

\$. River Cree

Introduction

The journey down the River Cree takes us from a small loch, Loch Moan, a distance of 52km, to the mouth where it enters Wigtown Bay. I do not subdivide the text with headings or provide an index, but a guide to the pages on which the main features, and the detailed tabulations of watermills, are to be found, follows.

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4. River Cree

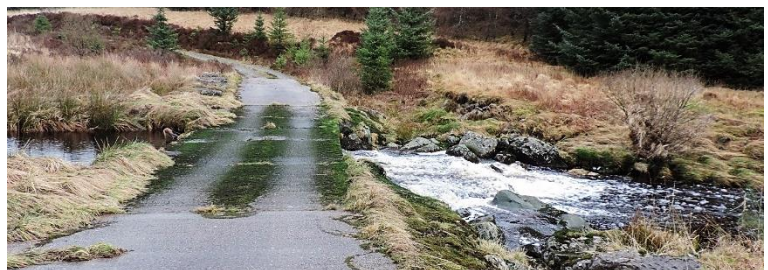
The River Cree flows out of from Loch Moan, in the midst of a swathe of country largely devoid of human habitation. The loch is very irregular in shape, oriented approximately south-west/north-east, and extends over 55ha; there are 4 islands, two of which White Island and Black Island, each occupy c1½ha. The wintry photograph shows Black Island, viewed from the south; trees are absent, though there are a few on White



Island, but this is in contrast to the banks of the loch, since almost the whole circumference has been planted with coniferous trees, including the north bank, shown in the photograph. Planting in this, the Glentrool Forest, began in the 1930s, and it occupies a large part of the northern Galloway Forest, which extends over 77400ha; there are visitor centres and cycling trails catering for some leisure activities, but many would argue that the extensive afforestation of Galloway has done little for upland vistas, while the environment of densely packed evergreen trees only suits a limited range of wildlife. The forest will be much in evidence along the River Cree.

Water seems to leak out of the west end of the loch, but soon forms a distinct river channel, at OS Grid Point NX 342 858 and at a height of 200m. The boundary between the present-day districts of South Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway runs along the north shore of Loch Moan, and from there, follows the course of the River Cree for 17½km. At an earlier date, the next stretch of the river separated the old counties of Kirkcudbrightshire and Wigtownshire for a further 34½km, following the low-water river course through the estuary and out into Wigtown Bay; the river was then a county boundary along its whole length. Almost immediately after its formation, the river is joined by a small south-flowing, right bank tributary, the Cairnfore Burn; the only reason for mentioning it is that the River Cree would be 4km longer if measured from its source, but I shall stick with convention. As for other rivers, the course is shown in sketch maps in the Appendix.

As suggested earlier, the river taking a winding course westwards, is in the forest from this point onwards, albeit that there are some cleared areas, either newly planted or being prepared. After a few kilometres, the river swings south-west, then south, still winding and still with densely packed trees



near each bank. At this point the river is joined by a right bank tributary, the Black Clauchrie Burn, shown near to the confluence in a photograph I have taken, along with a few others from a website, jimzglebeblog.blogspot.com; the stream flows through what looks like an Irish Bridge arrangement which allows higher flows to pass over the road surface. The burn flows from a source 340m high on the west flank of Fell Hill; firstly as the White Clauchrie Burn, and immediately enters the forest, through which it flows until it joins

with the Shalloch Burn. There it becomes the Black Clauchrie Burn, and flows past a mansion of c1900 to which it gives its name, and quickly arrives at the River Cree. I believe that the said mansion, built according to the Arts and Crafts genre and shown in the photograph, was the subject of a television programme concerned with rescuing country houses from ruin, and that the house and cottages nearby built for domestic staff, are now a holiday venue. At any rate it is the first building of note



encountered on this journey, and looks quite impressive with its clean lines. In viewing the present landscape, it is difficult to realise that a hundred years ago the rivers, now almost lost amongst trees, flowed across bare heather and rough grass moorland. Then, they were much more accessible and there are cairns and buried tombs which suggest the presence of man in pre-historic times. However, in these upper reaches of the River Cree and its tributaries there is an absence of hillforts and other fortalices, which suggests that there was little habitation from the beginning of the Iron Age (1000 BC) onwards until the trees were planted.

A few kilometres downstream the river emerges from the forest, north of where it is crossed by the A714, which links Newton Stewart to Barrhill and Girvan in Ayrshire. The Google view looks north (upstream) and shows the river winding away from forest in the background. However, the river dives



back into forest again, and has travelled another 6½km before it emerges into open countryside, which here includes a few walled fields of pasture. Thereafter, the River Cree flows south and then makes a tight corkscrew bend to the north before heading off eastwards. At the apex of the bend the boundary between South Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway continues west, parting from the river which has dropped below the 100m contour.

A few kilometres further, and the river swings south to arrive at the first settlement on its banks. Bargrennan comprises no more than a scattered of houses, a hotel, and a church, built in 1839, but now disused, all on the right bank of the river. Its name has been given to a type of chambered cairn, unique to the South-West of Scotland, one of which is fairly close to the left bank of the river. As can be seen in the photograph, a cross slab sits



above a stone-walled rectangular trench, which served as a burial site. There would have been stones built up

around the monument which might have housed more than one burial. In truth the distinctions made between different classes of chambered cairn seem fairly slight, and will not be detailed here, but there are many cairns of different configurations in the River Cree catchment, dating back 4000 years or more.

The Southern Upland Way crosses the river on the 19th century bridge carrying the A714. A short distance downstream, Clachaneasy Bridge carries a minor road over the river; a bridge is shown on Blaeu's map of the 17th century, but it has been replaced by another 19th century structure, shown in the photograph, with a single segmental arch spanning c17m, carrying a narrow carriageway, 3.6m wide. Not far downstream,, the River Cree arrives at the meeting point with its largest tributary, the Water of Minnoch, shown on the Google view, albeit rather obscured by trees. Both flow from the left, with the tributary higher in the frame. I shall have more to say about flow rates later, but for the moment it is enough to say that on average, the tributary, the Water of Minnoch, supplies slightly more water than the River Cree. As is normal in these accounts I shall track upstream to the source of the Water of Minnoch, and follow it downstream.



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The Water of Minnoch rises from a spring in a patch of rushes, a few metres east of a minor road between Bargrennan and Maybole; the source is at OS Grid Point NX 347 926, in South Ayrshire at a height of c400m, The road here, is near the crown of a pass known as Nick of the Balloch, which reaches a high point of 392m, in connecting the catchments of the Water of Minnoch and the River Stinchar; a challenging but popular test for cyclists. The streamlet flows for all of 50m in the open moorland beyond the boundary of Carrick Forest, before coniferous trees close in towards each bank. Travelling south it receives a left bank tributary, the Pilnyark Burn which is shown flowing along the north west edge of a forest plantation to the confluence. The photograph gives an idea of the appearance of the moorland, outside the forest with small



patches and larger banks of heather, amongst grass, with the inevitable densely packed trees massed on the sides of the little valley. About 2½km from the source the Water of Minnoch emerges from close confinement by trees, though they are very much in evidence at greater distance; the



photograph shows it flowing southwards across a moor; it is perhaps surprising, given that it has received a number of tributaries, that it has not grown larger. The photograph was taken from a bridge named for Maggie Osborne, a woman who was burnt as a witch in Ayr in 1629. The bridge itself is neither old nor distinctive, but presumably it had a predecessor, with which a legend was connected. Apparently the alleged witch was in the habit of visiting the normally deserted area for reasons not recorded, but on one occasion she saw a funeral cortege, with people she knew following the coffin. To avoid recognition she turned herself into a beetle, but was nearly trampled by the horse pulling the coffin. She took this personally and arranged for misfortune and unexpected deaths to assail the family. It should be added that there is a Devil's Bridge, to the north-west on the aforementioned Nick of the Balloch road, to which the same tale is sometimes attached.

