

There's a lot of playground chat going on. The children's park in our village is being updated and ideas for what to buy and the money to pay for them are being sought. I fancy one of those electricity-creating roundabouts that we keep sending to sub-Saharan villages so they can run their schools from it in an environmentally friendly manner. We might instead link it to the local hotel to keep the beer pumps and televisions running for their parents. Everyone's a winner.

I hate roundabouts – and swings- they both make me feel sick. I much prefer the chutes and the climbing frames. Just so long as the chutes are slidy. I used to take my nephews to a local park on a Sunday and there was a dad there who brought furniture polish to shine up the slide for his children. I hope that he was just making it slidy and he wasn't some sort of germ-paranoid parent.

Those of you familiar with my parenting skills will not be surprised to hear of the time I let one of my nephews go up the big chute on his own and he was so excited, shouting and waving to me, that he fall backwards off the top of the steps. Not even a bruise.

I was reminded of playgrounds in the last fortnight as we enjoyed our fortnight in Skye. Once again, we had magnificent weather and limited midge-trouble which wasn't bad for two weeks in a tent. As we were dog-less on this trip, we took the opportunity to dust off our rock-climbing gear and tackled some routes suitable for our advancing age and a ten-year rest from the sport.

I almost forgot how much I love to climb. Just the right side of scary and a reminder of what it is like to be a child. Of course, you have to know what you are doing, but I was lucky enough to be taught very well, and my partner (who I also happen

to be married to) has oodles of experience. We chose a good route, made sure we had enough time, took note of the weather forecast and managed to achieve something we've wanted to do ever since Sean Connery and Christopher Lambert had their 'Highlander' sword fight. And without the dodgy accents.

Climbing, like much of life, is a very serious matter but the best bits are when you see that perfect hold just as you think it's impossible, or when you pull over a large ledge in the least elegant manner you could imagine to meet the grinning face of your partner. The sense of play is what makes it so great. It's the same with running, dancing or skiing. They are all hard work; they require training and effort to be any good and you need to dedicate time to them even when you don't feel like doing it. But when things go right it's the best feeling in the world.

When we were in Glen Brittle this summer I felt like a little child as we scrambled about playing on the rocks, crawling in and out of our tent and sneaking rice pudding for my breakfast. Our little campsites high in the mountains were our playground, free from rules, disapproval and supervision.

It brought to mind a visit we made last year to a West Coast Inn. Sited in one of the mainland's stunning landscapes, the pub has changed hands since our last visit. The new owner has spent months refurbishing it and has great plans to bring kayakers, hikers and cyclists to this 'playground.' He told me he was delighted that the locals no longer drink there and mocked their nostalgia for the dingy old pub that had served them their whole lives. For the first time in its history, the Inn had been shut over the winter 'due to a lack of visitors.' Our tourism industry is important, and a lifeline for many remote and beautiful places, but this isn't Disney.

Playgrounds are for children. Our landscape and our people are what make the Highlands special. Shutting out the people who live and work here to create some kind of all-inclusive resort is not what Scotland should be about. The child-like will always find room to play.