The Pilgrim's Trail Project
North West Highlands Geopark
Place-names Gazetteer

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Introduction

This toponymic survey includes place-names related to sites of spiritual significance in the areas covered by Scourie, Kinlochbervie and Durness Community Councils. The category of 'spiritual' in this case incorporates sacred places both pagan and Christian, as well as other sites of mythological, folkloric and cultural significance. The associated major historic settlement names associated with these sites have also been included for context, or sometimes because they are the location of an otherwise unnamed site. As well as those for which the histories are known, names that suggest they may have had a story behind them have also been included – for example those that incorporate personal names, which usually denote an event rather than ownership - in the hope that an explanation for their significance may be discovered during the community consultation process.[1] In indigenous cultures such historical and moral tales enfolded in the landscape are what make places meaningful and strengthen the links between people and the land - as such they are part of the spiritual heritage of the area. It is not expected that all these names will be accounted for, but hopefully by including as broad a range as possible in this gazetteer the names can act as prompts for memories and discussion.

Names near the border between community council areas will be repeated in both the appropriate subsections. Head names are taken from the current 2007 OS Explorer maps where included, otherwise the most recent available form will be used. They have not been corrected to contemporary standardised forms and so any quirks of grammar, spelling and transcription will remain. When names are *not* evidenced by the OS this will be noted in the entry. Names deriving from existing names, e.g. Abhainn Sràth Chailleach, will be not be listed separately but included in the entry for the existing name, i.e. in that example Strath Chailleach. As is the case with much of the western Highlands, the vast majority of these place-names are only first recorded by the OS six inch first edition – in this area the survey was conducted in 1875 and the maps published in 1878. This is especially true of minor names such as those of shielings, burns and smaller hills - some older versions of settlement names and suchlike are attested elsewhere. It is important to bear in mind that the OS maps only represent a snapshot of what names were remembered in the late 19th century, which can be problematic in areas cleared decades before. Although some Gaelic and English names will be relatively recent, in terms of coinage as with most of Scotland the majority of these names will date to the medieval period, with the Old Norse names and some Old Gaelic forming the earliest surviving layers. There is a full bibliography of sources cited at the end, with hyperlinks given where possible.

[1] Although animal names can also have folkloric or mythological explanations, unless there is a clear indicator that this may be the case – e.g. red and white Otherworld creatures - they have not been included, as they are simply too numerous. Similarly names of springs and wells will not be included unless there is an obvious religious connection. A *sìthean* is a 'fairy hill', but toponymically just means a hill of that shape, so unless otherwise of interest these have not been included.

Names of particular interest

In the **Scourie** area, any information regarding the pre-Clearance settlements of the Reay Forest - Laxford, Foilles, Riroy/Reroy (Ruighe Ruadh) and Lone – would be significant. It would be valuable to establish if there was a link between Airigh a' Bhàird and Robb Donn. Meall Horn/Ally Horn/etc. are from *càrn* – it would be useful to establish whether or not this was a reference to a hill or a burial cairn. Bealach nam Fiann must be called so for a reason. It would be particularly good to find out more about Loubinhanat, Cladh an Lòin Lèith and the nearby Gille Pheadair names, and anything about Handa island (names from which are separated at the end of the section) and the burial ground there. Various other names include personal names, and there are also some *cailleach*s.

In the **Kinlochbervie** area, there is of course its own *annaid*-name, An Annait, on the sea loch Loch a' Chadh-Fi. There are a few *cailleach*s in the names here – most famously the *sràth*, but also a *loch* and a *cnoc*. Àirigh a' Bhàird may find an explanation here, and it would be good to find out anything relating to Loch Dhughaill, Sandwood or Sinairidh.

In the **Durness** area, there is the well-known church at Balnakiel, but also the lesser-known Ach na h-Anaite, and the burial grounds at Arnaboll, Eilean Hoan, and Eilean Choraidh. The monastic settlements at Ceannbeinne and Seanachaisteal are worth investigating. There is obviously a lot more in the way of archaeology evidenced and recorded in this CC area, especially around Durness, Eriboll and Loch Hope, ranging from prehistoric cairns to brochs to potentially Norse townships, which may prompt related stories of the past.

Churches and burial grounds have been listed on the following page for ease of reference.

Summary

There is a clear story emerging here for each area, involving ancient remains from pre-Christian times, pagan figures and early myths, early medieval churches and saints' names, fragments of Norse influence, and Protestantism via the established and Free Church.[2] Whilst there are aspects unique to each area, there are also common themes that bind them together. The toponymic evidence contains much to encourage more informed and respectful engagement from visitors, and also a few things that may even surprise local residents themselves.

[2] Modern churches have not been included in the gazetteer, as we know where they are and their names do not require any additional interpretation.

Names related to Christian religious sites

Scourie

Churches:	CNOC NA H-EAGLAISE
	LOUBINHANAT
	TRÀIGH AN TEAMPAILL (Handa Island)
Burial grounds:	CLADH AN LÒIN LÈITH
	MEALLAN AN TIODHLACAIDH

Kinlochbervie

Churches:	AN ANNAIT
Other:	CÀRN NAOMHAG (hill)

Durness

Churches:	ACH' NA H-ANAITE
	BALNAKIEL
Burial grounds:	CLADH A' CHORR-EILEIN
	Cladh Allt na Caillich (see ALLT NA CAILLICH)
	Cladh Poll Ath-Roinn/Cladh Arnaboll (see ARNABOLL)
	EILEAN HOAN
Other:	CEANNABEINNE (monastic settlement)
	CLACH NA SAGART RUADH (stone)
	SEANACHAISTEAL (monastic settlement)

Key to gazetteer

HEAD NAME PARISH ABBREVIATION Feature (Water, Settlement, etc.) NGR

Historic form, Date and source

Historic form, Date and source

Language, *toponymic element* [nominative singular], 'meaning of name'

Discussion of any relevant issues pertaining to the translation; etymology; information gleaned from historic maps; available archaeological information; location and topography; cross-references.

Abbreviations

CPNS *The History of the Celtic Place-names of Scotland*

en Ex-nominee/existing name

G Scottish Gaelic

NGR National Grid Reference

NSA *New Statistical Account*

OG Old Gaelic

ON Old Norse

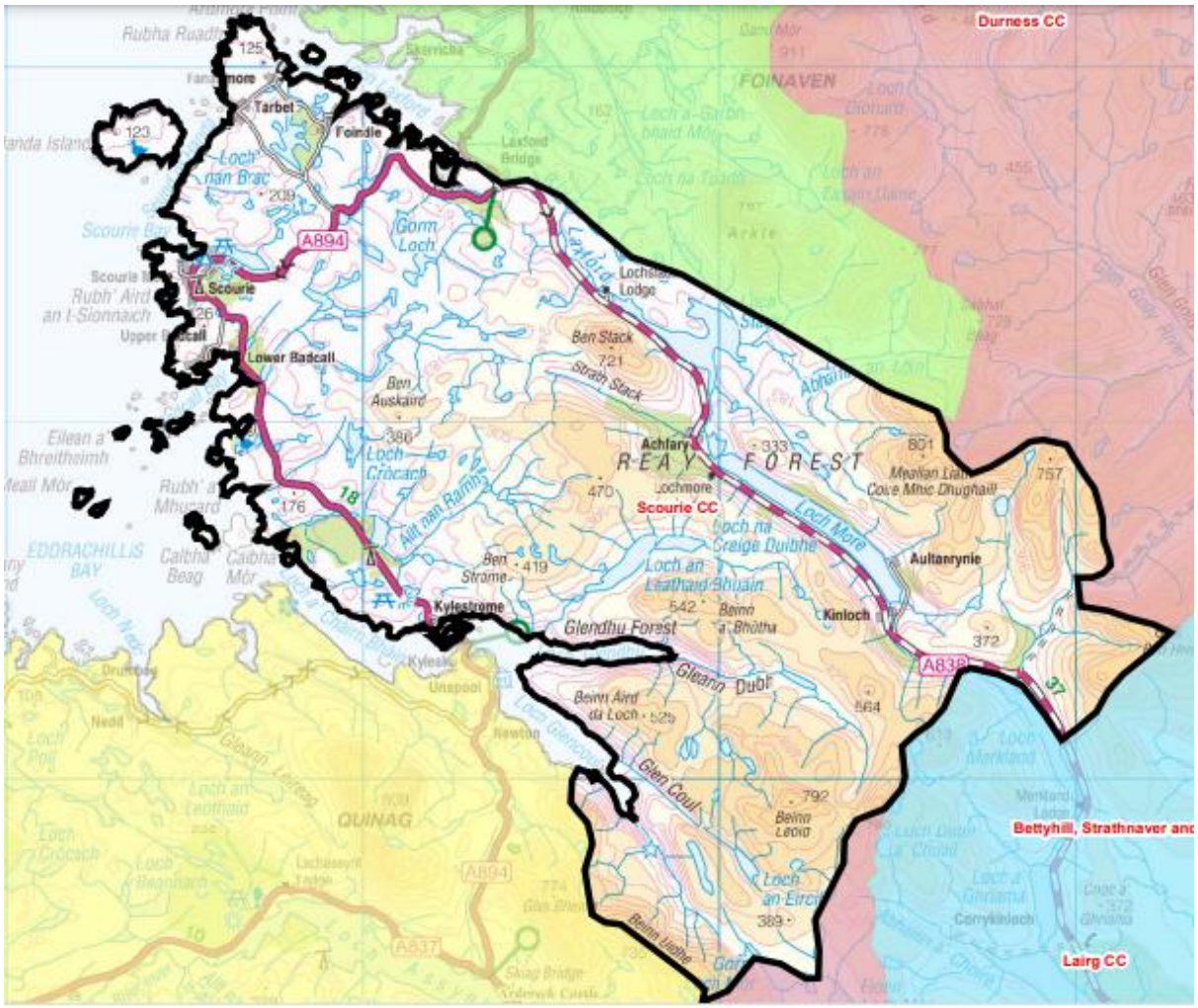
OPS *Origines parochiales Scotiae*

OSA *Old Statistical Account*

OSNB Ordnance Survey Name Books

PNRC *Place-names of Ross and Cromarty*

Scourie



ACAIRSEID MHIC MHURCHAIDH OIG EDS Coastal NC161504

Acarseid Mhic Mhurchaidh Oig 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *acarseid*; G *mac*; G *Murchadh*; G *òg*, 'anchorage of Young Murdo's son'

A rocky bay on the west coast of Rubha Ruadh, north of Tarbet. OSNB record OS1/33/17/113 – no stories recorded.

AIRIGH A' BHÀIRD EDS Settlement NC285455

Airidh a' Bhàird 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *àirigh*; G *an*; G *bàrd*, 'shieling of the poet'

A shieling at the base of Arkle, on its southern side. Potentially something to do with Rob Donn? After droving he was employed by Lord Reay as an 'underforester, a position which afforded him congenial occupation roaming the mountains of his homeland, and holding close converse with the wild animals of the chase' (*The Book of Mackay*, pg. 205), so this would have been decidedly his turf. One of his best-known songs is 'Is Trom Leam An Airigh' ('sad to me is the shieling'), where he complains of old loves going off with other men. Just over into KLB area, but close enough to merit inclusion here too.

Àirigh a' Bhàird, Loch Àirigh a' Bhàird, and Ben Stack, from the stalker's track to the north (photo by author, July 2020)

AIRIGH IOMHAIR EDS Settlement NC199431

Airidh Iomhair 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *àirigh*; G *Iomhar*, 'Ivor's shieling'

A shieling to the north of Cnoc Thormaid, south-east of Scourie. The OS six inch first edn. depicts one ruined houes at the site.

ALLT HORN EDS Water NC337451

Allt a' Chùirn 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *allt*; G *an*; G *càrn*, 'burn of the cairn'

A substantial burn that springs from several sources on the south-west side of Meall Horn, and flows down the glen to meet Loch Stack at Lone. One of a collection of names here featuring the element *càrn* (many anglicised to *horn*), which could refer to a hill or a burial cairn.

ALLT POLL AN EICH BHÀIN EDS Water NC271443

Allt Poll an Eich Bhàin 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *allt*; G *poll*; G *an*; G *each*; G *bàn* [/en Poll and Eich Bhàin?], 'burn of the hollow of the white horse'

No Poll an Eich Bhàin on the map, but presumably there was a story here – a water horse perhaps? This burn springs from the rough ground just north of Lochstack Lodge and discharges into the River Laxford at its west side. See Canmore entry 89612 – possible post-medieval shieling huts at NC267438. These are depicted on the OS 6 inch, but now under pine plantation.

BADNABAY EDS Settlement NC220466

Badnabay 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *bad*; G *an*; G *bàgh*, 'place/clump of the bay'

A settlement on the south side of Laxford Bay. Canmore record 4684 details a Neolithic Chambered Cairn here. The NSA claims there is a 'druidical stone circle' here (pg. 127).

BÀGH AN DUINE EDS Coastal NC205342

Bàgh an Duine 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *bagh*; G *an*; G *duine*, 'bay of the man'

A bay on Loch a' Chàirn Bhàin, west of Kylstrome. Which man??

BAGHAN UILLEIM EDS Coastal NC223476

Baghan Uilleim 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G bàghan; G Uilleam, 'William's wee bay'

A wee bay just north of Badnabay. This name is only evidenced by the OS six inch first edn, and does not feature on modern maps.

BEALACH NAM FIANN EDS Relief NC227938

Ballochnafey 1820 William Forbes *Sutherlandshire*
Ballochnofear 1832 Thomson *Atlas of Scotland*
Bealach nam Fiann 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *bealach*; G *an*; G *Fiann*, 'pass of the Fenians'

A bealach in the hills to the south of Achfary. OS Explorer shows a shieling here, but upon investigation the ruin is clearly an early 20th century hunting bothy. Clearly there was a story once, remembered in 1832 anyway by the looks of it – although I wonder from the spelling if that was maybe then *Fìr Mora*, latterly becoming *Fiann*? According to the OSNB, this is 'pass of the Fingalians', and the only occurrence of this name in its records. It also says this was on the footpath between Kylestrome and Loch More, which indicates where the old route passed. The earlier version from Forbes suggest instead 'pass of the deer', but this is not the best source, with many names clumsily Anglicised, so should be treated with caution. The date means this version could potentially have been collected pre-Clearance, however, and deer were though of course closely associated with the Fianna.

