

Ian Macpherson

Each year my wife and I travel to Aviemore from Surrey, England. My daughter also travels, but independently.

I understand that you have raise questions over the sleeper service to Inverness and the >through< day train. I make the following comments.

My wife and I have used the 'Motorail' service when it ran.

Nowadays we use either the sleeper or the day train and hire a car in Aviemore.

While we have in the past used the through day train [the 12:00 from Kings Cross], very recently we have had [for domestic reasons] to use the later connection [the 15:00 from Kings Cross, changing at Edinburgh]. This has been something of a disaster. You will recollect that the relevant connecting train [about 19:40] is the last train to Inverness, and if missed, leaves one stranded.

The first occasion the ex Kings Cross train ran late all the way up, and despite an heroic final stage on the part of the driver we reached Edinburgh about 1 minute before the Inverness connection was due to depart [it is something of a 15 minute connection]. I had prudently had an earlier word with the train manager, who phoned Edinburgh, who held the Inverness depart for a couple of minutes, enabling us and our cases to be hurled aboard. Not an easy experience, although I remain greatly obliged to the various staff members involved.

The second occasion the train ran only a few minutes late. Prudently I had made some previous research [not the sort of research that everyone would expect to have to make], which informed me that the train would arrive on the 'suburban' [beyond the wall] side of Edinburgh station, and that we would have to cross the overbridge to get to platform 19 on the far side of the station. I therefore arranged for assistance [we are 'of an age'], and this worked well in the sense that the porter met us as scheduled and was able to 'bulldoze' our cases to the front of the long queue to use the lift to the overbridge, and then to lead us along the slightly obscure route to platform 19. Unfortunately during this, my wife, who is not as speedy as I, became lost from us and was directed by passers-by to the station exit. Luckily she re-appeared just in time. Again, not an easy experience and it would have been quite impossible without the assistance offered.

We have concluded that for us it is either the >through< day train [if we can re-arrange our domestic problems] or the sleeper. The alternative would, of course, be to fly to Inverness, but that involves a fairly long [and possibly complex] journey back to Aviemore late at night, as well as the 'hassle' of getting to whichever London airport is offering a service next year. I think if the sleeper and the through train are withdrawn, then we will simply give this annual visit up.

As for my daughter, she goes up for a special event weekend. She goes up on the Friday night sleeper and returns on the Sunday night sleeper. There are no alternatives because of the exigencies of her job. She will greatly regret [as will the people she goes to meet] but no sleeper, no go!