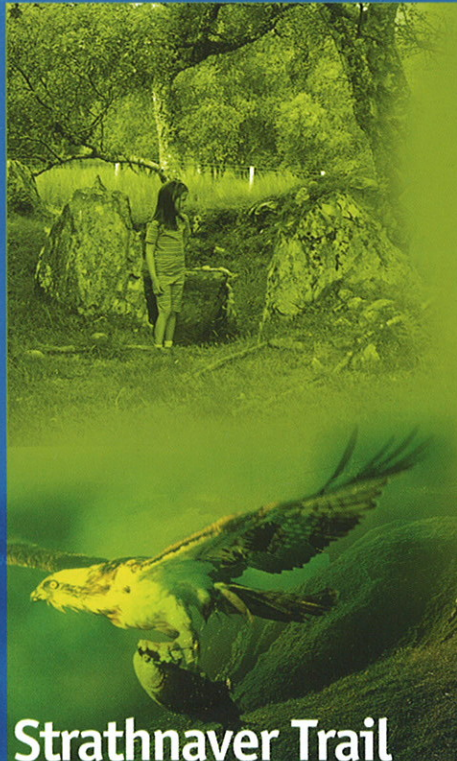


Strathnaver Trail

The Story of
a North Highland
Landscape

STRATHNAVER
an introduction & guide
by Jim A. Johnston



Strathnaver Trail

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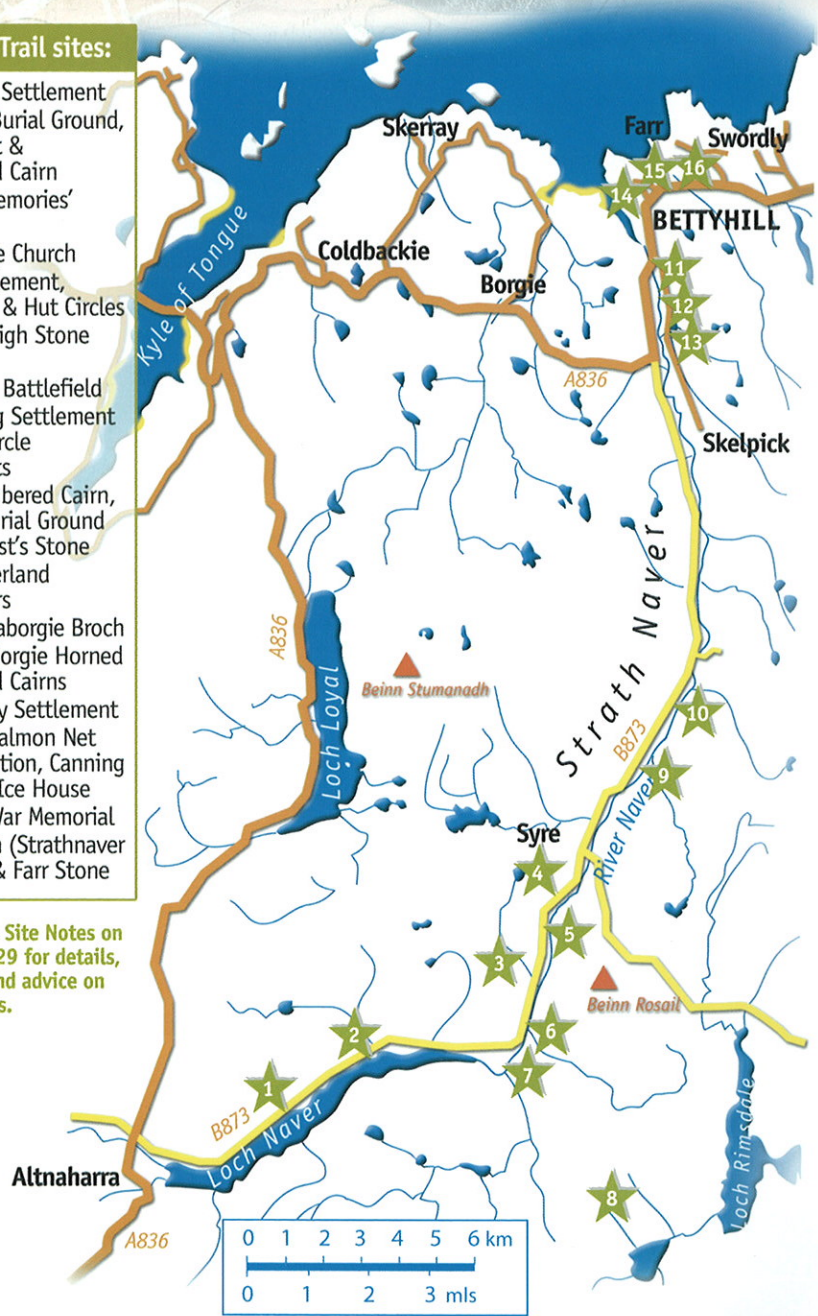
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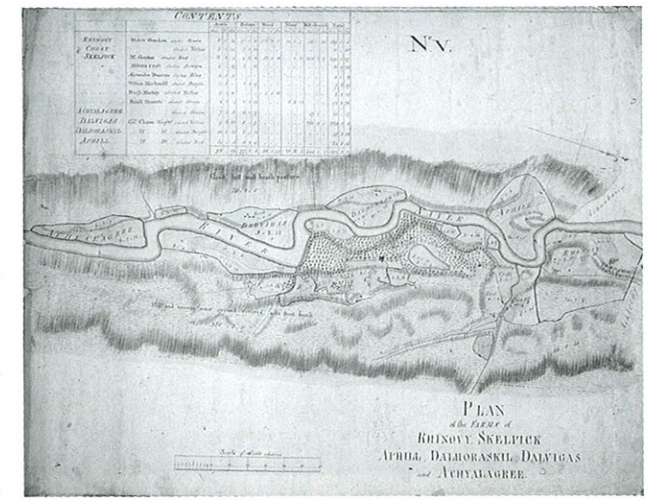
- 1 Grummore Settlement
- 2 Grumbeg Burial Ground, Settlement & Chambered Cairn
- 3 'Gloomy Memories' Memorial
- 4 Syre & Syre Church
- 5 Rosal Settlement, Souterrain & Hut Circles
- 6 Clach an Righ Stone Circle
- 7 Dalharrold Battlefield
- 8 Truderscaig Settlement & 2 Hut Circle Settlements
- 9 Skail Chambered Cairn, Chapel, Burial Ground & Red Priest's Stone
- 10 93rd Sutherland Highlanders
- 11 Achcoillenaborgie Broch
- 12 Coille na Borgie Horned Chambered Cairns
- 13 Achanlochy Settlement
- 14 Bettyhill Salmon Net Fishing Station, Canning Factory & Ice House
- 15 Bettyhill War Memorial
- 16 Farr Church (Strathnaver Museum) & Farr Stone

Please refer to Site Notes on pages 28 and 29 for details, descriptions and advice on individual sites.



CONTENTS

	page
Introduction	2
The Rocks	4
The Physical Landscape	4
The Natural History	5
The First Settlers	6
The Neolithic	7
The Bronze Age	8
The Iron Age	9
The Columban Church	11
The Norsemen	12
The Ascendancy of the Mackays	13
The Sutherland Clearances	18
The Post Clearance Strath	23
Further Reading	27
Notes on Strathnaver Trail Sites	28



(National Library of Scotland)

Ben Klibreck and Loch Naver from ruined building at Crumbeg (P3)



Strathnaver

When the Alexandrian scholar and astronomer, Ptolemy, published his *Introduction to Geography* in the 2nd Century A.D., one of the seventeen river names he listed in Scotland was *Nabaros* – the Naver.

The name is thus one of the most ancient recorded in Britain and pre-dates the known languages of our area. W.J. Watson, in his *Celtic Place names of Scotland*, interprets it as coming from a root word – *nabh* – found in Greek, Latin and Sanskrit and meaning a cloud or wet cloud. The name, therefore, in his view, originates from fogs rising over the river. Whatever the truth of this, the Gaels, in much more recent times, have

added their word, *strath*, meaning valley, to give the name we know today – Strathnaver.

That name is synonymous in many people's minds with the Sutherland Clearances of the early 19th Century but, although several places on the Trail make reference to that episode, its dismal history forms only a small part of the overall story. (Sites 1,2,3,4,5,13&16) While the Clearances largely took place over a 15 year period, with repercussions to the present day, the human history of the Strath goes back at least 6000 years, while that of its rocks and landscape telescope backwards into the

unimaginable aeons of geological time.

Today, Strathnaver is thought of as a mere section of Sutherland and, to most people, denotes simply the lands around the river from Loch Naver to the sea. It was not always so. The *Province of Strathnaver* in mediaeval times encompassed a huge area, stretching at one time from Reay in present-day Caithness to Durness and Eddrachillis in the far west. This, also known as the Reay Country, was the stamping ground of the leaders of the Clan Mackay, the Lords of Reay. Which can make the interpretation of past events a little confusing as things described as happening in

Strathnaver may well have occurred at any point in this vast domain. The Mackay chieftains were often bitter rivals of the Gordon earls, who controlled what was then Sutherland, and it is important to remember that Strathnaver has been, for most of recorded history, a completely separate entity from the county, now area, to which it, at present, belongs.

