

Lowdown  
on  
the upland of Mar

Joe Dorward

Version 1.0

of

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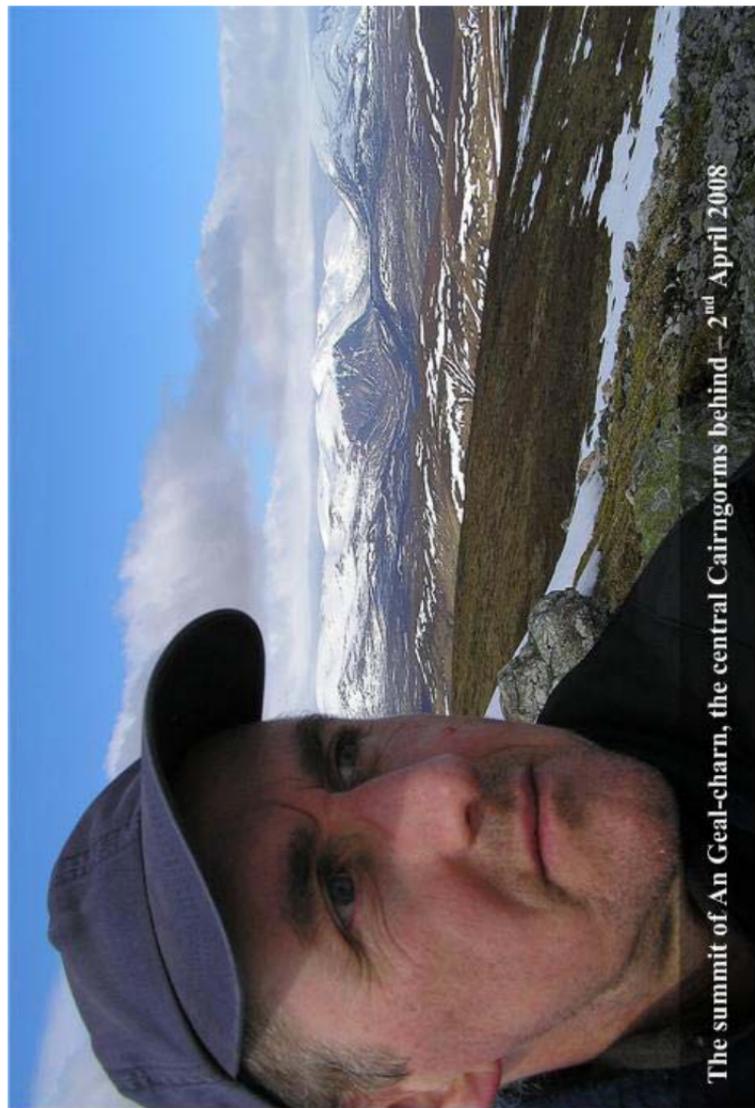
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The summit of An Geal-charn, the central Cairngorms behind – 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2008

## Introduction

To *consider oneself lucky* is an expression verging on the cliché, but as a lowland Scot from Dundee I really do *consider myself lucky* to have known the upland of Mar most of my life.

I'm not entirely responsible for the existence of this book ; my grandparents Joe and Janette Davie bear some responsibility – I would not know the upland of Mar as I do without them. There are some people living in Braemar who are also partially responsible – I'll not embarrass the guilty by naming names, but I'm sure they know who they are.

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### An early and lasting fascination

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Among the earliest memories I have are of weekends and holidays spent at the Canadian Campsite and of long walks along dusty estate roads in the surrounding glens. In one early memory I'm passing the ruins in Gleann Laoigh with a mental picture of a kilted highlander hiding a musket in the thatch of his cottage – and I just 'knew' that I'd find a musket if I went digging at the back of these ruins. The only difficulty being, I remember, I didn't know which part of the humps were the back walls.

From the beginning we went on walks. My grandfather occasionally took photographs, but my early memories are so unreliable that his few photographs are the only reliable 'memory' I have of those early walks. The earliest of these 'photographic memories' is the first time I reached Laoigh Beag. The photograph recording the occasion shows me (looking about 6 years old) and my brother at the old metal finger post. Ironically it shows me below the 'finger' pointing towards Làirig Dhrù – ironic because I couldn't have known then what Làirig Dhrù was, but within a few years the name, exerting an irresistible pull on my mind, had me nagging my grandfather into our first Làirig Dhrù crossing when I was 10-years old.

