

**Cal Transcript**  
**Wild for Scotland Podcast**  
**S6E9 (E79): 'A Coorie Winter' - A Winter trip to the Cairngorms & Moray Coast**  
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[main theme tune]

Hello there and welcome to Wild for Scotland,  
  
a podcast full of immersive travel stories from Scotland.

I'm your host and storyteller, Kathi Kamleitner.

Wild for Scotland helps you connect with Scotland  
Its people, wildlife landscapes and histories.

This season, I invite you to take it slow.  
Let's pay attention to the little details,  
And find ways to be fully present on our adventures.

In every episode, I either whisk you away on a beautiful adventure,  
Or introduce you to inspiring locals and their stories.

In between, I share my top tips for your own Scotland trip,  
And how to follow in my footsteps.

So, lean back and enjoy -  
Let's travel to Scotland!

[main theme tune end]

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We've almost reached the end of this season about slowing down on our travels through Scotland, so let's recap a little.

We've travelled to islands far and wide, and slowed down by hiking and cycling. We've narrowed our journeys, and expanded our experiences. We've spoken to experts about interactions with people and nature, culture and landscapes. And I hope that along the way,

you've felt inspired by my stories and conversations to slow down and become fully present on your travels.

Today, I have one more story for you.

To me, winter is the season of slowing down. Life might be hectic all around us, with the holidays looming just a few weeks away - but when you tune in with nature, you know it's time to slow down.

As I sit at my desk recording this very intro, I look outside my window and see the trees have dropped almost all their autumn leaves. A peat-scented candle fills the air with a cosy glow and I'm wrapped up in a soft knitted jumper I brought home from Shetland.

Winter is the season to get coorie. Coorie is the Scottish word for cosy or snug. You can be coorie indoors, with a bowl of steaming soup or a warming dram, but you can also be coorie outside, with a walk through brisk winter air or a hot flask of tea on a mountain top.

This story is all about getting coorie on a winter trip I did last year with my best friend from Vienna. We're heading to the north east of Scotland and visit places in the Cairngorms National Park, the Speyside and the Moray Coast.

This is 'A Coorie Winter'.

[jingle]

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Some things are so awe-inspiring that trying to describe them with words barely does them justice.

The twinkling lights of millions of stars illuminating the night sky is one of those things.

[soundscape - footsteps]

It's late winter and I'm walking carefully along a dark footpath that leads out of the village. Wrapped up in a long parka, a soft scarf and a woollen hat, I cross a meadow and enter an airy woodland of birch trees and low shrubs.

[soundscape - fades out]

After a few minutes, the path emerges onto an empty car park. From here, the trees cover up the lights beaming out from the windows of the village, and the night gets even darker.

At least, until my eyes have adjusted to the darkness and I lift my gaze to the heavens.

Now I see that the sky isn't dark at all.

I'm faced with millions of twinkling stars. White dots covering the night sky. Some barely visible to the naked eye, others beaming down with the brightness of a thousand suns.

I spot constellations that I've learnt to recognise - the three markers of Orion's Belt, the wonky W of Cassiopeia and the one I'm most familiar with, known as the Plough, or Great Dipper.

From there, I draw an imaginary line to find Polaris, the North Star, shining brighter than many others around it.

On the pictures I take with my phone, I can see even more stars, twinkling and hiding many lightyears away from Earth.

Oh, how I wish that was the story I could tell you.

In reality, the night we meant to spend stargazing in Tomintoul in the Cairngorms National Park,

[soundscape - wind and drizzling rain]

was dreich and windy. Clouds covered the sky almost entirely, and while I was trying to photograph the few patches of visible stars, raindrops kept drizzling onto my phone, making all my pictures blurry.

We stuck around for a little while, hoping that the rain would ease and the clouds disappear. But soon enough the opposite happened and we had to face reality. Stargazing in Scotland isn't always easy - even when you're in a Dark Sky Park, like the one in Glenlivet and Tomintoul.

[soundscape - fades out]

Instead, we made our way back to the village to the local pub,

[soundscape - door opens, people chatting in pub]

ordered another dram, and mingled with the locals.

Winter trips to Scotland require one thing above all - flexibility. That's why on this trip, we made sure to plan enough activities to avoid being disappointed if one of them didn't work out.

