

GLENMORISTON

PLACES OF INTEREST



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By William Owen

INVERMORISTON

At the very centre of the village of Invermoriston the River Moriston drops to the level of Loch Ness in a series of picturesque waterfalls. A few yards upstream from the present road bridge the river is spanned by an old double-arched bridge of keystone construction. This bridge carried all road traffic until the present road bridge was built in 1933.

Each year in early spring when heavy rains combine with melting snow on the hills in the Glen the river can become a raging torrent. In 1951 there was a particularly heavy flood. Huge trees torn from the river banks upstream became lodged under the main arch of the old bridge causing the flood waters to sweep over the parapet whilst other trees acted as battering rams. Much of the parapet of the old bridge was swept away.

Close beside the river at this point stands the blacksmith's shop. This building erected in 1883 stands on the site of an earlier one. Willie and Duncan MacDonald carried on their trade here until 1966 and they were well known to thousands of visitors. The two brothers were of a family which had been blacksmiths in the Glen for three generations.

ST. COLUMBA'S WELL

Between the Smithy and the village shop is a well called after St. Columba - "Fuaran-Choluim-Chille." This well was for ages an object of veneration among the people of the district, and healing properties were attributed to its waters. During the later half of the sixth century St. Columba journeyed through the Great Glen on his way to visit Brude the Pictish King, and tradition has it that he blessed this well.

THE FALLS WOOD

Across the road from the smithy is the falls wood where a path provides a very pleasant walk high above the river. A short distance along this path is a small summer house built by the late laird of Glenmoriston. The summer house overlooks the largest of the Invermoriston falls and was built to shelter the

laird's guests whilst they watched the salmon leaping the falls.

If you continue along the footpath some care should be taken as there is a steep drop close beside the path. At one point here the river is about one hundred feet below the path. Eventually the path drops nearer the level of the river and runs through the meadows below the laird's house. Here the river becomes wide and shallow and early in the season you may see men fishing for salmon. Fishing permits can be obtained for certain stretches of the River Moriston and for many of the hill lochs in the glen.

INVERMORISTON HOUSE

Invermoriston House is the home of James Ewen Grant the present laird of Glenmoriston. This is the fourth house to occupy the site. The first was burnt down by the government after the Jacobite rising of 1715. For the part he played in the rising the then laird, John Grant, not only lost his house but also forfeited his lands. Eventually after many difficulties Glenmoriston managed to buy back the estate and to rebuild his house. By the time of the Jacobite rising of 174s John Grant was dead and his son Patrick had succeeded him. Patrick raised 200 men from the Glen and joined the Prince early in the campaign. After the defeat of the Highland army at Culloden the following year the young laird became a fugitive sought by the Hanoverian redcoat soldiers.

The elderly Lady Glenmoriston, mother of the laird and of thirteen other children, was the only one of the family at home when a large party of Highland militia led by Sir Alexander MacDonal, the Laird of MacLeod and Lord Loudon arrived at the house. These Highlanders, who had joined the Hanoverian side at the start of the rising, were on their way from the Isle of Skye to Inverness. They had received orders from the Duke of Cumberland to punish Glenmoriston by putting the torch to every house in the Glen. The common men made camp around the house whilst the officers became uninvited guests within. Next morning Lord Loudon ordered his men to set fire to the house. An eye witness later described how much of the furnishings from the house were saved from the flames:-

"Among Sir Alexander MacDonald's following there happened to be two MacDonalds who were nephew to old Lady Glenmoriston whom they pitied much in her then distress, and honestly told her it was not in their power to do her any other service then to take her furniture out of the house and to put it into a hut, which they accordingly did, and then they were obliged to witness the burning of their aunt's house to ashes. "

Not only is this account interesting because it helps to explain how the family portraits and other heirlooms have managed to survive the flames, but it also illustrates the confused state of affairs when members of the same family fought on opposing sides.

Invermoriston House was once more rebuilt but was again destroyed, accidentally this time, in 1930. The present house is a modern one, and smaller than the one it replaced.

