



THE SOUTHERN CROSS
THE JOURNAL OF CLAN MHCNEACAIL
IN THE ANTIPODES Vol 1 No 6 November 1992



Sheriff Alexander Nicolson

Editor: Lisa Dillon, 8 Old Byron bay Rd. Newrybar N.S.W. 2479

From the Chief....

Having taken up a lot of space in the last two newsletters with accounts of our trips to the US and to Scotland, I will confine myself to simply repeating a paragraph that I contributed to the first issue of "the Southern Cross". It reads: "If I remember correctly, it was Professor Geoffrey Blainey of Melbourne University who used the expression 'The Tyranny of Distance' as the title of one of his many books. It is an evocative phrase that sums up the principal difficulty in attempting to keep the widely scattered members of an ancient Highland Clan in touch with one another - a clan that is now spread over four continents and at least eight countries. As I have previously pointed out, there is one all important step in keeping the clan in a cohesive state and that is the regular publication of comprehensive newsletters. I note that the Scottish and American publications are attracting a number of contributions from individual clansmen and clanswomen and take the opportunity to express the hope that some of our Australian and New Zealand members will submit articles and/or contribute to a "letters to the editor" page in this national newsletter. I am sure that the editor will be delighted to receive suggestions, historical tid bits, genealogical enquiries and complaints (but, with regard to the latter, please try to be constructive at the same time!)

In conclusion, I would like, personally and on behalf of the clan as a whole, to thank all the office bearers and members of our six clan branches (four in Australia and two in New Zealand) for their loyalty and the work they have put into the clan and fund raising activities. With regard to the latter, I sincerely hope that our dollar will someday recover sufficiently to allow many clan members to visit Ben Chraic and St. Columba's Isle and see for themselves the wee bit of Skye that is theirs for ever.

Yours Aye
Scorrybreac

From the Chaplain's Desk

Dear Kinsfolk,

The word "save" is one of the most beautiful in the English language. It is about relief in time of distress, comfort in time of sorrow, hope in a time of despair. It's about help in the nick of time - a no-nonsense word that puts a smile on a saddened face.

This word is the centre of the Bible. Maybe the Bible confuses you. Just think of it this way: The Bible is the story of God's provision for man's salvation. And men need saving, wouldn't you agree?

Our personal lives are often very disappointing. Jobs lost, children sick or ungrateful, family fights, any one of these or all of them plus a dozen more can make our lives pretty dreary. And when you add to all of this the massive problems of today's world, soaring crime rates, population explosion, nuclear weapons, and brutally selfish nations, there are times a man could just scream from sheer

hopelessness.

But the message the angel spoke to the frightened shepherds stands is God's great declaration that a Saviour has been born. He is Christ the Lord. He is the Son of God, and through the miracle of God's great grace He came to right the awful wrongs in human life.

A baby destined to bring salvation - how gloriously joyful! The Bible's message leaves no doubt that His penetrating power can penetrate every level of your life and can even change our world. But you must not fail to notice that the Saviour has come from God. He is not a man. He is Christ, the Son of God, the Lord. Man cannot save himself, but God can save him, and He has in Jesus. If you believe the angel's message, you will have a Saviour, too.

Heather, my wife, joins with me in extending to you Christmas Greetings. We pray that Christmas will be a time with the warmth of the Divine love, manifested in the Prince of Peace, blessing and enriching your hearts and homes and families in this hallowed time.

Yours in kinship,
Archie MacNicol.

To All Clan Members

*Le ceud mile beannachd Nollaig Chridheil agus Bliadhna Mhath Ur
(A hundred thousand blessings for a Merry Christmas and a Prosperous New Year)*

*From Iain and Pamela MacNeacail
of MacNeacail and Scorrybreac*

Clan's Heavy Athlete Tells How.....

By Steve Robinson

As the only American member of Clan MacNicol who regularly takes part in the heavy athletics at Highland Games, I have been asked by our persuasive Editor to share some of my experiences.

To begin, a Scottish athlete is asked a series of questions. Among them: What is it that you do? How do you train for something like that? And the hardest to answer, why? As to the latter, most of my non-Scottish friends look at me strangely when I reply I enjoy it. Spending a hot summer Saturday or Sunday throwing around more than half a ton of steel, stone, and timber strikes them as something less than enjoyable. But then, they are unaccustomed to the sound of the pipes and the wearing of the kilt too.

If you have attended your local games and watched the athletes, both amateur and professional status, you might have the idea that the heptathlon events aren't really too difficult. That is only because the athletes are so good they make the work look easy. Keep in mind that the Highland Heptathlon involves:

- throwing a 28lb weight for distance
- putting a fieldstone of 20 to 30lbs for distance
- throwing a 56 lb weight for distance
- tossing a 56 lb weight for height
- throwing a 22 lb hammer for distance
- tossing a 16 lb sheaf with a pitchfork for height
- tossing a 100 to 150 lb caber for accuracy

Add all these together and multiply them by three competitive throws a piece, plus any number of practice throws, and it soon totals over 1000 precision lbs. a day. You will simply have to trust me when I say that, for some of us, this is our idea of fun and relaxation.

As for the question of training, that is, admittedly, difficult, especially so in my case since I am an officer on an oil tanker. A ship at sea, rolling and pitching, is not the ideal place to lift weights. Even when we are in port, my shipmates get a bit nervous if I consider throwing steel weights on the steel deck of a ship with 200,000 barrels of gasoline or jet fuel on board. Therefore, my training schedule is one of starts and stops. I start again when I get home and I stop when I get back aboard.

I actually began training when I was a teenager, with a full program of basketball, swimming, fencing, and track and field, sports in which I lettered in both high school and college. I played center forward in the Big Eight, danced at Scottish social events, and was gradually introduced to Scottish heavy athletics by people who follow the careers of university athletes. I completed many of the instructional camps held by the established professional athletes, and still occasionally enroll in one to finehone skills. The rest has consisted of years of practice.

Early on, I had to learn the distinctive how to of each event. Throwing the weights for distance, for example, involves a technique somewhat like throwing the Olympic hammer or discus. But there is enough difference, due to the greater weight in our events, that one must unlearn a great deal and relearn a modified technique. And proper technique can account for a great deal of one's success in these events.

A few years ago at the Williamsburg Games, a number of the hammer throwers and shot putters from nearby William and Mary College showed up and wanted to compete. Most of them had been wrestlers and were big and burly and in prime condition, or so they thought. They were under the impression that they had only to round up kilts and sign up to walk away with competition ribbons. They couldn't believe it when they discovered the weights they were being asked to throw around. These extremely youthful, muscle-bound athletes were completely worn out by the end of the day, while the rest of us were ready to socialise a while and then drive 100 or 200 miles back home. Oh yes, they had won a total of zero medals or ribbons. They certainly found out that brute strength is not anywhere near enough.