The history and geography of the upland of Mar fascinates me ; I've always been more interested in the humps-and-bumps in the glens than the summits of the hills. In fact I've walked over the summit of Carn Liath (south of White Bridge) more often than I've walked over the summit of Ben Macdui, and I've had many more good days 'on the hill' below the 2,000 ft. contour than above it.

This book is intended to be a 'carry along' pocket-sized summary of the more detailed information on the project website. I wrote this book because I wanted a pocket-sized summary of what that information to carry with me on the hill and published it in the belief that other hill goers, and other visitors, will find this summary as useful as I hope it is.

This book is very much a work in progress and I intend to update it periodically. I'm very keen on getting things right – where there are gaps, I will fill them ; where there are errors, I will correct them.

The sale of the book supports the local history project researching the history and geography of the upland of Mar. The website of the project is : <http://theuplandofmar.squarespace.com/> – the email address of the project is : [theuplandofmar@hotmail.com](mailto:theuplandofmar@hotmail.com) where I look forward to receiving your comments and contributions – I am also @joedorward.

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### A brief history of the upland of Mar

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As much as I'm interested in the lives of the ordinary people who lived in the upland of Mar it is impossible to understand their place in it without the contextual framework of those who owned, or effectively owned, the land – the following timeline provides some of that contextual framework.

In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century – John 'Bobin Jock' Erskine, 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Mar was the feudal superior of the upland of Mar making him, effectively, the owner of the upland of Mar. His feuars – the lairds of Dalmore, Inverey, Allanaquoich, Invercauld, and Auchendryne rented their lairdships and the right (with some restrictions) to exploit 'their' land as if they owned it.

### **1715 – The Earl of Mar’s Jacobite Rising**

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In **1715** the ‘modern’ story of Mar Forest begins with the instigation of the Jacobite Rising by John ‘Robin Jock’ Erskine, 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Mar. The resulting forfeiture of 1716 marked the beginning of the end of the essentially feudal landholding system in the upland of Mar.

In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century the locality of Mar Lodge was known as Dalmore (from An Dail Mhór – meaning *the big haugh*) and was held by James McKenzie of Dalmore – the McKenzies had acted as foresters to the Earls of Mar from at least the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and their duties as foresters were to protect the natural resources (game, timber, agriculturally useable land) from unauthorised exploitation.

### **1724 – James Erskine, Lord Grange and David Erskine, Lord Dun**

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In **1724** James Erskine, Lord Grange (the Earl of Mar’s brother) and David Erskine, Lord Dun (a relative) bought the forfeited property from the Government. Life in Mar Forest was about to change – to finance the purchase Grange and Dun had ‘greatly extended themselves’ by borrowing money and urgently needed to turn some of what they’d bought into cash.

In **1726** they prepared Gleann Laoigh for selling its timber by ‘ejecting’ the tenants of James McKenzie of Dalmore – who, they believed, had illegally rented the glen to farmers.

Between **1730** and **1735** they sold the land – mostly to the existing Farquharson tenants, but also to an incomer William Duff, Baron Braco.

### **1735 – William, Baron Braco (1<sup>st</sup> Earl Fife)**

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In **1735** William Duff, Baron Braco bought the estate of Dalmore, building the 1<sup>st</sup> Mar Lodge (on the site of the current 4<sup>th</sup> Mar Lodge) soon after.

William, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl Fife clearly viewed his acquisitions as an income-generating asset to be exploited along traditional lines.

This was a largely agricultural use – trees were sold for their timber, the lower-glens were rented to farmers, and the upper-glens were rented for their grazing.

In **1754** the testimony given at the trial of Duncan Terig and Alexander MacDonald for the murder of Sergeant Arthur Davies provides us with unusually detailed glimpses into the lives of the ordinary people in the upland of Mar in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century – including the fact that the traditional summer grazing practice was still in operation, at least in Gleann Eidh.

