

News

Christmas 2009 Newsletter

Roger and I got back from Turkey after 10 days of almost non stop sunshine to find non-stop rain back home. It seems to be pretty dependable this year. Roger always comforts me by saying that we are high enough to survive Global warming and it will never be a concern to us - (thankfully we hadn't chosen to holiday in Cumbria!). We had a wonderful time, enjoyed the many ruined cities, sandy beaches and walking bits of the Lycian Way, a well recommended holiday to anyone interested in trekking.

The children all helped house and dog sit, but Kim was the one who was here most of the time. She also managed to keep an eye on Mum who at 89 increasingly needs to be kept an eye on. Apart from her balance and her aches and pains she keeps well. My brother was over from Canada and decided to stay with my sister in Harrogate which cheered her up no end. He tries to get over every second year so she really looks forward to his visits. Mum was already installed for his visit and we (apart from Ben) all managed down for a weekend at the end of October.

Ben graduated on the day we left for our holiday. A pleasant day, though mostly uneventful until we reached the airport; our journey down to Stanstead was not the greatest. Missing our flight and having to divert to Gatwick we arrived close to 11 p.m. Our only way to Stanstead was then by bus which took 3 hours stopping at every single terminal at Heathrow, which is a few to say the least. Staying in Edinburgh perhaps would have been a slightly better option as calling our friends out at 2.20am to pick us up was a little bit embarrassing.

Kim is enjoying her internship at Inverleith Gallery in Edinburgh and starts working with the Glasgow Arts Festival in January.

Jenny enjoyed being in Berlin illustrating the 20th anniversary celebrations of the Berlin Wall coming down. She is still surviving as an Artist, selling prints and drawings, having regular commissions plus being financially boosted with teaching jobs now and again.

We will as always be celebrating Christmas at home with the family. I've yet to get those decorations out of the loft and hang them up. The kids all say it looks magical. I think I'm beginning to become a bit of a humbug, perhaps one day soon they will settle down and invite us for Christmas but I think I may have to wait a wee while yet. Hogmanay too is being celebrated if not at home nearby. There are lots of events being planned in the village for the New Year.

I've still got lots of presents to buy and the freezer to fill but managed quite a lot of prepping before the holiday.

Do hope you all enjoy the festivities.

Love from us all,
Maria, Roger, Jenny, Kim and Ben, Conan and MacDuff.





Autumn Newsletter 2009

Well disregarding the rather wet August we had, it's been a bumper year for mushrooms this Autumn, with three trips to the surrounding woods filling up three basketloads of Chantrelle and a little later, Hedgehog mushrooms - two delicious type of local funghi! Marrows and courgettes this year were also good, though the rest of the fruit and veg were a tad challenged.

With the guesthouse winding down for the winter, I've managed to bake my Christmas Cake, jar up my mincemeat, prepare my Christmas Pudding and make some extra chili jam for festive presents. Roger and I leave for our holiday in Turkey on Friday and there will only be 4 weeks when I get back until Christmas. What a thought! That Christmas newsletter will be winging itself to you before you know it.

On our way down to catch our flight we will be stopping off for Ben's Graduation. He is well ensconced into the music world and by all accounts is proving to be quite a music promoter and band manager.

Kim is back from India and started her 6 month internship at the Inverleith Gallery in Edinburgh yesterday. She has also found herself some admin work with the International Visual Arts Festival in Glasgow starting in January.

Jenny is very busy and dare I say it making some money too. She is also off on Friday to Berlin to illustrate the anniversary of the wall coming down. I think its just an excuse for a jolly but I'm sure she won't admit to that.

Roger and I managed to sneak away at the beginning of September and climb 1/3 of a Munroe together above Ballachullish with our friends Judy and Drew. The weather was great and we finished off at the Seafood Café on Loch Leven . A must for any Seafood lovers out there.

Laetitia (my French student) left me in October. Although not the most diligent worker, she was wonderful company and great with the guests. The whole family was very sad to see her leave. She is now studying very hard in Toulouse .