The next few kilometres of the course of the river are an excellent illustration of the fact that a map reading that the river is flowing through a forest landscape can mean different things. The trees have a life cycle between planting of saplings (growing from seed to a half-metre sapling would normally take place in a nursery) and harvesting of a mature tree; at least 35 years for Sitka spruce, to perhaps 50+ years for other conifers. Obviously, it makes sense to plant and harvest quite large blocks, so as to utilise equipment and manpower efficiently. So an upland river can pass through large areas, which are shown on maps as forest, but harbour no trees at all, as the ground is being prepared for replanting; other areas will be populated by small saplings, and plantations of nearly-mature trees may seem widely spaced out. I guess the state of the market for soft woods will also influence the timing of planting and harvesting. It seems that at present, the Water of Minnoch flows through many areas in which there are no mature trees and the appearance is of moorland, though it is drained and prepared moorland, sometimes populated with small saplings, hardly visible from a distance.

The river continues south for c5km, in a landscape of trees and this slightly artificial moorland, receiving tributaries at fairly regular intervals; some draining small lochans, like Kirriereoch Loch. Having flowed from its source in South Ayrshire, the river picks up the boundary between that



county and Dumfries and Galloway, but only for little more than a kilometre before it enters the latter county. Curiously, the Water of Minnoch passes less than a kilometre east of Loch Moan, the source of the River Cree, though there is no path for water between them, (perhaps things were different before the last ice age, when deposition of moraine created a scattering of lochans, and could have changed river lay-outs). At this point the river receives left bank tributaries flowing a few kilometres from the western slopes of The Merrick, which at a height of 843m, is the highest peak in Southern Scotland. The photograph rather bears out the suggestion that

it is a challenge for hill walkers rather than mountaineers, and its isolation means that it is less well-known than lower peaks in the South of Scotland.

Continuing southwards, the Water of Minnoch has entered Glen Trool Forest, where the pattern is as before, with plantations of mature trees interspersed with cleared areas, but the names of 2 small right bank tributaries, Low Mill Burn and High Mill Burn, suggest that corn must have been grown in the neighbourhood at some point in the past, when the appearance of the land must have been very different, but none is



on an old map nor does any trace of a mill survive. The first authenticated mill on the downstream journey along the Water of Minnoch is at Glencaird, where remains of a corn drying tower, invariably part of a mill complex, are marked on a 19th century map, though again, there is nothing to be seen now, apart from a modernised farmhouse. Immediately downstream, the Water of Minnoch is joined on the right bank by a vigorous tributary, the Water of Trool. Actually, this stream is only about 3km long, emerging from west end of Loch Trool, which is itself 2½km long, but rarely more than a few hundred metres wide; the photograph conveys that shape and the fact that the banks are mainly forested. The loch is the downstream link in chains of lochs, namely, Loch Arron, Loch Neldricken, Loch Narroch and Loch Valley which drain into the west end of Loch Trool by way of the Gairland Burn, and Long Loch of Glenhead, and Round Loch of Glenhead, which drain through Glenhead Burn. Only a ridge extending south from Dungeon Hill separates these lochs from the headwaters of the River Dee. Were this account other than peripherally concerned with hiking and hill-walking in fine countryside, it would dwell for long on this area, but the emphasis in a historical journey must be different, so I shall move on.

Loch Trool is famous for a battle, perhaps no more than a skirmish, which is thought to have been a turning point in King Robert the Bruce's attempt to establish himself as Scottish King against the opposition of English occupying forces, and perhaps a majority of Scots, at that time; it is sometimes forgotten that division between the Bruce and Balliol/Comyn factions gravely weakened the resistance to King Edward I of England while he was trying to conquer the country. King Robert had been crowned at Scone, near Perth, in March 1306, a month after he had murdered his rival for the throne, John 'the Red' Comyn in front of the altar in a Dumfries church, an atrocity for which he was excommunicated. In June 1306, Aymer de Valence, the commander of King Edward's English army moved to Perth, where he was joined by large numbers of Scottish supporters of the Comyns. Nonetheless, King Robert may have had more soldiers, possibly 4000, though few were cavalry, but disastrously, he allowed himself to be attacked, while unprepared at Methven. Unable to recover he fled, but with only 500 men, leaving most of his army at the mercy of de Valence who had orders from his king to give no quarter, and obeyed. King Robert moved north-west, but he was defeated again by the MacDougalls of Lorne at the Battle of Dalrigh. After a winter spent in hiding, in the lands of the MacDonalds, during which the famous spider was alleged to have inspired him to persevere, he landed in the spring of 1307 in Carrick, south of Ayr, but his cause had already suffered more disasters. His brothers, Alexander and Thomas, had been sent to recruit in Ireland, and landed a force near Stranraer, but they were crushed by a MacDougall associate,

captured, and taken to Carlisle to be butchered alive on the orders of King Edward I; the same fate had already befallen another brother, Nigel.

The first sign that the tide might turn for the Scottish king was the recapture of his family's castle at Turnberry, and then he moved into the Galloway hills and defeated a small English detachment, camped near present-day Clatteringshaws Loch. This prompted de Valence to march from Carlisle with 2000 men to attack King Robert, whose army, probably numbering only a few hundred, was beside Loch Trool. Accounts of what happened are vague, but it seems that the King occupied high ground near the



east end of the loch, and rolled boulders onto his enemy, before his force charged downhill and inflicted heavy losses on a disordered adversary. This was a setback for the English, but in no way decisive, and with MacDougall reinforcements, they attempted to redress the situation, but King Robert escaped a trap set for him. His victory seems to have transformed the morale of his small army and his confidence in his own generalship, and in May 1307, having recruited a few more soldiers, he won a more significant victory at Loudon Hill, though again greatly outnumbered by de Valence. This, along with the death of King Edward I, transformed his prospects, and eventually led to his triumph at Bannockburn, 7 years later. Much is unknown about the Loch Trool battle, apart of course from its result, so the location of Bruce's Stone, which was erected above the north bank of the loch in 1929 (600 years after King Robert died) cannot be directly linked to a proven aspect of the battle. The inscribed boulder shown in the photograph, rests on a cairn built of smaller rocks, a reference to the role of such artefacts in the victory.