I mention the necessity of wearing a kilt in order to participate in the athletics. At many Games with open registrations, however, this is not now true, especially in the amateur division. Usually the rationale is, that by eliminating the kilt pre-requisite, more people will try their hands at the events, individuals who might end up competing regularly. That is certainly a worthy aim; still, I much prefer seeing competitors in kilts for a couple of reasons. First, anyone who is not sufficiently interested in things Scottish to buy a kilt will most likely not be interested enough to become a regular competitor. Secondly, these are uniquely Scottish athletics and should be done in uniquely Scottish attire. Anything else seems incongruous.

Speaking of kilts reminds me of the question that all wearers are asked. The so-called purists insist of course, that we should wear nothing under the kilt, but they have obviously never thought out the predicament of the spinning athlete as he throws weights.

Finally there is the question of why I have chosen to remain at amateur status all these years, rather than to embrace professional standing as I am entitled to do. Indeed the professionals started knocking at my door right after I graduated from college. The answer is relatively simple. By remaining an amateur, I can cut a huge swath. Many games have specific professionals they choose to invite each year. I have never really understood that because such games consistently run the risk of becoming incestuously exclusionary. Among the amateurs, we can apply and qualify across the board on an international basis. In my best years, I compete in thirty Games annually; therefore, admission and acceptance to competition around the world demands open doors.



Steve & Pat Robinson & son Brett.
Grandfather Mountain 1987

Of course, we give up something to gain something as well. The professional athletes have their expenses covered by the Games in which they compete; amateur athletes must seek other funding or foot the expenses themselves. Amateurs must also be prepared for a virtually intergenerational challenge. Amateurs from 18-60 customarily compete at the same level. Professionals are more often divided into age categories. While the professionals themselves sponsored the age divisions, several well-known professionals have openly told me that they miss the intense texture of a varied amateur competition and envy the amateurs' camaraderie as well as our free flowing adrenalin.

"Adrenalin" is the most appropriate juncture to mention my spouse. A particular asset to me in my careers has been marriage to a Farquharson. I don't know if you know these people, but if you meet any, I would definitely get them on our side as quickly as possible. They are the most amazing blend of incisive intellectuality, type A high energy overdrive, wild zaininess, and steely-eyed determination. Particularly the Christies (of whom Pat is one) will tell you how proud they are of their lyrical inclinations, all the while they are dropping some errant individual dead in his tracks with a killer look at hundred paces. And they are completely mesmerizing. On several occasion, I have turned up at some exotic clime for a far distant Scottish Games, in a place where people are speaking obscure languages, to discover myself virtually ignored until it is understood that I am "Pat's husband". One these occasions, I have then found myself welcomed with open arms, all the while fearing that the other athletes, often natives, would complain of my "preferential" treatment. Even though Pat has her own demanding career and is on the mommy-track, she sets up all my games, transportation, and arrangements. By all means if you can get one of these Farquharson people to act as an advance man in your career - of for anything else for that matter - nab him or her. They don't seem to me to be an overly large clan, so I think there is only a finite number to go around. Seriously, we need to applaud these toiling "star makers", they work as hard as the athletes.

Now that you know something of what we do and who we are, take special notice of the athletes the next time you attend a Highland Games. At many Games, it is possible to stand fairly close to us as we execute the events. It's not as comfortable as sitting in the grandstand and watching from a distance of course, but you will get a better idea of the effort required to hurl 56 pounds of steel some thirty or forty feet and a generally keener appreciation of our Scottish athletes. And do know that we hear your cheers and appreciate them. We perform the events very much with the satisfaction of our public and the loyalty of our clan-relatives in mind.

Ron McNicol



Ron & Joan McNicol
(Victoria)

My great grandfather, Peter McNicol came to Australia in the 1850's to join his brothers Duncan and Donald and son William who came out previously, settling in the Terang Camperdown district of Victoria.

After Peters death, William, my grandfather, moved to New South Wales where he married and took up land at Lake Cargellico where my father was born. After being wiped out by drought and rabbits they settled eventually within 20 miles of Melbourne.

The McNicols were honoured at a pioneers service at Terang Presbyterian Church (November 1988) where Peter and William were elders in the 1860's. I was the soloist on this occasion.

As for myself, I can't say that I have contributed greatly in business or sporting activities, but have been an active member of the Presbyterian and now Uniting Church, as elder and frequently choir master.

I spent most of my working life in the wool trade including service, as a wool classer and wool buyer.

I have sung with many choral societies over some 50 years, the first being the VSU choir, directed by my singing teacher when I was about 20.

My wife Joan, an ex-nursing sister is much more useful than I am and our son and daughter much more talented.

Daughter, Helen is a very successful business consultant and my son David an outstanding pianist, specialising in accompanying, being official accompanist for the Melbourne Herald Sun Aria finals since 1989.

I served in the AIF during the war which was won in spite of this.

I played cricket in the Essendon district until 1950 and now enjoy a game of bowls.

We now live in a retirement village in the Heidelberg area near where my grandfather farmed around the turn of the century. Although in a retirement village we are still active. Joan is a tireless craft worker and I do quite a lot of picture framing for others in the village, friends and relatives.

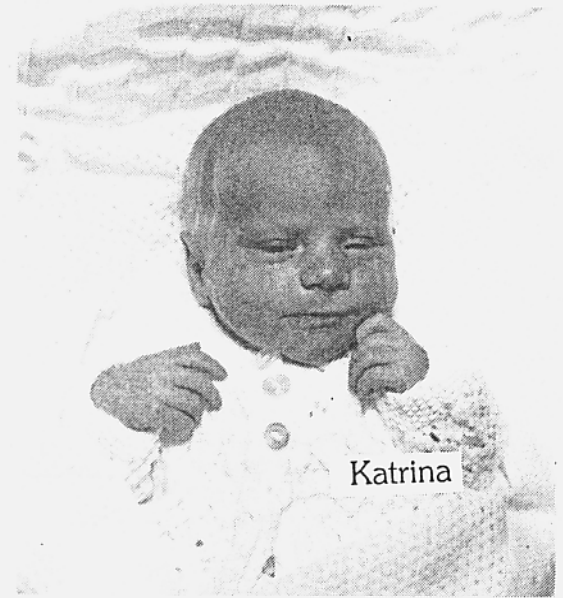
I still belong to two choral groups as well as being chairman of a Musical Society Centre, which involves me in the arranging of concerts, aided by my son.