We also had a local wedding in October which was a great event in Kilchrenan. Unfortunately I only made part of it as I became ill in the afternoon with some sort of bug. It was one of my few days off since Easter - that will teach me for relaxing!

Did anyone manage to see MacDuff in the September edition of Conde Nast Traveller? He looked very handsome and the camera crew and models all thought he was great. He also managed a 2nd at the Dalmally Show. Anyone that was present at the show should have also claimed an award for surviving the weather, it must have been one of the wettest days of the year.



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Summer 2009

We are now at the end of June and have had two successive days of very hot weather: the weather men have predicted a heat wave for this coming week; we will wait and see. My poor vegetable garden is behind in this year's 'summer climate' - it has been so cold nothing has grown and is now flowering before it has had a chance to mature. Patrick who helps me once a week keeps saying that we need a poly tunnel and I know he's right but an outside veggie garden looks so much nicer. I also don't think I'll be seeing all that wonderful fruit I had in abundance last year.

Back in April, Roger and I managed to recharge our batteries by staying with crofting friends up in Mellon Udrigle, Wester Ross. The weather couldn't have been kinder. During our stay Angela and Ian were busy lambing so Roger helped Ian while I was occupied with a little babysitting.

MacDuff will be featuring in the September issue of the prestigious Condé Nast Travel Magazine. He was personally asked to model earlier this month by the Ardanaiseig Hotel, so we chauffeured him up for the afternoon. He behaved beautifully and the other models loved him.

The children are all well. Ben is home contemplating his future though still achieving duties as partner in a record label plus manager of the band Washington Irving. Jenny is still drawing events around Scotland while exhibiting regularly. She is currently trying new tangents, the most recent by collaborating with a writer/performer for a theatre show at the Arches, Glasgow called 'The Line We Draw' which received four stars from The Scotsman and The Herald. Kim is in Kolkata piloting her Art and Drama Project with the street children. Her blog is proving increasingly popular for it's well written discriptions of her experiences. Not that we're biased but you really should check it out <http://kolkata40509.blogspot.com>

This season so far has been busy, July looks like it might be a little quieter though this predicted heat wave may help those last minute bookings!

Due to having another busy month I am behind with this newsletter and still haven't completed it. We had friends staying at the weekend who were training for a charity climb up Kilimanjaro in August. On Sunday Roger joined them at Beinn a Bheithir and Sgorr Dhearg - the 'horseshoe' walk in Ballachullish - and we ended the day at the Seafood Café in Loch Leven, a definite must for any foodies out there.



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June 2009

World Fly Fishing Championship Scotland 2009 - Loch Awe :
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_fUPN6SMJI

May 2009

Kim's Kolkata Blog - <http://kolkata40509.blogspot.com>

Spring 2009

Well last night I went to bed with thoughts of what I would write in my Spring newsletter after being reminded by my technologically prolific butcher that I was a bit behind and needed to update it. Beforehand whilst brushing my teeth, someone had left the light on with the window partly open and there beside I swear I could see several of those minute but dreaded little creepy crawlies, the infamous Highland Midgie in April. Far too early I know, but there they were in MY bathroom!

This morning I woke to brilliant sunshine and while walking the dog felt that Spring was really here. I heard my first woodpecker of the year, and MacDuff enjoyed flushing out a female roe deer in the undergrowth. He is much better now at being good and coming when he is called, which saves me from the mad pursuit and 10 minutes of my heart being in my mouth wondering where he has gone and what he is up to.

Talking about deer, they have been a complete menace this year. They've devastated three of my evergreen shrubs which now resemble skeletal specimens and I fear they may never recover. We were up in Lochinver last weekend and the amount of deer we saw was incredible: there seemed to be a herd on every second hill and mountain side - a side of venison would be a welcome addition in the freezer...

