

DEER FOREST



The Deer Forest was one of the first of Alex's tunes to be re-typeset. It is an arrangement by him where he added the second part. Following enquiry it was to turn out something more than was anticipated. No sooner had it been proof read and referred to Ian MacLellan for final checking than he responded swiftly that "this is not how we played it!" Some mild consternation followed as the new version was re-checked against the original. What was uncovered was that Ian was correct. However as it transpired there were several versions of this tune all in Alex's handwriting but each with a minor nuance. Moreover each example had a different date confirming that when Alex had a new intake of pipers and no spare copies, he re-scribed the tune in the way that he perceived it at that particular time.

No great catastrophe then, but what this meant was that the dates shown at the bottom of the original manuscripts might not be representative of the date of their composition, rather the date when Alex re-scribed the piece.

THE DEER FOREST. SLOW AIR. 1ST PART - TRADITIONAL.
2ND " BY ALEX. M. MAC IVER.

214TH GLASGOW COY., - THE BOYS' BRIGADE. 26TH JANUARY 1970.

This tune was played by most if not all generations of the 214 band and often in solo competition subject, of course, to Alex's strict approval.

Some insight into why Alex kept faith with this tune for so many years may be gleaned from the following notes.

An internet search shows that The Deer Forest (Gaelic: frith) is an institution and phenomenon peculiar to the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. It denotes a sporting estate which is kept and managed largely or solely for the purposes of maintaining a resident population of red deer for deer stalking purposes. Deer Forests are notable from our perspective as being practically devoid of trees. In short the same land which provided or could have provided homes for the crofters and their families was the prospective grazing ground for the Red Deer. There are more than 120 different Deer Forests listed. What this meant for our enquiry was that for us to identify which Deer Forest was in Alex's mind had become somewhat difficult.

In the early days of this project Calum Ross lent his support to our initiative. Calum is a piper, a loyal ex member of the 108 BB, a retired headmaster and notably a Gaelic scholar, (lecturer in Gaelic at the Scottish Conservatoire). Furthermore he is a renowned Mod Gold Medallist. He knew the MacIver family very well and Alex had given him a number of his compositions. Calum was a pupil at Hyndland and was in his last school year when Donnie MacIver, Alex's young brother, took up a teaching appointment at the school. Calum became our project's Gaelic advisor and among other things has translated the tune names for our collective amusement. He knew the song The Deer Forest (FRITH NAN DAMH RUADHA) and he confirmed that it was not exclusively a Lewis song. He informed us that it had at one time been a song set for competition at the National Mod. He has provided a copy of the song and has kindly translated the text for our delectation.

The austerity visited upon the crofters of Lewis was historically extremely severe. In the nineteenth century many of their number suffered eviction or were prevented reasonable access to land which could be farmed and on which crofts could be built to sustain family life. Their circumstances were dire. Countless numbers of these islanders sought not just a better life on the mainland or abroad but any reasonable opportunity to improve their prospects. During the last twenty years of the Victorian era the agrarian problems in Lewis saw huge pressures from the landowners to reclaim crofting land on the island in favour of encouraging "Deer Forests" and resultant hunting and shooting opportunities for the misnamed "great and good" of society.

Such was the increase in pressure on the islanders to leave, that eventually there was a serious collective revolt by the crofters. They decided that their best option was to cull the deer population completely and therefore remove one major cause of their despicable treatment. There were resultant arrests, trials, questions in parliament and even the dispatch of a gunboat and 500 Marines to Lewis.

FRITH NAN DAMH RUADHA

GLEUS F. *Séist.*

Le DOMHNALL FRISEAL.

{ : ḍ . ḍ | ḍ : - . r : n | n : - . r : n . s | ḍ' : - . l : s | s . l : - }
 Air mo hiù - raibh o ghea - llaidh, tha mi'n dùil ri dhol thairis

{ : s₁ | ḍ : - . r : n | l : - . s : f | n : - : - | - : - }
 Gu tir a' chruidh - bhair - nne 's an fheòir, _____

{ : s | ḍ' : - . ḍ : n | r : ḍ : ta₁ | ḍ : - . r : n | s : ḍ' }
 gu frith nan damh rua - dha 'S nan aigh - ean gum bhua-chail

{ : l . l | s : - . n : ḍ | n : - : r . r | ḍ : - : - | - : - ||
 far an tric thug mi ruaig air 'n tòir. _____

Rann 1.

{ : ḍ . ḍ | ḍ : - . r : n | n : r : n . s | ḍ' : - . l : s | s . l : - }
 Cha b'e ias - gach na h-ai - bhne air io_____sal nan srathan

{ : s₁ | ḍ : - . r : n | l : - . s : f | n : - : - | - : - }
 An ni sin a chleachd mi 's mi òg, _____

{ : s . s | ḍ' : - . ḍ : n | r : ḍ : ta₁ | ḍ : - . r : n | s : ḍ' }
 ach bhith di - readh nan stùc Le mo ghu - nna nach diùl - tadh

{ : l . l | s : - . n : ḍ | n : - : r . r | ḍ : - : - | - : - ||
 far an goir an t-eun fionn anns a' cheò. _____

2. Ged thigeadh an gailleann
 le sìon agus frasan,
 Gheibhinn dìon agus fàsghadh gu leòr
 ann an uaimheagan loinneil,
 Ann am fàsach is doire
 far an tric chuir mi ruaig air fear-cròic.

