



# Clan MacNicol

Chief: Nicolson of Scorrybreac

CLAN NEWS

SYDNEY

APRIL 1987

Dear Clansfolk,

The May Clan newsletter is early, firstly, to let everyone know that after a few set backs, Ben Chrachag is finally ours and that to date the grand sum of £19,927.09 has been raised - approximately £63 short of the full purchase price (in Australian currency about \$44,000).

Secondly, Jim, Milton and I are moving in the middle of May, and immediately afterwards I am going overseas, to represent the Scottish Australian Heritage Council at the International Gathering of the Clans and then to Scotland where I'll attend the Clan A.G.M. on Skye on 18 July.

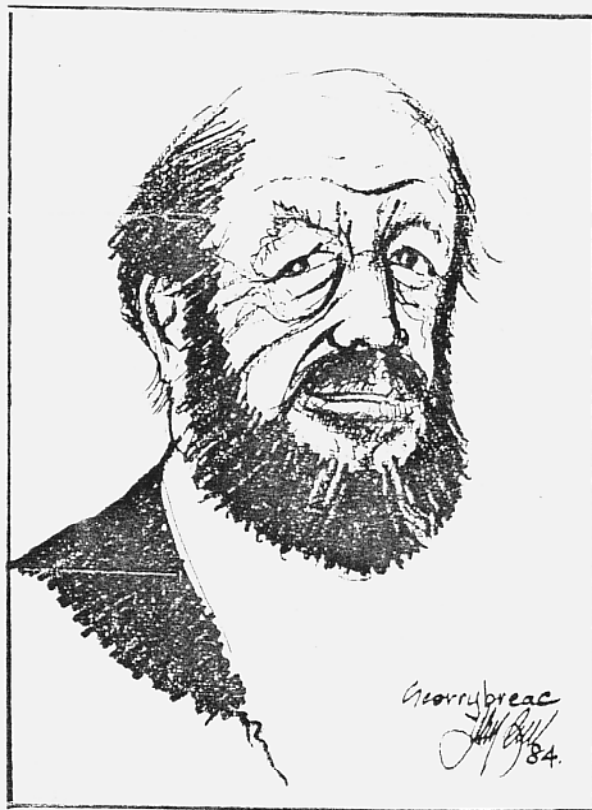
After the middle of May our new address will be; 10, Glendon Road, Double Bay, Sydney, N.S.W.2028. (Sydney in the address is included for our overseas Clansfolk who might not know that Double Bay is a suburb of Sydney).

This new house without stairs and a flat walk to the shops is going to be marvellous for me, as since my broken knee cap and other fractures last year, I've had great difficulty with steps and slopes.

On 7 March the Chief and Lady Scorrybreac were guests of honour at a Clan dinner organised by Peter Nicol, our man in Queensland. I quote from the Chief's speech prepared for the Brisbane dinner.

"I am happy to report that the Deeds of the Ben Chrachag property are now in the hands of our solicitors in Skye. Thus, after one hundred and sixty years, the heartland of the ancient Scorrybreac Estate is back in the care of Clan MacNicol. To achieve this, we were faced with the task of raising twenty

thousand pounds sterling in a very short time and, what's more, launching our appeal in the pre-Christmas period - a time when any professional fund raising organisation would be packing up for their holidays! Now, thanks to your generosity and to that of Clan Members in six countries, we are in sight of our goal.... and that goal is to have the land free of any encumbrance by 30 June of this year.



Here, I would like to point out, to the best of my knowledge, ours is the only clan to buy back any of their ancient homelands during the past half century or more (Clan Macdonald may have done so, but I think their Land Trust has been principally concerned with the re-building of Armadale Castle.) Fragic-

ally, the greater part of the Scottish Highlands and Islands has been alienated during the past two and a half centuries. The first Lowlanders to probe northward were affluent sheep farmers quick to take advantage of the tragic break-up of the clan system - a move induced and quite callously directed by the Government at Westminster. As the Highland clearances proceeded relentlessly and the glens were emptied, a bewildered population of crofters and their families were forced willy-nilly to migrate to strange and distant lands; the vacuum caused by their going was quickly filled by great flocks of blackface and cheviot sheep, driven north by Lowland shepherds. Many of the southern sheep men secured large and semi permanent leases, but there were others who were able to purchase the land from bankrupt lairds who had lingered too long in the new - found fleshpots of London and Edinburgh.