We stayed in self catering, unfortunately a lot of places were closed at this time of year (end March) but thankfully we managed to have a very nice dinner complete with open fire, friendly staff and live folk band at the reknowned 'Ceilidh Place' in Ullapool. This venue is certainly worth a visit as it has regular exhibitions – there's some beautiful artwork up on the wall – plus a great bookshop. That night there was actually a launch for the book festival they'll be having later on in the year, and lots of Scotland's literary heavyweights were there. Jenny recognised a few poets and writers that she has drawn at various events.

The children are all well. Jenny is still surviving as an artist and this month is going to be quite exciting – only last week she drew and later met David Byrne at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall, the drawings of which you can see on his website already under the Tour Reviews 31/3/09 (or this link here -

http://www.davidbyrne.com/tours/reviews/db_on_tour_08-09/2009_03_31_Soep_drawings.php).

She's also being showcased in a national trendy music, arts and film magazine called 'The Skinny' while at the end of the month is having an exhibition in Glasgow sponsored by Red bull and the Hinterland Music Festival for which she'll be 'artist in residence'

Ben has already got a good footing in the music business. He's currently managing his second band, which are just about to launch their first album with 'Instinctive Raccoon'. Instinctive Raccoon is a record label which Ben also works part time for, and while studying for his 3rd year exams in his Business and Marketing degree at Strathclyde, he's definitely not sitting idle!

Kim has been extremely busy recently organising her trip to Kolkata, India with established charity The Hope Foundation, where along with her best friend Rebecca, will be pioneering a project to set up drama workshops for street children - [Kim's Kolkata Blog - http://kolkata40509.blogspot.com](http://kolkata40509.blogspot.com).

They both held a very successful Ceilidh Dance and auction in the village hall on Friday (April 3rd), and have just returned from their sponsored climb up our local Munro Ben Cruachan. Between them both they've managed to raise at least £2100 but if you'd like to sponsor them any more you can go here <http://www.justgiving.com/rebeccaroberts8>. What they've raised so far could buy two new ambulances for the charity. They are getting added support from the Central School of Speech and Drama, London and have already received an enthusiastic letter from Dame Judi Dench - one of The Hope Foundation's major patrons - regarding the event and exhibition they're planning for their return.

So while the weather is warming up, the daffodils and primroses are in their glory along with the fresh smells of new growth, we're enjoying having Kim at home..... most of the time. She'll be leaving on the 25th of April for five months, so not long to go now. We are all rooting for her and Rebecca - it will undoubtedly be a life changing experience for them both.



December 2008

Preparation for the holidays is now underway. Gosh it does seem to arrive earlier every year.

Fortunately I managed to prepare my cake, mince meat and pickles before going on our break down South this year, so less to do in that department on my return.

We stayed with friends up and down the country - doggy ones since MacDuff accompanied us on our travels. We managed to spend time in Yorkshire, next to the Stray in Harrogate, in the small village of Eccleshall in Staffordshire, in Witham, Essex, and at Balscote, Oxfordshire, finding wonderful walks in all these places. I never realized before how many varieties of mud Britain could offer! Needless to say, MacDuff became experienced in all of them! The weather wasn't perfect, not that this would bother our big hairy puppy in the slightest. Our muddiest walk was undoubtedly the Maldon Estuary in Essex - MacDuff was absolutely covered. I've never seen mud like it and it is here that they hold the infamous Mad Maldon Mud Race which you can view on YouTube. Anyone who would wish to do this on New Years Eve must be stark raving mad. As a selling point I think I should add that Argyll offers wet clean peaty mud in comparison...

All the children are at home for the festivities although we've just found out that Kim is working at the Art Club in Glasgow on Christmas Eve so someone will have to volunteer to pick her up.

The Soep Clan wishes you all a very happy time over the Christmas and New Year Period. We will as normal be holding our annual party on Hogmanay which is, as a rule, full of music, dancing and general making of merry, and where we

look forward to catching up with friends who we rarely get to see during the summer months. Those who don't make it will still be in our thoughts when we raise our glasses at the bells.