[soundscape - fades out]

Luckily, the stars were the only no-show...

[soundscape - car driving, engine stops, getting out the car, car door slams shut]

It's mid-morning as we pull up on a wide, open car park, about halfway up a winding mountain road. A thin layer of snow covers the knee-high plants of heather, creating a patchwork of white and brown. Although, in the harsh winter sun and reflecting the bright

blue sky, the snow looks more blue than white, and so, the mountain does justice to its Gaelic name, Cairn Gorm - the Blue Mountain.

We're dressed to the T. Long thermal underwear, windproof hiking trousers, thick woollen jumpers, scarfs wrapped around our necks and a warm woollen hat. I put on my puffer jacket, zip up my waterproof jacket on top of it, and feel a bit like the Michelin man. Briefly, I consider adding my waterproof trousers as well, but decide to try without them. My sunnies complete the look.

We're not even at 600 metres above sea level and I'm wearing all these layers, but I still feel the icy air trying to reach my bones. The temperature is well below zero and the howling wind makes it feel even colder. But the sun is shining, and my adrenaline is high - we're about to meet Scotland's only reindeer.

A few others have gathered in the car park, equally dressed in multiple layers, and soon enough we're joined by our ranger guides. They've just scouted the hill to see where the reindeer are grazing today and after a short introduction, they lead the way up a pathless slope.

[soundscape: walking on wet snow]

We follow them in a single file, carefully stepping into the footprints of the person in front of us, to avoid rolling over stones or stepping into holes hidden beneath the heather and snow.

My gaze is firmly directed on the ground to avoid tripping or slipping, and to protect my face from the wind.

5 minutes pass, then 10 and slowly I worry that the reindeer have moved on.

[soundscape - fades out]

But then I lift my head to look up to where we're going, and spot movement on the hill. It's barely visible, but there are patches of white and brown that move against the backdrop of white snow and brown heather. The reindeer are right there.

Once we've reached the herd, our ranger guides gather us together to tell us more.

A long, long time ago, when the climate in Scotland was still a lot colder, reindeer roamed freely across the hills of the Highlands. The Old-Norse Orkneyinga saga mentions that as little as 800 years ago, reindeer were hunted alongside red deer by the Earls of Orkney up in Caithness. But with the changing climate, reindeer disappeared from our hills and plains.

Until in 1952, Mikel Utsi, a Sami from Swedish Lapland, and his wife Dr. Ethel Lindgren introduced reindeer back to the Cairngorms plateau. They started with just seven animals, but today, over a hundred reindeer make up the herd.

Most of them roam the hills freely within a large hill enclosure. Rangers track their position and herd them back if they stray too far from where visitors can reach them.

The sub-Arctic climate of the plateau offers them the most perfect conditions - in fact, it's the only place in Britain where reindeer can thrive today. It's us, who have to suffer a little to meet them in their ideal habitat.

As our rangers tell us more about the reindeer, a few of them start approaching them from behind. The first to arrive is called Holy Moley. Unlike other deer, both male and female reindeer grow antlers. They use them to defend themselves and assert their position within the herd. But Holy Moley only has one antler.

When she was a baby, she lost her mother, and without a mum to look after her, she found it difficult to be accepted into the herd. Reindeer mothers will kick calves that aren't their own, and one such kick broke her antlers. One of them had to be removed to avoid a life-threatening infection, and ever since, Holy Moley has only been able to grow one antler on her left side.

Luckily, she was eventually adopted by another reindeer cow and found her place in the herd. Today, she's the cheeky spearhead, always first in line for treats from the rangers.

[soundscape - reindeer grazing, then seeds being poured from a bag]

Reindeer eat a variety of plants and fungi, but in winter, their favourite food is lichen. They use their soft noses to dig it up from below the snow. On top of that, the rangers feed them small portions of seeds and grains to keep them occupied while the visitors are around.

[soundscape - fades out]

We're soon left to our own devices, roaming among the herd to take pictures and observe the reindeer as they feed or snooze. The interactions happen entirely on their terms - they're tame in the sense that they're comfortable around humans, but once they've had enough, they can retreat and find a quiet spot away from the group.

Since 2020, visitors are also no longer allowed to touch the animals, and our rangers tell us that the herd is now even more relaxed around people, and more reindeer are likely to stick close-by for photos.

