

Unlocking Scotland's best-kept secrets

Andrew Ditton hitches up and winds down at four of The Club's most northerly sites. Enjoying unrivalled locations, they offer you the chance to really get away from it all

Views like this are right on your doorstep at Dunnet Bay Club site



THIS MONTH'S SITES



1. CULLODEN MOOR
See p205 of the *Sites Directory & Handbook 2013/14*.
Facilities include a play area.



2. BRORA
See p201 of the *Directory*.



3. DUNNET BAY
See p206 of the *Directory*.



4. ALTNAHARRA
See p197 of the *Directory*.



You can book your pitch online at caravanclub.co.uk/searchhandbook or by calling our Advance Booking Service on **01342 327490**.

Please call Affiliated Sites directly.

FOOD + DRINK



Corner on the Square

The lovely people at Corner on the Square, a licensed delicatessen and eatery in Beaulieu, have saved you the trouble of scouring the local area for the best in food and drink – it's all here!

Contact: 01463 783000, corneronthesquare.co.uk

Nearest featured site: Culloden Moor

La Mirage Restaurant

This Helmsdale restaurant boasts mad décor, friendly service, fantastic fish and chips – and enormous portions. Booking is advised for evening meals but there's a takeaway service, too.



Contact: 01431 821615
Nearest featured site: Brora

Altnaharra Hotel

Choose from decent bar food or a restaurant for something a bit more formal.

Contact: 01549 411222, altnaharra.com

Nearest featured site: Altnaharra

Cups Tearoom

Don't let the unassuming exterior deter you, Cups Tearoom at Scrabster Harbour is a real find. If the cheerful interior doesn't put a smile on your face, the friendly welcome and the fabulous cake will. The owner even hand-knits the tea cosies.

Contact: 01847 896274, cups-scrabster.co.uk
Nearest featured site: Dunnet Bay



A golden scene on the road to Beaulieu

My trip to the north of Scotland was designed to provide the perfect antidote to the stresses and strains of modern life – I wasn't to be disappointed.

Sweeping views are on offer from almost every one of the 83 pitches at The Club's Culloden Moor site – a smart, recently refurbished, full-facility affair. Bordering the pitching area is a forest, ideal for dog walking, while an hourly bus service shuttles between the site and the bustling city of Inverness, making it popular with members living in remote Highland areas who come here for a spot of serious retail therapy.

With 2014 set to be an historic year for Scotland, my visit to Culloden Moor was a poignant one. Modern-day Scots head to the polls this September to vote on their country's independence; Culloden was the venue for a far less peaceful or democratic way of deciding Scotland's future – a gory land battle – in 1746.

Culloden Moor Visitor Centre, a National Trust for Scotland attraction, is just a mile from The Club site and is not to be missed. There is no charge to roam the

actual battlefield, which is an emotional experience, while the café is the perfect place to recharge and refill after a ramble.

For a lovely trip out, take a drive along the A862 to the west of Inverness where you'll be rewarded with fantastic views across the Beaulieu Firth. You could visit the Glen Ord Distillery at Muir of Ord or do as we did and sample the cake and riverside walks of the sweet village of Beaulieu.

THE STUFF OF FAIRYTALES

Another pleasant distraction is a jaunt to the late 14th-century Cawdor Castle, about 20 minutes from Culloden Moor. The castle is still home to the Cawdor family so, among all the period pieces, you'll see nods to modern living, such as a push-button phone next to the bed.

It's a lovely place – the stuff of fairytales and Shakespearian plays. Information panels in each room are written in such a humorous way, you'll probably be chuckling to yourself all the way round the castle. The gardens are super and there's the obligatory café serving great food, too.

However, dog owners will prefer to find refreshment in the nearby Culloden Inn where your four-legged friend is welcome

“Sweeping views are on offer from almost every one of the 83 pitches at Culloden Moor Club site”

to join you in the public bar area. The food here is good (home-made bread with my ploughman's lunch) and there's a great selection of local ales.

North of Culloden, the Moray Firth is one of the best spots in the UK to see dolphins, but for us it was already time to press on north to Brora, on Scotland's east coast. The 52-pitch Club site here is a little more remote, a little more rugged and a little more laid back than Culloden Moor, yet still offers clean and tidy facilities.

