



Peter and Roddy MacRae at their Cottage in Invergarry on 8th September 1995



Gaelic and Nordic names around Loch Hourn

List of toponyms etc.
from around Kinloch Hourn, Corran, Barrisdale and Arnisdale

With translations and explanations,
augmented by samples of native speaker Peter MacRae's pronunciation



collected by Ruurd & Mieke Groot

with contributions from Peter MacRae, Roddy MacRae and Dr Robert F. Smith

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fifth and final edition

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With translations and explanations,
augmented by samples of native speaker Peter MacRae's pronunciation,
as originally recorded on tape in September 1995
restored in 2021

collected by Ruurd & Mieke Groot
published 1996..2025

Translations and comments are primarily based on live – and lively! – discussions with Peter MacRae and his brother Roddy MacRae, who spent almost all of their lives in or near Kinloch Hourn. Additional help was given by Dr Robert F. Smith – who'd known the area and the MacRae family for almost 50 years.

*Sadly, these three invaluable contributors are no longer with us today.
Peter and Roddy MacRae died in 2002 and 1999 respectively,
Robert Smith passed away in 2013.*

☞ This final 2025 edition is dedicated to the fondest memories ☞
of our friends and loved ones:

Roddy MacRae, his kindness and wit
Peter MacRae, his wisdom and scholarship
Robert Smith, his insights and empathy
Joe Potter and his inexhaustible human skills
Donald Cameron and his endearing reliability
*Ruurd Groot, who to our great sorrow died in 2024,
for his love and care for Scotland and its people*



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More pictures related to this pamphlet can be accessed through <https://www.iwacc.com>



1 Introduction

This collection has a history – it started in 1991, in the real time diary we kept in our tent along the Loch Hourn River. We continued this practice for the next years, producing a text which also served as a source for photocaptions in the precious albums we were putting together.

Why a list?

We’ve always liked to learn to understand the landscape we found ourselves in, to get a sense of how these places define an interconnected whole. Well, knowing where you are is much easier if you can keep track of the names in an area – names of burns, rivers, hills etc. Such toponyms were recorded in our diaries and then migrated to the captions for our photo prints. But knowing how to write a name is not enough; you can only truly remember it if you can “think it aloud”. You need to remember its sound, for which you must have an idea of how the name is pronounced. Preferably, how it’s pronounced (or used to be pronounced) by local people. Also, it helps if you have an idea of what it means or used to mean, if that is possible at all.

And how?

In 1994 we collected all recorded toponyms from the four diaries up to then in an annotated list. This list we shared with friends, especially the friends we acquired around our Kinloch Hourn activities. Over the years the basic list grew, not so much in length as in presentation and meaning. That text was gradually updated, acquiring an introduction and other niceties. In the new century, we moulded the plain text of our pamphlet into a PDF which after a few years went public on our website. More about us and the list in chapter 5. Even in the first and primitive 1991 version of the list, we’d ventured on adding our own suggestions on pronunciation and meaning, as gleaned from what we’d read in books etc. or heard from the people we’d met. These home-baked suggestions weren’t completely wrong, but often clumsy and tainted by reckless hubris. So we started looking around for a reliable source of corrections. This turned out not to be all that difficult, as gradually we’d become more or less part of the community.

Local assistance

Meeting first Roddy and then Peter MacRae, we discovered that our new friends were great sources of knowledge about local lore and especially toponyms. Both were native speakers of Gaelic and had grown up in Kinloch Hourn, on what around 1994 was known as the Barrisdale farm. Peter worked that farm for many

years with their elder brother Eoin (1903 – 1982); he has conveyed the experiences of their youth, and of his adult life there, to a wider audience with the help of the Scots Magazine (*Kinloch Hourn Remembered*, by Alistair Scott; October 1993).

In that same period, Roddy was busy being a stalker and keeper along the shores of the original, later much inflated Loch Quoich, on the original, later so fragmented Glen Quoich estate – a life rudely interrupted by his being captured by the enemy in the North African campaign of WWII and being held as a prisoner of war in Italy... Of course, when we first met them, Roddy and Peter had moved in retirement to Invergarry long ago.

Peter turned out to be a veritable scholar, for he’d studied publications on the subject of toponyms, and had a knack for developing his own theories. His brother Roddy, on the other hand, was a witty ‘practical expert’, at crucial moments putting our wild theorising squarely in the perspective of actual usage and living speech.

Getting the sound right

In 1995 we recorded Peter reciting the names from our list. The recording was done on microcassettes, with a wee, wee, tiny wee journalist’s tape recorder, which explains the somewhat dull or flat sound quality of the recording. This lack of quality was rather a pity, as Peter’s dramatic voice added an awe-inspiring echo of history to the words he pronounced. Still, some of that echo remained audible on our copies, made on proper cassette tapes. Our son Jur, who made the copies at the time, was so impressed with the sound of the recited names, that he used to declaim them aloud when going up or down the stairs. Read more about the history of the soundtrack in chapter 5.

As we did with the list, we shared copies of the recordings with anyone interested. Peter’s authentic rendering of the names and his comments on their meaning made us vastly improve the notes we’d made in the list. Again, the improved list was distributed among friends and acquaintances, as a correction but also to elicit comments from anybody who’d care to give them.

More help, and the inconspicuous PDF

Meanwhile we had met Robert and Margot Smith, who’d known the area and the MacRae family since the early sixties. They shared our interest in the area and its history, and Dr Smith has been kind enough to help us with suggestions and additions. With all the help from him, from Peter and Roddy, and in some cases from others – local or otherwise, we finally made a re-

vised third version of our annotated list in May 1999. A year later this was offered in PDF format as version 3.1b, slightly updated again in 2002 as version 3.1b(2) – and finally in 2006 as version 3.1b(3), which was made available for download on our website.

The website was mainly intended for making our pictures available for anyone interested. Gradually other material was added, partly by way of links. This clumsy method was chosen for our PDF, which meant that its presence wasn't all that conspicuous – in fact, it was rather hidden.

A final coming out

The old PDF versions had an Epilogue containing phrases like: ... this amateur product can be improved upon considerably ... the audio record might be digitised into separate *.WAV (or *.MP3) computer files for every entry ... plans like that are a bit beyond our time budget ... etc. In the 3.1b(3) version of 2006 we'd added a note saying: we apologize for not having been able to correct or expand the current version. Well, circumstances involving work, health and diminishing assets kept on creating obstacles to what'd started out as an ambitious and hopeful undertaking.

However, recent new interest from people involved in the subject of this amateur product has prodded us to try and make amends for our involuntary negligence. These must surely be our final years, and what better to devote them to than to concluding this venture of long ago. So this PDF will be our our last version of Gaelic and Nordic names around Loch Hourn, revised and augmented with a better introduction, more circumstantial detail, some pictures – and last but not least a restored version of Peter MacRae's impressive recital of those wonderful names.

Peter's recorded voice is available in two formats – as single spoken names by clicking on the appropriate icon after each name listed in the PDF, and as a continuous audio file. More details about this in chapter 5.



2 Do names mean anything at all?

When looking for meaning in names, we should always be aware that the true meaning may have been irretrievably lost in time. Certainly most users of a name aren't really conscious of any meaning, most of the time. What's the meaning of 'Glasgow', or of 'London'? Other than a label designating a city? How many people know any other, 'deeper' meaning, let alone even think of it when using such names? It may appear from our list

and commentary that Highland toponyms are special, in that the meanings of so many appear to be derivable at all. If one is of a suspicious nature, one might get the feeling that too many of the names have been adapted in their form or spelling to meanings perceived by a later, perhaps somewhat romantic generation.

The volatility of names

People often ask, wonder, speculate or guess what a place name might mean – so names are often taken as referring to something other than just that place. And it is surely legitimate to suppose that, originally at least, there was some meaning when a place name first came into use. And even if that meaning were lost, it seems likely that through the centuries people often had some vague inkling of to what sphere a name belonged – its sociolinguistic register, as it's called. And then, such a 'meaning' might change over time as the people using a name would change. Therefore the meaning of a place name is a vast and many-dimensional subject. More musings about our own experience with this subject in chapter 5.

