

THE RIVER TAY - ITS SILVERY WATERS FOREVER LINKED TO THE PICTS AND SCOTS OF CLAN MACNAUGHTON

By James Macnaughton

On a fine spring day back in the 1980's three figures trudged steadily up the long climb from Glen Lochy towards their goal, the majestic peak of Ben Lui (3,708 ft.) The final arête, still deep in snow, became much more interesting as it narrowed with an overhanging cornice. Far below to the West could be seen the former Clan Macnaughton lands of Glen Fyne and Glen Shira and the two big Lochs - Fyne and Awe, the sites of Fraoch Eilean and Dunderave Castle. Pointing this out, James the father commented to his teenage sons Patrick and James, that maybe as they got older the history of the Clan would interest them as much as it did him. He told them that the land to the West was called Dalriada in ancient times, the Kingdom settled by the Scots from Ireland around 500AD, and that stretching to the East, beyond the impressively precipitous Eastern corrie of Ben Lui, was Breadalbane - or upland of Alba - part of the home of the Picts, four of whose Kings had been called Nechtan, and thus were our ancestors as Sons of Nechtan (Macnaughton). Although admiring the spectacular views, the lads were much more keen to reach the summit cairn and to stop for a sandwich and some hot coffee. Keeping his thoughts to himself to avoid boring the youngsters, and smiling as they yelled "Fraoch Eilean"! while hurtling down the scree slopes (at least they remembered something of the Clan history!), Macnaughton senior gazed down to the source of the mighty River Tay, Scotland's biggest river, and, as he descended the mountain at a more measured pace than his sons, his thoughts turned to a consideration of the massive influence this ancient river must have had on all those who travelled along it or lived beside it over the millennia.

Ben Lui.

At this point the river was a little spring called the Allt Coire Laoigh starting at 1,837ft and then becoming the Cononish Burn. Down in the strath below this burn



becomes the River Fillan near Tyndrum. This strath formed part of the main trade route from the West coast at Oban through Breadalbane, a route followed by the great Christian evangelists in the 6th and 7th Centuries, one of whom was Saint Fillan, and the beautiful strath has ever since then borne his name. At the Western end of the strath is Tyndrum and it is thought that near there back in 729AD King Nechtan IV and Angus, son of Fergus, a claimant to the Pictish throne, fought a battle near Lake Loogdae called the Battle of Monith-Carno. Nechtan was killed and the family of Angus triumphed, and that was the end of the line of Nechtan on the Pictish throne. Another battle further West at Dalry near Bridge of Orchy, fought in 1306 between supporters of John Balliol and the forces of Robert the Bruce,

found Donald Macnaughton, the 3rd Chief, on the side of Balliol, and since the Bruce was victorious, Donald forfeited much of the Clan lands.

At Crianlarich the Fillan flows into Lochs Dochart and Lubhair and then re-emerges as the River Dochart in Glen Dochart, a tumbling tempestuous stream, which thunders over the Falls of Dochart and into Loch Tay at Killin. Loch Tay stretches northeast for 15 miles dominated to the North by the massive Ben Lawers range, the highest mountain in Breadalbane at only 16 ft. short of 4,000 ft. This is all very much Macnaughton territory, because as far back as the 13th Century Macnaughtons were described as “Thanes of Loch Tay” and the Rev. William Gillies, in his fascinating book “In Famed Breadalbane”, states that Macnaughton “is one of the oldest, if not the very oldest Breadalbane surname.” On the

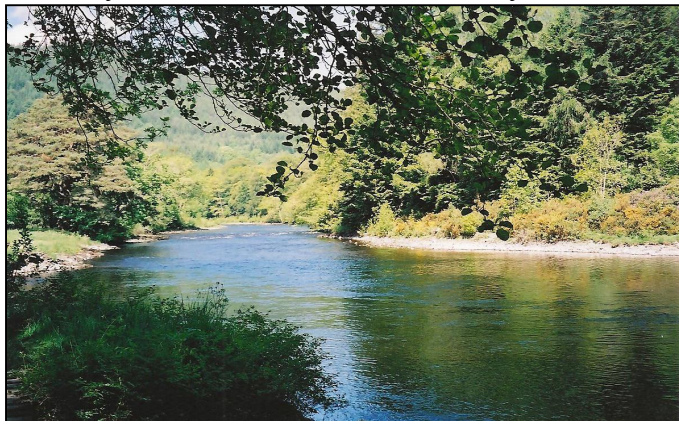


loch near Fearnan and Acharn are two of the ancient Crannogs - lake dwellings - in which some of our forebears lived in times of stress and upheaval.

