlands aren't all high. Though a strict defi-

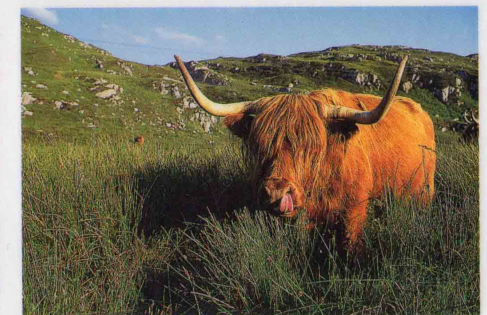


Opposite: At Highland Park where they malt their own barley, Jimmy Shearer dumps a barrow of wet barley on the stone floor of the malting room.

Left: Ian Renwick, a stillman, stands beside the spirit still at Glenturret, Scotland's oldest distillery.

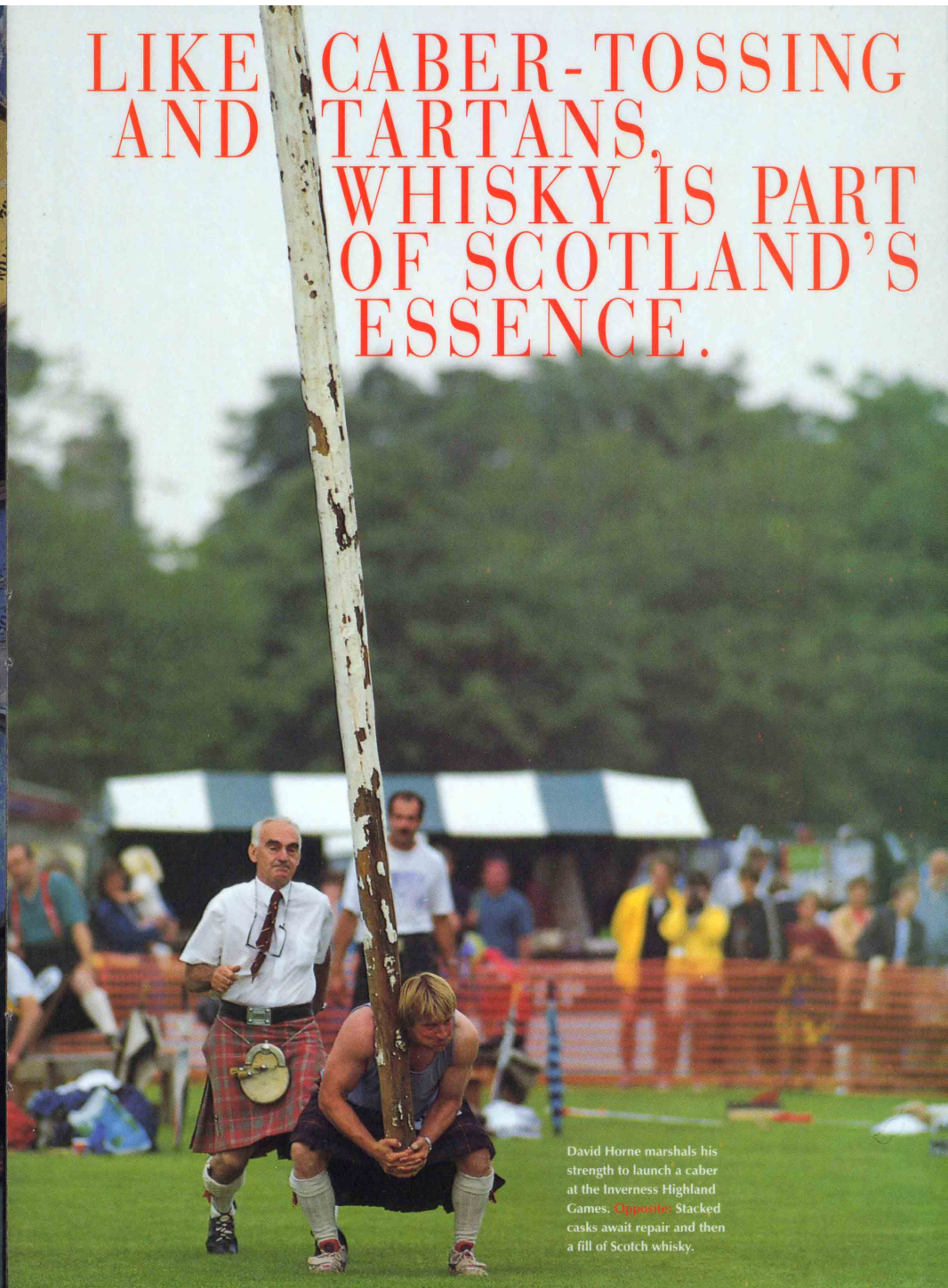
Below: Germinating barley at Highland Park provides the foundation of Scotch whisky.