Sources

For our translations and comments in the present list, however, we have mainly relied on very simple sources. First of course, the people mentioned in the Introduction; then Malcolm MacLennan's *Gaelic Dictionary*, subtitled *a Pronouncing and Etymological Dictionary of the Gaelic Language* (Acair and Aberdeen University, 1925 – 1979..1989).

Furthermore, Peter MacRae and Dr Smith were themselves familiar with other sources, e.g. *Celtic Place-names of Scotland* by Prof. W.J. Watson (Edinburgh, 1926). And of course, our personal experience – legs-on, so to speak – with the actual lay of the land in the present has helped as well.



3 Various vagaries of labeling

As explained in the introduction, our list refers to places we came by while hiking in the area around Loch Hourn, and were noted by consulting our maps. In principle, therefore, all names were copied from the Ordnance Survey maps we used. Of these maps we preferred those of 1:25,000 scale for their detail, putting up with the fact that the larger their scale, the more maps you need – our tent invariably contained a box with a veritable library of that type, which OS called Pathfinder at the time. While it's bad enough that many names as found on OS maps have been irrecoverably anglicised or otherwise corrupted, some of the names had

even been assigned to the wrong places, mostly in less frequently visited spots. Attribution of names to spots may also differ on the OS maps at the 1:25,000 scale from their location on the – less accurate – OS maps at the 1:50,000 scale.

A case in point is the area around Aird Chadhachan (between Slat Bheinn and Sgurr a' Choire-bheithe in the Barrisdale estate), where the 1:50,000 map misplaced several names of lochans. The relevant 1:25,000 map (Pathfinder 236 NG 80/90) was accurate around here.

Choosing the right approach

Of course, many meanings have been lost in time; and many names have been interpreted differently in different times which was reflected in a change in spelling.

Sometimes we may suspect mapmakers of bygone days, or their employers, of romantically inventing meanings. Pseudo-ancient spellings were adapted to the later interpretations, or just thought up for sheer historical exaggeration. The romanticism of the 19th century rekindled interest in the remnants of dwindling Highland culture – having oneself painted life-size in full Highland regalia became a must for even the most English or completely anglicised absentee landlord – and so produced its share of spurious folklore. Much like we now have the commercial exploitation and debasement of history's relics, and all the well-meaning pursuit of heritage, a EU-subsidised industry which could be even worse.

We thought what really matters, is what seemed natural or logical to those who have a living memory of the most recent customary and local Gaelic pronunciations and interpretations. Even so, some speculation about origins etc. can be an interesting pastime...

The Gaelic experience

A source of real confusion is the use of the Gaelic genitive case, as English nouns have lost real cases and the Gaelic use of the genitive differs considerably from the way that case is used in German etc. People nowadays even like to name their daughter Mhàiri as it 'looks more Celtic', although this would mean 'of Mary'; the correct form would be the nominative 'Màiri' – which they indeed use for their pronunciation, and not something resembling Vaary, if we follow the Sassenach way of representing that Gaelic (and Dutch) labial consonant by V. And then, as one in English might say 'A of B', or 'P of Q of R', the Gaelic may say 'B of A' or 'P, Q of R'.

Never assume that the characters used in spelling a Gaelic word denote a value corresponding to what you expect. In listening to our recordings you'll notice that the r and l e.g. can result in very unusual 'sounds'.

Moreover, that sound may depend on what came before or comes after. Don't complain: English behaves even worse in this respect.

Finally, the h often encountered in the form words take in the genitive case, may have no other function than to change the pronunciation of the preceding letter (as in mh), or it may indicate that the preceding letter just vanishes completely from the audible world (as in th). Facts like these had a profound effect on how names were handed down orally and finally written down, often in a more and more English-biased context.

All this may seem complicated enough, but in fact the reality is even far more complex.

Nordic, Anglic, Frisian, Doric

A special source of linguistic entanglement is the fact that in these coastal areas one dominant vernacular must have been some dialect evolved from Old Norse. Names from that may first have been celticised and later anglicised. This process was often further influenced by the English language being more closely related to the Nordic tongues than to the Celtic ones (apart from the French confusion brought with the 'Conquest').

We may also have to keep in mind that sometimes not English as such is the language in question, but something more like the – from about 1200 AD – originally quite separate language Scots, which seems much more 'Anglic' and less 'Saxon', and quite related to the Frisian still spoken in the relevant part of the Netherlands: Friesland. Mapmakers and archivists, not native to the Loch Hourn area, may have confused things with some variety of Scots, like 'Doric'.

We ourselves are Dutch, a language derived from Frankish and Saxon, but influenced by some sort of Old Frisian or even Ingvaenic (Wikipedia!). To be very precise, we're actually Westfriesians, and originally hail from where Zaans (Wikipedia!) was the vernacular. 'Doric' words sound rather familiar to us: kinkhoast (as far as we know from Perth to Aberdeen), meaning 'whooping cough', is identical to Frisian kinkhoast and quite similar to Dutch kinkhoest; people from Fife may call someone hardneck without any allusion to garlic, in the same vein the Dutch may refer to someone or something as being hardnekkig. Examples of such linguistic bridges abound.

Last but not least, the local Celtic dialects in their turn may have contained much that wasn't so much 'pure Gaelic' (which derives from Old Irish), as a local or regional dialect we'll never be able to reconstruct...

The locals have the last word

Finally, people often hand down names of familiar places in a form which means something to them. If in the meantime the language has changed, they may – even intentionally – ‘corrupt’ a name into something with relevance to their contemporary conditions. Quite often such a change comes down to something like a pun, the meaning of which will be forgotten again by later generations, as the reference of the pun – e.g. a person – is no longer around.



Lion's mane jellyfish performing in inner Loch Hourn

Lion's mane jellyfish, as photographed by us from aboard the *Erratic & Fierce*. This beautiful creature is quite abundant in the loch; its sting is rather painful and can be lethal. The body may reach a size of 7 feet, so it's a good thing they're not aggressive.

4 List of names with commentary and spoken examples

The list presented here is by no means exhaustive. Actually, it is quite random, based on names occurring in the diaries we kept in our earliest years in Kinloch Hourn, i.e. from 1991 to 1994 (cf. chapter 1 Introduction). The meaning of other local names, however, may often be approximated from the meaning suggested for names as presented here. To guess how to pronounce an unlisted name: compare it with an audio sample of a similar name, activated by clicking the adjacent play button once (or sometimes *twice*, depending on the program in which you're viewing this pdf): ▶

Note: 'now' in the comments usually means 'around the time we were in Kinloch Hourn'.

When possible, each name in the list is followed by an approximation in English of its probable or guessed meaning. For (parts of) names of which we have no idea of any meaning, we give a simple question mark. Furthermore we use these symbols:

- () additional meaning or explanation
- <> ellipsis made explicit
- (?) great uncertainty on our part
- ⇒ comments etc. (on separate lines)

See chapter 5 about any people mentioned in this list

Abhain Chòsaidh

river of Gleann Còsaidh (sheltered, cosy glen)

Achadh Luachraich

field of the rushes

⇒ This is the name of the estate at right from the trunk road, when approaching from Invergarry, just before one turns left for Kinloch Hourn onto the Tom Doun road.

Aird Chadhachan

top of the narrow, steep pass

Allt a' Chaolais Bhig

burn of the small narrows

Allt a' Choire Reidh

burn of Coire Reidh (flat corrie)

Allt a' Choire Uidhair

burn of Coire Odhar (dun-coloured or dappled corrie)

Allt Ban

white burn

Allt Coire Slat Bheinn

burn from corrie of Slat Bheinn (twig or stick hill)

Allt Coire Dhorrcail

burn from Torquail's corrie

⇒ *Dhorrcail* should be spelled *Thorrcail*, according to Peter MacRae.