The Water of Trool, flows south-west for only a short distance, but by way of the feeders into the loch, it drains a large upland area, so it carries a substantial amount of water, as indicated by the photograph. There are a number of rapids, one of which is shown, and a few small waterfalls, along its length. The Southern Upland Way is alongside the river between Bargrennan and Loch Trool. Mention should be made here of Glen Trool



village, a scattering of newish white-washed houses. It is actually beside the Black Burn, a tributary of the River Cree, some distance east of the Water of Minnoch, but counts as the only settlement in its catchment. Downstream from its junction with the Water of Trool, is the old Bridge of Minnoch, one of many wrongly called Roman, but it most likely dates from the late-17th or early-18th century as suggested by the RCAHMS site; some square that circle by claiming that what has been meant is 'Romany' to denote a bridge used by gypsies, but I

do not give that much credence. As can be seen in the photograph, one of many excellent views on the website, highlanderimagesphotography.com, it is a fine example of a packhorse bridge, without parapets; unusually, the arc of the arch seems to exceed a semi-circle, and may span c5m over the narrowed river, while it carries a track, c3.5m wide. The fabric of the bridge is granite rubble and the arch ring is made up of unevenly cut voussoirs of very varied lengths. The approaches have been built up and hardened with embedded stones, and there is a pronounced slope from one end of the bridge to the other. I



I don't think there is another quite like it in Scotland, and I am perplexed as to why it is not Listed.

Downstream from the bridge, the Water of Minnoch widens and continues south-westwards, still in Glentool Forest, until just short of its junction with the River Cree, it emerges into farmland, albeit that coniferous plantations are still near at hand. The Water of Minnoch is 19km long, and carries, on average, 81000 gallons of water per minute into the River Cree; the flow in the parent river is measured at Newton Stewart as 166000 gallons per minute, but by that point it has received more water from a number of tributaries. So at the confluence with the Water of Minnoch, the tributary may contribute 20% more water than the River Cree. The surrounds of the Water of Minnoch are almost entirely the result of human intervention, represented by the coniferous forests which cloak its banks, yet the signs of any human habitation in the past 3 millennia are almost negligible.

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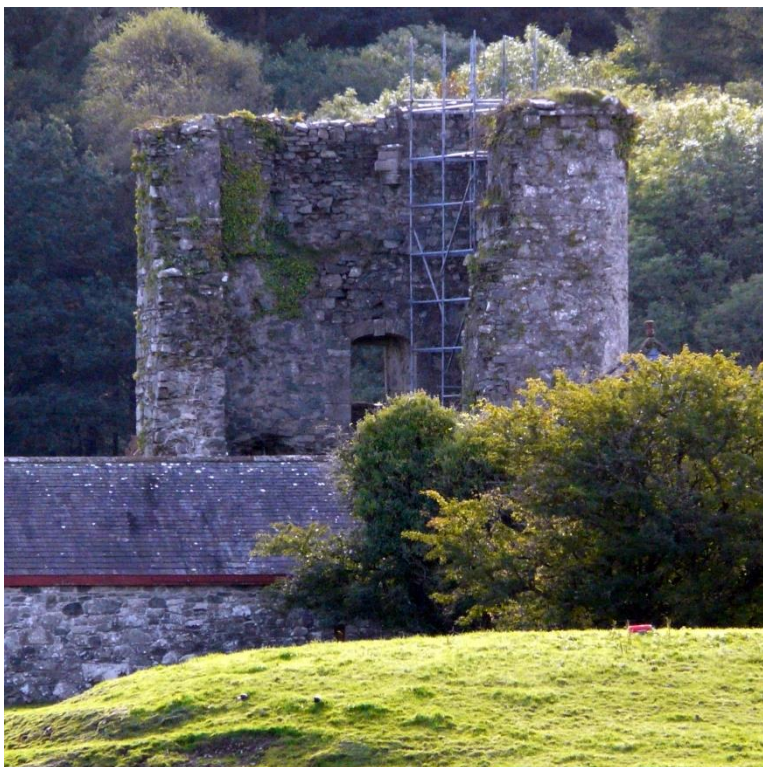
Looking at the OS map, it may seem that little has changed when the journey downstream along the River Cree is resumed, with areas of trees on both sides of the river, which has dropped below 30m. In fact the dense packed coniferous forests have been largely replaced by a succession of deciduous woodlands, especially on the left bank of the river. The centre-piece is the Wood of Cree, extending over 280ha, owned by the Royal Society for the



Protection of Birds (RSPB), which contains areas of ancient woodland, and has been extended in recent years by planting 200000 young trees on newly acquired farmland. Within the confines of the wood, the Pulhowan Burn, a small left bank tributary of the River Cree tumbles over the waterfall shown in the photograph. High Camer Wood is to the north, and Knockman Wood to the south, while on the right bank, Glenrazie Wood is like

the others largely populated with broad leaved, deciduous trees. There are trails through all of them where visitors can enjoy the environment or engage in more serious study of the wildlife.

Immediately south of Glenrazie Wood, there are the few houses of Penninghame where a large house built in 1869 by the Earl of Galloway, at the centre of a large estate, became a hospital during the 1st World War, then an open prison, and more recently a luxury hotel. Castle Stewart is a short distance further south on the A714 which still accompanies the River Cree on the right bank. It dates from c1500, when the estate was named Calcruchie, and it acquired the present name, after being purchased by a Colonel William Stewart in the 17th century; he also founded the town of Newton Stewart, 5km further along the road. In the 18th century the castle and estate were purchased by William Douglas, who changed the name of the nearby town



to Newton Douglas. The name-change proved temporary, and the castle estate also returned to a Stewart in the 19th century. The tower house may have been deserted in the late 18th century, but ancillary buildings, including a kitchen, now reduced to traces, probably survived until replaced by a modern house. The tower has dimensions, 9.1 X 8.6m with walls 1.4m thick, and is 12m high up to the corbels which once supported a parapet. The basement was not vaulted, but otherwise the layout was conventional with a hall on the 2nd floor. The rather unsatisfactory photograph, taken from some distance to the east, does show the rounded north corner and the interior of the south-west wall, and provides evidence of work that has been done to stabilise the ruin.

There are walled fields around the castle with sheep in some of them, and the impression is given that cultivated lowlands have indeed been reached. However, crossing to the other bank, there is no end to rough moorland. The Moor of Barclye, surrounds Drumwhirn Cairn, shown in the photograph taken from the Megalithic Portal website. Yes, it does just look like a heap of stones, and may never in 4000 years have



been much more, though there may have been a burial chamber underneath. This is a 'hot spot' for prehistoric monuments; to the north of the moor, beside the headwaters of a tiny left bank tributary of the River Cree there are a number of cairns, some chambered, but of a different configuration to that at Bargrennan, others without

an obvious chamber, and a stone circle. Also in close proximity is a monument known as The Thieves comprising standing stones or menhirs, each 3m high, and 4.5 m apart, with another stone lying flat nearby. It has been suggested that their positions align them with the sun at astronomically significant times, but I cannot comment sensibly on that. They are not easily viewed as a walk of c5m, there and back, is required if they are to be viewed. South of the Moor of Barclye, there are more such monuments, reaching along the left bank of the river into the populated area, which we are approaching, and beyond.

The River Cree sweeps in a double-bend from south to east and then south again, before it enters the main settlement on its banks; Newton Stewart is on the right bank, cross-river from Minnigaff and Cree Bridge to the east. At the crown of the second bend it receives the Penkiln Burn. This stream flows from its source 500m up the western slope of the intriguingly named Nick of Curleywee, actually a subsidiary peak of Curleywee Hill, which is 674m high, and part



of a sub-range of the Galloway Hills, known as the Minnigaff Hills. These mainly grassy hills, separate the River Cree catchment from Loch Dee, which is below their eastern slopes; Curleywee is shown in the photograph. It will not surprise anyone reading this account to find that the Penkiln Burn travels only a short distance before entering a coniferous tree plantation, and that its surroundings do not change for most of its 18km course.