Autumn

While I've got a spare wet afternoon in September (weather lately has been pretty diabolical) I thought I would write a few words for our Autumn newsletter. The seasons seem to come around earlier each year and the Fall seemed to arrive in August. The Mombresia and Rowan Berries were out in full Technicolor long before they should have been and the summer flowers passed looking their best by mid August. The fruit has kept me busy since July with the cherries starting first, then onto the raspberries, blackcurrants, gooseberries, worcester berries and now the plums and apples.

Roineabhal has had a great season; we've hosted so many lovely people. Apart from our regulars who have returned for another dose of midgie highland air, we have had a couple arrive from Bermuda for the weekend. Claire Calman a fictional writer with husband Larry, a handy London publisher and their little boy stayed for a week in June. She was writing a novel based on a woman that ran a bed and breakfast and swore blind she wasn't basing it on me. We've also had a London Cabbie, two young men - one a Barrister who came to fish, and a couple who lived on Lord Cowdray's estate who ran a shooting/sporting business. I can't recall everyone in this newsletter, there are far too many, but it's been fun meeting them.

MacDuff and Conan have kept us on our toes getting up to all sorts. The worst thing just now is that MacDuff has taken a liking to visiting the local pub by following house guests down the road, ending up at the Kilchrenan Inn. Unfortunately he's a little too big to go unnoticed and usually a phone call gets Roger and I tearing down the road to retrieve him. He's now 10 months and although a lovely dog he's as wilful as ever. Meanwhile, Conan has to be barricaded into the kitchen at night as he manages to open the door by jumping onto the handle, then proceeds to do the same at the guest room doors - one couple allowed him in at 4am one morning - after realising they were not being burgled - where he slept for the rest of the night.

The children are all fine. Jenny was recently featured under Up and Coming artist in the Scotsman recently and illustrated an Arts debate for them at the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh which all went very well. It has certainly given her a lot of good coverage. You can read the article on her here: <http://thescotsman.scotsman.com/critique/Sketching-the-scene--Jenny.4415478.jp>

Kim is now helping to manage the Glasgow Art Club and looking after the gallery there which will help her gather experience for that Masters in Modern Art History which she would like to attain one day.

Ben has passed all his exams and starts his 3rd year University at Strathclyde at the end of September. He still spends a lot of his time promoting and managing the band Yellow Bentine.

I am entering the Golden Spurtle World Porridge Making Championships once again in October. Fingers crossed I will get into the finals.

Julia, our Swedish Student leaves us on 17th October. I think she has enjoyed her summer with us. Her Father Lars came over for a short visit to see her and although the weather wasn't too kind he seemed to enjoy his stay.

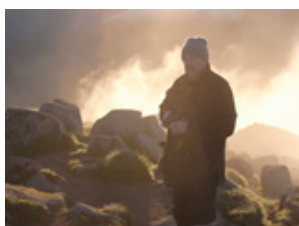
Last week-end saw local young couple Matt and Sofie get married in the village. They married in the little kirk and had their reception, dance and evening barbecue at the village hall. The locals were all invited including ourselves, with lots of the men wearing highland attire. During the evening flying lanterns were lit - much quieter and a touch more romantic than fireworks. It was a great day and one that I think the happy young couple will always remember.



Summer Time

'Summertime, and the living is easy', although that doesn't actually apply to my life at the moment. It has been pretty hectic for the past 2 months and seems to be getting busier everyday. We have had visitors from all over the world, the furthest probably being from Brazil so far, although Mike is piping up in the background as I write claiming that he is. Mike is my New Zealand student from Wellington, North Island but is leaving on Friday to travel Europe after 9 weeks helping me at Roineabhal. After all that time he's only had 4 days of rain, today being one of them. Marie-Reine arrives from France on Saturday and then I have Julia from Norway arriving in July to help me through the rest of the season.

The midgies have been the worst ever. Anyone of you visiting must bring your midge repellent. Avon 'Skin so Soft' cream - recommended by the local forestry workers who should know what they're talking about - is still the best protection so far.



Roger has just returned from spending the night on Ben Cruachan with Joe Cornish the landscape photographer who is a good friend. It is the first time that he has photographed at dawn on top of a mountain but in doing so got some amazing shots.