WEST HIGHLAND FREE PRESS. 30 JANUARY 1987

## Ben Chrachaig: An Assurance

P.O. Box 42  
Ballina  
New South Wales 2478  
Australia

Dear Sir

I note with interest your article on Ben Chrachaig (WHFP 2.1.87). With respect, I would like to answer several questions that seem to have been left hanging in the air.

In the first place, I can assure community council chairman Morrison that Clan MacNicol is not likely to "break up" - particularly since we now have an extra linch-pin provided by the purchase of Ben Chrachaig. In no less than five countries there are hundreds of Clan members who are pleased and proud to have acquired a stake in their ancient homeland.

Again, in answer to councillor Morrison, as far as I am concerned (and I am sure that I speak for other members of the Trust), Ben Chrachaig has been bought in order to preserve it 'as is'. The only development we contemplate is the construction of a small group of cottages, architecturally in harmony with those already dotting the slope

of Torvaig - provided, of course, that planning approval is obtained. These will provide simple accommodation for Clan members and other visitors. The land itself will be open to all who wish to enjoy its rugged beauty.

I would also like to correct the impression that I initiated the purchase of the property. This honour lies with Mr Iain Nicolson of the Isle of Man (born and bred at Camastianavaig) who drew my attention to the availability of Ben Chrachaig and urged the formation of a Trust to negotiate the purchase. Then, of course, we were in receipt of the generosity of Mr Calum Nicolson of Borne who, in order to ensure that negotiations with the vendor were not inhibited by any undue delay, offered to underwrite the transaction on his own account.

With regard to the actual fund-raising, the Clan has enjoyed the invaluable services of Mrs Rosemary Nicolson Samios of Sydney, Australia (our Ban-rùnaire) and Dr Murray Nicolson of Concord, Massachusetts (our High Commissioner for the Americas) - two Clan officers who have given an incredible amount of time and energy to the Appeal and thus ensured its success.

I trust that this letter may put at least a few minds at rest.

Yours faithfully  
Iain MacNeacail, Sgoirebreac

A second Highland landgrab occurred after Queen Victoria and her Consort fell in love with the great glens and the purple mountains, selecting Balmoral as their Highland retreat. Hot on their heels came a veritable stampede of wea-

lthy parvenus spawned by the Industrial Revolution. It now became very much in fashion to own a Highland Retreat, to be able to boast of deer parks, grouse moors and private salmon streams. Much good rough grazing land changed hands and was in future barred to the native Highlanders - apart from those who were recruited as gamekeepers or ghillies, or as beaters who were paid a few pence during the grouse season to drive the birds toward the waiting guns.

The past two decades have witnessed yet another rush to the Highlands. This time the incomers came armed with the incredible wealth flowing from Middle East oil wells, enabling them to make irresistible offers for some of the most historic real estate in Scotland. I recall chatting, in 1980, to one of the attendants in Dunrobin Castle. This girl, neatly and attractively dressed in tartan skirt and matching jacket, wondered jokingly how long it would be before she was forced to change to burnous and yashmak...now, I wonder if she was really joking! Again, in 1985, I remember quite a stir in the Scots press concerning the purchase of a well known Highland landmark by some Saudi prince-ling. The local villagers and crofters had forever enjoyed the right to use the pathway that wound through the woods to the stream and the hillside beyond, but, almost overnight, locked iron gates and barbed wire fences materialized along the castle boundary and the right-of-way that had existed unabused for centuries, was taken away. Well...Ladies and Gentlemen, I can now say, with a certain amount of pride, that Clan MacNicol has purchased Ben Chrachaig to ensure that at the path from Portree to Torvaig - and all the surrounding land - remains open to all who would go there to enjoy the peace and rugged beauty of the place (with the exception of litterers who will be shot and their bodies thrown over the cliffs to feed the green lobsters in the loch below.) The land will remain "as is" with the qualification that, given the means at some future date and, of course, the approval of the Portree Council, we would like to erect a small cluster of croft type cottages to serve as a very basic accommodation

# West Highland Free Press

AM PAIPEAR IONADAIL LE SEALLADH FARSAING

Gabh beachd air na tha tachairt air Ghaidhealtachd gach seachdain leis a' sgioba as fiosaich a' th'ann. Naidheachdan, spors, breithneachadh, na h-ealadhan agus litrichean beachdail.

