



CENTRE STAGE

The 'Central Belt' of Scotland – a swathe of culture, conurbation and countryside that stretches from Glasgow in the west to Edinburgh in the east – makes for a memorable tour, says Andrew Ditton

DON'T FORGET
You can book your pitch online at caravanclub.co.uk/searchandbook or by calling our Advance Booking Service on **01342 327490**. Please call Affiliated Sites directly.



Kicking off in the west, I started this tour by calling in at one of the newer additions to The Caravan Club's sites network – Strathclyde Country Park.

As its name suggests, this site is located within a country park complex and is an ideal place for people who like to go for a stroll. If you're feeling up to it, you can walk around the loch – all four miles of it.

This is also one of the best sites to bring your kids to, as a hop, skip and a jump away

lies M&D's Theme Park. From spring to autumn, you can enjoy the thrill of the amusement park's five roller coasters and other shriek-inducing rides, while the indoor Amazonia rain forest and 10-pin bowling will keep you occupied all year round.

There is no shortage of eateries in the country park. Fast food (burgers, chicken and pizza) is available from the Food Court, while both the Family Restaurant and Toby Carvery are popular, too. Those looking for something a little more sophisticated should pop along to the Alona Hotel – the afternoon >>

THIS MONTH'S FEATURED SITES

STRATHCLYDE COUNTRY PARK
See p224 of the *Sites Directory & Handbook 2013/14*

BLAIR DRUMMOND (AS)
See p199 of the *Directory*

THE WOODS (AS)
See p227 of the *Directory*

EDINBURGH
See p207 of the *Directory*



Strathclyde Country Park

FOR THE FAMILY



Photo: David Warren

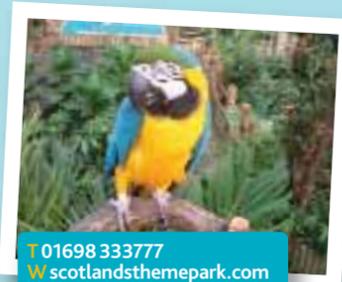
Call of the wild

Buy your entrance ticket to **Blair Drummond Safari and Adventure Park** from site reception and it will be valid for your entire stay. There are no footpaths from the site, so you'll need to take your car or the bus. See everything from pet rabbits to tigers and giraffes.

T 01786 841456 **W** blairdrummond.com
Nearest featured site Blair Drummond

Ride on time

Substantially discounted tickets to **M&D's Theme Park** are available from Strathclyde CP's wardens. Look out for some special festive events, including Santa's Magical Wonderland, an open-air ice rink and traditional storytelling in the heated, all-seated theatre.



T 01698 333777
W scotlandsthemepark.com
Nearest featured site Strathclyde Country Park

FLOCKS OF FUN



Down on the farm

As much as the animals and activities at the **National Museum of Rural Life** will appeal to the kids, it is the older members of the family who will be wallowing in warm nostalgia at this historic working farm.

T 0300 123 6789
W nms.ac.uk/rural
Nearest featured site Strathclyde Country Park

Zoo's who!

Giant pandas, the UK's only koala bears, monkeys and big cats are among 1,000 animals at **Edinburgh Zoo**. Early booking is advisable, especially if you want to view the pandas.

T 0131 334 9171
W edinburghzoo.org.uk
Nearest featured site Edinburgh



FOOD + DRINK



Good Woods

Stay at The Woods and you won't have far to walk to **The Woodsman Restaurant**. The quality of the food and the high level of service surpassed my expectations.

T 01259 760663 Nearest featured site **The Woods**

That's the spirit

No trip to Scotland would be complete without a wee dram of whisky. A tour of **Deanston Distillery**, housed in a former mill, is fascinating. Afterwards, make time for **The Coffee Bothy**, probably the best café near Blair Drummond.

SCOTCH STAR



T 01786 843010
W deanstonmalt.com
Nearest featured site **Blair Drummond**

Veggie treat

The **78 Café Bar** in Glasgow's West End serves hearty portions of vegan and vegetarian food. Dog-friendly.