The ruin at Bealach nam Fiann (photo by author)

BEINN LEÒID EDS Relief NC320294

Benleod 1832 John Thomson *Atlas of Scotland*
Beinn Leòid 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *beinn*; G *Leòd*, 'Leòd's mountain'

A 792m hill on the east side of Glen Coul. Is there perhaps a reason why it is Leòd's?

BOGHA NAM BIAST EDS Coastal NC148454

Bogha nam Biast 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *bogha*; G *an*; G *biast*, 'bend of the beasts'

According to the OSNB, 'An acute bend in Scourie Bay. Situate about 6. Chains north of Sgeir Fheaclaich. Sig. [Signification] Obscure.' (OS1/33/15/7) 'Beasts' will refer to the rocks at this point at the entrance to Scourie Bay.

From the 1878 OS six inch first edn.

CAILLEACH BORGAID EDS Coastal NC261313

Cailleach Borgaid 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *cailleach*; G? *Borgaid/Borgaidh*, 'Cailleach of Borgaid/Borgie'

A treacherous rock near Glencoul. The OSNB has instead *Borgaidh* (OS1/33/18/234), saying 'Applies to a Small Rock Covered at H.W. [High Water] on the N [North] Side of Loch Glencoul 3/4 of a mile NW [North West] of Eilean an Tighe and 1 mile E [East] of An Cona Chreag'. The element *cailleach* often refers to a rock either suggestive of the Cailleach or

treacherous in nature – see Whyte (2020). Presumably the specific element is the same as in Borgie further north. What is unknown is whether this Cailleach was supposed to have come from Borgie, or whether the *Borgaid*/*Borgaidh* is another place nearby with a fort. The *borgh* element here is the same that gives us the many Borves of the Western Isles, and as Jacob King says, 'This word almost always indicates the location of a pre-Norse Pictish tower' (Ainmean Àite na h-Alba, https://www.ainmean-aite.scot/placename/borve-skye/#:~:text=The%20meaning%20is%20'Little%20Borg,a%20pre%2DNorse%20Pictish%20tower.)

CEANNAMHÒR EDS Island NC140399

Keanmore 1832 Thomson *Atlas of Scotland*
Ceann a' Mhaoir 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *ceann*; G *an*; G *maor*, 'head of the factor/official'

One of the many islands off the west coast of Eddrachillis. The 1878 version is interesting, especially given that it is next to Eilean a' Bhreitheimh (see entry below). Was there a story, or is the current version correct? Thomson's version might support the latter.

CLACH NA CAILLICH EDS Relief NC305249

Clach na Caillich 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *clach*; G *an*; G *cailleach*, 'stone of the Cailleach'

This rock formation behind Ben More Assynt is just over the line into Assynt, but may have been a boundary marker hence its inclusion here. Right next to another formation called Cailleach an t-Sniomha. See Whyte (2020) for discussion of the *cailleach* element in place-names.

CLADH AN LÒIN LÈITH EDS Settlement NC350349

Cladh an Lòin Lèith 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *cladh*; G *an*; G *lòn*; G *liath*, 'burial place of the grey marshy meadow'

The walled and gated burial ground at the east end of Loch More. The OSNB claims that this 'Small public grave yard for the district of Kinloch & Lochmore' is 'of recent construction', but see the entry under Loubinhanat, which suggests the presence of an early church. There is also a religious connotation to some nearby place-names – see Leathad/Meall Gille Pheadair to the north. Canmore repeats the OSNB in record 71515. Two unroofed buildings and an enclosure are shown nearby on the OS six inch first edn., and a Bronze Age cist was found about a mile along the lochside in 1967 – Canmore record 4753. The 1793 OSA (pg. 282) says:

The number of baptisms in the year, as appears from the register, is at average 35: but there is no record of burial kept; because the people, experiencing great inconvenience in carrying their dead to one or two burial places, as in former times, on account of the great distance and the of the roads, have made choice of other places, the fittest they could find, near their respective dwellings, for that purpose; so that, in this parish at present, there are no less than 8 different burying grounds, though some of the old ones are presently in disuse.

Cladh an Lòin Lèith, Leathad Gille Pheadair, Meall Gille Pheadair (photo by author, August 2021)

CNOC AN FHIR BHREIGE EDS Relief NC172501

Cnoc an Fhìr Bhreige 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *cnoc*; G *an*; G *fear*; G *breug*, 'hillock of the false/lying man'

A hill on the north-west side of Fanagmore. Included out of interest! OSNB says 'hill of the false man', which may refer to a standing stone. A *fear-bhreige* can also of course be a 'puppet'.

CNOC NA H-EAGLAISE EDS Relief NC166420

Cnoc na h-Eaglaise 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *cnoc*; G *an*; G *eaglais*, 'hillock of the church'

The hill east of the church at Lower Badcall. The 'Kirk' features on Roy's 1747 map, showing a large area of cultivation. Canmore record 4587 has aerial photos and some basic information about the church, saying it was built in 1715. This name is therefore likely to have been of a later coinage, unless there was an as-yet unrecorded church there historically. See *Book of Mackay* pg. 444 for the document concerning the 18th-century phase of church-building in West Sutherland, and pg. 280-1 in the OSA.

CNOC NEILL DHUINN EDS Relief NC163422

Cnoc Neill Dhuinn 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *cnoc*; G *Neill*; G *donn*, 'Brown Neil's hillock'

A hill just north of the church at Badcall. Who was this Neill and what did he do here?

CNOC THORMAID EDS Relief NC191422

Cnoc Thormaid 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *cnoc;* G *Tormad*, 'Norman's hillock'

Seems to apply to a whole hilly area east of Badcall, incorporating other hills such as Sìthean Mòr Cnoc Thormaid, for example. Again the question is, who was Tormad and what did he do here?

CNOC TIGH ADHAMH EDS Relief NC171488

Cnoc Tigh Adhamh 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *cnoc*; G *taigh*; G *Àdhamh*, 'hillock of Adam's house'

This is the hill behind the wee dark loch at Tarbet. Hopefully someone in the village may still know why it is known as this.

COIRE MHIC DHUGHAILL EDS Relief NC352397

Coire Mhic Dhughaill 1878 OS six inch first edn.
G *coire*; G *mac*; G *Dùghall*, 'corrie of Dougal's son'

A corrie high in the uplands east of Loch More, right on the boundary with the KLB CC area. See also the adjacent Loch, Meall and Crò named after it. Clearly a shieling location of old, whether real or legendary. Same Dùghall as Loch Dughaill just north of Loch Laxford, and many other place-names in West Sutherland? There were various historical Norseman/Hebrideans active in the area called Dùghall; also according to *The Book of Mackay*, the first Lord Reay was known as Donald Dùghall as he served a spell under the King of Denmark.

EILEAN A' BHREITHEIMH EDS Island NC132396

Elan a Bhrin 1795 *OSA*
Eilean a' Bhreitheimh 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *eilean*; G *an*; G *breitheamh*, 'island of the judge'

One of the small scattered islands off the west coast at the mouth of Badcall Bay. The story survives for this one. The following is an account from the OSA (pg. 292-293), which goes on to detail how this island was one of the collection gifted to Fearchar Lighiche by Robert II – see Mary Beith's 'Fearchar Lighiche and the Traditional Medicines of the North':

> *Here once lived Little John McDhoil-mhich-Huisdan, a gentleman of the Assint McLeods, who were a branch of the McLeods of Lewis, or Shiol Torquil. He was low of stature, but of matchless strength, and skill in arms; kept always a bierlin or galley in this place with 12 or 20 armed men, ready for any enterprize. Some alledge he practised piracy; but of this there is no certainty. By him it was that judge Morison of Lewis, of whom several respectable families now living there are descended, was slain. This judge had King James VI's. commission for maintaining justice and good order in that country; and though he was murdered by this McLeod, it was for no personal quarrel, or injury done McLeod himself, but in revenge of his being instrumental in putting to death one of that family, who acted as laird of Lewis. The preceding laird of that place dying without lawful issue, but leaving a number of natural sons, (some say 60), a contention arose among them about the succession to the estate. The eldest being not so popular among the name, as one other especially, the son of gentlewoman whose parents were of considerable influence among the tribe, was obliged to leave Lewis, and live upon the main land. Judge Morison being informed that there was a French vessel employed in killing fish contrary to law upon the neighbouring coast, sent for the reputed laird, who lived near that place, and taking also a party along with him, boarded this vessel, and made her a prize; but whether by stress of weather or design, they came to anchor below the house of the eldest of the brothers upon the main land, who in this way getting his rival within his power, had him immediately put to death by hanging him up, thinking no more was necessary to his succeeding to the possession of the estate of Lewis. But the death of the favourite young man so irritated the whole clan of McLeod, that they resolved nothing except the death of the judge should atone for it, and this Little John McDhoil mhich Huisdan, being universally reputed the fittest person for this enterprize, it was committed to him accordingly. The judge, informed of his danger, thought fit to come and wait on the master of Reays who then lived in Diurness, about the Christmas*

holidays, in order to prevail with him, to protect him, and to threaten John McLeod from attempting any thing against him. But John McLeod being told of the judge's having left his boat at Inverchirkak in Assint, waited for him there is his return, flew both him and his brother; and after this went to Lewis and married the judge's widow. On account of the barbarity and cruelty of these McLeods at this time, and their murder of a very promising youth who was the rightful heir of the estate of Lewis, immediately upon his coming home to his estate from Edinburgh, where he had his education under the King's eye, and this murder of judge Morison, of whose integrity his majesty had a high opinion, the king disposed of Lewis to a company of adventures from Fife and Dundee, whose history is well known. Among the numerous islands on this coast is one called Elan a Bhrin, or, the Island of the Judge, from the above mentioned Judge Morison. After he had been slain, his friends in Lewis came in a galley to bring home his corpse; but contrary winds arising drove them with the body on board to this island, where they found it convenient, after taking his bowels out, to bury them; and the wind soon after changing, they arrived in safety at home. This small island, which furnishes good pasture for lambs, being about 4 acres of extent, is possessed by the present minister of Edderachylis, as it has been by all his predecessors in office by the gift of the family of Reay.

EILEAN NA BEARACHD EDS Island NC148398

Bera Id. 1832 Thomson *Atlas of Scotland*
Eilean na Bearachd 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *eilean;* G *an*; G *bearachd*, 'island of the judgement'

Another of the islands at the mouth of Badcall Bay. Third in a row with Eilean a' Bhreitheimh and Ceann a' Mhaoir. Connected?

FOILLES EDS Settlement ???

Foilles 1573 Ortellius *Scotiae Tabula* (head)
Foilles 1595 Mercator *Scotiae Regnum*
Foiles 1635 Blaeu *Scotia Regnum*
[not on Pont - seems to be further inland (east) than he goes]
Gone by 1693 Robert Gordon *Scotia regnum cum insulis adjacentibus*
Not on 1747 Roy *Military Survey*

G *fòlais*, 'narrow, streamlet'

This and [Inver]Laxford are the only two settlements represented in this area on the earliest available maps. On Ortellius *Foilles* looks to be on the south side of Loch Stack, where we later see *Riroy*/*Riroy* (see Ruighe Ruadh). Mercator's map has one long sea loch instead of the River Laxford and Lochs Stack and More, with *Foilles* further inland than Laxford, at the

southern extremity of the Loch. Willem Blaeu's appears to be copied from this. And then Foilles disappears, and Reroy/Riroy appears on later maps. Was it the same location, or did the centre of population move? It would be two syllables, apparently, like Fowlis, and most likely comes from *fòlais*/*foghlais*, 'narrow, streamlet', according to PNRC pg. 86, 'Fowlis' and pg. 234, 'Folais' – under the latter Watson gives the example of Allt Fòlais (Ross-shire), as he says, 'a reduplication or tautology which shows that the name Fòlais has long ceased to be significant'. See also Fòlais, Letterewe. An educated guess may put it somewhere around the section of river between Loch Stack and Loch nan Ealachan pictured below, perhaps at either Lone or Achfary – is this the *fòlais* in question?

Are these the narrows that gave their name to Foilles? (photo by author, May 2022)

GEODH' GILL' IOSA EDS Coastal NC153473

Geodh' Gill' Iosa 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *geodha*; G *gille*; G *Iosa*, 'cove of Gille Iosa'

A cove on the coast of Eddrachillis, directly across the Sound from Tràigh an Teampaill on Handa Island. It most likely would have been named after someone with the personal name Gille Iosa, 'follower of Christ' – where the name Gillies come from – but there may also have been a connection with the church on Handa.

[INVER]LAXFORD EDS Settlement NC237470

Laxford 1580 Abraham Ortelius *Scotiae tabula* (head)
Innerlusford 1583-96 Pont *[Eddrachilles; Northwest Sutherland; Loch Shin] - Pont 3 (front)*
Innerluzfoord 1636 Gordon *Edera Cheules*
Innerlaxford 1747 Roy *Military Survey*
[G *inver*; en Laxford]; ON *lax*; ON *fjǫrðr*, ['river mouth of Laxford'] 'salmon fjord/firth'

Historic settlement on the north side of Laxford Bridge. Presumably disappeared in the early 19th century along with the other townships at Ruigh Ruadh and Lone. See Canmore entry 70476. See also surrounding and possibly related Canmore entries: Creag Pholl 89608 (building) and 349697 (peat cutting) ; Laxford Bay 349699 (pier); Badnabay 4684 (Neolithic Chambered Cairn, 1 mile west) and 367091 (images); Badcall 89607 (building); Laxford Bay 4686 (store) and 4687 (jetty); Creag a' Bhaid Choill 89606 (building).

LEATHAD GILLE PHEADAIR EDS Relief NC358350

Leathad Gille Pheadair 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *leathad*; G *gille*; G *Peadar*, 'slope of Gille Pheadair'

The slope hillside below Meall Gille Pheadair, the hill behind Cladh an Lòin Lèith at the eastern extremity of Loch More. Gille Pheadair means 'follower of Peter', which most likely was a personal name, rather than translating as 'slope of the follower of Peter'. There is a parallel in the name of Gille Oran, who was killed by Svein Asleifsson at Loch Glendhu, according to both *Orkneyinga* and Torfaeus. It is interesting that this is so close to the burial ground and *annaid*-name – see Loubinhanat.