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centre. It has also been suggested that a clan museum would not be inappropriate in such a centre.

Turning from Ben Chrachaig to clan raising: I think the newsletters will have kept you up-to-date. Suffice to say that the Clan is very much alive in Scotland, in the U.K., in the U.S.A., in New Zealand and Eastern and southern Australia - countries and areas where there are active and expanding branches. Until quite recently, Canada has proved to be something of a disappointment - particularly since we are well aware of the considerable number of our clansmen and their families who crossed the Atlantic during the 18th and 19th Centuries. Now however, MacNicol's, Nicolsons and Nicols are beginning to emerge with the thaw. We have discovered a large and active McNicol Society in the Province of Quebec; we have been able to appoint a Convenor in Alberta, and there seems to be every chance of forming active branches in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.

By the way, if anyone here tonight has clan relatives resident in Western Australia, we are looking for a volunteer to raise the Clan in that State - preferably someone with a light 'plane and plenty of time on his/her hands!

Finally, you may or may not be aware that, thanks to the generosity of a U.S.A. clansman who prefers to remain anonymous, my wife and I will be enabled to attend this year's International Gathering of the Clans in Halifax, Nova Scotia and two other important Gatherings in the US. We will then fly on to Skye for the inaugural meeting of the Clan MacNicol Land Trust. Through our clan newsletters, I will report in detail on the trip and will hope to return with a good deal of photography to be circulated around the branches. If you are unable to get to Skye in the foreseeable future, we want you to have a clear picture of the land you have acquired by means of your valued contributions.

It is a tremendous pleasure to be here tonight and we thank you sincerely for your warm welcome and for your loyalty."

WEST HIGHLAND FREE PRESS. 6/2/1987

## Ben Chrachaig Deal "Not Finalised"

Kildonan  
Arnsort  
Isle of Skye

Dear Sir

I am puzzled by the letter of assurance from Iain MacNeacail last week (WHFP 30.1.87) and feel I should correct certain misconceptions that have arisen.

Mr MacNeacail clearly believes that the contract was concluded for Ben Chrachaig, and I fear that most certainly is not the case. In fact the draft disposition which has been with the Clan's solicitors since 11th November was only returned to us on 2nd February.

We agreed to sell to the Clan in September of last year. They were equally keen to buy, and the money

was apparently lodged with their solicitors before Christmas (and is still there, presumably).

The first mutually agreed completion date, 30th November, was extended at their request to 18th December because of the Clan's communication problems. We reluctantly agreed and missives were duly signed by both parties so that should Clan MacNeacail delay beyond the second agreed date they would invoke a penalty clause and pay interest on the purchase price. Another extension into January was requested by their solicitors, but we could not agree to further delay.

Now, in February, Iain MacNeacail thinks he has bought the land - we know he has not and have no money, please can anybody lend us some. And progress in this matter proceeds like a tired tortoise up Stormyhill.

As Durkheim points out, "there is more to the contract than the contract".

Yours faithfully  
Barrie Creed

The picture of the Chief on page 1 is a greatly reduced (by 65% and then again by 65%) crayon drawing by John Reid, a Melbourne architect and the designer of the Australian Tartan.

John came to Sydney in 1984 for the launching of the Australian Tartan, spied Scurrybreac at a function and did the drawing.

When he returned to Melbourne he sent me the drawing as a "thank you". I had been one of the judges of the Australian Tartan competition. I had never wavered, during 6 hours of

arguing, with the Irish judge threatening to walk out, in my support of his entry.

His was the only entry that recognised the Aboriginal contribution to our Australian culture. Incorporated in the design are the colours used by the Aboriginal people in their paintings.

I thought you might all like to share the drawing with me.

## **QANTAS**

On page 3 there's an advertisement for a subscription to the West Highland Free Press. I've used so many clippings from that newspaper. I thought the sharp panned Editor might consider that I now owed him an advertising favour.