Cazna

How delightful it is to let you all see what your newest members look like! Our Official Dancer, Sharine, and husband Werner Nicolson-Brass became proud parents in the early hours of the 16th August, 1992, at Wollongong Hospital (NSW south coast).

Cazna* Zarine Skye Follent Nicolson-Brass is the image of her mother whilst her sister Katira Chantelle Skye Follent Nicholson-Brass takes after her dad.



Katrina

*Cazna for an Australian Icon - Anzac (name reversed) is a tribute to the families proud military background; Sharine's father served in the 7th Division and her maternal Grandfather in the Light Horse WWI.

I'm sure it won't be long before Sharine has these delightful charmers in dancing shoes. Can we anticipate our Chief will have twin Official Dancers some time in the future?

FURTHER BEN CHRACAIG WOODLANDS DONORS

Chief's Piper Rob Nicol and Mrs Nicol
Mrs David Nicol

Happy Birthday to You, Happy Birthday to You,

Happy Birthday to the following members who will celebrate their birthdays in:

December: Mary Nicolson; Bobbie Wallis; Sybil Hewson*, Angus McDonald*, Lesley Way; Eileen Nicholson; Bob Nicol; Sheona Nicoll; Dorothy Nicholson; and Pamela Nicol.

January: Penny Nicoll; Beryl Clifford; Beth Bell; Thelma Wyatt; Kerry Nicolson *, Ronald McNicol* (see biography in this issue); Kath Nicolson; Rick Dillion*, Maxine Sheldrick*; Roy Shallcross; Jenni Nicholson; Bruce Clifford; and Luke Nicolson.

February: Adam Nicolson*; Arthur Newman*; Chloe* and Saadi* Allan; Ailsa Webb*, Grace Given*; Bradley McNicol*; Peter Nicol*; Audrey Nicholson; Barbara Roche and Lisa Dillion.

(Audrey, Barbara and Lisa are the only ones without a birthday twin in February!)

Hope you all have an especially great day.

*Donates birthday twins.

Moreton Branch Sth Qld

The Committee of the newly formed Moreton Branch is working very well with everyone bonding well and enjoying the social side of the committee work. This has been made easy by Robert W. Nicol who has managed to arrange for Committee meetings to be held at Emanuel College at the Queensland University, where these Saturday Night meetings have been held in conjunction with a great dinner on each occasion. Our thanks to Robert for arranging the venue and our thanks to the staff of the College for the great catering.

The Committee has made advances in the planning of the International AGM of Clan MacNicol to be held in Brisbane end of August 1993. The Committee has also made arrangements for a Dinner for Members to be held at "Dodds" early March, but more about this in the Moreton Branch News Letter which will be out late January 1993.

A banner for our Branch is to be made, and it is hoped that it will be ready for the Kirkin' o the Tartan to be held at St Pauls Church, St Pauls Tce Spring Hill 9.30am Sunday 29th Nov. 1992. Please come along to this annual event, all the Clans will be there. This has become a big event, growing more important each year, (representatives of all Churches, Government and Opposition etc front, so it is now an established annual event).

Bob and Judy Nicol of Kenmore have become Grandparents for the second time with their daughter giving birth to Samuel, so they are the very proud grandparents of both a grand daughter and a grand son.

Graham Nicoll's son Angus will be off to Dundee in Scotland in a few weeks time. Angus, who has just completed his fifth year in Medicine at the Qld. Uni, will be spending a couple of months at a Hospital in Dundee before returning to do his sixth year. Good luck Angus, we wish we could fit in your suit-case!

On a sad note, Lange George Kreisch, a member of Clan MacDonald Qld passed away after a courageous fight against his very painful illness. Lange was a great supporter of all things Scottish, and he and his wife Gail worked hard for the Scottish groups in Queensland. Lange was one of those rare people who never complained about things nor would he ever say an ill word against anyone. In June, when I was giving the "address to Bannockburn" at the annual Bannockburn Dinner, I was delighted to see Lange dressed in his kilt and attending the dinner but I was humbled to learn that he had obtained a Pass from hospital to attend the Dinner. The night has taken on a very special and personal meaning for me, one which will stay with me for ever. There are many things one wishes one had said, conversations one wishes one had had, but those of us who were privileged to have known Lange have had our lives enriched.

Coming Events

29th Nov 1992- Sunday : Kirkin o' the Tartan: St Pauls Church, St Pauls Tce., Spring Hill. 9.30am.

30th Nov, 1992 - Monday : St. Andrew's Day Mens Dinner, Soc. of St. Andrew of Scotland (Qld) Crest Hotel. Brisbane 7.00pm.

Phone 350-2297 for information of the above events.

Counsellor Peter Nicol.

Clan MacNicol Victoria Inc President's Annual Report 2/8/1992

It gives me much pleasure to bring you my second Annual Report for the Clan MacNicol Victorian Branch Inc. We started the year with a debit balance which has been cleared. We purchased our own tent with the assistance of some very generous donations from some of our members, which left us very little to find. We used the tent at the Ringwood Highland Gathering and found it to be a very good buy although it needs some minor repairs at the moment. It has been valued at over \$300. About eight of us attended the Trak Theatre at Kew and really enjoyed ourselves very much and can highly recommend a night there. Mick and I attended the following functions: St Andrews Remembrance Day at the Shrine and afterwards at the Army Barrack in Batman Avenue for afternoon tea and a display of Scottish Dancing which was most enjoyable; also a dinner at the Southern Cross in honour of the Clan Chief John MacLeod from Duvegan Castle Isle of Kye. The Chief is very interesting person. He also stated that the castle is now open part of Sundays as I told him that we were there on a Sunday. He also advised anyone visiting Skye to write to him and let him know when they will be there. If they are interested in the McLeods there may be someone that may be able to help them. Thelma Peter Mick and myself attended the Kirkan of the Tartan at Scots Church last August and Thelma, Peter and I attended again in July this year. We had a display table at the Glen Waverley School for the Genealogy Day where there was a lot of interest shown but no new members. Scots Church had their first ever Debutante Ball at Camberwell Civic Centre. We were asked to have a representative from our Clan to help form the quard of honour. Ian Nicolson of Bayles kindly accepted the job. Thanks Ian very much.