Bottom: Highland cattle once helped distillers by eating illicit mash leftovers.

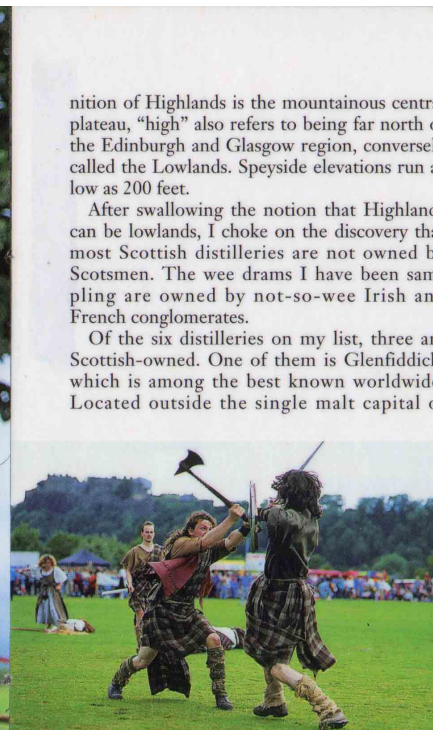




LIKE CABER-TOSSING
AND TARTANS,
WHISKY IS PART
OF SCOTLAND'S
ESSENCE.



David Horne marshals his strength to launch a caber at the Inverness Highland Games. *Opposite:* Stacked casks await repair and then a fill of Scotch whisky.



Dufftown (population 2,000), Glenfiddich employs 200 people and is by far the largest distillery I visit. It has been owned by the Grant family since its founding in 1887. In the summer, 50 tour guides lead more than 100,000 tourists through the bottling plant, warehouses and vast production areas filled with wooden fermenting vats called washbacks and long rows of coal-fired copper stills.

Everything about Glenfiddich is big, including the padlocked spirit safe, a long glass cabinet with a set of spigots, glass vessels and hydrometers for each still. By law, all distilleries must have such safes. The padlocked glass case allows the stillman to measure alcohol content but prevents anyone from siphoning off illicit whisky and avoiding taxes.

Beneath a catwalk teeming with visitors, a young stillman shows me how he uses the hydrometers. As the distillation progresses, the spirits' density increases. When the hydrometer records the proper density, the stillman shunts the final distillation to the whisky vat. In days of yore, distillers had no hydrometers. They judged alcohol content by mixing the raw whisky with gunpowder and putting a match to it. If it exploded it was too strong.

With so many distilleries around Dufftown, every wrong turn seems to lead to another

Opposite: At the Stirling Highland Games, girls compete in the Scottish Lilt.

Left: Reenactors at the games stage a battle scene inspired by the movie *Braveheart*.

Below: A pipe band marches at the Inverness Highland Games.

SINGLE MALT SECRETS

of hogsheads, butts and spirits

SINGLE MALT WHISKY-MAKING can be divided into malting, mashing, fermenting, distilling and aging. To be prepared for fermentation, barley must first be soaked, sprouted and roasted over a peat fire in a process called malting, then milled and washed in hot water to extract a