When the stream eventually emerges into more open country, Garlies Castle is above the right bank. The estate was given to the Stewarts in 1263, and a non-royal branch of the family continued to hold it until the 20th century; they acquired the title, Earl of Galloway, in the 1620s. The castle was extensive enough to meet the requirements of high status owners. The main survival is the lower part of a 15th century tower of



dimensions, 12.5 X 9.3m, with walls 1.8m thick. Inside, there was a vaulted basement, containing a prison together with storage cellars, and a servant's sleeping loft, supported on corbels, above. The upper floors have vanished. The tower was set in a walled courtyard and fragments of ancillary buildings can be seen, though their functions cannot be ascertained. The ruin has been stabilised, but judging by the condition, it seems unlikely that the castle was occupied later than the 18th century. Nearby, is the estate of Cumlodden House, built in the early 19th century by General Sir William Stewart, who has left a reputation as a valiant colonel who played a large part in the establishment of the rifle brigade, but a reckless general who tried the patience of the Duke of Wellington, on a number of occasions during the Peninsular War.

The village of Minnigaff is at the confluence of the Penkiln Burn and the River Cree, and although only an adjunct to Newton Stewart, it is the older settlement. Indeed traces of a motte in the angle of the adjoining streams suggest origins in the 11th or 12th century. By the 16th century there was a thriving market, and the village had housed the church serving an extensive parish. A church is mentioned in 1209, but the remains mostly date from the 17th century, though some late medieval elements were built in. That building was abandoned on being replaced



by the present church in 1836 and has been used as a burial aisle since. The roofless church is rectangular, of internal dimensions, 22.4 X 6.6m with walls about 1m thick. The photograph shows a round-headed door at the east end, below a twin-light lancet window, which is thought to be a medieval survival. All the walls stand to virtually their full height, and the west-end gable is crowned with a birdcage bellcote.

There is an old bridge carrying a footpath over the Penkiln burn in the village, to which the name Queen Mary has been attached. Though more credible as a label than 'Roman', additional evidence is needed to class the bridge as one of Scotland's relatively rare bridges built before 1600. Queen Mary's Bridge comprises two unequal near-semi-circular arches of different shapes and heights; the flood arch to the west being smaller. The fabric is rubble, mainly random but coursed in the large upstream cutwater which could be a



later addition. The single flush arch rings are particularly rough in appearance. The arches spring from the existing rock rather than built abutments. The footpath and railings are of recent origin, added after a flood swept the parapets away in the 1960s. The general appearance and roughness of the fabric are not incompatible with 16th century dating, though there has apparently been a substantial amount of patching. Certainly it does not look like a total rebuild carried out 2 centuries later, as suggested by the Listing, since at least the lower structure meshing with the rock was probably retained. Beside the bridge, there was a waulk mill, dating to c1800, which has been converted into flats. Otherwise, Minnigaff, which runs almost imperceptibly into adjoining Cree Bridge, comprises mainly fairly modern houses, and the needs of its residents must be met in Newton Stewart. The bridge, which carries them there, dates to 1813, and was designed by John Rennie (the elder). It has 5 shallow segmental arches, the

largest spanning 15m; the carriageway is 6m wide, and rather unusually for a bridge built in the 19th century, the cutwaters rise to provide refuges. It was a bottleneck before 1978, when a bypass opened, to take the A75 south of Newton Stewart.

There may have been some houses on the west bank of the River Cree beside a ford giving access to Minnigaff before Colonel William Stewart, then owner of Castle Stewart, got approval for a his new village to become a burgh of barony in 1677 called Newton Stewart. The town soon eclipsed Minnigaff in size and importance. Crucial developments were the bridging of the River Cree in 1745, and its incorporation in the Military Road linking with the ferry to Ireland. Newton Stewart became a stopping-point for travellers, and hostelryes appeared to service their needs, while Irish cattle were driven through the town to markets in England. In 1778, Sir William Douglas founder of Castle Douglas, purchased the Stewart lands, and obtained a new burgh charter changing the name of the town to Newton Douglas. He was successful in enhancing the prosperity of the town, opening cotton mills and other businesses, but his initiatives faltered after his death in 1809, and the name of the town reverted to Newton Stewart. The railway arrived in 1861, with a station on the Castle Douglas and Portpatrick line, and the Machars branch line to Whithorn, which opened in 1875 had Newton Stewart as a terminus. Both lines closed in 1965, and the site of Newton Stewart station became an industrial estate.

As with other small towns in the region, Newton Stewart, seems to be a bigger place than its population of 4000 would suggest. It has a long shopping street with a great variety of emporia, which have weathered the impact from a few supermarkets, albeit that none of the latter are giant-sized. For a period, I visited a 2nd hand bookshop there quite regularly; they had a varied and interesting stock, but what I best remember is a curious arrangement of bookcases that made access to some of them impossible, for most people. I have visited hundreds of such shops, and this was just one idiosyncrasy amongst many, not a few of which, must have cost sales. Otherwise, Newton Stewart is a bustling place, with enough cars for at least twice as many people, but in fairness I never found parking difficult. I should perhaps add that the town has schools, churches, hotels and leisure facilities, so the needs of the townsfolk are well-served, which is as well, because they have a long journey to any large town, like Dumfries or Ayr. I end with my general impression, biased no doubt by my liking for the place; it has no really memorable buildings, (the old town hall stands out, but not in an entirely positive way), and many of the houses and other buildings are functional at best, yet the sum of the parts is greater than the whole.

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After leaving Newton Stewart behind the River Cree meanders for the rest of its course. Machermore Castle is on the left bank just outside the town; it is now a hotel and additions and alterations, including baronialisation in the 19th century, disguise the fact that it began life as a 16th century tower house, built by a scion of the MacDougall clan. The tower, itself much modified peeks out on the right of the photograph. I was taken with the fable that when the castle was built the intention was



that it would occupy a different site, but when work started, the stones laid each day, were next morning found to have been moved to the current location of the tower, and eventually the builders gave up trying to confront a supernatural agency; a nice story even if total rubbish.

The river becomes tidal here, and at low-tide, flows in a central channel, with mud and sand exposed at each bank, sometimes extending into small marshes. After negotiating the Loop of Carsnaw, a tight 180 degree bend, which will presumably be short-circuited with the formation of an oxbow lake, in the not too distant future, the river arrives at Carty Port on the right bank. Here in the 19th century there was a tile works, and at different times 2 quays were built to allow small ships carrying up to 50 tonnes, to bring in raw materials, and take away finished products; the facility was also used to move out agricultural products and bring in coal, but the difficulty in maintaining a navigable channel, ended its use in the early 20th century. There is an association with the saint of Whithorn, St. Ninian, around here indicated by a number of placenames, but I know no more than that. The river is in farming country, but silage towers in which grass and clover are part-fermented for use as winter feed, and the cattle in fields of pasture, indicate that stock rearing predominates, with fields of grain and root vegetables, few and far between. The balance was certainly different in the past, as will be clear from the locations of corn mills and threshing machines presented in Alastair Robertson's Appendix; in this regard the River Cree catchment is little different from those of other rivers in Dumfries and Galloway.