River Tay at Kenmore Bridge.

At the Eastern end of Loch Tay - where the River Tay is finally given its proper name (after the river Goddess Tatha - the silent one) as it flows under the bridge at Kenmore - many generations of Macnaughtons lived and worked in and around the villages of

Acharn, Eddergoll, Portbane, Lurgloman and Inchadney. There also were Macnaughtons up on the hill above Acharn back in 1480, and at the same period and on into the 16th Century, members of the Clan were vicars of the church at Inchadney, a little village on a bend of the Tay at the Eastern boundary of the Taymouth Castle grounds. Many Macnaughtons are buried in the picturesque little graveyard at the Kenmore Church, and there were others from more ancient times buried at Inchadney, but their gravestones were lost when in 1572 the 3rd Earl of Breadalbane took possession of Inchadney, closed the Church and Graveyard and cast aside many of the tombstones. In the 19th Century some of these gravestones were taken to the front of Taymouth Castle, and used to re-enforce the ground rendered soft by the constant traffic of the builders. One cannot help being astounded at the unthinking sacrilege involved.



The River Tay at Inchadney.

In those early times the Tay was full of salmon and everyone, including members of our Clan, could catch them for their food. Nowadays, in complete contrast, all the salmon fishing on the river is privately owned and after constant over fishing there are far fewer salmon to be caught. This was partly due to netting down at the estuary, but the netters were bought out some years ago. Every year on

15th of January there is a ceremony beside the bridge at Kenmore to open the salmon fishing



great style with a piper in attendance and a bottle of whisky broken over the bow of the boat. Our forebears had their own versions of boats - coracles and canoes - and they used the loch and the river for traveling, because in those far off days there were no roads.

Salmon Fishing, River Tay.

Further downstream the River Tay is joined by the River Lyon and Glen Lyon was the home of many Macnaughtons over the Centuries.

It then flows East through the Strath of Appin past the ancient Stone Circle at Styx (Croftmoraig) to Aberfeldy and in times of snow melt or after heavy rain the fields on the North bank were often flooded to a depth of several feet and the road from Aberfeldy to Weem became completely impassable. These floods happened less frequently after the Hydro Electric Schemes of the 1960s dammed the headwaters of the River Lyon. At Aberfeldy General Wade built the first bridge over the river in 1739. Aberfeldy was the home of our family business McKerchar and Macnaughton Ltd., which ran through three generations - my Grandfather James, my Father Alastair and myself - from the 1850s through to 1984. This was a business comprising Licensed Supermarket, Department Store (including Tailoring), Bakery (and Bakehouse), Oatmeal and Provender Mill (using a tributary of the Tay - the Moness Burn - for its waterpower), Agricultural Merchants with branches in Kinloch Rannoch, Pitlochry and Blair Atholl. Four Travelling Shops serviced the surrounding glens. My Grandfather James entered into partnership with his cousin Peter McKerchar in the 1880's and they later built fine new premises in 1911. My Father gave up his engineering career with the Cleveland Bridge Company to join the business after Peter McKerchar's death in 1927, and used his engineering skills to re-equip the Meal Mill with more up to date machinery. I joined the business, from my career with Reckitt and Colman Ltd in Hull, in 1961, and, after my Father's death in 1967, ran it as Managing Director with my wife Renate and my sister Catherine as fellow Directors until we sold it in 1984. By 2002 Renate and I had left Aberfeldy, moving to Southern England to be nearer our three sons (Patrick, James and Kai) who all had flourishing careers there, thus sadly breaking a connection with Breadalbane which had lasted for at least 700 years, because Catherine, too, had moved away to Ballater in Aberdeenshire.

The Tay flows on down through several stretches of rapids to Grandtully, (the site of an international white water canoeing slalom course) and downstream on the right is Balnaguard where King Nechtan IV of the Picts had a seat. Onward past Logierait where it is joined by the River Tummel - and a few miles upstream on that tributary is Pitlochry, where Blair Macnaughton's family tweed business was started by his Remony Great Grandfather James, and James' brother Alexander.

