

NAMES MENTIONED - IN ORDER OF USE IN THE TALK

ORKNEYINGA SAGA - the history of the Earls of Orkney

Torf-Einar

Rognvald Eystensson, his brother Sigurth Eysteinnsson

Thorsteinn the Red

Meldun, Pictish ruler of Ross

Torbol, Skelbo, Embo (Eyvind's farm), Skibo (Skithi's farm)

-voll 'field', -stathir 'steading', -land 'cleared ground'

Torroble, Collabol

Rosebank, Eaglefield (Helga-voll), Cuthill (possibly Ketlar-voll)

Steanford, Allistie

Maelbrigte, Pictish ruler of Ross

SIGURTHAR-HAUG 'Sigurth's Grave-mound' (see overleaf)

heygth 'mounded, buried beneath a mound'

esker or eskar, ridge left by Ice Age glacier

Skalla-Grim, father of Egill (buried at Borgarnes in Iceland)

Ketill Flatnose, Helgi the Lean

Ospaksdal (Ospak, Earl of Caithness)

Arboll, Cadboll, Bindal, Seafield, Tarrel, Shandwick

tangi 'tongue of land', either 'long narrow promontories'

Ekkjall = Oykell = the Dornoch Firth

Ekkjalsbakki = bank of the Oykell = bank of the Dornoch Firth

SIGURTHAR - HAUG = 'Sigurth's grave-mound'

Development of name from Sigurthar-haug to Ciderhall :

895 : Sigurthar-haug, Sigurth's grave-mound

1222-3 : Syuardhoch (Scots spelling)

1275 : Sytheraw

17th century : Sythera, Sydra, Sitherow, Sidera

1733 : Siddera

Siddera was then anglicized to Cyderhall by someone who did not know that Sider- was pronounced with a short *i* and who took the final *-a* to be a corruption of *ha'*, for *hall*. Whoever this was, he did not know the district and was clearly working with a map. He subjected other Sutherland names to the same 'refeement', eg Rosehall for Rossal. It has nothing to do with roses or halls.

Cyderhall is now often spelled Ciderhall, and has been supplied with a story that cider apples were once grown there. This is a cross between rationalisation and folk etymology, and is total rubbish.

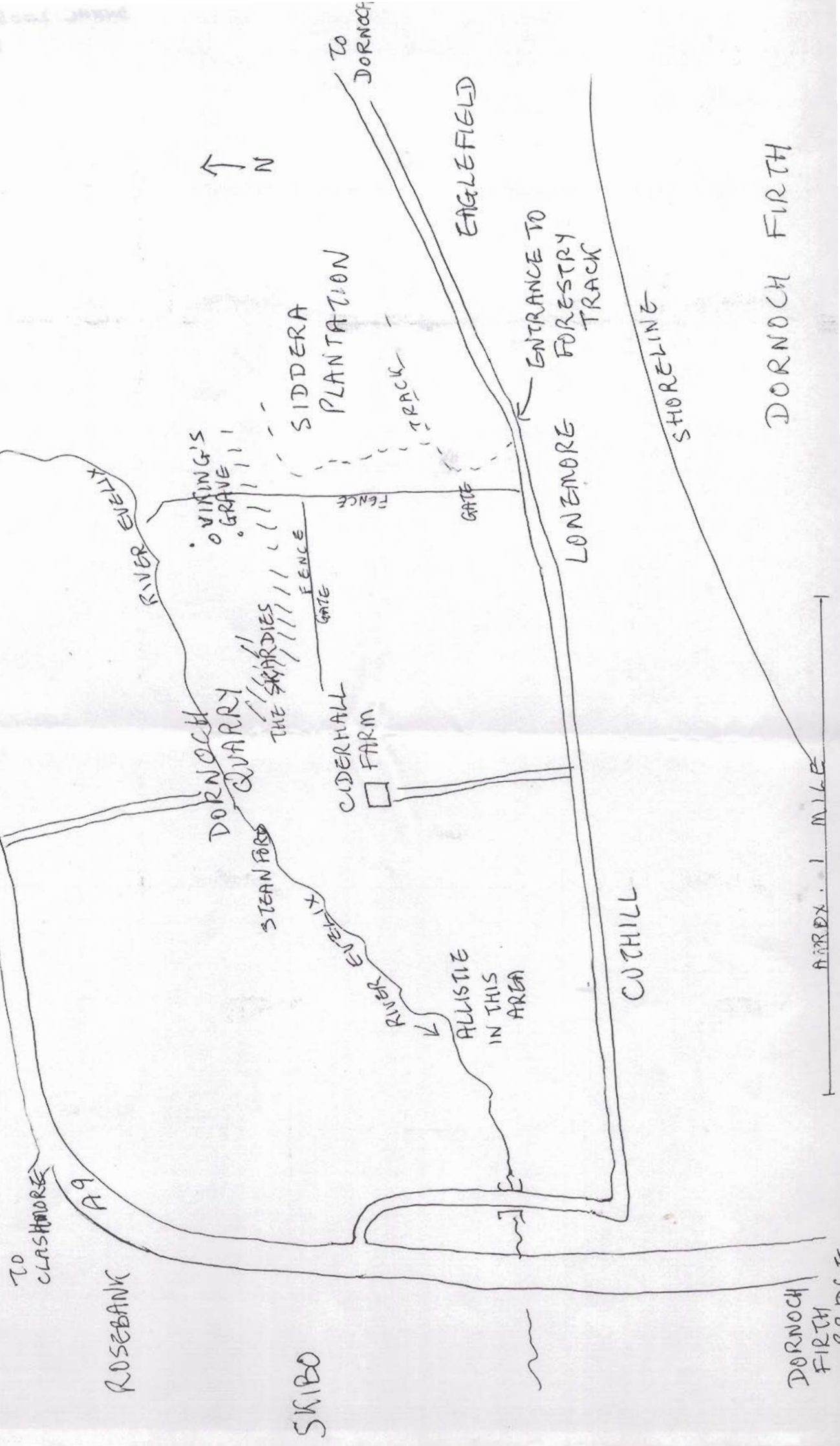
In Gaelic, Sigurthar-haug was translated, haug 'mound' becoming cnoc 'hillock', and the name Sigurthar was stressed on the second syllable. This gave a name something like Cnoc Sgurdaidh, and not recognizing this, Gaelic speakers changed it to a word they did know, sgardaidh 'loose shifting sand'. This was (much later) adopted by English speakers as The Skardies.