LEATHAD NAN CRUINEACHD EDS Relief NC159440

Leathad nan Cruineachd 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *leathad*; G *nan*; G *Cruithneach*, 'slope of the Picts'

The other side of Cnoc a' Bhùthain, the hill behind Scourie, where the walker's path goes past the wee loch. The spelling here *cruineachd* indicates 'wheat', but the use of the plural definite article suggests *Cruithneach*, 'Picts'. There are hut circles and other remains all around here – see Canmore records 171734, 171729, 4601 (many more are available on the map). Like Clais nan Cruineachd just down the road in Assynt, and Àirigh nan Cruineachd in Torridon, both of which are also situated close to the remains of roundhouses, it's likely that the names involving Picts are later attempts to explain the origins of these prehistoric ruins, making this an interesting example of how people understood the past and their place in history.

LOCH A' GHILLE RUAIDH EDS Water NC229355

Loch a' Ghille Ruaidh 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *loch*; G *an*; G *gille*; G *ruadh*, 'loch of the red(-headed) lad'

A wee loch just up the track from Kylestrome that heads towards Acfary, above loch Glendhu. Not a bad camping spot. Who was this red lad? OSNB favours 'loch of the brown lad'.

Loch a' Ghille Ruaidh (photo by author, May 2022)

LOCHAN IAIN MHIC LEÒID EDS Water NC149412

Lochan Iain Mhic Leòid 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *lochan*; G *Iain*; G *Mhic Leòid*, 'Iain Macleod's wee loch'

A small inlet of the sea on the north side of Badcall Bay. OSNB says 'small loch of John Macleod', but doesn't say why.

LOCH AN IASGAIR EDS Water NC198356

Loch an Iasgair 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *loch*; G *an*; G *iasgair*, 'loch of the fisherman'

A loch inland and west of Kylestrome. A human fisherman with a story to tell or a kingfisher?

LOCHAN TIGH MHIC CHAILEIN EDS Water NC176434

Lochan Tigh Mhic Chailein 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *lochan*; G *taigh*; G *mac*; G *Cailean*, 'wee loch of Colin's son's house'

A tiny lochan in the uplands just east of Badcall. There are hut circles and a cairn just to the west at Bealach na h-Imrich – see Canmore records 4598, 4592, 4590, 4591.

LOCH NA MNATHA EDS Water NC196440

Loch na Mnatha 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *loch*; G *an*; G *bean*, 'loch of the woman'

Who was the mysterious woman and what happened? According to Sofia Evemalm's work on anthropotoponyms, she probably met a watery death.

LONE EDS Settlement NC309423

Louin Skeggabill 1583-96 Pont [Eddrachilles; Northwest Sutherland; Loch Shin] - Pont 3 (front)
Lowin Skegabill 1636 Gordon *Edera Cheules*
Loan 1747 Roy *Military Survey*
Loan 1793 *OSA* (Vol VI)
Loan 1832 Thomson *Atlas of Scotland*
Lone 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *lòn*, 'marshy meadow'

The early Skeggabill is very interesting – a *bólstaðr*, surely, but the specific element? Possibly *skeg*, 'beard', being a nickname for the inhabitant. The Ballochhadaraval shown near here on Thomson's map is actually Bealach Eadar da Shàbhal, several miles to the east between Sàbhal Mòr and Sàbhal Beag. Canmore entry 4756 (farmstead): 'At NC 3092 4218 is

a 19th/20th century farmhouse named Lone, now deserted, together with a cattle shed, sheepfolds and associated field pattern. There is no trace of earlier settlement.' There is nothing but a locked bothy at Lone now.

LOUBINHANAT EDS Settlement NC346346

Loubinhanat 1747 Roy *Military Survey*
Lubinhanad 1832 Thomson *Atlas of Scotland*

G *lùb*; G *an*; G *annaid*, '(river)bend of the early church'

The name of a historic settlement at Kinloch, Loch More. This is an exciting one! Not on any OS maps, the Canmore entry (122504) has mistranscribed this from Roy's map as Lonbanhanal, obscuring the significance. Roy shows four buildings roughly where Kinloch is now, and cultivation on both sides of the river. Thomson only has one block across the river, but it is a less detailed and accurate map. The specific element *annaid* means 'early or mother-church, land belonging to such a church' – see Macdonald (1973) and Clancy (1995). Pont's ca.1583-1614 map has no clear name here, but definitely depicts a building. See also Cladh an Lòin Lèith, and Leathad/Meall Gille Pheadair nearby. Perhaps also worth remembering that Loch More was known as Loch Skoury on Pont's map and some other older sources, which may or may not be relevant in this context. There are *annaid*-names also attested in the KLB (An Annait) and Durness (Ach' na h-Anaite) areas.

Thomson's *Atlas of Scotland* (1832)

Roy's *Military Survey* (1747)

Pont's 16th-century map

MEALLAN AN TIODHLACAIDH EDS Relief NC148448

Meallan an Tiodhlacaidh 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *meallan*; G *an*; G *tiodhlacaidh*, 'wee rounded hill of the burying'

This hill is right on the coast at the burial ground on the south side of Scourie Bay. It would be interesting to know if it is still locally known, as it doesn't feature on the modern OS maps.

MEALL GILLE PHEADAIR EDS Relief NC359354

Meall Gille Pheadair 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *meall*; G *Gille Pheadair*, 'rounded hill of Gille Pheadair'

See Leathad Gille Pheadair.

RUBH' AN FHIR LÈITH EDS Relief NC208339

Rudh' an Fhir Lèith 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *rubha*; G *an*; G *fear*; G *liath*, 'promontory of the grey man'

The 'grey man' here in question does not appear to refer to any hazardous coastal rocks or the like, and the OSNB has no explanation other than the name itself.

RUBH' AN TURRAPHUILL EDS Relief NC186353

Rudh' an Turraphuill 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *rubha*; G *an*; G *Turraphuill*, 'promontory of Turraphuill'

Another headland just north-west of the Càrn Bàn itself. I'd imagine *Turraphuill* must have been *tùr a' phuill*, or 'tower of the pool', the tower long gone, the pool being that lovely wee sea pool there.

RUIGHE RUADH EDS Settlement NC263440

Rhie roy 1634 NRS GD84/1/12/4
Riroy 1747 Roy *Military Survey*
Riroy 1820 Forbes *Sutherlandshire*
Reroy 1832 Thomson *Atlas of Scotland*
Ruighe Ruadh 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *ruigh(e)*; G *ruadh*, 'russet red shieling (slope)'

From the name this was clearly a shieling that became a permanent dwelling before 1634. Not on Pont's map, which may or may not be significant. OSNB says 'A small enclosure on the S side of the River Laxford. 'Red Summer residence for Cattle''. See Canmore entries for Ruighe Ruadh 89613 (enclosure); 314299 (clearance cairn). See also record 70475 for the settlement, taken from the map only – whoever supplied their entry read Riroy as 'Kilroy'. [Inver]Laxford, and the mysterious Foilles/Foyles are the only settlements in this strath to get a mention on the maps pre-Roy. Cleared in 1832, the same year as Thomson's map.

Looking down on Ruighe Ruadh, from the path up Ben Stack (photo by author, July 2020)

'Riroy' on William Roy's 1747 map, with the settlement of Lone and the hills Arkle and Ben Stack

SGEIR ROB EDS Coastal NC160416

Sgeir Rob 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *sgeir*, G *Rob*, 'Rob's skerry'

The first big skerry out of Badcall Bay.

SGEIR THOMAIS EDS Coastal NC140444

Sgeir Thomais 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *sgeir*; G *Tomas*, 'Thomas' skerry'

One of the coastal rocks at Camas nam Bùth, the bay on the west side of the headland behind Scourie More. No longer named on the OS Explorer, but the 1878 version shows a concentration of names at this location – given the name of the bay, this may have been a coastal shieling site.

SGEIR UISTEIN EDS Coastal NC159413

Sgeir Uisdean 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *sgeir*; G *Uisdean*, 'Hugh's skerry'

A skerry at Badcall Bay, just behind Eilean Dubh. No longer named on the OS Explorer.

SEANA BHRUTHACH EDS Relief NC277395

Shunabrugh 1832 Thomson *Atlas of Scotland*
Sine Bruthach 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *seann*; G *bruthach*, 'old hillside/brae'

The hillside west of Achfary, north of Bealach nam Fiann. *Seann* is an enigmatic element in place-names and its meaning in many contexts is unclear – this being one of them. It may mean 'no longer used', in which case it may tell us something about the reorganisation of settlements and land access/use in this area by the estate after 1832. Curiously the OSNB had 'the outstretched hillside' which it then ammended to 'slope of storms' – the latter I expect from *sian*.

SRATH NAN AISINNIN EDS Relief NC336317 (also creag & allt)

Srath nan Asinnteach 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *sràth*; G *an*; G *Asainteach*, 'strath of the Assynt-men'

A strath just south of Kinloch at the east end of Loch More. See also nearby Creag nan Aisinnin, and also the *loch* and *allt* named after the *sràth*, all spelled instead *Asainteach* in the 1878 map. What happened here?

YLEN LOCH STACK EDS Island NC275434

Ylen Loch Stack 1583-96 Pont *[Eddrachilles; Northwest Sutherland; Loch Shin] - Pont 3 (front)*

G *eilean*; en Loch Stack, 'island of Loch Stack'

Small island on Loch Stack on which there is now a granite Celtic cross, apparently put there by Constance, 1st Duchess of Westminster. Pont's depiction is the only evidence of the name, and suggests a structure of some kind – perhaps a 'fortalice' as the Macleods had on Eilean Assynt on Loch Assynt at the same time. See Canmore 71062.

The following is from the OSA, pg. 294-5:

> *There is yet one small island in a fresh water loch, that deserve some notice on account of memorable events that happened in it. It lies in Loch-Stack, so termed from a mountain having the figure of a Hack of corn, but of immense height, near it. In this small island McKay Laird of Far, chief of the name, had a hunting house with a small garden, which on occasion of his visiting the distant parts of his forest in the hunting season he resorted to for some time, and not only he, but after him, other gentle-men have been in use to pass some days in the same place, when employed in the diversion of hunting. While Sir Hugh McKay of Far, the father of Donald first Lord Reay, happened to pass sometime in this island, it was the custom of the people in the neighbourhood to make him and his company presents of milk, fresh meat, butter, and cheese; and in this way the wife of a man occupying the next farm or grazing called Loan, who seems to have been of the better sort, came to him with her present also; and being a young woman, and as it would seem of uncommon beauty. Sir Hugh took a fancy for her person, wanting her to gratify his sensual inclinations; but she rejected his proposal disdainfully, telling him he would not live to commit such a base deed, while her own husband lived, and so wanting to return home she found she would not be permitted to leave the island. Next day Sir Hugh, with one or more attendants, took a walk towards the house, where the husband lived, and desired him to come along with them as they returned to the island, which as he was doing, either Sir Hugh himself, or some of his company, stepping behind, all at once ran him through the body with a durk, took off the head, which they brought carefully along with them, and upon their return presented to his wife. Then the poor woman fearing, by persisting in her opposition, to meet with her husband's fate, was*

obliged to submit to Sir Hugh's inclinations, and of that commerce was Donald McKay begot, who was the first laird of Edderachylis of the name of McKay.

Additionally *The Sutherland Book* (Vol II, pg. 140) includes a letter from Donald MacKay to the Earl of Caithness dated 1619, which gives *Loghstalk* as his location.

Ylen Loch Stack, or more correctly Eilean Loch an Staca (own photo, July 2020).

Handa Island

For Handa Island we have an additional map, which is the only source for the majority of the names listed here. Iain Munro was born and brought up in Scourie, but his mother moved the family back to her native Lewis after his father drowned in a tragic accident at sea in 1958 that also claimed two of his cousins. He learned Gaelic living in South Lochs and after studying architecture set up his own firm. Although he spent most of his life living in the Borders and latterly Ayrshire, he maintained strong links with North West Sutherland, visiting two or three times a year, until he passed away early in 2021. His map of Handa Island has four times as many place-names as any of the Ordnance Survey maps and as such is a valuable resource. Currently it is only available on request from the Scottish Wildlife Trust rangers on Handa. Many thanks to Julian Pearce of The Shorehouse Restaurant in Tarbet, Roger Tebay of Handa Island Ferries, and to Chris Munro of Scourie for information regarding this source and its author.

It is notable that all of these names are coastal. Handa was cleared in the 1840s and has been uninhabited ever since, meaning that most folk would only know its coast from fishing and fowling. It makes sense then that these names have been remembered while inland names are scant. Additionally the majority of names here are rocks named after men, indicating perhaps tales of fowling heroism/mishaps and the like.

GEODH' GILL' IOSA EDS Coastal NC153473

Geodh' Gill' Iosa 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *geodha*; G *gille*; G *Iosa*, 'cove of Gille Iosa'

A cove on the coast of Eddrachillis, opposite Tràigh an Teampaill on Handa Island. It most likely would have been named after someone with the personal name Gille Iosa, 'follower of Christ' – where the name Gillies comes from – but there may also have been a connection with the church on Handa given the proximity.

GEODHA NAN DAOINE EDS Costal NC124479

Geodha nan Daoine ca. 2000 Iain Munro *Handa*

G *geodha*; G *na*; G; *daoine*, 'cove of the people/men'

The cove north of Geodh' Dearg on Handa's west coast. What people and why? The same name occurs near Stoer Head in Assynt, which the OSNB has as 'cove of the men' - OS1/33/18/5.

SGEIREAN ALAS' 'CLEOD EDS Coastal NC148477

Sgeirean Alas' 'cLeod ca. 2000 Iain Munro *Handa*

G *sgeirean*; G *Alasdair*; G *Macleod*, 'Alasdair Macleod's skerries'

The first group of skerries north of the chapel on the east side of Handa. Strange abbreviation. Who was this man?

SGEIREAN FHIOMHRAICH EDS Coastal NC143470

Sgeir an Fhamair 1878 OS six inch first edn.

Sgeirean Fhiomhraich ca. 2000 Iain Munro *Handa*

G *sgeir*; G *an*; G *famhair*, 'skerry of the giant'

Both the 2007 OS and Munro's mapp have a nonsense-word as the specific element here; the 1878 OS has instead *famhair*, 'giant'.

SGEIR THORMAID EDS Coastal NC146471

Sgeir Thormaid ca. 2000 Iain Munro *Handa*

G *sgeir*; G *Tormad*, 'Tormad/Norman's skerry'

The rock at the most south-easterly tip of Port and Eilein. Which Tormad?