The *Strathnaver Trail* is contained within the boundaries of the present Strath but, in this booklet, reference will at times be made to the wider Province, of which our area was once the premier valley and most central part, though rarely the seat of power.

View north of Strathnaver from Achiceargany (P3)



■ The Rocks

Strathnaver is almost entirely underlain by metamorphic rocks of the Moine Series, so called from their type area in A'Mhoine, the wilderness area west of the Kyle of Tongue where these complex formations were first studied.

The strata were originally laid down on the floor of a great ocean before being subjected, around 700 million years ago, to immense heat and pressure in a mountain-building occurrence known to geologists as the Caledonian Orogeny. An astonishing feature of this event was the over-riding of rocks in the west by rocks from the east in a series of 'thrusts', including one called the Naver Thrust. The upshot of it all was to create a very hard bedrock, in which the melting and deformation that took place can be clearly seen today in the structure of the rocks wherever they are freshly exposed. In addition, there are one or two places, beside Loch Naver and round Bettyhill, where even older rocks outcrop. These are Lewisian Gneisses which, originating around three billion years ago, are among the most ancient rocks on the planet. As such, our entire area is a prime one for geologists and is one of the most widely studied in the world.

From a human point of view, these rocks, produced by titanic forces and in a time-span beyond our imaginings, form a plentiful and durable material for construction. In the hands of a stonemason, they can be split, faced and even carved. Unfortunately, this is not as readily accomplished as with the sandstones of Orkney or Caithness and, consequently, our ancient monuments, though as numerous and, often, as large and complex as theirs, have sometimes not stood the test of time quite as well and are rather more tumbledown in appearance.

■ The Physical Landscape

It is now well known that, over the last two and a half million years, the high latitudes of the world have alternated between warm and cold conditions on numerous occasions. In the coldest of these the whole of Scotland, Highland and Lowland, has been shrouded in ice hundreds, sometimes thousands, of feet thick. At such times Strathnaver would have formed part of a landscape similar to that of Greenland or Antarctica today, where only a few isolated mountaintops protrude from a vast expanse of glittering ice. Though the latest evidence suggests that Strathnaver was completely

clear of ice by twelve and a half thousand years ago, glaciation still leaves its mark. The erosive power of the ice is evident from the heights of Ben Klibreck, where great corries have been carved from the mountaintop, to the mouth of the Naver, where the steep valley sides illustrate the U-shaped cross-section characteristic of glacial valleys everywhere. Where rock surfaces are exposed, long scratches – known as striations – made by rocks embedded in the sole of the glacier, can still be clearly seen and, after a shower of rain, the sun reflecting off rocky outcrops on the valley sides shows how polished these were by passing ice.

As well as wearing the landscape away, glaciation builds new landforms. These are created from two materials – *boulder clay*, or *drift*, which is plastered on to the bedrock by the ice itself, and *outwash*, which, as its name suggests, consists of materials – usually sands and gravels – which are carried about and dumped here and there by the vast amounts of water produced as the glaciers melt. The long valley of Strathnaver is filled with a mixture of these deposits and it is on such landscape features that man has made his home.

The principal and most

obvious of these are the great terraces of sands and gravels, which exist at different levels throughout the length of the Strath. Some mark former sea levels when the valley, drowned by the sea as the ice melted, was rapidly infilled with waterborne material washed out from the retreating ice-sheets. The Naver, over the last twelve millennia, has been carving this loose material into the landscape we know today and man, as we shall see, has been busily exploiting the opportunities created.

■ The Natural History

To the casual visitor, much of Strathnaver must seem like a wholly natural landscape, just as the tropical rainforest, or the great expanses of the savanna, may appear to have escaped the hand of man. North Sutherland is often described as a 'wilderness' and, if absence of people makes a wilderness, then that is true. But, if we could travel back in time and follow the first settlers to either trek up the valley, or paddle round the coast in the wake of the vanishing ice, we would soon see how false the wilderness impression is.

Perhaps the most stable of our environments over the last 12,000 years have been

the great peatlands, the so-called 'Flow Country' which, in their purest form, stretch eastwards into Caithness over hundreds of square kilometres. Yet even these vast assemblages of vegetable matter have not grown uninterrupted through the millennia, as any peat digger will tell you. Before the peat, there were trees and, at times, peat formation has stopped, the ground has dried a little and tree cover has returned. Even today, many areas of apparently natural peatland would be shrouded in timber, were it not for the crofters' friend, the sheep, and the landlords' friend, the deer, which conspire to browse the saplings down. Just look in the heather at your feet and you will find them.

In more favoured areas, along the valley sides and in the sheltered bottoms, there are still areas of rough woodland – rowan, birch and hazel – and, at times in the past, these have been replaced by higher, or, sometimes, lower value species as climate subtly changed, a fact testified to by pollen analysis of microscopic grains perfectly preserved in peat or in pond sediments. In the early iron age there was sufficient timber to allow our forefathers to smelt local ores and this practice continued into late medieval times, as



Hazel *Corylus* (RBGE)

testified to by the energetic Timothy Pont in his 16th Century maps.

The pre-Clearance hill grazings, fertilised for thousands of years by the cattle, sheep and horses of the common people, offered a bonanza in the early 19th Century to the incoming sheep farmers, who were prepared to pay a significant premium for a landscape altered by man. Monoculture of sheep was not quite so good for these areas and gave rise, over a few generations, to the degraded grazings now extant throughout the Highlands – wilderness-like, but created by man.

On the coasts there is little of the rich machair found in the Western Isles – although pockets do occur – but the comparative richness of the crofting ground is due again to the influence of man,

the crofters cleared to the shore having to painstakingly drain their new holdings and, in some cases, carry earth into the crofts from adjacent areas on their backs in order to create a soil deep enough for ploughing. The inbye land of their abandoned settlements still bears the mark of run-rigs and lazybeds two hundred years on from the great dislocation and, being thoroughly unnatural, these continue to affect the vegetation and, consequently, the fauna, of the pre-Clearance settlement zones to this day.

Nevertheless, our un-natural landscape contains much to interest the naturalist, from deer and Arctic hare on the high ground to a remarkable

micro-fauna lurking beneath the surface of land and loch alike. Above all soar the birds, great in number and variety, and, blanketing the rocks and gravels not far beneath our feet, are numerous varieties of soil which provide niches, some very specialised, for an extraordinary range of plant life.

The First Settlers

It is quite conceivable that, even at the height of the Ice Age, Man, or, perhaps Neanderthal Man, was in this vicinity as a specialised hunter on the coastal edge of the ice sheets. After all, the Inuit survived very well on the ice margin in Greenland and North America

until contact with Europeans destroyed their long established traditional way of life. Whether the hardy exponents of such a life-style were here or not we shall never know, as any slight remains they may have left are now under the North Atlantic Ocean at an ancient coastline around forty miles off the Naver rivermouth.

The first humans known for certain to have ventured this far north are from the Mesolithic¹ Period. These people were hunters, whose life-style had little lasting effect on the landscape, though their impact on the larger wildlife was more permanent! No remains of this age are known from Strathnaver, but traces of



View north to Invernaver from Coille na Borgie Cairns (MP)



Coille na Borgie (Mike Taylor)

their occupation have been found at Smoo Cave, Durness, at Yarrows in Caithness, and in the Bone Caves of Inchnadamph, all near enough to infer their presence here.

The Neolithic

Spectacular evidence of our forebears comes from the Neolithic² whose farmers busily cleared the birch/hazel forest on the coast and all along the Strath.

There is ample proof of their presence on the Trail in the great monuments they built to honour their dead. These are known as *chambered cairns* or *passage graves* because their characteristic component is a burial chamber (sometimes in two or three parts) to which

access was gained by a low passageway. The whole was covered by a cairn that, in the earlier part of the period, was circular in plan but that, as time went on, changed to an elongated shape of more elaborate design, sometimes with a semicircular arena at the entrance to the passage. Individual cairns were often in continuous use for hundreds of years, illustrating the stability and continuity of the communities that built them. Some of the burial practices associated with chambered tombs are discussed on the Trail plaques. (2,9,12)

A recent researcher, writing in the *Scientific American*, speculated that a musician or shaman may have been inside the chamber chanting or

drumming as the chief mourner crawled into the womb-like interior, carrying the remains of his relative in an earthenware pot. Once inside, rhythmic resonance in the chamber could induce, 'a profound effect'. For the family or tribe, standing – or perhaps dancing – in the arena outside, the whole thing would have been a moving experience, not to mention the disorientating effect on the bearer of the pot!