During the year we had a General Meeting at Burrenbeet which was attended by about 25 members. It was a bit of a disaster as the Council Staff had not delivered the seating, the gentleman at the kiosk lent us some chairs. On the next day I went to the Burrenbeet Council and complained about it and they refunded our money for the rental. The General Meeting which was held at Huntly near Bendigo was a great success with a very large attendance and every one having a most enjoyable time.

Some members did not renew their membership for 1991-92. It appeared that they were not interested to carry on. We sent them reminder notices and after no reply we have stopped sending the Newsletters to them.

We had two raffles at our meetings; one of a Christmas Cake, made by Thelma and iced by me, was raffled at Burrenbeet and won by a Ron McNicol. The Maiden Hair Fern was the prize at Huntley. This helped with our funds. We now have the Tapestry which Dorothy Gavin has worked and once it is framed we will be able to raffle it. Thanks Dorothy.

Beth Bell.

Victorian News

Some of our members and friends have attended the following functions, organised by the Council of Clans. They included a lovely Luncheon at the "Greenacres" golf Club at Kew on 12th October which was very well attended. It is a very interesting to meet and hear how other members of the clans progress. There was seven of our members who attended the TRAK Theatre to see the "Man Who Came to Dinner" this was a very enjoyable night, as the standard of acting was very high class. Afterwards there was supper and a chat with the cast.

We have our Tapestry framed and ready to raffle. It is a very beautiful and who ever wins it I am sure will be proud to have it in their home. It will be drawn at a BBQ Lunch at Beth Bell's home on February 14th 1993. We will be attending the Ringwood Highland Games in March.

Some of our members are planning to be in Brisbane next August 1993 in time for the next Annual Meeting.

Book Review

So Far From Skye - By Judith O'Neill

"Allan, do you really want to go to this Colony?" It was the first time Morag had ever put into blunt words the question she'd been wanting to ask him for weeks, yet she almost guessed the answer before he gave it.

"No, of course I don't!" Her brothers voice was indignant. "But it's not a matter of whether I want to go. We've got no choice. We have to go. And so do the MacKinnons and the Mathesons and all of us here at Talisker!"

So begins Judith O'Neills delightful novel, suitable for teenage girls, but older folk would find it excellent reading. The book is based on the voyage of the Georgiana from Greenock to Geelong in 1852. The Captain and officers and some of the seaman bear their real names. The Skye families, although imaginary, are drawn from the details of hundreds of families who sailed from Scotland to Australia between 1852 and 1857 with the help of the Highland and Island Emigration Society.

The story of "the boy and the sheep" the woman living in the gravel pit, give a graphic detail of what life was like on the Isle of Skye, today we find them rather distressing, but yet they were real. Those of us who are descended from folk sent out by the H.I.E.S. would find this book an excellent means of teaching younger folk something of their heritage.

The author Judith O'Neill although living in Edinburgh, is an Australian and is descended from a MacDonald family send out on the "Allison" in 1852.

"So Far from Skye" is published by Penguin Books Australia R.R.P. \$19.95.

Beth Bell

International Clan Mac Nicol Conference

Brisbane • 27-29 August, 1993

The annual general meeting of the clan will be held at the Brisbane Parkroyal Hotel in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia on Saturday morning, 28th August 1993 following a meeting of the Trustees.

The Brisbane Parkroyal Hotel is situated close to the city centre and adjacent to the Botanical Gardens. Those arriving early on Friday or staying on beyond the week-end may be interested in a guided tour of the gardens which takes place at 11.00am and 1.00pm from Tuesday to Friday.

A number of clan activities have been planned for the week-end and these are set out below:

Date	Activity	Time
Friday 27	Arrival and Registration Optional St. Andrews Annual Dinner Dance at Attractive near city venue (arrange own transport)	7.30pm
Saturday 28	Meeting of Trustees followed by Clan Annual General Meeting Morning Tea Optional tour to Australian Woolshed including BBQ Lunch and sheep shearing exhibition (transport provided from Parkroyal Hotel)	9.00am 10.30am 11.30am
Sunday 29	Clan Dinner at Brisbane Parkroyal Hotel Kirking of the Clan (venue and time to be advised) picnic lunch in Botanical Gardens Clan history seminar at Brisbane Parkroyal Hotel (including afternoon tea) Home hospitality at various homes of Brisbane Members	7.30pm 12.30pm 2.30pm 7.00pm

If any visiting members wish to do any pre or post conference tours of any other parts of Australia, they may contact the Queensland Government Travel Centre (Ms Lyn Robinson), 196 Adelaide Street, Brisbane, phone 61 7 221 6111, fax 61 7 221 5320, who will be able to offer assistance.

Recommendations for further sight seeing would include:

- a visit to the Gold Coast (approximately 100k from Brisbane) to see some of the best beaches and holiday resorts in the World.
 - a visit to the Barrier Reef, one of the seven wonders of the World. The reef is located off the east coast of Queensland and is within one to two hours flying time from Brisbane.
 - for those who like rain forest walks, there are some excellent walks in the hinterland region situated within one hours car drive from Brisbane or the Gold Coast.
 - A luxury train trip up the East Coast of Queensland. (Early reservations essential as allocations are arranged six months in advance.)
- These are only a few of the many attractions available.

Costs

A registration fee of \$35 per person will be charged to cover various costs associated with the weekend activities. Accommodation can be offered at any one of three locations. However, the standard of accommodation varies as reflected in the accommodation charge as follows:
 Brisbane Parkroyal Hotel (3 1/2 star hotel - the official \$120 per single, double or twin room per night including a full buffet breakfast.
 Heritage Hotel (5 star hotel) \$186 per single, double or twin room per night. Breakfast is not included.
 Regal Motel (2 star motel) \$65 per room per night. Breakfast is not included.

Activities - Clan Dinner \$50 per person - visit to Australian woolshed \$39 per person
 - St. Andrews dinner dance \$50 per person - Sunday Picnic Lunch \$20 per person

NOTE: Prices are estimated at this stage and are subject to alteration.

For planning purposes, please complete the attached Notice of Intention and forward it to the Chairman of the Conference Committee, by not later than 31 March, 1993.

Mr R.G. Nicol, GPO Box 470, Brisbane Queensland, 4001 Australia
 Phone 61 7 835 5213 Fax 61 7 839 9766

International Clan Mac Nicol Conference • Brisbane - 27-29 August 1993

Notice of Intention to Attend

I/we advise that I/we wish to attend the above conference and request that a registration form be sent to me.

