Roger and I arrived back from our road trip holiday on Friday after a long drive up from England. It was really great to catch up with some friends and family down South and I also managed some shopping for the festive season. Wrapping all the presents will be the next thing on the agenda.

Conan was sure pleased to see us return. He certainly misses the company. Jackie was around during the day to keep an eye on him, making sure his food dish was sufficiently full. Although MacDuff enjoyed plenty of walks, and met up with lots of other dogs while we were away, he was so happy to be back home with his best pal.

We awoke this morning to a lovely blanket of snow and it’s still falling. It makes a welcome change to the constant rain we have been getting. The tyre chains are all ready waiting to be put in use if necessary. Fingers crossed for a white Christmas. We have had a friend staying for the weekend who now has to drive back to the central belt, needless to say with much trepidation.

All the children will be joining us for Christmas but looks at the moment as though they may all be away for Hogmanay. We don’t even know if the usual Christmas dip in Loch Awe is going ahead. A few festive party invitations have come through the door so I am sure we will have a great time whatever happens. Mattias (Jenny’s Swedish boyfriend) is joining us for Christmas but only for a few days this year. Jenny is arriving from Stockholm on the 19th so will be able to get some extra help with the decorations...me thinks. Kim and Ben will be coming up on the 23rd, cadging a lift from Mattias who is hiring a car from the airport.

I’ve just made the Christmas pudding which I entirely forgot about until I saw them in all the shop windows while we were away. Also more mincemeat has been made since I managed to use up quite a lot of my last batch while entertaining in November.

Mum and I are heading out to the historically wonderful Dunollie House in Oban to its first public ceilidh in the ‘Old Kitchen’ - a ‘Mulled Wine and Poetry Evening’ this Friday also with fiddle and clarsach. It should be quite a cosy and intimate affair with a limited audience so we must make sure we get tickets! You should take a look at their website - [http://www.dunollie.org](http://www.dunollie.org)

One of the people reading is Kirsty MacDonald who is one of Jenny’s best friends from Oban High School days. She’ll be reading poetry her father Donald MacDonald wrote. Tragically he died very suddenly this summer.

There is also the annual Kilchrenan Primary School Nativity Play to attend next week. It has always been part of our Christmas itinerary though we unfortunately missed it last year due to having a late holiday. Kilchrenan Primary has got a great new headmistress at the moment; we’ve been hearing some wonderful things that the children have been getting up to so we’re really looking forward to what they’ve prepared.

Wishing everybody, wherever you are, a lovely time over the festivities. Hope you will be well, warm and happy, in the company of loved ones.

Lots of love from, the Soep Clan.
Another season draws to an end and we have had a very busy time this last week: painting Kim’s room; foraging for wild mushrooms - which have been in endless supply this autumn; celebrating World Porridge Day by cooking porridge for the primary school children down in the village and producing oatmeal biscuits to sell at the coffee morning. We managed to raise £43 for Mary’s Meals and by a fortunate mistake got it documented and photographed by a freelance journalist, perhaps it will appear in the Oban Times.

Marie and Luise who arrived at the end of August/beginning of September left us towards the end of September after a short Workaway stay. Luise was from Leipzig, Germany and Marie from Cahors, France. They were both a great help at Roineabhal which was still running at that point on all cylinders. By October Francesca and Francesco were here, but helping at a much quieter pace. They have been fantastic company and have provided us with wonderful home-baked pizzas and chocolate cake. Francesca loves to bake so has helped me at every opportunity. Their help has meant I’m much more prepared for Christmas than last year with the Christmas cake and mincemeat already made. MacDuff has also enjoyed his many outings with the Italian couple. They will leave me next Wednesday when they return to University in their home town of Genova.

Jenny has been back in the country a couple of times with drawing work in Glasgow at ‘Loop de Loop’ and also at the Cuper Contemporary Arts Festival in Fife. She will be home at the end of the week to visit and catch up.