¹ Mesolithic Period 9000 – 5000 Before the Present

² Neolithic Period 6000 – 4400 Before the Present

Clach an Rìgh Stone Circle (Mike Taylor)



The Bronze Age

The Bronze Age³ is well represented on the trail, with a stone circle at Dalharrold (6) which, although folk memory says different, is in all probability an astronomical alignment with a similar purpose to those at Callanish, Ring of Brodgar and, even, Stonehenge – albeit on a very much reduced scale. Styles of burial changed in the Bronze Age with cist burials becoming the norm, where the dead were laid, often in the foetal position, in a polygonal stone chamber lidded with a large stone and covered by a small cairn. These cairns vary greatly in size but are sometimes almost

unnoticeable and are frequently confused with the field clearance cairns with which they are associated. Unlike the Neolithic burials,

these sometimes contain grave-goods and one, at Chealamy on Strathnaver, which was accidentally discovered by roadmen in the



Jet & Cannel Coal necklace (National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh)

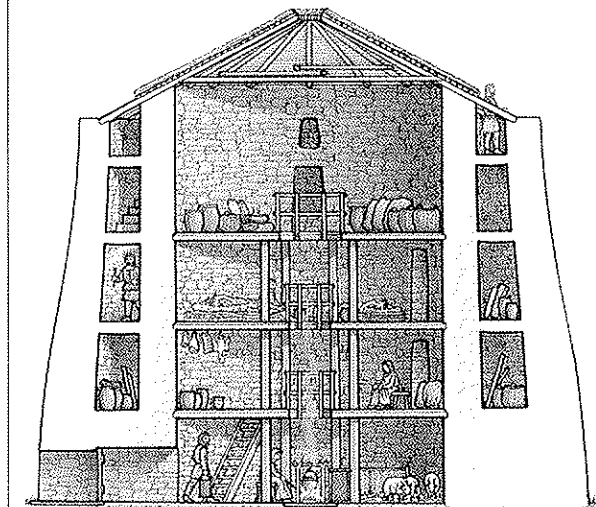
³ Bronze Age 4400 – 2500 Before Present

1970s, yielded a perfectly preserved earthenware beaker along with some skeletal remains. The beaker is now on display at Strathnaver Museum (16) and the cist has been reconstructed in the adjacent graveyard, near to the Museum door. Also, at Achcheargary, near to the site of what may have been a spectacular group of early Neolithic cairns, another Bronze Age artefact was recovered from a cist. Again, the discovery was made by roadmen, this time in 1938, and consisted of a jet and cannel coal necklace. This is currently in the National Museums of Scotland where it is being analysed, together with all other finds of jet from Britain, in a project to find out where this material, which could be worked into objects of such beauty by Bronze Age craftsmen, had been sourced from. The possibility is that it all came from Whitby in Yorkshire, confirming that a nationwide trade was going on, just as the shared interest in astronomical alignments, and the common funerary practices, suggest that, even in these remote times, a unified culture existed across what is now Britain.

The Iron Age

As far as the Iron Age is concerned, Strathnaver is dominated by the brochs, enigmatic towers built and occupied from around 100BC – 100A.D.. There are several of these along the route of the trail (1&11) and they are dealt with in some detail on the plaques. However, as to the Broch builders themselves, by this time we are emerging from pre-history to a time when, at least in some quarters, written records exist. The Roman Empire, already in control of mainland Europe, had reconnoitred Southern Britain in 55BC and had come back to conquer in 43A.D.. The Romans, a very well organised and literate people,

tell us that the then inhabitants of what we now know as Scotland were a Celtic people, the Caledonians. These were a warlike race, whose mode of social organisation was tribal and who fought repeatedly among themselves. In spite of the reputation for division given them by the imperial power, the Caledonians were able, in 83A.D., to put 30,000 fighting men in the field against 20,000 Legionnaires led by the great Roman general, Agricola. These huge armies confronted one another at Mons Graupius, the location of which is uncertain, (though usually claimed to have been near Bennachie in Aberdeen-shire) but which may have been in



Broch illustration (Mike Taylor)

the Highlands, perhaps near Inverness. When it came to a pitched battle against the seasoned and highly disciplined troops of Rome, the home side was, unsurprisingly, roundly defeated. However, the Romans never again made a serious attempt to subdue what is now Scotland and, apart from occasional punitive expeditions beyond their defensive walls against a people they now called Picts, were content to leave the Celtic people of the North alone.

Whether Calgacus, the Caledonian leader, levied troops from Strathnaver to die against the Roman shield-wall we shall never know but a people with the energy and the pride to erect so many of these elegant towers, and who, according to modern archaeology, were so concerned with their prestige, would surely have jumped at the chance of a death or glory battle against the might of Rome. (1&11)

As to the life style of the Caledonians, later to be designated Picts. The Romans also inform us that they were lovers of song, lovers of oratory and that they lived a pastoral life in a cattle-based society. We know from their surviving symbol stones (though no early ones are from Strathnaver) that they were proficient craftsmen and

lovers of both abstract and representational art. If all this is so then many of the more desirable elements of Highland life, as experienced, much later, in the 'heroic' age of the clans, were in place two millennia ago. But, much was to happen in between.

The collapse of the Roman Empire – they abandoned their British outposts in 410A.D. – created a power vacuum, which others struggled to fill in succeeding centuries. Among the losers, somehow, were the Picts, who eventually vanish with barely a trace other than the 'pit' or 'pett' element in placenames, of which there are a handful in Sutherland but none in Strathnaver. In addition, it has to be said, they left a legacy of elegantly carved stones throughout much of

Scotland and, at Strathnaver Museum in Clachan, Bettyhill is one such Pictish sculpture of considerable standing. This is the famous Farr Stone, (16) a Christianised Pictish monument bearing all the hallmarks of their artistry, but none of their pre-Christian symbols. It dates from a crossroads in time when the North was being evangelised by Celtic missionaries, Gaelic speaking holy men of the Columban Church. Almost simultaneously, what had been Pictland was being invaded linguistically, and, perhaps, actually, by Scots from Ireland whose language was, of course, Gaelic and who would eventually give their name to the nation.



Red Priest's Stone (MP)

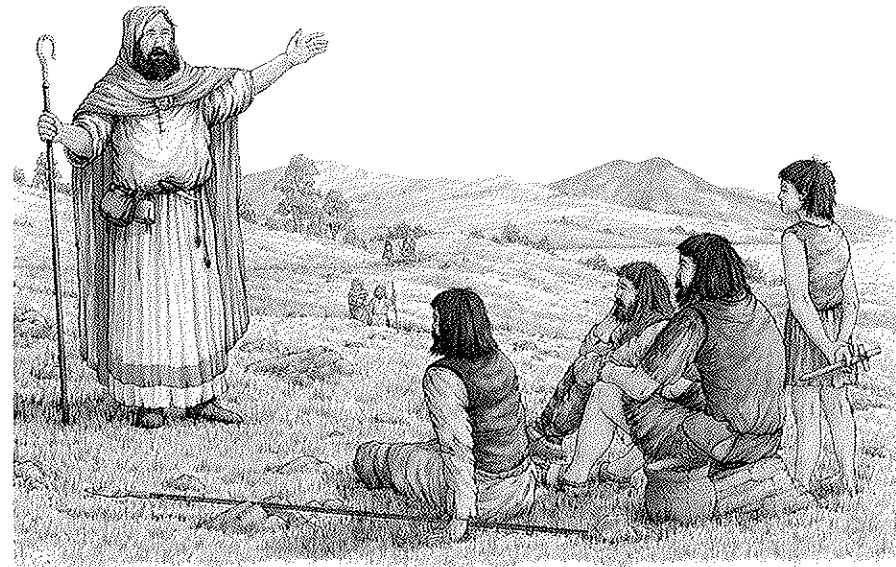
■ The Columban Church

There is no record of these events in Strathnaver, other than the story of Maol Ruadh, (the red-haired tonsured one), known locally as the Red Priest, who is said to have lived and preached here prior to his slaughter by a Viking warrior (9). (The same Maol Ruadh, or perhaps another with the same name, left his mark at various locations in the Highlands, notably Applecross in Wester Ross.) His 'cell', known locally as 'the temple' is all that remains of the chamber of an Neolithic tomb which, unlike most others on the Strath, has

been denuded of its covering cairn. Having suffered his fate at the 'door' of his cell, the Red Priest is said to have been buried about half a mile away at the site of a pre-Reformation graveyard and chapel, his last resting place being marked by a sandstone block with a cross deeply incised on it. (9) Curiously, this block bears a striking resemblance to illustrations of the cross-slabs from the Chapel of St. Duffus (reckoned to be a corruption of St. Duthac) in Tain, which was burnt by Thomas MacNeil, one of the three sons of Neil Mackay of Strathnaver, when in pursuit of a Mowatt of Freswick, whom he also killed there. Although this took



Farr Stone (Mike Taylor)



St. Maol Ruadh (Mike Taylor)

place around 1429, a pretty lawless time, Thomas was thought to have overstepped the mark and, having been betrayed by his two brothers, was taken to Inverness and executed. Maybe, though, the St. Duffus stone somehow found its way to the Strath as booty after this raid and, consequently, may post-date Maol Ruadh by hundreds of years.