SRON NÈILL EDS Coastal NC147485

Sron Nèill ca. 2000 Iain Munro *Handa*

G *sròn*; G *Nèill*, 'Nèill's nose'

A clifftop lump on the north-east side of the island. What did Nèill do here? Or did he just have a really big nose?

STACAN IAIN 'IC SHEUMAIS EDS Coastal NC129485

Stacan Iain 'ic Sheumais ca. 2000 Iain Munro *Handa*

G *stacan*; G *Iain*; G *Mhic Sheumais*, 'Iain Mhic Sheumais' wee stack'

A small, low, flat-topped stack just north of Geodh' na Goibhre on the north west coast of the island. Did he jump?

Stacan Iain ‘ic Sheumais is one of the small, low rocks bottom-right (photo by author, June 2022)

TOLL A’ CHOIN EDS Coastal NC146473

Toll a’ Choin ca. 2000 Iain Munro *Handa*

G *toll*; G *an*; G *cù*, ‘hole of the dog’

A coastal feature on the east side of Port an Eilein. Suggests a parable of some kind!

TRÀIGH AN TEAMPAILL EDS Coastal NC147276

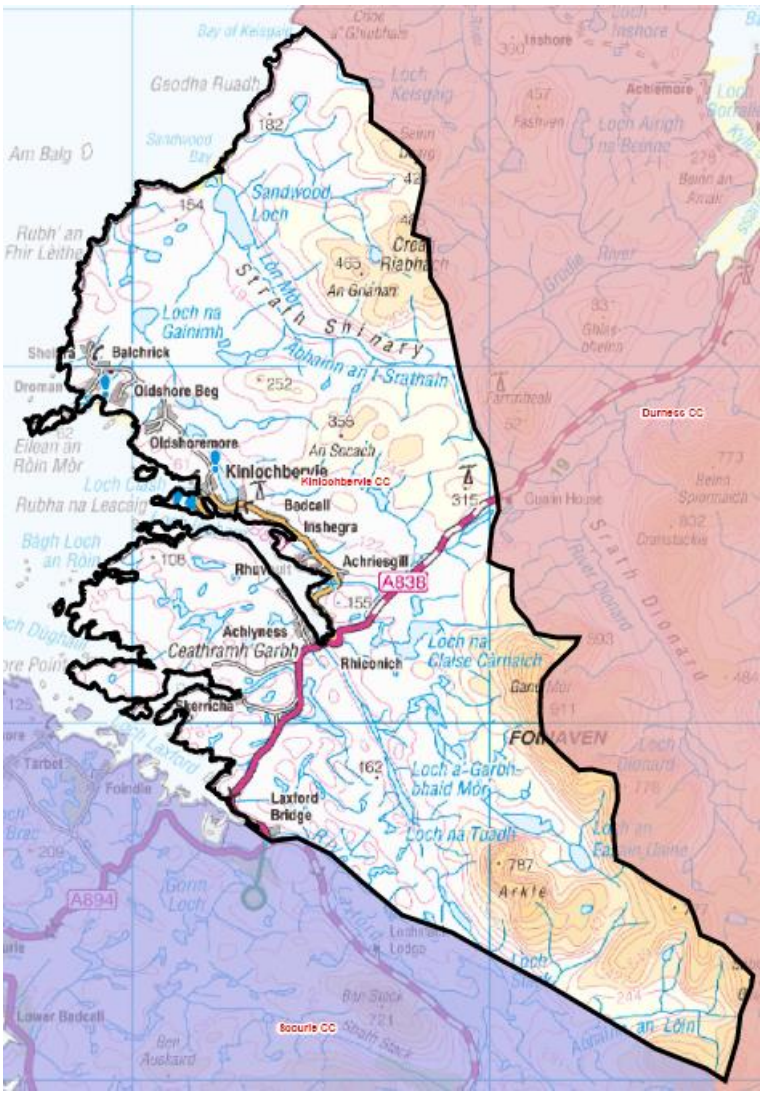
Tràigh an Teampaill ca. 2000 Iain Munro *Handa*

G *tràigh*; G *an*; G *teampall*, ‘(sandy) beach of the church/temple’

The beach closese to the old chapel, the site of which was near the shore. The graveyard is just to the south of the chapel site. *Teampall* is an ecclesiastical element particularly common in the Western Isles – see ‘Place-names and the early church in Scotland’ by Simon Taylor. This of course does not tell us the name of the *teampull* or burial ground themselves. See Canmore record 4583 for the church; 4586 for Iron Age pottery found nearby. Much info on Handa in the OSA: pg. 291-8.

A burial slab and other grave markers at the old burial ground at Port an Eilean (photo by author, 2022)

Kinlochbervie



AIRIGH A' BHÀIRD EDS Settlement NC285455

Airidh a' Bhàird 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *àirigh*; G *an*; G *bàrd*, 'shieling of the poet'

A shieling at the base of Arkle, on its southern side. Potentially something to do with Rob Donn, or someone else? After droving he was employed by Lord Reay as an 'underforester, a position which afforded him congenial occupation roaming the mountains of his homeland, and holding close converse with the wild animals of the chase' (*The Book of Mackay*, pg. 205), so this would have been decidedly his turf. One of his best-known songs is 'Is Trom Leam An Airigh' ('sad to me is the shieling'), where he complains of old loves going off with other men.

ALLT NA TUAIDH EDS Water NC245529

Allt na Tuaidh 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *allt*; G *an*; G *tuadh*, 'burn of the axe'

A wee burn running from what is now known as Lochan Lamhaidh into Loch Inchard on the north side of Achlyness. OSNB prefers 'burn of the hatchet' (OS1/33/17/100), but has no explanation for the name – was there a story attached?

AN ANNAIT EDS Settlement NC208509

An Annait 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *an*; G *annaid*, 'the early church'

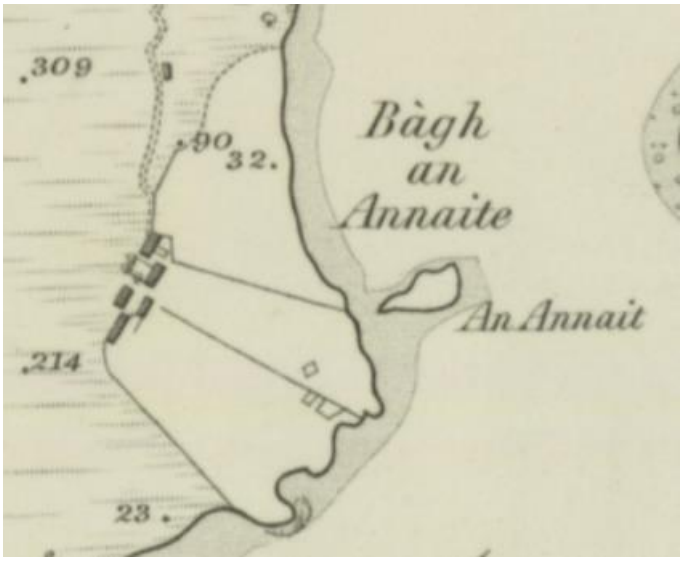
A settlement on the west side of Loch a' Chadh-Fi, a sea loch on the north side of Loch Laxford. The modern OS has this name for the settlement, but in 1878 the name appears to apply to the wee island in the bay - which would explain perhaps the grammar of Bàgh an Annaite, which we would expect to be Bàgh na h-Annaid. If it was understood as the name of the island rather than a church it may have been interpreted as a masculine noun. It may be that the actual church was on the island, which looks like it can be reached by a rocky causeway from where the settlement is (now part of an outdoors centre). Roy only shows the neighbouring Ardmore and Ardbeg, and Portlavorachie (aka Portlevorchy/Portluvurchie – an interesting name in itself – perhaps 'Murchadh's port', but where does the 'l' come from? Thomson's 1832 atlas has *Port Luarachy* – *lurach* as in 'lovely'?). These and other nearby settlements (Slugaid Liath, Clais Luchraich) are well documented by Canmore with several entries, with excellent aerial photographs – see the map for details:

https://canmore.org.uk/site/search/result?SITECOUNTRY=0&view=map

There are two entries for An Annait there: one for the township (86151), and one for the (possible) church (4707), which says:

> *NC25SW 1 2099 5092*
>
> *(NC 2099 5092) 'An Annait' is the name given to a rock, which in turn gives name to Bagh an Annaite, Bay of the Annait, to the north.*
>
> *Annait is a ninth to tenth century term for a church-site of any kind abandoned during that period, and not subsequently re-used as the site of a focal church.*
>
> *Name Book 1875; OS 6"map, Sutherland, 1st ed., (1875); A Macdonald 1973.*
>
> *There is local knowledge of a church or associated site, or of tradition pertaining to one. There is nothing significant on the ground.*
>
> *Visited by OS (J M), 9 June 1980.*

The fact that the sea loch itself appears on Pont, Blaeu, and Robert Gordon may support the local oral tradition – it must have been of some significance. See entry for Loch a' Cladh-Fi, and also Loubinhanat in the Scourie CC area.



An Annait on the 1875 OS map

Satellite image of An Annait (Bing Aerial, 2023)

BAD MHIC IOMHAIR EDS Settlement NC192515

Bad Mhic Iomhair 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *bad*; G *Mac*; G *Iomhar*, 'Ivor's son's place/clump'

A spot on the west side of the lochan of the same name, which is situated on the north side of the Ardmore headland, which in turn is on the south side of Loch Dughaill. There is also the *lochan* and the *bàgh* of the *lochan*. The *bad* itself is no longer on map, but from satellite images looks as though it may well have been a clump of trees in a crevice about halfway up the western bank of the loch.

CÀRN AN RÌGH EDS Relief NC202638

Càrn an Righ 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *càrn*; G *an*; G *rìgh*, 'cairn of the king'

A stony, cairn-like hill near the coast just south of Am Buachaille at Sandwood Bay. OSNB has 'The King Hill' - OS1/33/17/6. There is also a Leathad Càrn an Rìgh, which is the long, flat-topped slope on the left-hand-side of the last section of path before you get to the old farmstead. Canmore has a building at Port Mòr, just at the back of the *càrn* (record 86145) – there appears to be some dispute as to whether it's a mill or a fish-curing station.

CÀRN NAOMHAG EDS Relief NC233660

Càrn Naomha 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *càrn*; G *naomh*, 'holy/sacred cairn(-shaped hill)'

Another name that like An Annait, seems to have moved location since the 1878 OS map. Then Càrn Naomha was situated at NC241660, as satellite images show at the side of a lochan that was not depicted on the map. Càrn Naomhag, as the 2007 OS Explorer has it, is instead located closer to the river mouth at NC233660. In reality it could be any number of small knobbly hills in this area. Perhaps a counterpoint to The Cailleach of Strath Chailleach herself – see Whyte (2020) for how Cailleach-names are often found juxtaposed with a more pious name nearby. See also Càrn an Rìgh, Strath Chailleach.

CNOC AN TÙIR EDS Relief NC252534

Cnoc an Tùir 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *cnoc*; G *an*; G *tùr*, 'hillock of the tower'

A coastal hill between Rhiconich and Achriesgill. See also Bealach an Tùir nearby, which the OSNB has as 'the pass of the tower' - OS1/33/17/99. Canmore only has a township (86155) and a landing point (349795) at this location.

CNOC CÀRN A' BHODAICH EDS Relief NC215526

Cnoc Càrn a' Bhodaich 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *cnoc*; G *càrn*; G *an*; G *bodach*, 'hillock of the cairn of the old man'

A hill on the south side of Loch Cròcach in the interior. Càrn a' Bhodaich could of course have been an existing name. Surely a story there – was it a burial cairn?

CNOC NA CAILLICH EDS Relief NC231559

Cnoc na Caillich 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *cnoc*; G *an*; G *cailleach*, 'hillock of the old woman/crone'

The craggy hill between Badcall and the south end of Loch Innis na Bà Buidhe. A *cailleach* or a *Cailleach*? There is a burnt mound between here and neighbouring Cnoc Garbh – see Canmore record 4693.

CREAG FHIONNLAIDH EDS Relief NC231559

Creag Fhionnlaidh 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *creag*; G *Fionnlaidh*, 'Finlay's crag'

A crag forming part of Cnoc na Caillich in Kinlochbervie. Not included on the modern OS map.

CREAG MHIC GRIOGAIR EDS Relief NC239559

Creag Mhic Griogair 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *creag*; G *mac*; G *Griogair*, 'crag of Gregor's son'

The crag behind Badcall.

EILEAN AN EIREANNAICH EDS Island NC202503

Island an Erinich 1793 *OSA*

Eilean an Eireannaich 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *eilean*; G *an*; G *Eireannach*, 'island of the Irish(man)'

An island at the entrance into Loch a' Chadh-Fi. The OSNB has 'Island of the Irishmen' - OS1/33/17/121. There is also a Poll Eilean an Eireannaich on the island's north-east coast – according to the 1793 OSA, the best harbour in Loch Laxford (pg. 290). Worth remembering

that there is also *earann, earrannaich*, 'division, divide(ing)', but the proximity to An Annait may be significant.

GLAC DHUBH NEILL EDS Relief NC291456

Glac Dhubh Neill 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *glac*; G *dubh*; G *Neill*, 'Neill's dark hollow/defile'

A hollow just east of Àirigh a' Bhàird – it appears to refer to the wee dip between Càrn Àirigh a' Bhàird and Arkle proper. OSNB has 'black hollow of Niel'[sic] - OS1/33/17/180.

[INVER]LAXFORD EDS Settlement NC237470

Laxford 1580 Abraham Ortelius *Scotiae tabula* (head)
Innerlusford 1583-96 Pont *[Eddrachilles; Northwest Sutherland; Loch Shin] - Pont 3 (front)*
Innerluzfoord 1636 Gordon *Edera Cheules*
Innerlaxford 1747 Roy *Military Survey*

[G *inver*; en Laxford]; ON *lax*; ON *fjǫrðr*, ['river mouth of Laxford'] 'salmon fjord/firth'

Historic settlement on the north side of Laxford Bridge. Presumably disappeared in the early 19th century along with the other townships at Ruigh Ruadh and Lone. See Canmore entry 70476. See also surrounding and possibly related Canmore entries: Creag Pholl 89608 (building) and 349697 (peat cutting) ; Laxford Bay 349699 (pier); Badnabay 4684 (Neolithic Chambered Cairn, 1 mile west) and 367091 (images); Badcall 89607 (building); Laxford Bay 4686 (store) and 4687 (jetty); Creag a' Bhaid Choill 89606 (building).