The veggie garden is still not producing much but is quite promising this year if MacDuff would only just leave it alone. He has taken a liking to the most beautiful red maple that I was given for my 50th. It has been pulled up over 4 times now and offered to various guests. I shouted at him so fiercely last time that I think the whole village must have heard. Conan is a very good little cat and is spoiled by all the guests. He continues to be very submissive towards MacDuff who could just do with a slight biff with his claws now and again. I thought cats always tended to be the boss in this sort of relationship.

The children are all fine and still living in Glasgow. Jenny is currently artist in residence at Glasgow's West End Festival while also having another exhibition at a highly raved about contemporary Scottish restaurant called Roastit Bubbly Jocks in Dumbarton Road which will continue until the end of June. The food is very good and reasonably priced plus you get to take your own wine in - I would definitely recommend a visit. Jenny's show ends at the end of the month and has already been featured in the Evening Times and the West End News.

Kim, apart from working in a wine bar and deciding on what to do study wise, has just finished helping with the design of a Greek tragedy. Ben has just finished his second year and is looking forward to Strathclyde in September. He is spending a lot of his free time promoting and managing a group called Yellow Bentines and is currently with them on their first ever tour including a date at the popular Water Rats near Kings Cross in London. Fingers crossed they will manage to cover their costs.

Wishing you all out there a lovely sunny Summer and maybe we will see some of you over the next few months at Roineabhal.



Easter

I can't believe it's almost Easter - only 3 days to go until Good Friday. I will have to get the feather duster out and get cracking with some cleaning. The winter has whizzed by, I guess Easter being that much earlier this year has taken us all by surprise.

MacDuff is growing on a daily basis and looking after him is keeping me on my toes. He is a good dog on the whole but on occasion has that stubborn streak when he just tests you to the limit. Conan doesn't seem to have grown much at all in comparison, we all think it must be stress living with MacDuff - trying to avoid being eaten and ducked down the toilet is just many of Conan's daily adventures. The funny thing is he always seems to come back for more - what is it they say about cats being masochists?

The children are now all living in Glasgow, although frequently visit. Kim is the only one planning to be home for Easter week-end.

Jenny's exhibition is on at the Byre Theatre in St Andrews with drawings from her residency covering last year's Stanza Poetry Festival. It's on until the end of March.

Ben, as well as being at Business College, is managing a bright young band called The Yellow Bentines. They are a very talented group featuring piano, trumpets and guitar, have a lot of energy and I'm sure will go far.

A Happy Easter to you all from us at Roineabhal when it arrives. I'm off now to do some baking - I must get that Simnel Cake finished.



No animals were harmed in the making of these pictures...except, the crocuses are no longer with us. (And that's a *toy* mouse, not a real one: Conan - yes, *the cat* - likes to play 'Fetch' with it - *hours* of fun!)



Dinner Party with Great Company

March 2008

Here is a photo of our new puppy MacDuff



Early December 2007



Roger and I have now been back from our holiday for over a week. We saw many old friends and caught up with all their news. We enjoyed lots of wonderful French food and sampled some very good wine. We visited and discovered lots more of France and clocked up an impressive 4,000 kilometres. We managed walks in the mountains above Provence, in the foothills of the Pyrenees and up in the Haute Pyrenees just below Pic du Midi.

We are now busy preparing for the festive season and this year with our effort to reduce negative impact on the environment we are sending a message of goodwill in our newsletter via email rather than by post. Today Roger, Kim and I have been busy splitting and stacking logs. The cellar is now full of firewood and we are all feeling satisfied with a hard day's work.

My success in Porridge making and winning the title of 'The Worlds Best Porridge Maker' (for those who haven't read about me or heard me on the radio or even seen me on the television) has brought me some unexpected glamour. I was in Edinburgh this week, being filmed for the new Bowmore Whisky Documentary. I'm now famous at the age of 50 and all because of Porridge! Though, I promise not to make it compulsory at breakfast.

We will have all the children home at Christmas, as well as Conan our new Burmese cat and MacDuff, our new Spinone Puppy will also have arrived by then.