Having said that, there is powerful place-name evidence from Skerry, just along the coast from the Naver river-mouth, that Columban clerics were indeed in action in the area from early times. The small island that shelters Skerry's harbour has two names - *Eilean Neave*, which has been interpreted as Island of the Saints or Island of the Church land, and *Coomb Island*, which is said to mean the island of St. Columba. A field on the Skerry side, just across the narrow sound, is known as *Iomair Chalaim-cille* - the rig or portion of St. Columba - and, just by the harbour, there is a hill known as *Cnoc a Phobuill* - the people's knoll - where the locals are said to have assembled to hear the words of the Columban cleric, Cormaic, ringing out across the water. At nearby Strathgongie is *Loch Cormaic*, where a devotee of the cleric is said to have been pursued by the heathen locals. About

to be killed, he cried out to his leader for help - but to no avail. However, the loch bears the name of his mentor to this day. Much of the foregoing may just be stories but there is no doubt that Irish evangelists travelled throughout the North and had settled, for example, as far afield as the Faroes and Iceland before the next move in the history game - the sudden outpouring of the heathen Vikings from Scandinavia. Whether the Red Priest, Cormaic, or his follower ever existed we will never know but people like them unquestionably brought the Christian religion here not long after St. Columba's move from Ireland to Iona in 563A.D..

■ The Norsemen

By the time the monastery of Lindisfarne had been sacked by the Danes in 793A.D., other Vikings, from Norway, were already moving into Shetland and Orkney. Having secured these islands, they moved on to the Hebrides, Ireland and the Isle of Man, as well as adding Caithness, Sutherland and what they called the 'Dales of Caithness' to their expanding territories. By Caithness they meant more or less the county as we know it today, the 'Dales' were the valleys west of Caithness - later to become the Province

of Strathnaver - and Sutherland was, just as its name suggests, the area south of Caithness and the Dales, which was to remain under that title until it expanded to include the so called *Province of Strathnaver* in much more recent times.

Historians agree that the valley of Strathnaver, then, was firmly within the grip of the Norsemen for several hundred years. However, although Castle Borge at Farr, and Castle Varrich at Tongue, are both sometimes attributed to the Norse invaders, there are no authenticated archaeological remains from this period in Strathnaver itself and only very scanty ones, including the recently discovered Viking burial at Durness, from the rest of our wider area. Proof of the Norse incursion must be sought by other means and, while the sagas are, unfortunately, almost silent on the Dales of Caithness, placenames in the 'Dales' speak volumes about the area's past inhabitants. From Durness to Halladale - both derived from Old Norse - names of Nordic origin dot the coast and, where good quality land is available, such names penetrate far inland. This is certainly true of Strathnaver where Mudale, Rosal (5), Rimsdale, Langdale, Skail (9) and Skelpick all testify to the long-term

presence of a forgotten language.

Further evidence is to be found at Dalharrold (7) where, in either 1196 or 1198, Harrold Maddadson, Norse Earl of Orkney, was defeated in battle by Reginald of the Isles, also known as Rognvald Gudrodson. Reginald/Rognvald, another Norseman, but from the Isle of Man, who had been recruited by William the Lion, King of Scotland, to attempt to assert his authority in the far North.

In spite of the centuries of Norse incursion, the fact remains that more than 90% of Strathnaver placenames are Gaelic in origin and there is no doubt whatsoever that the

dominant culture of the last seven or eight centuries has been that of Gaelic speaking Scotland. It is to this period that we turn next.

■ The Ascendancy of the Mackays

Mackay chroniclers claim that the valley of Strathnaver came under the control of their ancestors following William the Lion's campaign in the North, of which the Battle of Dalharrold (7) was a part. On his withdrawal from the area, Reginald, William's mercenary general, is said to have appointed one Alexander (Mackay), chief of the Galloway contingent in his army, to rule over the Province of Strathnaver on

behalf of the King and that this worthy character, 'soon expelled the Norsemen'. Whether this is completely true is open to question as Harrold Maddadson, and his successors, remained a powerful force in Orkney and Caithness for many years thereafter. However, the name Strathnaver begins to appear in written records by 1269, which suggests that Gaelic speaking people were in full charge by that time.

The true origin of the Mackays remain obscure, though the clan is strongly identified with the area known as Moray (once extending from Nairn to Buchan), and with the vanished clan of 'Morgan' possibly meaning the 'men of



Dalharrold Battlefield (Mike Taylor)

Moray'. Clan genealogies trace the origins of their chiefs back to around 1085 in the person of Aed, Earl of Moray, whose wife, Lulach, was a cousin of the rather undeservedly infamous Macbeth. The first actual Chief of Mackay, however, was said to be Iye MacEth, born around 1210 and a grandson of the Earl of Ross while, where written records are concerned, we have to wait until 1415, when the seventh chief, Angus Mackay of Strathnaver 'unequivocally'

makes his appearance in the literature.

From then on the deeds of the Mackays, under different chieftains, are increasingly well recorded and, by the time that Donald, the fifteenth Chief, was ennobled, on the 20th June 1628, with the title, Lord Reay, he was firmly part, though an exotic one, of the British aristocratic establishment. As to the extent of their territory - at its greatest, the Province of Strathnaver, from 1628 known

as 'the Reay Country', consisted of Eddrachillis, Durness; West Moine and Kintail; (roughly equivalent to the present day parish of Tongue), and Strathnaver, Strathy and Bighouse; (equivalent to the present day parish of Farr plus part of the Parish of Reay.)

Though members of the Clan Mackay lived throughout this area, the whole was not necessarily owned by their chief and, even when it was, there were often

arrangements whereby different parts were owned, or leased, by different branches of the Mackay aristocracy including the Mackays of Strathnaver, the Mackays of Bighouse and the Mackays of Strathy. The issue of ownership is further complicated by the progressive takeover of the Mackay lands by the Earls of Sutherland. This took place in piecemeal fashion from as early as 1642, when the family name of the Sutherland Earls was Gordon, and culminated in 1829 when Eric, the 7th Lord Reay, sold the remnants of the Mackay estates to the Marquis of Stafford for £300,000, an act which earned him little credit

from clan historians: *'Thus what the Mackays held through sunshine and storm through about twenty generations, was at last miserably frittered away by a degenerate son, who accidentally got the power to do so.'*

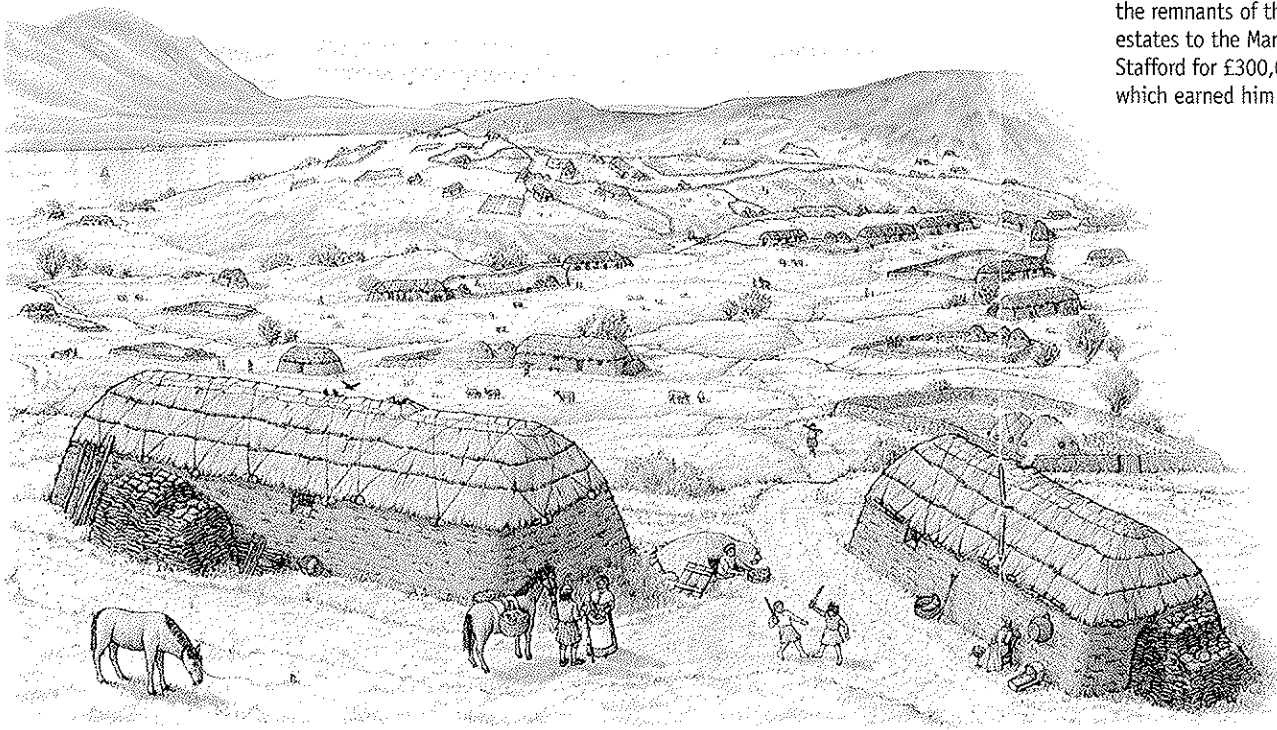
Though the landowning aristocracy often got into debt and, like the 7th Lord, verged on bankruptcy, they enjoyed substantial incomes and, by the standards of their time, were extremely rich. This enabled them to pursue a lifestyle which their tenant clansmen could barely dream about and which induced them to take part in national and, even, international affairs to what was sometimes an unwise degree. We will consider something of that later but meantime, what of the lot of the common man in the age of the kinship clan?