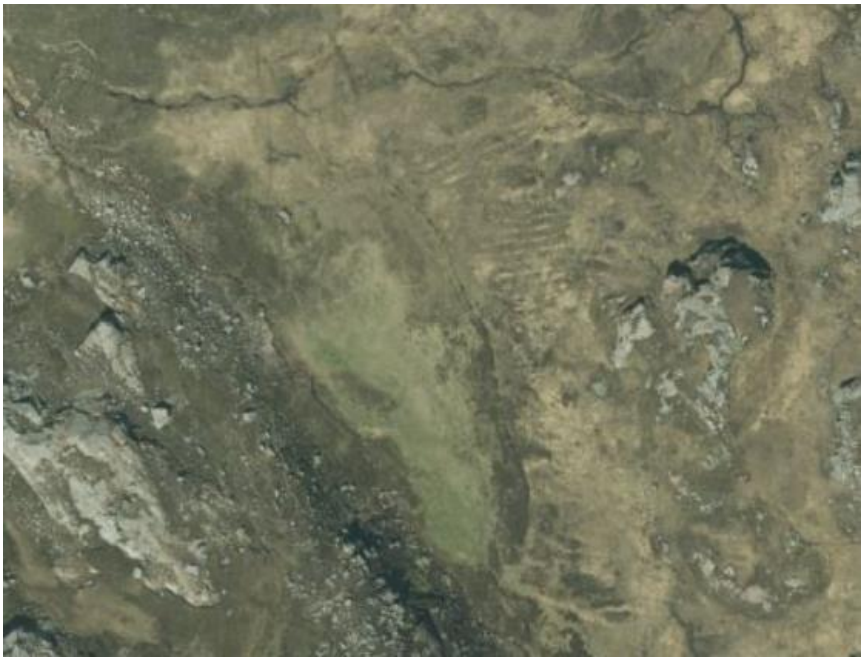
LARACH TIGH DHONNACHAIDH EDS Settlement NC230659

Larach Tigh Dhonnachaidh 1903 OS six inch second edn.

G *làrach*; G *taigh*; G *Donnachaidh*, 'the ruin's of Donnachaidh's house'

The site of a ruined dwelling on the sandy headland at the north end of the beach at Sandwood Bay. Not on the OS six inch first edn. On the second edn. this name appears on either side of the burn at this location that discharges into the sea. The 2007 explorer positions the name to the side of the burn. Canmore has a hut circle closer to the beach (record 4711), but nothing for this site. Regarding the hut circle, they say: 'Embedded in the blown sand in the central area the broken top of a rotary quern was discovered during field investigation; however, there is no evidence of cultivation associated with the homestead.' There are however *feannagan* or 'lazy beds' clearly visible on satellite at Larach Tigh Dhonnachaidh, and given the machair-like ground here, it is likely there were more. The same report also asserts that 'located in such an isolated position, it could be suggested that the homestead was constructed by seafarers utilizing the excellent beaching facilities of

Sandwood Bay, which are rare on this coast.' The 'isolation' they refer to is a modern phenomenon, and whilst the house's use by seafarers cannot be ruled out, historically their nearest neighbours would only have been a mile or two away on either side.



Satellite image of the *feannagan* (centre right) at Larach Tigh Dhonnachaidh (Bing Aerial)

LEUM A CHOIN DEIRG EDS Relief NC184511

Leum a' Choin Deirg 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *leum*; G *an*; G *cù*; G *dearg*, 'leap of the red dog'

A narrow inlet in the rocks near Ardmore Point, perhaps most clearly depicted on the 1878 OS below. Like the *leum*-names involving human protagonists – see Maclean (2017) - it is likely there was a story behind this unusual feature and the red dog.

Leum a' Choin Deirg on the OS six inch first edn.

LOCH A' CHADH-FI EDS Water NC217513

Loch Chavy 1583-96 Pont *[Eddrachilles; Northwest Sutherland; Loch Shin] - Pont 3 (front)*
Loch Chavy 1636 Gordon *The draught of Edera Cheules*
Loch Chavy 1654 Blaeu *Atlas of Scotland*
Loch Havie 1747 Roy *Military Survey*
Loch a' Chathaidh 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *loch*; en Cadha-Fèith, 'loch of Cadha-Fèith (the deer pass)'

The sea loch at An Annait, that branches off the north side of Loch Laxford. There are a variety of settlements evidenced here – see notes under An Annait. There is also an Eilean Loch a' Chadh-Fi (Pont: *Ylen a chavy*). The translation is a guess but an educated one: there is an An Cadha just at the settlement of Skerricha, named after Sgeir a' Chadh, a skerry that marks the entrance to the *cadha*. The specific element is open to alternative suggestions, but for now I think this is the most likely interpretation. The historical versions are surprising, and could support the aunthenticity of An Annait as a historic church site – otherwise why would this slightly obscure sea loch feature on Pont, Blaeu, etc?

LOCHAN DUBH EOIN EDS Water NC285535

Lochan Dubh Eoin 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *lochan*; G *dubh*; G *Eòin*, 'John's wee dark loch'

A lochan just north-east of Loch na Claise Càrnaich near Rhiconich.

LOCHAN DUBH MHIC AONGHAIS EDS Water NC262530

Lochan Dubh Mhic Aonghais 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *lochan*; G *dubh*; G *mac*; G *Aonghas*, 'Angus' son's wee dark loch'

A wee loch just north-west of Rhiconich.

LOCHAN DUBH MHIC EÒIN MHIC DHONNACHAIDH EDS Water NC245575

Lochan Dubh Mhic Eòin Mhic Dhonnachaidh 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *lochan*; G *dubh*; G *mac*; G *Eòin*; G *mac*; G *Donnachaidh*, 'son of Eòin, son of Donnachaidh's wee dark loch'

A tiny lochan under a mile north-east of Loch Càrn Mharasaid. Perhaps the same Donnachaidh and the same Eòin we have already encountered.

LOCHAN NAM BAN EDS Water NC197523

Lochan nam Ban 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *lochan*; G *an*; G *bean*, 'wee loch of the women'

A small freshwater loch on the north side of Loch Dughaill. There is also an adjacent *bàgh* on the sea coast named after the loch. Most likely so-named as it was a shieling site, but you never know.

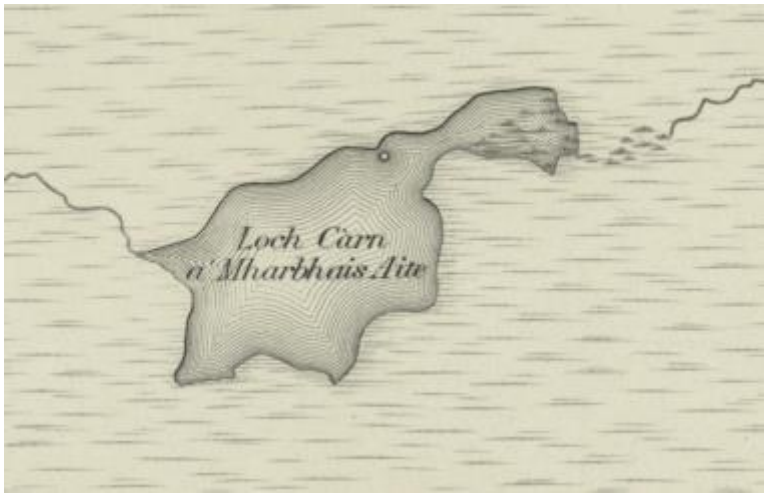
LOCH CÀRN MHARASAID EDS Water NC236583

Loch Càrn a' Mharbhais Aite 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *loch*; en. Càrn a' Mharbhais Aite, 'loch of Càrn a' Mharbhais Aite'

A loch up on the high moorland at the end of the KLB Peat Road. The modern version of the *càrn*'s specific element is a nonsense-word, the 1878 OS ambiguous, but possibly something along the lines of *marbhaich-àite*, meaning something like 'killing place' or 'kill-spot'. As an absolutely wild guess, I'd hazard that this was a deer trap of some kind, perhaps involving chasing them into the boggy area at the east of the loch. There are the remains of several shieling huts around two of the burns here too.

Loch Càrn Mharasaid (photo by author, August 2021)



From the 1875 OS six inch first edn.

LOCH DÙGHAILL EDS Water NC192520

Loch Dhughaill 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *loch*; G *Dùghall*, 'Dùghall/Dougal's loch'

The sea loch north of Loch Laxford, with a name of similarly Norse origin, *dubh-gall* being what the Gaels called the Danish.

LOCH NA CAILLICH EDS Water NC250511

Loch na Caillich 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *loch*; G *an*; G *cailleach*, 'loch of the old woman/crone'

This lochan just south of Rhiconich is actually a distinct northern branch of the larger Loch na h-Ula ('loch of the long grass').

MEALL AN ULBHAIDH EDS Relief NC214497

Meall an Uile Bheathaich 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *meall*; G *an*; G *uile-bheathach*, 'rounded hill of the monster'

OSNB says 'hill of the monster' so this specific element must be a variation of what Dwelly has as *uile-bheist*.

POLLAN DHUGHAILL EDS Relief NC310487

Pollan Dhughaill 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *pollan*; G *Dughall*, 'Dougal's wee hollow'

A small hollow about 250m up the west side of Foinaven. There is also a nearby *lochan* and a large Creag Ghlas named after it.

PORTLAIDH MHURCHAIDH EDS Coastal NC249536

Port Mhurchaidh 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *port*; G *Murchaidh*, 'Murdo's port'

A natural harbour on the south side of Achriesgill Bay. Not sure where the more recent '-*laidh'* suffix came from or what it's supposed to add.

SANDWOOD EDS Settlement NC219643

Sandwatt Moir 1583-96 Pont [Eddrachilles; Northwest Sutherland; Loch Shin] - Pont 3 (front)
Sandwat Beg 1636 Gordon *The draught of Edera Cheules*
Sandwood 1747 Roy *Military Survey*
Sandwood 1878 OS six inch first edn.

ON *sand*; ON *vatn*, 'sand water'

As we all know the original Sandwood was the loch itself, and the settlement was named after the loch. This theory is supported by the existence of other Sandvatns: for example the lake in Iceland about sixty miles east of Reykjavik. However, as we can see from the spelling used on the secondary features named after it on the 1878 OS, to Gaelic-speakers the name of the settlement became *Seannabhaid*, 'the old place'. Is there more to be known about this? James Carron, author of 'Highland Hermit' (the book about Sandy), managed to track down a local man called Norman Morrison, whose mother was born in the shepherd's cottage at Strathchailleach in 1897, before moving with her family to the house at Sandwood. He said she spoke of both places with great affection and described how they used to feed their chickens with salmon. Aside from the ruins of the house and enclosures at the settlement, Canmore also details an apparent burial site just down by the beach: human remains composed of the bones of an adult and child were found here in 1983 – see Canmore entry 4712.

The ruined cottage and *feannagan* at Sandwood (photo by author, August 2020)

The *baile* at Sandwood in 1747, on William Roy's map

SINAIRIDH EDS Settlement NC239626

Sinairidh 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *seann*; G *àirigh*, 'old shieling'

This is marked on the modern OS map as a 'sheepfold' roughly halfway between the south end of Sandwood Loch and Strathan bothy. An old shieling is exactly what one would expect to find within a few miles of an old place, given that according to the cartographer Blaeu in his 1654 atlas, in Sutherland 'the farmers from the nature of the region are more dedicated to pasture than to field.' This name appears to have given its name to the wider strath. In his 1901 *Kinlochbervie*, Alexander Macrae attests that Strath Shinary once provided 'good pasture for the whole district', and archaeological investigations in 1998 found evidence of groups of shieling huts scattered right along the strath.

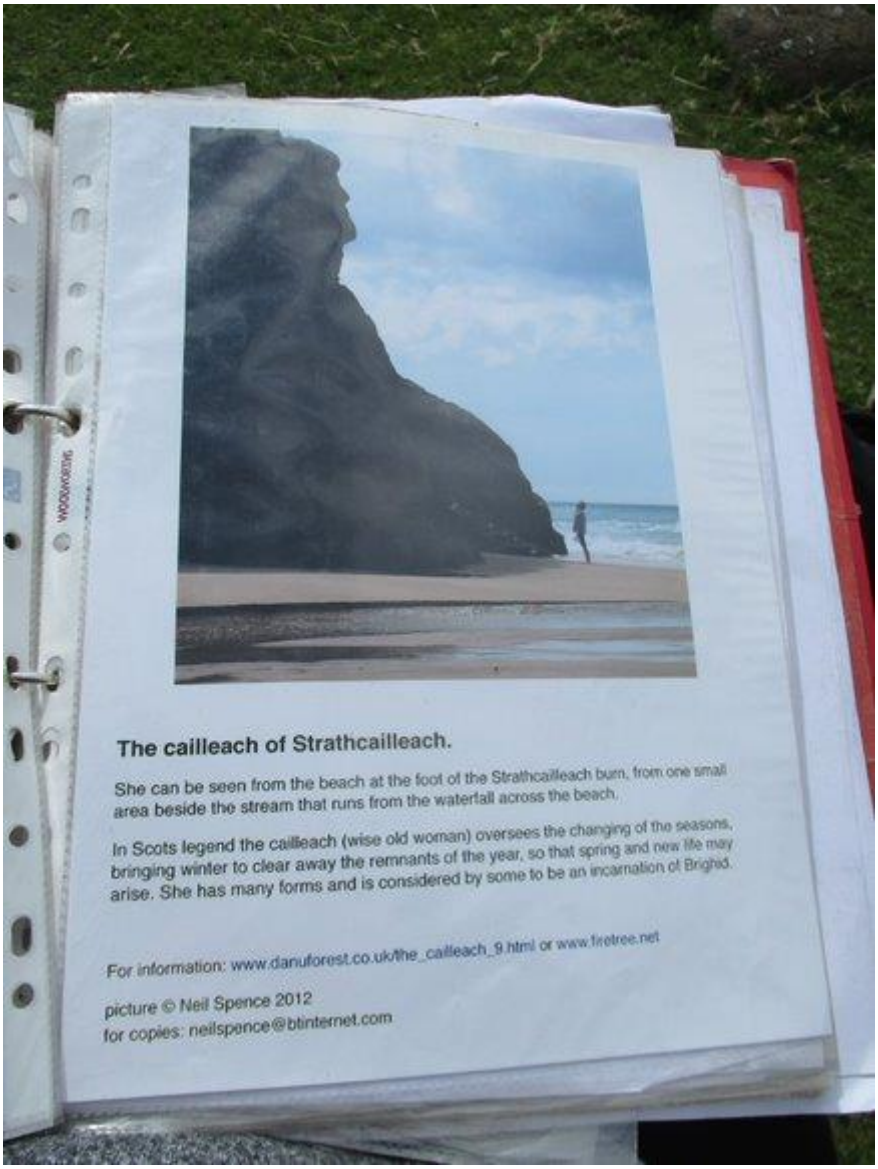
The sheep fank at the old shieling site of Sinairidh (photo by author, July 2021)

STRATH CHAILLEACH EDS Relief NC244664

[*Ald*] *Strath Allich* 1747 Roy *Military Survey*
Srath na Caillich 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *srath*; G *an*; G *Cailleach*, 'strath of the old woman/crone'

The strath of the river that springs from a variety of sources about a mile south of the bothy of the same name and discharges into the sea at Càrn Naomhag. The Roy map has the river name, but there doesn't seem to be any earlier attestation of either the strath or the settlement that was where the bothy is. According to Whyte (2020), many *cailleach*-names are named for rock formations resembling a woman, and the most credible explanation for this one is provided by the photo someone has left in the red folder in the bothy, of the rock formation down at the beach at Bun Abhainn an t-Srath'-chailleach. There is also the MBA bothy known by this name, inhabited for 30 years by Sandy – the possible source of some of the ghost stories of ancient mariners sighted on the beach at Sandwood. This was built at what looks to have been an earlier settlement site, with remains of as-yet unrecorded older structures littering the area around the current house.



