



The bridal party makes its way toward the chapel to the tune of a traditional Scottish pipe melody. They are, from left: the Laird of Balgonie, Raymond Morris of Balgonie and Eddergol; the bride, Kim Ann Perino, escorted by her son, Wesley Duke Perino; Amanda Brooke Perino, the bride's daughter and maid of honor; and the laird's piper.

Aye, Scotland makes for a bonnie wedding

BY STEPHEN MICHAEL
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Stripes Travel readers

You meet the princess of your dreams, she meets her prince charming . . . What can you do to weave the magic and romance into the fabric of reality? How about: Rent a castle, wed in the medieval chapel and feast in a great banquet hall?

When we decided to get married, we knew we wanted to do it in Scotland, due to ancestral connections and our mutual love of all things Scottish. We also spend much of our off-duty time in Edinburgh, the capital city where we own a modest apartment, and it was from here we began our quest.

TRAVEL TALES

Our initial question was: "Can two Americans living in Belgium be married in Scotland?" Pleasantly, the answer was "Yes." In fact almost anyone can marry in Scotland provided they are legally free to wed. We went to the Internet and found the information we needed, including required forms to download.

But where does one begin to find that special venue? Obviously the rich and famous (like Madonna and Guy Ritchie) have no problem — and no budget concerns — but we are humble civil servants. So we turned again to the Internet, and also invested in copies of U.K. bridal magazines.

After considering sites on the western coast of Scotland where Stephen's ancestors lived before immigrating to America, we realized that the logistics of a wedding in Scotland would make



Banners reflecting the arms of previous owners of Balgonie Castle adorn the great hall, and heraldic symbolism can be seen throughout the castle.

this expensive and difficult. We decided to find a venue near Edinburgh, one of Scotland's two major cities with international airports, excellent rail connections, and a plethora of hotels, restaurants and nearby castles.

We settled on Balgonie Castle in Fife, about 35 miles outside Edinburgh on the northern side of the Firth of Forth. We visited the castle, receiving a hearty welcome and guided tour from the Laird of Balgonie himself. This location is fast becoming one of Scotland's most popular and affordable wedding locations. The laird was happy to show us photos of previous wedding parties and to recommend local businesses to help us out, such as photographers, florists and caterers.

Almost instantly we knew we had found our ideal castle. It had the perfect balance of magic, history, ro-

mance — and price. We paid for the use of the 14th-century chapel and great hall, although either venue is available separately, and the laird arranged a minister to officiate and the use of his piper to "pipe in the bride."

We also met with a catering official who was willing to provide champagne and hors d'ouvres, a sit-down dinner and a limited bar within our budget.

During one weekend in February 2004, we attended a local wedding show. Sifting through the dozens of services on offer, we found a wedding cake designer, stills photographer and videographer. We asked acquaintances in Edinburgh about potential florists and were delighted to secure the services of Stems Limited, the same company that provided the floral arrangements for the 2003 MTV Europe music awards. The prices were affordable, the owner intuitive and professional, and the arrangements breathtaking.

Kim found a gorgeous, medieval-style wedding gown in gold silk, and Stephen engaged the Celtic Craft Centre to manufacture a Highland doublet in blue velvet to wear with his Michael from Appin tartan kilt.



Photos by Alastair Stevens

Bride Kim Ann Perino, in a gold, medieval-style gown, and bridegroom Stephen Anthony Michael, dressed in his family's tartan with a blue velvet Highland doublet, stand in front of the chapel altar at Balgonie Castle in Scotland. The dark diamonds on the wall are the coats of arms of previous owners. Chapel lighting comes solely from candles.

With the venue and clothing evoking medieval splendor, we decided the wedding feast should have a similar theme. Again using the Internet, we located a company specializing in medieval cookies using authentic ingredients and recipes — these would accompany the coffee or tea at the end of the evening.

In a bridal magazine, we read about a troupe of traditional Scottish entertainers called Herald Events, which offered music, drama and merriment in traditional Highland style. After talking to the founder and listening to one of their CDs, we booked them for the post-feast entertainment.

Due to our '60s "coming of age," we

added a feature to the evening that was mildly out of sync with the venue: We procured dozens of instruments — egg shakers, rhythm blocks, wrist bells, ocarinas and tambourines — and placed them on the tables of the Great Hall so our guests could contribute to the festive mood by making their own music.

Finally, another Fife company, Message on a Bottle, customized bottles of fine Scotch with our name, wedding date and Stephen's personal coat of arms, giving guests yet another unique remembrance of our wedding.

Logistics was a key concern in planning the wedding. Guests from the United States, Belgium, Germany

and England were able to fly into either Glasgow or Edinburgh with ease. Using Rabbits Tours to arrange hotels for all guests, as well as a full-day excursion to the Highlands on the day after the wedding, made the experience painless.

We pronounced the event a dream come true. People traveled a long way to help us celebrate, and we wanted them to leave with something memorable. They did — and you can, too. For the wedding of your dreams, consider Bonnie Scotland.

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As the Laird of Balgonie's piper plays a Scottish tune, the laird, center, welcomes the newlyweds into the great hall for their wedding feast. The coats of arms of previous owners and notables associated with the castle are painted on the panels of the musician's gallery above the hall entrance.

Tips for planning a wedding in Scotland

Arranging weddings in historic Scottish venues is a booming business, with ceremonies at castles and stately homes in all regions. Much of the research can be done on the Internet. For help in answering the "who, what, when, how and how much" questions, see www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/grosweb/grosweb.nsf/pages/gromar. Everything is clearly and concisely explained. The Web site has required forms to download and print, as well as links to the various registrar offices where the paperwork needs to be filed at least three weeks before the wedding.

Balgonie Castle has an excellent Web site at www.balgonie-castle.com. Gode Cookery, which made our special wedding cookies, offers a variety of designs and flavors, and the cookies stay fresh for weeks and even freeze well. Its Web site is www.godecookery.com/cookies/cookies.html.

The Web site for Message on a Bottle, which provided the souvenir Scotch and bottles, is www.messageonabottle.biz.

Rabbies Tours arranged for guest accommodations in the area and a day-after Highlands tour. Its Web site is www.rabbies.com.

— STEPHEN AND
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PETER JAEGER/Stars and Stripes



Guests take their places at the banquet tables in the Laird's Hall, or great hall, of Balgonie Castle. Like the chapel, the hall is lit only with candles. It seats up to 50 guests comfortably, including the wedding party at the head table.