

Archive

Classified

Shopping

Promotions

Games

Fast Times

My Times

Site s

Search this site

GO

# The Sunday Times - Property

May 5 2003

NEWSPAPER EDITION

May 04, 2003

- Monday
- Tuesday
- Wednesday
- Thursday
- Friday
- Saturday
- Sunday**
- Sunday - Britain
- Sunday - Comment
- Sunday - World
- Sunday - Scotland
- Sunday - Ireland
- Sunday - Review
- Sunday - Football
- Sunday - Sport
- Sunday - Business
- Sunday - Money
- Sunday - Property**
- Sunday - Magazine
- Sunday - Travel
- Sunday - Culture
- Sunday - Books
- Sunday - Doors
- Sunday - Style
- Sunday - Jobs
- Sunday - Motoring

TIMES ONLINE

- Home
- Breaking news
- Iraq
- Britain
- World
- Business
- Sport
- Your Money
- Comment
- Sports Book
- Travel
- Shopping
- Law
- Classifieds
- Games
- Crossword
- Motoring
- Property
- Student
- Sunday Times

NEWSPAPER

- Sunday
- Today
- Tuesday
- Wednesday
- Thursday
- Friday
- Saturday

QUICK CLICKS

- Appointments
- Arts
- Books
- Contact Us
- Creme
- Education
- Fast Times
- Film
- Finest
- First night
- Food and Drink
- From the Archive
- Good University Guide
- Health
- Online Specials
- Play
- Promotions

## Tales of a Landlady: Croft original

Sheer business drive makes a Scottish retreat pay for itself, finds Rosie Millard

Some people just like doing it the hard way. So when Richard Nash, from Glossop in Derbyshire, bought a holiday home in Scotland in 1990, he didn't go for a little granite cottage in a Perthshire village or a nice Georgian flat in Edinburgh.

Nash, the director of an enterprise agency, decided to make his purchase as enterprising as possible. He and his wife plumped for the 25-acre Morroch Bay on the ravishing Mull of Galloway, southwest Scotland, with a single four-bedroom beach cottage and a run-down croft.

The sea view was astonishing, but so was the only way down to the cottage, namely a cliff path, 1-in-1 in gradient, with a nasty hairpin bend. Never mind, thought the intrepid Nash, who snapped up the package for about £90,000, I've got a Land Rover.

Happily, so have quite a lot of other people. More to the point, Nash discovered that the people who were buying Land Rovers, or things like them, live in places such as Glossop, thoroughly civilised areas without a hope of either a 1-in-1 track or a hairpin bend.

"I found there were lots of people who have these expensive cars but nowhere to drive them. So I started to market the cottage through magazines such as Land Rover Owner International," says Nash.

A single advert might bring in 60 inquiries. Slowly, Nash started filling the house with holiday-makers who could think of nothing nicer than chilling out with an entire Scottish bay to themselves.

The inaccessibility of the house became its unique selling point; in fact, it became such a selling point that he decided to allow 4x4 virgins to visit the house.

"I advertised in the local paper for a couple who would look after the site. I ended up with a fantastic pair who live locally. They have my old Land Rover and will take visitors to and from the house. You just park your car at the top of the cliff."

It worked a treat. Scott Cameron, the manager, drove white-faced guests down to the cottage and back again, while his wife, Miriam, refurbished the derelict croft. Now Nash had two inaccessible Scottish cottages to market.

At which point, Nash's other passion, the internet, came into play. "I built my first website in 1997," he says, "and I'm fascinated by e-commerce."

So how best to market Morroch Bay on the net? Answer: make the search engines your slave.

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"You have to put in words that attract the engines," explains Nash. There's a whole list of them, including, beach cottage, Scotland, southern, isolated, remote and even nude. After all, who's going to see you on Morroch Bay? It's not even all that chilly, insists Nash. "We have the Gulf Stream," he says, sounding as if the balmy phenomenon makes a personal visit to his shingly shore. "We even have palm trees."

The website works well. Tap "beach cottage Scotland" into Google and Morroch Bay comes up first. Clearly, it helps in the holiday rental game if you are a bit of an anorak.

"I track all my internet inquiries and see how people have found the site. Plus, I look at my rivals, and if we are slipping down the search engines a bit, I can see why they are overtaking me."

The intrepid man even put a banner advert on the [visitscotland.com](http://visitscotland.com) site. His expertise in e-commerce has paid off: the cottages are now booked up through the year. Nash claims to get 100 inquiries a week through the internet.

One of his guests, Nick Davy, works for a nightclub production company in Leeds and organises events at groovy places such as Coast in Lancaster and Elemental in Manchester. "I go to the web first for pretty much everything I need," says Davy, 31. "And my girlfriend Gina and I wanted to take off for a weekend to somewhere relaxing and isolated."

He put the key words into Google (probably not nude, but you never know), and bang, Morroch Bay came up first. "We didn't even bother looking any further," says Davy. "Normally when you are so specific on the net, you don't find exactly what you want, but actually this was just what we wanted."

Is he a 4x4 owner? No, but he loved the ride in the manager's motor. "And because most of our luggage was food and drink, our bags were very light on the way back, so we walked up the cliff."

Even for veteran all-terrainers, it's still a bit of a treat. Northumberland GP Gerry Morrow, his wife and their five children rented the place this Easter but no amount of Northumberland driving had prepared him for the descent to Morroch Bay: "We were all terrified. Two of the children were in tears, two were doubled up with hysterical laughter, and one was deadly silent.

"After we got to the bottom, my wife gave me a card with 'My Hero' written on it."

If you have a similarly wacky rentable holiday cottage, Nash suggests you make what could be a detraction into an attraction; the tricky descent became a USP.

Sort out a professional manager to run the place in your absence, he advises — and, crucially, enable visitors to find you easily on the web. Even nudists.

*Morroch Bay, 01457 862 128, [www.morroch-bay.com](http://www.morroch-bay.com)*

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