The word 'clan' means children and implies that the clansmen were the children of the chief. This blood relationship was, for the most part, more notional than real where the peasantry were concerned and their contact with the top man was fairly limited. Nevertheless, they attached great importance to lineage and undoubtedly felt a profound attachment both to their leader and to what they thought of as a territory held in common - the clan

lands. In practice, the clan lands were let out to gentry known as tacksmen, often actual relatives of the chief, who then sub-let these tacks (areas of land) to the ordinary members of the clan. In exchange for use of the land, the peasantry contributed a proportion of their produce, through their tacksmen, to the chief and, in time of war or threat, were also required to be available for military service.

(The threat may not just have come from men if Timothy Pont, the amazingly energetic late 16th Century cartographer's comments on Strathnaver are to be believed: *'The violence and numbers of most rapacious wolves which here, prowling about wooded and pathless tracts, cause great loss of beasts and sometimes of men, are such that, driven from almost all the rest of the island, they seem to have fixed their lairs and homes here. Assuredly they are nowhere so plentiful!'*)

In the early days of the clan system the greatest threat came from other clans, and the clansman was often required to defend his own lands or to raid those of others. As time went on, and the Highland chieftains became more and more integrated into the politics of the nation, this military service took the Highland



Grummore (Mike Taylor)

peasant soldier, including those from Strathnaver (10) further and further from home as participants in civil, religious and imperial wars in Britain, the Continent and worldwide.

For the most part, though, life was nothing like as exciting as that. The people lived in settlements of varying size like Rosal (5), Grumbeg (2) and Grummore (1) and worked fairly intractable land in an age old cycle of agricultural activity. Oats and *bere*, a coarse form of barley, were the principal crop and, while sheep and goats were kept in small numbers, cattle dominated the livestock to an extraordinary degree, although there were times when horses were reared and sold from Strathnaver, principally to the *'men of Orkney'*. Each village was enclosed by a dyke of stone and turf, within which was all its arable land while, beyond this, was access to grazing and peat cutting rights on the open hill. A form of transhumance was practiced, where *shielings*, or summer farm areas, similar to the *saeters* of Norway, were used to accommodate livestock during the warmer months, while the inbye ground was being used for the cultivation of crops, including all important winter fodder for the cattle. The young people,

men and women, went to the shielings in the summer while the older people remained in the villages, tilling the fields and maintaining the houses – an ongoing cycle of labour as both walls and thatch had to be periodically renewed so that buildings would remain relatively wind and waterproof.

This was fundamentally a subsistence economy with the main aim being to produce sufficient food to get by from one year to the next and little surplus being created to generate cash. What cash did come into the area was usually derived from the sale of cattle and, as time went on, this became more and more important as the chieftains, increasingly seeing themselves as landowners rather than custodians of the clan lands, began to demand a money rent instead of the payments in kind which had previously been their due. Cattle were gathered from throughout the Highlands by men known as drovers, some of whom were tacksmen, some of whom worked for the chiefs and some of whom were even entrepreneurial cottars. This trade culminated in great *'trysts'* at places like Crieff and Falkirk where thousands of animals changed hands before being driven on again to the markets of the Lowlands and, sometimes, as far afield as England. The

money that changed hands there then found its way, in the pockets of the drover, back to the original owners of the cattle in their distant corners, reduced somewhat by the drovers' expenses on their long trek. The people of Strathnaver were deeply involved in this trade, both as providers of cattle and as drovers, including one Angus Mackay from Syre, who went bankrupt in 1807, owing money to tacksmen and tenant alike.

As early as 1631, it is clear that Donald, Chief of Mackay, the first Lord Reay, was well integrated into the aristocracy of the nation. When he appeared before the Court of Chivalry in the Palace of Westminster on the 28th November that year, he was not clothed in the rough apparel which would have characterised his clansmen. No, Mackay sported a fashionable, silver-buttoned doublet hung with loops of silver and black silk. Round his waist was an embroidered silver sword-belt and, from his neck, hung a jewel on a 'tawny ribbon'. Such accoutrements did not come cheaply. Nor did the military lifestyle to which this first Lord aspired. In the years leading up to his appearance in London, he had been deeply involved in the recruitment of soldiers, including many from

Strathnaver, to serve in Europe on the Protestant side in what became the Thirty Years War. His method was to offer to 'adventurous men of good family' a commission in his regiment provided that they produced a certain number of recruits. This worked admirably, in Strathnaver and elsewhere, and the 'warlike and ambitions' Donald was able to dispatch 3600 men to serve under Gustavus Adolphus – the 'Lion of the North' – in Germany. By the time they had participated in now forgotten battles on the Elbe and at the Pass of Oldenburg, the *'bonny men'* had been reduced to 800 able-bodied and 150 maimed. This high rate of attrition necessitated Lord Reay's return to his homeland in search of further recruits – a more difficult task second time round. Though he had been wounded by an exploding gunpowder barrel at Oldenburg, Donald was 'comely, firm and very portlike' when he made his appearance at the Court of Chivalry. Unfortunately for him and his Mackay legacy, he was never fully recompensed by the King for his expenditure in recruitment for the Continent, which increased his need to raise money from his estates and led eventually to the sale of large areas of land outwith his clan.

Nor was adventuring in foreign lands the only way for a Highland chieftain/landlord to run up a large bill. Such people were expected to follow a lavish life-style including, as recorded by Rob Donn, the great poet of the wider Strathnaver, the deerhunt:

*'I would be well pleased
To be in the heights of the
rugged hills
Where the tawny one could
be seen
Running lithely on the slope
And the deer hounds in full
chase
Jumping playfully at his
hair
On the edge of the ravine'*

*'S ann leamsa bu shocrach
Bhith an soc nam meall garbh,
Far am faicteadh 'm fear
buidhe
'S e 'na chaol-ruith le
bruthaich,
Agus miolchoin 'nan siubhal,
'S iad a' cluiche ra chalg,
Air faobhar a' chadha*

In 1760, Bishop Pococke records that the then Lord Reay held an annual deerhunt in which up to sixty animals were shot in a single day and, where the Kirtomy Burn crosses the A836, is a small gorge still called, in Gaelic, *'the Bitch's Leap'* after an event in a deerhunt with hounds long ago. This traditional demonstration of the chief's power was costly enough but, more so was the

cost of belonging to the ruling aristocracy of the British nation which might require the maintenance of a house in Edinburgh or London, sending one's children to be educated in Europe, and generally keeping up appearances in a dazzling social circle far from the ancestral lands.

The transfer from a subsistence economy to a money economy, the growing distance between the chiefs and their people, and growth of population during the 18th Century were among factors increasing pressure on the ordinary citizen of Strathnaver many years before the Clearances (1). This disenchantment, added to by periodic bad harvests and times of great shortage, (despite the cushioning effect of the new and prolific potato) led to widespread emigration from throughout the Highlands, including many people from our area. These people left of their own free will, often under the leadership of their tacksmen, and against the wishes of their landlord/chiefs and the Government which both saw emigration as ruining the recruitment potential of the Highlands for the armed forces. It was some time before this view changed.

■ The Sutherland Clearances

By the time that the Sutherland Clearances began in 1806, the lands along the Naver had been in the possession of the Earldom of Sutherland for around a century. Elizabeth, Countess of Sutherland, who had inherited the extensive Sutherland estates as an infant in 1766, had been thinking long and hard on how to 'improve' her northern lands and, when, in 1785, she married George Granville Leveson Gower, who later became Marquis of Stafford and 'a perfect leviathan of wealth', the financial means to do almost anything would soon be at her disposal.

Having grown up in Edinburgh and London, and as familiar with Paris as she was with Sutherland, the young Countess was the example *par excellence* of the new breed of chieftain/landlord whose interest was directed at maximizing opportunities rather than at maintaining the traditional way of life.

