

Rural Youth Exchange Report

When I look back at my time I spent on exchange it's hard to put into words how amazing it was. I have seen more places in Northern Ireland and Scotland than some who live there, been to many different farms, met so many people (making it difficult to remember everyone's names!) and learnt how people on the other side of the world farm and live. Writing a report which does the trip justice is not truly possible and I think before coming on exchange I wasn't aware of how many experiences I would encounter. I have met people who will be friends for life and as I sit in the airport on my way home, I feel a touch of sadness knowing some of those I did meet I won't see for a long time or possibly forever. As I reflect on my time it is important to detail the experiences and opportunities, I have been fortunate to be a part of. One of my favourite things about the two countries is how many farm shops they have, I visited at least one with every one of my hosts and they are such a great way farmers are diversifying their businesses.

I flew out of Devonport on the 24th of May into Melbourne where I stayed overnight. The following day I flew to Hong Kong before landing in Manchester and then Belfast. Richard Beattie, my first host picked me up from the airport and as he was still working we went to Rory Wood's farm for a short tour of his new farm. I met his father, Trevor Wood's who was once the chair of the YFA and has been involved in many international young farmers conferences. Richard and I then went to the Ballymoney show meeting that evening where I met Carol Hogg, a former young farmer who went to Tasmania on exchange who my parents hosted when they were in Rural Youth.

It was a very busy first week whilst with Richard, Lynsay and their seven-month-old twin boys. I went to work with Richard one morning and visited Alistair Forsythe's farm where I learnt about robot milking and how innovative the technology can be in detecting early changes in the cow's health. Richard also took me for a tour around his work, Chestnutt animal feed mill where I learnt about the process of making feed and testing silage. Lynsay took me sight seeing during the week which included the Dark Hedges, Ballintoy Harbour, Ballycastle, Whitepark Bay, Portballintrae, Portstewart, the Gortin Glens, Mullaghcarn Giant, Glenarm Castle and the Walled Gardens. I also spent some time on the silage harvesters at both Richard and Lynsay's family farm. I met more young farmers when Lynsay's club, Seskinore performed in their one act drama performance in which they placed 2nd. Although my exchange was only to Northern Ireland, Lynsay's cousin turned 21 whilst I was with their family, and we got the bus down to Donegal Town (Republic of Ireland) to celebrate. I finished off my time with Richard and Lynsay at Corrick House in Omagh with Lynsay's father, mother and father-in-law and sister-in-law and her children. We went back to the Beattie's home to get my things, we got a family photo and Lynsay told Kirsten and I, her Uncle Sam Hawke travelled to Tasmania on exchange and after asking my dad he said he met him whilst he was here. I find it extremely interesting how

many people I have crossed paths with that my family knew while on my travels in both Northern Ireland and Scotland.