A short distance further downstream, the Palnure Burn enters at the right bank. It is tidal for a short distance upstream, and in this stretch there was a quay where ships of up to 50 tonnes could unload, though silting must have done for it, a century ago or more. It rises beside the A712, south-west of Clatteringshaws Loch on the River Dee, and flows generally south-westwards for 13 km to its mouth. It is most noted for the rapids and small waterfalls, illustrated by the



photograph, which are certainly a challenge for the canoeists who sometimes attempt them. Like so many streams in the catchment it flows mainly through tree plantations, though deciduous trees form part of the mix. Downstream from the mouth of the burn, the A75, and the remnants of the Portpatrick and Wigtownshire Railway stay close to the right bank, before swinging east, just short of Creetown.

With a population of c800, Creetown is hardly more than a village. Its origins were as a medieval village called Crithe where there was a hospice used by pilgrims waiting to be ferried across Wigtown Bay to Whithorn, and the shrine of St. Ninian. The role of a ferry port continued after the Reformation, when the village became known as Ferrytown of Cree, and travellers were accommodated in hostelries. From the 1760s the village benefitted from being on the route of the military road built from Bridge of Sark to Portpatrick. Then in 1785, the local laird, James McCulloch of Barholm, changed the name to Creetown and redeveloped it as a planned village. The harbour where the Moneypool Burn empties into the River Cree on the south west side of the town remained important through to the end of the 19th century. Rather bizarrely, sea shells were a major contributor to the

prosperity of the village, as large scale excavation near the river-mouth yielded a useful fertilizer. A cotton mill was established, and lead mined nearby to the north was used to make lead shot. A number of quarries to the south of the village yielded Galloway granite, and after 1840, large quantities were shipped to Liverpool and used to extend the docks there; the quarries are still open but now produce mainly aggregate for road building.

There is a rather mysterious bridge in Creetown, sometimes called Barholm Bridge, or Moneypool Dry Bridge. In the 18th century, it seems that no less than 3 bridges crossed a stream, the Moneypool Burn, here, at the north side of the village. The Scotland's Oldest Bridges website states that Roy's map of 1750 shows a bridge but that it was rebuilt in 1763 to carry the Military Road, but rebuilt again in 1770. Curiously a newer bridge which used to carry the A75,



before a bypass was built, is Listed though it was built 50 years later. The Listing actually mentions the bridge under consideration as an aside, but it is not Listed. The Google view does not help much either, but I present it for what it is worth; in truth this looks more like a 19th century bridge, not least because it is skew. So; I am left puzzled; did the Moneypool Burn originally flow under the bridge, or was it a twin-arch bridge with a second arch spanning the burn to the north? Not perhaps questions of great moment as the bridge is no architectural gem, but I would like to know the answers. I should add that the Moneypool Burn is a not insubstantial stream which flows west from its source for c7km to the River Cree; as normal for the area, most of its course is tree-lined, but there are strips of old deciduous woodland.

The River Cree flows into Wigtown Bay beside Creetown, as shown in the photograph looking south-west from Cairnsmore Hill, which is at the watershed between the catchments of the River Cree and the Water of Fleet. The river, coming from the right, enters north east of the broad bay, with The Machars behind and in the distance, Luce Bay. Measured to the visible mouth, the River Cree is 52km long, but as with all the rivers flowing into the Solway Firth, low tides reveal east and west channels carrying the outflow of the river south-eastwards



between mud and sand for an additional 8km, before it finally disappears under all conditions. Conventionally, this extra length is not taken into account as a part of the river, but the 'continuation' provides me with justification for going a little further along each shore of Wigtown Bay. Before doing so, I will return to the question of the river flow rate, the mean value of which is measured as 166000 gallons per minute at Newton Stewart. Downstream of the metering point, a number of burns flow into the river, and by my estimation, they might bring the mean discharge rate at the mouth up to 190000 gallons per minute, (close to 20 standard road tanker loads per minute). I take no account of any streams flowing into Wigtown Bay in this calculation.

Progressing along the A75, on the eastern shore of Wigtown Bay, the hamlet of Carsluith is reached, before the ruined castle of the same name appears immediately south of the road. The lands of Carsluith were held by the Cairns family until 1460, when they passed to James Lindsay of Fairgirth, who was probably the builder of the main tower at Carsluith in c1500. The castle then passed, to the Browns of Carsluith who added to the castle, building the stair tower on the north side in the 1560s. They emigrated to India in 1748, and the castle has not been occupied since. In the early 19th century, farm buildings were built on to the castle, forming a U-plan steading, which unfortunately survives. The castle comprises a main tower of dimensions, 9.8 X 7.6m, and a later stair tower, built on to the north east.



The main tower is c10m high to the eaves, above are crow-step gables, with corbelled wall walks along the gable ends; 3 of the corners have round turrets. The vaulted basement is divided into two cellars, with gun loops in the walls. Above is the hall with windows and a fireplace. Another floor would have had bedrooms, below an attic with accommodation for servants, at the wall walk level, but these floors have gone. The photograph was taken from the north. I have passed by the castle many times, but its situation very near a trunk road and attached to newer buildings, means that it is bereft of historical ambience.

Kirkdale House is a short distance further south-west and visible from public roads; the property has belonged to the Hannay family since 1532; before then, they had an estate containing Sorbie Tower beyond the opposite shore of Wigtown Bay. It seems that they occupied a mansion rather than a tower from the time of their move to Kirkdale, though details of this building are unknown. In the late 18th century, using money acquired in India, willed to him by his brother, together with his own earnings as an agent and financier in London, Sir Samuel

Hannay, decided to build a more grandiose dwelling, and hired the top architect and interior designer of the day, Robert Adam, to oblige. The classical house, shown in the photograph was actually a slightly scaled down version of Adam's first design, but the cost proved too much for its purchaser. When he died in 1790, his executors found that the only way of paying off his debts was



to sell the house. Yet the family somehow regained possession, and acquired another estate at nearby Cardoness in which they now live. A fire destroyed much of the central interior of Kirkdale House in 1893, but it was restored, preserving most of the Adam exterior; in the 1960s, the house was divided into 8 flats. Robert Adam designed other items on the Kirkdale estate, which were built but not quite as he designed them, including a bridge and a mausoleum in the graveyard of ruined Kirkdale Church which is just to the north of the house.

A third relic of the past is a short distance to the south-west, but 16th century Barholm Castle, was visited in the journey down the Water of Fleet. In that account, I showed a photograph of the castle in a ruined state, but here I show the 'flashy' result of its restoration, personally, I preferred the ruin to the restored model, but obviously the owners and architects thought differently. Barholm Castle is just inland from Ringdoo Point, which can reasonably be taken to mark the end-point of the 'low-tide' River Cree. Beyond are large caravan sites above rocky shores, where the coast line turns north-eastwards into the estuary of the Water of Fleet. However, before returning to the river mouth prior to journeying a short



distance down the west shore of Wigtown Bay, one more site of interest should be visited, on the hillside, a little more than a kilometre inland from Ringdoo Point, namely the Cairnholy Tombs. Both lie open to the sky as most of their original covering stones have been robbed to build field walls; they were partially excavated in 1949 by archaeologists Piggott and Powell.

