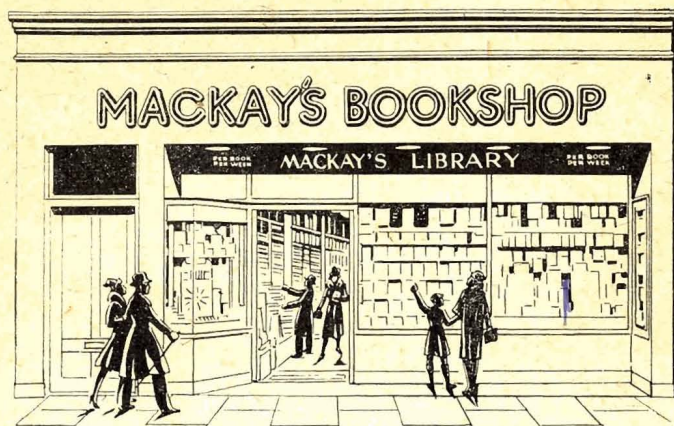


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THE BOOK OF ROSS

A composite illustrated Guide to the Counties of
ROSS, SUTHERLAND, CAITHNESS
(with **INVERNESS** section)

by

D. MACDONALD, L.R.I.B.A., F.R.I.A.S.

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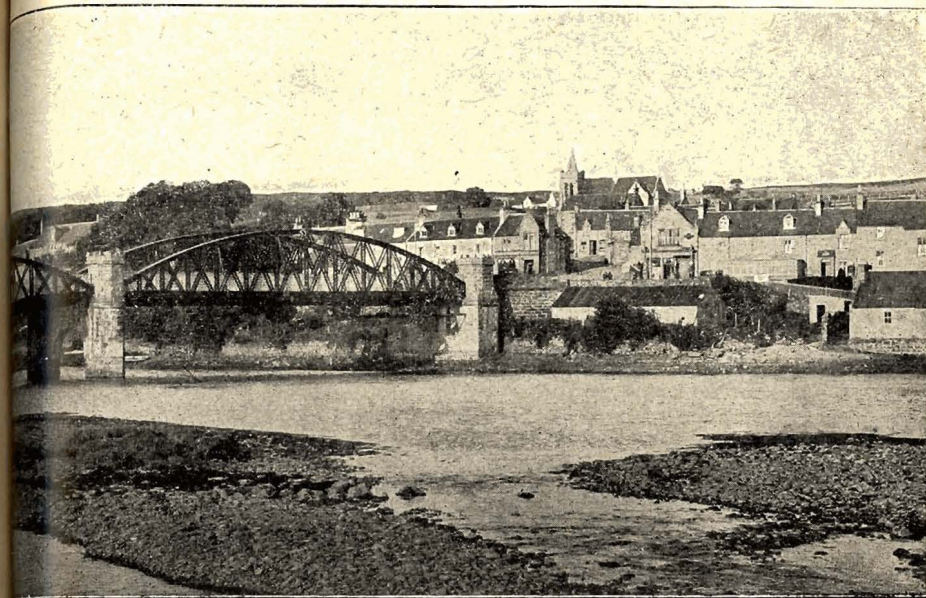
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Valentine

Bonar Bridge

Dundee

BONAR TO THE MOUND VIA DORNOCH.

From Bonar to Dornoch the road skirts the coast of the firth for nearly the whole of the thirteen mile drive. The vitrified fort of the Dun of Creich is on the right, on a headland jutting into the firth. Of it Sir Robert Gordon says in his history that it was built by a Paul Mactire "with such a kind of mortar that at this day it cannot be known whereof it was made." In this neighbourhood, at Drumleae, are tumuli, cairns, and hut circles, said to commemorate the defeat of the Danes about 1031 A.D., in the days of Malcolm the Second. This expedition to Sutherland landed near Ospisdale, and was under the direction of one Alanus. When Alan, Thane of Sutherland, heard this, he collected all the men he could and went to meet them. The plundering Norsemen were ravaging all before them when they spied the canny Sutherlanders in battle array in a favourable position. The hardy sea-rovers accepted fight, and a desperate struggle between heroes ensued. Though driven down the slope, they continued to fight on the plain. Several ships were burnt, others escaped, but the cairns still there attest to the great number slain.