BHLARAI DH

About five miles from Invermoriston is Bhlaraidh, pronounced Blairie. In olden times this was one of the many small hamlets in the Glen. Each hamlet consisted of a group of small houses surrounded by narrow strips of land known as rigs which the people cultivated. Beyond these fields was the rougher grazing land. The houses and the land were rented from the laird by a tacksman, usually a relation of the laird. The tacksman would in turn sub-let small plots of land to poorer individuals. Up until the middle of the eighteenth century most of the houses were built of turf and wattle. Only the laird and the tacksman had houses of stone.

The name of this place is interesting. In 1345 it was spelt Blare; in 1509, Blaree; in the eighteenth century Blary; and more recently Blairie. Alex Mackay in his excellent book "Urquhart and Glenmoriston" suggests that the name means - The Place of Small Plains. But I would suggest that the name should be interpreted as - The High Battlefield. The word Blar in Gaelic can mean either a plain or a battlefield, and in this case I would favour the meaning "battlefield" for the simple reason that high on the hillside above Blaraidh a battle was fought between raiding Norsemen and the local inhabitants, the

Caledonians. The Norsemen were led by their king, whose name was Eric, and accompanying him was his beautiful daughter. After a stiff engagement the Norsemen were driven to flight. They were pursued and overtaken at a hill called "Cnoc-an-Tionndain" - The Knoll of the Turning, where King Eric was slain and his daughter taken prisoner. Many of the topographical features of the hillside between Blaraidh and Achnaconeran (a hamlet high on the hill above Invermoriston) have names connected with this battle. A hill beside the battlefield has the name "Cam an t-Seanna-Bhlair" -Cairn of the Old Battlefield.

THE POOL OF TWENTY

Half a mile beyond Blaraidh, at a bend in the River Moriston there is a deep pool known as The Pool of Twenty. Tradition says that twenty men were drowned in this pool one night when the river was in spate. The men belonged to a gang of reivers (cattle rustlers) who were trying to escape from pursuing clansmen whose cattle they had stolen.

DUNDREGGAN DAM

A short distance upstream is Dundreggan Dam, part of the Moriston Hydro Electric Scheme. The scheme utilises the water power of 158 square miles of Inverness-shire to produce about 216 million units of electricity annually. The 58 foot high dam forms Loch Dundreggan headpond, the water level of which is controlled automatically by sector gates. The dam has a Borland fish pass which allows salmon to ascend to the level of the headpond so that they may continue upriver to the spawning ground. Some 300 feet directly beneath the dam is Glenmoriston underground power station with a capacity of 36, 000 kilowatts, comprising two 18, 000 kilowatt vertical shaft Francis turbine-driven machines. Water reaches the power station down a vertical, shaft and is discharged into Loch Ness through a tailrace tunnel four miles long and over 20 feet in diameter.

THE OAK ROCK

Close beside Loch Dundreggan and on the opposite side from the road is a long low hillock known as "An-Creagan-Daraich"-The Oak Rock.

Up until the middle of the sixteenth century the lairds of Glenmoriston always built their homes upon this rock. The tradition was brought to an end by a Thane of Cawdor whose daughter married Patrick Grant of Glenmoriston. Cawdor is said to have visited the young couple and to have been horrified to find his daughter living in a primitive wattle house. To ensure that his son-in-law would allow him to build them a house of stone he set fire to the old house. The new house was built at Invermoriston, but because stone was not a popular building material there were no local stonemasons, and workmen had to be sent from Cawdor.

DUNDREGGAN

Dundreggan means the Dun or Hillock of the Dragon. The dun takes its name from the field (or place) of the Dragon nearby. There are various tales to account for the name. One tells how a dragon dwelt here and how it was slain by Fingal after an epic battle and buried where it fell. The Dun was long known as a dwelling place of the little people or "Sithein Dun". The particular tribe of fairies who dwelt within the dun are said to have carried off the mothers of new-born babies to be wet nurses to their fairy children. In fact the dun is typical of the many ancient burial mounds found throughout the Highlands.

Dundreggan was the setting for one of the most barbarous episodes of the 1745-46 Jacobite rising. After the Hanoverian army had defeated the Highland army of Bonnie Prince Charlie at Culloden Moor near Inverness the Duke of Cumberland moved his entire army to Fort Augustus. From here parties of redcoats and Highland militia were sent out into the neighbouring glens to destroy the homes and crops of the Jacobite clansmen.