Cairnholy I Tomb is the more elaborate; the overall dimensions are 50 X 15m, and there is a curved line of erect stones forming a backdrop to a forecourt in front of the tomb. The tomb has two chambers; the outer chamber, entered between the high portal stones (c3m) of the façade, was found in 1949 to contain a fragment of a jadeite ceremonial axe, (which may have come from Northern Italy more than 5000years ago) together with sherds of Neolithic pottery, a leaf-shaped arrowhead and a flint knife. The inner chamber was built as a closed box, and

was inaccessible from the outer one. It was probably originally roofed by a great stone slab. The inner chamber contained a secondary cist, with food vessel sherds and a cup-and-ring carved stone. Cairnholy II Tomb is located to the north of Cairnholy I. Local tradition maintains that it was the tomb of Galdus, a mythical Scottish king, but it is far too old to be linked with any such individual, mythical or not. It has dimensions 20 X 12 m, and is less than 0.6m high. Although robbed of many stones, two high portal stones still stand in front of the chambered tomb, together with a very shallow V-shaped forecourt. This tomb also contained two chambers, and although they had been previously robbed, an arrowhead and a flint knife were found, along with sherds of pottery. The tombs are shown (Tomb I, above) in the photographs, and are thought to be Neolithic, dating to between 4000 and 6000 years old. It cannot have



been easy to convey suitable stones to the site, but that is true of many ancient artefacts. I was a lone visitor, several years ago; the site is windswept and isolated, and the ages of the monuments certainly engender a sense of wonder. Although the Cairnholy tombs stand out, they are two of several chambered cairns in the neighbourhood; I do not know whether they should be seen as separate artefacts, or taken together as a complex stone-age landscape.

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I shall only go a short distance along the west shore of Wigtown Bay, because the Bladnoch River enters the bay at the town of Wigtown, so part of the coast must be considered as in its catchment. The channel made by the River Cree is close to the eastern shore, so the west side of the bay, known as Wigtown Sands comprises mudflats and sandbanks, which are never submerged to any great depth. On the bank there is a marsh through which a burn, Bishop's Burn seems to have been diverted northwards into the River Cree, as part of a drainage project. Upstream beside the burn, there is a graveyard, in which footings of a small rectangular church, dedicated to St. Ninian, are visible. Built in 1550, this was the parish church of Penninghame, a parish which extended north as far as Castle Stewart. Just west of the marsh is a farm steading, Barsallock, where the explorer of the Canadian Arctic, Sir John Ross was born in 1777. He first went to sea in a naval ship at the age of 9, but as the son of a parish minister, he had no 'interest', i.e., relatives or other family contacts with influence in the Admiralty to advance his career, so promotion was slow, in spite of his earning distinction and many wounds during the long wars with France (1792 – 1815). However, in 1812, after a period of secondment to the

Swedish navy, he was promoted to the rank of commander, and so became eligible to command smaller naval vessels. He had a reputation as an excellent seaman, and this was probably why he was given command in 1818 of a Royal Navy expedition to search for the North-West Passage, thought to link the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans round the north of the Americas. The expedition accomplished little, and soon brought ridicule to its commander. This came about, because he turned back from exploring Lancaster Sound when he claimed to have seen mountains blocking off further access in the distance, an observation backed by no-one else on his ship. One of his officers, Edward Parry, returned a year later to Lancaster Sound and penetrated further west than anyone had before, along what was to prove the eastern section of the North-West Passage.

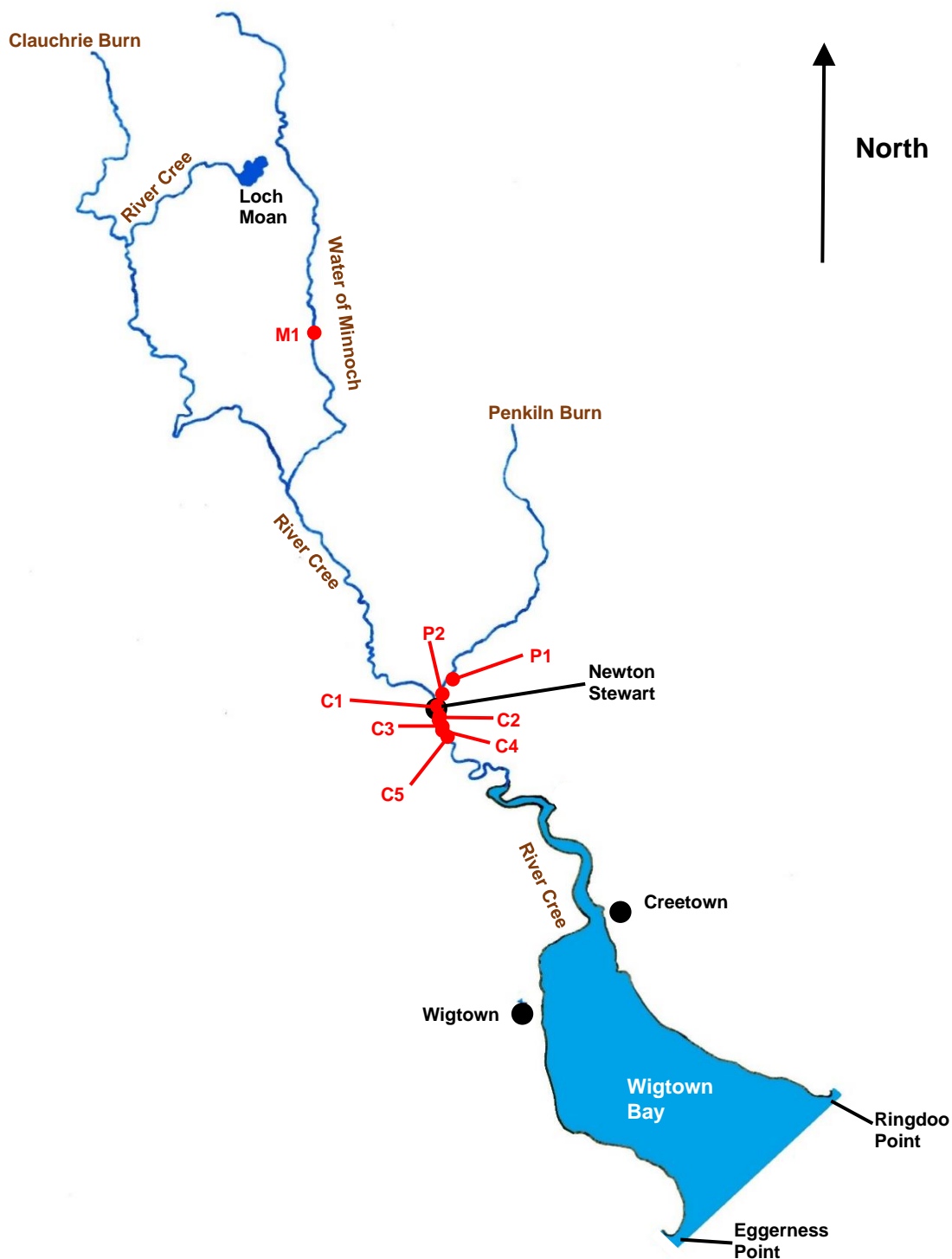
Ross had been promoted to Captain, and sought an opportunity to redeem his reputation by going back to the Arctic, but it was only with the aid of private funding, that he was able to lead a 2nd expedition in 1829. It proved far more successful, locating the Magnetic North Pole, amongst other geographical firsts, though it was icebound over 3 winters, and ended with the members abandoning their ship, before they were rescued by a whaling vessel. Ross was knighted, and a few years later became British Consul to Sweden, an appointment lasting for 7 years, but his involvement in the Arctic seemed at an end, until the disappearance of Sir John Franklin. At the age of 72 Ross commanded a ship which joined in the search in 1850. Little came of this, not least because Franklin and his crew had already perished. Ross, by then a Rear-Admiral, never went to sea again, living in a house he had built in Stranraer until his death in 1856. He lived to see the Americas circumnavigated by Sir Robert McClure in 1854, though the journey had included a short sledge trip across ice; the first person to complete the journey through the North-West Passage by boat was Roald Amundsen, which he did between 1903 and 1906, before going on to greater fame as the first to reach the South Pole in 1911. In truth, the achievements of Sir John Ross, seem less than those of many other Arctic explorers, and he was perhaps fortunate to receive the acclaim that eventually came his way. No-one seems to have doubted his competence or courage, but he was a pessimist, and this perhaps contributed to a lack of perseverance, though it also meant that his crews survived. Those who recorded their impressions of him, depicted a stubborn, humourless, disciplinarian. Barsallock is only 2km north of where the channel formed by the River Bladnoch across Wigtown Sands meets the bay, so it is appropriate to end the journey along the River Cree at that point.

