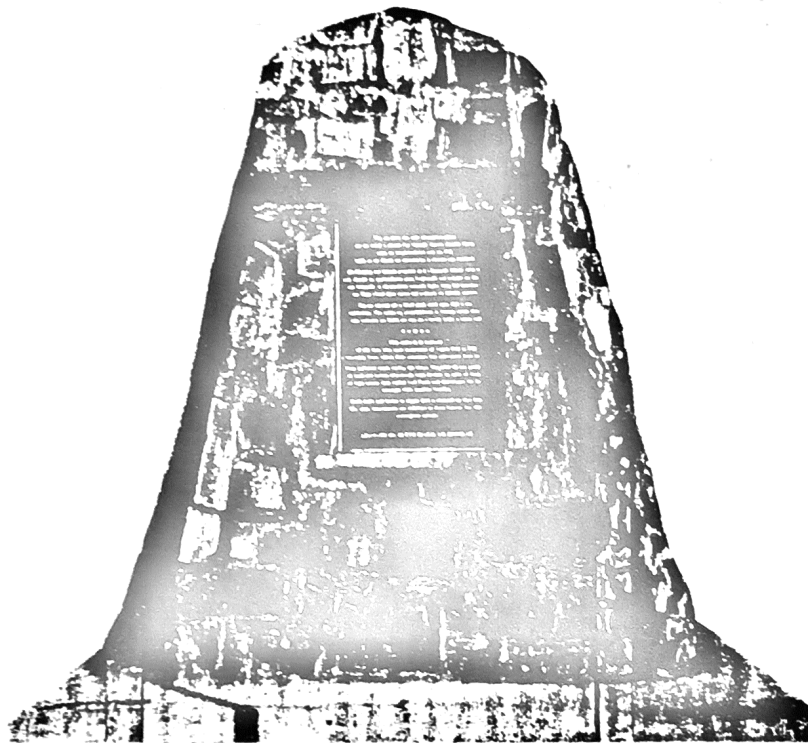


# Foillseachadh



## Càrn Chuil-Uaraich

Di-Sathairne 27mh an t-Samhainn 1993

# Clàr an Fheasgair

## 2.00 Feasgar

Cruinneachadh	Tac Chuil Uraich — “Na Taighean Geala”
A' Coiseachd Chun a' Chàirn	<i>Mna P. Iain Moireasdan</i>
Eachdraidh a' Chàirn	<i>Coinneach A Mac Iomhair, Armh. 11</i>
Ùrnaigh	<i>Iain Dòmhnallach, Armh. 24</i>
A' Foillseachadh a' Chlàir	<i>Peigidh Mhoireasdan, Armh. 1</i>
Òraid Ghoirid	<i>Murchadh Dòmhnallach, Armh. 3</i>
Seinn — Salm 78, Rann 3,5,6	<i>Murchadh Dòmhnallach, Armh. 20</i> <i>(a' togail an fhuinn)</i>



## 2.45 Feasgar

Ath-Chruinneachadh	Sgoil a' Bhac
Fàilte	<i>Coinneach A Mac Iomhair, Armh. 11</i>
Òraid	“Beagan smuaintean mu Eachdraidh Chuil Uraich” <i>Dòmhnall A Stiùbhart, Armh. 28</i>
Seinn	<i>Mairead Stiùbhart-Harding, Armh. 19</i> <i>Clann-Sgoile Chuil-Uraich</i>
Altachadh	<i>Dòmhnall Moiresdan, Armh. 1</i>



## Teatha

A' Toirt Taing	<i>Iomhar MacAoidh, Armh. 6</i>
Seinn : Salm	<i>Alasdair Stiùbhart, Armh. 13</i> <i>(a' togail an fhuinn)</i>

## Beagan smuaintean mu thimchioll eachdraidh Chuil-Uaraich

The following notes are penned mainly for the benefit of the younger members of our community. It is hoped that they might stimulate enquiring minds and instil in those minds a greater sense of being part of our local community.

To understand a people, we must first understand their country. Seldom is the above saying more true than it is when we look at the available clues to decipher the past history of our own Hebridean villages. A cairn of stones here, the remnants of a boundary wall there, the remains of the once cultivated "feannag" lying secluded in some lonely glen - if only those stones could speak!!

But communicate with us they can - if only we were intelligent enough to decipher what they are trying to tell us.

