

EDITOR'S EXCURSION

A Letter from Scotland.. Alex McLeod

In 2010 we had 8 representatives from SA to the 4 yearly Clan MacLeod Societies' Parliament. It was not so much of a Parliament; but a Gathering with some Clan business.



I was thrilled by the strong attendance of Merawyn, Alexa, Stefan & Doreen, Bronwyn and Bill & Jenny Hunt who were warmly greeted. The Raasay MacLeods especially acknowledged them for preserving the MacLeod history at their farming property "Nalang", near Bordertown.

Our pre Parliament gathering in Scotland is usually about regional culture and history, and this time it was held in the parish of Assynt, in the Northwest Highlands and coast.



That required some traveling, which we also continued later. So here is a spray of traveler's impressions, Alexa, Jenny, Merawyn at Ceilidh;

**Kosaks, McLeods, Hunts at Borreraig;
Doreen & Stefan Kosak first Kilting,
Wallace monument. sions.**



Scotland through a lens.....Prose by Alex McLeod

**Glasgow, architecture old and new.
What rain can't clean, steam may do.
Yin and Yang.
Clydebank shipyards, "Where ye gang?"**

Edinburgh, Fringe - both witty and rank.
Military Tattoo was slick, refined.
Every old building looks like a bank;
-but isn't. -ATM's are hard to find.

Stirling Castle under renovation.
Brooch of Scotland. Great history of a nation.
The Wallace monument, -Stand and linger.
Still Wallace gives England the finger.
Culloden battlefield Visitor Centre,
Highland Charge; Helter Skelter.

Aberdeen; Granite grey upon grey;
What were they thinking?
Couldn't find it on a cloudy day.
Missed Perth, I was blinking.
Bright Dundee on the Tay,
Scot's ship Discovery,

St. Andrews, golfing town of eagles, birdies and pars,,
Triple bogey traffic jams for travelers in cars.
Grampians, Cairngorms, mountains galore.
Funicular, tourist action, Aviemore,

Inverness and Moray Coast,
young faces in old places
and plenty to boast.

Loch Lomond -pretty, Rannoch Moor -pretty wild, Glencoe -pretty awesome.

Tobermory colours of lego town.
Single lane roads slow you down.
On inviolate, iconic, Iona Isle,
lies many a Lord, Chief and Gael.

Loch Linnie, Loch Lochy, Loch Ness. Fort William, Ben Nevis,
sodden campers in a mess.
The Great Glen -lost in cloud and rain, again.
Another time, then. (cont.)

Out from Inverness, we met the barren, lifeless, forbidding North-west Highlands of ancient glacial plateaus, rain sodden high moors, lochs and tumbling streams which seemed to flow nowhere in particular. Here, the great gnarly mountain peaks rise like knuckles out of the earth. For good reason this area is a UNESCO Geopark. At this pre-Parliament gathering in the pub, the MacLeods' welcome was like a campfire in the wilderness, enthusiastic and warm.

In Assynt, Neil MacLeod's old Ardvreck Castle is on its knees, humbly crumbling and submits to this panoramic theatre of geological and human drama. In this place of ghosts, we bonded by blood or by name; but these Assynt ancestors were cursed by the same: For family feuds, Politics and clans brought strife, and finished the life of the MacLeods of Assynt.

On to Isle of Sky and Clan Parliament

-From Inchnadamph, by mountains Beinn Leoid, Suilven, Canisp, Stac Pollaidh, Healabhal Beag, The Torridon, Quiraing, Cuillins, through Corrieshalloch, Drumbeg, Gairloch, Kinlochewe, Bealach na Ba, Borreraig and Dunvegan.

Such a strange tongue. Such alien landscapes of ghostly mountains masked in mists, and hovering clouds. It makes up a mythical world, inscribed with ancient Gaelic images, lost history mixed with fairy tales. We enter a place of mystery and legend; where fact and fable are intertwined.

In Dunvegan, we began with happy reunions and many new introductions. Of the 200 registered about three quarters were first timers. The Dunvegan Hall was the focal point of activity, and the wine and cheese reception was a vibrant start.

This Sunday every 4 years the local Durnish Parish church is filled to capacity; then a sumptuous Luncheon was consumed followed by the official opening of the Gathering. National banners, Clan Chiefs and cadet family banners and those of various officers, were piped in with some respectable attention.

The Parliament programme for 6 days was busy, but opportunities arose for doing our own activity. A visit to nearby Dunvegan Castle is a good start.

Chief Hugh apologised for the castle not being in its sunlit splendor, as much of it was in Construction Site shroud, giving it the distant appearance of a Nuclear Power facility.

However, the place exudes a charm and warmth befitting a home, despite the trail of visitors. It is set in magnificent gardens. The rooms contain numerous portraits, extensive library, and items of historic and clan interest, which personalise the progress of that family, this clan, over 800 years, and that which, although not endowed with Political or Royal power, remained in tact and in place on that rock.

The programme had organised tours to Orbost Community, Isle of Raasay, Clan Donald Centre, The Borreraig Cairn, and MacLeod's tables. On offer were daily workshops for dancing, craft and music. The structured discussion groups dealt with our Clan Association and future matters. We had our Elections, whiskey appreciation, evening Ceilidhs, and entertainment, and finally the Clan MacLeod Ball.

One highlight was the visit to the MacCrimmon Cairn, Borreraig, erected in the 1930's above Loch Dunvegan. Our pipers led us up the hill, where we assembled about the cairn. There, Piper Ewen MacCrimmon played the piobaireachd with solemnity, for it was penned by long ago by a MacCrimmon mourning the deaths of his children. Ewen eeked out an enchanting melancholy, and as he played, the music evocatively summoned the spell of timelessness.

Gazing across the Loch and the Minch on this rare clear day, we listened attentively, and heard the soundtrack of centuries.

At 10 o'clock at the Ball, we mustered outside the Hall, and with our 3 wonderful pipers, we marched up the road to the pub to view the excellent community fireworks on the hill above the village. With bursting chests we were piped home again to a grand finale and many fond farewells.

cont..?-

**Skye and the highlands were a tease, like a woman with secrets;
Who would only lift her skirts a little now and then.**

**She flirted , as the low clouds revealed, and then concealed her limbs.
Her bosom and nether beauty was clothed in gossamer mists,
offering meagre passing glimpses of her appealing beauty.**

**Then, sometimes, in the rare clarity of golden sunlight, unveiled,
she would reveal her textures, her exquisite and generous forms,
glistening, as with sweat.
The reflected glow, like a blush, a smile, beckons the night.**

I was a romantic pilgrim, but the Scots are her lovers.

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Another time, another place under a wet heavy sky, another voice might be heard..."the weather is
a real bitch ain't it?"

