

ANOTHER CAIRN

During their recent trip to Skye, Rosemary Samios and Ann Inglis attended the unveiling of the new cairn on Nicolson, or should I say Mac Neacail, lands in Portree. This unveiling was performed by Iain Mac Neacail (Scurrybreac). The whole affair went off very well and at the ceilidh in The Coolin Hills Hotel that night, 94 Nicolsons danced until 2am. Present were John Nicolson, the author of "I Remember" which is all about the Isle of Raasay, came up from England as did Angus Nicol, who contributed the Gaelic inscription on our Scotland-Australia cairn in Mosman. Murray and Barbara Nicolson, Harman and Brooke Nicholson were there from America. Also present were 17 Delrachie Nicolsons from all over Scotland and Australia. It appears that our Rosemary is a Delrachie Nicolson, though what use we can make of that information, I'm not sure yet! Jan Nicolson of Portree organized everything and his sister Margaret, who is a well-known singer and Mod Gold Medalist was the star performer at the ceilidh! Her name, (need I say it?), is MacLeod!



Scurrybreac unveiling MacNeacail Cairn in Portree, Isle of Skye, 1989.

GOLF DAY AT MANLY

Manly and Golf Day were sort of combined this year, and as far as I can gather both were a great success. The organizer of Golf Day, Bill Broun, managed to last out Scottish Week and then had to go into hospital. We hope that by this time he is up and about and coming along nicely.

CEILIDH

Both the Duke of Montrose and Sir Iain Noble's sister, Leila Spence, will be in Sydney during January. The SAHC will be organizing a ceilidh in their honour. As the exact date is not yet known, someone will ring around in the hope of gathering you all in. It will probably be at "Wellings".

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We completed the tour in mid afternoon and hastily changed into kilts for the unveiling ceremony. At this stage a heavy rainstorm came hastening down from the north and a good soaking looked to be imminent. However, by the time the clan members had gathered on the shore below the Coolin Hills Hotel the low black clouds had passed on their way and the light had brightened appreciably. In the wake of piper Tom Turnbull, playing the quickstep 'Norman Nicolson of Scorrybreac' we moved along the path to the site of the cairn.

With an anxious eye on the sky, I gave a fairly brief address and thanked the various principal persons involved in the acquisition of the land and in the construction of the cairn. I also pointed out that, in a sense, I regarded it as a memorial to my father; this because of a small stone incorporated into the face of the cairn - a stone that my father picked up when visiting the ruins of old Scorrybreac House in 1917 while on furlough from the Western Front. He took it back to Australia and later had it set into the keystone of the main fireplace of our home in Tasmania. When we moved to New South Wales I took the stone with me and now, seventy two years later, and after a return trip of some twenty two thousand miles, it has been returned to Skye.

At the conclusion of my address I unveiled the cairn and invited the Rev. Ferguson of The Church of Scotland, Portree, to dedicate it with prayer. This he did, both in Gaelic and in English.

As the last of those who had been attending the ceremony moved back to the shelter of their vehicles or the hotel another storm swept in swiftly from the north. We had been extremely fortunate... there is nothing quite so wet and clinging as a soggy kilt!

On the night of the 13th, the annual clan ceilidh - or social evening - was held in the spacious dining room of the Coolin Hills Hotel - an ideal venue for this event and one that I trust the Skye Committee will be able to retain in the future. It should be noted that this hotel stands on ancient Scorrybreac land and that tradition has it that the walls contain stones brought down the slopes of Torvaig from the ruins of old Scorrybreac House.

As was to be expected, Jan and his Skye Committee turned on an evening that will be long remembered. That superb entertainer Margaret Macleod and her Albany group - with the help of talented local pipers dancers and singers - kept the 150 guests clapping and cheering for the first half of the evening (Margaret, incidentally, is Jan's sister-in-law, the wife of his brother Ewan.) Then the dancing commenced and carried on to 1.30 am with Margaret and her lads providing the music and, very importantly, urging everyone on to the floor and assisting the tyros to learn the steps of the traditional Highland dances. Then there was the supper - an excellent and varied cold buffet produced by John Murphy, late of the Skeabost Hotel. This was the third clan ceilidh and by far the

best yet; If Jan and his committee can maintain this standard they should not have to worry about attendance numbers in the future.

At 10 am on the morning following the ceilidh, the members of Urras Ben Chraicigh met at the Coolin Hills Hotel for the Annual general meeting. Apart from myself, those present were the vice chairman, Calum Nicolson of Borve, the Honorary Secretary Dr. Murray Nicolson of Concord, Mass, USA, the Honorary Treasurer, Jan Nicolson of Portree, H. Burke Nicholson of Atlanta, Georgia, USA, Rosemary Samios of Sydney, and Aonghas MacNeacail of London. Apologies were received from Ian F. Nicolson of the Isle of Man and from John Nicoll of Sydney. Also present were the Trust Solicitor, Donald Ferguson and Calum Nicolson, Murdo Nicolson, Dr Alasdair Maclean and Euan Nicolson (members of the Skye Management Committee) C.B. Harman Nicholson of Atlanta, USA, John Nicolson of London, John Gillis (Solicitor to the Scorrybreac Fund Inc, of the US) and Ann Inglis of the Scottish Australian Heritage Council (Invited observers.)

During the course of the meeting I took pleasure in moving that '...the Trustees congratulate the Skye Management Committee on the magnificent effort put in during the past year in maintaining and improving the land'. Future funding for the improvement and maintenance of the land is, of course, a matter of paramount importance and was discussed at length. Jan estimated that a sum of £600 per annum would be required - apart from a one off capital expense for a new footbridge near the entrance gate estimated to cost £1200. However, it is anticipated that a portion of these costs will be recovered by means of a grant from The Countryside Commission while Jan and his Committee are also investigating other possible sources of government and semi government assistance. After all, it should be remembered that the Trustees have, in effect, donated a small and well improved national park to the nation.

