

Different senses of scale create different travel expectations

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A friend of mine had a business meeting near London, and he decided to extend it to a tour of Scotland and England once the meetings were over. (This is the same friend who took me on the emergency vacation many years ago.) His plan was to rent a car early one morning and drive from the meeting location all the way up to Aberdeen at one go, then slowly work his way back south, enjoying the sights along the way. He sanity-checked his plan against his colleagues from Great Britain. “I looked it up on multiple online mapping sites, and they all say that the trip from London to Aberdeen is doable in a day. I take motorway X, then Y, then Z. Does this make sense to you?” Every single one of his colleagues said, “Oh, no. You can’t do it in a day. You should budget two days travel time.” My colleague was curious. Is the motorway really congested? “Not particularly.” Is the road unusually difficult to navigate, or is the road in poor condition? Something that would prevent me from traveling at the posted speed limit? “No, the roads are just fine, and driving is straightforward.” He asked several other questions trying to find out what it was about the trip that required it to take two days. Is there something funny at the England/Scotland border that takes a long time? Do I have to cross a mountain or something? “It just can’t be done in one day.” My colleague concluded that it was simply in the mindset of the locals that driving that far in one day is Just Not Done. There is nothing physically preventing it, but it is considered to be highly unusual. As I recall, he ultimately executed his plan without incident. I wonder if the other drivers on the road looked at him funny. **Bonus story:** Another friend of mine was staying in Reading, and he decided to take a weekend excursion to Wales. He pulled out the map, calculated how long it would take him, and noted that the map indicated that there were mountains that he needed to cross to reach his destination. He set out with what he thought was plenty of time to spare, but it started getting late, and he still needed to cross the mountains, and he was concerned that the people in Wales would start worrying when he didn’t show up. And then he reached his destination.

He drove over the mountains without even realizing it.

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