

These Are Your People

Clan Robertson

By D. MacDonell MacDonald

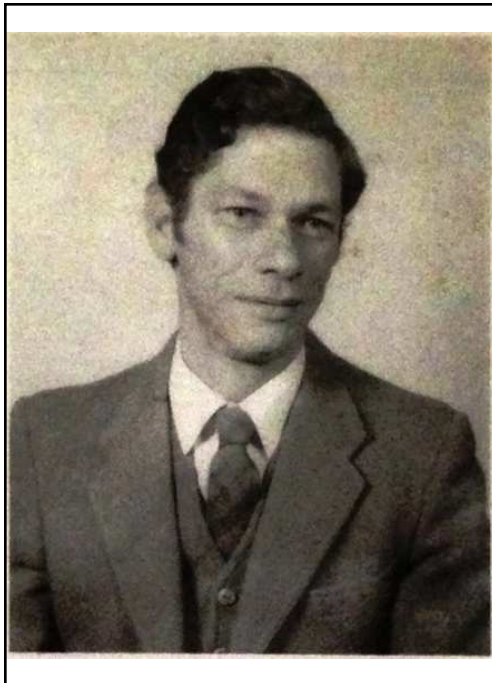
In the uplands of Atholl, by the chain of lochs along the great valley that runs eastward from the Moor of Rannoch and the dark waters of the Rivers Gaur, Errochty, Tummel, Garry, and Tay, Clan Donnachaidh carved their place in Scotland's history with claymore, dirk and broadsword.

Dunkeld is an appropriate starting point for a tour on the ancient territory of Clan Donnachaidh, for the Robertsons claim descent from Abbot Crinan "of the kin of St. Columba" who inherited the abbey lands of Dunkeld and Dull in Atholl. His son King Duncan, slain by MacBeth. His grandson was Malcom Canmore. It was to Dunkeld that the relics of St. Columba were carried after the first Viking raid on Iona.

The Clan was long in dispute with the church over lands at Dunkeld. The 4th Chief, Robert, Riabach the Grizzled, was mortally wounded in a fight with the nephew of the Bishop of Dunkeld. He tied his head in a white cloth and, a dying man, rode to Perth where he got from the King a new charter of his lands, then returned home in time to die. It was Robert Riabach who, with Stewart of Garth, captured the assassins of James I who was murdered at Blackfriars in Perth. That deed is marked by the chained savage and the hand upholding the crown in the Chief's armorial bearings. Under the 5th Chief, the Robertsons showered the arrows at Bishop Lauder of Dunkeld during Mass in the cathedral, an act which did little to further their claim to church lands.

A search for places associated with the Robertsons is a worthwhile reason to turn away from the fast-moving traffic of the new Perth-Inverness highway and savor the restored peace of the old cathedral city of Dunkeld and the tourist facilities at Pitlochry, both now by passed.

The tourist road climbs north out of Dunkeld. Where the Tay, far below, gleams silver through the trees, lies Inchmagranach, which was for time Robertson land. Guay is another clan name. Robertson of Guay was one of the Jacobite officers captured at at Preston in the 1715 rebellion. His estate was confiscated.



At Logierait, where the Tay turns away to the west, and the Tummel now keeps our road company, Robertson of Killiehangie, was in charge of the prisoners take at the battle of Prestonpans in 1745. The Duke of Atholl, who himself almost starved in prison, directed that they should receive ale every day, beef and mutton, two pecks of meal a week, and one penny a day "for drink or how they will". The prisoners were allowed to roam within one mile of their prison camp. This is marked contrast to the grim deeds of Cumberland's soldiers after Culloden, and the hellships on the Thames.

High above the raised beach which borders the east bank of the river the Robertson lands of Dulacben from which came the Collier family to win fame in the Low Countries. At Pitcastle there stands a the ruins of a 16th century house of the Robertson laird. At Tulliemet, in 1615, William, leader of the clan during a young chief's minority, was beheaded by the Earl of Athol. Across the river rises the crag of Killiehangie topped by an ancient fort.

On the fringe of Pitlochry, the new road sweeps left across the Tummel, above Loch Faskally, with the magnificent views unfolding. Here, after the 1745, Robertson of Faskally, a fugitive, was living at Aldour farm when the 'Redcoats' were sited. He managed to creep down the burn and, climbing a great oak tree in a field by the river, remained hidden until the soldiers left the district.