In **1759** William, Baron Braco was created Earl Fife.

### **1763 – James, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Fife**

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In **1763** William died, and his son James became the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Fife.

James, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Fife was much more interested in shooting deer than his father. The expansion of the deer forest dates from his earlship, and his journals and letters contain frequent references to his sport being spoiled by men searching for stray domesticated animals.

In **1769** Thomas Pennant (writer and naturalist) visited the upland of Mar – his account, in *Pennant (1771)*, provides us with interesting references to “Ben y bourd” (p107), and a glimpse of the living conditions of local people whose houses were “shocking to humanity, formed of loose stones, and covered with clods” (p109).

In **1776** Charles Cordiner (minister of Banff) visited the upland of Mar – his letters to Thomas Pennant, in *Cordiner (1780)*, provide us with interesting references to the deer forest, sawmills, and farms.

The earlship of James, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Fife saw the enlargement of the estate until it included most of Aberdeenshire west of Braemar – including Auchendryne, Corriemulzie, and Inverey.

### **1809 – Alexander, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl Fife**

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In **1809** James died, and his brother Alexander became the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl Fife.

About **1810** George Keith (minister of Keith-Hall and Kinkell) visited the upland of Mar – his account in *Keith (1811)* provides us with interesting references to the farm of Charles McHardy in Gleann Dhé, and commercial grazing in Gleann Giubhasachain and upper Gleann Dhé.

### **1811 – James, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl Fife**

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In **1811** Alexander died, and his son James became the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl Fife.

The earlship of James, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl Fife saw the construction of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mar Lodge at Corriemulzie – the almost total conversion of the estate to deer forest and the first wave of shooting lodge and keeper's cottage construction in the glens.

In **1829** the Muckle Spate not only destroyed that year's crops, but it also damaged the agricultural value of the glens to both tenant and landlord.

The early **1830s** saw the removals from Gleann Dhé, and the leasing of the old forest to Francis, 7<sup>th</sup> Duke of Leeds.

The early **1840s** saw the removals from Gleann Eidh.

In **1848** Queen Victoria stayed at Balmoral Castle during her first visit to Deeside. She and Albert liked it so much that they bought and rebuilt the castle.

About **1852** the lease of the old forest held by Francis, 7<sup>th</sup> Duke of Leeds expired.

About **1856** the lease of the old forest was taken up by Mr. Powell – I've no information about him.

### **1857 – James, 5<sup>th</sup> Earl Fife**

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In **1857** James died, and his nephew James became the 5<sup>th</sup> Earl Fife.

The earlship of James, 5<sup>th</sup> Earl Fife saw the opening of the Linn of Dee Bridge by Queen Victoria, and her ascent of Ben Macdui.

I'm inclined to believe that most of the construction at Derry Lodge, Bynack Lodge, and Geldie Lodge was carried out during the earlship of James, 5<sup>th</sup> Earl Fife.

### **1879 – Alexander, 6<sup>th</sup> Earl Fife**

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In **1879** James died, and his son Alexander became the 6<sup>th</sup> Earl Fife.

The earlship of Alexander, 6<sup>th</sup> Earl Fife saw the peak of the deer forest. It also saw the birth of Seton Gordon (writer and naturalist), his first visits to the Cairngorms, and the publication of his first two books.

In **1889** Alexander married Princess Louise of Wales, a granddaughter of Queen Victoria. Within days of the marriage, Alexander was created Duke of Fife and Louise created Duchess of Fife.

In **1895** the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mar Lodge (at Corriemulzie) was destroyed by fire, the 1<sup>st</sup> Mar Lodge (on the site of current 4<sup>th</sup> Mar Lodge) was demolished, and the foundation stone of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mar Lodge was laid by Queen Victoria.

### **1912 – Louise, Princess Royal, Duchess of Fife**

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In **1912** Alexander died without a male heir, and Mar Forest passed to the Duke's wife Louise, Princess Royal, Duchess of Fife. Although the Duke's wife and daughters were keen fishers ; the ladies did not shoot deer. I speculate – that maintaining a deer forest only made sense with a male heir to shoot deer, so the infrastructure of the deer forest was gradually wound down.