British Tourist Authority

171 Clarence Street, Sydney, N.S.W. 2000  
Telephone 29 8627 Telex: BTASYS 20762



WEST HIGHLAND FREE PRESS, 6/2/1987

# **Clan "still don't own Ben Chrachaig site"**

It was revealed this week that the proposed purchase of Ben Chrachaig in Portree by the Clan MacNicol has not yet been concluded, and some doubt now surrounds the deal.

In a letter to the **Free Press** this week (see page 3) the proprietor of the 140-acre Ben Chrachaig site, Mr Barrie Creed, said recent correspondence from the clan chief Iain MacNeacail in Australia indicated Mr MacNeacail was under the impression that the contract had been sealed. Mr Creed added, however, that this "most certainly is not the case".

But Mr Donald Ferguson, of the Portree firm of solicitors representing the clan, expressed confidence that the deal would go through "subject to certain formalities". Mr Ferguson

said: "We have concluded a contract. There has been a slight delay in concluding other legal formalities concerning the conveyancing." Subject to these formalities being concluded "the deal will go through".

Although he did not wish to comment further at this stage on the legal aspects of the deal, Mr Creed said he was unhappy about other points which had emerged in correspondence from the Clan MacNicol. In particular it appeared they were now proposing more substantial development on Ben Chrachaig than had originally been envisaged. He said: "Since we respected the views of the community council that nothing should be built on Ben Chrachaig we would hope that the Clan would do likewise."

**Dr. Murray Nicolson**, the Chief's Commissioner in the US, on 4th March wrote to the American Clan Treasurer thus:

"Dear Alex, [thanks for your letters of 2/12 and 2/24. (Americans seem to write their dates back to front). WE MADE IT ! ! ! On Monday, 2nd March I heard from Donald Ferguson that we had the missive and that the deal is made. It was much trickier than I thought. A week ago on the morning of the 23rd I phoned Skye to find out what was going on, having had an ominous letter from

Scurrybreac, and a news clip from the WHFP, with a letter in it from Creed saying that Clan MacNicol weren't coming up with the money. I found out from Mr. MacMillan in the lawyer's office that Creed's lawyer had got the cheque on 2/9 for 20,000 pounds, and after 2 weeks had RETURNED it, demanding interest from 12/20 at 15%. Ferguson was furious and returned the cheque immediately, demanding the Deed. It turned out there was a clause in the contract allowing Creed to charge interest from 12/20, but there was also a clause saying it didn't have to be paid if they hadn't given a clear title. They had provided a **DRAFT** certificate of title on 12/20, but Ferguson insisted on the real thing, and didn't get it until the 2nd February.

Well I got the wind up - I didn't want to end up in a lawyers' struggle with the chance of things falling through, and having to return all that money. So I phoned Australia a couple of times, phoned the lawyer daily saying that we were willing to negotiate a little on the interest question to get the thing completed finally and quickly. (Rosemary wanted to hang tough, I got squeamish !). Anyway, this Monday I phoned again, and asked if there was any news of the negotiations. "I have indeed", said Donald Ferguson in his best Para Handy accent. It turned out Creed had capitulated completely; we paid them no interest, and the deal was for 20,000 pounds exactly. "It was just a bit of a try-on" said Mr. Ferguson. So now he is working on the details of the Trust agreement to hold the land, and we can go ahead with plans for the grand opening on Skye on July 18th. It cost me a few sleepless nights, worrying about protracted long range legal battles - our tract record so far in Scotland hadn't been too good with lawyers; maybe we should stick to the Highland ones now !"

## **THE SCOTTISH AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE COUNCIL**

PRESENTS

SCOTTISH WEEK 1987  
Sunday 29th November to  
Sunday 6th December

INTERNATIONAL GATHERING 1988  
Sunday 27th November to  
Sunday 4th December

Join the Gathering



Murray is going to get a shock when he gets my letter posted a few days ago - for the Ben Chrachaig drama is not ended yet.

on 18 March a grinning postman handed me a very official looking letter stuck about with bright eye catching labels. "The Sheriff in Skye wants you", says he with glee.

Sur enough, as the agent for Clan MacNicol I had been served with a summons to attend the Sheriff Court in Portree, Skye, on 14 April.