Robertson of Faskally was another notable chieftain, who in 1745, was sent to Perth with his men 'to take special care that no insult nor abuse be done or offered to the prisoners there'.

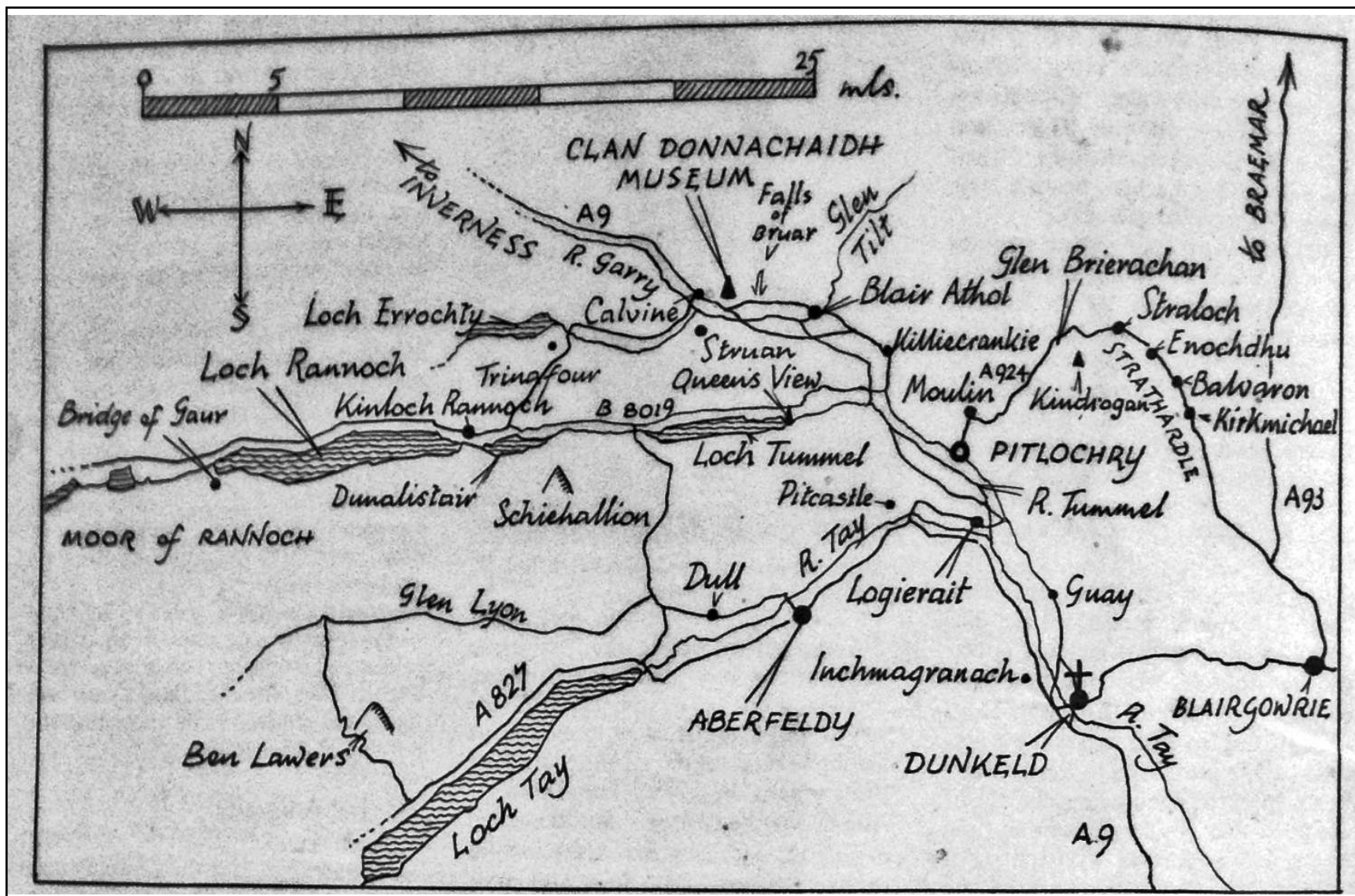
In the centre of Pitlochry is the road to Moulin and Strathardle, home of the Robertson of Straloch and Inverchroskie, the Barons Reid, whose progenitor got his name of Ruach or Reid from his red hair.