Kim is due home for a week in the middle of November and will join us for the start of our annual holiday. She also managed a couple of days here in October too. She is now beginning to settle in London and I think enjoys it more than she did initially. She is definitely a country girl at heart like her mum, but with the career she has chosen the city holds a lot more for her. Her visit to see Jenny in Stockholm was much enjoyed and together they had a lot of fun visiting many places of interest. Swedish life seems to appeal to them both.

Ben is busy with managing Washington Irving, working on promoting lots of shows and has just started working on Communion Glasgow which started out in London and has now spread as far afield as New York. It helps to promote exciting new music to as big and broad an audience as possible.

Roger and I plan to go down south in November for an eagerly anticipated break while Jackie looks after the house and
the cat. We will be catching up with friends that we never seem to get a chance to see. Time seems to go by faster the older you become. It's a good thing all our friends are doggy friendly and I'm sure MacDuff will enjoy catching up with all his old pals too.

Summer 2011

It’s at last summer, although I do need to remind myself. After 2 months of rain and cold weather July finally brought us a little more sunshine with warmer temperatures. Jenny eventually moved to Stockholm but is now home again drawing at some festival or other before she and Mattias help out at Roineabhal for a week. Yes Roger and I are taking our first summer break in 11 years while one of our children stays at home to look after the houseguests. I pray there are no complaints and everything will be in order on our return from France. She has sheets of instructions which I know she will follow very precisely; it’s just her timing that maybe a little out. I’ve explained that breakfast is served between 8am – 9 am and cannot be eked out to 11. We are flying out to Bordeaux and will be staying a few days with Francois and Monique before heading up to the Dordogne to a party at Ally’s. Jenny has been asked to draw again at the Polar Music Prize in Stockholm which is quite a coup, especially since this time they will be making prints of her drawings of the laureates Patti Smith and the Kronos Quartet to give to all the ceremony guests; a great introduction to the music and arts glitterati of Sweden and beyond. Kim is still in London working at the Art Gallery and living in Chiswick while Ben is in Glasgow carving out a career in the music business. Funny how all my children chose the arts. He and Washington Irving have just finished another very successful British tour.

The garden is looking rather sad this year and the vegetable garden has been a complete disaster providing very little in the way of edible produce. If things have managed to grow they bolted and flowered before ripening. I haven’t had one cherry off any of my 3 cherry trees. The gooseberries haven’t berried either. We had a very bad storm here at the end of May with 100 mile an hour winds. The poor trees got such a fright! A lot thought autumn had come early and the leaves have already turned brown. Blackcurrant jam and some bottles of homemade cassis liqueur will probably be the only preserving I will be doing this summer, unless the courgettes produce fruit and then I may make some pickles with them. Even my rasps don’t look very promising. Perhaps an Indian summer is on the cards. I have had an amazing crop of garlic although some of the bulbs could have been bigger; Jenny has made about five 3 foot braids of them already to hang once I make room for them.

The weather I am glad to say hasn’t put the visitors off and some of them as far away as Chile have enjoyed their stay at Roineabhal. We have had young and some a little bit older workaways staying and helping me too from as far afield as Boston, Quebec and at this present time Holland and Italy. They seem to have been very lucky with their days off too, with a handful of them getting to witness the Puffins on the Treshnish Isles near Mull as well as the mountains of Glencoe and with fine weather to boot!

As I still haven’t got the summer newsletter up on the website I thought I would add that we are now back from France. We had a splendid time catching up with friends of some of which I hadn’t seen in 25 years, staying with Monique and Francois in Les Pouey outside Tarbes for three days and then travelling up to the Dordogne for a party at Ally’s, an old friend who has a gite out there. Kim and Ben flew out to Bordeaux to join us in the celebrations which was a great
surprise for their father. A local jazz band from Bergerac came along and played from 3 in the afternoon until midnight.

