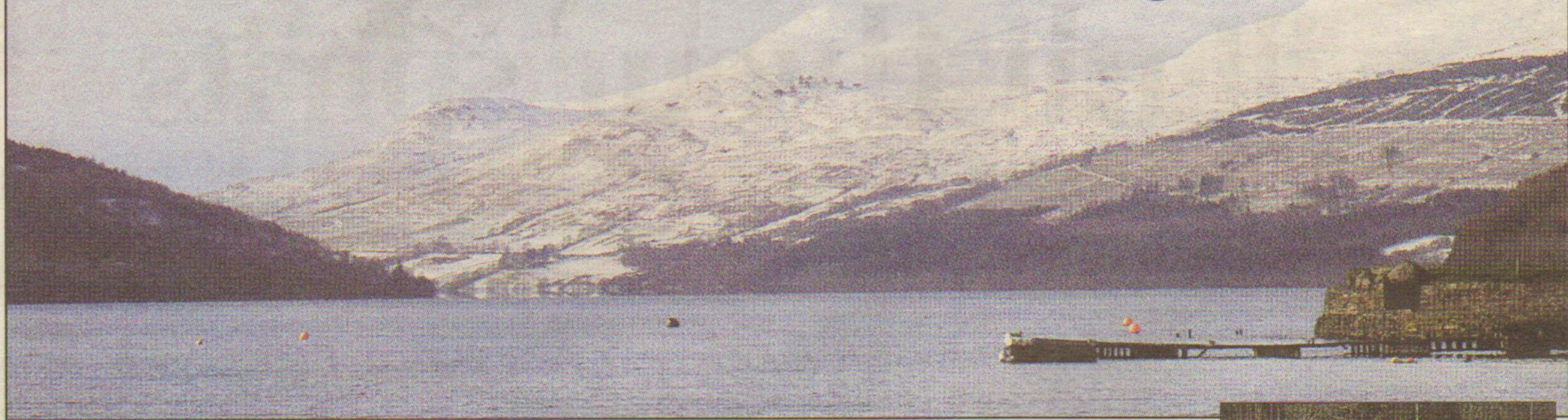


Fill your lungs with fresh Loch Tay air



OVER the years I've driven along the shores of mighty Loch Tay and hiked in the high hills above, but I've never stayed the night.

That all changed recently when I headed off for a family weekend in Kenmore.

Kenmore is a lovely wee village with a pretty main street that lies right at the point where Scotland's longest river leaves the eponymous loch.

General Wade's sturdy old stone bridge, built as part of the attempt to pacify the Highland clans once and for all, is a sign that these parts are rich in history and legend — which only adds to the natural drama.

Our base was at impressive Mains of Taymouth (www.taymouth.co.uk). This 160-acre private estate boasts a choice of luxurious holiday cottages, a family-friendly restaurant and a shop laden with food. They're also in the process of adding a swimming pool and spa, which will take things up yet another notch.

Luxury

Our cottage, Granary Court, was spot-on, managing to negotiate that fine line of offering real luxury, but also being family friendly.

My baby daughter Tara loved the big open-plan living room and kitchen, while my wife, Jenny, and I were fans of the outdoor hot tub and the stand-alone sauna. As it was snowing we enjoyed the surreal experience of bubbling away in the warm water as our hair started to ice up!

The Mains of Taymouth people can organise pony trekking and also book you a round at the Kenmore Golf Club, who offer a neat little nine-hole course right by the cottages.

I preferred just to take Tara down for a stroll by the Tay and along the trail that leads to Taymouth Castle, a grand country pile that now handily serves up lunches.

The walking in and around Kenmore is great. There's that riverside walk and then the various trails that break up from behind

Mains of Taymouth on to the forested slopes of Drummond Hill. This is rugged mountain bike territory too, so watch out for speedy cyclists whizzing by.

Whether you're on a bike or just on foot you get to enjoy the same views and that lung-filling, life-affirming fresh air.

Another local attraction that works well for families is the Scottish Crannog Centre just a short stroll west along Loch Tay from Kenmore.

The crannog, an overwater

dwelling that once offered a secure and welcoming haven for people to feel safe in, is a crucial part of Scottish history and culture.

The re-creation Bronze-Age crannog really shows you what they would have looked like originally and the exhibits also illuminate what life was like in the old days, a vivid experience no school lesson can match.

We were there in winter, but Kenmore really comes alive in summer when water sports take over. From the village you can hire out kayaks and boats to set off on the epic loch, though kayaking on the feisty River Tay is only for experienced paddlers.