Europe, in her time, was in a state of ferment with war following war and only brief interludes of peace. Demand for wool and mutton was at an unprecedented high with episodes of strong upward pressure on prices and the opportunity for sheep farming

to make money on a grand scale. Enormous strides were being taken in the technology of farming, and this had already resulted in increased productivity on arable ground simultaneous with a release of former farm labour to the growing cities as what later became known as the Industrial and Agricultural Revolutions got under way. There was a tremendous desire for 'improvement' in all levels of society and the young, beautiful and energetic Countess felt impelled to be at the forefront of this. The scheme that she evolved, in company with her advisors, was grandiose in the extreme and involved social engineering on a massive scale. Put simply, it meant the clearance of thousands of people from the inland parts of the Sutherland Estate and their resettlement in coastal allotments where, in the view of the 'improvers', they would shed the 'slothful' habits they were accustomed to and become more useful citizens of the United Kingdom (5). They would also, of course, be better able to generate money rents and, therefore, be more profitable tenants of Sutherland Estates.

The events, which took place in Strathnaver, were by no means unique. Indeed, the transformation that occurred here was only a small part of

a huge pattern of events which repeated itself throughout the Highlands and Islands between 1790 and 1870, by which time just about all the ground that was suitable for sheep-farming had been placed under that form of land-use. Nevertheless, the Sutherland Clearances have become a by-word for the painful

process of agrarian transformation and have passed into literature and myth as the archetype of landlord cruelty and exploitation. There are a variety of reasons for this. One is the scale and speed with which the massive movement of people was carried out, contrasting somewhat with other

episodes, which, though equally traumatic, were smaller and more piecemeal. Another is the very high level of documentation in existence and which has been made available to historians. Most important of all for the acquisition of this unenviable reputation, however, were chance factors applying to

particular individuals involved in the affair, including, most notoriously, Patrick Sellar. (2,4&5)

Just as the Countess of Sutherland was the exemplification of an 'improving' landlord, so Sellar typified the entrepreneurial and innovatory spirit which characterised the interface



Gloomy Memories (Mike Taylor)

between eighteenth and nineteenth century Scotland. A man of extraordinary energy and considerable intellectual ability, he had already acquired a considerable reputation as a man of ideas and action by the time he arrived in Sutherland in 1809. For the British nation, the seventy-one years of Sellar's life, from 1780-1851, spanned the most rapid and comprehensive period of population growth and economic expansion ever experienced by any country. In that short span the nation's population tripled while income per head

doubled, an astonishing economic achievement, which offered tremendous opportunity to those ready to seize the moment.

Sellar was poised to do exactly that and, in his capacity as a factor on Sutherland Estate, set about the implementation of Estate policy with enthusiasm and vigour. The first phase of the Sutherland Clearances, involving the creation of the 'Great Sheep Tenement', stretching from Loch Naver south towards Lairg, had already taken place before Sellar's arrival. (5) He earned

his reputation in the second phase of the operation, a phase in which he had a direct personal interest as Patrick Sellar, instrument of Sutherland Estate, was also Patrick Sellar, future tenant of the huge, new farm. The area to be cleared of people included Rosal, now redolent with folk memory, and, crucially for Sellar, Badinloskin, where the events that led to his trial for culpable homicide took place. There, it was alleged, men acting on his orders had torn down and burned the house of Chisholm, a tinker, without regard for an aged woman,

Chisholm's mother-in-law, and that, as a result, the old woman had died. Various other lesser charges were also brought. Sellar was tried and acquitted in Inverness where, in the early morning of Wednesday 24th April 1816, as the verdict was announced, he suddenly burst into tears. This display of emotion was entirely uncharacteristic of the man and illustrated, perhaps, that, while innocent of the murder, he may have entertained some thought of his own culpability. Whatever mind when he broke down in court, he soon regained his composure and returned to the task of modernising Sutherland Estates. However, although he was initially allowed to resume his work as factor, his reputation with his employers had been seriously damaged and, though the Countess was prepared to retain him as a tenant, he was, in effect, dismissed from her employ within the year.

Sellar's removal from the direct employment of the estate did not end his association with Strathnaver. The third great clearance, in 1819-21, while carried out under new management, was every bit as controversial as the earlier ones had been and added greatly to Sellar's possessions in the Strath as he was then allowed to add the farm of Langdale to his

already enormous tenancy (13). Eventually, he held all the ground from Dunviden to Truderscaig (8) on the East bank of the river and from Grummor to the sea on the West bank (1). The only settlement to remain uncleared was Invernaver, whose inhabitants were required to man the lucrative salmon fisheries of the Naver and Borgie river mouths (14).

The previous population of Sellar's farm, more than two thousand people, was replaced by nineteen shepherds from the Scottish Borders, eleven married men and eight single, who worked the nine herdings on behalf of their master on the nineteenth century equivalent of a workers' incentive scheme which enabled them to earn double what they would have been paid in their native region. Their master himself took an active personal interest in all aspects of the running of the farm and his efficiency as a farming entrepreneur, both here and at Morvich and Culmailly on the East Coast of Sutherland, eventually made him a rich man. He was able to set his nine children up to become pillars of Victorian society and, in 1838, to purchase an estate of his own at Morvern in Argyll. There, he resumed the process of 'improvement', which he had begun in Strathnaver almost

thirty years previously, with the eviction of forty-four families from his new property.

Throughout his life, Patrick Sellar was convinced of the rectitude of his own actions. He was combative in his dealings with others, whatever their station was in relation to his, and often sharp and sarcastic in his mode of speech. He was a stickler for detail in the smallest thing and never forgot any slight, insult or disagreement, however trivial. He sprang to the pen in his own defense at the slightest provocation and this extreme prickliness prolonged and exacerbated all the many conflicts of his long and public life. In talking of the Gaelic language, he referred to it as 'barbarous jargon', while Highlanders themselves were often, 'banditti'. Sub-tenants on his farms, or, later, on his estates, could expect no mercy if they stepped outside the narrow confines of the rules but would be subjected to the full force of his wrath and to being, 'set down for prosecution and removal'. Ironically, he was descended from a poor farmer who had himself been evicted from a tenancy in Banffshire, and Sellar attributed the subsequent success of his own forbears to being 'driven out of thrift' by this event. In his view, therefore, he was



The Street, Dalcharr, Invernaver (MP)

The Bettyhill Salmon Net Fishing Station (MP)



merely extending similar opportunity to the poor people of Strathnaver and, later, Argyllshire. Little wonder though, that such a man attracted opprobrium. It was not enough to be the most effective sheep farmer in Britain, possibly even in the whole of Europe, as farmers as far away as Poland consulted Sellar about his farming methods. His character, and method of dealing with people detracted from any of his achievements to such a degree that no defense could rescue his reputation and, to this day, his memory is vilified far beyond Strathnaver.

Another major contributor to the lasting infamy of the Sutherland Clearances was the stonemason, Donald Macleod, who gave up his artisan's tools and took up the pen in defense of the cause of the Highland peasantry, in Strathnaver and beyond. Macleod, who was born at Rosal in the mid-1790s, was cleared to Airdneiskich in Bettyhill when his community was displaced on the 13th June 1814. Macleod was eventually expelled from Sutherland Estate in 1830 and, from then until his death at Woodstock, Ontario in 1857, mounted a vitriolic campaign against the 'improvement' policy

throughout the Highlands, initially in letters to the Press on both sides of the Atlantic, and finally in book form as *Gloomy Memories*. The contribution this publication made to the anti-landlord ferment – known as 'The Crofters' War' – which led to the Napier Commission and the subsequent Crofter Holdings (Scotland) Act of 1886 should not be underestimated. The passage of this act, against the strident protests of the landowning classes, guaranteed security of tenure for smallholders in the Crofting Counties and gave them effective immunity against rack-renting and eviction. By then Macleod

was long dead but is still remembered, with some justification, as a heroic polemicist for the crofters' cause (3).

Sellar and Macleod were not the only contributors to the extraordinary fame of the Strathnaver Clearances. Donald Sage, missionary at Achness, kept a diary of events. This was first published, as *Memorabilia Domestica*, in 1889, fifty years after his death and, although only a small part of the 300 page book refers to the Clearances episode, that part is so graphic and so disturbing that it is easy to see why his descendants should have been reticent in publishing such controversial memoirs. Hugh Miller, stonemason, geologist, pamphleteer and editor of *The Witness*, the newspaper of the nascent Free Church of Scotland, wrote vehemently and at length on the subject. Not all of the literature was on the side of the peasantry. Harriet Beecher Stowe, celebrated author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, made her contribution in *Sunny Memories – In (England) A Foreign Land*, which extolled the virtues of the improvements while giving Donald Macleod an appropriately contrasting title for his collected works. James Loch, M.P., Commissioner of Sutherland Estates, produced

a handsome little volume setting out the aims of estate policy, and even Patrick Sellar published his *Farm Reports*. The Clearances of Strathnaver even came to the attention of no less a personage than Karl Marx, who included a passage on these events in one of his voluminous treatises and, as might be expected, weighed in against the ruling classes.

Further to these 'hot' accounts, written at or near the time of the events themselves, have been a large number of fictionalised versions of the Clearance story, many set in Strathnaver. These include *And The Cock Crew* by Fionn MacColla, *Consider the Lilies* by Ian Crichton Smith and *Butcher's Broom* by Neil M. Gunn. Each of these makes use of real characters and events, either directly named or thinly disguised, and, being fictional, both add to and detract from historical fact. They contribute to the tendency of the whole episode to slip from history into myth and, while influencing opinion on the subject, do not necessarily do so from an objective stance.