So all the names associated with the site, Ciderhall, Siddera, Cnoc Sgardaidh and The Skardies, are derived from the name Sigurthar-haug given to it in 895.

NOT REALLY
TO SCALE

TO THE
NORTH

↑
N



DORNOCH FIRTH

APPROX. 1 MILE

DORNOCH
FIRTH

NORSE PLACENAMES IN STRATH CARNAIG

TORBOLL is sometimes interpreted as "Thor's farm" or "Thorir's farm" (both common Norse forenames), but neither of these can be right, as the possessive "s" would be retained (as in THURSO). The same placename appears as TORROBLE near Lairg.

Three possibilities :

1. It may be the Norse forename *þorðr* (Thord is as near as you can get in English orthography). This name had a possessive genitive Thordar, not involving "s", so the name may be Thordar-bol, "Thord's farm". Against this is the fact that Thord was not a very common name.

p = th
as in
"thin",
þ = th
as in
"then"

2. Torro- could represent a woman's name, since the possessive form in a woman's name did not end in "s" - "Thora's farm". Against this is the unlikelihood of a woman having ownership of an important farm in this area at a time when it was a disputed frontier - although women did have rights of ownership, it would be more frequent in peaceful times and peaceful places.

3. Torro- may not be a personal name at all, but a description. torf-bol "farm built of turf blocks". One of the Earls of Orkney in the early 10th century was called Torf-Einarr, and the Orkneyinga Saga explains this as being because Einarr was the first to use turf for building houses (this may be folk-etymology). The Norwegians, of course built with wood, but the Icelanders often used turf, wood being in short supply. The question is whether wood was scarce in Strath Carnaig and above Lairg at the time when these farms were established. I rather like this interpretation of Torboll / Torroble.

Apart from Torboll, there do not seem to be any Norse names in Strath Carnaig. Some placenames there have a vaguely Norse look, but turn out to be Gaelic, e.g. Dalnamain uses not Norse dal "valley", but Gaelic dal "a piece of flat land beside a river", and the entire name is Gaelic. Carnaig itself is Gaelic, and so is Torri Falaig, and Garskelly.

Associated with Torroble near Lairg there are a few surviving Norse names - Ramascaig, Cracail, both loch names now - and you would expect a cluster of Norse names around Torboll in Strath Carnaig. But if they existed, they have been lost.

Any references to Norse princes (names of stones or hillocks) usually call them Danish and are of very little value in assessing Norse presence. Elsewhere, e.g. in Argyll, the word "Danish" seems to be used simply to mean "ancient", and the structures referred to as Danish forts turn out to be prehistoric.