Sadly neither the web or email address listed are still functioning (photo by author, August 2021)

STACAN GILLE PHEADAIR EDS Coastal NC232550

Stacan Gille Pheadair 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *stacan*; G *Gille Pheadair*, 'Gille Pheadair's wee stack'

A stack on the south side of Loch Inchard. The same Gille Pheadair as Scourie's Meall and Leathad?

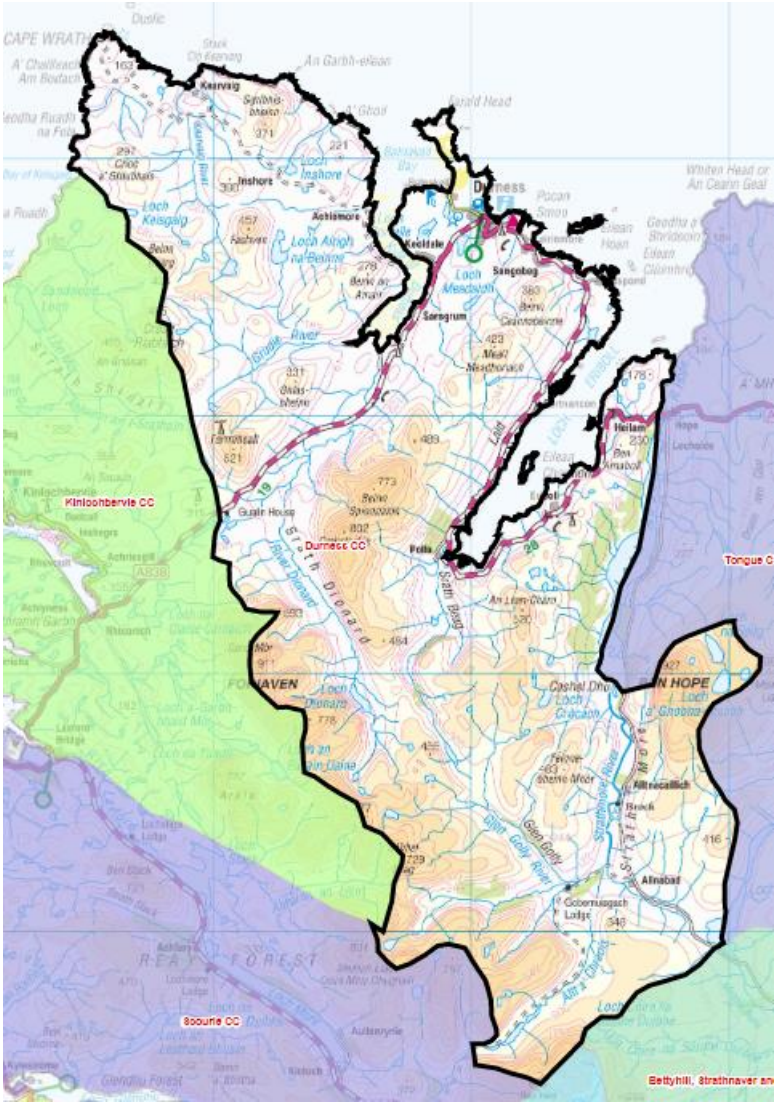
UIDH ALASDAIR GHUINNICH EDS Water NC272523

Uidh Alasdair Ghuinnich 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *uidh*; G *Alasdair*; G *Guinneach*, 'ford of Alasdair of the Gunns'

A narrow section of water between Loch an Easain Ghairbh and Loch na Claise Càrnaich, due east of Rhiconich. The meaning of *uidh* is slightly more complicated than 'ford'; technically an *uidh* is a narrower stretch of slow-moving water between two larger bodies of water. In reality it is more often than not fordable, and in this case perhaps linked to a tale similar to those we find connected to anthropotoponymic *leum*-names – see Maclean (2017).

Durness



ACARSAID CHOINNICH OIG DUR Coastal NC257747

Acarsaid Choinnich Oig 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *acarsaid*; G *Coinneach*; G *òg*, 'young Kenneth's anchorage'

A rocky bay just south of the lighthouse at Cape Wrath. Obviously there was a fair community here at one point maintaining the lighthouse, but this name is likely to be a lot older than that.

A' CHAILLEACH DUR Coastal NC249735

A' Chailleach 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *an*; G *cailleach*, 'the old woman/crone'

One of a pair of sea stacks on the coast just over a mile south of Cape Wrath. See also Am Bodach.

ACH' AN DÙIN DUR Settlement NC461605

Ach' an Dùin 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *achadh*; G *an*; G *dùn*, 'field of the fort'

The area around the broch at Heilam – also hut circles, a burnt mound and a Cathair Dubh nearby. Among many Canmore entries here, they describe 'the heavily robbed remains of a broch, partially overlain by a ruined cottage, on the end of a rocky ridge' (record 4957), and the building built onto it (record 86201).

ACH' CHAIRN DUR Settlement NC363620

Ach' an Arain 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *achadh*; G *an*; G *càrn*, 'field of the cairn'

An area on the eastern slope of Sìthean Mòr, a hill at the south end of the Kyle of Durness. The 1878 version is dubious – 'field of the bread' is unattested elsewhere, although that is the interpretation given by the OSNB (OS1/33/11/8). There is apparently a broch here, acoording to Canmore record, the most recent update of which says:

> *The remains of a denuded broch on a spur above the W bank of the River Dionard. A nearby stone-built fank probably accounts for much of the depletion. All that survives in situ are fifteen or sixteen blocks of the base course outer face, and these mainly concentrate to the westerly half, giving an overall diameter for the broch of 19.0m. An abundance of small stone covers the site some of it undoubtedly cleared off an adjacent field. A later, rectangular footing, 12.0m by 5.0m, occupies the easterly part of the broch. The broch position offers little natural defence but nothing of a complementary outwork is recognised. Revised at 1:10,000.*

Visited by OS (J M) 20 November 1978.

Could it perhaps have been a cairn after all? Or was it just labelled a cairn as the broch was so 'denuded' it looked like one?

ACH' NA H-ANAITE DUR Settlement NC385655

Auch-na-hanet 1790 Brown *Plan Of Intended Road From The Kirk Of Durness To The Head Of Loch Naver, Sutherland*

Achnahanet 1820 Forbes *Sutherlandshire*

[Cnoc] Ach' na h-Anaite 1871-1875 *OSNB*

[Cnoc] Ach' na h-Anaile 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *achadh*; G *an*; G *annaid*, 'field of the early church'

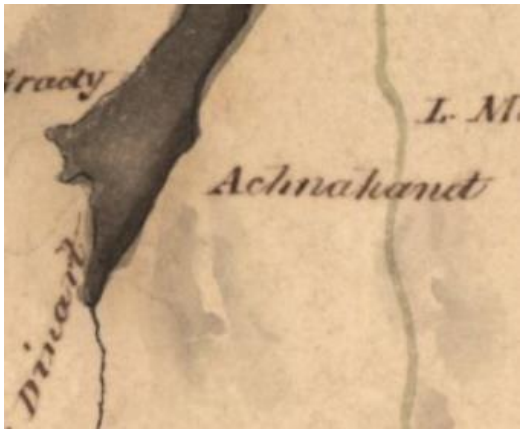
Another one – this time on the east side of the Kyle of Durness. This was the name of a settlement cleared when Keoldale was made into a sheep farm. The 1878 OS only names the hill behind it (now known as Cnoc na Mòine), incorrectly, although they get it right in the OSNB, despite saying that 'the meaning of the word is not known'. There may have been a church here, or it may just have belonged to the church at Balnakiel, although the OPS says that:

> *At Balnakiel is a hollow stone or basin, known as the 'clach na sagart ruadh' or stone of the red priest... the red priest is believed to have been the last incumbent of Farr or of Durness previously to the Reformation, and a worker of miracles... The red priest is believed to have built a chapel at Bealoch Mhor between Durness and Eriboll, at which the inhabitants of Eriboll occasionally worshipped.* (pg. 702-3)

There is also an association at Applecross between 'the red priest' and St. Maelrubha, according to the Highland Historic Environment Record entry regarding this source (MHG9503, also MHG29611 for the 'homestead'). Lots of archaeology around here on Canmore – hut circles (71531, 4774), cairns, a broch (4769) – as there is right down the Kyle. See also Ach' a' Chairn, and the Canmore details included under the entry for Cnoc nan Ceannan below, which also tells of archaeological finds here, and of one of the cairns here being known as Cnoc nan Cnamhan. Interestingly, there is also a *Carkaig* marked here on Blaeu's 1654 map, quite separate from Balnakiel. Roy's 1747 map (which has Kyle of Grudie rather than Durness), only a Ballachledich named on this side of the loch, but shows clusters of buildings where Ach' na h-Anaite was.

The unnamed settlement on Roy's 1747 map

Brown's 1790 map



Forbes' 1820 map

The historic landscape surrounding Ach' na h-Anaite, as recorded on the 2007 OS Explorer map

ALLT EILIDH A' CHLÈIRICH DUR Water NC371462

Allt Eilid a' Chleirich 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *allt*; G *eilid*; G *an*; G *clèireach*, 'burn of the cleric's hind'

A burn at the east side of Foinavon, just south of Loch Dionard. Not as romantic as 'the cleric's Eilidh', this is more likely to refer to an *eilid*, 'a hind', as it appears on the 1878 map. OSNB has no thoughts.

ALLT NA CAILLICH DUR Water NC471458

Allt na Caillich 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *allt*; G *an*; G *cailleach*, 'burn of the old woman/crone'

A burn that springs from several sources in the foothills of Ben Hope and runs through the settlement of the same name to join Strathmore River just north of Dùn Dornaigil. A most interesting site where we find a Christian burial ground named after a place named after a pre-Christian goddess: Cladh Allt na Cailleach. Not on Roy, although he has *Dun Dornadilla* and the historic bailtean of *Dalnachery* and *Strathmor*. Canmore says 'A stone-walled graveyard now disused, the last inscribed grave slab being dated 1898. No trace and no local knowledge of a chapel having existed here' (record 4893). See also Canmore entries 4890 (settlement) and 4889 (burnt mound).

AM BODACH DUR Coastal NC249735

Am Bodach 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *an*; G *bodach*, 'the old man'

The other half of the pair of sea stacks on the coast just over a mile south of Cape Wrath. See also A' Chailleach.

ARNABOLL DUR Settlement NC

Arnabol 1654 Blaeu *Atlas of Scotland*

Ardiboll 1747 Roy *Military Survey*

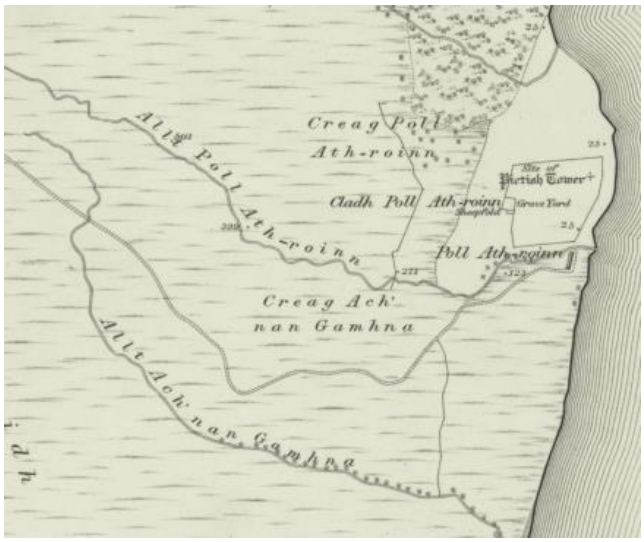
Arnaboll 1832 Thomson *Atlas of Scotland*

Poll Ath-roinn 1878 OS six inch first edn.

