

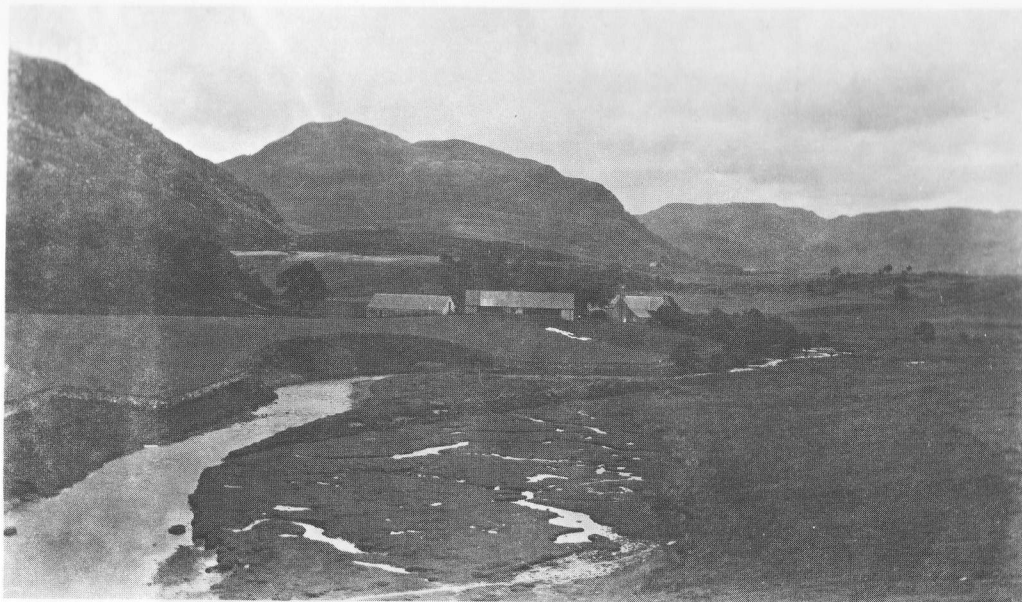
TRADITIONAL SITES
of
MATHESON HISTORY
in
LOCHALSH



with annotations based on
the narrative contained in

THE HISTORY OF THE MATHESONS
by Alexander MacKenzie (1st Edition) 1882
and Alexander MacBain (2nd Edition) 1900

© The Clan Matheson Society 1981



FERNAIG Photograph by the late Sir Roderick Matheson Bt.



LOCHALSH CHURCH Photograph by Dr Mary Macrae.

Preface

The aim of this booklet and the accompanying map is to relate the place names mentioned in the *History of the Mathesons* (long since out of print) to the ground, and to record some of the history that is associated with those places.

The locations have been gleaned from the memories of LOCHALSH people over the last four years and, except where stated, are believed to be accurate. I have an estate map of vast scale, made in 1807, and it is interesting to note that he who located LUB-A-GHOILL on a 1-inch map in 1977 was right on target! Unfortunately no other relevant names appear on the 1807 map.

Centuries ago every physical feature on the ground had a name, so essential for a pastoral people when it was quicker to walk cross-country than to follow the few roads then in existence. Now sadly, with changing ways of life, many of these names have passed into oblivion. Maps change, and there seems to be a tendency to put in fewer names. IOMAIRE, which gives its name to an important branch of the Clan, used to be shown on the 1-inch map, but on the new scale, 1:50,000, it has been deleted. As people of the older generations pass on, so place names die with them.

There is however one worse hazard – the creeping carpet of coniferous trees which will obliterate the landscape and remove more topographical and historic features from view. The site of the FORT on the spur above ACHAIID-NA-H-INICH Farm with its commanding position is now enveloped, and heavy machinery has even been driven over the walls. At the tail-end of the Loch, access to the Wishing Well was so obliterated that its location was lost for nearly a decade. A concerted effort recently re-established its position. The farm of ACHNA-DARACH with its historic MATHESON connections has suffered a similar fate – no longer is it 'The Field of the Oak'. And finally, the slopes of SGURR MOR in BALMACARA have been planted. No longer will we be able to enjoy the view immortalized by William Daniell in the second decade of the nineteenth century – the view with BALMACARA HOUSE in the foreground and with SGURR MOR as the backcloth.