Your first port of call should be the beach. You'll rarely find another soul sharing this blissful expanse of sand with you, but do be respectful of the Arctic terns that call it their summer home – after all,

they've travelled 10,000 miles to get here from the Antarctic!

There's a lovely cycle ride from the site that will take you along quiet lanes to Loch Brora where greylag geese and terns can be seen. On the way back, why not pop into the Clynelish Distillery for a tour, before wheeling your bike the short distance back to your caravan.

Brora railway station is but a mile from the site, and a trip to Wick and back is a must. Your eyes will feast on spectacular views and the train is the only way to enjoy some stunning, remote areas where no cars can venture.

A few miles up the coast from Brora is the old herring port of Helmsdale, accessible by road or rail, which has an interesting heritage centre called Timespan – a smart, modern building housing a museum which tells the story of the area in days past, as well as a 'creative space' where the works of modern local artists are exhibited.

The exhibition I saw was a bit beyond my simple style, so I took refuge in the most famous restaurant in Helmsdale, if not the entire region. La Mirage is just up the road from Timespan, its décor blurring the >>



FOR THE FAMILY

Landmark Forest Adventure Park

In addition to the usual theme park rides, this Carrbridge-based adventure park offers some interesting and unusual attractions such as 'Bamboozeleum' – which really has to be experienced to be believed!

Contact: 0800 731 3446, landmarkpark.co.uk

Nearest featured site: Culloden Moor

Loch Ness Centre and Exhibition

The legend of the Loch Ness monster is explored in glorious interactive detail here. Science, folklore, photography, proof and spoofs are all presented to help you make your mind up once and for all.

Contact: 01456 450573, lochness.com/loch-ness-monster-exhibition

Nearest featured site: Culloden Moor



Seadrift

Getting to Seadrift couldn't be easier – it's upstairs from the site reception at Dunnet Bay. Displays help both adults and children learn about and better enjoy and appreciate the area's natural surroundings. Free entry.



Contact: 01847 821531 (Ranger), highland.gov.uk/seadrift
Nearest featured site: Dunnet Bay

Timespan

This Helmsdale attraction is another for adults and children alike. The story of the Highland Clearances is presented in a modern and interesting way and there's even an interactive 3D video room.



Contact: 01431 821327, timespan.org.uk
Nearest featured site: Brora



Newark Bay, Orkney

“From a day trip to Orkney to a guided walk, there’s plenty to do from Dunnet Bay Club site”

boundaries between eccentric, quirky and utterly bonkers. The business of serving up decent, honest food is taken most seriously though. Top tip? Arrive hungry. Very hungry.

GOLDEN SANDS

Hitching up and heading even further north, nothing can prepare you for the sight that greets you from the A836 as you approach the sandy bay that is home to The Club’s Dunnet Bay site. Deserted dune-backed golden sands stretch out for miles as gentle rollers tumble to shore with hypnotic rhythm. The site itself is bright and open, with many of its 57 pitches enjoying a sea

view. A sparkling facility block caters for those who require it, but you won’t find hardstandings – well-drained soil means they are simply not necessary.

The stunning beach can be accessed directly from the site – a gate leads down a few steps through the dunes. If firmer conditions underfoot (or under-buggy) are required, there’s a community forest just across the road where one mile of stone path offers easier going.

From a day trip to the Orkney Islands to guided walks by the area’s ranger (who rather conveniently resides in the Seadrift centre upstairs from the site reception),



CULTURE



Cawdor Castle

A favourite for Shakespeare fans on the trail of Macbeth, this fairytale fortress is still a family home and has lovely formal and informal gardens to explore.

Contact: 01667 404401, cawdorcastle.com

Nearest featured site: Culloden Moor

Culloden Battlefield

To tread the turf where the last land battle in Britain took place is free, but there’s a charge for non-National Trust for Scotland members wanting to visit the modern Culloden Battlefield Visitor Centre exhibition, the highlight being the 360° battle immersion theatre.



Contact: 0844 493 2159, nts.org.uk/Culloden/Home

Nearest featured site: Culloden Moor



Strathnaver Museum

Set within a former chapel in Caithness, this museum charts local history in a thoroughly charming way. The turbulent ‘Clearances’ and everyday life are brought to life with interesting artefacts and displays made by local schoolchildren.