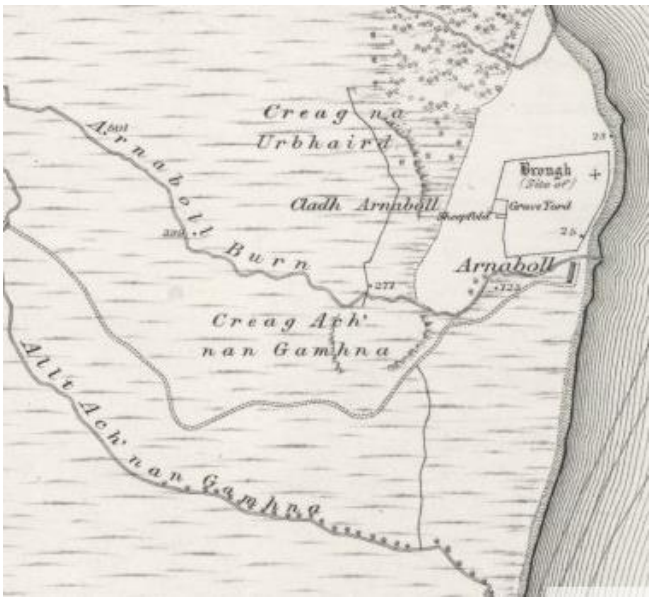
ON ??; ON *bólstaðr*, '--- farmstead'

Now best-known for the not-so-secret and very fancy bothy - once property of Durness School, now notionally looked after by the local MBA folk – this site was previously a *baile*,

and from the probably ON name we might suspect a *bólstaðr* too, although the specific element is uncertain. There is a burial ground here just a little up the hill at NC467579 (Canmore 73064), with a nice view over Loch Hope, which is named on the 1878 map as Cladh Poll Ath-Roinn – the surprising thing from that source being that at some point after Thomson's 1832 Atlas the settlement appears to have changed name, and became known as Poll Ath-roinn, changing back to Arnaboll by the time of the OS six inch second edn. in 1903, with the *cladh* then taking that name. The OSNB translates *ath-roinn* as 'forest hollow', which I cannot find any other example of. What the 1878 OS map calls a Pictish Tower here is now thought to be the remains of a cairn (Canmore 4898). Interestingly just across Hope Bridge into the next CC area, we find an Allt an Teampuill – I cannot see anywhere else nearby this would refer to. Not sure about the meaning of Creag na Urbhaird on the 1903 version, but there's another one about a mile south too.



Poll Ath-roinn on the 1878 OS six inch first edn.



Arnaboll on the 1903 OS six inch second edn.

Inside the bothy at Arnaboll (photo by author, September 2020)

Cladh Poll Ath-roinn/Cladh Arnaboll, much over grown with bracken (photo by author, September 2020)

BALNAKEIL DUR Settlement NC391686

Balnakill [ca. 1583-96] Pont *1 - [Durness and Tongue]*

Balnakile 1654 Blaeu *Atlas of Scotland*

Kirk 1747 *Roy Military Survey*

Bailenacille 1878 OS six inch first edn.

The name of the settlement in which the church was situated. Believed to have been established by St Maelrubha in the 722AD, there is documentary attestation of a church site here from the 12th and 13th centuries. The present roofless ruin was built in the early 17th century by the first Lord Reay, and abandoned in the 19th century.

The OPS says that 'In a vault under the church is the tomb of Donald McLeod the Rob Roy of the north [aka Domhnull MacMhurchaidh of Eriboll], and the Gaelic poet Robert Doun (or Don) was a native of the parish' (pg. 706). The inscription on the tomb reads, 'Donald Makmurchou here lies low, Was ill to his friend, and worse to his foe, True to his master in prosperity and woe. DMMC 1623'. He was said to have wished to be buried within the church, but was interred in the wall as his service to his Mackay master in quietly getting rid of troublesome hinderances made him a doubtful candidate for burial within the church. For more on Donald see pg. 295-7 of the OSA. The churchyard is also the location of the grave of Rob Donn (d. 1777) and the monument erected to him in 1827.

For more on the archaeology, see Canmore record 4768, and HHER record MHG31413. The church font apparently disappeared without trace in 1984. As Canmore's map shows, there is much more to be found round about here too – Balnakiel House is thought to be built on the site of a residence of the Lords Reay, and the original settlement of Durness was next door. Robert Gordon's 17th-century *Genealogical History* claims that there was a castle once at Balnakiel (pg. 10). According to some older sources (e.g. Pont), Loch Croispol was once known as Loch na Cille, 'loch of the church'.

Balnakiel church and burial ground; Duncan MacMorrach's tomb; Robb Donn's grave (photos by author, May 2015-September 2020)

BEALACH MHAIRI DUR Relief NC454577

Bealach Mhairi 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *bealach*; G Màiri; 'Mary's pass'

A pass among some lumpy hills north of Eriboll. Highly unusual to see a woman's name in the landscape not attached to the body of water in which she drowned, which is the most common story. Also unusual to see a non-religious Màiri, which would of course be Moire. No explanation in the OSNB.

BEALACH NA SGEULACHD DUR Relief NC420538

Bealach na Sgeulachd 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *bealach*; G *an*; G *sgeulachd*, 'pass of the story'

A pass in the hills at the south-east end of Loch Eriboll. There must have been a story behind this one! See also nearby Creag Coire na Corranaich.

BEALACH ODHRSGARAIDH DUR Relief NC400515

Uruisg-choire 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *ùraisg*; G *coire*, 'corrie of the brownie/water-horse'

The corrie south-east of Strabeg. Various attempts have been made to explain the modern version – the result of another of Rev Joass' tortuous Norsifications of a perfectly ordinary Gaelic name. There is also a *loch* and an *allt* named after this.

CAILLEACH A' MHUILLEIR DUR Coastal NC463622

Cailleach a' Mhuilleir 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *cailleach*; G *an*; G *muillear*, 'old woman/crone of the miller'

A sea stack on the coast at the north side of Beinn Heilam, Loch Eriboll. No longer named on the modern OS map. If the *cailleach* is the stack, what happened to the miller here?

CÀRN AN RIGH DUR Relief NC373579

Càrn na Fridhe 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *càrn*; G *an*; G *rìgh*, cairn of the king'

Just south of a Loch na Seilge ('loch of the hunt') and there is a *bealach* also so-named. The 1878 OS has *fridhe*, a variation of *frìth*, 'deer forest', which would certainly make sense

positioned as it is just south of a Loch na Seilg, 'loch of the hunt'. However, the OPS (1851) tells us that, 'In 1769 there was on the side of the hill Ben Spionnadh a square building called *carn nri* (the king's carn)' (pg. 706), which comes from Pennant, who says that this 'probably was the place where his Majesty sat or stood, and saw the sport, as he had from hence and extensive prospect' (pg. 340). There is a cairn recorded here on the current OS map, and by Canmore (record 4757).

CÀRN A' PHIOBAIRE DUR Relief NC462483

Càrn a' Phiobaire 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *càrn*; G *an*; G *piobair*, 'cairn of the piper'

The hill behind Muiseal, just south of Loch Hope.

CATHAIR DUBH – Heilam

Càthair Dhubh 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *cathar*/*càthar*; G *dubh*, 'dark seat/mossy ground'

A hill just north of Ach' an Duin, north of Heilam. *Càthar* with the accent as in the 1878 version can mean 'boggy/mossy ground', but with the broch and other prehistoric remains nearby, there is the possibility that this name may be part of a folkloric story to explain their existence, in which case *cathar* or 'chair/seat' may be the translation – the lenition of *dubh* in the 1878 version suggests a feminine noun, i.e. *cathar*, whereas the modern version would be grammatically incorrect.

CEANNABEINNE DUR Settlement NC439656

Keanbein 1654 Blaeu *Extima Scotiae*

Kenben 1747 Roy *Military Survey*

Ceannabeinne 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *ceann*; G *an*; G *beinn*, 'head of the mountains'

The ruined settlement east of Durness, and now sadly one of the NC500's most popular unofficial campsites, unsurprising given that their website lists the location as a beach and says nothing whatsoever about the township. Once home to around 50 people at least ten households, the village was cleared by 1842 – not without some resistance, with one incident becoming known as 'the riot of Durness'. The Ceannabeinne Township Trail guide tells us that 'On a rock stack by the cliffs below are the scant remains of an early Christian monastic settlement consisting of domestic buildings and a chapel'. Although I have not been able to find the original archaeological report (Lelong, Glasgow, 2007), it would be

worth pursuing if it might promote more respectful engagement from visitors. Canmore has this site recorded under Traigh Na H'uamhag (4951), and links it to the other potential monastic site at Seanachaisteal.

The Durness website also says the following, although I'm not sure where they are getting this translation of *chailgeag*:

> *Traditionally the beach was known as Traigh Allt Chailgeag – the beach of the burn of bereavement and death. This referred to a story of how an elderly woman fell into the burn, which flows onto the beach, and drowned. The burn Allt Chailgeag, was in spate at the time and her body was washed down to the shore.*

I suspect this may in fact be another Allt na Cealgach, 'burn of deceit', with a similar story to the one in Assynt.

CLACH NA SAGART RUADH DUR ?? NC239968

Clach na Sagart Ruadh 1851 OPS

G *clach*; G *an*; G *sagairt*; G *ruadh*, 'stone of the red priest'

From the OPS (pg. 702):

> *At Balnakiel is a hollow stone or basin, known as the 'clach na sagart ruadh' or stone of the red priest… The red priest is believed to have been the last incumbent of Farr or of Durness previously to the Reformation, and withal a worker of miracles… The red priest is believed to have built a chapel at Bealoch Mhor between Durness and Eriboll, at which the inhabitants of Eriboll occasionally worshipped'.*

See also Balnakiel, Ach' na h-Anaite.

CLADH A' CHORR-EILEIN DUR Settlement NC421482

Cladh a' Chorr-Eilein 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *cladh*; G *an*; en Chorr-Eilean, 'burial ground of Chorr-Eilean'

An old burial ground located on the island in Loch Eriboll now known as Eilean Choraidh, it is no longer marked on the modern OS. An Corr-Eilean, according to the OSNB entry (OS1/33/11/36), is from *corra*, 'heron', so 'heron island', although the earlier versions in Pont, Blaeu, Roy and the OPS suggests Choraidh may be correct – a possible norse *-ey* name? The OPS says, 'On the islands of Hoan and Choarie are cemeteries locally said to have been used to protect the remains of the dead from wolves' (pg. 703). The NSA says in 1845 that this and the cemetary on Eilean Hoan have been out of use for 100 years (pg. 86). As well as a shipwreck, a limekiln and a township, Canmore have an entry for the *cladh* (4933), on which they can't agree:

> *NC45NW 5 4218 5825.*

(Name: NC 4218 5825) Cladh Eilean Choraidh (NR) (Site of Grave Yard)

OS 6" map, Sutherland, 2nd ed., (1908)

The name signifies "Burying Ground of the Heron Island", and applies to part of An Corr Eilean which was used as a graveyard when the island was populated. It is long disused, as the site only remains.

Name Book 1872.

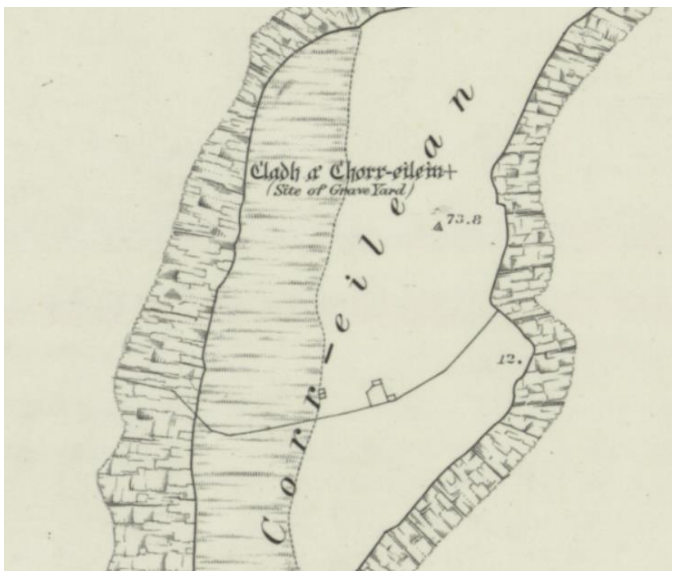
NC 4228 5828. At this site, on a sheltered shelf to the N of a low rock face on the E side of Eilean Choraidh, is a vague enclosure and ruined building. The enclosure is approximately circular measuring 19.0m in diameter with walling 1.0m thick and 0.2m high. West of, and contiguous with the enclosure are the footings of a rectangular building measuring internally some 15.0m N-S by 3.0m transversely, with walling of similar dimensions to the enclosure. There are traces of another wall to the W. The complex may be the site of the graveyard.

Visited by OS (W D J) 3 June 1959; Visible on RAF air photographs 106G/Scot/UK73: 4177-8

There is no trace of a graveyard on Eilean Choraidh. The form of the rectangular building and contiguous enclosure described by the previous field investigator is more of a dwelling and stackyard. No local information.

Visited by OS (N K B) 8 November 1978.

See also Eilean Hoan.



From the 1875 OS six inch first edn.

Roy's 1747 *Military Survey*

CNOC NA BA RUAIDHE DUR Relief NC349700

Cnoc na Ba Ruaidhe 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *cnoc*; G *an*; G *bò*; G *ruadh*, 'hillock of the red cow'

What the OSNB calls a 'healthy clad hill' on the west side of Balnakiel Bay, where the Kyle of Durness meets the sea. This is actually now known as Beinn an Duibhe, but the 1875 name has been used as the head name above for clarity. An otherworldly cow?

CNOC AN FHREICEADIAN DUR Relief NC324598

Cnoc an Fhreiceadain 1908 OS six inch second edn.

G *cnoc*; G *an*; G *freiceadan*, 'hillock of the guard/watch'

A small hillock on the north side of Farrmheall in the middle of Srath Dionard, presumably with a commanding view. Not included on the 1878 OS, but appears on the 1908 version, and is misspelled on the 2007 Explorer. The name of Farrmheall itself is interesting and possibly related – I would guess it's *faire-mheall*, 'watch-(rounded)hill'.

CNOC NAN CEANNAN NC385656

Cnoc nan Ceannan 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *cnoc*; G *an*; G *ceann*, 'hillock of the heads'

A small hill on the nortn side of Ach' na h-Anaite at the Kyle of Durness. The grammar here seems a little off – it should really be Cnoc nan Ceann - but there doesn't appear to be any more versions available. For once, the OSNB has a story behind the name here:

> *This name applies to a small mound having an Elevation of about five feet above the General Surface there is a tradition that it marks the Graves of Several Danes who*

were slain at this spot, but the date of the occurance is unknown. A portion of this mound was taken away A.D. 1835 when Several human bones were found as well as a small bronze elliptical cockade, & polished bone supposed to be used for fastening the military plaid. It Signifies the "Hillock of Heads".

There's also rather a lot of interesting details in Canmore entry 4821 – see particularly the information about Cnoc nan Cnamhan, 'hillock of the bones' from the 1845 NSA:

NC36NE 9 3842 6566.