Further on is the village of Spinningdale, called Spanegydhill in 1463 in a charter by John, XII. and last Earl of Ross. At one time there was a cotton factory here, established by an English company, and the place was becoming important when it was destroyed by fire in 1809 and never rebuilt. The gaunt ruins still stand.

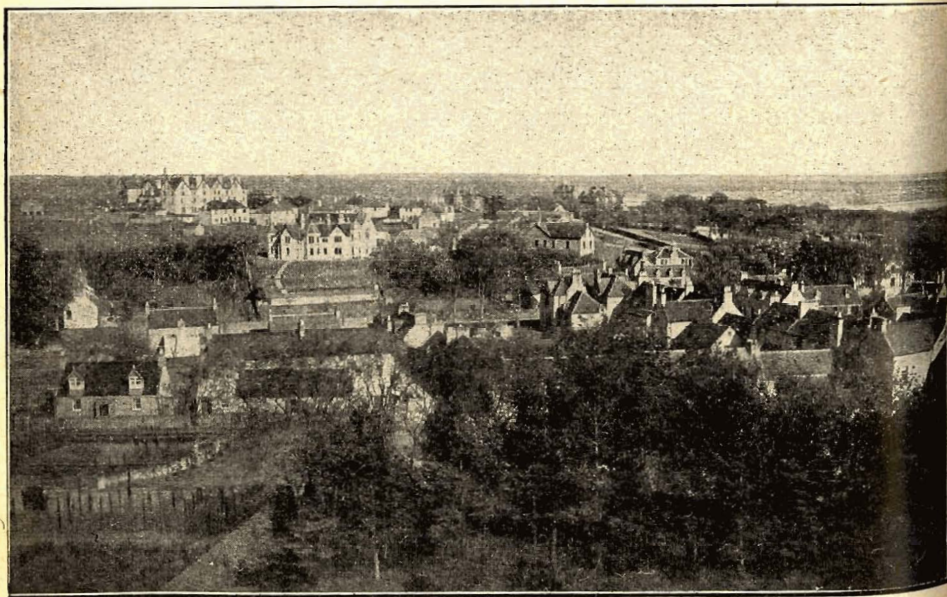
The next object of interest is the historic and now palatial Skibo Castle, which was largely rebuilt by the late Andrew Carnegie at a cost of about £100,000. It was plundered and destroyed by the Mackays in 1545. Since then it has had many proprietors. Montrose was brought here on his way from Assynt to Edinburgh. At that time Jane Seaton, a niece of the Earl of Winton and Eglinton, was chatelaine.

She took pity on the prisoner in his woe-begone condition and at once prepared a sumptuous repast, and requested Montrose to take the seat of honour. Before he could do so, the officer in command of the party coolly appropriated the seat. Jane Seaton promptly ordered him to get up and give way to his betters, but he demurred, mumbling about his lordship being a State prisoner. Then the lady of Skibo arose in her wrath, exclaiming, "Certes! if ye dinna ken ye're ain place an' mainers at my table, I'll teach ye." She thereupon seized a leg of mutton from a dish and flung it at the officer's head. Of course he retired in high dudgeon, leaving Montrose and his companion to finish the repast. After the Restoration, Robert Gray of Skibo was fined £1,200, Robert of Creich £2,400, and Robert Gray of Arboil £4,800. There are now Montrose and Sigurd rooms in the castle.

DORNOCH.

Three and a half miles further east, Dornoch, the county town, is reached. At the tercentenary celebrations in 1928, a pageant, beautifully staged, showed from episodes in its history how old and important a place it has occupied in the history of the north. In July, 1628, Charles I. erected Dornoch into a free Royal Burgh, though for many years before then the city of Dornoch was incorporated as a Burgh of Barony, with the Bishop of Caithness as feudal superior. The superiority passed at the Reformation from the Bishops to the Earls, and then from the Earls to the Crown. The Patron Saint of Dornoch was St Findbarr.