We ate some delicious pork at 9pm which had been slowly roasting for 5 hours on the spit. Phillip a local from the village basted the pork and prepared and served the rest of the buffet. Needless to say we were all well fed, extremely merry and fun was had by all 70 plus of us.

We are now back trying to re-adjust to Roineabhal in August which is always pretty hectic. Jenny survived the week admirably although her ironing skills need to be improved. Mattias and even Roger’s secretary Jackie were roped in to lighten the load. Mattias had the grass cut too which was a lovely surprise again for Roger. Our Dutch workaway Gerda, Mattias and Jenny got a demonstration in how to make authentic Italien pasta courtesy of our workaway Georgia while Mattias also made some lovely Swedish cinnamon buns. A thoroughly international exchange (and by the looks of it Jenny’s struck lucky with Mattias 😊). The house is still standing, no one is suing us for food poisoning and there are even a few lovely comments in the visitors’ book.

Spring 2011

It has been a week or so since I first remember hearing the cuckoo which was a real reminder that I was late with this newsletter. Well I can really say that my garden is looking good for this time of year and I am for once actually ahead of myself. The potatoes, onions and shallots are already planted and the flower beds are looking very spring like with the daffodils, primulas and tulips in full bloom. The cherry trees are bursting with blossom along with some of the rhododendrons; others are just about to burst with flower. It is no doubt the best time of the year for the garden; everything is so fresh.

We have had a busy start to the year with weddings and parties to attend. Roger and I were invited to Mar Hall in Erskine to celebrate the marriage of Stan and Jackie in March. An amazing day was had by all and it was lovely for us to catch up with the rest of the Prosser family in such grand surroundings. Earlier, in February we were also invited to celebrate the marriage of Frank and Sally in the village hall which was great fun, after the sit down meal the tables and chairs were pushed back for the ceilidh dance, everyone letting loose in at least one Strip the Willow or Dashing White Sergeant. The weekend before we opened for the season saw us up in the Ardnamurchan at Acharacle celebrating Joke’s 60th. It was wonderful for me to see such familiar faces I hadn’t seen in over 30 years (I lived for 10 years in this area with my parents back in the 70s).

Max and Lydia have been staying with us for the past 8 weeks. They are my young ‘workaways’ from Frankfurt and have been working hard getting everything ready in the house and garden. (You can see a nice picture of them with MacDuff.)
Roger finally finished my walk in linen Cupboard upstairs which now holds my dryer and ironing board. It is very ‘perjink’ and frees my small utility room up for wet washing. All I need now is a flatscreen TV in there and I’ll be sorted.:)

Jenny moves to Stockholm on May 25th, she is joining Mattias out there. I am sure money will be saved on travel as they seem to spend so much of their time flying backwards and forwards between Sweden and Scotland. She’s certainly filling in her last few weeks before she goes by illustrating a second children’s book, 3 exhibitions, one all day music/art event and drawing a wedding down near Newcastle.

Kim is surviving in the Big Smoke and working hard at the gallery. She tells us very little and I know misses home but I’m sure her social life has improved. Ben returned back to Glasgow with Washington Irving after another UK tour and in profit which is unheard of apparently for an unsigned band. He is still working at the Arches in Glasgow and still running his record label.

The weather for the past week has been wonderful but it is now raining on Easter Saturday morning. Forecast is to improve by lunch time but we will have to wait and see if the sunshine appears.

Winter 2010/2011

A belated Happy New Year to everyone out there who we haven’t seen in 2011. Apologies to anyone that didn’t receive our Christmas E-card and newsletter due to a new tried method which unfortunately didn’t work as planned.

Our last minute holiday to Morocco was very successful, which apart from spending one day of it in Gatwick due to Spanish air traffic striking and messing up our flight the journey was smooth, although afterwards we did find out that Edinburgh does flights to Marrakech which would have made it even more so. Our holiday being around the beginning of December, we were very fortunate to just miss out on the winter chaos causing airport closures which had a lot of folk missing Christmas with their nearest and dearest.