Allt Coire Mhalagain

burn from corrie of Malagan (?)

Allt Coire Mhicrail

burn from Ranald's son's corrie

⇒ cf. Coire Mhicrail

Allt Coire nan Cnàmh

burn from the corrie of the bones

Allt Coire Peitireach

burn from Coire Peitireach (?)

Allt Coire Shùbh

burn from the corrie of the berries

Allt Coire Shùbh Beag

burn from the little corrie of the berries

Allt Gleann nan Eun

burn from the glen of the birds

Allt Loch an Lagain Aintheich

burn from loch of the sandy hollow

Allt Lochan an Fhigheadair

burn of small loch of the knitter

Allt Slochd Nighinn Bheathain

burn from pit of Matheson's (?) daughter

⇒ Slochd is anglicised spelling for Sloc, cf. Slochd Nighinn Bheathain and *Bachd* for *Bac*.

An Caisteal

the fortress (or castle)

Aonach air Chrith

ridge of trembling (?)

Aonach Sgoilte

split ridge

Bac nam Fòid

bank of peat

Bac nan Canaichean

bank of pedlars (?)

⇒ From an original spelling *Bac nan Ceannaichean*, i.e. bank of the merchants. Itinerant merchants used to go around selling and buying. ‘Pedlars’ are often mentioned in local tradition as victims of murder and robbery. They would be warmly welcomed for the night, to be sounded out about their wealth and – if judged profitable – misdirected next morning, to be ambushed on the way. The names *Drochaid Allt a’ Bhodaich* and *Allt a’ Bhodaich* (from *bodach* = *old man*, so *bridge of old man’s burn* and *old man’s burn*, both half-way the pass between Loch Quoich and Kinloch Hourn) are sometimes suggested to refer to the same tradition, the old man in question having been such a pedlar. Also suggested, however, are the meanings *bank of dolphins* and *bank of little dogs*....

Bachd Mhic an Tosaich

bank of Macintosh

⇒ *Bachd* is anglicised spelling for *Bac*, a bizarre rendering of the original pronunciation, cf. *Slochd*.

Bealach an Lapain

pass of the cripple

Bealach an Toteil

pass of the smoky <mists or fogs>

⇒ Thus if we correct *Tot* - into *Toit* -, a root meaning *smoke*, or the way fog or mist may appear from a distance. Even these days, the local situation makes this a plausible interpretation. When we interviewed Roddy MacRae, he talked about the veils often hanging over this bealach and over Sgurr a’ Bhac Chaolais. On the rim of the bealach a certain rock then may remain visible, guiding a climber from Coire Reidh. We have personal experience of these conditions.

Bealach Caol na Droma Mòire

pass of narrows of big ledge (?)

Bealach Choire Rèidhe

pass of Coire Reidh (flat corrie)

Bealach Coire a’ Chaorainn

pass of the corrie of the peat chunk (?)

⇒ but cf. Coire a’ Chaorainn

Bealach Coire Dhorrcail

pass of Torquail’s corrie

⇒ *Dhorrcail* should be spelled *Thorrail*, cf. Allt Coire Dhorrcail.

Bealach Coire Mhalagain

pass of Malagan’s (?) corrie

Bealach Coire Sgoireadail

pass of Coire Sgoireadail (?)

⇒ cf. Coire Sgoireadail

Bealach Coire Thollaidh

pass of the intruding (?) corrie

Bealach Duibh Leac

pass of the dark slab

Bealach Fraoch Choire

pass of the heather corrie

Bealach Mhinniceig

pass of ?

⇒ spelling probably corrupted

Bealach na Craoibhe

pass of the tree

Bealach na Faire

pass of the sentry

Bealach Sgurr an Lochain

pass at the peak of the small loch

Beinn Bhuidhe

hill (of) yellow

⇒ or *hill (of) pleasant*

Beinn na Caillich

hill of the old woman

Beinn na h-Eaglaise

hill of the church

Beinn Sgritheall

hill of scree

Buidhe Bheinn

yellow hill
⇒ or *pleasant hill*

Cadha Mòr

great narrow and steep pass
⇒ This not really very high pass above the Stalkers Cottage and the lodge of the Kinloch Hourn estate, is steep and rough. No amount of reciting the normally so powerful mantra ‘I will *not* get into a sweat’ will prevent the outbreak of profuse transpiration when one is ascending this sample of Highland torture, as Joe Potter — the famous Birdman of Kinloch Hourn — would testify.

Cadha nam Bò Ruadha

narrow and steep pass of the red cow

Caolas an Loch Bhig

narrows of the small <end of the> loch

Caolas Mòr

great narrows

Carnach

rocky place

Carn Màiri

stony heap <of> Màiri
⇒ This name should be spelled *Carn Mhàiri*, the ‘of’ expressed by the genitive case of *Màiri*. Màiri was the Barrisdale woman of legend, who didn’t want to leave at the time of the Clearances, so they finally poisoned the mussel banks that were her last sustenance. People from Arnisdale will still pronounce the initial *Mh*, saying *Vaari*, with the *v* as the *W* in Dutch *Willem*.

Carn Mòr Coire Mhalagain

big stony heap of Malagan’s (?) corrie

Carn nan Caorach

stony heap of the sheep

Ceum na Leth-coise

steps of going toe-for-toe
⇒ From experience we can confirm this name is a good description for the so designated descent from Ladhar Bheinn by way of Stob a’ Odhair.

Cluanie

green plain
⇒ an anglicised form of *cluaineag*

Cnap an t-Sear

knob of the east side (?)

Cnoc Dubh Achadh Arsgalain

dark knoll of the field of the high shieling
⇒ The word *Arsgalain* probably derives from *Ardsgalain*, which might also mean *superb shieling* (when we take ‘high’ in an abstract sense).

Coile Mhinniceig

woods of ?
⇒ cf. Bealach Mhinniceig; *Coile* should have been spelled *Coille*

Coille Lochain Coire Shùbh

woods of small loch of the corrie of the berries

Coire a’ Chaorainn

corrie of the peat chunk (?)
⇒ possibly better: ...of the *rowan*

Coire an Lochain

corrie of the small loch

Coire an Spidein

corrie of the peak (?)
⇒ cf. Spidean Mialach

Coire Dubh

dark corrie

Coire Dhorrcail

Torquail’s corrie
⇒ *Dhorrcail* should be spelled *Thorrail*, cf. Allt Coire Dhorrcail.

Coire Glas

grey corrie

Coire Lair

corrie of the mare

Coire Leacach Mòr

great corrie of the slabs

Coire Mhalagain

Malagan’s (?) corrie

Coire Mhicrail

corrie of Ranald’s son
⇒ The name of this corrie, high above the burn delivering life-giving water to Skiary, refers to Alasdair Ranaldson Macdonnell, the 15th chief – known from the famous portrait by Sir Henry Raeburn,

but surely even more from the lids of boxes of shortbread. He turned up in Edinburgh for the visit of George IV in 1821 at the head of his fully armed ‘tail’ of retainers, to the alarm of the citizenry. He is reputed to have been the model for the character Fergus MacIvor in Sir Walter Scott’s *Waverley*. He died prematurely in an accident near Corpach, when leaping ashore from an early steamer in 1828. His estates were left in a poor condition, which eventually led to their abandonment by his successors. He had attended Cambridge University and his act of being a remote Highland chief was quite fake; even the romantic author Scott regarded him as an anachronism. Alasdair made a great fuss about the construction of the Caledonian Canal: thus he maintained that Loch Oich belonged to him, to the extent that he could drain it if he liked, and so initially he wanted an embankment built down the middle of the loch to shield his home from passing traffic. His brother, Sir James Macdonnell, fought at Salamanca and Vittoria and became famous for his distinctive deeds at Waterloo; he ended up quite a real general. (All details of this entry were provided by Dr Smith.)