8 days after accepting the Clan's money for Ben Chrachaig, Mr. Creed had initiated proceedings against us, he has gone back on his word and is now demanding the interest to which he is not entitled.

I have forwarded the summons to Mr. Ferguson, our lawyer, and said, "I would be most grateful if you would act for Clan MacNicol and me in this matter.

I am inclined not to pay Mr. Creed one cent but ofcourse will be guided by your advise to us".

This is not the first time Mr. Creed has gone back on his word to Clan MacNicol.

He initially offered 140 acres for sale at 20,000 pounds. When I spoke to him on behalf of Clan MacNicol, the sale of 140 for 20,000 was agreed upon.

Subsequently, he withdrew from sale 9 acres (which we suspect is the best flat part but until we see it in July we wont know for sure) and still demanded 20,000 pounds for the remaining 131 acres.

Besides that, Scorrybreac and I received a letter from Mr. Creed which could be considered defamatory. Our lawyer has informed his lawyer that he may take action.

CLANSFOLK VISITING SKYE HAVE ASKED ABOUT CAR HIRING FACILITIES ETC.

Here's a couple.

**IAN CORMACK**  
Private Car Hire  
Portree (0478) 2957 or 2023  
(24-hour Service)

**GUS'S TAXI**  
PORTREE  
Day (0478) 2281  
Weekends/Evenings  
(0478) 2074  
Wedding Day Hire  
Bookings in advance -  
7 days minimum

## Fish farm bids for Portree and Kyleakin

Among the latest batch of fish farm applications to go before the Crown Estate Commissioners are two for sites at Portree and Kyleakin in Skye.

Local fisherman Kevin Simmister and Dan Corrigan of SkyeFish are seeking a 99-year lease for rainbow trout and salmon cultivation in Portree Bay. The 10-hectare site has been split into two areas to avoid navigational problems - in front of Ben Chrachaig, and across the bay between Camas Ban and Vriskaig Point. The applicants want permission to place up to 12 cages on the site, and say the aim is mainly to supply the local market.

We are keeping an eye on the Fish Farming proposal in front of Ben Chrachaig.

Teachers Scotch Whisky

## Aberdeen stars to visit Skye

Aberdeen footballers Alex MacLeish and Willie Miller are to visit Skye in March to open the island's new sports shop. Portree businessman Jan Nicolson said this week that work was progressing well on the Jansport shop in Wentworth Street, and that the two Aberdeen players had agreed to come to the official opening on Wednesday 18th March.

Jan Nicolson wrote to us offering assistance with the management of Ben Chrachaig. The Chief has invited him to attend our meeting on Skye on 18 July.

WANTING TO KNOW WHERE TO STAY IN PORTREE, SKYE ? WHERE ELSE BUT ARCHIE NICOLSON'S HOTEL.

## Coolin Hills Hotel

Portree, Isle of Skye



### COUNTRYSIDE GRANTS

The Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967 empowers the Countryside Commission for Scotland to contribute, at its discretion, towards the costs of:

- (i) providing, developing or improving facilities for enjoyment of the Scottish countryside;
- (ii) conserving or enhancing the natural beauty and amenity of the countryside.

Grants may be paid to any person or organisation undertaking schemes of this kind. The arrangements for paying these grants are set out in this publication. Separate procedures apply in the case of grants for local authorities and a separate publication dealing with these is available from the Commission.

Ian Nicolson, Isle of Man, wrote to the Countryside Commission for Scotland on behalf of the Clan, they replied thus: "Ben Chrachaig is attractively and conveniently situated to the north of Portree overlooking the town and bay. Commission staff consider that because public access on to this land would be enjoyed by residents and visitors alike accordingly, it appears that the Commiss-

ion may be able to assist with modest works to enhance the appearance of the Ben Chrachraig property by way of tree and shrub planting and improvement required to facilitate public access, for example the formation of footpaths and the erection of appropriate signposts and waymarkers."

Clan MacNicol's submission to the Countryside Commission for Scotland will be formulated at the time of the Clan's meeting on Skye.

Official guest at Bendigo's Scottish Week in November will be Mr John Nicholson.

Mr Nicholson is the son of the present chief of the clan MacNeacail, Ian.

The Scottish Week is a first for Victoria.