We then had a lovely family Christmas with Jenny’s boyfriend Mattias joining us from Stockholm for part of the festivities
as well as Maureen, a close family friend who came up for Christmas Day itself. Jenny has decided to try out a move to Sweden this year. She’s still drawing a lot of the music scene but is diversifying in sonic/visual experiments with musicians and sound designers. She’s also looking forward to illustrating more children’s books by the same author she worked with last year.
Kim is also leaving Scotland to go south of the border. She starts her new job in Chiswick at the Lemon Grove as a senior arts consultant (selling paintings) while still being involved with the art collective that she represents called Ealanta Lochaber. The collective is made up of 10 artists from the Western Area of Lochaber, and various members have found opportunities in London with an upcoming exhibition also in The Queen’s Gallery, Dundee. Ben enjoyed his internship at The Arches and made some great contacts with offers of work.

Mum has just got back from Harrogate after a three week stay with my sister. She is now in her 91st year and doing very well. She managed to get out quite a bit and thoroughly enjoyed a WW2 sing along while also seeing The King’s Speech at the cinema.

Julia who helped me three years ago was over from Copenhagen in January. She is studying there at Medical School and seems to be very happy. Staying for a week this time enabled her to see us all. It’s always nice to see my students come back. We’ve also had Felix here helping us prepare for the season; he is from Vienna and is a dab hand with the paint brush.

We also recently celebrated the village wedding of local couple Philip and Lizzie on 22nd January. The actual marriage ceremony took place on top of the hill above the bride’s house. Although the sun didn’t manage to completely come through, it was dry and misty giving it a Lorna Doone atmosphere, with the bride being piped up the hill and one of her bridesmaids being led by Lizzie’s pet lurcher. The reception was held in a marquee in her parent’s garden. Everyone came with a plate of food and the evening guests were asked to bring cheese. It was really well coordinated, thought out and had a lovely communal atmosphere.

The weather is a slight improvement today after a lot of rain. Everyone complains about the snow and ice but I much prefer to be out in it than the continual wet weather. My snowdrops are now through which tells me spring is on its way. 2011 marches onwards.
Christmas 2010

Wow! Where has the year gone? Roger and I are off to Morocco for a week’s holiday on the 4th with an old friend of mine who I never seem to find time otherwise to see. So I must get this newsletter finished before I go or I’ll never get it out there for Christmas. The children are all stepping in again to house and dog sit. What would I do without them?

Jenny is still in Sweden as I write this with Mattias. He is joining us too for the festive season this year which will be nice. Kim may have to spend it away working which is rather sad but it’s not completely certain yet. Ben will probably be working up until the last minute, arrive on Christmas Eve and before Midnight Mass stuff himself with mince pies or some such seasonal goodies from the pantry. One thing is for sure – no more nibbling on shellfish for Kim! We found out after her eating an oyster at a friend’s Christmas party and the ensuing unpleasant night of violent vomiting that perhaps shellfish is a no go from now on, which she’s rather upset about.

Once we get back from our last minute holiday there will only be 9 days until Christmas so I must plan everything rather carefully so as not to run out of time. We have never left it so late before. The picking of holly, sorting out the decorations, outside Christmas lights etc. Mincemeat is already made but the actual pies need making ready for the bombardment of guests - I just won’t have time to stress this year!

I do hope we manage to have a white Christmas again. Last year was so magical and the snow lasted weeks. It is so much nicer than the rain. We will certainly be sending our Christmas greetings electronically again although we still have friends and family who are a bit behind the times and will have to receive something by snail mail. Hogmanay looks like it will be a quiet one this year with the children away but arrangements could change. We haven’t any definite plans ourselves but I’m sure we will celebrate it somewhere nearby.

