

## **Deep Roots: We are one in spirit**

by Wilma Heberling

During our recent trip to Scotland, we traversed the country from Galloway to Caithness and back. As we zig-zagged or way south to north and back again, I was struck by the differences. Of course the scenery and terrain varies. Just the short drive through Ross & Cromarty, Sutherland and Caithness has complete contrasts from the rugged hills and rushing waters of Ross to the flat “flow country of Sutherland and Caithness.

But it's not just the scenery. The people are different. A number of novels and movies and of course Scottish Tourism have all attempted to portray the “national character” of the Scots—the tartan-clad, laughing, brave, bagpipe playing Scot. But for every supposed character trait there are a thousand exceptions. Many of the stereotypes are far from consistent. How is it possible to be generous, tightfisted, courageous, mean, open hearted, dour, happy, and cynical all at the same time?

Part of the difficulty lies in presuming the Scots are one people. This they are not. Although much blending has taken place, there are still racial differences between the Southern Uplanders and Lowlanders, and between them both and the Highlanders/Islanders. Oh, yes, they come together to pour scorn on the long-suffering English, and upon any visiting soccer or rugby team, but other than that there is not much unity.

Climate may also play a part. The milder Western Isles seems to produce a warmer personality than the icy, wind-blasted East Coast. Take for example Glasgow and Edinburgh, two major cities in the Lowland belt separated by just over 50 miles. Glaswegians (westerners) tend to be “chatty” and friendly, while Edinburgh citizens (easterners) are more reticent to talk to strangers. The only difficulty with the friendly Glaswegian is you are most likely not going to understand a word he is saying. In Edinburgh they are rather proud of their excellent enunciation.

Now about being tight with money – most Scots are far from being mean, but are quite hospitable, even to complete strangers, but there is an old joke in Glasgow that goes as follows: In Glasgow if you knock on someone's door at teatime (dinner) you will be invited in with, “Come in and have your tea!” In Edinburgh they say, “Of course, you'll have had your tea!”

We all have the image of the brave Scottish warrior – movies have given us Braveheart and James Bond, but where is the female heroine? Oh yes, we have Mary Queen of Scots and Flora MacDonald, but the list gets a little thin after that. Scotland is historically even more “macho” than Australia. It is true that most of Scotland's male heroes have lived and died by the sword – not usually a female pursuit.

Highlanders have always had, and still have a different perspective on life than Lowlanders. Those in the Highlands and Islands live often in quite isolated communities.

They need to depend on their own resourcefulness and the kindness of neighbors much more than the “city folk” need to.

There is one more time (other than scorning the English and visiting sports teams) when the Scots come together, and that is on Burns’ Night. I hope to see you all there, and maybe we can have a “crack” about the differences while we celebrate being “One in spirit” with Scots around the world.