The only hands-on interaction is the hand-feeding session. The rangers go round with a bag of feed, drop some in your cupped hands, and before you know it, your skin is tickled by the soft snouts of two or three reindeer, squabbling for seeds.

After about 40 minutes, it's time to say goodbye. The sun has disappeared and the air is getting hazy. The wind is bringing snow across the hills and I can see the clouds descending from the summit. The reindeer don't seem to mind what's coming their way, but I pull my scarf tighter around my face and start making my way back down.

From the Cairn Gorm mountain, we make our way north, stop for lunch in Aviemore and drive through the Speyside towards the sea.

Our next stop is Findhorn, a small village on the Moray Coast, probably best known for its Ecovillage, an intentional community with a focus on sustainable living, ecological architecture and community building.

We check into our accommodation, a bright and airy wooden house with huge windows on a street called Field of Dreams.

[soundscape - footsteps]

We follow footpaths past houses with living roofs. Some have more windows than walls, others are covered in colourful paintings. We pass an area with new construction, and reach the dunes covered in grasses, heather and gorse.

[soundscape - waves by the sea]

The path leads along the coast and eventually,

[soundscape - door opens, pub noise]

we reach the main village, find a cosy pub and call it a day.

[soundscape - fades out]

We wake up to sunshine beaming through the windows, casting patches of light onto the walls.

Another walk through the village brings us past the community garden. The beds are resting and new leaves won't sprout for another month or so. A wee cat takes an interest in us, rubbing its face on the bent willow branches of the fence, and follows us out through the gate. The Ecovillage is surrounded by pine trees, growing tall and straight, and the cat sharpens its claws on their soft bark.

We follow a path that leads back into the village and walk past big houses with sunrooms and balconies, a small octagonal log cabin, and tiny houses clad in larch wood. It's a village unlike any other I've seen in Scotland so far.

A few hours later, we find ourselves back in the dunes on the coast. It's sunny, but there's a chill in the air - nevertheless, we're in our bathing suits.

[soundscape - woodburning fire, water hitting the hot stones]

Findhorn is among the growing number of beaches in Scotland with an outdoor sauna. Built in a vintage horse box and heated by a wood-fired stove, Watershed Sauna sits on top of the pebble beach of Findhorn. A large window gives way to views of the North Sea, and if you're lucky, you may even spot seals or dolphins playing off the shore while you sweat inside.

We booked two seats for a communal session and are joined by three locals who come here regularly. The sauna attendant has already lit the fire and made sure we're all set. As we sit

and sweat, the others tell us about the local area and how they've come to enjoy the heat of the sauna here. It's a social experience, as much as it is about your physical wellbeing.

[soundscape - fades out]

After a wee while, we step outside and walk down to the beach.

[soundscape - seagulls and gentle waves, splashing and footsteps in water]

Even though I was hot and sweaty just a moment ago, the cold water feels unbearable. I walk in to my calves and bend down to dip my hands in the sea, but I can't get myself to go all the way.

Back into the sauna, for another round of sweat.

[soundscape - footsteps in water]

The next time, I manage to walk further, have the water by my hips, and by my third attempt,

[soundscape - a big splash in the water]

my shoulders go under, allowing the sea to swallow me whole.

Back in our winter jackets, we stroll along the sandy part of the beach, walk past colourful beach huts and pick up treasures that were washed up by the waves.

[soundscape - waves, then stones rattling]

A cormorant is sitting on top of a wooden pole reaching out of the sea, and spreads its wings to dry. Beyond that, we can just about make out the dark shiny bodies of seals, basking in the sunshine on a sandbank across the water.

We walk round the sandy point of the beach, where the River Findhorn meets the sea, and listen to millions of pebbles rattling softly in the waves.

[soundscape - fades out]

Our trip continues, to see rock arches on the Moray Coast and meet Shetland ponies in the golden glow of sunset light. We drive down on snowy mountain roads, visit public art throughout the National Park and wander through glens, towns and pine forests.

And even though the skies remained dark on that final night in Tomintoul, this trip to the Cairngorms and the Moray Coast was filled with all the things that make for a coorie winter.

[jingle]

I hope you enjoyed this story of our winter journey to the Cairngorms and the Moray Coast. We actually spent 5 days on the road, and stopped in a lot more places than I could possibly fit in the story.