So from the whole of the Soep Clan at Roineabhal, Have a Merry Christmas and Enjoy the Festivities!
Autumn 2010

The season came to an end with the preparations and joint celebrations of Mum’s Surprise 90th Birthday Party and our 25th wedding anniversary, which was in the theme of Agatha Christie. We had around 80 – 90 guests here and it was great to see that everyone obviously enjoyed making that extra effort to get dressed to kill. ;) There were so many amazing outfits and Rob and Jayne earned first prize with their exquisite outfits, Rob was Poirot and Jayne his glamorous partner. Mum, who up until her entrance had absolutely no idea, was in her element once she realised what was happening. The Canadian side of the family - including 3 great grand kids - had arrived the day before and had been prepped to say that our eldest daughter Jenny was putting on a murder mystery dinner party for us all.

Apart from the party the past month or so has also been very eventful with Jenny’s teaching trip to Moscow where she was teaching music inspired art workshops to 2-13 year olds, Kim’s trip to London to visit art galleries and promote the Ealanta Loch Abar artists’ collective www.elantalochaber.co.uk as well as Ben’s band Washington Irving playing at the Lexington in London with Led Zeppelin’s Robert Plant in the audience. Ben has been managing them for a few years now and is excited to see the directions they’re going.

The weather has been mixed but for the past week or so we have had lots of heavy rain which means the river is in full spate. The distinct lack of sun made it pretty miserable for the Canadians who of course never forgot to remind us of what a wonderful fall they had just had in the Okanagan.

The depressing weather also meant mushrooming seemed to be pretty poor this season although we were able to harvest them for longer - we were eating hedgehog mushrooms right up until the very end of October. We do still have our magical days too - Roger was out walking MacDuff at the weekend and spotted 3 otters on the Loch. The weather had improved, the water was still as glass resembling a mill pond, the sky azure blue - it was one of those special Autumnal days when the changing colours of the leaves sort of made up for all those rainy days which we had just experienced and already forgotten. Calling MacDuff to his side, they watched the otters swim in the water for quite a while before they disappeared out of sight.
Summer 2010

Well we had glorious weather up until July, it is now the middle of August and I think it has rained almost every day since then. The poor farmers will have to wait a little longer for their silage that’s for sure. I feel so sorry for those visitors that have come from overseas for their 2-3 week break never to see Scotland in the sunshine. My veggie garden was doing so well but many things have decided to elongate and form flowers instead of fruit. Never mind, every year nature tries to deter you with its weather, infestations or disease but we must fight on. It’s the local horticultural show next week and I haven’t much to offer if I’ve a hope of winning anything. My beetroot are being eaten by the voles and resemble eaten apple cores when I go to dig them up. My shallots are amazingly large this year, do they judge on size? I have managed to supply most of the village with my courgettes including Robins Nest, our local tea room in neighbouring Taynuilt.

My 18 month old washer packed up at the beginning of the season and in the middle of the season caused me a complete headache. I felt justified in wanting a replacement washer considering this was the fifth time it had broken down from new. We were so amazed when our local supplier where we purchased the machine from gave us a full credit whilst the manufacturer would do nothing to help.

The children are all well. Jenny is still in Glasgow but not for much longer there are rumours she is going to join Mattias in Stockholm next year. Look out Sweden! Washington Irvine got into T in the Park and will be playing at the Lexington in London in September so Ben is pleased about that. He too is still in Glasgow. Kim is working at Resipole studios and has been busy along with a group of Artists in Lochaber putting a collective together; she also helped out with The Merchant City Festival in Glasgow a few weeks ago. There are also rumours that she will be heading over to Chicago for an internship with the Institute of Art next April but before that she intends to spend her winter in B.C working up at Silver Star.

I had a wonderful birthday this year, the children all joined us at home for Lobster and champagne. It was a great treat and such an easy meal to prepare. We finished off with The Hummingbirds Carrot Cake which incidentally is yummy. It was one of those rare days when the sun came out and we had a game of Frisbee on the lawn.

