

DUBH LOCH CASTLE

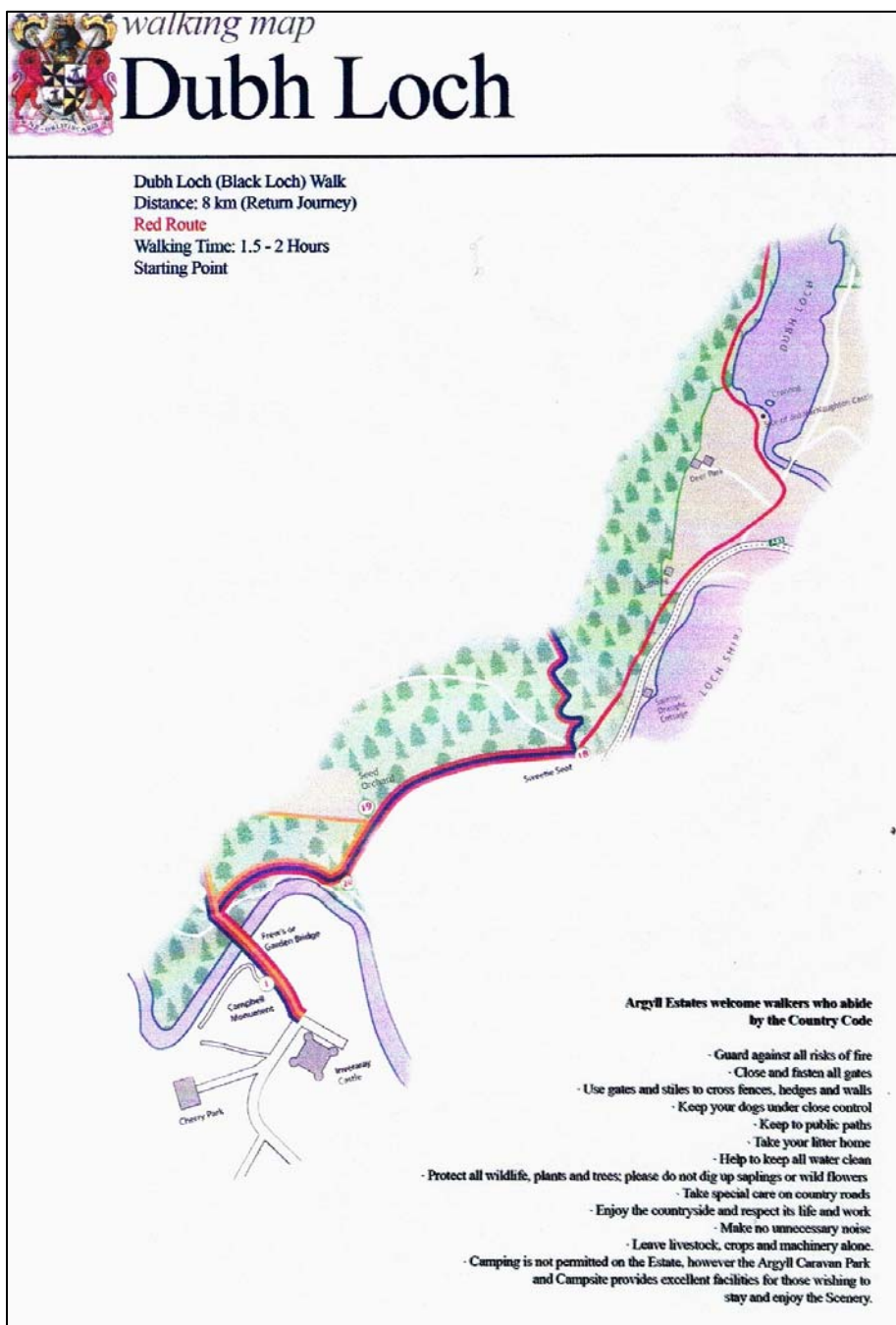
PART II: ARCHAEOLOGY AND PLAGUE

If you read the article “Location of the Macnachtan Settlements on Dubh Loch” [1] you may remember the main conclusions. Clan Macnachtan built a castle or fort on a crannog or small island at the southern tip of Dubh Loch in Glen Shira, Argyll, Scotland. They probably built it some time after historical references to the castle at Fraoch Eilean in Loch Awe at the end of the 13th century and abandoned it before the end of the 17th century. It appears that the geography of Dubh Loch changed in the second half of the 18th century and the crannog—which had been surrounded by water—became attached to the shore to form a triangular peninsular. Some archaeology has been made on the site, since Millar [2] describes it in detail, some of which was quoted in *The Red Banner* [3].