The most striking building in the town is the Cathedral, which was founded by Bishop Gilbert Murray, who was consecrated in 1223. In 1570 all but the tower and steeple was burned down by the Master of Caithness and Mackay of Strathnaver. On 5th November (Gunpowder



Valentine

Dornoch from West

Dundee

Plot Night) "the inner stone pillars of the north syd of the body of the Cathedral Church at Dornoch (laiking the roof befor) were blown from the very roots quyt clein over the outer walles of the church; which walls did remain nevertheless standing, to the great astonishment of all such as hath scen the same." This cathedral ultimately became, and still is, the parish church. It was restored in 1835, and again some twenty years ago. The bodies of sixteen Earls of Sutherland repose in the vault below the chancel, and there is a sarcophagus, surmounted by the carved figure of a cross-legged knight, which contains the relics of Sir Richard de Moravia, the brother of the founder. There are beautiful stained glass windows, and altogether the interior is well worth seeing.

The Bishop's Palace—now Dornoch Castle—stands close by, a quaint, stately, turreted pile, which adds to the dignity of the town. The upright stone on the links, called "the Earl's Cross," has probably taken the place of a more ancient one erected to commemorate the victory of the Sutherlanders over the Danes in 1248; at which fight, according to tradition, the then Thane of Sutherland seized a horse's leg and with it slew his adversary, the Danish leader; and hence the apocryphal story of how the horse-shoe came to be in the Dornoch Town Arms.

In a garden near the Ladies' Golf Club house stands a bluish whinstone bearing the date 1722. This was said to be the spot at which Janet Horne, a reputed witch, was, with the approval of the crowd, burned to death, after a trial before the sheriff. The charge was that she had transformed her daughter into a pony and had her shod by the devil.

There are many beautiful houses in this clean and well-kept town, and several good hotels. There are excellent bathing facilities, but it is for its wonderful golf courses that Dornoch has for many a long year been most widely famed. As far back as 1630 the Sutherland historian wrote: "About this town, along the sea coast, there are the fairest and largest links or green fields of any pair of Scotland fitt for archery, goffing, riding, and all other exercises; they do surpass the fields of Montrose or St Andrews."

The climate is dry and bracing, and altogether this is an ideal place for holiday-makers. The surrounding district teems with interest for those who can enjoy walking or motoring trips, or take an interest in archaeology or ecclesiastical history. (See Dr Bentinck's "Dornoch Cathedral and Parish.")

DORNOCH TO THE MOUND.

"Dornoch is connected with the main line of the L.M.S. Railway by a branch line $7\frac{1}{2}$ miles long, and which traverses a district as rich in historic interest as any in the Highlands. It passes the purely fishing village of Embo. Years ago the health conditions of this place were far from satisfactory, but now the village is well kept, and the inhabitants have taken ample advantage of the railway connection. Further on, on the left, are the ruins of Skelbo Castle, which belonged to the ancient Bishops of Caithness, and which is linked with many a local legend and historic fact. It is believed to have been built by Sir Richard de Moravia about 1245, and soon after was so important and commodious a place that the commissioners sent from Scotland and England to meet and escort south the Maid of Norway, stayed here, and here heard the tidings of her death. About the close of the sixteenth century the place was occupied by a certain Marjory Mowat, who, when the owner, Allan Kinnaid,

died, produced a duly signed will showing that the place had been left to her; but old Allan's heir showed in the law courts that the will was sealed after the proprietor's death, and then bitterly she cursed him and prophesied evil to himself and his lands here and in Morayshire. Her prophecies were remembered when his fertile Culbin lands were converted into a wilderness of sea sand, and this made "The Curse of Culbin on you" for many a day as great a terror to Highlanders as "The Curse of Cromwell on you" was to Irishmen. When the Jacobites, 1746, were on their northward march working havoc on Royalists' property, they held high revelry in this castle soon after dispersing Loudon's troops, but some little time afterwards they had to surrender to a small body of Sutherland Militia within sight of it but on the other side of Loch Fleet, which in comparatively modern times was known as the Ferry of Unes. According to Sir Robert Gordon, who wrote in 1630, it was at this spot that the Cat tribe—the Murrays—landed in 91 A.D. to take possession of the land given them by the King. After anchoring, the leader went ashore to recreate himself and spy out the land, when he was suddenly attacked by a body of monstrous large cats. The fight was fierce and long continued, yet in the end he killed them all. From thence the Thanes or Earls of Sutherland carry as their crest a cat with one foot up ready to pounce upon its prey.