The Soep Clan wish you all a very happy time over the festivities. Anyone nearby that would like to join us on Hogmanay is very welcome. We will be raising a glass at the Bells to all our friends and acquaintances.

Autumn 2007

Well it has been very busy lately. Apart from the house guests booking that last Autumn Break and staying with us at Roineabhal lots of other events have been happening.

Conan our latest addition to the family is keeping everyone busy and entertained. He is our new Brown Burmese Kitten of 14 weeks.

If those who don't keep up with the media, I would like to announce that I now hold the Golden Spurtle Award for the Worlds Best Porridge. Nothing prepared me for the onslaught of media coverage it has provoked. Apart from being on Scottish and National Television and National Radio I have been interviewed live so far from Canberra, Australia, Tasmania and Dallas Texas. www.goldenspurtle.com



Jenny's first solo exhibition is opening tomorrow .As well as her art work she has 3 west coast Scottish contemporary bands who will be playing. Kim is exhibition organiser and Roger, Ben and I will be there to help when and if needed. www.jennysoep.com

Tuesday 31st July 2007

I can't believe that it's the end of July already and that we are half way through our summer season. What a summer although the weather has been kinder to us than down south we have still seen quite a lot of rain. As well as our regular guests we have seen lots of new faces from Britain, Europe and other far off places.

Earlier on this year two of our guests flew a power kite next to the house, we had to help Fiona from being flown away by holding her down by the strimmer harness. Another young couple flew in by microlite via Oban Airport, they had been camping for two nights and were relieved and thankful to have a warm room with dry sheets and a shower.



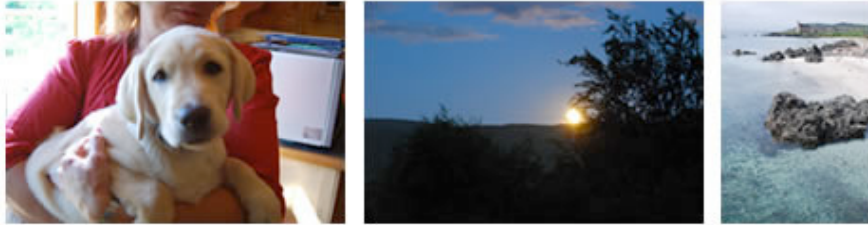
Today we have had the T.V cameras from STV filming our eldest daughter Jenny about her art work. She will be having her first solo exhibition in October at Resipole which will include musicians from the west coast and highland region www.jennysoep.com

Along with so many others Denis Ribas, (a passionate world renowned artist from Catalan) and his family stayed with us for a couple of days.

Another visitor earlier this summer was Nelson, a 3 month old Labrador Pup, as you can imagine he kept everyone entertained but was well behaved and has even been asked back.

We have had the three children home this summer Kim has now graduated and Ben has finished his first year of his

Strathclyde business course in Glasgow.



Thursday 22nd March 2007

After several days of cold wintry weather today was sunny and warm with alpine skies.

The Dippers are busy nesting in the banks of our burn along with the grey Wagtail. which I saw for the first time this year. Spring is here at last.

Our local village hall is now refurbished and looking very smart. Apart from the weekly events of Scottish country dancing, Spanish, bridge and art classes, there has been a successful ceilidh dance, quiz night and on April 12th the Ian Thompson Band will be performing. They are a Traditional Scottish folk band from the Isle of Mull and have been compared to Blazing Fiddles. The band features the world class accordion player Gregor Lowrey who happens to live just down the road.

We had vegetarians in this evening for dinner so we had Hummus with Persian Flat Bread hot from the oven and salad to start, Aubergine Parmigiana served with a selection of fresh vegetables for the main course, rounded off with little pots of chocolate and Spanish meringue biscuits, all freshly made today.

Regards the garden, the daffodils, primroses, and crocuses are bursting with colour. The vegetable patch however is requiring some love and care after the hard wet winter, and thankfully my part time gardener is back from his jaunt around India to give it some well needed attention.

