



PHOTOGRAPHY: RICHARD ROWE, GREAT GLEN YURTS

Field of dreams

RICHARD ROWE DISCOVERS THE ULTIMATE ROOM WITH A VIEW IN A FIELD OUTSIDE FORT WILLIAM

IT'S NOT often that you get to enjoy an uninterrupted view of Scotland's highest mountain from the comfort of your own bed – particularly one that is framed by the front door of a Mongolian yurt. But that's exactly what's on offer at Great Glen Yurts based at Torlundy Farm, near Fort William.

It's a simple set-up. Backed by woodland and a bubbling burn, three brand new yurts sit, nicely spaced, in a field on an organic farm with front-row views over the Nevis Range. The brainchild of sisters Julie French and Sophie Carver, the yurts offer back-to-basics accommodation but without scrimping on comfort.

"The yurts were Sophie's idea really," explained Julie. "She had stayed in a yurt in France one winter and so knew they were cosy and could cope with the Scottish weather. We also wanted to offer something a bit different – there's nothing else quite like it in the area."

You can say that again. Our home for the weekend, Otter – one of the two smaller yurts available – is ideal for two (plus dog), with a double bed decked out with plump pillows, quilts and fake fur throws. The homely feel is enhanced by a collection of colourful furniture, including two single futons that are perfect for kids, an armchair and a tiny wood-burning stove.

The bare wooden floor is covered with an assortment of sheepskins and rugs, while oil lamps, candles and wind-up lanterns create a romantic atmosphere at night. The yurt is incredibly well-insulated and with the stove going full blast, it doesn't take long to heat up – retaining warmth long after the fire goes out. A word of warning, though: the doorway is very low and it may take a few cracks to the skull before remembering to duck. Or maybe that's just me.

In keeping with the informal, eco-friendly feel of the place, facilities are pretty basic. They include a couple of wooden cabins that house

dry compost toilets – facilities that put the *long* into long drop. Compost toilet newbies might find using them a little unnerving at first – particularly in the dead of night – but you soon get the hang of using sawdust to 'flush' and washing your hands in a bucket of peat-tinted water taken from the nearby burn.

Julie and Sophie are eager to encourage a sense of communal living and have set aside a campfire pit with brazier near the yurts, plus a barn converted into an inside/outside kitchen complete with flatbed stove, barbeque, lanterns and a pot-bellied wood-burner to keep the chill off. One night while cooking steaks on the barbeque, the light fading over Ben Nevis, we watched as bats flitted into the barn to snatch insects attracted by the lanterns.

During daylight hours, it's impossible not to be impressed by the grandeur of the surroundings. From the doorway of our yurt, we gazed up at the Aonachs Mor and Beg, the ski paraphernalia of the Nevis Range clearly visible on the high ridges. Through binoculars, we could also make out the two downhill mountain bike tracks that start high up the hill; the famed World Cup trail shoots almost vertically down the mountain, while the new red trail takes a more meandering route before disappearing into the broad band of Leanachan Forest that wraps around its base.

And then there are the uninterrupted views across the shattered north face of Ben Nevis itself – the actual summit seemingly perpetually shrouded in cloud. Scanning the mountain's massive flanks, it is possible to see walkers plodding up the main track from Glen Nevis before zig-zagging out of view.

Unable to resist, we sampled as much as we could, hitting the trails on foot and by bike and even squeezing in a trip to Glen Roy to check out the famous Parallel Roads. And at the end of each busy day, we returned to our little round house, lit the fire, cranked the lanterns and settled in for a blissfully cosy night. ■



Round house (clockwise from above left): accommodation with a difference; inside one of the yurts; standing guard; views to Ben Nevis

Great Glen Yurts

The yurts are recommended for two to four people, although the larger Eagle Yurt can sleep up to six if you don't mind a snug fit. Prices start at £140.00 (minimum two-night stay) with weekly rates also available. Dogs are welcome (small surcharge payable). This winter, the yurts will be closed but are likely to book up fast on reopening in March. www.greatglenyurts.com



In the area

Nevis Range

Ski, ride, climb or just lark about on the new high wire Adventure Course – the choice is yours. www.nevisrange.co.uk

Lochaber and around

For much more on what is available around Lochaber – the self-styled Outdoor Capital of the UK – visit www.outdoorcapital.co.uk

Fishing

Torlundy Farm has three well-stocked trout fishing hill lochans with great mountain views. Rod hire and tuition available if required.

Geological wonders

For something different, head to Glen Roy to see the Parallel Roads – giant 'tide marks' on the hillside that indicate the previous shorelines of ancient, ice-dammed lochs.