Check out the Cairngorms and Speyside travel guides on my Scotland blog [Watch Me See](#) for more ideas for what to do in these parts of north-east Scotland.

If you'd like to learn more about the reindeer in the Cairngorms, there's actually a great documentary on YouTube called *A Baby Reindeer's First Christmas* that among others follows Holy Moley's story. And if you prefer to read, Tilly Smith, who is one of the co-owners of the reindeer herd, has written a book called *Reindeer - An Arctic Life*, which is a lovely winter read for you.

And now, it's time for the practical part of the show. Here are five travel tips for a slow and purposeful trip to the Cairngorms in winter.

#### Tip number 1) Minimise your mileage

Reducing the amount of ground you're trying to cover is always my first tip when it comes to planning a slower trip to Scotland, but in no season is this more true than in winter. Daylight hours are extremely limited in the winter months, so in order to maximise the time you have to explore each day, I recommend reducing your mileage and the amount of driving you're doing as much as possible.

On this trip, we did one longer drive at the start to get to Aviemore and another one at the end to get back to Glasgow, but in between that, we never drove more than 40 miles between our overnight destinations.

#### Tip number 2) Be intentional about your accommodation

To me, a slow trip in winter is all about getting coorie or cosy once the darkness settles in. Think a roaring fireplace, a comfy armchair and a dram of warming whisky. Where you stay can play a big part in how achievable that is, so either book accommodation that is cosy and comes with a fireplace, or find a place in a small town where you can easily walk to the next cosy pub.

We stayed at Carn Mhor B&B in Aviemore, Rainbow Lodge in Findhorn and the Argyle Guest House in Tomintoul which were all in walking distance to cosy pubs at night.

#### Tip number 3) Make time for some unusual activities

One thing I hear over and over again from people who plan a trip to Scotland during the winter months, is that they are worried that things will be closed and there's not enough to do. But that couldn't be further from the truth.

There are many unique activities you can do in winter, beginning with the obvious things like stargazing and chasing the aurora if the skies are clear, to the more unusual stuff, like hiking



with reindeer at the Cairngorms National Park or sweating with a view at one of Scotland's many seaside saunas.

#### Tip number 4) Prepare for the weather

Scottish winters are generally quite mild, but when you're up in the Cairngorms, you're about as far from the coast as possible, and you're also higher up than in most places. That means that the climate here is very different. It tends to be a lot colder and you're likely to run into snow at some point during the winter months.

When we hiked to the reindeer herd, it was well below zero and the wind made it feel even colder. And on our drive through the Speyside, we had a sprinkling of snow on the road. You definitely have to pack warm winter layers and be prepared for driving in those conditions.

#### Tip number 5) Check out my winter travel guide

On my Scotland blog Watch Me See.com you can find a blog post filled with winter travel tips for Scotland, from adjusting your itinerary to the darker months of the year, to driving tips and more inspiration for things to do.

You'll find the links to all the places and resources I mentioned in the full show notes on our website.

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[main theme tune]

And with this, I send you off to dream about your own winter trip to Scotland. Whether you're drawn to the rugged mountains of the Cairngorms or the crisp air of the Moray Coast, winter can be a wonderful time to get out and corries in the Scottish landscapes.

I hope you feel inspired to seek out coorie adventures and indulge a little through the colder months of the year.

I have one more episode for you before we reach the end of Season 6, Slow Travel in Scotland. Next week, we're heading back inside, for more coorie, laughter and music. I hope you'll tune in again.

Thank you so much for listening to Wild for Scotland! If you enjoyed this story, send the link to a friend who might enjoy it too. Or why not listen to it together and show them how **they** can subscribe on their own phone. Think of it as an early Christmas present for them.

Wild for Scotland is part of the Tremula Network - adventure and outdoor podcasts off the beaten path. The show is written and hosted by me, Kathi Kamleitner. Fran Turauskis is the editor, sound designer and co-producer of the show. Michelle Payne and Anesu Matanda-Mambingo are supporting us with social media and transcripts. Podcast art is by Lizzie Vaughan-Knight and all original music is composed by Bruce Wallace.

Until next time, when we travel slowly to a different place in Scotland.

[main theme tune end]

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