Clan MacNeacail's origins are Celtic. The tribe, under the leadership of the noble Cobthach Fionn, crossed from Co. Antrim in Ireland to the ancient Kingdom of Dalriada (presently Argyllshire) circa 498 AD, and then travelled north to the Hebrides.

That the MacNeacails were anciently a powerful clan is confirmed by Norse runes translated into Latin by a monk Bragi in the 10th century, and preserved in the Royal University of Copenhagen.

These verses recount the defeat of the clan at the hands of Danish invaders in 840 AD.

The clan built the first castle in the Hebrides — at Stornoway in Lewis.

This was lost to the MacLeods towards the end of the 13th century.

After that the chiefly residence was set up at Scorrybreac in the Trotternish region of north-eastern Skye.

For four centuries preceding 1266 AD the Hebrides were firstly under the influence, and later under the direct rule of the Kingdom of Norway.

There is little doubt that the clan absorbed a good deal of Norse blood during that time.

Preceding the mid 15th Century, during the period when the Lord of the Isles held sway, the MacNicol chiefs held a place on the council of 16 members.

Although their lands were given by royal charter to the powerful and court-wise MacDo-

## Chief's son guest for Scottish Week

nalds of Sleat and MacLeods of Dunvegan, the MacNicol's retained their identity as a cohesive clan up to the end of the 18th Century.

They refrained from taking any part in the bloody feuding between the MacDonalds and MacLeods. These two clans respected the neutrality of the eastern Trotternish region and no blood was spilt there.

This may have influenced King James V when, in 1540, he accepted the hospitality of Scorrybreac and set up temporary court in the great house in order to accept the vows of allegiance from chiefs and local lairds.

Scorrybreac House was gutted by fire early in the 17th century.

Shortly after this disaster, Norman of Scorrybreac and his three brothers obtained commissions in the British Army (through the good offices of their uncle, Major General Sir John MacDonald, Adjutant General to the British Forces).

Norman, an engineer, was killed accidentally in Van Diemen's Land and was succeeded by his brother, John, who had followed him there as an officer in the Commissariat Department.

The latter married Marian Davidson, a daughter of one of the earliest Scottish settlers.

He died in 1867 and was succeeded by his son Norman (d. 1923)

FROM "THE BENDIGO ADVERTISER" 11/86.

and in turn by his son Norman (d. 1962) father of the present chief, Ian, father of John Nicholson.

Clan members have undertaken the task of raising the clan on an international scale.

Excellent progress has been made so far with the formation of strong branches in Aus-

tralia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States.

During the past decade, Scorrybreac has undertaken three trips to Skye to restore the links with the homeland.

Scottish Week will be held in Bendigo from November 24 to November 30.

John Nicholson of XL Farm, P.O.Box 115, Underberg, Natal, 4590, South Africa, is seeking information about his ancestor John Craven Nicholson born in Yorkshire 1750 died 1828.

Ivan C.T.Nicol, 47, Strathallan Rd., MacLeod, Victoria 3085, asks if anyone knows of an autobiography by John Nicol, published in 1822. He was a mariner on the "Lady Juliana", which arrived in Botany Bay sometime between 1788 and 1792.

Secondly, Ivan says, "I have inherited 2 paintings. One is of a Bishop Nicol and the other of his son, a Rev. Nicol. Members of my immediate family seem to think they lived during the 1700's and 1800's respectively. Can anyone suggest where I may obtain some information about them.

I am descended from a group of Nicols that landed at Geelong, Victoria, travelled overland and settled in North Queensland. They introduced the 'Bowen Mango' and bred horses for the Indian Army".

"SPECIALIST INDEXES IN AUSTRALIA-- A GENEALOGIST'S GUIDE", compiled by Judith Webster. This useful guide lists over 100 specialist indexes being compiled in Australia and New Zealand.

Indexes are devised into 4 categories - Localities and Pioneer Registers; Surnames, Newspapers, and other Topics. The latter category includes - Ship's logs, Sea Captains, Immigrants, Convicts, Professional photographers, Drovers, Solicitors, Hotels and Publicans etc. \$6 (includes postage in Australia) Write to; Judith Webster, 77, Chalfont St., Salisbury, Queensland, 4107, enclosing payment.

Hope to see some of you in Skye,  
Yours aye,

*Norman*