I am much indebted to Dr FARQUHAR MACRAE, M.B.E., M.C., whose maternal grandmother, Mrs MURDOCH MATHESON of the IOMAIRE branch was prominent in the compilation of the LOCHALSH genealogies; to Dr SORLEY MACLEAN, whose maternal grandmother was a MATHESON of the GLAS-NA-MUCLACH branch; to many others in Lochalsh unknown to me for all their assistance in relating the place names to the map; and to the staff of the Ordnance Survey, Southampton.

Finally, if anyone disagrees with these locations, or has any others to add, I would be delighted to hear from them.

July 1981

TORQUHIL MATHESON OF MATHESON

	Place name	Grid Reference
6	CLACH NA BAINTEGHEARNA 'The Lady's Stone' at ARD-DARACH	805311
6/7	GLAIC CHAILEN 'Colin's Valley'	793294
13	DAIL ACHA-DA-THEARNAIDH 'The Field of the Two Descents'	817311
—	FORT	819315
13	LUB-A-GHOILL 'Curve of Boiling Water' U-bend in river near the site of BEN DRONAIG LODGE	011389
13	GLEN UDALAIN (runs NE to SW)	8730
13	CNOC-NAN-CATTACH 'The Sutherland Hill'	946334
13	BRAES of POLL-AN-TAIRBH 'Braes of the Bull's Pool'	947335 eastwards
13	CNOC MHIC RUARI 'Mhic Ruari's Hill'	938337
13	LUB-A-MHORAIR 'The Earl's Curve'	964342
13	LOCHAN-NA-H-ULLAIDH 'Lochan of the Treasure (or Baggage)'	973356

Just on the north side of the road are two mounting stones, where MUIRE or MARY, daughter of KENNETH GRUMACH MacMATHON, used to mount her palfrey. This was in the reign of ALEXANDER II, which started in 1214. KENNETH was Constable of EILEAN DONNAN CASTLE.

COLIN FITZGERALD married MARY, daughter of KENNETH GRUMACH, and failed to name the first born son KENNETH as promised, but called him COLIN. The second son was named KENNETH. Offence was taken at this and certain MATHESONS lured young COLIN to this valley, and murdered him near by at TORR-AN-T-SLADRAIDH - 'The Mound of the Murdering Place'. The perpetrators of the crime fled to SUTHERLANDSHIRE and became the progenitors of the MATHESONS of SHINESS.

The generally accepted site of the Clan Gathering Place is the open space of field at the head of LOCH ACHAD-NA-H-INICH. This is overlooked by the site of the FORT.

Not mentioned in the *History*. The site, now covered by fir trees has a magnificent commanding position. The outlines of the walls are easily seen, also the remains of one or two chambers. It must surely have had MATHESON connections. (see page 8).

Chief ALASTAIR MHIC RUARI MATHESON lent his celebrated deer-hound, BRODDAM GLAS, to the Earl of SUTHERLAND. After a time the hound returned to his master, who declined the request of the Earl that the hound should go back to him. SUTHERLAND was infuriated by ALASTAIR MHIC RUARI'S reply and invaded LOCHALSH and went to LUB-A-GHOILL.

The MATHESONS gathered at the Gathering Place to bring them luck and marched cross-country to GLEN UDALAIN where they found SUTHERLAND encamped on a hillock, CNOC-NAN-CATTACH on the BRAES of POLL-AN-TAIRBH.

MATHESON concealed himself from the enemy from behind a hill now called CNOC MHIC RUARI. Eventually the two parties fought fiercely on the plain or flat ground between the two hills. On the arrival of MATHESON'S father-in-law, MacINTOSH, with reinforcements, the SUTHERLANDS took to flight after a valiant battle. Many were killed including Lord SUTHERLAND who was buried near the river side in AULT-NAM-BRAN in GLEN LUINGE, which place is known as LUB-A-MHORAIR. Their flight was so precipitate that, to avoid being taken, they threw their baggage into a lochan, known as LOCHAN-NA-H-ULLAIDH.