Where our remote ancestors came from over 3000 years ago, we can merely speculate; what exact language they spoke we can make intelligent guesses. But come they did and settle they did and the remains of their works are still to be seen to this day.

Possibly the best example of work by the earliest inhabitants is the now sadly dilapidated "Càrn" lying about half a mile west of Gearraidhghuirm. This is an example of a "Barpa" or chambered burial cairn. The chamber itself is still quite discernable, together with its entrance corridor, once fashioned with massive upright stones. Northwards from the "Carn" lies the "Clach Bhàn" which more than probable both in direction and distance bears some relationship to the position of th "Càrn".

Without available evidence one cannot say with certainty where those far-off people would have had their places of abode. It would however be reasonable to assume that they would have lived close to the seashore where the living would be easier. The machairlands of the Hebrides abound with examples of primitive houses from this period and so the machair of Upper Coll would have provided a natural homeland.

We can also be sure that those people would have, at times, fought against one another and would at other times would have joined forces to repel the threat of the invader.

Those Pictish indwellers, if Picts they were, and their culture had, however, to give way to the foreign culture, and language of the Gaels who were slowly making their way northwards through Scotland. These Gaels or Scots would originally have come from Ireland as missionaries in the earlier part of the millenium and later on in the 6th and 7th centuries, as Columban missionaries from Iona. Although Lewis has many examples of Celtic chapels dotted throughout the island there are no attributable antiquities of this period in Upper Coll although undoubtedly the missionaries would have worked amongst the people. Any remnants of the language used by our early ancestors would also seem to have been eradicated by later invaders and settlers.

Gleann Fàil might be an interesting name. It would seem to be one of the few words for a prominent feature with a Gaelic origin. Even names for small streams in the township, like Eanagro, have a Norse origin and yet the name for this more significant glen would seem to have lost its Viking name. The obvious interpretation for Gleann Fàil is the glen of the sheep folds but "fàl" is also an obsolete Gaelic name for a nobleman or king - "lia-fàil" is another name for the Stone of Destiny.

Could this glen, therefore, because of its proximity to the burial cairn, have been a place of reverence in the mind of the pre-Viking inhabitants and that the Vikings then adopted its original name? This is merely a passing thought but it is a reminder that we should strive to preserve the name of landscape features as they may well give clues to later historians to help unravel the complexities of our past.

The coastline, at that time would have extended much further out into the sea, and it could be that many of the homestead sites have long since been eroded. A former village site certainly existed, about fifty yards east of the Cairn, and this site could well have been occupied since time immemorial. The shards of "Barvas type" pottery, which abound in the area, are, for the amateur, very unreliable dating artefacts as they were in use with little modification for many hundred of years.

But sometime during the 8th century the indwellers of Upper Coll were in for a rude awakening. The sailors in the long-boats landing on Coll beach did not come in peace. As recorded in the "Orkneyinga Saga" - "When the brothers Paul and Erlend ruled the Orkneys, King Magnus came from Norway. He had a large army ..... King Magnus went to the Sudreyar (Hebrides) accompanied by Magnus and Erling, the sons of Earl Erlend. But when King Magnus came to the Islands, he began hostilities first at Liodhus (Lewis) and gained a victory there. In this expedition he subdued the whole of the Sudreyar."

We can be certain that the people of the Coll area would have been overwhelmed by the Vikings and that many of them would have finished up as slaves to serve their new masters. The indigenous language would also have been overwhelmed to be replaced by Old Norse - the language of the incomers.

Although one cannot point with any degree of certainty to remains of buildings dating from the Viking period, this dearth is compensated for by the vast number of place names like Coll, Laicisdil, Brunish and even small streams like Eanagro to remind us of their former presence. Even after the Western Isles were ceded back to Scotland by the Treaty of Perth in 1266, our Upper Coll Vikings would already have been in the area for hundreds of years and would thereafter have stayed - if they had returned to the land of their origin the placenames would surely have gone back with them!

It was during Viking times that the Macleods came into prominence and we can be fairly certain that some petty chieftain who supported the Macleods would have had his seat in those far-off times at Coll Farm.

The end of the reign of the Macleods in the early 17th century, with Niall Odhar making a determined stand against the Mackenzies, were certainly turbulent times. As a very young child, the writer remembers an old lady from Coll recounting in detail a battle fought at Upper Coll long ago. Alas, the details have long since been forgotten but it should not surprise us if it did not coincide with this most rebellious of times. There was certainly a tradition of people having been buried at the junction of the Upper Coll road and the main road and the recently found skeleton with the damaged skull well may have been one of the unfortunates to perish on that day. The families in the Coll area at this time would have been mainly Macleods, with the Barantaich being prominent. The Portairean could also have originally been Macleods as either ferrymen or guardians to the chief and the Ruadh Stewarts had arrived in 1541, before the end of the Macleod era.