Coire na Fiar Bhealaich

corrie of the sloping (meandering?) pass

Coire nam Plaideachan

corrie of the small plaids

Coire nan Cadha

corrie of the narrow, steep pass

Coire nan Cnàmh

corrie of the bones

Coire nan-Eiricheallach

corrie of the hidden stolen cattle (?)

⇒ The last part is sometimes also spelled *Eiriche-alloch*; that version was interpreted as ‘corrie of the lazy shepherdboy’ by Peter MacRae, when he was young. Now *eirich* (rouse) and *ealloch* (burden) don’t seem quite to fit, but the Gaelic *r* is a complex consonant.

Coire nan Leac

corrie of the slab

Coire Odhar

dun-coloured (or dappled) corrie

Coire Peitireach

corrie ?

⇒ The meaning is unknown; the spelling may be corrupt.

Coire Reidh

flat corrie

Coire Sgiath Airigh

corrie of wing/shield (?) of the shieling

⇒ but cf. *Sgurr Sgiath Airigh*

Coire Sgoireadail

corrie ?

⇒ An old form of the second part was *Sgoire a’ Dail*, still to be seen on an old print in one of the buildings at Kinloch Hourn. This might be constructed as meaning *brow of the dale*, or *dale with a brow*, which would be quite apt. Of course, the Gaelic *dail* derives from an Old Norse root.

Coire Shùbh

corrie of the berries

⇒ *shùbh* is genitive of *sùbh*; cf. Loch Hourn and Coireshubh

Coire Shùbh Beag

little corrie of the berries

⇒ cf. Coire Shùbh

Coire Slat Bheinn

corrie of Slat Bheinn (twig or stick hill)

Coire Uaine

green corrie

Coireshubh

<hamlet at the> corrie of the berries

⇒ There was still a ruin here, in the pass between Loch Quoich and Kinloch Hourn, just before one reaches the latter. At this point is the ancient eastern boundary of the socio-political Knoydart (see the comments with that entry); cf. the original spelling in Coire Shùbh.

Coire Torr an Asgaill

corrie of the mound

⇒ or *corrie of the armpit*

Coire Toteil

corrie of the mists (fogs)

⇒ cf. Bealach an Toteil

Creag a’ Mhàim

rocks of the smooth pass

Creag Bheithe

rocks of the birches

Creag Coire na Fiar Bhealaich

rocks at corrie of the sloping pass

Creag Meagaidh

rocks of Maggie (?)

⇒ i.e. if taken as short for Margaret – nice to have your own rocks, by the way

Creag nam Damh

rocks of the stag

Cuillins

?

⇒ The meaning seems to vary according to the opinion of individual historians and linguists. It may have to do with hollies, but we're afraid the meaning of this ancient name has been lost.

Doireleathan

<hamlet at the> broad grove

⇒ originally *Doire Leathain*, cf. *Sgurr an Doire Leathain*

Druim a' Choire Odhair

ridge along the dun-coloured (or dappled) corrie

Druim Coire nan Eirecheanach

ridge of corrie ?

⇒ meaning unknown; the spelling may be corrupt

Druim Fada

long ridge

Druim na Geid Salaich

ridge of the foul bunch

⇒ Thus, if we take *Geid* as the genitive of *Gad*, and *Gad* as a 'general collective'.

Druim Seileach

ridge of the willow

Dubh Lochain

dark (of) small loch

Dubh Lochan

dark small loch

Eas Coire nan Choire

falls of the corrie of the corrie

⇒ This was the name as printed on the OS maps.

But it is almost certainly a 'misprint' for *Eas Coire nan Cnàmh*, cf. the next entry.

Eas Coire nan Cnàmh

falls of the corrie of the bones

⇒ Our reconstruction of the previous name; cf. *Coire nan Cnàmh*.

Eilean Mhogh-sgeir

island of the hand-shaped (?) reef

⇒ A habitual nesting site of herons

Faichem

?

⇒ meaning unknown; corrupted spelling?

Faichemard

upper Faichem

⇒ or 'top of' Faichem; cf. previous entry

Faochag

wee whelk

Fhuarain

<peak> of the green spring

⇒ Its full name must be *Sgurr an Fhuarain*, just like other hills of similar name.

Fiar Bealach

sloping (or meandering) pass

Fraoch Bheinn

heather hill (or *foreboding hill*)

Fraoch Choire

heather corrie (or *foreboding corrie*)

Gairich

<peak of the> continued shout (echo?)

⇒ if taken as originally spelled *Gàirich*

Gairich Beag

little Gairich

Garr Garry

short <river> Garry (?)

⇒ Cf. Glen Garry from *gleann garaidh*: possibly *glen of the copse* or *thicket*. But Invergarry would be from *inbhir garaidh*, *cove at the mouth* or *confluence of (the River) Garry*.

Glac nan Sgadan

hollow of the herring

⇒ Catching herring used to be a booming business in and around Loch Hourn. Overfishing made the locally spawning subspecies extinct, as happened in many places all over Western Europe.

Gleann an Dubh-Lochain

glen of the small dark loch

Gleann an Guiserein

glen of ?

⇒ possibly from a personal name

Gleann Còsaidh

sheltered (cosy) glen

Gleann Dubh Lochain

glen of the small dark loch

Gleann nan Eun

glen of the birds

Gleann Unndalain

glen of ?

⇒ *Unndalain* sounds like something to do with a hinge, hazards Peter MacRae.

Glen Dessary

glen that is open to the South

⇒ spelling corrupted

Glen Toman Odhar

glen of the dun-coloured (or dappled) hillock

Gleouraich

<hill of> ?

⇒ The spelling is certainly corrupted; some think the name refers to some ‘uproar’, but it may also be connected to a ‘frown’.

Innis na Craige

green place of the rocks

iolair

golden eagle

⇒ not a place name, of course; this word was added for our interest in its pronunciation

Knoidart

fjord (-land) of Knut (?)

⇒ This is probably from a Old Norse name, like Sunart, also someone’s fjord. Dr Smith remembers it was Eoin MacRae (the elder brother of Roddy and

Peter), who suggested this derivation. The way the person’s name *Knut* might have evolved into the *Knoid* – spelling is unclear, but the Norse connection is of interest, as *Barrisdale* and *Arnisdale* are Norse as well, and possibly Runival (chapter 5) too. Nowadays, most of the time the name Knoidart is used as a name restricted to the westernmost peninsula, but cf. the earlier entry Coireshubh for its original boundaries, which included Kinloch Hourn and Skiary. The inhabitants, originally totalling some 1300 — before the Clearances — used to be quite sea-oriented; contacts with Glenelg etc. were easier than over the rough hill terrain with land-bound Glengarry. Note the clear pronunciation of the leading *K*.

Ladhar Bheinn

prong (of) hill

⇒ A quite apt name, as this westernmost Munro of the Scottish mainland is indeed two-pronged, or even three-pronged. Another, related meaning of *ladhar* is *hoof*; if that was the intended meaning, the name might refer to the whole horseshoe-shaped Ladhar Bheinn ‘system’. A typical example of semantic multipurpose application of ancient names! Incidentally, if the name is interpreted as referring to a *prong*, that would indicate the name was given by people not usually looking at Ladhar Bheinn from the East. As the sound sample proves, *Ladhar* is pronounced as a single syllable; when speaking without emphasis, locals say something like *Lurven* for the whole name, with a *v* as the *W* in Dutch *Willem*.

Loch a’ Choire Bheithe

loch of the birch corrie

Loch a’ Coire Uaine

loch of the green corrie

Loch Beag

small <end of the> loch

Loch Bealach Coire Sgoireadail

loch on the pass of Coire Sgoireadail.

⇒ cf. Coire Sgoireadail

Loch Coire nan Cadha

loch at the corrie of the narrow, steep pass

Loch Coire nan Cnàmh

loch at the corrie of the bones

Loch Coire nan Crogachan

loch at the corrie of ?

⇒ The *Crogachan* part may refer to many things: from a dish or earthen vessel, through an aged ewe, to a shrivelled branch.