T 0141 576 5018
W the78cafebar.com
Nearest featured site **Strathclyde Country Park**

Stirling service

Nicky-Tam's Bar & Bothy is located in Stirling's old town. It serves regular pub grub, is family friendly and offers OAP food specials. Popular with students later in the evenings, though.

T 01786 472194
W nickytamsbar.co.uk
Nearest featured sites **The Woods/Blair Drummond**



Falkirk Wheel



tea here is to die for! Keep an eye out in the site's information room or check with the wardens to see if there is a member offer on at the Alona. You can buy discounted tickets for M&D's and Amazonia from the wardens, too.

CITY SPECIAL

Public transport is your best bet if you want to head into Glasgow – parking at Motherwell and Belhill railway stations is free of charge and height barriers, although motorhomers may prefer to take a taxi (cost £5) from site to station.

Scotland's largest city, Glasgow could entertain you for days and days – and still entice you back for more. In addition to generous retail therapy provision and a spectacular choice of restaurants, the city is dripping in heritage.

Walk in an easterly direction along the northern bank of the River Clyde and you will end up at Glasgow Green. Here, I'd recommend you take a tour of the People's Palace (free) and admire both the

terracotta Doulton Fountain and the decadent exterior of Templeton's Carpet Factory (now posh flats and offices) before stopping off at WEST, a German-style micro-brewery within the Templeton building, for a spot of refreshment. From there, a five-minute walk takes you to The Barras, a noisy, bustling market area that



Blair Drummond AS

sits in the shadow of the world-famous Barrowland Ballroom.

STIRLING EFFORT

After a breathless tour of Glasgow, Stirling slows the pace a little – it offers a choice of Affiliated Sites, both of which are waiting to soothe and delight in equal measure. The first of these, Blair Drummond, located adjacent to the Safari Park of the same name, is to the west of the city.

Most of the site's pitches lie within a walled garden, leading to a sense of exclusivity and shelter. Just outside the walls are two further pitching areas – one by a children's playground, the other overlooking woodland which will please those looking for a bit of peace and quiet.

To the east side of Stirling, near the town of Alloa, is The Woods, another peaceful AS retreat. This site offers wonderful views of the Ochil Hills, which look stunning in winter when crowned with snow.

A visit to Stirling, especially its castle, is an absolute must. By far the easiest way to



The Woods AS

get there from either AS is to use one of the two motorhome-friendly Park and Rides, both of which are well signposted. These are staffed while open, feature CCTV and have no height barriers.

About a 20-minute drive from both Blair Drummond and The Woods is the Falkirk Wheel. Part of the ambitious Millennium Link across Scotland, the Wheel joins the Forth and Clyde Canal with the Union Canal. To connect a canal that is 135ft above the other would normally require 11 locks, taking a whole day to navigate. The Falkirk Wheel does the job in one serene action, lifting a 'gondola' containing a section of canal while simultaneously lowering another. To see it in action is >>

OUTDOOR FUN

WATER DELIGHT



Loch is the key

Believe it or not, the loch at **Strathclyde Country Park** was created as recently as 1974 when the former mining village of Bothwellhaugh was flooded. As well as the walk and the cycle ride around the loch, shorter walks are available taking in woodland and Roman remains.

T 01698 402060
W northlanarkshire.gov.uk
Nearest featured site **Strathclyde Country Park**

Cycling

For a family-friendly and mostly traffic-free route, try **National Cycle Network Route 75** between Edinburgh and Glasgow. For a more challenging ride, **National Cycle Network Route 1's** 'Coast and Castles' trail can be joined in Edinburgh and followed north, across the Forth Road Bridge to Kinross.

W sustrans.org.uk



Garden heaven

Considered one of the world's most important gardens, the **Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh** is the culmination of centuries of botanic exploration. Free to visit but there's a charge to enter the glasshouses.

T 0131 552 7171
W rbge.org.uk
Nearest featured site **Edinburgh**



Kite flying

Visit **Argaty Red Kites** near Doune and enjoy a ranger-led trip to a hide to see these amazing birds feeding, flying or perching. Well-behaved dogs welcome and hide is accessible to wheelchair users. Pre-booking is essential.