After this battle ALASTAIR MHIC RUARI was brought before King JAMES I in INVERNESS, and was eventually beheaded in EDINBURGH in 1427.

ALASTAIR MHIC RUARI left two sons – JOHN, his heir and DONALD BAIN. His widow married ANGUS MacLEOD of ASSYNT who usurped the family patrimony of LOCHALSH. Both sons fled – JOHN to his MacINTOSH grandfather, and DONALD BAIN to CAITHNESS.

16 GLAIC NAM FEAR 828273
'Dell of the Man'
(located behind the house near this grid reference)

On reaching manhood, JOHN returned to LOCHALSH with a band of MacINTOSH volunteers and hid in the hollow called GLAIC NAM FEAR. Meantime, MacLEOD, fearing the day of JOHN'S return, had placed some 'BUTHANAICH' ('livers in tents' and outcasts of clans) into households as spies.

16 TORR-AN-T-SLACHDAIRE
'Mound of the Hammerer?'
Unlocated, but thought to be in GLEN RERAIG, in which runs the BALMACARA Burn, or on the middle slopes of SGURR MOR behind and above the BALMACARA HOTEL 818288
817277

JOHN went to TORR-AN-T-SLACHDAIRE, where MacLEOD and his mother resided, disguised as a hawker of wools. He discovered from his mother that she wished to see her son re-instated in the ancestral possessions, so at once he made himself and his designs known to her.

17 FEATHA MHIC EACHERN
'MacEachern's Fen'
Unlocated, but near either of the two previous suggested locations

During the night all the 'BUTHANAICH' were slain in accordance with a pre-arranged plan. But one, MacEACHERN, escaped and was only overtaken and slain a short distance from MacLEOD'S house. The place where he was slain is known as FEATHA MHIC EACHERN. MacLEOD'S mansion house was set on fire, not before JOHN'S mother had escaped with her husband concealed under her nightgown! MacLEOD eluded the picquets posted to capture him and reached DOIRE DAMH in DUIRINISH, where he hired a poor boatman to take him to LEWIS, with the promise of a free grant of land there. On arrival, MacLEOD, furious at his treatment in LOCHALSH, made a gallows of the oars and hanged the boatman, observing that his grave would be the free ground.

17 DOIRE DAMH 778313
'Stag Thicket'

18 ARD HILL 8226
18 BLAR NAN SAIGHDEARAN 825270
'Battlefield of the Archers (Soldiers)'
18 LOCHALSH or ARD HILL 829272
CHURCH

Soon afterwards MacLEOD returned to LOCHALSH with a force and landed at ARD HILL. A battle was fought at KIRKTON in the fields below the church, and the area is known as BLAR NAN SAIGHDEARAN. A party of routed men took refuge in the church, trusting that it would be a sanctuary, as was the custom. But one, DUNCAN MATHESON set fire to it, and he was ever after known as DONNACHADH-AN-TEMPUILL. Elsewhere on the battlefield a party of MATHESONS under IAIN CIAR MacMURCHAIDH MHIC THOMAS stood between the enemy and their embarkation point. He wrought great havoc amongst the enemy with his arrows. (He is attributed to have quarried and carried down on his back from the Braes of KIRKTON the tombstone bearing the effigy of a corpse which can be seen in the churchyard.)

19 FERNAIG 8433
19 SAIL FERNA 847338
(possibly near FERNAIG House)

— OLD BURIAL GROUND 855333
(is this CROERATHAICH where MacLEOD and the slain were buried?)

MacLEOD and the remnant of his followers escaped and at a later date mounted another expedition, landing at FERNAIG. He was encountered by JOHN MATHESON at SAIL FERNA and was killed. (Possibly the old burial ground at ACHMORE has an association with this event, *inter alia*.)