I spent week two with the Davis Family (Robert, Linda, Aimee, Kirsten and Zara). We hosted Kirsten last year when she came to Tasmania on exchange and it was great to see her again and what her part of the country was like. Their family own Laurel View Equestrian centre and Laurel View Social Farming. I was very interested to learn about the social farming side of the business which Kirsten eventually wants to expand upon. This business offers animal encounters and on-farm experiences for people with disabilities. Kirsten has done a lot of research in this area and has visited farms in other European countries as part of her study. I was particularly interested in one of her trips to Norway where they have a large field and people living with dementia can go and visit the farm, tending to their own garden, making wooden objects and walking as they please. Whilst with the Davis family some of the places we visited included Lough Neagh and Cave Hill, the Ulster Wool Factory, Antrim Castle, St Anne's Cathedral, Joy's Entry, Victoria Square, tour around Station U105 with Linda's sister (who actually stayed with my gran and pop when she did her exchange to Tasmania around the 2000's), the Titanic exhibition (it was built in Belfast), Glenoe waterfall, Glenaraff, Slemish, Ballymoney Show and Lyellhill BBQ. I also spent a day with Victoria Minford, another member of Young Farmers and her mum. They took me into Belfast for some sightseeing, driving past Stormont, Royal Victoria Hospital and Belfast City Hospital and going to the Ulster Museum, Botanical Gardens and Queens University. I also helped out around the yard at the centre and on the farm which included feeding the horses and learning how classifying their Irish Morley cattle works. I was also fortunate to still participate in some of my hobbies back home with Kirsten taking me to her Pilate's studio and Gym. I met more young farmers at their football and tug of war competitions at the Ballymoney Show and whilst helping behind the bar at the BBQ. I spent a morning with Linda's mum where she taught me how to make wheaten bread, a traditional Northern Irish bread. Kirsten's cousin Ben, who is also a young farmers member took Linda, Kirsten and I for a tour around their family's dairy farm where they are currently milking 290 Holstein cows and have a mixture of pure bread and Charolais-cross calves. On my final night with the Davis family, Kirsten, Zara and I attended the Lyellhill safety night and tractor competition where we took turns driving the tractor and at the end of the night the club gifted me their club T-shirt to thank me for my help at their BBQ which was very kind! While with Robert and Kirsten I also got to participate in goat yoga which was a crowd favourite at the church fete, social farming visit and aged care activities day.

On my final week in Northern Ireland I had 2 different hosts. Octavia Wilson and her family hosted me for the first part of the week. We visited Hillsborough castle and Forest, Newcastle and Spelga dam. Octavia's father, William also took us for a tour of their farm, wind turbine, tree plantation (13,000) and dairy. He was awarded the 2025/2026 farmer of the year for sustainable farming. Whilst with

Octavia, Kirsten, Victoria and I caught the train into Dublin for the day. We went into Trinity University which was massive before walking through Grafton Street shopping centre. We visited the highly rated Bambino's pizzeria before frantically trying to organise transport back into Belfast as the trains were suddenly stopping trips after 3pm due to protests in Belfast. After securing a lift back to Belfast we went to the Guinness Storehouse for a tour which was very interesting. The sustainability and innovation behind the production of Guinness is very astounding and they have minimal waste out of their product. We then got photos in-front of one Dublin's historic bars, the Temple Bar. My second hosts for the week were Caroline Barr and her family (Barry, Caroline & Hugh). Whilst with the Barr's I went to see the Ballymena market, Mussenden Temple, Downhill beach, Gortman Viewpoint, Carrick-a-Rede Bridge (once used by fisherman to get across to the small island off the coast), Bushmills Distillery, Giants Causeway and 2 of their favourite food spots (Ursa & Minor and Megden). I also had a farm tour of their dairy and learnt about Hugh's business in model tractors. Barry then took me to the Armagh show where I met Amy Ritchie who I spent the day looking around the show with and introduced me to some of the members from Carluke young farmers. Amy and I then headed into Belfast to attend the executive dinner and night out. It was great to meet the members from this team and they were keen to learn more about Rural Youth and Tasmania.

The 14th of June was my final morning in Northern Ireland, and I spent the morning in Belfast with Victoria who took me to the airport. I then flew into Edinburgh, and met Ellen Glennie the international chair of the SAYFC Young Farmers. I then went to the grounds of the Highland show where I met some members of the Scotland Young Farmers and saw a tiny bit of the setup. I then met my next host Joanne Hall and had dinner with some of the members from Carluke Young Farmers.

Whilst with the Hall's (Joanne and Mhairi), Joanne, her friend Joanna and I went to Largs and caught the ferry across to Great Cumbrae Island, a small island approximately 1 hour from Glasgow. We hired push bikes from the main town on the island, Millport and cycled to see some of the sights. We then caught the ferry back and drove to see the Burrell Collection, Pollock Park and Pollock House before finishing off in Glasgow for ice cream. Joanne was playing at a wedding the following day so one of the members from Carluke, Heather took me to Overton Farm where Jack gave us a tour of their farm and shop, we went to see the Kelpies and the Forth Bridges. I also went to New Lanark with Joanne and Mhairi to see the old mill and Lanark Loch.