At Cambusavie there is a platform but no station. Before the junction is reached, "The Mound," so called from the famous mound built across Loch Fleet at this point, and completed in 1816, has to be crossed. Exclusive of the bridge of four arches with its valve gates, this mound is 995 yards long, 60 yards broad at the base, and 20 feet wide at the top, and about 18 feet in perpendicular height. After much difficulty the work was duly completed, and several hundred acres of splendid pasture land were recovered from the sea, and now sheep graze where



Valentine

Castle Varrich and Ben Hope from Tongue

Dundee

ships were wont to ride. The total cost, even in the days of cheap labour, was £9,600. Along the side of this embankment the train now speeds.

FROM BONAR TO THE MOUND VIA LOCH BUIE.

This is a drive of thirteen and a half miles through a bare and uncultivated country. It skirts the shores of Loch Buie (two miles in length). Then Strath Carnach is reached, and, where the road joins Loch Tollie, the ruins of a Pictish tower may be seen, as well as several tumuli and cairns. Some lovely bits of scenery may be seen ere the traveller reaches Torboll Falls, which are about 60 feet in height, and where there is a remarkable salmon ladder constructed to allow fish to pass on to Loch Buie, five miles further up. A feature of this ladder is that after the salmon have taken several short jumps over steps not much exceeding a foot in height, they are provided with resting pools in which to recruit for the next series of jumps. The total length of the ladder is 378 yards, and is from 10 to 12 feet wide. The salmon are thus able to ascend an incline 138 yards long, with a gradient of about 1 in 5, by means of a series of 23 pools.

BONAR TO LAIRG.

The run along the side of the Kyle to Invershin Station ($3\frac{1}{4}$ miles) is level. Here one gets a splendid view of Carbisdale Castle, built thirty-two years ago by a Dowager Duchess of Sutherland. It is a beautiful building, but there are no policies and no sporting facilities in connection with it. Here is the Hill of Lamentation, where Montrose was outwitted and defeated by Lieut.-Colonel Strachan. On that day (27th April, 1650) many gallant cavaliers were made prisoners, and when the day was irretrievably lost, the Marquis threw off his cloak, decorated with the Star of the Garter, changed clothes with a common Highlander, swam across the Kyle, fled up Strath Okyell, and lay among the wilds of Assynt. After enduring hunger and fatigue for three days he was apprehended.

At Invershin Station travellers for the west of Sutherland usually leave the train to take the motors which in summer regularly run to the north and west of the county. Here the Oykeil joins the Shin. Though there is a road on each side of the Shin, that on its right bank is the better, and the drive is through a picturesque valley. At one part the railway may be seen running along the top of a precipice about 200 feet in height. At the foot of this precipice the Shin rushes wildly over rocks and boulders. Then come the woods and policies of Achany and Gruids. On the other side may be seen the quiet lodge which the late Dr Andrew Carnegie built for himself at Achinduich, and so on to Lairg Hotel, which is reached by crossing the bridge at the lower end of Loch Shin. The hotel stands on an eminence, and excellent views of Loch Shin and the surrounding district may be got from it. The village itself is certainly an up-to-date place, with well-built houses and electric light in nearly every one of them. Electricity is also used as a motive power in the workshops here.

Lairg is the most convenient distribution centre for travellers and goods for the north and west. The distance from Invershin is $7\frac{1}{2}$ miles. Here is the manse where the writer of "The Shipwreck of the Juno" was born. There are tumuli, Pictish towers, and cairns in the neighbour-