Name: _____ Address: _____

Phone No: _____

Number attending	_____	I/we will attend the following activities
Preferred Accommodation	_____	Clan Dinner
Parkroyal	_____	Australian Woolshed
Heritage	_____	St. Andrews Dinner
Regal	_____	Sunday Picnic Lunch
		Home Hospitality

If you wish to stay at your preferred accommodation for any nights in addition to the Friday, Saturday and Sunday of the Conference, please indicate below:

FOCUS

A VIEW
FROM
NORTH LOCHSAIMSIR
EACHAINN

Under normal circumstances I wouldn't dream of exposing a case history to the public gaze. However, I'm sure you will agree that the results of my recent surgical probing of an old friend are far from normal. My "discovery" deserves a wider audience than the British Medical Journal.

When councillor Macdonald first admitted to his wife that all was not well with his intestines she called me immediately. He doesn't trust "other doctors" and refused to place himself in their hands.

He has a horror of surgeries but agreed reluctantly to let himself be examined in his garage — with Dennis of Dennis Autos standing by. We eased him onto the workbench with the forklift and commenced exploration. With long sensitive fingers I probed hither and thither amongst the folds of wasted muscle. And sure enough I soon found it. An ulcer, we thought, gnawing hungrily at the neck of the duodenum. We had to tell him there was nothing for it but to go under the knife.

The operation had to be performed this very day in the short time between a transportation committee meeting and a sheep fank in Callanish. The theatre was cleared and less urgent cases sent home. The operation itself was straightforward and surprisingly simple, but I was momentarily shaken by his lack of faith when he turned to his wife at the last minute and said: "Remember he owes me some money."

(*Tiug e na mo chuimhne fear
Grabhair a bh'anas a Home Guard.
Bhithheadh e 'g eitheachd, 's am baile*

ga chluinntean; 'Nis a Mhairi, mur a till mise a nochd; tha fios agad fhein far 'eil an airgead.) (Parenthesis, Dear Ed, in case we give offence to Leslie).

I must confess the gory lump we removed had the team puzzled. But for the presence of a trainee vet, who was let in for the experience, I might not have recognised "Woolball".

"Woolball" is, of course, normally a problem in young lambs. There can only be one explanation: rough butchering in the byre forced upon us by the imminent closure of the slaughterhouse. I hope the appropriate authorities take note.

The patient "himself" has a passionate interest in science, and I'm certain he will not object to publication if he comes round.

MANY PEOPLE have written to the paper pleading for my thoughts on fox hunting, so I cannot avoid the issue for a minute longer.

As every schoolboy knows, we have no foxes on our island: we drove them off Lewis and onto Skye the way St Patrick drove the snakes out of Ireland. But still we have plenty women, which is a species that has much in common with the fox; and God gave us dominion over both. If you know (in

the Biblical sense) and have hunted one you know the other.

What I am trying to say is that I cannot object to the hunting. However, I draw the line at tearing to pieces. When in the full bloom of youth I hunted for all I was worth, but with never anything worse in mind than the intent to molest. Molestation of this nature was for many a huntsman an obsession that has lingered on long after the ageing process has diminished the ability to molest.

Sometimes we hunted in packs because many of the hunters, then as now, were scared of women and would fall back when the prey was run to ground, or into the cloakroom of Laxdale village hall.

As for the hunted, though they sometimes squealed they seldom organised protest marches far less go in for sabotage. Some, crazier than any fox, would lead the pack into Stornoway's Castle Grounds only to frustrate and lose the braves on horseback in the rhododendrons. Occasionally a flighty vixen would allow herself to be caught, and in no time at all a hairy brute with a shotgun would appear to terminate the hunter's career.

What we are talking about here, in our old-fashioned way, is what John Macleod of the "Herald" calls rumpy-

pumpy. I'm pleased to see that unlike many of his colleagues on the paper, but like many of his friends in the Church, he has some enthusiasm for The Hunt.

Personally I like this new and vivid Lowland expression, rumpy-pumpy, but, alas, it has caused some distress in the Highlands. Middle-aged women come home from communion demanding their share of this "rumpy-pumpy", thinking they are missing out on some modern mainland caper. Their husbands, although they know very well, pretend it is some kind of culinary invention in the pudding line, simply because they are well past the rumpy never mind the pumpy.

I'm afraid the Churnalist of the Year has a lot to answer for, and I've written to his old fellow (through the Deacon's Court). Mind you, what he does in the shower is his business.

WHEN I INTIMATED a few minutes ago that I was never scared of women I forgot a certain type of woman that frightens me so much I wilt at the very thought of her. That is the type with total recall. Compared with this lady Margaret Thatcher is a cuddly sucklepu.

I picked her up some time ago in her own car on the east side of Loch Lomond. We had perhaps an hour's

drive to Paisley if one could drive well and knew the road.

Now don't get me wrong; I'm very fond of the girl, and she is easy to look at, but her stories drive me insane. Once launched into a narrative she cannot be diverted by fair play or foul.

She kicked off on a promising yarn in Drymen about a fisherman who had spoken to her for one whole hour on the previous night. Somewhere in Balloch I took a wrong turning. She stopped to direct me for perhaps two minutes (no, I tell a lie, it was three minutes . . . stop, I'm wrong, it was one-and-a-half . . .). Do you see what I mean?

Two or three, what does it matter, she resumed her yarn as if my drive round the block had been a semi-colon. At the Erskine Bridge I thought I had her beat. There was a delay — a long delay — and a search for change, but no matter. I tried to create a diversion by asking about this rumpy-pumpy business but I might as well have addressed Dunbarton Rock. Somewhere over the Clyde — she must keep a finger on the mental page — she said: "So I said to him and he says to me . . ."

I arrived at Gleniffers Brae a broken man. If all Lowland women are like that they can keep their rumpy-pumpy.

The myths surrounding the "massacre" of Glencoe

This week marks the 300th anniversary of one of the most often told stories of Scottish history, that of the massacre of Glencoe. Who ordered the killings, and why? JEANNIE CAMPBELL tries to sort out the myths from the massacre . . .

Glencoe must be one of the best known stories in Scottish history. Everyone has heard how the Campbells went as guests to Glencoe then turned on their hosts the MacDonalds and murdered them.

Three hundred years later this is still the general opinion, although some blame is now put on King William and the Master of Stair who planned the massacre, and it is realised that the perpetrators were not Campbell clansmen but soldiers of Argyll's regiment of the British Army.

A closer look at the facts leads to several questions. As a massacre it was considered a failure, with only 38 killed out of a population of over 400. If William's purpose was to destroy this small clan, why did he not march in a regiment of English or Dutch

soldiers? He had plenty of experience in warfare and would know how these things were done.