Loch Coire Shùbh

loch at the corrie of the berries

⇒ Some Sassenachs will commit the atrocity of calling this loch the *Monkey-tree Loch*.

Loch Fearna

loch of the alder tree

Loch Hourn

loch of the gap of the berries (?)

⇒ Must be severely corrupted, as in Gaelic the *h* can't be used as an independent letter and it certainly would never be used as the first letter of a word. But cf. nearby Coire Shùbh, so the name may have been something like *loch shùbh bearn* or *loch shubh-bhearna(ch)*, the basis of this translation. A possibility might be *Loch a' Chuirn*, i.e. *Loch of the Cairn*. The sometimes encountered explanation as *loch h-iuthairne* for *loch of hell* is probably just a romantic fancy – albeit one preferred by Aileen Cameron...

Loch Quoich

Loch Cup

⇒ Thus if we interpret the pre-anglicised form *Loch Cuaich* as referring to the cup-shaped 'system' of glens forming the various parts of present-day Glen Quoich. One might also think of *loch of the cuckoo* (*cuaich* as genitive of *cuach* = *cuckoo*), a bird by now indeed numerous on the grassy slopes from Invergarry to Airor, as it usurps the nests of the even more numerous local meadow pipits for its own eggs. But one might argue that in ancient times the cuckoo would not have been as abundant as it is nowadays, as the slopes of the cup-shaped area and the borders of the original loch would have been covered in trees and bushes, so that the plethora of meadow pipits we find here now would have been absent.

Lochan an Fhigheadair

small loch of the knitter

Loch an Lagain Aitheich

loch of the sandy hollow

⇒ The sand referred to is still in evidence nowadays.

Lochan Charn nan Caorach

small loch of the stony heap of the sheep

Lochan nam Breac

small loch of the trout

Lochan na Stairne

small loch of the noise

Lochan Torr a' Choit

small loch of the mound of the small boat

⇒ cf. our remarks with *Torr a' Choit*

Lùb an Achaidh Dhuidh

bend at the dark field

Luinne Bheinn

hill of ?

Màm Unndalain

smooth pass of ?

⇒ cf. our remark with Gleann Unndalain

Maol Chinn-dearg

bald red head

Meall a' Chait

lump of the cat

Meall an Spàrdain

lump of the nesting places

Meall an Uillt Bhain

lump of the white burn

Meall Buidhe

yellow lump

⇒ or *pleasant lump*

Meall nan Eun

lump of the birds

Meallan Odhar

small dun-coloured (or dappled) lump

Mulloch Gorm

blue-green height

Saileag

heel-step

Sgurr a' Bhac Chaolais

peak of the bank of the narrows

⇒ To Donald 'Silver' Cameron, stalker etc. at Kinloch Hourn, this name appeared quite obscure, and we must agree.

Sgurr a' Bhealaich Dheirg

peak of the red pass

Sgurr a' Chlaidheimh

peak of the claymore

Sgurr a' Choire-bheithe

peak of the birch corrie

Sgurr a' Gharg Gharaidh

peak of the bitter (?) thicket

Sgurr Airigh na Beinne

peak of the shieling of the hill

Sgurr an Doire Leathain

peak of the broad grove

⇒ cf. Doireleathan

Sgurr an Fhuarain

peak of the spring

Sgurr an Lochain

peak of the small loch

Sgurr Beag

small peak

Sgurr Coire na Feinne

peak of the corrie of the soldiers (?)

Sgurr Coire nan-Eiricheallach

peak of the corrie of hidden stolen cattle (?)

⇒ cf. Coire nan-Eiricheallach

Sgurr Dubh

dark peak

Sgurr Fhuaran

peak <of the> spring

⇒ Maybe the name was originally Sgurr an Fhuarain, like elsewhere.

Sgurr Leac nan Each

peak of the slab like a horse (?)

Sgurr Mòr

big peak

Sgurr na Carnach

peak of the rocky place

Sgurr na Ciche

peak of the nipple

⇒ The *sgurr* part should probably be spelled *sgòrr*, according to Peter MacRae. A *sgòrr* is a steep, pointed *sgurr*.

Sgurr na Ciste Dubh

peak of the dark coffin

Sgurr na Ciste Duibhe

peak of the dark coffin

Sgurr nan Coireachan

peak of the corries

Sgurr nan Eugallt

peak of the deadly <dangerous> (unclimbable) burn

⇒ The southern slope, called just *Eugallt*, is indeed formidably steep and raggedly cut through with numerous rocky gullies.

Sgurr nan Saighead

peak of the arrow

Sgurr na Sgine

peak of the knife

Sgurr nan Spainteach

peak of the Spaniards

Sgurr Sgiath Airigh

peak of wing (or shield) (?) of the shieling

⇒ This is the 'mapname'; it has probably been pronounced something more like *Sgurr Skiary* for ages, cf. the name of the original hamlet along the path to Barrisdale. There are sources deriving this from original *Skithe's shieling*, i.e. shieling of Skith(e), a Norse name. Of course, any 'reconstructed spelling' would be a more or less plausible guess, but the Norse element certainly has its attraction, as relics of Norse personal names abound around here, as in Barrisdale (cf. *Barrisdale* in chapter 5), Arnisdale and probably Knoydart (*Knut*). Cf. *Runival* in chapter 5.

Sgurr Thionail

peak of the gathering

Slat Bheinn

twig (or stick) hill

⇒ a *slat* is a thin, supple branch

Slochd Nighinn Bheathain

pit of Matheson's daughter

⇒ *Slochd* is anglicised spelling for *Sloc* – another weird rendering of the original pronunciation, cf. names with *Bachd* for *Bac*. 'Pit' may mean 'gorge'. The daughter in question may have met her death here.

This place is as exotic as the name looks...

Spidean Dhomhuill Bhric

peak of spotty Donald

⇒ *Spidean* is unclear in origin, but certain enough in meaning: *peak*.

Spidean Mialach

lousy (?) peak

⇒ cf. the previous entry

Sròn a' Breun Leitir

'nose' of the inhospitable slope

⇒ The word *sròn* is still in use with stalkers as a technical term for the nose of a red deer. It is often used figuratively in the name of rounded promontories.

Sròn a' Chuilinn

'nose' of the hollies

⇒ cf. *Sròn a' Breun Leitir*

Sròn Glac na Gaoithe

'nose' of the windy hollow

⇒ cf. *Sròn a' Breun Leitir*

Sròn Lice na Fearna

'nose' of the slab with the alders

⇒ cf. *Sròn a' Breun Leitir*

Sròn na Geid Salaich

'nose' of the foul bunch

⇒ cf. *Sròn a' Breun Leitir*

Stob a' Chearcaill

upright post of the circle

⇒ The term 'upright post' is the standard nickname for steep conical, or 'pyramidal' hills. Note how the particular hill of this entry looks, when walking to the West along the Barrisdale river in Glen Barrisdale (cf. *Barrisdale* in chapter 5). The 'circle' part must refer to its shape from the West.

Stob a' Choire Odhair

upright post of the dun-coloured (or dappled) corrie

⇒ cf. *Stob a' Chearcaill*

Stob Dhorrcail

upright post of Torquail

⇒ *Dhorrcail* should be spelled *Thorrcail*, cf. Allt Coire Dhorrcail.; for *Stob* cf. *Stob a' Chearcaill*.

Stob na Muicraidh

upright post of the swine herd

⇒ cf. *Stob a' Chearcaill*

Tom nan Ràmh

hillock of the oar

Tomdoun

brown hillock

⇒ originally spelled *tom donn*

Torr a' Choit

mound of the small boat

⇒ A shape name? On the bank of the lochan near the 'mound', even nowadays a small boat is kept...

Torran Darrach

small mound of the oak

more on the next page





Some additional names

The names listed below weren't recorded on tape, but we have discussed them at other times, sometimes with the MacRae brothers or with Dr Smith and other people. Many other names have featured in our conversations, but these five seemed particularly relevant. The accompanying sound samples are NOT spoken by Peter MacRae, but by ourselves, using the broken Gaelic we used to employ while we were there among the natives. Och, they understood us all right and didn't complain about our pronunciation. (Well, 'och' is a Dutch word too, and even sounds the same.)