After 2 days with the Hall's, I took the train into Edinburgh where I would be staying for the Highland Show. I then met the members of the International Travel Committee and we did an open-top bus tour around Edinburgh to see some of the sights before getting off to walk up Calton Hill which had panoramic

views of Edinburgh from above. We all went out for dinner before continuing on to the show dance at the Highland Centre.

Next up was the hotly anticipated Royal Highland Show. My dad was there 32 years ago and from his description and those of many of my hosts in Northern Ireland, it was definitely something to look forward to. If I had to describe the show it would be approximately 4 times bigger than Agfest, however, means as much to the Scottish community as Agfest does to Tasmanians. The highlight of the Show for me was getting to do the 80ft pole climb (which involved beating Daniel Gladwell). The show has everything from Clydesdale Demonstrations, Stock Judging, Cattle, Sheep and Goat showing, craft and clothing stores, Young Farmers handicrafts (which are very impressive) and Young Farmers competitions with a favourite being tug of war on Saturday afternoon. I had a morning to myself on Friday and as the weather was poor, I went to Mary's Kings Close and learnt about the people who lived in Edinburgh at the time of the black plague. The tour took us below the Edinburgh city chambers, which was actually built on top of the old town. Interestingly the rooms and old houses below these well-known buildings are still established and it is very strange to think another town was built on top of the old one. I then walked some of the Royal Mile which was flooded with tourists taking pictures of the century-old buildings. Then back to the show for the afternoon and had a Scottish Young Farmers International Exchange drinks receptions where I met others who have been or are going on international travel adventures. After this drinks reception, I attended the Young Farmers' Ambassadors - YFA Scottish Region drinks reception and met a lot of members who have aged out of young farmers but during their time had been on international exchanges, this included a few to Australia! I also saw lots of young farmers who I met whilst in Northern Ireland and it was great to see them again at the Show Dance on Saturday night. On Sunday of the show I met Lindsay-Anne Graham who came to Australia on an exchange when my father was in rural youth and he hosted her, then dad stayed with when he went to Scotland 32 years ago. It was interesting to hear about her time on exchange and see some photos from when dad was younger.

I spent week 5 of my exchange with Cameron Smith, Kelly Jack and their dog Garth. This is the week I did more farm tours and work than my entire exchange which gave me a great opportunity to see more of the farming lifestyle. This included a day picking and packing peonies with Cameron's mum, facing my fear of birds and packing eggs in one of Cameron's two chicken sheds. They have about 74,000 chickens across the two sheds. I learnt about the process of packing eggs and how Lewis (house manager) tends to the flock daily. I then suited up to go into the main shed (I still didn't go in amongst the chickens). I joined Cameron's young farmers club, Kinross for their polo-cross evening where we learnt how to play polo on a wooden horse before getting to try on a real one! Cameron's friend Dave, who was also in young farmers took me for one day for a Sainsbury's information session at a dairy farm in Lanarkshire. It was very

informative and we learnt about the impacts different proteins and nitrogen can have on milk production. That evening Kelly and Cameron took me to the Steak Barn in St Andrew's. We then went into the old town of St Andrew's and snapped pictures on the iconic St Andrew's golf course bridge. We visited Kelly's mum and dad on the way home and saw their bees and horse. Once Cameron had finished his spraying for the week, we spent a full day doing farm tours. We started off visiting St Andrew's Farmhouse Cheese Company where we had a tour of their family owned and run cheese factory and learnt about their cheddar and anster. We had a look at their robot dairy where they have 4 robots. We then went to the Brunton's family farm and saw their highland cows, sheep and learnt about the process of growing grains for seed. We then went to Grangemuir farm and toured around their poly tunnels full of strawberries, and the processing and packing areas. Cameron and I then went to the primary school in Perthshire where Kelly works and watched her primary 7 class perform their class production. I also spent a morning with Beth, Fly and Roosa (Beth's sheep dogs) on the farm she works at, checking the 900 ewe's with lambs they have and separating some for shearing. I also learnt about the process of growing Christmas trees as this is the main thing Cameron farms. They have approximately 145,000 trees at the moment and will harvest around 15,000 per year!

