

B&B AND BEYOND THE STEADING, ABERFELDY

All the ingredients for the perfect Highland retreat

This contemporary house showcases local produce, from Aberfeldy stone to eggs from the garden. By **Lucy Gillmore**

If you reach Dull you've gone too far. I had to backtrack in the dark to the hamlet of Tullicro, with its cluster of thatched cottages – and one sleek, contemporary B&B.

The village of Dull in the Scottish Highlands was officially paired with Boring in Oregon in 2012 – and the first Dull and Boring Day took place last August. Of course, the Upper Tay Valley is anything but. The picturesque little town of Aberfeldy is home to Dewar's World of Whisky, a working distillery and heritage centre; Loch Tay is on your doorstep and it's the gateway to Glen Lyon, the longest and one of the most magnificent glens in Scotland. It's also where you'll find Highland Safaris with moorland tramping, high ridge hikes, 4x4 off-roading and wildlife watching with kilted rangers – and, on the other side of a deer fence, The Steading, the chic B&B clad in Siberian larch and Aberfeldy stone with a smart aluminum roof.

THE BED

The advantages of designing your own house if you plan on starting up a B&B is obvious: you can tailor the layout to your exact requirements, which is what the owners of The Steading have done with the help of local architect, Colin Smith.

The guests' section of the house has a separate entrance leading to

two luxurious bedrooms, one on the ground floor with its own outdoor seating area scattered with woollen rugs, and one upstairs in the eaves. My room was fresh, bright and painted white, with sloping ceilings a small sofa and flat-screen television. Above the bed – dressed in The White Company linen and heather-hued cushions and throws from Scottish designer, Anta – was a giant tweed headboard. There were fresh roses in the white-and-slate shower room, sumptuous fluffy towels, dressing gowns and toiletries, again from The White Company. Along with a tea tray stocked with a cafetiere, fresh coffee and shortbread, thoughtful touches included two wine glasses and a corkscrew.

A fire was blazing in the wood-burning stove in the drawing room when I arrived and, as I sank into a welcoming sofa, a pot of tea and homemade mince pies appeared.

THE BREAKFAST

The provenance of all the break-

WINTER WARMER
The Steadling's exterior (main); the cosy sitting room (top right); and Glen Lyon

ALAMY

fast ingredients is outlined in the menu, along with the commitment to local, seasonal and, where possible, organic produce. And you can't get more local than the eggs. Youngest son Jack, 11, clearly has a budding entrepreneurial streak, selling the eggs laid by his chickens to his mother. The coffee comes from Glen Lyon, the most remote roastery in Scotland; porridge and stoneground seeded bread from the Watermill in Blair Atholl; locally smoked kippers from Arbroath and black pudding from Stornaway. Breakfast is served at a table in front of the picture window in the drawing room, which frames a thatched cottage, sheep-flecked fields and Bolfracks Hill beyond.

THE HOSTS ...

... are Sarah Jane and Will Burton. Sarah Jane grew up on the outskirts of Glasgow but spent weekends here as a child – her grandfather was the chemist in Aberfeldy. This valley always felt like home to her

and, when the opportunity arose to move the family here from the Borders (they have three sons, George, 16, Harry, 14 and Jack) after Will switched from farming to agricultural finance, they jumped at it. Coming full circle, Sarah bought the plot to build the house from Carl, their Swedish neighbour, who had bought her grandfather's shop many years ago.

THE WEEKEND

You can stroll the three miles into Aberfeldy along a path beside the River Tay, to mooch around shops such as shabby-chic homes emporium Homer (01887 820802; athomer.co.uk) and the Aberfeldy Watermill (01887 822896; aberfeldywatermill.com) next door with its bookshop, art gallery and cosy café. Or take a distillery tour and tutored whisky tasting at Dewar's (01887 822 010; dewars.com). If you'd rather explore the great outdoors, head to the far-flung reaches of the longest glen in Scotland or book a trip with High-

land Safaris (01887 820071; highland safaris.net) which offers walking, mountain-biking and 4x4 off-roading into the heather-sprung hills.

THE PITSTOP

Tips for eating out include The Fortingall Hotel (01887 830367; fort ingall.com), an old shooting lodge at foot of Glen Lyon next to the oldest yew tree in Europe. However, I opted for their local, the Ailean Chraggan (01887 820346; aileanchraggan.co.uk), a small family-run restaurant with rooms, just down the road, after hearing about its old-fashioned hospitality – and great seafood. The decor is also a little old-fashioned but the welcome was as warm as they said, the bar buzzing with locals and the fish and chips (£11.75) delicious.

THE ESSENTIALS

The Steading, Tullicro by Camserney, Aberfeldy, Perth and Kinross, Scotland PH15 2JG (01887 820718; steading aberfeldy.co.uk). Double rooms start at £95, including breakfast.