Allt Ruighe nam Fiadh

burn of the shieling-arm of deer

⇒ The Gaelic words are probably correctly spelled, but a place called *Ruighe nam Fiadh* itself is nowhere indicated as such on any of our current maps. The burn in question comes down into Coire Sgoireadail from Bealach Coire a' Chaorainn, on the ridge connecting Sgurr Thionail above Wester Glen Quoich to the North, Am Bàthaich ('the barn') over Coire a' Chaorainn to the East, and Sgurr a' Mhaoraich (or maybe *Mhormhaich*, see below) to the South. The 'shieling-arm of deer' must be the grassy ridge itself; we do know from our own experience that the ridge and its slopes were often crowded with deer. The word *ruighe* can be pronounced like *rooye* would, and *fiadh* has to sound a bit like *feeyah*.

Barrisdale

dale of Barri (or: dale of Barre)

⇒ A Norse name; cf Arnisdale, which means 'dale of Arne'. Real West Coast people prefer the spelling with double *r*, as most maps'll have it, because of the way older people, all native Gaelic speakers, pronounced it – e.g. the grandmother of Iain Warren, stalker of the Barrisdale estate at the time we wrote this. Peter MacRae too was of the opinion that this is the correct spelling. We must note, however, that *Barisdale* with a single *r* was the habitual spelling used by 20th century estate owners, and thus it is this form in which it still often appears in public, as on signs, letterheads etc. and in Google references.

Creag Raonabhal

bare rock of the orchard plain (?)

⇒ cf. Runival, the next entry

Runival

orchard plain (?)

⇒ This used to be spelled *Raon Abhall* (cf. previous entry) and pronounced like 'Rön Avall', with *ö* as *eu* in French *neuve*, *v* as *W* in Dutch *Willem*, and *all* as *aul-* should be sung in 'Auld lang syne'. It may well be, argues Dr Smith, that spelling and meaning are romantic renditions from mapmaking times of a Norse root. The anglicised form of the name reminds one of the hills Askival and Conival on the isle of Rum – also Norse (the 19th century *h* in *Rhum* was introduced by the Bulloughs when they bought this island, in a romantic fit – or from a severe Victorian aversion to the popular beverage or 'demon drink'). A variant, even more archaic but therefore not necessarily ancient spelling was Roan a' Bhal.

Sgurr a' Mhaoraich

peak of the often flooded grassy plain

⇒ This meaning is derived from the spelling suggested by Peter MacRae: *Sgurr a' Mhormhaich*. The last word is genitive of 'mormhaich', often anglicised into 'morvich' (there is a place name like that near Shiel Bridge). It was pronounced as *Vohraich*, with *V* again as *W* in Dutch *Willem* and *aich* as usual in Gaelic names – cf. Achadh Luachraich, the second name on the tape. The 'flooded grassy plain', of course, would be the flat area of Kinloch Hourn. The spelling as given on maps would refer to shell-fish, or bait for fishing, which makes no sense to anybody, and which is probably not ancient. The old Bartholomew's map (half-inch sheet for Arisaig and Lochaber) named it Sgurr a' Mhoraire, meaning 'the great man's hill', presumably meaning 'the hill of the laird'. Locals felt this was a 'colloquialism', and the MacRae brothers used it as such in conversations with Dr Smith. This type of colloquial usage is probably a case of consciously changing an ancient name into a modern meaning – something we ourselves are quite familiar with in our own all but defunct dialect of Dutch-Frisian. Dr Smith also suggested a connection with thrift, a pink flower indeed abundant on these high hills in the updraft of the briny air currents of the West Coast.





5 Sundry nuggets and trifles

[the items below are in no particular order]

we thought we knew the Highlands...

The first time we came to the Highlands was in 1977. At the time, we were accompanied by our son Jur, all of seven years old. It shows we weren't complete strangers to the Highlands when in 1991 we came to Loch Hourn, but we hadn't expected such a paradise. From that year onwards, for many years we set up our yearly base camp in Kinloch Hourn.

Most years we stayed for some six weeks, hiking from our base camp over the surrounding hills and glens – or visiting the friends we were acquiring in the area... Often too, we carried a wee backpacking tent a bit farther away from Kinloch Hourn, enabling us to cover a wider area; thus it is that Corran, Barrisdale and Arnisdale are a few of the other places we have learned to love. We roamed widely, but Loch Hourn and Kinloch Hourn (KLH) were always the centre of our attention – as it remains the centre of our memories now. More about our background elsewhere in this chapter.

why just these 201 names?

In fact the list of names is purely coincidental, based on the rather random occurrence of names that ended up in our diaries of the first four years of our wanderings. We didn't seek for a full thesaurus of Gaelic toponyms at all. What motivated us was the desire to gather just enough examples of pronunciation to get an idea of how to say the new names we might encounter in the following years. And so we did, gradually getting the knack of pronouncing new names in such a way that the locals understood what we meant, and didn't complain too much about (or were too polite to take exception to).

Please remember that in the early nineties, recorded sound wasn't as trivial a matter as these days. By the time it dawned on us what a treasure we had with Peter's performance, other things had taken up our time and attention. Yes, we had long holidays, but we also used that time for work we'd taken with us.

And of course, the real obstacle was far more insurmountable and tragic. Our sources were no longer around...

sounds on and from our PDF

At the time we finished this fourth edition, recorded speech was made available in two formats: (1) as single spoken names by clicking on the appropriate icon after each name listed in this PDF *Gaelic and Nordic names around Loch Hourn*, and (2) as a separate continuous

audio file *PeterMacraeContinuous*. At present (2022) PDF and audio file can be downloaded from our website: <https://www.iwacc.com>

Both are available under a simple Creative Commons license.

However, as we can't be expected to be immortal, this channel won't be accessible indefinitely. So we hope that interested others will assist us in keeping the KLH legacy alive. The mp3 format is playable on most playback devices, and probably will be for a long time. The usefulness of the PDF format may seem just as secured, but the ability of making embedded sounds audible is another matter – this depends on the environment in which the PDF is accessed; in our experience this can be rather iffy, so trial and error are the way to go.

This pamphlet can be printed from any environment and printer capable of rendering PDFs correctly; but then, the *sound* will be lost. In such a case one has to rely on the playback of *PeterMacraeContinuous* while or after reading the printed list.

history and quality of the soundtrack

As noted in the Introduction, the original recording was done with a miniature tape recorder on tiny micro-cassettes. Our son later carefully copied the content on a proper compact cassette. It wasn't until 2003 that the analog recording was professionally transferred to a digital medium in WAV format. The WAV format has a wide spectrum, but of course couldn't really 'improve' on the microcassette; nevertheless, some unwanted extraneous noise was suppressed. Other natural but unwanted noise remained, as the primitive recording device we employed had to be held very close to the speaker's mouth, picking up a background of breathing and clicking dentures etc.

In 2021, as part of the 4th edition project which demanded that we'd fulfill our promise of distributing an easily accessible and improved sound, we decided to revisit the best copy we had and try and restore it. The resulting continuous audio file *PeterMacraeContinuous* was assembled from separately treated samples for each recited name. All clicking and hissing sounds were cautiously removed and gaps were bridged. Finally, the main voice spectrum was carefully balanced and normalised to a realistic level. The separate name samples were then rewelded into a continuous whole.

In this whole the spoken names are separated by the sound of Peter turning over a new leaf. For our private fun the start and end were capped by tiny snippets of an amateur recording we'd once made of our own rendition of *As Tears Go By*, not all that inappropriate, we hope.