After leaving Cameron and Kelly's I went to Aberdeenshire for the Grampian Rally. I had a try at stock judging which was good fun and I scored 341 points out of 400! The Glennie's were my next host's and they were participating in some of the events at the Rally. I watched the main activities which included rope making, football, netball, handicrafts, picnic table making, quad bike handling, fence making, excavator games and tug of war. Whilst with the Glennie's, Sally and Ellen took me to Balmoral Castle and Gardens which were immaculate. Now a tradition of the Glennies, we also went to get a photo with the Aberdeen Angus Bull at Alford. On my final day with the Glennie's, Elaine, Callum's mum took me around their farm in the morning to check the sheep and cows whilst also taking me to a few local castles. That afternoon, Maureen, Sally's mum and I went for lunch at Barra Berries and a few farm shops, we also visited Port Elphinstone for a photo and went to the Aberdeen mart (however, there was no livestock for sale at the time).

The 30th June was my final day in Scotland and I caught the early train into Edinburgh which allowed me to see some of the coast, countryside and the North Sea. Once I arrived in Edinburgh I took in the last of the historic sites before heading to the airport for the long journey home.

I will be forever grateful for Rural Youth Tasmania, my sponsor Salters Event Hire, the Ulster Young Farmers and Scottish Young Farmers and every person who made me feel welcome in their country. As part of my travels, I have compiled all my photos into collections which I hope will inspire more people to apply for an exchange. It has been a truly amazing experience which I feel not

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enough people appreciate. When I applied, I never could have imagined I would visit all the places I have, nor made as many friends as what I have now. If I could say one thing to someone who may be considering an exchange it would be to apply, you never know what you are missing out on and the opportunities and friendships you will make is amazing. I also never imagined I would meet so many people who knew my dad.

By Jessica Elphinstone

Photos:

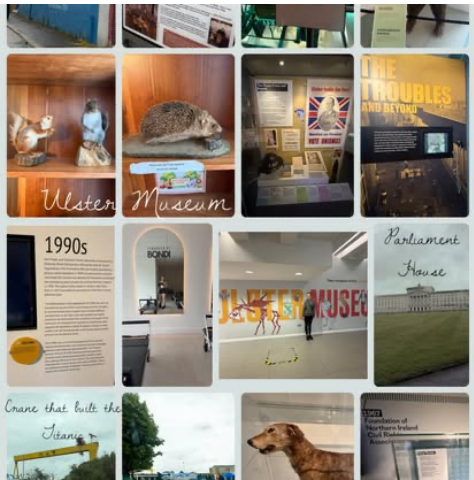
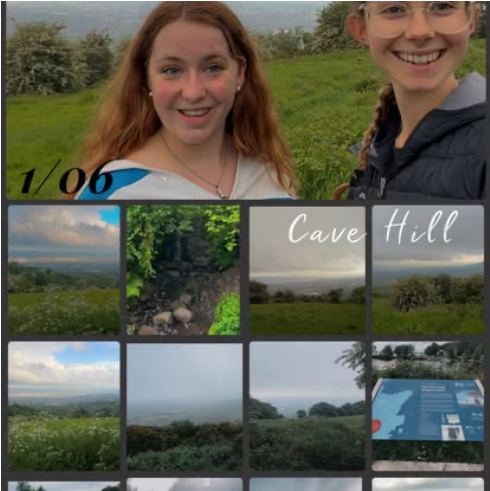
Getting to Northern Ireland & week with the Beattie's