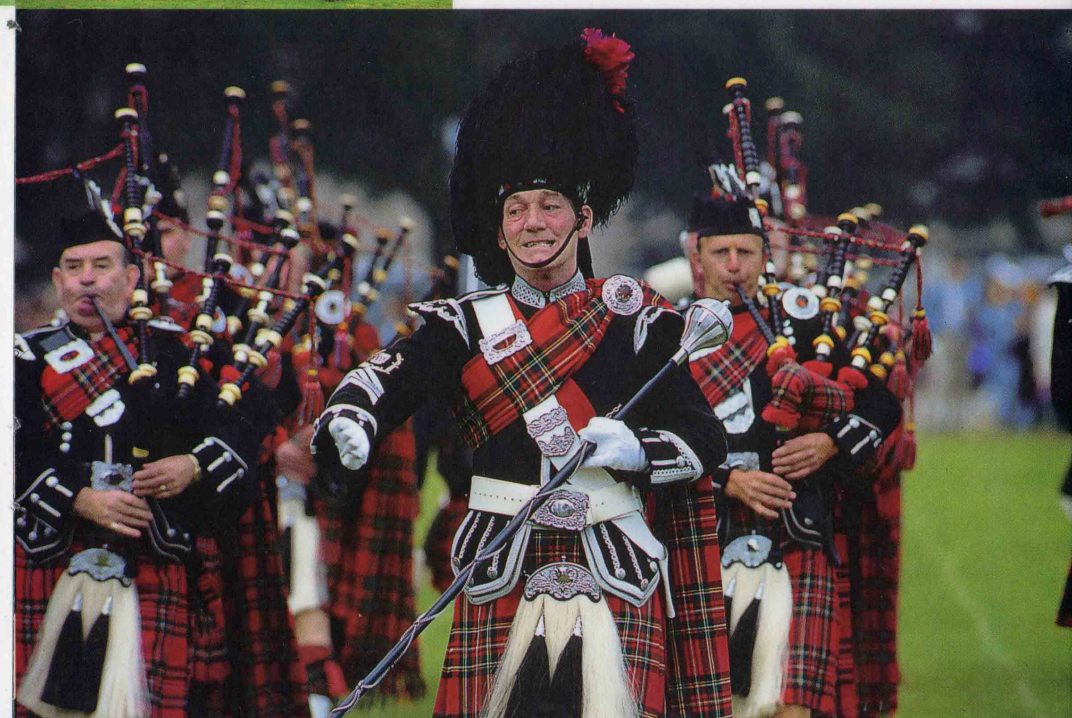


A sample from Glenlurret.

and, besides passing lots of gas (carbon dioxide), they produce alcohol. The beer-like liquor is called wash.

Two consecutive copper stills boost alcohol content through distillation, first to "low wines" at about 20 percent, then to "spirits" at around 70 percent. The second distillation makes the whisky; a stillman must divert the "heart of the run" into a warehouse vat, avoiding the poisonous early distillate called foreshots as well as the weak, late distillate called feints.

The colorless whisky is aged 10 to 25 years, but not just anywhere; Scotsmen prefer hogsheads and butts. These are neither man nor beast, but rather casks. Hogsheads hold about 55 gallons while butts carry a whopping 110 gallons. The casks come from the United States and Spain after use in aging bourbon or sherry, which gives whisky its color and some of its taste. About two percent of the spirit evaporates from the casks each year, a portion called the "angels' share." Water added at maturation dilutes the alcohol level to about 40 percent, enough for single-malt fans to get their own little share of heaven.



scotland's national spirit trip planner

GETTING THERE British Airways, American Airlines and Icelandair all service Glasgow from North America. Economical transatlantic airfares to Heathrow and Gatwick airports make London—served by numerous U.S. carriers, Virgin Atlantic and British Airways—an attractive option. If you want to skip the six-hour drive from England to Scotland, British Airways and British Midland fly to Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Inverness from London.

GETTING AROUND A rental car is essential. Any of the standards (Avis, Hertz, etc.) fill the bill, though brokers such as **Kemwel Holiday Autos**, (800) 678-0678, make choosing a car a snap by tracking down the lowest prices and arranging prepaid vouchers. Buy collision insurance (CDW) with your voucher to avoid exorbitant fees in Europe. The so-called Malt Whisky Trail, including Glenfiddich, is a day tour that snakes through the Speyside region southeast of Inverness, but allow 7-10 days for the 1500-or-so-mile route covered in this article, depending on your "mosey factor."

INFORMATION PLEASE The **British Tourist Authority**, (800) 462-2748, can help you plan your trip; ask them about ferry schedules. Tourist information kiosks appear in towns and cities throughout Scotland. The **Scottish Tourist Board** has a helpful internet site at <http://www.holiday.scotland.net>, or call them at 44-131 332 2433 (dial 011 first).