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### 1931 – Alexandra, Princess, Duchess of Fife

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In **1931** Louise died, and Mar Forest passed to her eldest daughter Alexandra.

In **1959** following the death of Alexandra, Mar Forest was split into two pieces. The southern piece continued as Mar Estate under the ownership of Alexander Ramsay, and continues in the hands of his descendants. The northern piece became Mar Lodge Estate and has passed through several hands.

In **1995** the National Trust for Scotland bought Mar Lodge Estate – it continues in their hands.

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### Maps and land measurement

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In **1703** John Farquharson, 9<sup>th</sup> of Invercauld created his hand-drawn map *Farquharson (1703)* providing us with a fascinating snapshot of the upland of Mar a little more than a decade before the Earl of Mar's Jacobite Rising in 1715.

In **1869** the Ordnance Survey published the first series of their 6-inch to 1-mile maps. These maps are based on the survey carried out in 1866, and give us a snapshot of the upland of Mar as it was in 1866.

The **20-acre rule** is a rule-of-thumb I invented based on rough-measurements of the farm enclosures in Gleann Eidh – they're all roughly 20-acres. It's unlikely to be a coincidence that 20-acres is roughly equivalent to an Oxgate – an old unit for measuring farming land.

The 20-acre rule work best in Gleann Eidh where the farm boundaries are most evident, but it also appears to work well in locating the farm boundaries in Gleann Dhé and Gleann Laoigh.

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### Gaelic place names – what we should know already

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It's a frustrating fact that many writers have not taken the time to get the place names right. A great deal is already known, and anyone can know the history and derivation of the place names without being any kind of Gaelic place name expert. That job is done, but, in spite of that fact, other writers repeatedly get the history and derivation of these place names wrong when a little research would have kept them right.

The best example of getting it wrong when a little research would have kept them right is in *Dixon & Green (1995)* where the authors repeat someone else's speculation on the derivation of the Corrour Bothy place name – writing :

In origin the place-name suggests that the site was used as a shelter for the corrour or forester's assistant (Guilbert 1979, 134ff), but it may have been used as a stalking shelter in more recent times

– Dixon & Green (1995) (p29)

My mind boggles – there is no doubt about the derivation of Corrour Bothy – it's a straightforward Anglicisation from the Gaelic name of the corrie above it. It's a well-known and well-documented fact *Alexander (1928, p143)*, *Watson (1975, p145)* and others.

In the 1860s the Ordnance Survey carried out the first systematic attempt at collecting the Gaelic place names of the upland of Mar. These place names were collected for the old 6-inch maps that were published in 1869.

The collection of Gaelic place names is a job for experts in the collection of Gaelic place names, and the fact that many incorrect place names appear on Ordnance Survey maps suggests they lack that expertise – for example *Learg Ghruamach* appeared on the old 6-inch map (1869), and on current maps it continues to appear as *Lairig Ghru* rather than as *Làirig Dhrù* as it should probably be. To be fair to the Ordnance Survey they've 'always' been aware of place name errors ;

have ‘always’ been open to their correction and have a process in place for doing so.

You might think (as I once did) that any Gaelic speaker would be up to the job of collecting Gaelic place names, but you’d be wrong (as I was). The correct collection of Gaelic place names requires a double expertise – an expertise in the collection of place names and an expertise in Gaelic speech.

In **1915** the (even then) noted expert on Gaelic place names William Watson was asked by the editor of the Cairngorm Club Journal to comment on their proposed collection of place names in the Cairngorms – his response hit the nail on the head :

there is one condition necessary, and that is that the names, so far as possible, shall be checked from the mouths of Gaelic speakers, especially Badenoch and Braemar. This is not a piece of work that can be done by any chance man who can read and write Gaelic ; it is work for an expert ... it should be obvious that a discussion that does not start with firm data [local pronunciations collected by an expert] is futile ... The one thing needful, the native pronunciation in Gaelic, is the one thing that nobody thinks of ascertaining

– William Watson (CCJ 46, January 1916, p133-134)

Clearly – getting place names right is not just about writing the right words down. It's also about getting the subtler aspects of language such as dialect, and pronunciation right too. And that, as William Watson makes clear, is not a job any Gaelic speaker can do.