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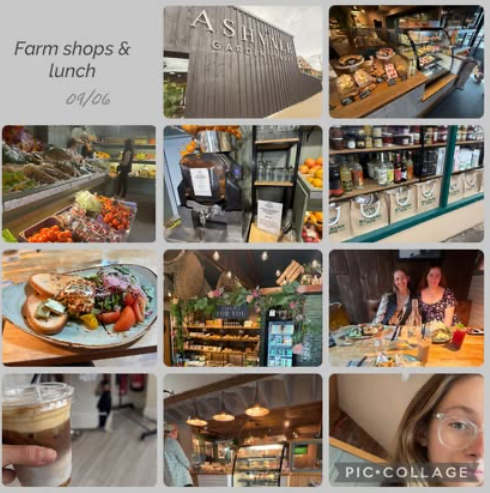


Week with the Davis Family



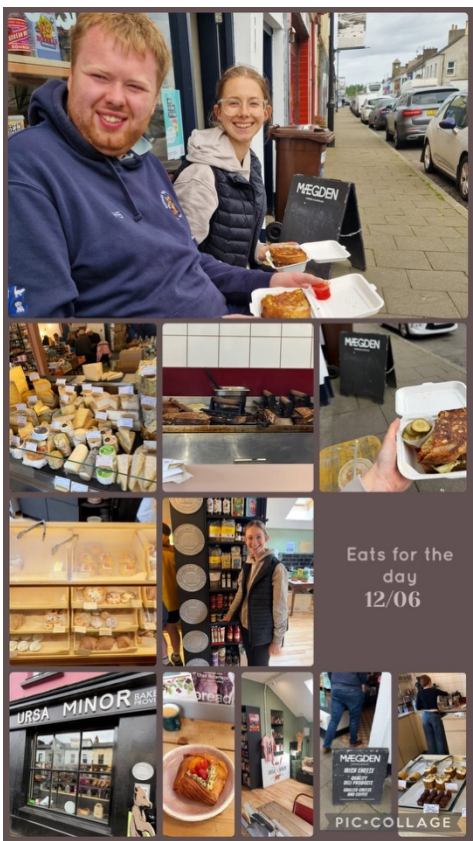


First part of the week with Octavia and the Wilson Family

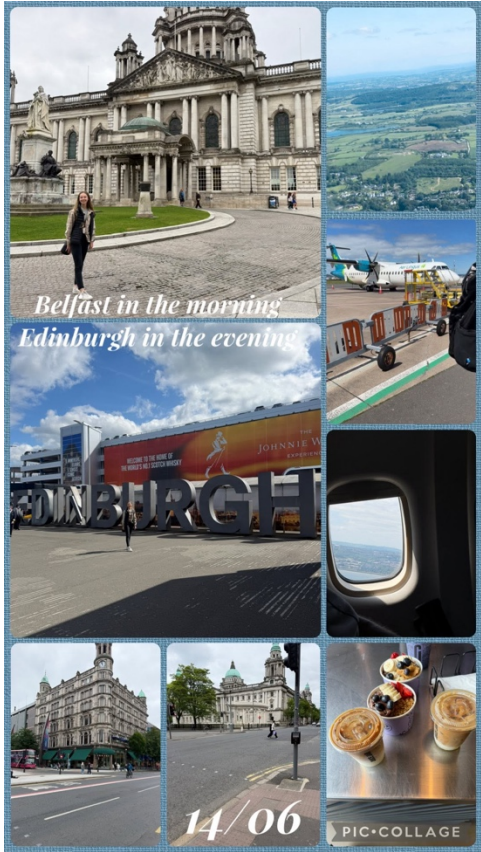




Second part of the week with Caroline & the Barr Family







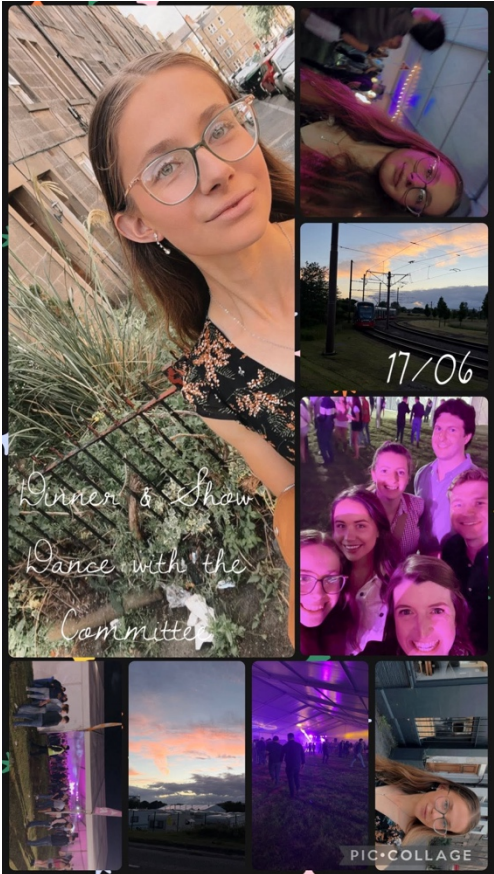
First part of the week with Joanne & Mhairi