The exact location of the castle is a bit of a mystery. Matthew Cock in his recent book on the Macnachtan Clan [4] wrote a chapter on the Dubh Loch castle but did not include a photograph of the site. He does quote the RCAHMS [5] “The low oval mound, about 25 meters in length and 3 meters high, is today 200 meters north of the Dubh Loch bridge, on the south shore of the Loch.” However, the loch is oriented NNE by SSW—in other words, almost N-S—and is quite narrow, only 1.5 furlongs, 300 meters, or 330 yards, according to the Scottish Gazeteer [6] and Cock is non-committal on whether the mound is on the eastern or western shore. Furthermore, there is confusion in the RCAHMS literature—which we will examine later in this article—and some authors have postulated that the mound is on the *western* shore, whereas Millar says “The location of the castle lies east of the river’s exit from the loch and is on the point of a low, triangular-shaped green promontory.”

Modern maps only add to the confusion. The Ordnance Survey map that we referenced [7] shows a crannog just off the southern shore. A visit to the site and photographs of it [1] will prove that there is no such isolated crannog offshore. A walking map on the Inveraray Castle site (at right) shows not only this non-existent crannog but also marks a spot on the southern shore “Site of old MacNaughton Castle,” but there is no mound at that point. We are indebted to both these maps in two respects—they bring visitors into the area of the Macnachtan castle and they indicate that there used to be a crannog here.

So myriads of visitors—including Macnachtan Clan members from overseas—have traveled thousands of miles, come to the southern tip of Dubh Loch, and wondered where the castle was. Their confusion was due to the fact that there have been published no precise directions and no photographs of the site. Now the Clan Macnachtan Association Worldwide has a unique opportunity to place a marker that will orient visitors correctly so that when



they go home they can write their blogs and show photographs of the actual site.

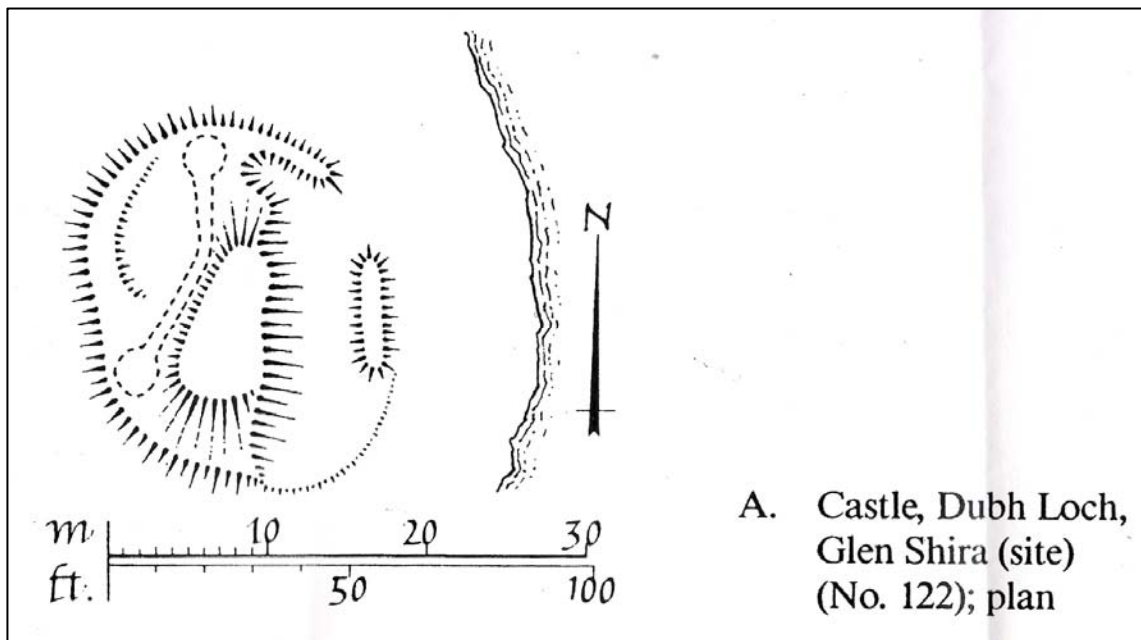
ROYAL COMMISSION

The Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Scotland [5] has three paragraphs about the Dubh Loch castle site and a plan (see below). Some reference numbers have been deleted here to avoid confusion with current reference numbers.