Pending the drawing up of by-laws for the Trust, it was resolved that the present officers retain their positions. In the meantime, the members accepted with gratitude the offer of Aonghas MacNeacail of London to draft a set of standing orders (Aonghas is a leading London barrister.)

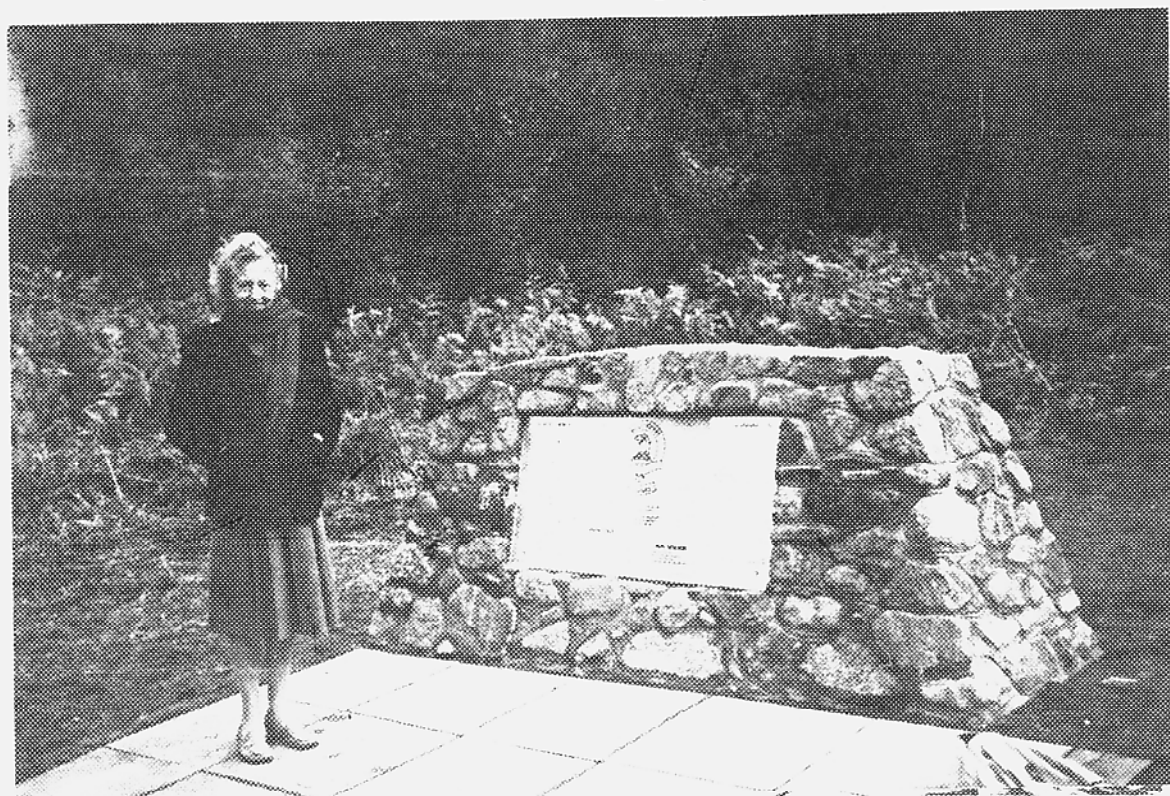
Jan reported that the proposed database arrangement with the Portree High School was not now advisable since the school authorities could not guarantee the clan access to stored information at all times. In view of this, the meeting agreed unanimously that some of the funds set aside for the database be used to purchase suitable recording equipment to allow Dr. Alasdair Maclean to set up our own database project, enlisting the co-operation of high school students.

It was agreed that the members of Urres Ben Chracaig should meet again in Skye for the 1990 AGM on October 5th of that year (which will probably mean that the clan ceilidh will be held on October 4th.)

By the end of Sunday 15th, most of the overseas and mainland visitors had left for their respective homes. However, my wife and I stayed on for another week to visit and enjoy the company of old friends. We also took advantage of the opportunity to drive to Armadale to inspect the Clan Donald Centre where we were most hospitably received by the Director, Rob MacDonald Parker. We had not been in the area since '65 and were most impressed by the progress made during the last few years. And most importantly, the Director indicated that our clan historian and genealogist could have access to all the Clan Donald papers and to the rapidly expanding library. This, despite the fact that these papers were recently withdrawn from public scrutiny.

Of necessity, the above is an abbreviated report but nevertheless, it has probably taken up more than a fair share of this newsletter. Finally, as I sign off, I would like to say that all I saw and heard in Skye this year has heartened me greatly and convinced me that our clan is gaining strength and achieving a very real sense of identity.

Scorrybreac



Pamela MacNeacail at the new cairn on Ben Chracaig which lists the names of all donors to the Land Purchase Fund.

The cairn, incidentally, contains a time capsule installed by Jan Nicolson to intrigue archaeologists in some century to come - providing, of course, a second ice age or a second deluge doesn't arrive in the meantime. It contains, amongst a variety of articles, a copy of a letter written by Norman Nicolson of Scorrybreac in 1917. The Chief's father was, at that time, a Captain in the AIF and, returning to the Western Front from a much cherished furlough in Skye, had put his experiences and impressions down on paper for the benefit of his family back in Tasmania. We hope to publish extracts from this letter.

One of the projects on the Skye Committee's drawing board is a small wishing well to be sited on the shoreline path between the cairn and Sgeir Mhor. Apart from having some aesthetic appeal, we hope that it will generate a small, but ongoing, income !