Major James Lockhart of Cholmondeley's Regiment, the most notorious of the Duke of Cumberland's lieutenants, was despatched to Glenmoriston with a party of 96 redcoats and 100 militia. They crossed the hill into the Glen by General Wade's military road. Hugh Fraser, John MacDonald and the former's son James Fraser were busy harrowing a field beside the road. Lockhart ordered some of his men to shoot the three. Their bodies were thrown over the backs of pack ponies to be hanged

later in a suitable spot. They went on to Dundreggan where Lockhart ordered Grant of Dundreggan, a peaceable man who had taken no part in the rising, to gather up all his cattle whilst he and his men harried and burned another district. Finding on his return the next day that the cattle had not all arrived from the remote glens he stripped Grant naked, bound him hand and foot, his wife also, and in this condition made them witness the hanging of the three men who had been murdered on the previous day, after which they too were to be hanged. Their lives were saved by the intervention of a Captain Grant, an officer of militia. Lockhart had his men take all Dundreggan's cattle, set fire to his house and rob his wife of her clothes and rings.

THE FOOTPRINTS

The Footprints are situated just a few yards from the road at Lagganbane. A small pile of stones beside the road marks the spot, and a small gate gives access to a path leading to a large cairn behind which are the footprints. They are said to date from 1827 when an itinerant preacher, Finlay Monroe, was conducting a service on this spot. He was interrupted by two young men, who disapproved of his teachings and began to throw mud at him, calling him a cheat and a liar. The preacher declared that the ground on which he stood would bear witness to the truth of what he said to the final day of judgment. His footprints remain today, and although the grass grows thickly around them the footprints stay bare.

TORGOIL BRIDGE

A little further on, the road crosses the River Moriston over a narrow bridge at a place called Torgoil - The Hill of the Stranger or Lowlander. This most attractive bridge was designed by Thomas Telford the celebrated engineer and designer of the Caledonian Canal,

Just before the road crosses the bridge at Torgoil a minor road branches off to the West. This road continues along the North side of the river and connects four small hamlets; Dalchreichart, Balintombuie, Balnacarn and Tomcrasky,

CLACHAN MHERCHEIRD

Close beside the river at Balintombuie is an ancient graveyard where once stood a church founded by St. Merchard, the patron saint of Glenmoriston. Tradition tells that the saint when labouring as a missionary in Strathglass with two companions, discovered, by previous revelation, three bright new bells buried in the earth. Taking one himself, he gave the others to his fellow-missionaries bidding each to erect a church on the spot where his bell should ring for the third time of its own accord, undertaking to do the same with regard to his own. One of his companions founded a church at Glenconvinth in Strathglass, the other at Broadford, Isle of Skye.

St. Merchard himself travelled towards Glenmoriston. His bell rang for the first time at Suidh Mhercheird (Merchard's Seat) a hill above Balintombuie. The bell rang a second time at Fuaran Mhercheird (Merchard's Well) beside the burn at Balintombuie; and a third time at a spot beside the River Moriston *where* he built his church.

After the church fell into decay, early in the seventeenth century, the bell remained in the churchyard. The narrow-pointed spar of granite on which it rested still stands there. The bell, unfortunately, was wantonly removed by some strangers to the area about eighty years ago. Tradition has it that the bell would ring of its own accord when a funeral came in sight, and that whenever it was removed from its usual position it was invariably found restored miraculously to its place.

In the SE corner of the churchyard there is a stone set into the ground which has been hollowed out to form a small round basin. The stone, known as a Font Stone, always contains water, even in dry weather, and if it is emptied it quickly refills itself. Similar font stones are to be found in other districts, usually at the site of an early church. There is one in the old churchyard at Killianan, below the village of Abriachan on Loch Ness-side and another at Marydale in Strathglass.