Moulin was a place of importance, guarded by many forts away back in Pictish times, and it is the meeting-place of many old roads.

Moulin church is believed to have been built on the site of an earlier religious settlement surrounded by a Pictish fort. In the churchyard are many old stones, some recording the passing of Robertsons.

Raid of Angus

From the high moorland, Schiehalion, Farragon and the Lawers range present a great sweep of peaks before the road descends to Glen Brierachan which was held by the Robertsons of Balnaguard. Dalnagarin - Filed of the Cairns - was the scene of the last fight in the Raid of Angus in 1389, when the Robertsons, led by four sons of their chief, with other allied clans under a son of the notorious Wolf of Badenoch, harried Glenisla and Glenesk. The men of the Angus glens caught up with the raiders near Blairgowrie but were repulsed with heavy losses and the Atholl men continued driving their spoil up Strathardle. Mounted, armoured knights of Angus, led by Sir David Lindsey, of Glenesk, overtook the Robertsons at the head of Glen Brierachan, but the clansmen struck back with such ferocity that they swept their pursuers from the field. The Raid of Angus, because of the value of the spoil taken and the number of casualties, became a kind of datum line in those troubled times. Struan and his two brothers were outlawed for their part in this raid.



The Barons Reid of Straloch, a branch of the Struan family, unlike the rest of the clan, were Whig Cameronians. They lived first at Balvaron on the river Ardle where a great block of granite stands. This is the Clach nan Barain, the Baron's Stone, and each heir was baptized from the basin hewn out of the great stone, a new one cut for each ceremony. The parents of the last baron, it is said, despised this rude font and used a silver bowl. The last Baron was General Reid, who composed that stirring march the "Garb of Old Gaul".

Robertsons of Straloch, once sheltered MacGregors who were pursued over the hills from Breadalbane by the Campbells who had with them their notorious 'black dogs', said to be raised on the milk of captured MacGregor women, and able to distinguish members of that clan anywhere. The Robertsons carried the fugitives on their backs up the steep face of Kindragan Rock and hid them in a cave. One man plied the Campbells with drink that night, covered them as they lay in their drunken sleep with the MacGregor's plaids and let the dogs into the house. The dogs savaged the sleeping Campbells and in the confusion of drawn dirks the dogs were killed and all the party wounded.

At Enochdhu is a mound between the standing stone and a round boulder. It is said to mark the grave of Ardle, a prince and his henchman who were killed when they out-distanced the rest of their army while pursuing the Danes who had been defeated in battle. The Robertsons of Kirkmichael deserve to be remembered for being the first to join the Athol Brigade in 1745.

The Roberston Route requires an about-turn to Pitlochry north of which branches the road to Rannoch along the north side of Loch Tummel. It swings across the Garry and heads west.

The outstanding feature of this road by Loch Tummel is the Queen's View, different now from that seen by Queen Victoria when she drove over from Blair Castle. Today a greater Loch Tummel, a hydro-electric reservoir, stretches away towards the peak of Schielhallion with its new islands set in the foreground. Schielhallion, the fairy mountain, has traditionally a precious gem on its peak which could be seen flashing at noon throughout Rannoch. It marked the entrance of a treasure house in the heart of the mountain. To see the gem flashing in the moonlight meant misfortune.

At the far end of the loch near Port an Eilean there used to be an artificial island on which the chiefs had a "strength" which is now beneath the water. Duncan Reamhair, hero of Bannockburn, died there.

Bannockburn

The Robertsons mustered on Loch Tummelside before marching to Bannockburn. It is claimed that it was their arrival on the skyline of Gillies Hill which swung the victory in favor of the Scots. After the battle King Robert the Bruce addressed Duncan, Reamhair - the Stout - , the chief and his men saying ' Hitherto ye have called the sons of Duncan but henceforth ye shall be called my children'. So it is said, Clan Donnachaidh became Clan Robertson.