It’s also impossible to overstate the importance of the local Gaelic speech – for example – although Sròn an Daimh near Loch Etchachan may literally mean *nose of the ox*, by reading *Gordon (1925)* anyone could know that in the upland of Mar it actually means *nose of the stag*. Although not an expert place name collector, Seton Gordon recorded many place names in his books that he learned from local Gaelic speakers at a time when Gaelic was the everyday speech in the upland of Mar. Given William Watson’s reply to the editor of the Cairngorm Club Journal in 1915, as flawed as Seton Gordon’s methodology may have been, his contribution is one we can learn from and build on.

Before you start thinking I’m any kind of Gaelic expert – I’m not. What little knowledge and expertise I’ve acquired about the Gaelic

place names in the upland of Mar is due to the fact that I've read the books of people who actually know what they're writing about – which is exactly my point.

Among those books the one I consider to be the most authoritative is *The place names of Upper Deeside* by Adam Watson and Elizabeth Allan. Most of my knowledge, and most of my authority regarding place names in the upland of Mar is derived from that creditable piece of work.

Earlier writers, unwilling to run the risk of confusing their readers, have followed an established convention of using the same place names used by the Ordnance Survey on their maps, even when they know them to be wrong. I doubt the risk of confusion is significant ; and think it high-time we credit readers with enough intelligent to cope with seeing one place name on a map, and seeing the place name in another form in a book – especially if the right form is explained.

Knowing what we know – I think it's high-time we :

- Stop doing the wrong thing (perpetuating place name errors)
- Start doing the right thing (use correct place names)
- Made no apology for any confusion we cause – we'll make errors too, but we can correct them as we go

In *Watson & Allan (1984)* we have a great place to start. I'd rather rely on it (and be wrong) than perpetuate the known place name errors of the Ordnance Survey.

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### Some Gaelic and Scots words used in this book

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While this book is in English, it contains a few words of Gaelic or Scots origin that are such everyday words to many Scottish hill-goers that replacing them with English equivalents seems inappropriate. That said, because they won't be everyday words for everyone, the following explanations are included.

**Bealach** – used in place names, and in conversation to refer to areas of ridge-like lower ground in the hills. Typically the term can refer to a low point between two distinct hills, the low point between two summits of the same hill, or the low point on a ridge.

**Bothy** – is a building built by an employer to house employees while engaged in their work. The term ‘bothy’ is often misapplied to mountain shelters, but Corrou Bothy, Dubh-ghleann Bothy, and the original Luibeg Bothy were true bothies ; they were built by the estate to house gillies and deer watchers.

**Cateran** – it’s simplistic to portray Caterans as merely armed cattle thieves, which they certainly were, but for the purposes of this book there’s no need to expand further.

**Dail** – a Gaelic word that translates best into the Scots word *haugh* then into English – meaning *flat land beside a river*.

**Gillie** – a Gaelic word meaning *boy*, but on sporting estates it’s the job-title of a keeper’s assistant. Typically – gillies were hired for the duration of the shooting season.