“The traditional site of a stronghold of the MacNaughton family occupies a low oval mound in a triangular area of low-lying ground on the S shore of the tidal Dubh Loch, about 200m NNW of the Dubh Loch bridge. This area is still inundated at spring tides, and 18th-century estate-maps appear to show it completely insulated; a particularly marshy hollow lies to the W, at the foot of the higher terrace on which the estate road runs. The straight river-bank to the SE was probably formed in the mid or late 18th century when the outflow of the loch into the Gearr Abhainn river was widened. It was perhaps this insulated area, rather than the crannog immediately offshore to the NE, that was named on Pont’s manuscript map of about 1590 as ‘Ylendow’ (‘black island’).

“The mound is about 25m in maximum length and 3m in height. On the S it slopes evenly down from the summit area, which is no more than 5 m wide, whereas to the W there is a lower platform which has been disturbed by a dumbbell-shaped excavation of recent origin, possibly a military training-trench. On the N and W there is an outer bank about 1.6 m in width and 1m in maximum height, which probably served as a barrier against floodwater and may formerly have been continuous with a similar length of bank to the E. A circular disturbance on the summit may mark the former position of a flagpole or gun-emplacement, and the most probable site for an early building is on the intermediate platform to the W rather than on the summit itself. There are no remains of masonry, although it is reported that probing has identified much stonework below the turf.

“The existence of a MacNaughton castle beside the Dubh Loch was first recorded in 1843, while Lord Archibald Campbell subsequently collected the tradition that it was demolished and abandoned in favour of Dunderave Castle following a plague. Pont’s map shows ‘Ylendow’ as an occupied site, but it is not mentioned in a somewhat later description of fishing expeditions by the 7th Earl of Argyll [1777-1847] to the Dubh Loch. The existing remains are too amorphous for their antiquity and original character to be ascertained, and it is possible that the mound underwent various modifications in connection with fishing or wildfowling, in addition to the recent disturbances described above. A plan of the Inveraray policies about 1720 shows an ambitious formal garden in the Deer Park, which includes a pavilion on the island, and although this scheme was never executed, a plan of the Deer Park in 1747 marks the position of the mound by a circle, perhaps indicating an intention to adapt it at that period.”



DISCUSSION

It is fascinating to read a description of this ancient Macnachten castle site, which is mostly straight forward, but does contain a few mysteries, as follows. The opening sentence of the description seems to contain an error that may account for some of the confusion in the literature. It says the mound is 200 m NNW of the bridge. If this were correct, it would place the mound on the western shore of the loch. But Millar [2] says it is east of the bridge. And if you go to the southern tip of the loch or look at the Figs. 2 and 3 in Ref. 1 you will see a green mound on the eastern shore but none on the western shore. If the direction were written “NNE” rather than “NNW” that would place the crannog on the eastern shore.

The article speaks of a “crannog immediately offshore to the NE” as though it were a second crannog. What if there were only one crannog, immediately offshore to the NE? And what if the plan above, vague as it is, shows a crannog in a loch immediately to the left of the land, instead of a crannog on the land immediately to the left of the loch, which the dotted lines in the plan seem to indicate? The line on the right is concave to the crannog, which makes it look more like the eastern shore than the western shore.

The second paragraph describes the mound as sketched in the plan that was made for RCAHMS by pencil in 1984 and by pen in 1990 (since Cock [4] did not publish this plan and did not quote the material in detail, it seems safe to assume that both are being published here for the first time). The second sentence relates “... to the W there is a lower platform which has been disturbed by a dumbbell-shaped excavation of recent origin, possibly a military training-trench.” It hurts to think that soldiers have been messing with our ancient Macnachten castle site, but sure enough, I found a reference [8] that might explain how this happened. In this report, we read how the First Canadian Corps trained at Inveraray in 1943 for assault landings, prior to Normandy.