Why have a small group of soldiers lodge in the glen for two weeks prior to the massacre? Why did the MacDonalds not fight back? Casualties among the soldiers were negligible.

Why did William order a massacre that did him no good politically and gave his opponents a useful propaganda weapon against him?

William was not stupid; he was a devious and clever politician. Look at the facts from a different angle and the soldiers become the bait in a very clever trap.

The choice of Argyll's regiment was deliberate. As Scots they were expendable, but they were still British soldiers. The regiment had Campbell

connections so enmity between the clans could be stressed.

The officer in charge, Robert Campbell of Glenlyon, was a perfect choice. Bankrupted by the MacDonald raiding of his lands he was forced to take up a career in the army at the age of 59. He was uncle to the wife of the MacDonald Chief's younger son so would be received as one of the family. A drinker and a gambler he was of little use to the army alive, but dead would make an excellent martyr.

The soldiers were Protestant and Whig, the MacDonalds Catholic and Jacobite. Put the two groups together in overcrowded living conditions in mid-winter and trouble should be guaranteed.

The date of the massacre is also significant. It was the third anniversary of the proclamation of William and Mary as King and Queen, and this could have provoked the MacDonalds to action.

The timing given in the orders is interesting. Glenlyon received a letter on the evening of the 12th ordering him to kill the MacDonalds. He was to begin at 5am precisely. He was told Major Duncanson and a stronger party

would be with him at that time or shortly after but he was not to wait, but to "fall on at five".

However, Major Duncanson and his men were ordered to be at the "several posts assigned them" by 7am. Thus Glenlyon and his men, outnumbered four to one by the inhabitants, had to fight alone for two hours.

The Chief, Maclain, was one of the first victims, so it would be the aim of every MacDonald to get Glenlyon. Add to this the MacDonalds' reputation as fighters and give them all the advantages of fighting in the dark on their home ground and you have the perfect conditions for a massacre — of the soldiers.

Consider what the story might have been if all had gone according to plan.

Fort William is overcrowded so two companies of soldiers are sent to lodge in Glencoe. Two weeks later there is trouble and fighting breaks out. The soldiers are massacred by their hosts but many of the MacDonalds are killed also. Major Duncanson arrives two hours later and kills more: the remaining murderers flee from the glen but are trapped by soldiers blocking the exits and killed. Public opinion is outraged

at this murder of innocent British soldiers by Highland barbarians, and King William has the excuse and the backing he needs. The following spring and summer would have seen the complete destruction of the Highlands and the end of the Jacobite threat.

But events did not go according to plan. Surprisingly, the two groups got on well together, with sporting activities during the day and ceilidhs and card games in the evenings. When ordered to kill their hosts the soldiers had little enthusiasm for the task, and many MacDonalds were warned.

The Chief's son John seemed to have some suspicion of what was planned, and realising their only chance of survival was to get away he led his people out of the glen — not by the regular routes, all of which were blocked by soldiers, but by a perilous way to the safety of Appin, a route thought to be impassable in winter.

The MacDonalds could not now be blamed for starting the massacre, so another explanation had to be found. The rather lame excuse of Maclain having been late in swearing allegiance was used, but King William also managed to put the blame on the

Campbells where it has remained to this day.

John Campbell, Earl of Breadalbane, was arrested and came near to losing his life for his part in the affair, but after some months' imprisonment he was released on the King's orders. In 1715 a regiment of Breadalbane men fought at Sheriffmuir on the Jacobite side although the Earl, then aged 80, was not able to lead them in person. Only illness saved him from being arrested again. He died soon after.

Robert Campbell of Glenlyon died in Bruges in 1696, still a pauper and a debtor. His son John led 500 Breadalbane men at the battle of Sheriffmuir where they fought alongside the MacDonalds. John's son Archie led the Glenlyon men in the Jacobite army in 1745.

Glenlyon's order from Major Duncanson was not placed with the regimental papers but was kept in the Glenlyon family and later the Breadalbane family, as evidence that he had done no more than obey orders.

If events had gone as planned the MacDonalds would have gone down in history as the clans who massacred their guests.

SHERIFF ALEXANDER NICOLSON

Sheena Nicolson of Edinburgh kindly allowed us to reproduce this photograph of the remarkable Sheriff Alexander Nicolson, one of Skye's most celebrated sons. In the book "History of Skye", written by his namesake Alexander Nicolson, MA, there was a detailed biography of the talented man. We have taken the liberty of "lifting" this section from "History of Skye".



Alexander Nicolson was the son of Malcolm Nicolson, who was proprietor of the small estate of Husabost, in the parish of Duirinish. Here the future sheriff was born in the year 1827. He was educated privately, and at an early age proceeded to Edinburgh University, where he gained high honours both in literature and philosophy. During the illness of Sir William Hamilton he was appointed deputy to that renowned philosopher, and he afterwards became assistant to Professor MacDougall. Sir Archibald Geikie, who was one of his students in 1856, makes mention of the impression made on him by the "big-boned Celt with a look of strength and kindness in his large and strongly-marked features."

At this time he intended to qualify for the ministry. With that end in view, he attended classes in the Faculty of Divinity, only to discover that he could not conscientiously pursue his studies; for, in his own words, "the officer's uniform in that excellent body is painfully tight."

Thereupon he turned his attention to journalism, writing voluminously for several periodicals in an easy, graceful style.

On his father's death he decided to enter the legal profession, and was "called to the bar" in 1860. Owing, however, to that erraticism which has so often proved the undoing of some of the most brilliant members of his race, the great expectations entertained of him came to nothing; and, as Geikie says, "this most gifted and genial man become the most unsuccessful of the advocates who paced the floor of Parliament House."

In 1865 He was one of the commissioners appointed by the government to inquire into the state of education in the

Highlands, and he gave of his abilities and his energies with zeal to that endeavour. Indeed, it was work of this nature, necessitating his attention only for a time, that best suited his genius, which was meant to sparkle, but not to emit a continuous flare.

In Edinburgh he was a member of several exclusive clubs, notably the "X" and the "Red Lion", at which his company was much sought, because of his affability, his brilliance, and his rare wit. When Sir William Thomson, afterwards the great Lord Kelvin, in his presidential address to the British Association in 1871, propounded the theory that life came to earth through the broken fragments of meteorites, Nicolson delighted the members that evening at the Red Lion dinner by singing his clever skit on the "British Ass", one verse of which is quoted:

"To Grecian sages charming
Rang the music of the spheres;
But voices more alarming
Salute our longer ears.
By science bold, we now are told
How life did come to pass.
From world to world the seeds
were hurled,
Whence sprang the British Ass."