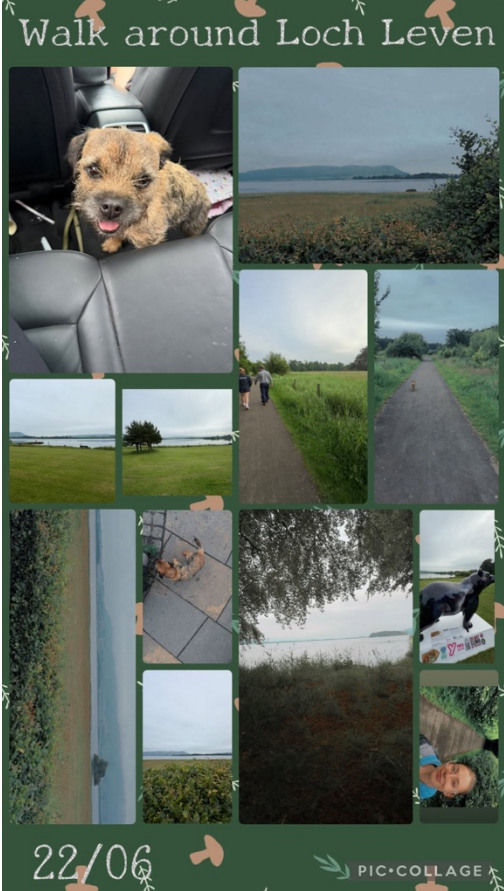


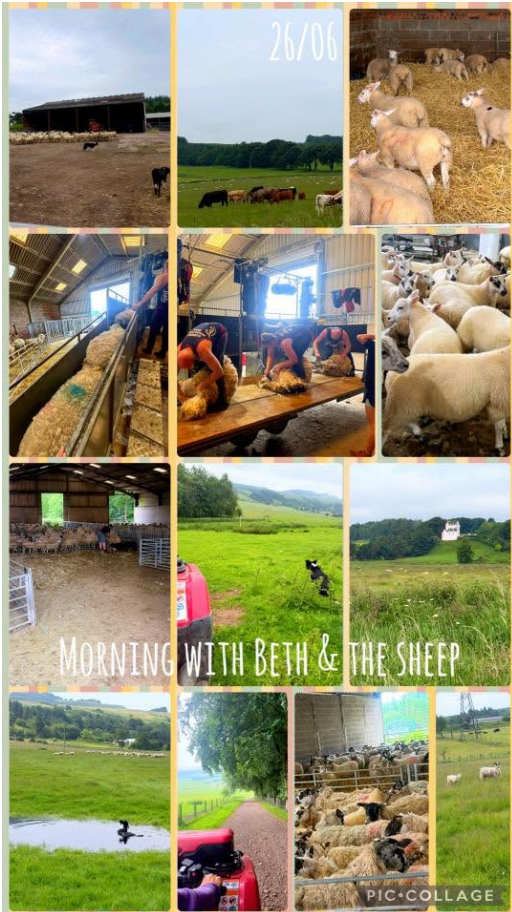
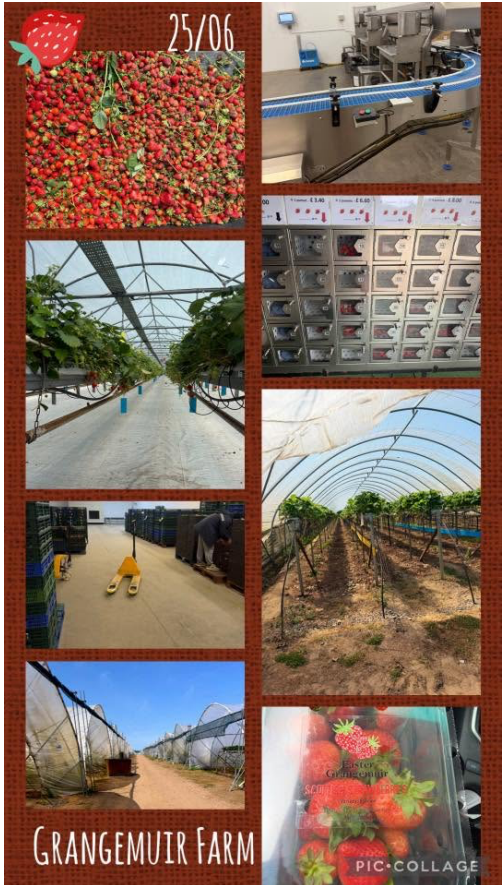