Once the Mackenzies were in control of the Lews they would have ousted the sitting Macleods as tacksmen, viewing them as threats and they would have installed those people that could be relied upon to give them support in times of strife.

Thus we find the Morrisons established as tacksmen in Upper Coll in the 1600s. These Morrisons, often in dispute with the Macleods, were of the Brieve or She\riff family from Habost, Ness, and one of the most noted of them was John Morrison, Iain Mac Mhurchaidh 'c Ailein. John Morrison wrote a history of Lewis and met Martin Martin, the Skye writer, when he was visiting Lewis. John Morrison had an even more famous son, Roderick, "An Clasair Dall" the noted harper and bard. John Morrison had come from Gress and later went to Bragar so we cannot be certain as to where Ruairidh Dall was actually born.

John Morrison besides being a highly educated man was noted for his wit which he often expressed in short bardic pieces. It is to him that we are indebted for outlining the boundary between Coll Farm and Nether Coll village:

"Tha chioch an Bogha nan Naosg  
's mar thairneas tu an taod teann  
dh'an Bhota Dhomhain seo shuas  
's a sin a Chol Uarach nam Beann"

"Bu'n naosg" is still recognised in Coll Glen and the remains of the seaward end of the boundary wall after at least 400 years is still visible above Creag Riofain.

We shall not go into detail as to why John Morrison left Coll for Bragar but he would seem to have fallen out with the Coll tenants to be told that if he was not across Abhainn a Ghlinn Duibh by midnight on a certain date that the "toradh" (substance) would be taken from all his cattle. John Morrison took his leave sensibly not waiting to argue.

But the Morrisons did not totally forsake the tenancy of Coll Farm at that time for we still find them there as late as 1726 with Murdo Morrison as sole tacksman.

We now come to the more memorable period of tenancy of the Farm - that of the Macivers.

The Macivers, the Coll stock being of Clann a Bhàillidh, along with several other families such as Mackenzies, Macraes, Finlaysons would have been brought across initially by the Earls of Seaforth from "na caoil ud a muigh" in order to help them to control and subdue the indigenous Macleod stock.

The Coll Macivers came by way of Carloway with the first tacksman being William, mac Choinnich Frangaich. If one has any knowledge of Highland history at the beginning of the 18th century and an awareness of the troubled times, one can guess how Coinneach Frangach was accorded his epithet.

In order to gain an insight into conditions at Upper Coll at this time we may note, in evidence to Seaforth's Chamberlain in 1754 - "Compeared Angus McGilliechallum a married man aged about 40 years who stated that Upper Coll consists of 9 penniesland, 6 pennies possessed by 17 tenants, each with a 1/2 penny and pays £1 Sterling. Angus McGilliechallum has lived in Upper Coll all his lifetime". Several of Angus McGilliechallum's descendants are still with us as Maciver stock in Upper Coll and the pennies refer to an old Gaelic, originally Norse, system for defining areas of land. It should also be noted that 17 tenants made up a sizeable community in those days.

It is more than likely that at least some of the other Coll Macivers would have come across from Carloway with William and indeed it is tradition that 'An MacIomhair, father of Domhnall Mòr, had a place at Eunagro.

THEORY

In the 18th century the main neighbourhood villages were at the mouth of the Coll river and to the south of the Angus River, where at least the remains of two house sites are still visible - tigh Aoghais MhicIllinein on croft No 333 and tigh Sheorais Stiubhart lying some distance to the east of the main road.

Sometime around the beginning of the 19th century the people of Coll moved to their present site and the tenants of Gearraidhguirm were evicted by the Maciver tacksman. The descendants of some of those dispossessed tenants are still living in the community, like those of George Stewart who had come from Lossiemouth after serving as a soldier in the Seven Years War. Other tenants have recorded their names simply as Malcolm MacChristy (MacIllechrìosd) or Murdo Glass (Glas) which indicate that surnames as we know them nowadays had yet to receive recognised status.