Gaelic stresses and vowel values take precedence.

THE DEER FOREST (The Valley of THE RED DEER)

ON MY HO RO MY PROMISE. I INTEND TO GO OVER

TO THE LAND OF THE MILK COWS AND THE GRASS

TO THE FOREST OF THE RED DEER AND THE HINDS WITHOUT A HERD

WHERE OFTEN I GAVE CHASE IN THEIR PURSUIT

IT WAS NOT THE FISHING ON THE RIVER ON THE LOWER PARTS OF THE STRATHS

THAT I WAS ACCUSTOMED TO WHEN YOUNG

BUT TO BE CLIMBING THE PEAKS WITH MY GUN THAT WOULD NOT REFUSE

WHERE THE PTARMIGAN CALLS IN THE MIST

THOUGH THE STORM WOULD COME WITH ITS BLAST AND SHOWERS

I WOULD GET PLENTY PROTECTION AND SHELTER IN BRIGHT LITTLE CAVES

IN CHOICE PASTURE AND THICKETS

WHERE I OFTEN GAVE CHASE TO THE ANTLERED ONE

"ON MY HO RO MY PROMISE" IS A ROUGH TRANSLATION.

Alex was Honorary President of the Lewis and Harris Association and fiercely proud of his island roots. He was undoubtedly very knowledgeable about Lewis history and particularly these agrarian issues. It is reasonable for us to surmise that his adaptation of FRITH NAN DAMH RUADHA and his perpetuation of it, being played by the band and by the boys in solo competition, were in some small way how he recognised the struggles of his predecessors and attested to their resilience. To learn more of these troubles see below “The Park Deer Raid November 22nd 1887” and research The Lochs Crofters March to Lewis Castle in 1888.

DEER PARK RAIDERS, 1887.

In November, 1887, several hundred crofters from the Pairc region staged a deer raid in protest at their treatment by The Matheson’s, landlords of the Lewis Estate.

Prior to the raid, many Pairc townships had been systematically cleared to give greater access to land that was regarded primarily as deer hunting ground. The boundaries of the deer forest widened as townships were cleared and tenants marginalised; crofters working the land for survival were regarded as a hindrance to sporting pleasure, and were treated accordingly.



Eisgen Lodge circa 1900

The raid was planned and co-ordinated by six men, amongst them Donald McRae, the schoolmaster from Baile Ailein (Balallan). Already an eloquent spokesman for the Land League, McRae also alerted sympathetic journalists in Glasgow with a three-word telegram: HUNT IS UP.

The raiders met Mrs Platt, the sporting tenant of Pairc, as they approached their agreed starting point. She invited them to Eisgean Lodge for food and drink. They declined and commenced with the hunt. In protest at the loss of their ancestral lands, they killed a large number of deer, many of which were distributed to the needy.

They spent the evening talking to journalists and explaining their grievances. Throughout the two-day raid, they maintained good relations with Mrs Platt and her gamekeepers, and went quietly to their homes when ordered to do so after the Sheriff had read the Riot Act. Nevertheless, the authorities panicked and sent a contingent of police and marines to quell what they thought was a full-scale rebellion. Six were arrested and sent to trial in Edinburgh.

Widely regarded as savage and ignorant folk, the crofters distinguished themselves during the trial by their eloquent arguments for a fairer deal from the Lewis Estate. Their counsel successfully argued that no riot had taken place since the men were spread out over an area of 144 square miles. Although the judge was hostile in his summing up, all six were acquitted to loud cheers from the courtroom gallery. Donald McRae was carried shoulder high through the streets and the raiders were entertained in the Prince of Wales Hotel in the evening.

Seven years later, the crofters lit bonfires to celebrate the Report of the Deer Forest Commissioners, which recommended a great reduction in the Highland areas, given over to deer forest. Today, most of Pairc is still a sporting estate in private ownership.

In 1994, a cairn commemorating the Deer Raid was commissioned by a group called Cuimhneachain nan Gaisgeach (Commemoration of our Land Heroes). This impressive monument stands at the edge of Baile Ailein on the Tairbeart (Tarbert) to Steornabhagh road.

Designed by renowned Scottish artist Will MacLean, the cairn has been built by stonemason Jim Crawford - a fitting tribute to one of the most peaceful, yet influential protests made in the history of the Crofters' Wars.



STRI AN FHEARAINN
The Land Struggle
CUIMHNEACHAN AIR GAISGICH NAN LOCH
Memorial to the Heroes of Lochs





Angus 'Ease' Macleod at the Cairn

Pairc Historical Society Archive



A stag in Harris lest we be accused of not being even handed!