Long-delayed preferment at length came the way of the briefless barrister, when, in 1872, he was appointed Sheriff of Kirkcudbrightshire; but he was not happy there, for he missed the congenial life of the capital. When his friend and admirer, Professor Blackie, succeeded in founding the Chair of Celtic in Edinburgh, it was confidently expected that Nicolson would become its first occupant. But, to the regret of many, he declined the proffered post.

In 1881 he published his unique compilation of Gaelic proverbs, a work that, for fulness of material and evidence of scholarship, will remain a monument to his name so long as the language of the Gaelic is spoken. When the land troubles in the Highlands had at last commanded the attention of the government, Sheriff Nicolson was nominated as one of the Commissioners; and we can trace his work in several portions of the epoch-making report produced by that august body.

In 1885 he was transferred from the Stewartry to Greenock; but there also he evinced no enthusiasm for his work; and, to the disappointment of all, relinquished his profession and retired to Edinburgh in 1889. His retirement, however, failed to bring him happiness. He suffered from periodic fits of depression, and his end came suddenly on the 20th of January, 1893. Sir James Crichton-Browne, in referring to his death, says of him: "He was a big man with a big heart, which was ever in the Highlands, or more particularly in the Hebrides, the glories of which he celebrated in a few exquisite lyrics." His best efforts were in praise of his native isle, all of them being characterised by a healthy patriotism and a beautiful sentiment blended with a noble reverence. Thus, in his paean on the Isle of Skye, he writes:

"Many a poor, black cottage is
there
Grimy with peat smoke;
Sending forth in the quiet
evening air
Purest of incense.
Forth from their darkness I've
seen
Coming pure linen;
And like the linen their souls
were clean
Of them that wore it."

His martial song, "Agus Ho Mhórag", extolling the prowess of Highland soldiers on the field of battle, shows his great power of fitting words to a difficult metrical scheme:

"Many were their deeds of arms
'Gainst the swarms of Hyder
Ali.
Leagured close in Mangalore
Tippo and his hordes they
baffled."

The same wonderful command of language is shown in his masterly translation of that greatest of sea-epics, "Birlinn Chlann Raoghnuill", by Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair:

"Drive the mountain-monsters
onward.
Ho ro hùg a bhia
Mounding grey-backed swirling
eddies.
Ho ro hùg bhì:
Send the surge in sparkles
skywards.
Ho ro hùg bhì:
Hoary-headed seas upswelling,
Ho ro hùg bhì:

His works are scattered throughout various publications. The fascinating articles on the Coolins he so much loved, appear in "Good words". Two of his poems, together with a brief memoir, are given in Edward's "Modern Scottish Poets"; and the Rev WC Smith, DD, published several of his works and a sketch of his life in the year 1893.

Royal portrait of a prince among crofters

JASON ALLARDYCE reports from Berneray

It wasn't exactly what the media circus had flown up for. Evidently Prince Charles did not have a wee "Highland Fling" in Berneray with "TV golden girl" and close friend Selina Scott.

And since he only sang at a ceilidh to other people, and not to potatoes, they could hardly lay claim to conclusive proof that the future monarch of Britain had flipped. "There's nothin' in it for 'The Sun'," concluded one bored reporter, consoling herself in a hotel bar.

The truth was that his five-day visit to Berneray, "living the life of a crofter", did Charlie's public profile a lot of good. As 23 representatives of the media in Benbecula last Thursday watched a special screening of the documentary made during his stay, it became clear that he had succeeded to some extent in promoting the language and culture of the Gael.

Taking a moment to speak to presenter and executive producer Selina Scott, in between creel fishing and howking potatoes, the Lord of the Isles does drop the odd clanger — such as suggesting it might be a good idea to somehow make the abandoned blackhouses on the island habitable by modern standards. "They have got so

much character and charm," he insists.

He also believes a causeway link with North Uist would deny Berneray its special island quality which is "obviously something of great value to people who may be experiencing a very much more stressed existence". It is, he adds, something future generations might come to regret. One islander later pointed out that the prince did not have to live there.

But those involved in the fight to save living crofting communities and Gaelic traditions will take some comfort from much of what the future monarch has to say — those, that is, who won't be keeping the television switched off on Sunday night or who are not still making their way back from church when the programme is shown on the ITV network.

Prince Charles first visited Berneray in 1987 to find out about "the whole way of life; the croft, its existence and what part-time farming actually involves". He was convinced by Selina Scott to return to the island at the end of last year to promote the Gaelic language and culture following the Government's decision to spend an extra £9.5 million annually on Gaelic television.

In Grampian's 50-minute documentary "A Prince Among Islanders" Prince Charles says: "It (crofting) is a way of life. What I sometimes object to is

the idea that agriculture is considered as an industry when, in fact, it is far more complex and profound than that.

"Farming has a cultural, a social significance which is way beyond the ordinary concept of an industry. The people, like those who live here, who live in the remoter areas of this country, are to all intents and purposes the backbone of this country. They are people who have real values and a care for the land and for their communities which is essential if we are going to remain a civilised nation."

He considers Gaelic television funding "a wonderful idea", adding: "Obviously there are many people who ask what the relevance is of a language like Gaelic. It is only spoken by about 85,000 people on the last count. What is its relevance to modern contemporary existence? Language gives people a sense of belonging. We all need a sense of belonging, a sense of pride and a feeling of roots."

A sense of pride, it quickly became clear, was not a quality to be found in some of the attendant media gathering. After the screening Grampian laid on a press "bash" which later degenerated into literally just that. Some of the more obstreperous in the bunch took part in a food fight which eventually led to a minor scrap between two journalists who had to be removed from the room.

During his own much more civilised stay HRH even sat through a Gaelic service on the island in the pew of his hosts Donald Alick "Splash" MacKillop and wife Gloria. The only worshipper to leave the church carrying an umbrella in case he got his hair wet, Charlie later compares the sound of the Gaelic psalms to that of the bagpipe. Selina described the atmosphere in the "bare little church" as "electric" and said the prince had later told her it was "one of the most moving experiences of his life".

One of the funniest moments is when, after some cloutie dumpling and a few drams at a house ceilidh on the island, the future monarch performs a party piece he said his granny had taught him: a sanitised version of "Aunty Mary had a Canary".