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The focus of this account has inevitably been on the lower reaches of the River Cree, because there is only so much that can be said about river courses enveloped by coniferous forests, as is the case for the river and most of its tributaries. The historical view does eliminate most of the trees but they are largely replaced by isolated bare moorland. These areas were occupied by Neolithic peoples, and they have left marks of their presence in much of the catchment, e.g., chambered cairns, stone circles and menhirs. However these monuments are more than 4000 years old, and have no successors from the Bronze Age, Stone Age or in recorded history.. Newton Stewart, largely an 18th century planned town is characterful, and obviously supplies most of the needs of the widespread locality it serves. There are ruined medieval castles along the lower reaches but only Garlies Castle was much more than a tower, and little is left of it. There are no substantial ecclesiastical remains, in part, no doubt because of the proximity to Whithorn. Returning momentarily to trees, there are areas of old deciduous woodland in the lower reaches, looked after by community groups and organisations like RSPB, and varied wildlife can be seen in them. Alastair Robertson's Appendix presents information about watermills, and

the distribution of cornmills and threshing mills, shows that cultivation must have been attempted higher up the rivers of the catchment than is the case now, a similar story to that for the other Galloway rivers. Finally, it can be noted that a small but key episode in the resurgence of King Robert the Bruce after early defeats took place at Loch Trool in the catchment, so its place in Scottish history is secure.

Appendix - Table 1: Watermills on the River Cree and its main tributaries



River Cree

	Mill	Mill Type*
C1	Newton Stewart Sawmill	Saw
C2	Heugh Mill	Corn, Snuff
C3	Brewery	Brewery
C4	Minnigaff Corn Mill	Corn
C5	Newton Stewart 1	Tannery

* There was, in addition, a cotton mill in Newton Stewart in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. This was demolished in the 1820s and its exact location was not determined.

Tributaries**Water of Minnoch**

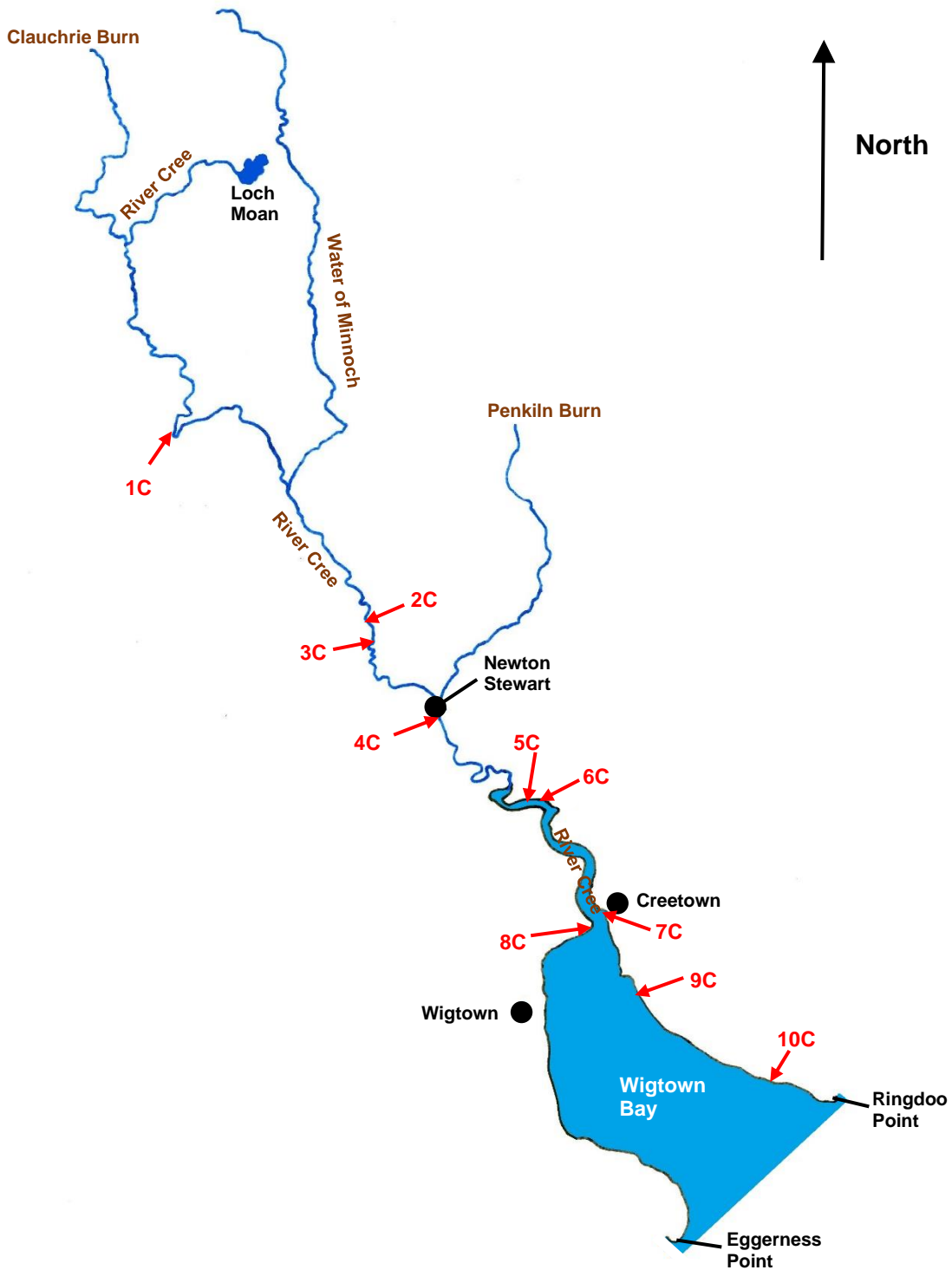
	Mill	Mill Type
M1	Glencaird Mill	Corn, Snuff