LODGING & DINING For flexible, economical travel in Scotland, nothing beats bed-and-breakfasts. They are often half the price of a hotel and twice as cozy. Country homes are comfortable and oozing with history but can be pricey. Both B&Bs and country homes are excellent ways to get into the local scene. **Thistle Hotels** and **Highland Hotels** are the two major hotel associations in Scotland, both offering world-class service at reasonable prices. A free booklet listing B&Bs, country homes and hotels can be obtained through the British Tourist Authority. What to eat? Haggis is a traditional Scottish meatloaf; you're sure to encounter it, but don't ask what's in it. What to drink? Come on, now.

INSIDERS' TIPS Most "petrol" stations (don't call it gas!) accept credit cards; brace yourself to pay about four dollars per gallon. • Europe's notion of size is different from America's—expect a full-size car to measure about the size of a compact. • Specify automatic transmission if you're not accustomed to driving a "stick" (you have to do it with your left hand here) and remember to drive on the "wrong" side of the road! • Watch out for the "single track" roads on your map—they are slow-going, single-lane roadways with occasional wide spots to allow for oncoming cars. • Time to travel: June-August is high season with warm days, cool nights and a fair amount of sun; April-May and September-October are shoulder months with blustery weather but sparser crowds and lower prices. • Highland Games run throughout the summer on weekends, moving from town to town; the British Tourist Authority can provide a roster. • Distilleries sometimes exclude young children from tours due to high concentrations of carbon dioxide in still houses. • Currency is the British pound. At press time one pound = \$1.65. Scotland prints its own paper money, too; technically it's accepted throughout the United Kingdom, but some English sales clerks get sniffy about it. Change your money at the airport or any bank.

READING UP *Whisky* by Carol Shaw (Running Press, 1994) is a pocket guide with historical and technical overviews on Scotch and brief reviews of all Scottish distilleries with taste ratings. *The Mitchell Beazley Pocket Whisky Book* by Charles MacLean (Reed International Books Limited, 1993) is the aficionados' pocket guide to all Scottish distilleries, with taste descriptions and detailed histories. *Scots on Scotch*, edited by Phillip Hills (Mainstream Publishing, 1991), is a history of Scotch with posters, memorabilia and anecdotes. The video *Scotland's Malt Whisky Trail* is available from The Video Catalog, (800) 733-2232.

whisky sample. Before anyone decides to test my alcohol-laced breath with gunpowder, I make a quick exit and head 150 miles due north for the Orkney Islands.

Several distilleries dot the coast from Inverness to Wick, but none is more northerly than Highland Park in the Orkney Islands, a cluster of more than 70 islands north of the Scottish mainland. To get there I catch the John O'Groats ferry at land's end and take it to the southern Orkneys. I am now closer to Oslo than to London. The Churchill Barriers, a series of causeways built by Italian prisoners of war in World War II, connect northward across several islands to Kirkwall, home of Highland Park. The distillery is one of the last in Scotland to malt its own barley, the first step in whisky-making.



In a cavernous stone room the length of a warehouse, a lone man in a blue jumpsuit sifts through a sea of ankle-deep barley with a wooden shovel. Shafts of sunlight stream into the warehouse through a row of tall windows, illuminating the golden grains. For whisky fans, this is as close to the Temple of Single Malts as it gets.

The barley has already been steeped in water for several days and is germinating, starting

Continues on page 68

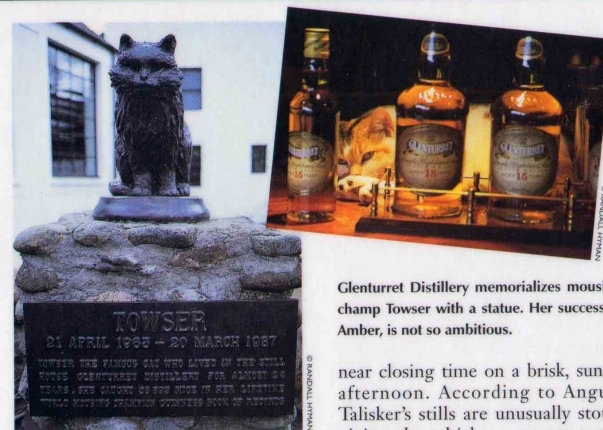
SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL SPIRIT

Continued from page 40

the process that will create fermentable sugars. Turning it prevents heat from building up. To arrest the sprouting at just the right point, the grain will be roasted in one of Highland Park's two peat kilns, giving the malted barley a distinctive smoky taste.