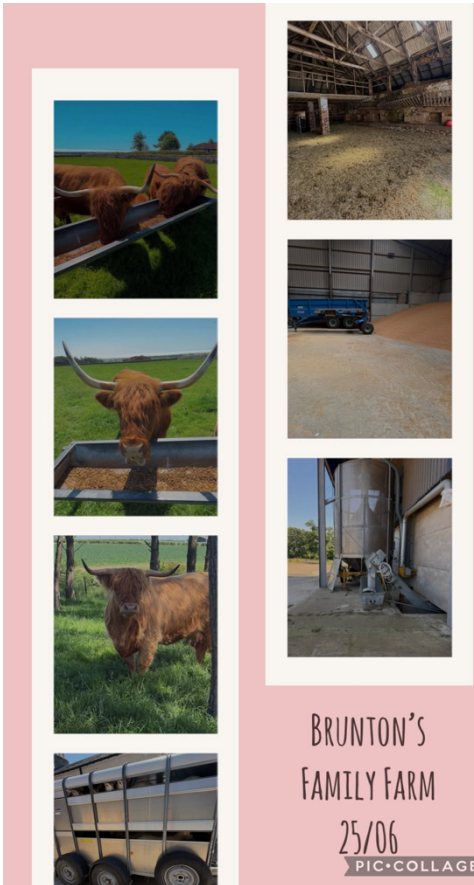
Second part of the week in Edinburgh and at the Highland



