

It's the little Skye cottage with the big wow factor

BY PAUL RIDDELL

QUESTION: WHAT DO you get if you take an interior finished to the high level of specification you might expect at somewhere like, say, Gleneagles and plop it into a neatly constructed stone and wood building on a bare hillside in Skye?

The answer is the Bothy at Number 7. This little gem of a self-catering cottage, opened in August last year, is a five-star home-from-home; a place with real character and perfectly designed to accommodate visitors to the island at all times of the year.

We went in November, west through the burnished mountains of Glencoe, under the towering Five Sisters of Kintail and over the sea, lashed all the way but undeterred by rain and sleet.

It reminded me of Dr Johnson's similarly weather-beaten arrival, as narrated in his account of his journey to the Western Isles with Boswell: "In our passage from Scotland to Sky[sic], we were wet for the first time with a shower. This was the beginning of the Highland winter, after which we were told that a succession of three dry days was not to be expected for many months. The winter of the Hebrides consists of little more than rain and wind." Eternal verities, eh?

An hour or so later, nestling in a comfortable sofa in front of a wood-burning stove and with a glass of fine red wine in my hand, the appeal of luxury living in this wild corner of Scotland was evident.

The bothy, owned and run by the Corcoran family who live next door, is on two levels, with a snug bedroom, a capacious bathroom, an all-mod-cons kitchen (dishwasher, washing machine, microwave) and a sweeping living area on the ground floor. Up the spiral staircase into the cathedral ceiling is the upstairs area containing a computer station, a mini-library of books on Skye, a further bathroom and, the *pièce de résistance*, a sauna. If you fancy it after a hard day on the



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Cuillins, there's also a cross-trainer up there.

As well as the stove, there is central heating throughout, including under-slate-floor heating in the bathroom, which has the biggest walk-in shower and shower-head I've ever seen.

There's a 40-inch Sony TV with Sky HD (and a mini one in the bedroom), a collection of DVDs and a sound system. The list could go on.

But perhaps the most stunning feature of the Bothy are the immense picture windows that give beautiful views southwards over Portree and towards the Cuillins and westwards over the moors and the road to Uig. As we arrived at night, the splendour of

View of the Cuillin Mountains on Skye, main; the Bothy at Number 7, below

this aspect was concealed. In the dawn light, its emergence was sublime.

As Skye virgins with a 20-week-old baby son, we took the sightseeing easily. But was that governed by the poor weather or the lure of supreme comfort? Rob Corcoran guessed the latter: some visitors, he said, don't emerge for several days.

We drove up the winding road along the Trotternish peninsula to see the stunning Old Man of Storr, Kilt Rock and Quaraing before returning to explore Portree itself. We were back home by lunchtime.

Even in the summer, I'm not sure we

would have made it much further: there is a south-facing stone terrace I could easily imagine lounging on.

Indeed, externally as well as internally, the cottage is a work of fine craftsmanship, especially the stonework carried out by stonemason Neil Montgomery.

Not that the building process was easy, I understand. But do the Corcorans have any plans to build a sister bothy? It would make sense, admits Rob, to be able to house those they cannot accommodate at Number 7 when it is booked up; but I get the impression the family may need a little time to get over the emotional and practical effort involved in building this one.

On the face of it, the prices seem rather steep, but when you consider that everything has been thought of ("We wanted it to be how we would kit our retirement home," says Rob), and that a decent hotel would set you back as much, if not more, the Bothy at Number 7 is actually a bit of a bargain.

It is certainly the talk of the steamie in the tourism world, both in Skye and beyond. The Corcorans have set the bar high. Is this yet another sign of the much-heralded renaissance of Scottish tourism? Let's hope so. **SM**



FACTFILE SKYE

HOW TO GET THERE

■ Rail travel to the Kyle of Lochalsh starts from £27.60 for a Value Advance ticket from Edinburgh and Glasgow, and £26 from Aberdeen, all with www.thetrainline.com

WHERE TO STAY

■ The Bothy at Number 7, Achachork, Portree, Skye (tel: 01478 613104, visit www.bothyatnumber7.co.uk).

A week's accommodation costs £650 in low season and £895 in high season.

■ Scotsman Reader Holidays has four-day trips to Skye and Raasay in June and July from £325. Tel: 0131-620 8400 or visit www.holidays.scotsman.com