Highland Park is the Orkneys' only remaining distillery, sole survivor of the lucrative contraband years at the start of the nineteenth century when stills dotted the outlying islands. The Kirkwall exciseman had an impossible task in those days. It was bad enough that both the Kirkwall provost and local navy commander were smugglers, but the town church was often used to hide the booty!

As remote as the Orkneys are, the Isle of Skye off the west coast of Scotland is even more secluded, separated from the rest of the country by the most mountainous and desolately breathtaking land in Britain. Tucked in a cove that lies farther west than Belfast, Talisker is



Glenlivet Distillery memorializes mousing champ Towser with a statue. Her successor, Amber, is not so ambitious.

Scotland's most isolated single malt. Most of the employees have second, third or even fourth-generation histories at Talisker, and one-third are drawn from the MacLeod clan, whose chiefs have lived in Skye's Dunvegan Castle since the thirteenth century.

Twenty-year veteran stillman Donald Angus shows me around

near closing time on a brisk, sunny afternoon. According to Angus, Talisker's stills are unusually stout, giving the whisky a creamy taste. Like most distilleries, only 10 percent of the product is bottled as single malt whisky; the rest goes into mainstream blended whiskeys.

After 10 days on the road, I'm growing accustomed to the clipped, lilting Scottish accent. I know a "wee dram" from a "bonnie loch," but Angus' accent takes me back to square one. "I like a wee ballacham,"

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he laughs. "That's Gaelic for dram." Gaelic is still spoken in this part of Scotland, isolated as it is.

Returning to the mainland, I complete my circle of Scotland by heading toward its spiritual center, Stirling, where William Wallace of *Braveheart* fame triumphed over the English army and launched his nation toward independence. Half an hour outside Stirling I pass the village of Crieff, the crossroads between Highland and Lowland where drovers and farmers once traded cattle and trafficked whisky. My final distillery stop lies just down the road: Glenturret, Scotland's oldest.

Founded in 1775, Glenturret looks its part. Bathed in the crisp sunlight of late afternoon, the neat cluster of white, slate-roofed buildings with pagoda chimneys paints a vivid picture of yesteryear. Amid this old-world charm, an odd scene catches my eye at the warehouse door: a worker fills cask after cask with a gasoline-pump nozzle. The hose leads not to a gas pump but to a large steel vat filled with high-octane whisky.

Glenturret is one of the few distilleries left where everything is done by hand. Stillman Ian Renwick, 27, and a colleague single-handedly run the entire distillery, taking over from another two-man team at two in the afternoon. After Renwick fills several casks with new whisky, I watch as he taps wooden plugs into the casks and rolls them inside the warehouse. The casks will sit there for as long as 27 years before anyone knows if Renwick did his job well.

"We each have to know the whole process here," says Renwick later that evening as we chat after visitors' hours. The grounds are empty except for Amber the distillery cat, who seems more interested in sleeping than doing her job. Her predecessor, Towser, made it into the *Guinness Book of World Records* as World Mousing Champion for catching 28,889 mice over her 24-year reign.

"People get all excited when you tell them you work here," says Renwick, leaning against a gleaming copper still, "but after all, it's just a job." As darkness and a damp chill fall outside, we are wrapped in the

cozy heat of Glenturret's boiling wort. A single lamp bathes the room in gold, and the sweet pungency of fermenting barley permeates the air.

The intimate scene is a single-malt lover's dream, but unlike the subtleties of whisky bouquets, this isn't lost on me. For a brief instant I am transformed from spectator into participant, and the oldest distillery in Scotland is mine. I am smuggler, exciseman, Highlander and Redcoat. Would Renwick understand if I told him he is living history? Nah, it's just a job. **HT**

RANDALL HYMAN is a photographer and writer whose images have appeared many times in HT and whose *Macbu Pichu* story and photos were published in the Summer 1997 issue.



For another article about Scotland's heritage, go to <http://www.thehistorynet.com> on the World Wide Web and read "High Drama: Scotland's Dunnottar Castle" by Judy P. Sopronyi. It will be available on TheHistoryNet starting April 27.

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