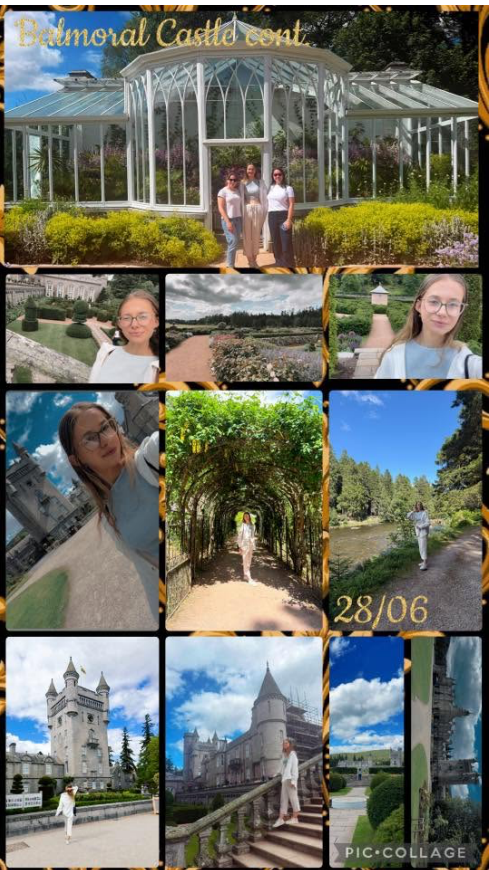


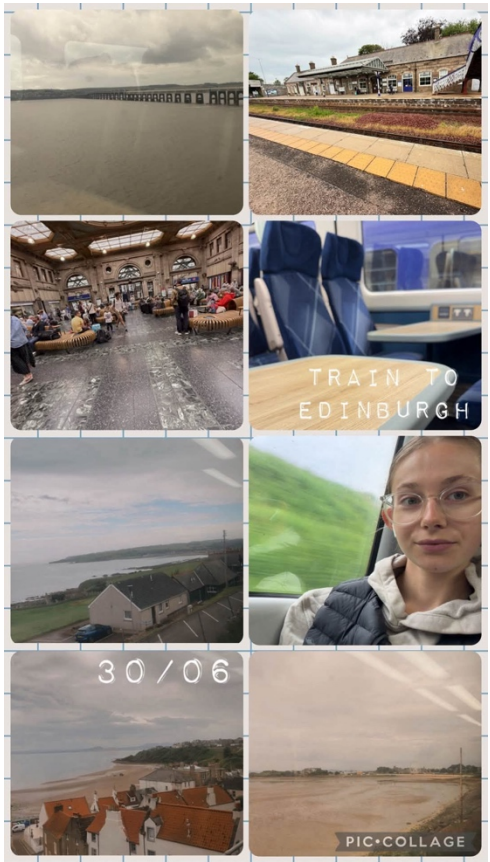
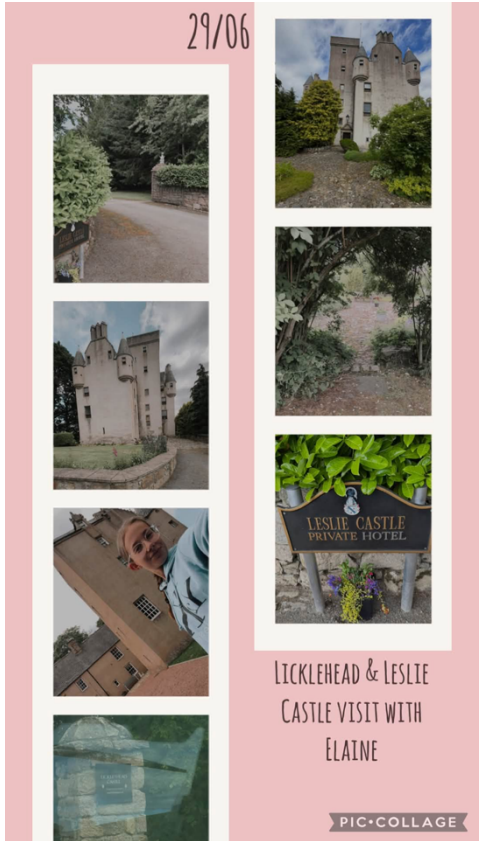
Week with Cameron & Kelly





Last few days with Ellen & the Glennie Family





Time to come home