14 LEACHD IAIN GHALLAICH 790290
(it is accepted to be
somewhere in the vicinity
of this grid reference)

20 CRANNOG in 812308
LOCH ACHAID-NA-H-INICH



Photograph by
Dr Mary Macrae

— TEANGA MHOR 810231
'Big Tongue'
— CARN CLOINN BHEINN 820225
MHIC CRUIMEN

87 ACHTAYTORALAN 850295

To return to DONALD BAIN, the second son of ALASTAIR MHIC RUARI. Whilst in CAITHNESS he apparently got Lord CAITHNESS'S daughter with child. She escaped and went to LOCHALSH. After her arrival she was delivered of a son at the roadside between ERBUSAIG and BALMACARA. He was called IAIN GHALLAICH (JOHN of CAITHNESS) and the place where he was born is marked by a cairn and is called LEACHD IAIN GHALLAICH. His descendants are known as CLANN IAIN GHALLAICH.

JOHN MATHESON, also known as IAIN DUBH, eventually became Constable of EILEAN DONNAN CASTLE and was killed defending the castle in 1539. (See page 3 of the Gathering Programme). He was succeeded by his son DUGALD ROY MATHESON.

The heap of stones in the loch are all that remains of an island castle which at one time was owned by MATHESONS. In the time of DUGALD ROY it was possessed by MacDONALD of GLENGARRY who shared the LOCHALSH grazings and rents (mainly in kind) with DUGALD ROY. On one occasion their ground officers quarrelled over a kibbock of butter. MacDONALD'S man wanted the whole for his master but DUGALD ROY'S man cut it in half with his dirk. MacDONALD was furious and determined to pick a quarrel with his friend and neighbour and eventually to eliminate him. Knowing that DUGALD ROY would not eat goat flesh, he fed a lamb on goat's milk, and when it was ready for slaughter he invited DUGALD ROY to a feast in the island castle, whither he went accompanied only by his gilliemor, and not the usual twelve retainers as befitted a man of his standing. DUGALD ROY recognised the taste of goat and refused to eat it. MacDONALD swore that it was as good lamb as was ever eaten. A quarrel quickly ensued, dirks were drawn, his gilliemor killed, and DUGALD ROY was quickly overcome and taken prisoner to INVERGARRY CASTLE on LOCHNESS, where he died of grief.

DUGALD ROY was succeeded by his son MURDOCH, commonly called MURCHADH BUIDHE or MURDOCH with the Yellow Hair. Nearly all the MATHESON genealogies now extant trace back to him. MURDOCH was alive in 1580.

In the time of MURCHADH BUIDHE, a MATHESON kinsman had taken his cattle to summer grazings in the parish of GLENELG, near the entrance to KYLE RHEA, which was MacLEOD territory. MacLEOD came with a strong band to evict MATHESON, who put up a spirited fight, and being an expert archer killed many men. Eventually he was mortally wounded. MURCHADH BUIDHE determined to avenge his kinsman, and having sent a 'FIERY CROSS' round LOCHALSH, raised the clan and crossed the water to TEANGA MHOR. A bloody conflict ensued and on both sides many heroes fell. The MacCRIMMONDS, fighting for MacLEOD, lost upward of 80 men, and the cairn on BHEINN MHIC CRUIMEN commemorates the event. Needless to say the MATHESONS won the day.

The map in the MacRAE History marks ACHTAYTORALAN as being in the area of COIRIE BUIDHE. The 1:50,000 map shows a TUMULUS in this area.

Clan History Page	Place name	Grid Reference
27	GLAS-NA-MUCLACH	858328
27	ACHMORE	8533
27 and 125	SGEIR A'CHLAIDHEAMH (it is a small sunken rock off the north point of DUBH-AIRD Point)	784342



Photograph courtesy of Commander K. Rogerson, RN and Bristow Helicopters.