To keep the size of the PDF within manageable limits, the separate sound samples available for every single

name are more compressed than the continuous audio file. This means that they are sometimes a bit more difficult to make out. In such a case the continuous file may be of assistance.

our credentials regarding place names

We claim no special scholarly authority in etymology – the study of the original form and meaning of words – or in onomastics – the etymology of names in particular. One of us, Mieke, has a life-time experience as a translator of many books, a *great number* of books, actually. The other, Ruurd, also translated books – but when young, while being a visual artist, he also read classics and ancient Greek philosophy, but later switched to physics; a messy grounding he applied to researches into the psychophysics of perception – such as how and why the private visual awareness of our surroundings is influenced by our mind-set and vice versa.

Apart from this, for years we were occupied with serious voluntary work in a natural conservation area near our home, a very Dutch peat meadow area below sea level. It may surprise the reader that, botanically at least, this drowning environment was quite similar to a highland setting: sphagnum, cotton grass, sundew, tormentil and so on.

This diversity of backgrounds gave us some feeling for the subject of this amateur product, but surely didn't make us into onomastic specialists. More relevant may be the fact that together with our son Jur, we published a booklet on the toponyms used in the peat meadow conservation area in our native region, based on our own field research and literature studies, but very much on the memory of elderly inhabitants.

We have experienced that names of places can be very old, while being perfectly 'translatable' at the same time. Some parcels of land in the area we've researched originate from Old Frisian, a language nobody has spoken there for something like a millenium. Translating those names was relatively easy, as we were helped by numerous onomastic publications on ancient Dutch-Frisian field and water names in similar conservation areas.

Onomastic research is an interesting occupation in its own right, but of wider interest as it may guide archaeologists to likely spots for digging, and historians in general to a clearer vision of ancient patterns of habitation and land use in general. This circumstance will explain the availability of so much helpful documentation.

making friends and losing them

Although we were only given a few years in which to know Peter and Roddy MacRae, and even then only during spring and summer months, it was quite enough

to grow very fond of them. The stern authority of Peter was quite a contrast with Roddy's quick and earthy wit, but together they were a striking example of a whole being more than the sum of the parts. Our son Jur, who every now and again joined us in KLH, immediately got on very well with Roddy when they first met at the MacRae cottage.

Roddy died in our 9th KLH year, while we were still away at home, making the loss a very sad occurrence. When three years later Peter died, we were over in Scotland; but again we couldn't mean anything to him when, as we heard, he met an undeserved end.

When in 2013, Margot Smith wrote us that her husband had died, we'd lost the last of the contributors to this faint echo of Gaelic Loch Hourn. Robert Smith was a wonderful man, combining mildness and empathy with careful judgement.

Donald and Aileen Cameron

In 1990, Kinloch Hourn was 'found' by our son, when visiting the area with a friend. Years before, we ourselves had seen it from afar, and later always always longed to go there. When returning home in 1990, our son reported one could set up a tent in the field there, near a cottage bearing a name plate. So we wrote a letter 'To the the people living at Stalkers Cottage, Kinloch Hourn'. The answer came in the beautiful handwriting of Aileen Cameron, saying that indeed we would be welcome. After arriving at KLH on our motor bikes, we were soon greeted by Donald Cameron driving by our tent. 'So you've arrived,' he said. The rest is history, a very, very long history.

At the time, Donald and Aileen were the only persons living year round in the KLH clachan. Our friendship easily grew, and we got to know each other very intimately. You'd think we were very different – nothing's farther from the truth. It helped that we came from a tiny hamlet in rural Westfriesland, but the truth must be that the four of us had some deeper common ground and that Aileen and Donald had a true talent for recognizing such ground.

Gradually we became part of each other's lives, writing letters (well, as usual in present day culture: Aileen and Mieke did) and sharing joy and troubles. This pamphlet is inadequate for conveying the full weight of what this meant to us – that would deserve a book.

Suffice it to say that in August 2014, at our last parting in the pass between Loch Hourn and Loch Quoich, there were tears in our eyes. We kept on corresponding and phoning regularly, and not just for Christmas... the message of Donald's sudden death in August 2022 devastated us like a bomb.

Margaret and Joe Potter

For many years, the Potters were the renowned hosts of the Barrisdale farm tearoom on the south-side of KLH, often referred to as *Lochournhead*. In our first year in KLH, Joe Potter was there alone, as his wife Margaret had stayed home to tend to their daughter, who was ill. In the few weeks when we were there with him alone, we quickly discovered he was a terrific expert on bird life. And even for our innocent Dutch ears, he was obviously not of the Gaelic persuasion: his tongue had a different imprint. We later learned he was from Fife, and that much of that vernacular was rather familiar to us.

From 1992 onward, Margaret was the heart of the tearoom. We became very close to the Potters too; after some time we thought of ourselves as the third couple in the hamlet.

We went for walks around KLH, with them together or separately. The tearoom contained a growing stack of our photo albums to entertain the guests. In due course, we became acquainted with their offspring, including grandchildren. From early on, we became particularly fond of grandson Josh (or Joe) Mcdermott, just five years old at the start; by now he has married and has a wee daughter himself. At the time of this writing, we're still part of that distant family, in very regular contact.

When age forced the Potters to part with KLH, they retired to their home ground in Kincardine. Still, we kept on seeing them every year we came to Scotland, staying over for a day or two on our way up North, and again when we went back toward home.

As with the Camerons, the final goodbye was in August 2014. It was as if a black velvet curtain fell over our life. Suddenly something very close retreated into a far, untouchable distance. As life will inevitably turn, joy and grief can't be separated. Little more than a year later, Joe became ill and died, while we were on the other side of the sea. Margaret is still there, fortunately surrounded by the love of her family.

other noteworthy people

Of course we met and knew dozens of people, enough for a lifetime... Below is just a very random sample without any particular order; the list is for the nostalgic joy of anyone reading this and recognizing a name:

Robin & Mairi Scott, former rulers of the Invergarry Store; Ruurd once had a conversation with Robin – in Latin.

Mabel & John Sloggie; mainstays of the regional shinty world.

Alistair Grant of Faichem; we discussed his views on *Meditations*, written in Greek by Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius.

Len & Sheila Morrison, who welcomed guests in their cottage with a view of Loch Hourn; he was the ferryman.

Richard Wood of Invergarry, later of Cannich; an accomplished photographer, who walked and climbed every glen and hill with bare knees in all seasons. We did some climbing together and visited each other – he at our tent or we at his cottage; well known: a postcard from Australia, simply addressed to Richard Wood, Invergarry, was duly delivered to the addressee.

Phyllis & Stephen Miller, who ruled Barrisdale for a while, later of Letterewe (Loch Maree), where we stayed with them. As true Orcadians they were well at home on the waves. Once we climbed over Luinne Bheinn with Phyllis and Joe Williams.

Joe Williams, who ran the teasop for a time and played the guitar with Ruurd; a thoughtful person, whose life was too short.

David & Kate Rushton, acquainted since David put up his tent next to ours. We showed them the Tea Hut, and David, a virtuoso guitar player, once took part in a ceilidh at the Stalker's Cottage. Music was made by all, including Joe Williams and Ruurd with song and guitar, and Donald on fiddle and accordeon. We still maintain contact with the Rushtons.

Rob & Milly Gordon of Balgour; after Rob's father – The Major – had to retire, they took over the Barrisdale lodge, where we often met them with their daughters. They loved the rough and tangible beauty of the West coast and took very good care of their property.

Roy & Cecilia Dyckhoff of Runival, their summer abode; she a QC and he a logician (computer science), which made for interesting conversations about vision, the human condition, reality and the weather. Roy died way too young.

Jean Grant, one-time chief of the Invergarry post office; we also knew her daughter Jennifer, who is responsible for the education of young people.

Davy McKenzie, who was the stalker at Barrisdale when we first came; stalker before him had been Stephen Potter, son of Joe and Margaret.

Iain Warren, another stalker who served at Barrisdale for a while, like Davy very young. Ian was a wizard at sea, having grown up further North on the West coast.

John Campbell, also stalker at Barrisdale for a few years; the son of a lord, he saw himself as a sheep farmer and sheep were like wax in his hands. We once served him a meal of chanterelles in the Barrisdale bothy.