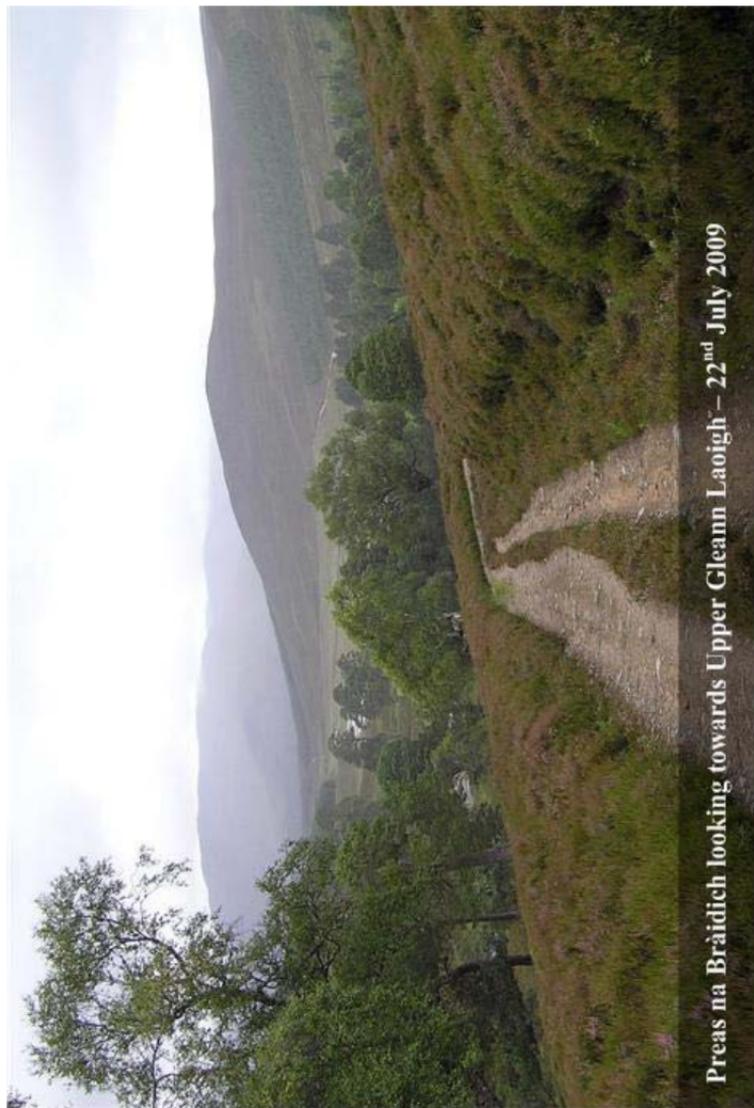
**Larder** – a building where shot animals are processed and stored temporarily. On Mar Lodge Estate the main larder is the large wooden building east of the stable block. The shooting lodges had their own smaller versions.

**Ruighe** – a Gaelic word used in place names associated with the traditional summer grazing practice of the highlands. The animals would be kept on the arable land near the farmhouse through the winter. In spring, when it was time to plough the arable land the animals would be driven to the summer grazing area in the hills and not brought back to the farm until after the crops were harvested. Shieling or Shiel are often used interchangeably with Ruighe.

**Spate** – the sudden rise in river level caused by recent heavy rain or rapidly melting snow. The Muckle Spate (big flood) of 1829 saw the Dé rising several feet above normal and sweeping away crops, houses, and bridges.







Preas na Bráidich looking towards Upper Gleann Laoigh – 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2009

## Gleann Laoigh

As a place name Gleann Laoigh – means *glen of calf-one*, a reference to the river – the river is the *calf-one*.

This non-literal translation of Laoigh to *calf-one*, rather than the literal *calf* is non-obvious, and has led many to the erroneous conclusion that Gleann Laoigh must be *the glen of the calves*, and the Làirig Laoigh must be the *pass of the calves*.

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### Canadian Camp

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From 1942 to 1944 Company 25 of the Canadian Forestry Corps occupied the whole of the ‘peninsula’ between the Laoigh and the Dé. They stripped the surrounding hillsides of trees, chopped them into manageable logs about 10-feet long on the hillside and brought them to the sawmill where they were sawn into faced slabs. The faced slabs were carried by truck to the railway station at Ballater and then by rail to wherever they were needed.

The two colloquial names for the area : Canadian Camp, and Canadian Campsite are references to that wartime occupation.

My earliest memories of the upland of Mar are from the late 1960s ; of weekends and holidays spend in the family caravan left ‘permanently’ at the Canadian Campsite, the successor to the wartime Canadian Camp.

My first weekend at the Canadian Campsite must only have been a little more that twenty years after the Canadian Forestry Corps left, but the evidence of the lumber camp and the associated activity was still evident.

In the late 1970s the estate closed the open campsite and turned the whole area into a plantation, but even today – more than sixty years after the Canadian Forestry Corps left – the evidence of the wartime occupation is still evident. If you explore the plantation you can still

see the roads they built, the ceramic isolators they screwed into trees, the big-ditch, the concrete blocks that supported the machinery of the sawmill, and the remains of the Canadian Bridge – the log-built bridge over the Dé.