Notes on Sources of the *History*

The *History of the Mathesons* was written in 1882 by Alexander MacKenzie, and was updated by Alexander MacBain in 1900. Their writings were based on four MSS :-

1. The IOMAIRES MS, written by Rory Matheson, farmer of IOMAIRES, in 1824.
2. The BENNETSFIELD MS, written by Captain John Matheson, Chief of the Clan, in 1838.
3. The TIREE-MANCHESTER MS, from letters written by Duncan Matheson, missionary in Manchester, to his cousin Alexander Matheson, sometime schoolmaster in Tiree, in 1842.
4. The MS of Captain Alexander Matheson, ship-owner of Dornie, 1868.

Inevitably there are variations in both dates and traditions.

MURDOCH MATHESON, a great grandson of MURCHADH BUIDHE, lived in ACHMORE and was an excellent swimmer. Whilst accompanying MacKENZIE of KINTAIL in a boat to LEWIS, the latter dropped a silver-hilted sword into the sea somewhere north of PLOCKTON. MURDOCH, after considerable diving efforts came up with the sword, and the sunken rock near which this took place is called SGEIR A'CHLAIDHEAMH, or Rock of the Sword. MURDOCH was rewarded with a grant of that part of ACHMORE called GLAS-NA-MUCLACH to himself and his heirs forever; but having no charter for it, it was lost after the death of his son EWAN.

ACHAID-NA-H-INCH FORT

Report by R. Gourlay Esq. Regional Archaeologist, Highland Region

It is a fortified structure of the class known as a 'galleried fort' because of the galleries, or internal structures within the thickness of the walls. The crag on which the site stands is known as Carn na Sean-chreige or Seann-chreag (Old Rock). Now much reduced from its former glory, the remains consist of a stone-walled enclosure, sub-rectangular in shape, and measuring 30 x 28 metres internally. The wall, where thickness can still be determined, is about 3.9 metres, and was originally faced on the outside with large blocks of local stone. Inside the wall, here and there, can be made out traces of a 'stabilising' wall, which would have helped bind the structure together. At the north-west corner, traces of one of the galleries can still be made out, about 0.9 metres wide and now about 1.0 metre deep (or high). One of the lintels of the gallery roof was intact at my last visit. Faint traces of another gallery are visible on the NE side. The SW side has almost wholly disappeared over the crag, all that remains being a scatter of loose stones and boulders. The entrance is in the centre of the opposite (NE) side, being a passage about 1.4 metres in width. Part of the way along the passage are checks for a door, within which the entrance passage widens slightly. The interior was planted about 1968/69, but the area was featureless before that. These forts belong to a style of fortification midway between forts and duns, which is basically a difference in size. Their most important features are the galleries, which suggest some kind of architectural relationship with the brochs, with which they are roughly contemporary. Some forts like this were apparently built in the Iron Age, abandoned, and subsequently reoccupied at the time of the Scottish invasion of the west from Ireland in the 5th and 6th centuries AD. This one, because of its size, probably represented the fortification of a local chieftain (perhaps an ancestral Matheson!), and would have had wooden huts and so on constructed against the fort wall on the inside as lean-tos. It has not been excavated, and to the best of my knowledge no finds have been made there. The walls might originally have stood as high as 4 or 5 metres, with the galleries giving access to a fighting-platform on the wall-top.

In recent years the Reverend William Matheson of Edinburgh University gave two papers to the Gaelic Society of Inverness :-

1. *Traditions of the Mathesons*, 10 Feb 1956. Vol. XLII of the Society's Transactions.
2. *Genealogies of the Mathesons*, 10 Feb 1971. Vol. XLVII.

In these two papers he lucidly points out discrepancies in the above mentioned MSS and reinforces his arguments with a wealth of well documented research. In the second paper he also extends the genealogy of his own branch, that of DUGALD MacIAN OG, which receives scant attention in the *History*.



Achna-darach Farm

Drumbuit

Doire Damp

TRADITIONAL SITES *of* MATHESON HISTORY *in* LOCHALSH



with annotations based on
the narrative contained in

THE HISTORY OF THE MATHESONS
by Alexander MacKenzie (1st Edition) 1882
and Alexander MacBain (2nd Edition) 1900

© The Clan Matheson Society 1981