AONACH

About three miles further on we come to Aonach where, in the eighteenth century, there was an inn at which Dr. Samuel

Johnson and James Boswell stayed during their famous tour of 1773. Today a low stone wall, all that remains of the inn, forms part of a sheepfold. At the time Johnson and Boswell stayed at the inn the landlord was a McQueen who had fought in the army of Bonnie Prince Charlie. McQueen complained to his guests that he was forced to emigrate shortly to America because his annual rent which twenty years before had been five pounds was now raised to twenty pounds. McQueen added that seventy men from the Glen had already gone to America. Dr. Johnson describes the inn as consisting of three huts, one of which was built of loose stones. But the part in which he and Boswell dined and slept was of turf wattled with twigs which kept the earth from falling. This room had a small glass window. When Dr. Johnson expressed surprise at finding several books in the room the landlord's pride was hurt and he made it clear that he was a man of some education. Later they were waited upon by the landlord's daughter whom they describe as a "modest, civil girl". Before they left the inn Dr. Johnson presented the girl with a book which he had purchased in Inverness, namely "Cocker's Arithmetic". James Boswell in his book, "The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides", tells us of the surprise and amusement amongst Dr. Johnson's friends when the title of the book was told to them. Boswell himself once questioned the Doctor upon the subject:-

Boswell- "But, Sir, is it not somewhat singular that you should happen to have Cocker's Arithmetick about you on your journey? What made you buy such a book at Inverness?"

Dr. Johnson-"Why, Sir, if you are to have but one book with you upon a journey, let it be a book of science. When you have read through a book of entertainment, you know it, and it can do no more for you; but a book of science is inexhaustible. "

Dr. Johnson has often been criticized for the many harsh things he said about the Highlands and the Highlanders, and yet it is obvious from the following quotation that he was affected in no small measure by the romance of the Highlands:

"I would like nothing better on earth than to isolate myself on an island of the Hebrides and, in the intervals of writing long Ossianic poems, to found a clan of tartan-wearing youths trained from their earliest years to tear income-tax collectors limb from limb."¹¹

Dr. Samuel Johnson

RODERICK MACKENZIE'S CAIRN

Three quarters of a mile further on is a cairn marking the spot where Roderick Mackenzie, an officer in Prince Charlie's army, was killed by redcoat soldiers. This happened in 1746 at the time when the Prince was a fugitive with a prize of £30,000 on his head. Mackenzie, himself a fugitive, was passing through Glenmoriston when he was surprised by a redcoat patrol. The soldiers pursued him and eventually shot him down. As he fell to the ground he cried "You have killed your Prince". He did this in order to make the soldiers believe that they had at last caught the royal fugitive. This man was of the same age and build as Charles Edward Stuart, and the soldiers were inclined to believe that he was indeed the Prince. They cut off his head to take back to Fort Augustus, whilst the body they dragged to the riverbank where they buried it in a shallow grave. This grave, marked by a simple wooden cross, is still to be seen today.

Jacobite prisoners held at Fort Augustus refused to identify the head and it was taken by the Duke of Cumberland to London where he hoped that prisoners in the Tower would make a positive identification. Although the head had been pickled in brine at Fort Augustus, it deteriorated so much by the time it reached London that identification was not possible. During the weeks following this incident the hunt for the Prince was no doubt carried out with much less enthusiasm now that the soldiers believed that the reward money had been won.

SALMON SPAWNING GROUND

A quarter of a mile further along the road is Ceannacroc Bridge. A short distance downstream from the present road-bridge is the original old bridge, now no longer in use.

Below this bridge a barrier has been built across the river to allow the salmon to be stripped of their eggs. The eggs are taken to a salmon hatchery at Invergarry where the salmon fry are reared and protected until they are ready to be released into the river and its tributaries. The North of Scotland Hydro Electric Board have taken these measures to compensate for the loss of salmon spawning ground due to their schemes.

CORRIE DHO

At Ceannacroc the River Dho joins the River Moriston after having flowed through Corrie Dho, a broad fertile corrie which cuts northwards between the hills which separate Glenmoriston from Glen Affric. It was in the remote corries which branch off from Corrie Dho that the famed Seven Men of Glenmoriston hid after the battle of Culloden. These seven men who had been neighbours in the Glen, joined forces and at a time when other men in the Glen were surrendering their arms, they vowed never to surrender. Hiding in these hills, which they knew well and in which they were skilled fighters, they carried on a form of guerilla warfare against the devastators of their country. They found shelter in a cave known locally as Uamh Ruaraidh na Seilg - The cave of Roderick the hunter, in Corrie Mheadhoin - The Middle Corrie.