Rev Moses Donaldson, for quite a few years he was the minister at Tom Doun chapel; his sermons were exciting and wonderfully entertaining, look him up with Google!

Sheena Nash, last but not least, hostess of the one and only world-famous Tea Hut of Corran and keeper

of a beautiful flower garden; the Hut is still operational today, but irreducibly modernized by her daughter.

To any unmentioned friend, dead or alive, whose name is lacking: our sincere apologies. Whoever misses someone else's name: again, apologies. Please consider: we're *old*.

Peter English and Arnisdale

The late Peter English – professor of animal science and husbandry – certainly deserves a separate mention, particularly for his book *Arnisdale and Loch Hourn: v. 1: The Clachans, People, Memories and the Future*. We ourselves were a tiny bit involved in this private publication from the *Arnisdale and Loch Hourn Community Association*, as we provided a few of our photographs for the illustrations. The book is a plethora of detail about Loch Hourn and of special interest regarding the MacRae brothers, their youth and their lives.

At present, the book is too difficult to come by; we were in contact with Peter English's offspring, as we hoped to have some suggestions in this matter. We'd even obtained permission to quote here from the book, but our limited topic wouldn't do justice to the scope of *Arnisdale and Loch Hourn*; ill health and old age took us down a peg. We still hope that somebody may find a way to give it a wider audience.

To catch the atmosphere of the tales in the book, we can recount something from our own memory. At school, above the porch of the Barrisdale farm, or 'up the steps', as they used to say, the MacRaes were taught in English – like the Bretons in France were taught in French. Asked whether they themselves gradually switched over because it was the modern thing, Roddy said: 'Oh yes, it was *dashing!*' – as nowadays boys would say *cool*. But the striking thing is, they kept on switching back to Gaelic in situations that called for curses or insults. As if you can't freely lose control in English.

After the unfortunate death of Peter English, the Arnisdale clachans he loved so much named their community centre after him. If you know how to surf it, there's much to learn about him on the net, as he was rather famous. Despite his, well, rather inconvenient surname, he used to be quite popular as a shinty player. His role in social history should be remembered quite a bit longer.

our website

Our old website was a rather tatty data vehicle; we didn't do enough to keep it fresh and up to date. For quite a number of years we'd been planning to improve and restructure it with a better selection of upgraded photos and a clearer access to its content. With the new edition of our pamphlet we've finally also realized these vague intentions.

We've laboured on the website in parallel with the task at hand: this new edition of *Gaelic and Nordic names around Loch Hourn*. It took quite a while, for our age took its toll. Ruurd is slowed down by a few prostheses and too many strokes, and Mieke – the primary contractor vis-à-vis the website – also lost some speed. So for all who came by this pdf by other means: come and visit us on www.iwacc.com, to immerse yourself in the complete visual KLH experience.

Erratic & Fierce

The name of our wee boat, just 12" long, named after the description of the squalls of Loch Hourn, as encountered in a booklet with sailing directions. We bought the Pioner with money from a windfall: royalties we didn't have to spend immediately on food and clothes. For a long time we'd been looking forward to such apt luxury in the Loch Hourn environment. What's more, we noticed we were getting older and soon might no longer be able to climb Ladhar Bheinn twice a day.

With the *Erratic & Fierce* Barrisdale and Arnisdale became much closer, and we struck up close friendship with the seals, the lion's mane jelly fish and other members of the Loch Hourn menagerie. We went 'over the ocean' too, visiting Airor and Doune etc. The sea could become quite rough, but we managed – even when the outboard started giving troubles in high waves. Then Ruurd had to bend over the thing, trying to remedy the glitch, while Mieke manned the oars, to keep the boat pointing into the towering waves. Ach, we were both from a very watery place and in his youth Ruurd had actually been an *ordinary seaman* for a while, once even holding the wheel of a coaster in a storm.

We sometimes took passengers if they dared and weren't afraid of a bit of spray. The *Erratic & Fierce* is worth a novel of its own, but it will never be written...

work in a tent or at the neighbours

Work we'd carried with us could generally be done in our tent, which had gradually grown a bit in size. Our work abroad mainly consisted of reading and taking notes, things that only need light, and around summer there's enough of that in the Highlands. Every now and again we'd need digital assistance, and then Donald and Aileen'd kindly lend us the use of their PC.

At one time we had a bigger job for a publisher, the editing of a rather complex publication we'd done the translation for. For that task we needed a table, and Aileen granted us the dining room normally reserved for B&B guests. Our son had come over to help us getting the job done (besides being a math teacher, he is an accomplished book designer). Like often, we'd put up the hiking tent next to our living quarters.

Tents are ideal for some kinds of work, like finally

getting rid of a backlog of journals. Once we'd started using a trailer, we could take several volumes with us.

our transport & our itinerary to KLH

As told elsewhere in this pamphlet: at first we arrived on motorbikes, each riding a modest 400 CC Honda. In the beginning we sailed from Rotterdam, quite far from our home, to arrive in Hull, even farther from KLH. A journey of that kind was quite a hassle, and it was a welcome solution when a new ferry service started, connecting IJmuiden (a few miles West of Amsterdam) with Newcastle. From Newcastle we needed just one stopover before reaching our destination; we generally made use of Youth Hostels – it's remarkable how during the 20th century the age of the population of youth hostels kept track with the times.

On motorbikes, luggage is a problem: space is very limited, especially if you want to live in a tent for six weeks. We soon got the habit of sending part of the luggage ahead by post, and leaving all of the stuff we wouldn't need at home, behind in KLH. For that purpose Donald provided us with enough space in a disused pigsty. Even so, the motorbikes were loaded to the limit, leaving just enough space for ourselves.

Actually, we'd partially solved this problem. To one of the bikes we'd attached a small singlewheeled trailer, connected to the bike by a special type of universal joint. It accommodated the ups and downs of the vehicle combination, but strictly following the vertical attitude of the bike. This worked fine, but in high side winds it gets dangerous and, more important, too heavy a job. It wasn't unusual for the rider to become drenched with transpiration.

So in 2006 we gave in: henceforth we go by car. Well, car – we decided on an old Fiat Panda. It leaked a bit (in those days, cars rusted), but it had a towbar. And our neighbour had a trailer, more or less for common use. From that time on we came with this combination, carrying as much as we wanted to take. And our modest camp grew with it: a separate, smaller tent to serve as a barn, and two tentpoles with a tarpaulin to hang up the laundry under it, in the not infrequent case of rain.

Another change brought about by the car: from now on we went by the A1, straight North toward Edinburgh. For now we could follow that road, exposed as it is on the cliffs along the North Sea, without fear of being blown away. And we no longer needed to use any YH as a stopover: as related somewhere above in this pamphlet, we went by Kincardine, so we could stay for a day or two with Joe and Margaret.

And so ended our life as temporary teuchters. For the rest of our lives we have to try and survive below sea level (really!), dreaming of Sgurr and Gleanns, lochans and bealachs – and the amazing people we found there.

A final dramatic view of inner Loch Hourn, from the steep slope of Buidhe Bheinn. Sun, wind and slashes of rain.



A true squall files past, *Erratic and Fierce.*



Robert and Margot Smith at their Cottage
in Kinloch Hourn, 25th of June 1998

Ruurd and Mieke Groot at Allt a' Ghunna near Barrisdale, 23rd of June 2001



Closing note

This pamphlet is only an amateur product. And we are old, and ageing fast – Ruurd was from before WWII. But as long as we're still around, we'll always be eager to hear about what others might want to do with this pitiful echo of Gaelic times.

Alas, Ruurd is no longer with us. Even so, Mieke and her son Jur—who was a big help in the making of this pamphlet—are still interested. Please contact us and convey your remarks and suggestions:

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More pictures related to this pamphlet can be accessed through <https://www.iwacc.com>



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Fifth and final edition of
Gaelic and Nordic names around Loch Hourn
Oudendijk, 2025