Penkiln Burn

	Mill	Mill Type
P1	Cumloden Mill	Wool
P2	Minnigaff Mill	Farina, Saw

Table 2: Mills on other River Cree Tributaries

Locations of Tributaries, see tables below for the key to the codes



River Cree

Tributary Code	Tributary	Mill stream	Mill	Mill Type
1C	Carrick Burn	Carrick Burn	Wauk	Wauk
1C	Carrick Burn	Carrick Burn	Carrick Mill	Unknown
2C	Coldstream Burn	Coldstream Burn	Cruive End	Lead Mine
3C	Castle Stewart Burn	Castle Stewart Burn	The Mill	Saw, Threshing

Tributary Code	Tributary	Mill stream	Mill	Mill Type
4C	Unknown 3	Unknown 3	Newton Stewart 2	Tannery
5C	The Lane	Calgow Burn	Calgow Sawmill	Saw
6C	Palnure Burn	Graddock Burn	Graddock Mill	Corn
7C	Moneypool Burn	Moneypool Burn	Creetown	Shot, Farina
7C	Moneypool Burn	Englishman's Burn	Ballachanour	Waukmill
7C	Moneypool Burn	Englishman's Burn	Creetown Woollen	Wool, Cotton
7C	Moneypool Burn	Englishman's Burn	Creetown Corn Mill	Corn
8C	Bishop Burn	Bishop Burn	Mill of Penninghame	Corn
9C	Carsluith Burn	Carsluith Burn	Carsluith	Corn
10C	Kirkdale Burn	Kirkdale Burn	Barholm Bridge	Saw

No mills were found on tributaries of the Clauchrie Burn, the Water of Minnoch and the Penkiln Burn.

Notes:

Table 3. Summary of Watermills in the River Cree Catchment

Catchment	Corn	Saw	Textile	Brewery	Tannery	Snuff	Lead Proc.	?	Mills
Cree	2	1	1	1	1	1			6
Minnoch	1	0	0	0	0	1			1
Penkiln	1	1	1	0	0	0			2
Carrick	0	0	1	0	0	0		1	2
Moneypool	2	0	3	0	0	0	1		4
Others	3	3	0	0	1	0	1		8
Total	9	5	6	1	2	2	2		23

The last column contains total numbers of mills.

The other columns contain functions so that a mill appears in 2 columns if in its operating history, it had 2 functions. As a result the numbers do not add to give those in the last column.

In this case 'Lead Proc.' includes the use of waterpower in manufacture of Lead Shot, and mining operations.

'?' denotes unknown function.

Threshing Mills

Threshing mills were identified in the River Cree catchment primarily from the first edition of the Ordnance Survey (OS) six inch to the mile maps which were published around 1860. Joe Rose's "Mills in Scotland" map, the second edition of the OS 25 inch to the mile maps and the Scotland's Places Website were used as supplementary sources of information. All three maps are available on the NLS Maps site.

All threshing mills in the Cree catchment that were marked on the OS first edition six inch maps are tabulated. The term threshing **machine** was also used on these maps, often on farms which had mill dams and ponds, or streams running through them. Thus, threshing machines were recorded as threshing mills in the tables below, if there was a viable water supply. This may have led to the inclusion of some horse or steam powered threshing mills, if the available water source was not used, but probably very few.

Farms where there was no note of threshing but where there was a mill pond or a mill lade were defined here as having threshing mills as threshing mills were by far the most common type of farm mill. A total of 36 farms were found in in the Cree catchment.

A total of 52 threshing mills was found in the Cree catchment. The numbers and locations of these mills are summarised in Table 4. (The main tributaries are listed according to the order where they joined the Cree, from upstream downwards.)

Table 4: Summary of the locations of threshing mills in the River Cree catchment

Location of Catchment	Number of Threshing Mills
River Cree	51
Tributaries	
Clauchrie Burn	0
Water of Minnoch	0
Penkiln Burn	1
Total	52

Threshing mills were found throughout the catchment but most were downstream of Newton Stewart on Streams flowing into Wigtown Bay.

The individual mills are listed in Table 5. The list starts upstream and moves downstream. The table defines, where possible the name of threshing mill, the name of the millstream and the name of the tributary of the Cree or one of the main tributaries.

Most threshing mills identified utilised mill dams and many were built on very small streams, often little more than drainage ditches. The result is that the list in Table 4 contains many tributaries and mill streams whose names were not readily found. These are marked as "Unknown".

Table 5: Threshing Mills in the River Cree Catchment

Tributary	Mill Stream	Mill
Unknown 1	Unknown 1	Creebank
Washing Burn	Unknown	Drannadow*
Castle Stewart Burn	Castle Stewart Burn	The Mill
Unknown 2	Unknown 2	Boreland
Penkiln Burn	Penkiln Burn	Kirkland
Unknown 3	Unknown 3	South Barnkirk*
Unknown 4	Unknown 4	Barhill*
Unknown 5	Unknown 5	Machermere
Unknown 6	Unknown 6	Nether Bar*
Unknown 7	Unknown 7	Upper Bar*
The Lane	Calgow Burn	Calgow
The Lane	Calgow Burn	Larg
Black Strand	Unknown	Meikle Carse
Palnure Burn	Mill Burn	Bardochwood*
Palnure Burn	Unknown	Strathmadie*
Unknown 8	Unknown 8	Baltersan*
Unknown 8	Unknown	Balwhirran*
Unknown 9	Unknown 9	Carsenestock*
Unknown 10	Unknown 10	Carsewalloch*
Pulwhat Burn	Pulwhat Burn	Pulwhat*
Pulwhat Burn	Unknown	Spittal*
Unknown 11	Unknown 11	Grange of Creetown
Moneypool Burn	Green Burn	Greenburn*
Moneypool Burn	Unknown	Barholm Mains*
Moneypool Burn	Unknown	Larg*
Bishop Burn	Merton Burn	Barnean*
Bishop Burn	Unknown	Barraer*
Bishop Burn	Unknown	Barvennan*
Bishop Burn	Unknown	Wood of Auchend*
Bishop Burn	Unknown	Mains of Penninghame
Bishop Burn	Bishop Burn	Barsalloch*
Borrowmoss Burn	Unknown	Auchleand*
Borrowmoss Burn	Borrowmoss Burn	Cairn House*
Borrowmoss Burn	Unknown	Mains of Glenturk*
Borrowmoss Burn	Broken Causeway Burn	West Kirkland*
Borrowmoss Burn	Borrowmoss Burn	Borrowmoss*
Unknown 12	Unknown 12	Kirkmabreck*
Kirkbride Burn	Kirkbride Burn	Blackmyre*
Kirkbride Burn	Kirkbride Burn	Kirkbride
Carsluith Burn	Carsluith Burn	Bagbie
Puldroit Burn	Puldroit Burn	Stroans*
Kirkdale Burn	Unknown	Cairnholy*
Kirkdale Burn	Unknown	Barholm*
Auchenlarie Burn	Auchenlarie Burn	Low Auchenlarie
Auchenlarie Burn	Auchenlarie Burn	High Auchenlarie*
Lady Burn	Unknown	North Balfern
Lady Burn	Lady Burn	South Balfern
Lady Burn	Unknown	Stewarton*
Unknown 12	Unknown 12	Orchardton*
Culscadden Burn	Culscadden Burn	Culscadden*
Culscadden Burn	Unknown	Sorbie Farm*
Unknown 13	Unknown 13	Penkiln*

* These threshing mills were identified from the presence of mill ponds and/or mill lades