

A Day in the Bonnie Braes of the Colorado Highlands

Description

I hear the bagpipes long before the town comes into view. A short drive from Denver into the Colorado Rockies, the small town of Estes Park has been playing host to the Longs Peak Highland Festival for 32 years. Now over 75,000 visitors descend upon this town of 6,000 for four days every September. Started by four families in 1976, and inspired by the majestic mountain views and a reminder of the highlands of Scotland, the festival continues to grow in size and popularity every year.



As I come into Estes Park, I cross a small bridge. The Loch Ness monster bobs in the water to my left, behind which the main festival grounds can be seen. Parking is rather painless for an event of this size, well organized and plentiful. The first thing that strikes me as I walk toward the entrance is the music. I can feel the low throb of the drums makes me want to dance. The wail of the bagpipes nearly brings tears to my eyes, of joy or sadness depending on the tune.

I show my ticket and enter the festival grounds proper. I make my over to Clan Row. Here one can find out more about their family history from booths run by the respective clans. This is nearly always my first stop, as the volunteers at my surnames booth have become close friends over the years- we are family after all. People stop by, looking at the crest and reading the information sheets. Saying goodbye, I make my way to the games.

When most people think of highland sports they think of throwing telephone

poles. This is known amongst Scottish sports enthusiasts as the caber toss. The caber, which does resemble a telephone pole, is nearly as iconic an image as the kilt. Lesser known sports, such as the hammer throw and stone putting, also get their time in the spotlight here. Nearby, an area has been set up for the children to try out their athletic prowess with miniature versions of the caber. I watch until the athletes take a break, then it is time for lunch.

As I make my way to the food court, I am surrounded by people in traditional Scottish dress. Most of the men are kilted and wearing simple linen shirts laced up the front with leather. The women wear dresses similar to those seen in renaissance period clothing- ankle length dresses made of linen or other natural fabric. They finish the look with a tartan sash draped over the shoulder and pinned in place. Many of the women are also wearing ankle length tartan skirts and linen shirts similar to those of the men. The reds and greens of the plaids with the bright white of the linen gives everyone a bright cohesive feel even in the midst of the chaos of such a large crowd of people.

I sit down and enjoy some haggis and a pint of Guinness while watching some young girls in traditional Irish dancing dresses tap and kick their feet in intricate steps. After enjoying the music and the food for a bit, I go and do a bit of shopping. This highland festival differs from many of its brethren in that they are strict with their vendors. All vendors must carry Celtic themed items. This makes shopping here a quality experience, as one does not need to look long to find wonderful themed souvenirs.

That evening I go to the Ceildh (pronounced kay-lee), the Celtic New Years party. This is a cozy gathering that goes on into the wee hours. Live music, drinks, and good people make this one of the high points of the festival. Tickets for the Ceildh cost extra, and it isn't as crowded as the festival fields. I talk to a couple from Newfoundland who have made the trip to Estes Park and the festival every year for the last decade. I can understand why, as I adjust my kilt. The Longs Peak Festival is not just a reenactment of Scotland's Glory days. In an age where we are traveling further from our roots more than ever, the festival gives us a chance to remember where we came from. The call of the bagpipes, the highland jigs, all of this soothes the

romantic part of our soul that wonders what life would be like if our ancestors had stayed in the old country. For four days, we can pretend the past is still alive.

As I drive out of Estes Park and back to Denver and my life of as a modern American woman, I roll down the windows to hear the pipes one last time. The melody follows me for several miles, and will continue to haunt my dreams for days to come.

CATEGORY

1. LIFE LOVERS

Category

1. LIFE LOVERS

Date Created

August 12, 2009

Author

jenny