At the far end of the loch near the power station at Tummel-bridge where Wade's hump-backed bridge spans the river , an old Jacobite soldier Robert Ban, the fair-haired, after the 1745, had his own moment of revenge. He spied a squad of soldiers resting by the river bank. Hurrying home for his targe and sword, sprang out between the squad and their piled muskets, and, putting the fear of death into them, sent them on their way northward weaponless.

There is another road to Rannoch through Robertson country which necessitates continuing on the new main road high above the Pass of Killiecrankie on to Blair Athol. Lude, seat of the senior cadet branch of the Robertsons from the 14th to 19th centuries stretches north-east to Glen Tilt. The little church at Kilmaveonaig, east of the bridge over the river Tilt contains memorials to the family.

Inverack Castle 'a simple tower now a tumbled ruin' was the original home of the Struan family. Its site is on the far bank of the Garry near the footbridge at the west gate of Blair Castle. Inverack was burned in Cromwell's time when the house of Lude was also destroyed. Where the River Bruar with its famous falls comes tumbling down to join the Garry the Robertsons of Kindrochit had their home.

Here too is the Clan Donnachaidh museum opened in 1969 a "must" for all touring members of the clan. One of the "treasures" on display is the Clach na Brataich, a luck stone said to date back to the days of Robert the Bruce. Tradition has it that it was found by Duncan Reamhair when he setup his standard on night on Loch Ericht shore. When the standard was pulled up the next morning, the crystal was found adhering to the base of the staff. There after it was carried in every battle at the head of the clan. Before Sheriffmuir, a flaw in the stone was seen for the first time, and since the then the clan's fortunes declined.

Calvine and Woodsheal nearby have their places in the clan's history. It was Robertson of Woodsheal who led the clan at Culloden. Left for dead on the field, he escaped to France. Robertson of Calvin was killed.

Here the Robertson route turns away from the main highway and runs south-west by the green fields of Glen Errochty to Trinafour. South, and atop a ridge, the whole of the Tummel Valley is revealed in all its grandeur, at the foot of the long descent lies Dunalistair reservoir. Dunalistair was the home of the 13th chief, Old Struan, the only man who had out in the Jacobite risings of 1689, 1715, and 1745, who never swore allegiance to the Hanoverians, and who ended his days peacefully - apart from domestic quarrels - on his estate. Duncan Robertson of Drumachune succeeded him, but as he had been out in the Forty-Five and not included in the Act of Indemnity, the estates were confiscated until after his son succeeded him. Two of the Drumachune family, Alexander and Donald Robertson, were taken prisoner at Preston in the 1715 rising. Alexander, the heir presumptive to the chiefship, was condemned to death, but his younger brother contrived to take his place on the day of execution, although aware that a pardon was on the way for himself.

Kinloch Rannoch was at one time another residence of the Struan family. It owed something of its growth to an unsuccessful experiment by the commissioners of the Forfeited Estates to settle demobilized soldiers there.

Clan Donnachaidh held the south shore of Loch Rannoch, the slios garbh or rough slope. The Robertsons of Aulich lived on the slios min or smooth slope on the north shore and, there also was the original gathering place of the clan, Fea Choire, a little glen linking Rannoch with Glen Errochty. Carie on the south shore was another house of the chiefs. It was burned in 1716, rebuilt, burned in 1746 and again rebuilt. It was there that Old Struan died in 1784.

The Black Wood of Rannoch, part of the old Caledonian forest, was Robertson property. In 1784, John Robertson of Tulliebelton, Provost of Perth, was felling 2000 trees a year. Canals were cut there in the early 19th century with storage dams, the trees being shot down flumes to Loch Rannoch and floated downstream to Perth, where many were exported to the Continent. In recent years the wood has been protected by the Forestry Commission in the hope that this remnant of the old forest will remain for all time. For the adventurous tourist there is a road along the south side of the valley that leads back to Pitlochry.

Obviously this a backward-looking tour of the clan's ancient territory. The chiefs and the chief men are landless and the clans folk are scattered but because this area did not suffer the Highland Clearances there are here many people with the various surnames which entitles them to wear the Robertson tartan whose spirit and role in local affairs is as effective as was that of their forebears in the high noon of Clan Donnachaidh.

Reprinted from The Highlander