The Upper Coll Maciver tacksmen were in many respects an interesting family. They were not farmers as we know them today. Rather they were entrepreneurs trading as merchants - "Peggy of Stornoway" being one of the Maciver sloops - with places as far apart as the Baltic ports and the Mediterranean. They were usually a well educated people with a townhouse in Stornoway and generally were married into families with a similar background to their own. Kenneth, William's oldest son was married to a daughter of the Maciver tacksman at Tolsta and Colin, who succeeded his father at Upper Coll, was married to a daughter of Evander Maciver of Gress.

The Macivers of Coll, Gress and Tolsta were therefore interrelated and they could be regarded as the last of the "old order" of Highland tacksmen in our area. They would have been vassals of Seaforth, the chief of the Mackenzies, and although they might on occasion differ with him in opinion, they were nevertheless always indebted to him, certainly in terms of payment of rent, and they would have a certain allegiance to him which made them in turn powerful and influential people in the community.

Curiously enough, the people of Nether Coll, unlike those of Back, Gress and Vatiskier at the time paid their rents directly to Seaforth so that, unlike their neighbours, they had a measure of independence from the tacksman.

One is always intrigued by several other features of our township, many of which I am sure would have predated even the period of the Macivers' tenancy.

For instance, who would have occupied the substantial ruins of, say, an Àirigh Ghlas or Tigh Thàiseadar? These remains are certainly too substantial for seasonal summer sheilings and would whosoever occupied an Àirigh Ghlas have contributed to the extensive run-rig cultivation of Gleann Fàil? And again, one should never discard tradition as being of little or no value. The older members of the community will certainly recall that it was said that tobacco was grown in Leas Gil Thàiseadar. Rather far fetched, one would say, until one learns that tobacco juice was used in the older days for smearing sheep to prevent sheep tick. What then would be more natural at the time than for the farmer to grow his own tobacco particularly as it did not have to be dried and cured?

When Colin Maciver, Cailean Chuil, gave up his tenancy in the 1830's, it marked the end of the "old order" of tacksmen. He emigrated to Canada and died there as an old man in 1859. A gravestone marking the graves of two of his children is still to be seen in the old Sandwick cemetery and this is certainly worth a visit.

Colin was followed as tenant for a short period by Roderick Nicolson. Nicolson was a Lewisman and was like his predecessor a fishcurer, merchant and trader. The Coll tenants did not seem to take to him and he was forever in dispute with them, impounding their cattle and sheep and calling on them for unpaid labour on the farm together with assisting him with his proposal to drain Loch Chuil Uaraich. "An Fhaing Ruadh" in the Coll Glen could have been one of his pounds, for nearby on the north side of the river is "Cnoc a Phoind". Nicolson did at least leave one visible legacy for if one stands on the Coll Bridge and looks out towards the Glen one is impressed by the straightness of the river. He diverted the river from its original course through Liana Mhòr and arranged to wall the banks of the river - parts of the stone work can still be seen to this day. It should also be noted that the Nicolson Institute owes its existence to the wishes contained in the wills of the sons of Roderick Nicolson.

It was during the Nicolson's tenancy in the 1830s that Gearraidhghuirm was once more resettled. This time the village of about a dozen houses was sited on both sides of the main road where ruins are still evident, in line with "an rathad àrd". Most of the settlers were made up of previously

evicted tenants from Melbost, Borge, together with a few families from Coll. But this settlement lasted only for about ten years and the peoples were once more evicted. The Coll folk went back to Coll and several of their descendants are still to be found in the township of Upper Coll.

After nearly two and a half centuries the Seaforths finally surrendered ownership of the Lews and sold it to Sir James Matheson in 1844. This period also coincided with a new form of tenancy for Upper Coll. The Gaelic speaking local tacksmen were to be replaced by English-speaking southerns, the Riggs followed in turn by the Hunters with different ways, different attitudes and different relationships with their neighbouring tenants in the township of Coll.

This was certainly a period of improvements in the ways in which the farms were run, for the new farmers relied solely on the produce of the land for their livelihood and not on entrepreneurial skills like their predecessors.

Sir James Matheson carried out improvements to the steading and farm house at Upper Coll and a note of this account still remains:

"Measurement and Valuation of the Farm Steading of Coll and repair of dwelling house - 14 July 1851.

Mason work of Barn and Granary	- £28.10.0
Roofing and Slating	- £53.04.3
Flooring and Joisting of Granary	- £10.11.6½
+ other information - Contractor: Robt. Sheddon"	

One of the workmen who was employed during the repair of Coll Farm steading Donald Macleod (Domhnall Tàillear) from Coll. He wrote some amusing verses, still extant, when he missed the nail and hit his thumb whilst working on the roof of the farmhouse.