Whilst the Seven Men were living the lives of outlaws the Prince was being hunted from island to island of the Outer Hebrides. On the 5th of July 1746 he landed once again on the mainland at Morar. The Prince and his party travelled north hoping that at Poolewe they would find a French vessel to carry the Prince to safety. The morning of the 29th found them in Glenmoriston wet and miserable and short of provisions. Their guide, a Glengarry man, knew the hiding place of the Seven Men and he suggested that the Prince and his retinue should seek shelter with these men. The Seven Men sheltered and provided for the Prince and his party for three days in the cave in Corrie Mheadhoin, after which time they moved to a similar cave in the neighbouring Corrie Sgrainge - The Corrie of Gloom. Whilst the Prince was their guest, one of the Seven Men walked over the hills to Fort Augustus to buy bread and the latest newspapers.

He also managed to obtain a pennyworth of Gingerbread, the greatest delicacy he could find for his Prince. Had any of these men been willing to provide information as to the whereabouts of the Prince to the garrison at Fort Augustus, they could have collected the £30,000 the government was offering for his capture. After staying in the second cave for a further four days, the entire party of eleven set out for Poolewe. Whilst on their way to Strathglass they met with another Glenmoriston man whom they recruited into their party. Upon reaching Strathglass one of the Glenmoriston men went on ahead to Poolewe, but he soon returned with the news that two French ships had put in at Poolewe but had sailed once more after having landed two officers. These officers were now on their way south to Lochail's country hoping to find the Prince there. Anxious to know if the two officers had despatches for him, the Prince resolved to return toward Lochail's country.

The party returned to Glenmoriston by an old hill-track which runs beside Loch na Beinne Baine and which enters the Glen at Lagganbane. They camped here for two days whilst scouts went ahead to see if the Glen was free of redcoat patrols. At this time Patric Grant of Crasky, leader of the Seven Men, and Alexander Chisholm of Blaraidh, went into the Glen foraging for food. They accidentally met with the Laird of Glenmoriston who asked them many questions, such as "Where they now lived, as they were so seldom seen?" "What were they doing and how they made purchase for sustenance?" "What is become of the Prince, I wish if he came this way that I might know of it, for he should be taken good care of?" But the two men would not acknowledge that they knew anything about the Prince or his motions, and they answered the laird's questions by saying - "that as the enemy were pillaging and plundering the country it were a pity not to share in the spoil, upon part of which they made shift to live rather than that the enemy should have it all."

On their return to the Prince they informed him of this meeting and suggested that they should fetch Glenmoriston to him, he being a faithful and trusty friend. The Prince said that he was well pleased with his present guard and wanted none other, and that he had experienced poor folk to be as faithful and firm as any men, rich or high could be."

Patrick Grant's narrative "Lyon in Mourning"

INTERPRETATION OF SOME GLENMORISTON PLACE NAMES

Achnaconeran	The Field of the Dog-Men (The Feinne)
Allt Saidh	Saidh, pronounced sigh. Burn of the Bitch (She wolf)
Aonach	Place of Gathering, a market place
Balintombuie	Town of the Yellow Knoll
Bhlaraidh	Pronounced Blairie. The High Battle-field.
Ceannacroc	Head of the Hill
Cluanie	Place of meadows
Creag nan Eun	Crag of the Birds
Culnacarn	Back of the Cairn
Dalcataig	The Field of the Cats (Wildcat)
Dundreggan	The Hill of the Dragon
Invermoriston	Mouth of the River of Great Waterfalls
Inverwick	Mouth of the Buck's Stream
Lagganbane	The Small White Hollow
Livishie	Place of everflowing waters (liable to flooding)
Portclair	Port of smooth planks (once the only bridge here was a smooth wooden plank)
Rhubha Ban	White Promontory
Tomcrasky	Knoll of the Crossing (a river crossing)

LOCAL LOCHS

Loch na Beinne Baine	Loch of the White Mountain
Loch a Bhainne	Loch of Milk
Loch a Bothain	Loch of the Bothy (a primitive hut)