T 01786 841373
W argatyredkites.co.uk
Nearest featured site **Blair Drummond**



CULTURE



Fort for the day

Arguably the most important fortress in Scotland, **Stirling Castle** has recently had a lot of money spent on it to return it to its original splendour. Costumed guides bring the castle to life.

T 01786 450000 W stirlingcastle.gov.uk
Nearest featured sites The Woods/Blair Drummond

Power to the people

People's Palace gives an unrivalled insight into how Glaswegians lived, worked and played from the 18th to the 20th centuries. Afternoon tea in the tropical Winter Gardens is a must.

T 0141 276 0788
W glasgowlife.org.uk/museums
Nearest featured site Strathclyde Country Park



All aboard!

According to Visit Scotland, **The Royal Yacht Britannia** is Scotland's 'Best Visitor Attraction'. The polished engine room is particularly spectacular.

T 0131 555 5566
W royalyachtbritannia.co.uk
Nearest featured site Edinburgh



Jewel in the crown

Home to Scotland's Crown Jewels, **Edinburgh Castle** dates back to the 12th century. Still a military barracks, the castle also plays host to the National War Museum of Scotland.

T 0131 225 9846
W edinburghcastle.gov.uk
Nearest featured site Edinburgh



amazing, but to actually ride it is even better. Great-value boat trips are available from the Visitor Centre. There is nothing quite like the return trip, where the canal simply stops dead some 100ft in the air!

CAPITAL GAINS

Heading further east, my final stop was at The Club's own Edinburgh site, a full-facility location with the Firth of Forth and its long promenade just across the road – the perfect spot at which to unwind on sunny days.

Of course, the main reason for a stay at this site is to visit Scotland's fascinating capital and its plethora of attractions. A regular bus service – the stop is just a 10-15 minute walk from the site – takes you to the city in about 25 minutes.

If you've never been to Edinburgh before, expect to be amazed as you step off the bus – not just by the grandeur of the buildings, but by the astonishing amount of parkland and green spaces. The historic castle, Holyrood Palace and the Royal Mile will be on everyone's 'must-do' list, but do not leave the city without also taking in Holyrood Park.

To find such an expansive, wild, rugged area within an urban space is quite a shock to the system. The 800ft-high peak of Arthur's Seat is well worth conquering if fitness levels allow, as the panoramic view from the top is breathtaking. Reward your efforts with a Royal Cream Tea from the Holyrood Palace tearooms (accessible without



Edinburgh Club site

needing to enter the palace) before embarking on a free tour of the unusual Scottish Parliament Building across the road. Love it or hate it, it's a striking place well worthy of a wander.

Head back up to the Old Town and seek out the statue of Greyfriars Bobby, the devoted Skye terrier adopted by the people of Edinburgh – this loyal mutt spent 14 years of his life guarding the grave of his late master in the mid 19th century.

Opposite Bobby is another free attraction, the modernesque Museum of Scotland, which complements its older neighbour, the Royal Museum of Scotland (also free), where the dinosaurs naturally pull in the families.

The jewel in Edinburgh's crown is its Festival, which takes place throughout August. If you love the arts and the vibe, you'll not want to miss it. If you hate crowds and hustle and bustle, give it a wide berth and come another time.

No matter what time of the year you visit, you will never run out of things to do in Scotland's Central Belt. Unless you can spend months here in one hit, you will return time and time again. ■

MEMBERS' VIEWS

Wendy and Surian Nganasurian enjoyed both Blair Drummond and Strathclyde Country Park on their tour. "We love Blair Drummond as we enjoy the forest walks on the doorstep with our dogs. At Strathclyde,



we enjoyed visiting the nearby owl sanctuary and loved the River Clyde for both drives and walks."

To read even more member views, see our fantastic online forum at caravanclub.co.uk/together



We caught up with **Marion and Bob Johnson** at Edinburgh Club site. "What we enjoy most of all is the location of the site, right on the Firth of Forth. We can walk for miles along the promenade and enjoy spotting the different birds. We also love the great-value golf course right next door at Silverknowes."