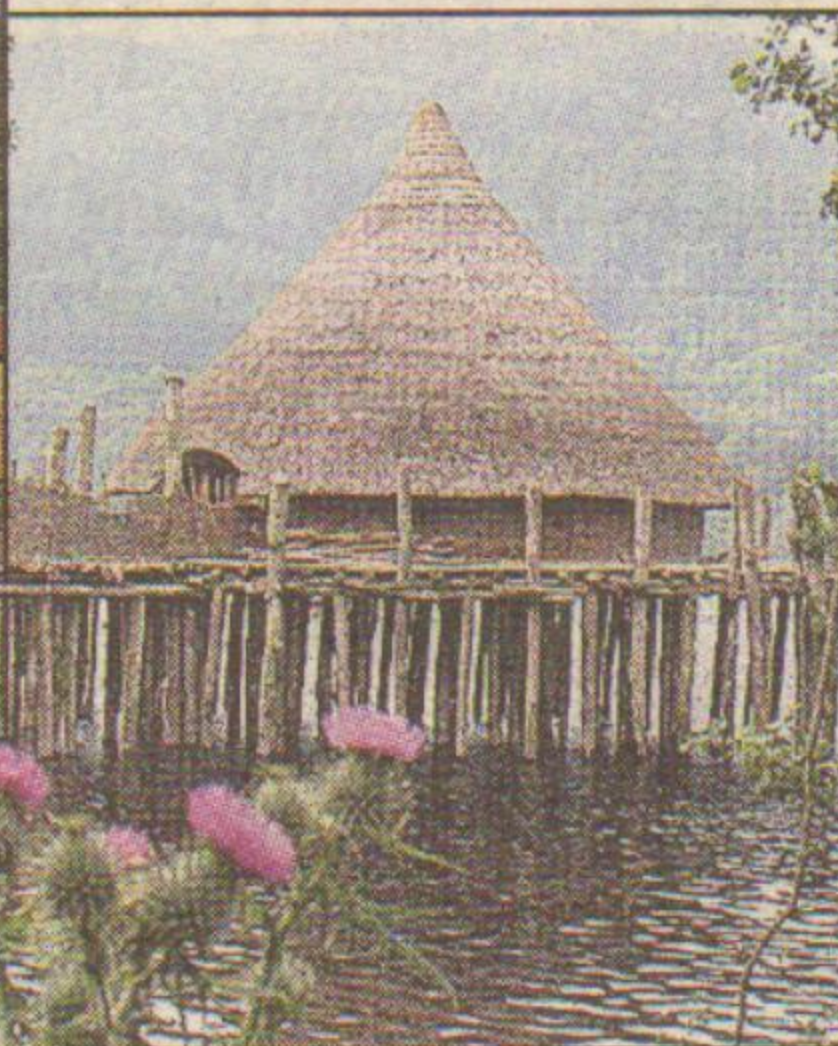
Further downstream companies like Activ8s (www.activ8s.com) offer the likes of whitewater rafting and canyoning. The latter is brilliant fun, though you do often end up a bit battered and bruised as you hurl



■ Above — Granary Court at Mains of Taymouth.

■ Left — General Wade's bridge.

■ Right — The Bronze Age crannog.



■ All wrapped up, Robin and Tara enjoy the snow at Mains of Taymouth.

yourself around a gorge in just a wet suit and helmet.

For more sedentary visitors I recommend nipping along to Aberfeldy, a 10-minute drive away. "Scotland's First Fair Trade Town" boasts a sprinkling of little delis and food shops and is a fun place to spend a morning or afternoon. Then there are art galleries, craft shops and antique shops.