“Wire parties, usually consisting of three men, rush from the craft immediately the door or ramp goes down and under covering fire (generally from a Bren gunner in the forward turret) make for the wire carrying three rolls of chicken or rabbit wire. One method is for two men to carry one roll while the third follows up carrying the other. The rolls are then thrown over the barbed wire and gaps cut, if necessary, by the wire cutters. Having prepared the gaps the wire party take up positions so as to give covering fire for the sections to follow. A further advance in this training is made when similar exercises are carried out from moored LCAs [landing crafts]. Three of these craft were moored on the shore of a small loch, LOCH DUBH. [H]ere procedure was similar except that the men became familiar with the craft itself, though these were earlier models of LCAs.”

This account was written by a photographer attached to Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry. The Canadian Army was led from 1939 to December 1943 by General Andrew George Latta McNaughton (1887-1966), who graduated in physics and engineering from McGill University. He was blamed for the disastrous Dieppe Raid in 1942, but hailed for many of his achievements. Did he arrange landings on the castle site at Dubh Loch and organize some amateur archaeology? If so, I wonder if he found anything?

PLAGUE

In our first article on the location of the Macnachten Settlements on Dubh Loch [1] we discussed how the castle was abandoned due to plague. Since writing that article, I have been able to examine the reference on bubonic plague in the British Isles by Shrewsbury [9]. There is nothing here that would define the year the castle was abandoned, but there are some interesting comments.

Plague in Scotland was mostly confined to the ports on the east coast around the Firth of Forth, closest to Europe. Records may not have been kept as strictly in the country as they were in the cities, but plague was taken very seriously and one could be executed for concealing cases. So if plague did reach Dubh Loch, it certainly would have been newsworthy. Bubonic plague is transmitted to humans by a bacterium *Pasteurella pestis*, an internal parasite of rodents and particularly of the rat, via fleas. The legend is that it was brought to Dubh Loch by linen merchants, presumably because the bales of cloth became infested on the voyage from Europe.

Shrewsbury affirms that plague was epidemic in various places in the Scottish Lowlands in the closing years of the fifteenth century, which is when Angus Macnaghten believed the castle was abandoned. The “Rule of the Pestilence of 1456” is supposedly the earliest Scots law about plague. In Edinburgh in 1505 women were prohibited from purchasing any kind of material for clothes. The epidemic of 1530 appears to have been one of the worst outbreaks in Scotland in the 16th century. In 1564 the government considered ‘lynt’ (which may have been linen) the most dangerous stuff with respect to the importation of plague of all the goods coming from Denmark. In 1568 a Statute of Pestilence absolutely prohibited all sales of cloth, especially wool and linen.

George Douglas Campbell [10] is more specific and Cock [4] referred to his page 249:

“1661—PLAGUE AND FAMINE

The visit of the Plague is very vividly remembered in the oral tales. At the Dhuloch in Glenshira there was an old fortalice of the MacNaghtons, and there the plague came; the girl who was the heiress of the place died of it. It was remarked that, like the cholera, the plague devastated the South side of the Glen, and left the North side free. It spread through the whole of Kintyre, and other districts suffered severely. Two years after the Plague came there was a terrible famine. Sleet continued to come down during all the spring. Farmers were not able to plough, nor crofters to dig. The corn when it came up, did not ripen. The meal mash from it was bad, and fever spread. Another bad year followed. The corn and hay seemed sapless, people and cattle died, and Kintyre became nearly a desert. Between Barr and West Loch Tarbat smoke only arose in three townlands or villages. Many instances are told of the scarcity. A farmer went through all the country to try to buy corn, and all he could obtain was half a peck of meal and two pecks of com. When the district was in this condition through famine and pestilence, MacCailen brought men from Carrick and Ayr to be farmers in Kintyre.”

What have we here? Campbell gives a YEAR for the visit of the plague—1661. Not just that. He uses the date as a primary headline—“1661”—then on the next line “Plague and Famine.” Why is this date not mentioned anywhere else in the literature, especially by Cock, who refers specifically to this page? Campbell is very clear. The previous entries in this chapter on “The Seventeenth Century” are all dated very precisely—even to the day in some letters—and the subsequent section is clearly dated “1685.” Is it possible that the Dubh Loch castle was inhabited until 1661, a century after Dunderave was started? Why not? Is there any support for the year of 1661?

