

MARCH TO INVERLOCHY

MACDONALDS & CAMPBELLS JOIN IN A FUND-RAISING RE-ENACTMENT

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When the army of the Marquis of Montrose streamed over the plain at Inverlochy to fall upon the Marquis of Argyll's forces in the gloom of a February morning they were assured of a place in history. For, after marching almost 40 miles over mountains and through bogs and torrents, the 1500 Royalists were poised to attack before the enemy knew they were there.

When they stormed into action, Argyll's army was swept from the field. Nearly half of his 3000 troops died while he escaped down Loch Linnhe in his galley.

Since that day in 1645, historians have theorised and argued, not about the battle, which was obviously won by Montrose's genius and the fighting spirit of

his men, but about the route taken on the approach march.

From the moment his army took to the hills above Cille Chuimein, now Fort Augustus, where the march began, Montrose relied on local clansmen, notably Iain Lom the Bard of Keppoch, to avoid the easily-watched Great Glen. But it seems that the historians never consulted the clansmen or their descendants.

This was a mistake, for recently some of these descendants drew on a wealth of family histories and their knowledge of the country to re-enact the march on its anniversary. They demonstrated in astonishing and dashing style that the great traditions of courage, stamina, and natural leadership are alive and thriving in Lochaber.

Twelve men stood on the bank of Loch Uanagan, near Fort Augustus. Dawn was breaking on the leaden sky over the Great Glen.

On or near that spot 341 years before, the Marquis of Montrose had to decide whether to go north and confront the Earl of Seaforth's 5000-strong army or turn south to attack the Marquis of Argyll's force camped at Inverlochy, now part of Fort William.

His decision to take his Highlanders, Islemen, and Irish over the rugged country by Culachy, Glen Roy, and Spean to Inverlochy was the beginning of a legend. And the 12 men were there to honour that legend and the men of both sides who died in the battle.

Nine had family connections in the area which can be traced back for centuries. One, carrying a 5ft claymore he made himself, was descended from Irish MacDonalds

who fought for Montrose under Alasdair Colkitto MacDonald of Colonsay. The others were a Balquhiddie MacGregor and an Athollman.

The march was organised by a Glen Roy crofter, Ronald Campbell, whose branch of the clan settled in Keppoch in the fifteenth century when they became bodyguards, pipers, and foster-parents to MacDonald chiefs.

It quickly took the form that was to be maintained throughout with shepherd Aladair MacDonald and farmer Willie Shaw breaking the trail through soft snow to Culachy heights with a rhythm of movement that only those who spend their lives on the hills can achieve.

The marchers swiftly brushed through clumps of birch trees dotting the bogs and snow banks that led to Culachy boundary where

Robin MacGregor broke off to attend to his shepherding nearby.

As they dipped down to Glén Buck and up the Allt na Larach, the pace did not slacken although the strong east wind began to bite and blown snow danced on the existing drifts.

A herd of startled hinds floundered away towards Carn Dearg. Benavie headmaster Edward Hunter plunged waist-deep into a snow drift. "Could someone please give me a wee hand out of here?" asked this descendant of the Arkaiside MacMillans politely.

At 2000 ft. snow showers swept the tableland. Harry MacDonald's red hair turned white with rime. The kilted Athollman's legs took on a purple hue. The sling used for carrying the claymore broke and the sword tripped Bill MacHugh the galloglaigh who fell flat on his face. "I'm not at all cold," said the Athollman loftily, "the kilt is an underrated garment." But he was carrying a pair of heavy longjohns in his pack just in case.

After six hours, the marchers were at Allt Lairig Moire looking down into Glen Turret, taking a break because they were ahead of schedule.

All agreed that it was one thing for well-fed men with light packs

Fording the icy waters of the Spean in pitch darkness.



and reasonable weather to make a fast time, but entirely another for Montrose's ill-clad and hungry 1500, battered with sleet and carrying heavy weapons.

Then, as hoodies cried out in alarm, the marchers bounded down the steep east slope in a shower of snow, crossed Glen Turret at Allt na Teanga Bige and, spurning the Wade route, climbed on to the first parallel road, one of Glen Roy's geological wonders.

Here they were joined by Kevin Dignan, descendant of Alasdair

such traditional fare. Mrs. Ann MacDonell, the "Chief of Staff" who researched the project, had made a huge pot of soup from venison, mutton, and beef. Ronald Campbell's sister Ishbel had baked enormous quantities of oatcakes and scones.

Mrs. Joy Munro, a Leanachan Kennedy whose husband Billy was on the march, and Mrs. Kate MacDonald of Inverroy kept the food flowing in a crowded wool shed.

Montrose's army spent several hours at Achavady awaiting dark-

ness to conceal their crossing the Spean, but the 1986 marchers were off again in less than an hour.

A dram was taken at the Briagach's sharpening stone, said to have been used by the Royalists to put an edge on their swords, then it was off to Caol Lairig, the ancient pass from Glen Roy to the west.

Immediately, Willie and Alasdair led a group including Alasdair Wardlaw 500 ft up the slope to the top parallel road at a killing pace. Someone suggested to Ronald Campbell that they were going too high. "They're just having a stretch after the food," he replied. "We'll meet them at Allt Ionndrainn." Which is what happened.

Darkness fell as the marchers left Allt Ionndrainn — the wandering burn — and went south-west into a new forestry plantation where slush, bogs, and bushes slowed the pace. No-one was sorry to quit the plantation for the gentle fields of Inverroy leading down to the Munros' house at Foich where more hospitality waited.

Also waiting to join the march were the Munros' sons Graham and David and Kenneth Mackintosh. They had travelled to Skye that morning, played a game of shinty and returned immediately after.

Ronald Campbell leads the band of marchers across the bleak terrain of Glen Roy.



A claymore is raised again in Glen Roy: Bill MacHugh from Milngavie (pron. "Mulguy") silhouetted against the winter landscape with his home-made weapon.

Buidhe, 14th Chief of Keppoch and Maclain of Glencoe. Kevin, Scottish Senior Schoolboy, Motor Cycle Champion for the second year running, and shepherd Alasdair Macintosh were the youngest marchers as they approached the ancient township site of the Briagach a mile north of Achavady.

Here Montrose's army received reinforcements of Glen Roy men and it is inconceivable that they were not also given hospitality by the friendly inhabitants of Lickroy, Annat and the 14 hamlets which existed there at the time. Deer would be down in the hard weather and oats would be available.

The 1986 marchers feasted on

