

SUTHERLAND

The name takes us back to the days when Caithness and Sutherland formed one province under the rule of Norse earls, whose power extended from the Orkneys, to the shores of the Dornoch Firth. The Norsemen called the southern part of the country, 'Sudrland'. It was not until the beginning of the thirteenth century that the Norwegian Earl was forced to give up Sudrland by William the Lion and the king then granted these lands to Hugh Freskyn of Moravia, a powerful magnate in his following. Though the Norsemen were never so completely masters of Sudrland as they were of Caithness, their settlements can still be traced by place names, such as the Oykel and Helmsdale, which, in altered form have come down to the present day.

No part of the Highlands has greater contrasts of scenery and climate than the county of Sutherland, which, with Caithness stretches right across the top of Scotland. On the eastern side of the county, there is a green border of fields, dotted with the white cottages of many small-holders, with here and

fields,dotted with the white cottages of many small holders, with here and there a flash of colour from the walled garden ~~of~~ one of the larger houses,hidden among surrounding woods. All along the shores of the Dornoch Firth the fields slope to the sun; ~~their~~ their green is set off by the blue sea and the soft colours of the Ross-shire hills on the opposite side of the firth. But the Sutherland folk are generally too busy to bother about the colours of the landscape, they are more intent on the setting of their 'taties' and in the sowing and in harvesting^{of} their crops. Hardwood trees flourish in this district; ash,sycamore and beech line the roads in may places; they have escaped the axe,which laid low so many fine woods of larch and fir. One cannot help but regret those woods,it will take many a long year to replace them.

Sutherland has no town of any size. Dornoch,the capital,though a Royal Burgh, has only about seven hundred inhabitants, and Golspy,though called a village,is really much larger; but Dornoch has attained fame from its golf course,one of the best in Scotland. The cathederal of Dornoch was built in the thirteenth century by Bishop Gilbert of Moravia,who made Dornoch the seat of the Diocese^{of} Caithness and Sutherland,removing it from Halkirk and the power of the

Norse Earl and his followers, who had treated two of Gilbert's predecessors with savage cruelty. To-day, the cathedral is used as the parish church, having survived seven hundred years of stormy history. The castle, which faces the cathedral on the opposite side of the main street, ~~was~~ originally part of the bishop's palace, was later a residence of the Earls of Sutherland.

The road from Inverness to John O'Groats passes behind Dornoch, crosses the long embankment at the mouth of the Fleet river, known as the Mound, and follows the line of the coast, passing successively through the villages of Golspy, Brora, Port Gower and Helmsdale, before its long climb over the Ord into Caithness. In olden days, the Ord was the most dreaded part of the journey north, so fiercely does the wind blow across the headland in stormy weather, and the old road, which, until the beginning of the nineteenth century, was the only road in Sutherland, ran so near the edge of the cliffs, that travellers were sometimes in danger of being blown over.

Behind the coastal belt of cultivated land, the character of the country changes entirely. To the north and west lie thousands of acres of moorlands and some of

the finest mountain scenery in Scotland. The mountains of Sutherland do not extend in one range, but are rather scattered in vast detached masses of rock, many completely bare of vegetation, their sides seamed and scored with the channels of innumerable watercourses. From a distance, on a fine day, they take on every shade of blue from deepest violet to the delicate shimmering turquoise of a Chinese enamel; in cloudy weather, they stand out black and forbidding, mists streaming from their sides, throwing deep shadows on the rocks below. The toothed peaks of Suilven; the jagged crown of Ben Laoghal; the precipices of Ben More Assynt; are often spectacular in their colouring and have an added ~~fx~~ enchantment from their lonely situation.

Sutherland is a land of many lochs, most of them well-known to fishermen. Loch Shin, by Lairg, is sixteen miles long, and with Loch Merkland and Loch More forms an almost continuous line towards Loch Stack and the west coast, where hundreds of small lochans lie among rocks, on which only a little coarse grass, or tough-rooted bunches of heather, can find a living. There are besides, the great sea lochs of ~~Laxford~~ Cairbawn, Laxford and Inchard: but the whole of the west coast is nicked and dented with innumerable bays and headlands, and off the shore, the sea is dotted with small islands, which

may be anything from a few yards to several miles from the mainland.

Though there is no railway to the west of Lairg, small motor buses carry ~~the~~ mails and passengers to Loch Inver, Scourie, Durness and Tonque. At all these places there are hotels and further in land, there are a number of inns which cater for the needs of fishermen, where one finds a hospitable and friendly welcome even in these rationed days. The mail bus carries luggage and all sorts of parcels and the driver is also a postman, for at intervals, along these lonely roads, one sees wooden boxes perched on a post. If there is mail for any of these, the bus stops, the driver thrusts a newspaper or some letters through the door, and the bus then goes on its way, until the next box is reached, several miles further on. Parcels repose in perfect safety at the roadside. In summer, these journeys are delightful, but in winter it must often be an arduous service, along icy roads. The snow posts, which mark the roadside in many places are a reminder of the winter storms which sweep across the moors.