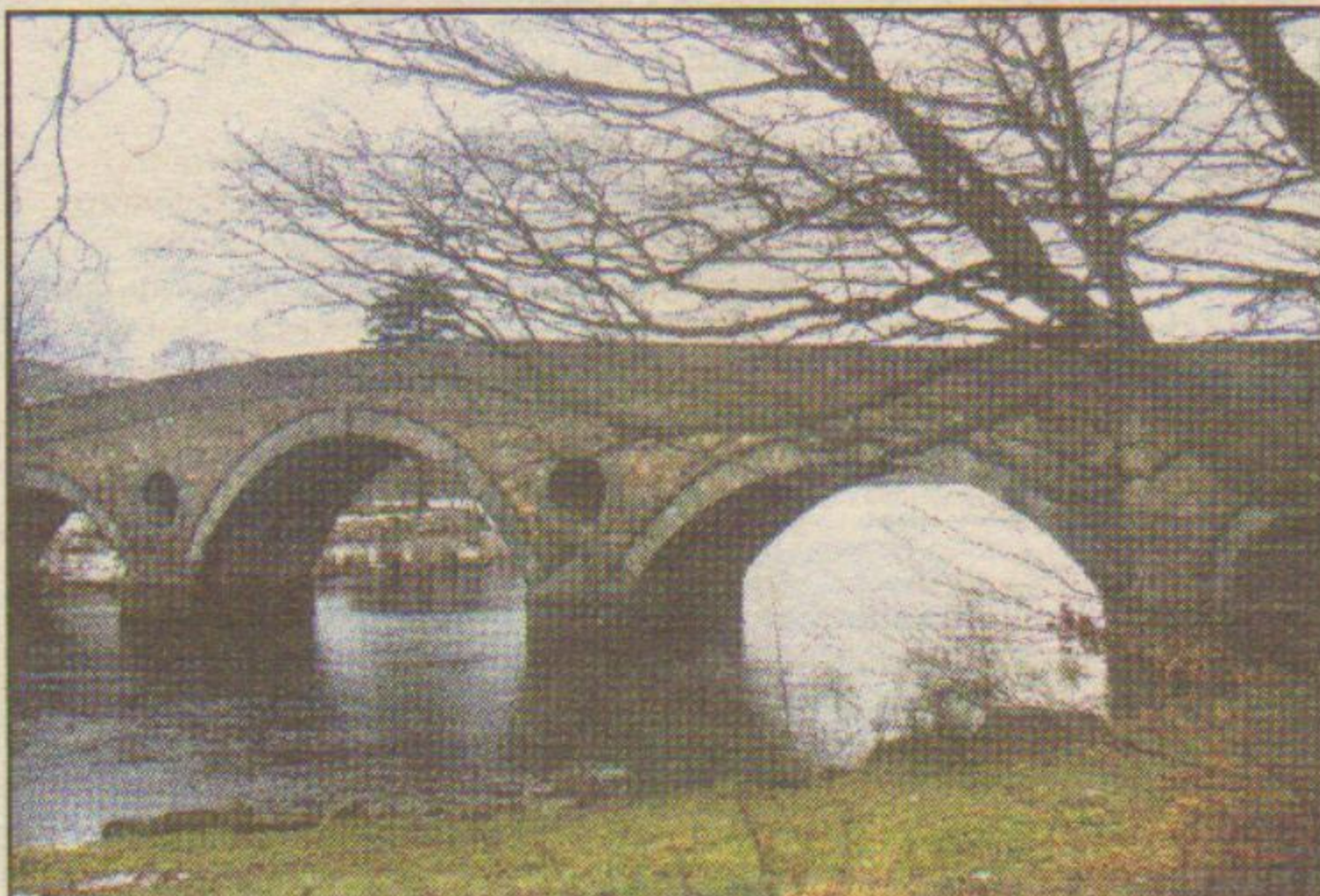
Between Kenmore and Aberfeldy, Dewar's World of Whisky awaits with its award-winning visitor centre and heart-warming tastings. This is one distillery where tours are open to all ages, which is handy for families.

If you've only ever driven past, walked around or above Loch Tay, think about stopping off for at least a weekend. As well as enjoying one of Scotland's most attractive settings Kenmore boasts lovely holiday cottages and a surfeit of things to do whether you want to get wet or not.

Further info

Kenmore is less than two hours by car from most of Central Scotland and car is the best way to get there. There are buses from Perth to Aberfeldy and a Post Bus also serves Kenmore.

Lonely Planet's Scotland guide has further information on the area as has www.visitscotland.com



Hotel of the week

LE MERIDIEN Hotel Bristol — Despite a glut of shiny new hotels opening in the Polish capital in recent years the Bristol remains arguably Warsaw's finest accommodation and a member of the Leading Hotels Of The World group. The hotel is a byword for luxurious opulence and first-class service so expect to be pampered within an inch of your life. A swimming pool is on hand to help ease muscles strained by a day of sightseeing over the old town cobbles. Doubles from £140. 42/44 Krakowskie Przedmiescie. Tel. +48-22 625 2525. www.bristol.polhotels.com

Flight of the week

EXPANDING REGIONAL carrier Flybe recently announced flights from Aberdeen to the Welsh capital, Cardiff. Travellers from the north-east can now buy affordable direct flights for a weekend of rugby action at the world famous Millennium Stadium. You can also enjoy the bright new face of the city in the form of the revamped waterfront, with its bars, cafes and restaurants, and also the beautiful countryside just outside the city. Returns from £90.50. www.flybe.com