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### Canadian Camp to Derry Lodge

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If you park in the car park near Eas Dé, the usual route up Gleann Laoigh by Black Bridge follows the track through the plantation to the estate road on the right-bank of the Laoigh. If you're in no hurry a more enjoyable route up Gleann Laoigh by Black Bridge follows the track along the left-bank of the Laoigh from Lui Bridge.

**Black Bridge** – is the vehicle bridge over the Laoigh near the middle of Gleann Laoigh.

As a place name there's no evidence that Black Bridge is anything other than literal. The bridge I remember into the 1970s was a painted black.

Approaching Black Bridge the view of the glen opens up on the left showing the broad valley of upper Gleann Laoigh. From Black Bridge the route to Derry Lodge follows the estate road along the left-bank of the river.

In this part of Gleann Laoigh the broad U-shaped valley, and the two conical moraines a short distance upstream from Black Bridge are the obvious signs of the ancient glacial past of the glen. The Gaelic speakers gave names to every hump and bump in the landscape including these moraines, which they named Na Da Shidhean – meaning *the fairy hillocks*.

Other remains in the glen are relatively more recent – seen as grassy, roughly rectangular outlines – are the ruins of farm buildings.

In **1726**, after the forfeiture of 1716 and the repurchase of 1724 the farmers occupying upper Gleann Laoigh were 'ejected'. We can get emotive, as others have, and call this a 'clearance' – or cloud the issue by arguing the rights and wrongs of landowners removing farmers from

the land. That's all good stuff, but it ignores what I believe are the facts of the matter – that upper Gleann Laoigh was then part of what is known as the *old forest*, an unoccupied area set aside for hunting.

I'm inclined to believe that the 'ejection' of Gleann Laoigh in 1726 was merely a legal process of a landlord removing squatters – that these farmers were occupying land without legal permission from the landowner. I believe that that James McKenzie of Dalmore took advantage of the authority vacuum created by the forfeiture of 1716 by renting out the previously unoccupied Gleann Laoigh to farmers. Once James Erskine, Lord Grange and David Erskine, Lord Dun repurchased the estate in 1724 they took steps to 'remove' the farmers who, they believed, were illegally occupying the glen. The letter from James Erskine, Lord Grange to James Farquharson of Balmoral ordering the 'ejection' supports my belief that James Erskine, Lord Grange believed the farmers occupation of upper Gleann Laoigh was illegal. Although in *Michie (1901)* the author does not agree with my conclusions, we are fortunate that he has reproduced the letter – in that letter James Erskine, Lord Grange – writes :

that people may see they are not to be suffered in their illegal Insolence, nor dream that by such doings they can continue their usurpations. And if, by trusting to such methods any of these people come to find themselves unprovided, they have themselves to blame who were legally warned and who have notwithstanding of their Insolence [been] indulged to sit till now ; and they deserve to suffer. However, our view is not Revenge against them but to have the estate presently put in a right way, and that the Country may be duely governed.

It will be in vain for James Mckenzie to pretend that he does not countenance them : they are there as his Tenants, and surely none of them can be so stupid as to imagine they may continue there as our Tennants spite of our Teeth ; And Mckenzie's folly is very great in not freeing us from all trouble in ejecting them, after he has been so often told, even by his own best friends, that he has no Right and has taken wrong measures