A few miles further downstream, again on the right bank, is Dalguise, where in 635AD King Nechtan III/Gartnaidh of the Picts fought a battle against the three sons of Nechtan II, and all were killed there. Until recently, a huge cairn with a single stone coffin and two high upright monoliths marked this spot. Nechtan/Gartnaidh's brother Bredei then ruled over the Northern Picts from 635- 641AD.

Down through the forest-flanked banks is Dunkeld where there are more strong links to Clan Macnaughton. The 6th Chief, Alexander (1403) was the father of Donald, who became Dean of Dunkeld in 1436 and unfortunately died on his way to Rome to be ordained Bishop. South East of Dunkeld is Kinclaven, where in more recent times Niel Macnaughton B.D. (son of Allan D.D. Parish Minister of Campbelltown in 1821), was Minister in the 1840s. Further downstream, to the East of Stanley, lies Dunsinane Hill where MacBeth - a Pictish King related to the Nechtans - fought against Malcolm, the son of King Duncan whom MacBeth had killed.

Just North of Perth, then the River Almond flows into the Tay and to the West, near Methven in Glenalmond is Inchaffray Abbey with which the Clan had very close connections. In 1246 Gilliechrist Macnachdan, 2nd Chief, gave to Inchaffray the Church of St. Mordac at Kilmorich at the top end of Loch Fyne in Argyll. Then, in 1257, his brother Ath gave to the abbot and canons of Inchaffray the Church of St. Findoca on the Isle of Inishail on Loch Awe. These actions

emphasised that some of the Macnaughtons had migrated from Perthshire to Argyll earlier in the 13th Century when Malcolm McNachtan, the 1st Chief, helped King Alexander II to subdue the Macdonalds, the Lords of the Isles, (in 1222) and was then given lands in Argyll, including Fraoch Eilean.

River Tay looking south - flowing through Perth.



The Tay now flows through Perth (deriving from the Pictish word for a thicket), ancient capital of Scotland, and a couple of miles to the east of the river is the village of Scone, where the famous Coronation Stone was used by the Pictish Kings from Nechtan IV in the early 8th Century and on for many Centuries thereafter. King Edward I of the English captured the Stone in 1296 and removed it to London (was it the genuine Stone of Destiny? We Scots certainly think not!), but Scottish Kings continued to be crowned at Scone until 1651. At Perth the river becomes tidal, and the city has an important harbour to this day. Unthinking planners allowed houses to be built on the North Inch, part of the flood plain just upstream from Perth, and so they have had problems with flooding there ever since, because when the flood waters come down and the

tide is rising, the water levels can rise by up to 7 metres above normal! East of Perth the Tay is joined by another important tributary, the River Earn, and near their confluence is the ancient burgh of Abernethy, another Pictish capital in the times of the Nechtan Kings, and the site of an Abbey founded by Nechtan IV. The unique Round Tower Abernethy is thought to have been built on his orders, also.

The river now widens out into its Firth and passes Dundee (originally Dun De - the Fire Fort in the Gaelic), a major industrial and port city. One of Scotland's most beloved poets, whose poetry was so badly written that everyone loved it, was William McGonagall, who wrote of the Tay:

***“Beautiful silvery Tay
With your landscapes so lovely and gay
Along each side of your waters, to Perth all the way:
No other river in the world has got scenery more fine,
Only I am told the beautiful Rhine.”***

The first railway bridge across the Tay at Dundee (10,709 ft. long) was built in 1878, and at that time was the longest in the world. Sadly, however, it collapsed the following year when a train was halfway over it, and 90 people were drowned. William McGonagall described the tragedy in his own inimitable way:

***“Beautiful railway bridge of the Silvr’y Tay!
Alas! I am very sorry to say
That 90 lives have been taken away
On the last Sabbath day of 1879,
Which will be remembr’d for a very long time.”***

You cannot really follow that, so, after 117 miles laden with fascinating history involving the lives of thousands of our Clan members over the years, we leave the majestic Tay as it joins the North Sea.

In the 30 years since that climbing expedition on Ben Lui, all three of our sons have grown up, matured and are now much more interested in - and very proud of - the history of their family and Clan, so, who knows, maybe one of them will update my musings later in the 21st Century. ♥

Sources:

- Map of the River Tay with thanks to Director, David Summers of the Tay District Salmon Fisheries Board.

See map of River Tay on the following page.

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