The last of the Coll farmers, Charles Hunter, having been raised in Upper Coll, had more in common with his Coll neighbours than previous occupants. Although they were under no formal obligation the crofters of Coll gave him much assistance in running the farm - helping with peats and tilling the ground.

The crofting township of Upper Coll, with its 42 crofts, owes its existence to the determination and efforts of mainly a number of Coll people who had survived the carnage of the Great War to come home "to a land fit for heroes".

Space does not allow us to go into detail with regard to land agitation in the late 19th century and the implications of the Small Landowners (Scotland) Act, 1911. Suffice to say that the period of crofter unrest was well anticipated in the Local Government Board Report of 1916:

Lewis is always referred to as an insoluble problem. In point of fact it is no problem at all..... the Lewis Estate have done everything in their power to thwart the economic development of the island. ....after the war, when efective steps are taken to ameliorate the situation, I am informed that violent steps will be taken to secure land for crofters."

Such a warning was ignored at the time and it would, in due time, prove to be a timebomb around Lord Leverhulme's neck when he purchased the island for £143,000 in 1918.

Upper Coll along with Gress was first raided in March 1919 but after withdrawal for a time the farms were reoccupied in January 1920. Although Leverhulme put the law into force against the raiders, they defied the interdict and a warrant was issued for the raiders arrest. Leverhulme however capitulated and halted the proceedings. In October 1920 the raiders once more left Upper Coll maintaining their position, but on the understanding that it would make negotiations for the Board of Agriculture. Further raids took place in the spring of 1921 but by the end of October Leverhulme had to admit defeat and he the whole of Coll and Gress Farms.

It is fitting that our brief look at the history of Upper Coll should end with an account of the farm raids - it is to the memory of the courageous leadership of those who participated in the raids that the cairn is dedicated.

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# Programme

2.00 pm

Assemble	Coll Farm — "Na Taighean Geala"
March to Cairn	<i>PM Iain Morrison</i>
History of the Cairn	<i>Kenneth A MacIver, No. 11</i>
Prayer	<i>John MacDonald, No. 24</i>
Unveiling of the Plaque	<i>Peggy Morrison, No. 1</i>
Short Address	<i>Murdo MacDonald, No. 3</i>
Praise — Psalm 78, v. 3,5,6	<i>Murdo MacDonald, No. 20</i> (precentor)



2.45 pm

Reassemble	Back School
Welcome	<i>Kenneth A MacIver, No. 11</i>
Talk	"Some thoughts on the History of Upper Coll" <i>Donald A Stewart, No. 28</i>
Singing	<i>Margaret Stewart-Harding, No. 19</i> <i>Upper Coll Schoolchildren</i>
Grace	<i>Donald Morrison, No. 1</i>



Tea

Vote of Thanks	<i>Evander MacKay, No. 6</i>
Praise: Psalm	<i>Alasdair Stewart, No. 13</i> (precentor)

Tha an càrn seo mar chuimhneachan  
air na seòid a ghabh Col Uarach thairis dhaibh rheir  
agus an teaghlachan ann an 1921.  
bailé as an deach an sinnearan a chéana am fuadach

Dh'fhuair iad mòran cruaidh rè a' Chogaidh Mhòir (1914-18)  
ach chaidh na geallaidhean gum faigheadh iad tatalamh na dhèidh  
am briseadh. A dh'aindeoin mairidh lagha thug iad ionnsaigh  
air Taca Chuil agus reinn iad a-mach an tatalamh ùr.

Sid an tatalamh air a' bheil gach croft agus tigh & fìr  
suidhichte. Tha sinne na ginealachan & thàinig iad dèidh  
nan comunn gu bràth air son an t-tìr seo fàidh a' tatalamh iad.



This cairn is in memory  
of the men who took possession of Upper Coll in 1921,  
a township from which their ancestors had previously been evicted.

They suffered much during the Great War (1914-18), but promises  
of land and homes afterwards were broken. In spite of threats  
of legal action they raided Coll Farm and distributed the land  
amongst their landless families.

Each croft and house in Upper Coll is situated on that land.  
We, their descendants are indebted to them forever for their  
courageous actions.

LEANABH GU BLÙTH RI CLID ÒR SINNEAR