Objectivity is difficult to attain on such a topic and, since the events themselves, historians have disagreed, sometimes vehemently, on all aspects of the story. However, the release of the papers of

Sutherland Estates, now in the National Library of Scotland, has opened up new fields for historical research and this has borne fruit over the last twenty years as scholarly interest in what was a neglected era of Scottish history has been reawakened. A list of some modern publications appears at the end of this booklet, should anyone wish to pursue the issue further.

The Post-Clearance Strath

By 1822 the whole inland area of Strathnaver was divided into huge sheep-farms, principally Skelpick Farm, let to Paterson of Sandside in Caithness, and Patrick Sellar's giant farm, already described, spanning both sides of the river.

The previous population of this huge area was now confined to the small coastal allotments, which had been set out by Estate surveyors prior to the evictions. With the passing of the Crofting Acts in 1886, this coastal landscape was fossilised in time and the present croft boundaries in, for example, Bettyhill, Farr, Kirtomy and, indeed, the whole North Coast, remain exactly as laid out in Countess Elizabeth's great plan. Some, in the most inaccessible of places, such as

Polourascaig, have been abandoned, but most remain as agricultural entities in one form or another.

The coastal allotments, ranging in size from two to three acres, were never intended to be sufficient to fully support a family but were meant to 'pinch'. The theory behind this was that the people, who had previously enjoyed, in the opinion of their landlord, a life of indolence, would be shaken out of their lethargy and would be forced to engage in 'manufactures' or in other productive activities, such as fishing. For 'manufactures' there were virtually no opportunities and fishing was greatly hampered by the absence of suitable harbours along the whole length of the coast. Nevertheless, the people fished of necessity, mainly for lobsters and herring for sale, while white fishing was pursued largely for home consumption. All fisheries were restricted by the absence of curers as, with much greater opportunities on the East and West coasts, few were attracted to the slim pickings of the North's hazardous littoral.

Writing in 1843, the Rev. David Mackenzie, minister of the Parish of Farr for the previous twenty-eight years, commented: *'I remember very well the change which took*

place in removing the small tenants from the interior to the sea-shore. In my opinion the people have been decidedly losers by the change. They cannot command the same amount of the comforts of life as they did formerly. Their condition has deteriorated both in food and clothing. They used to keep many cattle and had an excellent supply of milk and butcher-meat. They likewise manufactured their own clothing, and were far better supplied with bedding and clothing than they are now. These are facts to my certain knowledge. I am certain that the food and clothing of the small tenants is more scanty than formerly.'

In these circumstances it would not be surprising if emigration should occur and you might even expect the population to drop. However, the number of people here actually increased for much of the nineteenth century and it was only in the twentieth century that the true 'clearance' in the sense of a dramatic population drop, took place. The reason for this apparent anomaly is quite simple. People were pouring out of the Highlands throughout this time but population growth more than kept pace with their disappearance. The introduction of vaccination for smallpox, after a terrible outbreak of this dreaded

illness in 1815, cut mortality significantly, and the removal to the coast did have one advantage in improved accommodation for the common people. While the initial resettlement plan allowed the removed people to build in the traditional manner, with stone and turf, on their new allotments, the Estate required them, after a time, to build houses to a new, more modern plan. The incentive was that the Estate subsidised the roofing materials and, in exchange, laid down the exact specification of the house to be built. Thus, throughout the area, you can see these 'tenantry cottages', now sometimes ruinous but often converted to byres or sheds. Each is thirty six feet long by sixteen feet wide and, in its heyday, sported two rooms, each twelve feet by eleven foot six, plus a closet seven feet wide by seven foot six deep. Above this was a substantial loft, and each of the three rooms had a proper window with glass panes. There was no byre directly connected to the house and smoke vented from an open fire in each end through a chimney and not, as in days of yore, from a central hearth through a hole in the roof. Such houses were drier, warmer and cleaner than their predecessors and their occupants, though hungrier, must have been healthier as

they survived to adulthood in increasing numbers.

But the population pressed against the coastline was not a happy one. As the century crept by they, like their contemporaries elsewhere in the Highlands, became increasingly politicised. This was reflected in great events such as the Disruption of the Church of Scotland where whole congregations deserted the Established Church in favour of the Free Church of Scotland, formed in protest against the landowner's right of patronage. So strongly did feelings run that, in 1884, almost two thousand people took part in a 'commemorative march' into Strathnaver, carrying banners bearing such motifs as, 'Farr demands the Highlands for the Highlanders, and a vote for our Householders' or, in Gaelic this time, 'Restore us to the lands of our ancestors'. Among one thousand four hundred members of the Strathnaver Crofters' Association who took part was an eighty-six year old woman from Armadale, by what would now be regarded as the curious name of Grizzel Claggan, who had been evicted from her home in Langdale three-quarters of a century before.

Pressure of this kind in various parts of the Highlands and Islands, including the election of crofter M.P.s to

Parliament, contributed to the passing of the pro-crofter legislation referred to earlier and also to moves to restore some of the cleared land to the people.

In 1897 the apparatus to do just that was set up by the Government when the Congested Districts Board was established. One of its first actions was to purchase the northern portion of Syre Farm in Strathnaver and offer it for sale to smallholders in twenty-nine lots (9). The smallest of these was priced at £288 18shillings while the most expensive, the only one to include a house, was expected to fetch £780 12shillings. As these sums were beyond the wildest dreams of those aspiring to such holdings, the proposal was to offer a fifty-year annuity at a rate varying from £10 14shillings to £28 18shillings and 3pence. Against what would then have been substantial sums to find annually would be offset a share of the shooting rent (hunting and fishing rights were not sold with the holdings) amounting to from £4 12shillings and 2pence to £12 3shillings and 9pence. In addition the purchasers were able to borrow up to £150 if taking one of the smaller holdings or up to £300 if the holding was larger, these sums being for the erection of dwelling houses, barns, fences, drainage and all the

other accoutrements of crofting. Part of the plan was that the outrun of these holdings should be held in common as a Sheep Stock Club, with 1200 ewes, to be managed by a committee of five appointed every three years by the new owners from within their number. Between 1900 and 1904 most holdings were taken up but the resettlement was not an immediate success as the settlers found the annuities too burdensome and were also complaining about erosion of their fields by the river and depredation of their crops by deer. They petitioned the Congested Districts Board to become rent paying tenants under the Crofters Holdings Acts and this wish was eventually granted. Later, when Skelpick Farm, on the East bank of the Naver, was split into smallholdings in 1914, it was done on the basis of annual rental rather than purchase. Also, part of the outrun of Skelpick Farm was set aside to extend the meagre common grazings of thirty-three crofters in Bettyhill, thus alleviating a problem that had rankled with their forefathers since they were cleared to the coast almost a century before.

These were exciting times in Strathnaver when it seemed that the powerful wishes voiced in the great march into the Strath in 1884 were being satisfied and that a

bright future beckoned for the descendants of the dispossessed. This might have been so from a nineteenth century perspective but people's expectations from life changed rapidly during the twentieth century and, as time has gone on, fewer and fewer have aspired to a croft in the hills as offering a desirable lifestyle. Education, electricity, piped water, radio,

television, better roads and communications have all become available to the dwellers on the periphery, including those on the Strath, but none of these things have been enough to retain the native population in the place of their birth. The population of the parishes of Tongue and Farr, of which the area covered by the Strathnaver Trail is a part, is now, in 2001, less than forty percent of what it was in 1901. This is a startling reduction, particularly when the population of the nation has increased markedly in the same period, and the reduction here would be even greater were it not for the influx of settlers from other parts of Britain.

Nevertheless, Mackay is still the dominant surname in the

area and a glance at the war memorials at Syre or Bettyhill illustrates that the citizens of Strathnaver have, in the twentieth century, been as willing to serve their nation as were their wartime ancestors of old. Like the Caledonians described by the Romans, the love of music is retained and, while few are conversant with the Gaelic tongue, the ancient culture of the area remains a force to be reckoned with. Your journey along the Strathnaver Trail will take you back, somewhat sketchily, through the uncertainties of the past. The future is equally uncertain but at least part of that future will be the exploitation of Strathnaver's rich natural and cultural heritage whose surface has, so far, only been scratched by the Trail.

