

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. 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 the Hunts for preserving the Raasay 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, by Inchnadamph, in the northwest highlands and coast.

That required some traveling, which we also continued later. So here is a spray of traveler's impressions.

Glasgow Yin and Yang.
Clydebank shipyards 'lang gang'
Architecture old and new.
What rain can't clean, steam may do.

Edinburgh, Fringe - both witty and rank.
Every building LOOKS like a bank;
but ATM's are hard to find.
Military Tattoo was slick, refined.

Stirling Castle renovation.
Brooch of Scotland. 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;
-couldn't find it on a cloudy day.
What were they thinking?
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 at Aviemore,

Inverness and Moray Coast,
Energetic and plenty to boast.
young faces in highland apparels;
Scotch and oil by the barrels

(cont..)

Loch Lomond is pretty,

Rannoch Moor is pretty wild,
Nessie- is pretty dull tourism,
Glencoe was pretty awesome.

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

Loch Linnie, Loch Lochy, Loch Ness.
Fort William, Ben Nevis, sodden campers in a mess.
The Great Glen in cloud and rain again.
Perhaps another time, then.

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 ancient Assynt hosts
were cursed by the same.

For family feuds brought strife,
then rival clans and political assault
of blame and shame finished the life
of the MacLeods of Assynt.

Now travel south-west to Isle of Skye and Clan MacLeod Parliament

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

Such a strange tongue of the Gaels and Vikings, describing alien landscapes of ghostly mountains masked in mists, and shrouding clouds. It's where monoliths are inscribed with ancient Gaelic images and remind you of another time, conjuring a mythical, mystical world, where true and vague history mixes 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 and remarkable gardens 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 which exude a vibrant life to compliment the iconic home of MacLeods. The castle rooms contain numerous portraits, extensive library, and items of historic and Clan interest, which personalise the 800 year progress of that family, this Clan, that which, although not endowed with Political or Royal power, remained in tact and in place on that rock.

The Parliament 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 Dunvegan Ball.

One of the highlights 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 a spell of timelessness. Gazing across the Loch and the Minch on this rare blue sky day, we listened attentively to the emotion in the music, and heard the soundtrack of centuries.

At 10 pm at the Dunvegan Ball, we mustered outside the Hall, and with our 3 wonderful Pipers, we marched up the road to the pub, for the excellent community fireworks above the village. With bursting chests we were piped home again to the grand 'finale' and many fond farewells.

**My visit to Skye and the Highlands ...
was like encountering a winsome, capricious woman,
secretive; a little flirtatious, teasing;
who would raise her skirts a little, now and then.**

**She flirts, with the low clouds revealing,
and then concealing, her firm nimble limbs.
Her bosom and nether beauty, clothed in gossamer mists,
offer meagre passing glimpses of her alluring assets.**

**Sometimes, in the rare clarity of golden sunlight, unveiled,
she reveals her textures, her exquisite and generous forms,
glistening, as with sweat, in a satin sunshower.
Then the reflecting sunset glow, like a blush, a smile,
beckons the night.**

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

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