Shrewsbury [9] tells us [page 428] that “Glasgow was scourged by an epidemic of it that raged there until 1648, in which year bubonic plague disappeared from Scotland for the succeeding 2-1/2 centuries...” What if Campbell is right and plague reached Dubh Loch in 1661, via some itinerant linen merchants? That would be big news. Big enough to be preserved in legend, if not in civic records in Glasgow and Edinburgh. On page 427, Shrewsbury tells us about two doctors in Edinburgh who were designated to look after the infected in 1646. Dr. Paulitius, whose salary had been raised to 100 pounds a month on 6 June, died about that date, possible of plague, and Dr. Rae was appointed on 13 June. Rae lost his wife and family, but, in August 1661, he petitioned for arrears of salary amounting to 300 pounds. If plague disappeared from Scotland in 1648, why is the plague doctor petitioning for back pay in 1661, thirteen years later? Is it just a coincidence that 1661 is the year that Campbell says plague hit Dubh Loch? Did this freak outbreak jog Rae’s memory? Or was he called to go back on duty?

Sir John George Edward Henry Douglas Sutherland Campbell (1845-1914), the 9th Duke of Argyll, wrote “Adventures in Legend” in 1898, when he was 53, thirteen years after the “Records of Argyll” [11] was published by his younger brother, Lord Archibald Campbell (1846-1913) at the age of 39. Why did he write a 340-page, 122,000-word book on the same subject as his brother’s 514-page, 194,000-word book? Did he feel he had new or different information? Did he feel he too had to publish a book because he was Duke and his brother wasn’t? Were they that competitive? The Duke was born one year earlier and died one year later. They must have had somewhat parallel lives. I have not seen the date 1661 for the year of the plague in “Records of Argyll.” Cock [4], in his chapter on the Dubh Loch castle, refers only once to “Adventures in Legend,” but five times to “Records of Argyll,” which has three pages on “The MacNaughtons of Dunderave (pp. 46-49), an 1833 etching of Dunderave by Charles Laurie, and an Appendix (pp. 489-505), “Macnaughtan of the Dun—A Poem,” with introduction and notes by Alexander Carmichael (1832-1912), another writer and folklorist from Argyll.

The copy of “Adventures in Legend” I got on inter-library loan from the University of Mississippi had about 15% of its pages uncut at the top or right hand side. It is therefore possible that no one had read this copy in 100 years. Does that help explain why this information has been poorly absorbed? I took out a bread knife to correct this oversight.

1661

Just in case you are thinking, “Why did the Macnachtans have all the bad luck and the Campbells had all the good luck?” you should know that 1661 was not a good year for the Campbells either. Archibald Campbell (1607-1661), eldest son of the 7th Earl, took control of the Argyll estates in 1628, when his father converted to Catholicism. When the father died in 1638 Archibald became the 8th Earl of Argyll and one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in Scotland. He was a prominent leader of Scottish resistance to the Catholic King Charles 1. After Cromwell’s victory in the English Civil War, Charles was executed in January 1649, Argyll was suspected of conspiring with Cromwell and Scotland was horrified. Charles II became King of Scotland and was restored to the English throne in 1660. Argyll was arrested, thrown in the Tower of London, tried in Edinburgh, found guilty of treason, beheaded on 27 May 1661 and his head was fixed to a spike at the Edinburgh Tollbooth. Other extreme Presbyterians were executed in the same

year and Oliver Cromwell's body was exhumed and symbolically beheaded.

Also during 1661 and into 1662 Wikipedia tells us that Scotland held one of the largest witch hunts in European history, in which an estimated 600 people were accused of witchcraft or ritually summoning the devil. Typically this sort of witch hunt could be related to outbreaks of famine and plague but the reasons for this spike are unclear. Holme [12], in his prolific speculations, claims that the Campbell "Ardkinglas clan was steeped in witchcraft" and suggests that the religious strife may have contributed to the downfall of the McNaughtons, since the Chief had to become Protestant to keep his good standing with Argyll but the "ornery clansmen remained Catholic."

Of course it is possible the inhabitants of the Dubh Loch castle died of some other terrible disease mis-identified as plague. And with all the other things going on, they may have died of broken hearts. And we thought we had problems.

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CREDITS

Figure 1. Scan of walking map from Inveraray Castle to Dubh Loch published by kind permission of Argyll Estates.

Figure 2. Reprinted with kind permission, Crown Copyright Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland.

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