Further Reading

The following booklist will expand your knowledge of Strathnaver and similar areas:

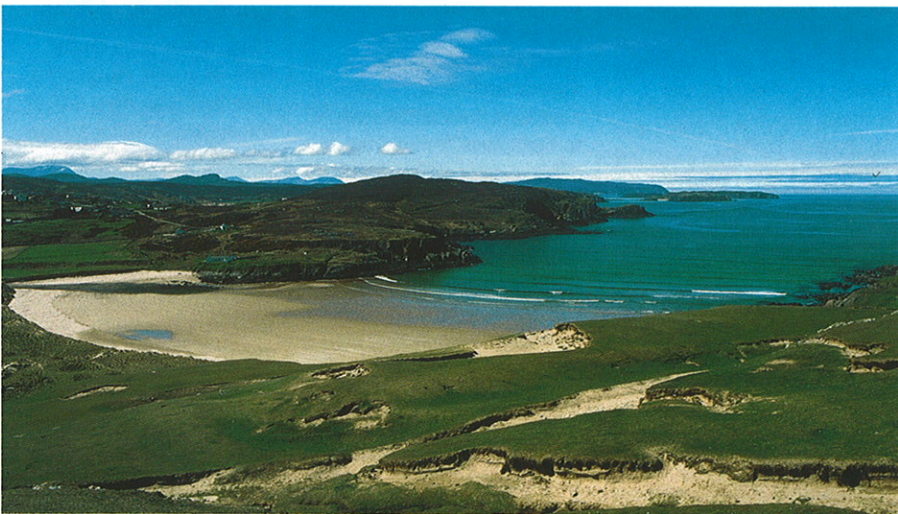
- Adam, R.J.
 Angus, Stewart
 Baldwin, John R.
 Bumstead, J.M.
 Craig, David
 Grimbale, Ian
 Grimbale, Ian
 Grimbale, Ian
 Gunn and Mackay
 Gunn, Neil M.
 Gunn, Neil M.
 Henderson, John
- Kemp, DW. (Ed)
- Kenworth, J.B. (Ed.)
 Loch, James
- MacColla, Fionn
 Mackay, Angus
 Macleod, Donald
 Omand, Donald
 Prebble, John
 Richards, Eric
 Richards, Eric
 Richards, Eric
 Richards, Eric
 Roberts, John L.
 Sage, Donald
 Smith, Iain Crichton
 Smith, John S.
 Temperley, Alan
 Various authors
- Sutherland Estate Papers** (Edinburgh, 1972)
Sutherland Birds (Golspie, 1983)
The Province of Strathnaver (Edinburgh, 2000)
The People's Clearance (Edinburgh, 1982)
On the Crofters' Trail (London, 1990)
The Trial of Patrick Sellar (London, 1962)
Chief of Mackay (London, 1965)
The World of Rob Donn (Edinburgh, 1979)
Sutherland and the Reay Country (Glasgow, 1897)
Butcher's Broom (Edinburgh, 1934)
Sun Circle (Edinburgh, 1933)
General View of the Agriculture of the County of Sutherland (London, 1812)
Tours in Scotland 1747, 1750, 1760 by Richard Pococke (Reprint by Scottish History Society Edinburgh 1887)
John Anthony's Flora of Sutherland (Aberdeen 1976)
Account of the Improvements on the Estates of the Marquess of Stafford (London, 1820)
And the Cock Crew (Glasgow, 1945)
The Book of Mackay (Edinburgh, 1904)
Gloomy Memories (Toronto, 1857)
The Sutherland Book (Golspie, 1982)
The Highland Clearances (London, 1963)
The Leviathan of Wealth (London and Toronto, 1973)
A History of the Highland Clearances: Volume 1 (London, 1982)
A History of the Highland Clearances: Volume 2 (London, 1984)
Patrick Sellar and the Highland Clearances (Edinburgh, 1999)
The Highland Geology Trail (Strath-tongue, 1990)
Memorabilia Domestica (Wick, 1889) 1975 edition
Consider the Lilies (London, 1968)
The County of Sutherland (Edinburgh, 1988)
Tales of the North Coast (Edinburgh, 1977)
North Sutherland Studies (1987) - Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group

Jim A. Johnston, author of this guide and researcher for the Strathnaver Trail Project, is the head teacher at Farr High School, Bettyhill.

Bettyhill War Memorial (15)



View west from Farr Bay to Bettyhill (PT)



Strathnaver Trail: Notes on Sites

For all sites on the Trail, visitors are requested to observe the country code and kindly respect this working landscape. Please park in lay-bys and car parks provided – where there is no provision, park carefully, with due consideration for other road users. The roads in Strathnaver are very winding and mainly single track, with passing places. PLEASE DRIVE CAREFULLY and PLEASE TAKE ALL LITTER HOME.

1 Grummore Settlement

The foundation remains of 66 buildings, 24 enclosures and head dyke. Access – circular, hillside, route of 975m (2/3 ml) over rough grazing and board walkways. Walking boots recommended

2 Grumbeg Settlement

The foundation remains of 25 buildings and 11 enclosures.

Grumbeg Burial Ground. Remains of Neolithic Chambered Cairn.

Access – circular, route of 540m (1/3 ml) over rough grazing and board walkways. Walking boots recommended.

3 Gloomy Memories Memorial

Memorial to commemorate Donald Macleod, a native of Rosal, who published his account of the Highland Clearances in 1857. Short access over rough grazing. Walking boots recommended.

4 Syre & Syre Church

19th century corrugated iron church. Parking and further information on the church and Patrick Sellar's sheep farm.

Car parking and access to sites 1 – 4 has been arranged with the kind permission of The North Loch Naver Estate and The Syre Estate. The estates are involved in a number of businesses including the production of lamb from a flock of hill sheep, the production of timber, and the production of venison from red deer. The deer numbers also have to be controlled both for the benefit of the environment and to maintain a healthy population. NO DOGS can be allowed on common grazing areas and NO CAMPING PLEASE.

5 Rosal Settlement

The foundation remains of 39 buildings, 1 enclosure and ring dyke. Iron Age Souterrain, Cairns & Hut Circles. This site is interpreted by Forest Enterprise. Access route, along forestry track and over rough grazing, of 3.25km (2 mls) return from car park. Walking boots recommended.

6 Clach an Rìgh Stone Circle

Remains of a stone circle and low central cairn within a clearing in the forest. Access - 4km (2 1/2 mls) along forest track from car park

7 Dalharrold Battlefield

Location of the 12th century battle between the Norse Earls of Orkney and the Scots. Access - 4km (2 1/2 mls) along forest track from car park

8 Truderscaig Settlement

The remains of a settlement, which accommodated 18 families prior to the 19th century clearances. This site has been left uninterpreted. Access - 8.9km (5 1/2 mls) along forest track from car park.

Sites 6, 7 & 8 are accessible on foot, but this moderate route, with long stretches of track through dense plantation, is recommended for mountain bikes and other bicycles with wide tyres. The round trip to Truderscaig from the car park is 17.7km (11 mls). Car parking and access to sites 5, 6, 7 & 8 has been arranged with the kind permission of Forest Enterprise. NO CAMPING PLEASE.

9 Skail Chambered Cairn

990m (2/3ml) along road from lay-by, includes stile and 50m path over rough grazing.

Skail Chapel, Burial Ground Site & Red Priest's Stone

280m (306yds) from lay-by over stile and across rough grazing. Walking boots recommended.

Car parking and access to the Skail sites has been arranged with the kind permission of The Scottish Executive, Miss W.Mackay and Mr A.O'Brien. Visitors are requested to observe the country code and kindly respect this working landscape. Access may have to be restricted at certain times of year during crofting activities such as lambing. NO DOGS can be allowed in fields and NO CAMPING PLEASE.

10 93rd Sutherland Highlanders

Roadside memorial, commemorating the raising of the regiment in the early 19th century.

11 Achcoillenaborgie Broch

Tumbled remains of 28ft diameter broch set on a low knoll, with a curved ditch and bank on the north and west. Access - 150m (170yds) along grassy track and across rough grazing. Walking boots recommended.

12 Coille na Borgie Cairns

The remains of two long chambered cairns with rectilinear forecourts at either end, defined by short horns. Access - 160m (175yds) along compacted gravel track. Sensible shoes recommended.

13 Achanlochy

The foundation remains of 14 buildings and 3 enclosures. Access - 150m (330yds) up inclined track, with compacted gravel surface, through kissing gate or field gate, to circular route of 250m (550yds) over rough grazing. Walking boots recommended

Car parking and access to sites 11 – 13 has been arranged with the kind permission of The Skelpick Partnership and The Bettyhill Common Grazings Committee. Visitors are requested to observe the country code and kindly respect this working landscape. NO DOGS can be allowed on common grazing areas and NO CAMPING PLEASE.

14 Bettyhill Salmon Net Fishing Station

Storehouse, ice house and the remains of a dwelling house. The buildings belong to The River Naver Fisheries Board.

No public parking available at site 14 – please park safely and with due consideration for other road users. The information plinth has been erected with the kind permission of The Skelpick Partnership. NO DOGS can be allowed on common grazing areas and NO CAMPING PLEASE.

15 Bettyhill War Memorial

No public parking at access to site 15. Parking available nearby.

16 Strathnaver Museum & Farr Stone

The Parish Church of Farr, built in 1774, is now the home of The Strathnaver Museum. Within its grounds stands the 8th Century Christianised Pictish Stone.

Car parking and access to site 16 has been arranged with the kind permission of The Highland Council and The Strathnaver Museum Trustees.

AN A3 TRAIL MAP IS ALSO AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH, GAELIC, FRENCH, GERMAN AND ITALIAN.