Keith our friend from Mount Wanganui in New Zealand came to see us in July, it was a lovely visit but too short. We also had the Selby Family and Aaron their friend stay, they climbed one of the Three sisters in Glencoe with Roger and descended down the lost valley where myself and my helpers Jane and Stefanie managed to scamper up (perhaps that...
isn’t the correct description but the only one I can think of at the moment) and meet them. Unfortunately I am always working in the summer and never seem to have time to socialise properly. Apart from Keith we have had house guests from all over the globe this year, our first visitors from Columbia and also Bolivia stayed with us along with our regular German, Spanish and Dutch visitors.

The summer despite all the rain seems to have whizzed by and we are now more than half way through the season. As always I am looking forward to November when I can put my feet up a little and get ready for next summer but before that we have that Indian Summer to look forward to.

Spring 2010

Spring has sprung and the past few days have been warm and sunny. The daffodils are at last bursting out and the tulips will shortly follow. Everything in the garden seems to be so much later this year. We’ve got the organic manure on the veggie beds and the potatoes are in along with the garlic and shallots. The grass still needs to be cut but hopefully it will remain dry until the weekend and Roger will manage to do it then. I saw the first dipper today in the river, the male bird, without his mate. Do hope she has survived the harsh winter. The pied wagtails are back too, along with the hen harrier across the other side of the river.

Easter weekend came and went with just a few visitors. I still have a few up until 24th when the season really seems to start, with bookings looking healthy up until July. By that time I should be filling up until October if previous years are anything to go by.

April has kept Roger and I extremely busy socially and last week end saw us attending two birthday parties in the village and making dinner in between for guests. The older I get the more I realize that I can’t do both.

The children are all kept busy with their work and commitments. Ben is now happily ensconced in Glasgow, still working hard booking gigs and looking after his musical bands. Kim at the moment is working with the Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art. She thoroughly enjoyed working with the Art Fair and helping to put on a Fine Art Exhibition up at Resipole Studios. Jenny is off to Stockholm again for a week, negotiating documentary illustration work for the month of June.
Winter 2009 - 2010

Wow, what a wonderful winter it has been this year! Apart from having a truly white Christmas and New Year we have had frosty nights, starry skies and amazing sunny days. Scotland’s ski resorts have had an abundant dump of snow allowing them to make up for the past few seasons which have offered hardly any. The kids have all been home and managed some sledging and MacDuff has been in his element playing outside.

Whether we decide to host a party or not, we normally always have great company staying, and this particular New Year was no exception. ‘Mr Jaunty’ joined us, one of Jonathan Leach’s creations, a large exquisite puppet who has featured prolifically in his recent illustration career. Jonathan is currently working very hard on an exciting new novel which hopefully will be published by 2011. Jonathan studied illustration along with Jenny in Dundee. Along with Jonathan Jenny had a couple of other friends stay and with Nana, the family and another few friends more, we all had a wonderful Hogmanay Ceilidh dance celebrated down at the Taychreggan Hotel. Fireworks on one of those magical frosty nights that I mentioned earlier (with a Blue moon no less!) was one of those New Years for us all to remember.

Jenny is in Stockholm this weekend visiting Mattias her new chap from Sweden, who she met during the celebrations in Berlin last November. She seems to be working on some exciting new projects at the moment ranging from recently drawing a band called Florence & The Machine to doing drawing workshops in primary schools. Kim is currently sharing her time between helping to revamp the art gallery at Resipole Studios and working for Glasgow’s Art Fair which opens next week Ben is meanwhile in Toronto and then Austin Texas for a couple of music festivals to promote his record label. He is also working as a booking manager in Glasgow and moves into his new flat this month.

I have managed to escape down to Harrogate for a few days. I took mum down to my sister’s and shopped and shopped. They do offer rather a lot more choice than Argyll in that department, all that traffic being the downside.

Roger and I have spent most weekends catching up with all the jobs that need doing before the summer season starts again this April, from retiling a shower, putting in new lighting to restoring a set of antique dining chairs. There is always something to do and the time just flies by, but it’s certainly never boring!