Contact: 01641 521418, strathnavermuseum.org.uk

Nearest featured site: Altnaharra

Castle and Gardens of Mey

This lovely castle in Caithness was saved from dereliction by the late Queen Mother. Presented exactly as Her Majesty enjoyed it, it pays homage to this wonderful lady’s warmth of character and mischievous sense of humour.

Contact: 01847 851473, castleofmey.org.uk

Nearest featured site: Dunnet Bay



OUTDOOR FUN



RSPB Dunnet Head

Enthusiastic birdwatchers will head for the remote RSPB Reserve at Forsinard Flows, but Dunnet Head remains far more accessible from The Club site and has the added thrill of being the most northerly point in the UK. Spot puffins, guillemots, kittiwakes, razorbills and fulmars among others.

Contact: 01463 715000, rspb.org.uk/reserves/guide/d/dunnethead

Nearest featured site: Dunnet Bay



Brora Golf Club

Superb links golf is on offer right next to The Club site. Pay per round or per week; clubs and buggies for hire.

Contact: 01408 621417, broragolf.co.uk

Nearest featured site: Brora



Cycling

National Cycle Network Route 7 passes through the stunning Cairngorms and Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Parks. For a coastal ride in northern Scotland, National Cycle Network Route 1 hugs the east coast, linking Dundee, Aberdeen and Inverness.

Contact: sustrans.org.uk



Fly fishing

Superb fishing is available at both Brora and Dunnet Bay, but Altnaharra takes the crown as the fly fishing for brown trout (no bait allowed) is free of charge to members staying on site.

Contact: 01549 411226 (Site Warden, limited office hours), caravanclub.co.uk

Nearest featured site: Altnaharra

there's a wealth of things to do here. Anglers can choose from a couple of lochs for trout fishing – bank permits start from £5 per day. Meanwhile, ornithologists are completely and utterly spoiled. Dunnet Head, mainland Britain's most northerly point, is 'bird city'. Even if you don't know a puffin from a plover, it's worth making the effort to get here just to enjoy the scenery on the five-mile drive or cycle ride.

REMOTE RETREAT

The last site on my tour is arguably The Club's most remote – the nearest shop to Altnaharra is more than 20 miles away, so stock up before you get here! You won't starve if you do run out of supplies, though, as the lovely wardens sell a few essentials. The drive to this 24-pitch site through the Strathnaver valley is jaw-dropping enough, but the view you get when you are pitched on the edge of the inky-blue Loch Naver, with Ben Klibleck rising majestically in the distance, is even better. Be sure not to let your jaw

drop too much though, or you might end up 'eating' a few midges.

There is no toilet block or laundry on site, so you will have to use your own facilities – some of the pitches have electric hook-ups. Members with larger units should call the wardens for assistance before booking.

Fly fishing, birdwatching, walking and simply winding down and recharging the mental batteries are the site's top attractions. Fishing on the loch is free to those staying on site. Feathered and furry visitors to the site include golden and sea eagles, buzzards, black- and red-throated divers, great northern divers, otters and deer – there's even a resident pine marten who puts in an occasional appearance. Photographers need to remember to pack every lens and memory card they have.

Sadly, all good things have to come to an end. Do make sure you have sufficient payload in your outfit to allow for the heaviness of your heart when the time finally comes to reluctantly leave.

MEMBERS' VIEWS



John and Debbie Harper from Bury St Edmunds visited all four of the featured sites. A keen fisherman, John particularly enjoyed fishing the lochs around Dunnet Bay and Loch Naver at Altnaharra. "One of the highlights of our trip has to be seeing the dolphins at Chanonry Point on the Black Isle, not far from Culloden Moor," Debbie told us: "We went as the tide was rising and saw dolphins coming in very close to shore. It was wonderful!"

Sylvia and Mike Few enjoyed Dunnet Bay and Altnaharra Club sites with their Tibetan Terrier, Tara. "As dog owners, what we particularly like about this area is that there are no restrictions on dogs on the beaches in the summer," Sylvia told us. "Dunnet Bay is superb. While there, we enjoyed a super walk from John o' Groats to Duncansby Head upon the advice of the helpful folk at the John o' Groats tourist centre. We've just done a lovely three-hour walk from the Altnaharra site."



Club Together

The online community that just keeps growing

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