(NC 3842 6566) Cairn (NR)

OS 6" map, (1962)

Cnoc nan Ceannan (NAT)

Human Bones and an Elliptical Cockade found here AD 1835 (NAT)

OS 6" map, Sutherland, 2nd ed., (1878)

"In one of these (cairns), called 'Cnoc na Cnamhan', i.e. the hill of bones, near Keoldale, a small brass elliptical cockade was found two years ago, and a small polished bone supposed to be used for fastening the military plaid. The tradition is that it contains the remains of those who fell in battle."

New Statistical Account (NSA) 1845.

'A few miles from Durness, on the road to Gualan House, there are two cairns. One of them was opened many years ago and I was told that the bottom of a brass candlestick was found in it; this was no double an elliptical Scandinavian brooch. The other was opened by Professor Worsaae, who took away a skull from a small kist that was in it. The kist was full of bones when I saw it and I took a thigh bone out . . . it was remarkably fresh. The hillock on which they were placed is called Cnoc-na-cnavan.'

J Horsburgh 1870.

A cairn evident as a turf-covered mound, approximately 17.0m in diameter and 1.5m maximum height, quarried from the N and E.

There is no trace of the second cairn noted by Horsburgh, but immediately N of the cairn are traces of a circular enclosure some 19.0m in diameter mutilated by car parking, and in too poor a condition to classify.

Surveyed at 1:2500.

Visited by OS (R L) 20 July 1971.

No change to the previous field report.

Visited by OS (J B) 14 November 1978.

COIRE NA LURGAINN DUR Relief NC336494

Coire na Lurgainn 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *coire*; G *an*; G *lurgann*, 'corrie of the shin'

A large corrie on the east side of Foinaven. Included as *lurgainn* may indicate a mythological tale, as with Loch Lurgainn further south. In that case for some reason it is always translated as 'shank' rather than 'shin': When Fionn and his mother were escaping giants, he seized his mother by the legs, threw her over his shoulder, and fled. He stopped at this loch, and on taking her down, found he had only the shanks of her, which he threw into the loch. There is a Cadha na Beucaich, 'pass of the roaring/bellowing/cry of the roebuck' at the top of the corrie – another hunting association? There are tales of the Fianna also associated with Ben Loyal – one version of The Lay of Diarmaid has it as the location of both his grave, and the den of the boar who killed him. See Watson, CPNS, pg. 208; also 'The Boar of Ben Laighal' in *Popular Tales of the West Highlands Vol. III*. See also Foinaven.

COIRE UINNSEINN DUR Relief NC359558

Coir' A' Nois-Neach 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *coire*; G *an*; G *uinnseann*, 'corrie of the ash (tree)' - ?

A wee corrie near the top of Cranstackie, on the Loch Eriboll side. The 1875 OS has instead *nois-neach* - the OSNB says this is 'high hollow of the one person or individual' (OS1/33/12/5).

CREAG COIRE NA CORRANAICH DUR Relief NC405535

Creag Coire na Corranaich 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *creag*; G *coire*; G *an*; G *corranach*, 'crag of the corrie of the funerary recital/loud wailing'

A crag at the south end of Loch Eriboll near Strabeg. OSNB has 'rock of the funeral cry' (OS1/33/12/27). Coire na Corranaich may of course have been an existing name. Linked to Cladh a' Chorr-Eilein?

DÙN DORNAIGIL DUR Settlement NC457450

Dun Dornadilla 1747 Roy *Military Survey*

Dun Dornadilla 1832 Thomson *Atlas of Scotland*

Dùn Dornadilla 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *dùn*; Dornadilla (?), 'Dornadilla's fort'

The broch in Strath More. The OSNB tells us that ‘this name applies to the remains of a tower said to have been the hunting seat of King Dornadilla’(OS1/33/13/33). As the Canmore entry (4891) points out:

> *In 1874, the name was collected as 'Dun Dhoirneghil', but was 'corrected' to 'Dun Donradilla' by Rev J M Joass, Golspie. The broch is still known locally as 'Dun Dornaigil' (Information from Dr C S Sandeman, Durness) , but the 'Dornadilla' form of the name is of interest in that a 'Dornadille' appears in early king lists.*

From the OPS (pg. 706):

> *A mile above Mussall (in Strathuridale) stands an old building made in the form of a sugar loaff, and which lias a double wall and winding stairs in the midle of the wall roundabout, and litle places for men to ly in as is thought, and all built of dry stone without any mortar. Its called by tradition Dundornigil. An old poem, of which a fragment was extant in 1777, described this building as 'the Dun of Dornghiall the son of Duff' built on the side of the strath next to Reay seven miles from the ocean and on the road by which the warriors or 'cearn' travel to Caithnes.*

The earlier version seems to support the *Dornadilla* interpretation. Certainly it appears that by 1747, this was how the name was understood – it may have been a story fairly recently associated with the site. However, the other collected version of *Dornaigil* sounds potentially like an ON *-gil* name. There is no clear answer here.

The *dùn* and surrounding settlements on Roy’s 1747 map

DURNESS DUR Settlement NC404678

Dyrnes 1223-1245 *Sutherland Charters*

Duriness [ca. 1583-96] Pont *1 - [Durness and Tongue]*

Durenish 1654 Blaeu *Atlas of Scotland*

Dureness 1747 Roy *Military Survey*

Durness 1878 OS six inch first edn.

ON *dýr*; ON *nes*, 'deer headland'

The settlement that gave its name to the wider parish. Where the name came from originally is revealed by Robert Gordon in his *Genealogical History*:

> *In Durines, west and north west from the Diri-more, there is ane excellent and delectable place for hunting, called the Parwe, wher they hunt the red deir in abundance; and somtymes they dryve them into the ocean sea at Pharo-head, wher they do tak them in boats as they list.*

So the *dýr nes* was the headland at Balnakiel. Faraid Head it seems is the Gaelic name for the same thing, or at least the extremity of it – the 1878 OS tells us Faraid is *Fair-Aird*, most likely *faire- àirde*, 'watching point' (aka *Ardurines* in some sources). The 'deer headland' then gave its name to a settlement next to Balnakiel, and then to the wider region - similarly to what happened with *Ashair* (and its various alternative forms), which was a name for the settlement at Oldshoremore that at one stage was used as a name for the wider region. On Roy's 1747 map it looks like the old *baile* of Durness was right next door to Balnakiel, roughly where Durine is now. Interestingly, if the church at Balnakiel was indeed founded by St. Maelrubha in 722AD, the topographic ON name Durness would most likely have been coined at some point in the following 200 years, so the settlements would have co-existed almost from the start. In crofting times Durness has spread along the road right down to Smoo – the grid reference above is the Spar, which could be considered the modern village centre.

Book of Mackay (pg. 51) has the following detail (as oposed to Robert Gordon's account):

> *Durness* [parish] *was not the property of the bishop of Caithness, but the church owned fifteen davochs of land in the said parish, viz., Gauldwall, Keoldale, Cranega, Borley, Slanis, Alshermor, Alsherbeg, Sandwood, Carrowgarve, and Carnnmannach.*

This and many other sources (eg. OSA pg. 297) attest to Durness having been churchlands of the bishopric of Caithness. Aside from that the OSA for Durness is rather scant, and only knows of the church at Balnakiel being built in the 17th century and of 'Dun Dornadilla'. The 1845 NSA says that, 'it cannot be expected, that the annals of a parish so remote and so thinly inhabited, should at any time have excited much public interest', and dismisses duns as 'the simplest mode of structure that would appeal to a rude people'! (pg. 92-93) The Rev William Findlater does however say in the same source that:

Superstitious observances, belief in witches, and other enchantments, are gradually wearing away – though even a grave elder may occasionally be met with, who will quote scripture, and relate many traditionary stories, as evidences of his faith. [...] Their attendance in religious ordanances, however, is pretty regular; and in most cases, the evening and morning devotions of the family are offered up. On the Sabbath evenings, the Shorter Catechism is taught; or they congregate together is some commodious house in the township, to repeat the Shorter Catechism and read the Scriptures. These meetings are always commenced and concluded by prayer and praise, and often tend to spread a moral and religious influence over the hamlet. (pg. 96-7)

EILEAN HOAN DUR Island NC444673

Ylan Hoa [ca. 1583-96] Pont *1 - [Durness and Tongue]*

Yl Hoa 1654 Blaeu *Atlas of Scotland*

Hoan Id. 1832 Thomson *Atlas of Scotlan*

Eilean Hoan 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *eilean*; en Hoa?

The unnamed old burial ground here is at at NC441672. The OPS says, 'on the islands of Hoan and Choarie are cemeteries locally said to have been used to protect the remains of the dead from wolves' (pg. 703). The historic versions suggest the island name itself may be an ON *-ey* name. See Canmore entry 4949 for the graveyard, and 86191 for the township. Pont's map says there was 'guid corn and fishing' here. See also Eilean Choraidh.

FOINAVEN DUR Relief NC317507

Bin Fannevin 1654 Blaeu *Atlas of Scotland*

Foinne-bheinn 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *fionn*; G *beinn*, 'white mountain'

Certainly not 'warty mountain', as the inimitable Rev Joass would have us believe in the OSNB. Included out of interest as I have always wondered about this one – being in what is celebrated in many historic documentary sources as *the* deer forest, could this originally have been a Fenian name? Interestingly, there is also a Feinne-Bheinne Mhòr (NC418467) and a Feinne-Bheinne Bheag (NC435461) just west of Alltnacaillich, which were spelled the same on early maps (see image below). With that spelling these two are very likely to be named for the Fianna. See also Coire na Lurgainn for details of nearby Fenian legends. It is a very white mountain though, especially in the sun.

Feinne-bheinnes *beag* and *mòr*, on Robert Gordon's map *The draught of Edera Cheules* (1636-1652)

The *beinn* itself looking particularly *fionn*, from the Sandwood Bay path (photo by author, August 2020)

GEODH NA LEODHASAICH DUR Coastal NC361696

Geodh na Leodhasaich 1908 OS six inch second edn.

G *geodha*; G *an*; G *Leòdhasach*, 'cove of the Lewismen'

A cove on the west side of Balnakiel Bay, north of Daill. Not featured on the OS six inch first edn. (and consequently no OSNB entry), but it appears on the second.

LEAC AN FHIR-DHUIRNIS DUR Relief NC389717

Leac an Fhir-Dhuirnis 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *leac*; G *an*; G *fear*; G *Diùirnis*, 'slab of the Durness man'

A flat-ish spot on the cliffs at the end of Faraid Head. The current OS map has for some reason 'Leae' for *leac*. The OSNB says 'This name Signifies the "Durness Men's flag" and applies to a portion of Low Water rocks Situated a little the East of "Fair-aird"' (OS1/33/16/17) – by 'flag' I think they mean 'flagstone'. See also Loch Fir Dhuirnis – he must have been some man!

LECH-VUAIES DUR Relief NC ??

Lech-vuaies 1851 *OPS*

G *leac*; G ??, 'slab of ??'

This is only attested by the OPS in 1851 (pg. 706). It describes 'A rock in Loch Eribol named Lech-vuaies has been supposed to be that on which King Haco slaughtered the cattle he took from the Caithness men in 1263'. This is from Pennant again (Vol 3, pg. 343):

> *At Loch-eribol on the North side, there is a plain rock which is still called Lech vuaies where they say that Hacon King of Norway slaughtered the cattle he took, from the natives in his return to Orkney after the battle of Largis in the year 1263. Torfaus gives a journal of that expedition, and mentions Hacon landing there.*

There doesn't seem to be any evidence of this name surviving onto the OS maps, and it is unclear what the specific element was – presumably something to do with cattle or killing.

LOCH FIR DHUIRNIS DUR Water NC376471

Loch Fir Dhuirnis 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *loch*; G *an*; G *fear*; G *Diùirnis*, 'loch of the Durness man'

A small loch south-west of Loch Dionard. See also Leac an Fhir-Dhuirnis.

LOCH SIAN DUR Water NC447632

Loch Sìne 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *loch*; G *Sìne*; 'Jean's loch'

A small loch just off the north-west side of Loch Eriboll, with an adjacent bay named after it. Loch Sian does not make much sense grammatically or otherwise ('loch of the shriek'?), although it is marked as a 1-inch revision in Oct. 1894 based on 'local pronunciation' (OS1/33/11/25). More likely this is named after a woman who drowned there – see Evemalm (2018), or if the revision is correct, a *sìthean*, 'fairy hill'.

POLL A' CHAIT FHIADAICH DUR Coastal NC427673

Poll a' Chait Fhiadaich 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *poll*; G *an*; G *cat*; G *fiadach*, 'pool/hollow of the wildcat'

Located as it is at the very end of the headland north of Leirinmore, this is highly unlikely to be named as it was the habitat of the wildcat. More probably a tale of the macabre divination ritual known as *taghairm nan cat* was associated with this spot – see Wiseman (2010).

POLL A' CHOIN DEIRG NC410497

Poll a' Choin-Deirg 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *poll*; G *an*; G *cù*; G *dearg*, 'pool of the red dog'

A tiny lochan in the hills south-east of Strabeg. A red Otherworld dog or just a fox? OSNB has 'hollow of the red dog' (OS1/33/13/24).

RUBHA CREAG IAIN DUR Relief NC451656

Rudha Creag Iain 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *rubha*; en Creag Iain, 'headland of Creag Iain'

The headland north of Rispond at the mouth of Loch Eriboll. No story in the OSNB.

RUBHA ELSPET DUR Relief NC454648

Rudha Elspet 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *rubha*; G *Elspet*, 'Elspeth's headland'

A headland south of Rispond at the north-west side of Loch Eriboll. An unusual personal name! No elaboration in the OSNB.

SEANACHAISTEAL DUR Settlement NC405694

Seanachaisteal 1878 OS six inch first edn.

G *seann*; G *caisteal*; 'old castle'

A ruined *dùn* or broch on a point on the east side of the Balnakiel peninsula. The OSNB refers to it as a 'Pictish tower' (OS1/33/10/1/4). Canmore has the fortress in record 4947, and also what is thought to be an early monastic site very close by in record 4952.

SÌTHEAN A' BHODAICH DUR Relief NC321619

Sithean A' Bhodaich 1908 OS six inch second edn.

G *sìthean*; G *an*; G *bodach*, 'fairy hill of the old man'

A small hill on the west side of Ghlas-bheinn at the south end of the Kyle of Durness. Although toponymically-speaking a *sìthean* is just a hill that *looks* like a fairy hill, I do wonder if the wee mannie went inside for a visit, as the story commonly goes.

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