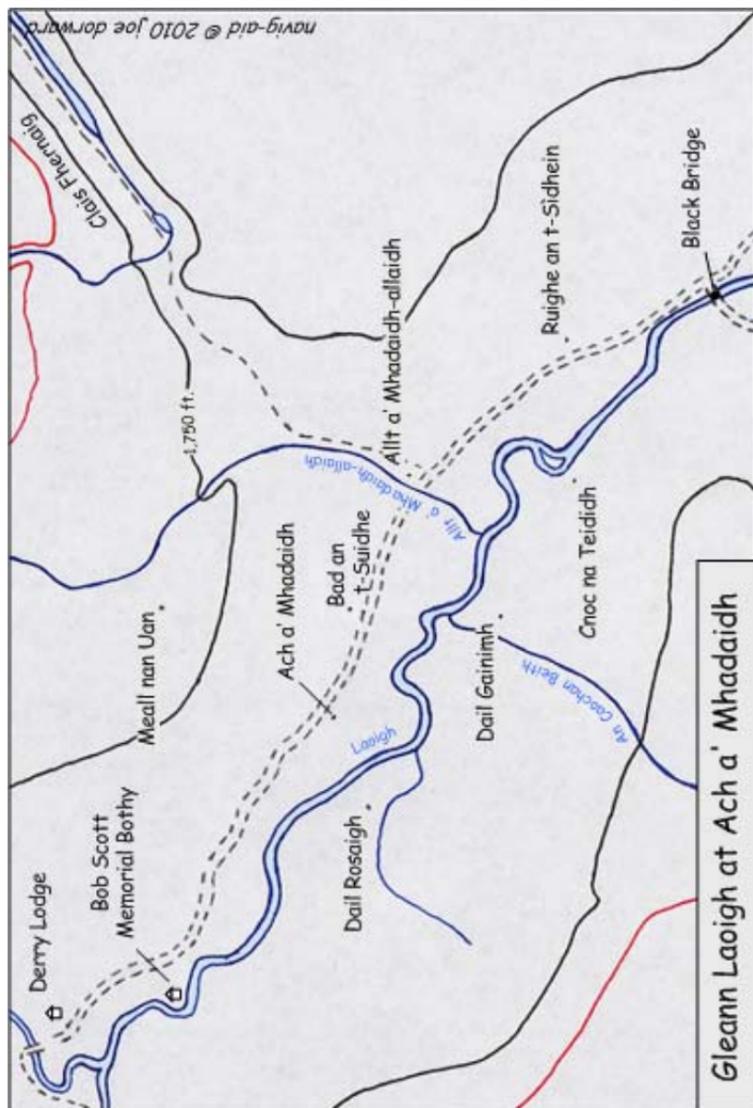
– James Erskine, Lord Grange (1726)

John Michie casts the letter as “characteristic of the crooked policy of the writer”, but I see no evidence of that. I believe the letter shows that James Erskine, Lord Grange believed that the occupation was illegal,

and that he was merely enforcing his legal landowning right to ‘eject’ them.

The farm boundaries in Gleann Laoigh are older and less clear than the farm boundaries in Gleann Dhé and Gleann Eindh. Using the 20-acre rule one could speculate where the farm boundaries were, but speculation is speculation and won’t get us much closer to knowing. That said some boundary walls do survive to show us where some of the farm boundaries were.





**Ruighe an t-Sidhean** – is the first (ruined) farm on the left-bank of the Laoigh.

As a place name Ruighe an t-Sidhean – means *cattle-run of the fairy hillock* – a reference to the conical moraines nearby.

**Allt a' Mhadaidh-allaidh** – is the second (ruined) farm on the left-bank of the Laoigh.

As a place name Allt a' Mhadaidh-allaidh – means *burn of the dog or wolf*.

**Bad an t-Suidhe** – is the third (ruined) farm on the left-bank of the Laoigh.

As a place name Bad an t-Suidhe – means *clump of the level shelf*.

**Ach a' Mhadaidh** – is the fourth (ruined) farm on the left-bank of the Laoigh.

As a place name Ach a' Mhadaidh – means *field of the wolf*.

**Cnoc na Teididh** – is the first (ruined) farm on the right-bank of the Laoigh.

As a place name Cnoc na Teididh – means *knoll of the wild fire*.

**Dail Gainimh** – is the second (ruined) farm on the right-bank of the Laoigh.

As a place name Dail Gainimh – means *haugh of sand*.

**Dail Rosaigh** – is the third (ruined) farm on the right-bank of the Laoigh.

As a place name Dail Rosaigh – means *haugh of wooded place*.

There may have been more farms in upper Gleann Laoigh, there certainly appears to be enough flat land by the river for at least another two 20-acre farms, but without a proper archival and archaeological investigation it's impossible to know much more about the occupation of the glen.