During the programme Charles — sporting cap, waxed jacket, rubber gloves and wellies — seems to enjoy mucking in with the rest, on one memorable occasion adeptly grabbing a sheep by the buttocks and horns to drag it through the dip. At a makeshift



Royal helper . . . Charles assists with dipping the sheep on Berneray

press conference in Berneray Community Hall the day after the screening, "Splash" MacKillop told 12 reporters that "without a shadow of a doubt" Charles could cut the mustard as a crofter if he ever chose to take it up on a full-time basis.

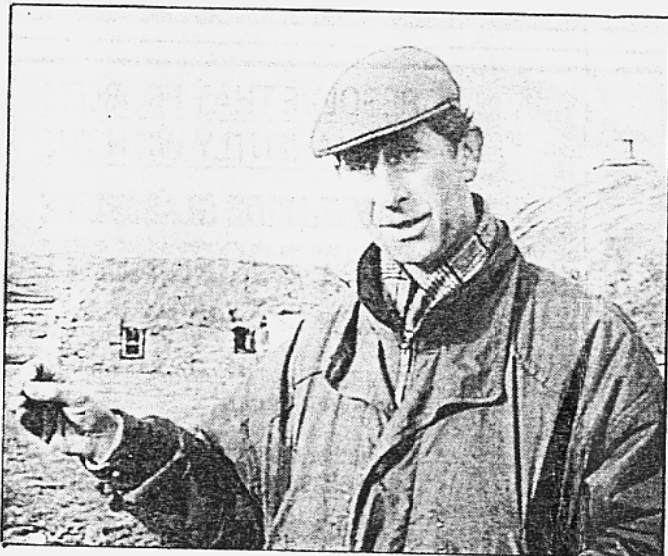
Then, undoubtedly for the first time ever, a national press conference was interrupted because one of the interviewees wanted to speak to the postman who turned up at the hall while it was going on. When he returned some sections of the eager press pack made clear the angle they each wanted to take: "Did Prince Charles phone home a lot?" . . . "Did he do anything stupid?" . . . "Are you going to cash in on the fact that Prince Charles slept here for B&B?" . . .

and, "Selina, are you and Prince Charles on the same wavelength?"

"Splash" MacKillop said he had taken exception to the coverage by certain newspapers of Prince Charles' earlier visit to the island in 1987 when he was portrayed as "The Prince of Potatoes". This time around it seems little has changed. Last Sunday's "News of the World" screamed: "Great Scott! Charles Fiddles With Selina" (the story vies for space with a picture of nude Vida, 24, clutching a snooker cue to her bosom). Mean-

while, the "Daily Record" has christened Charles "Prince of Pails" — referring to the lifting of the potatoes.

Bidding farewell to the media "Splash" MacKillop probably summed up the views of many islanders, who had greatly enjoyed Charlie's visit and a special screening of the documentary in the community hall the previous night but were less impressed with the press pack. "I thank all of you very much for coming," he said, "and I thank you very much for going."



Crofting is a way of life, Prince Charles announced to the cameras

From West Highland Free Press

The mystery of the great Scottish sea serpent

With the Nessie-hunting season now upon us, and a panel of scientists set to launch a three-week sonar survey of Loch Ness, TOM BRYAN charts some of the "sea serpent" sightings recorded over the past couple of centuries.

Despite the attention given to Loch Ness, most Scottish sightings of unusual creatures have occurred on the high seas. Many reputable witnesses have risked ridicule to report what they have seen. "Sea Serpent" sightings have even been sworn under affidavit in Scottish courts.

Some of these sightings were of rare creatures known to science: the leatherback turtle, the basking shark, the oarfish, the giant squid. There have been a number of hoaxes. But there are a few accounts which seem authentic. Have some Scots actually seen the great serpent of myth and legend?

Here are some accounts which are not easily dismissed.

1808 The Reverend Donald MacLean was rowing along the coast of Coll one fine day when he was startled by a beast 70-80 feet long. He was no less startled than the crews of several fishing boats which also glimpsed the creature in deep water off Canna.

1872 On a clear day on 20th August, Reverend John Macrae and his friend, Vicar David Twopenny, and three other witnesses saw a

many-humped creature in the Sound of Sleat. The animal was over 80ft in length and Mr MacRae, who had knowledge of wildlife in the area, said it had "no resemblance to any known cetacean, shark, or fish of any kind".

1873 Lady Florence Gower and her companion Mrs Coke and several other persons saw a huge creature of an unknown kind in the sea east of Dunrobin. The animal was estimated to be 40-50ft long.

1873 A crowd of over 120 people on a boat near Belhaven Bay in the Firth of Forth watched an undulating creature over 100ft long cavorting in the water. They were able to watch the animal for over 20 minutes.

1882 On 31st May, the captain, passengers and crew of the German steamer 'Katie' came upon a writhing creature over 150ft long off the Butt of Lewis.

1887 Professor Heddle of Saint Andrews and the eminent ornithologist JA Harvie Brown sighted an unusual beast 60-65ft long, on the morning of 30th

July, near the famous whirlpool of Corrivrechan.

1893 On a clear summer afternoon, Dr Farquhar Matheson and others sighted an animal with a tall giraffe-like neck. They compared it to a giant eel.

1895 Off the Isle of Bernera, a 60ft serpent was seen in the shallows by Angus MacDonald of Tobson and an even longer creature was seen the following month by the local Free Church minister.

1904 Young Sandy Campbell and two older men were hauling in their nets off Skye when the boy was frightened out of his wits by an enormous neck emerging from the waves not far from the boat. The rest of a huge creature was seen below the surface. The men raced their boat to shore and claimed that the creature left a wake as large as that made by a huge steamer.

1910 In Meil Bay, Orkney, WJ Hutchison had a view lasting about five minutes of a sea serpent whose neck extended 18ft above the water's surface. Hutchison said the creature was the colour of kelp and had a head resembling a horse's or camel's.

1917 Ronald and Harry MacDonald watched a high-necked creature moving through the mouth of Loch Brittle at a speed of five knots.

1919 At Brims, Tor Ness, Orkney, J Mackintosh Bell, a Scottish lawyer, saw a strange marine animal near Bell's lobster creels. It had a neck 5-6ft long, a head similar to a dog's and was about 20ft long. The same animal was seen several times that summer by lobster fishermen in the area.

1931 On 28th July, near Arran, Dr John Paton was surprised when what he supposed was a large overturned boat turned out to be an enormous sea creature.

1953 In August, in the Firth of Clyde, Ayrshire fishermen witnessed an unusual sea creature over 30ft long.

1964 Sound of Jura. In early June, Neil and Lily MacInnes reported a 20-minute sighting of a smooth grey animal about 25ft long, with a cow-like head, swimming at a speed of six miles per hour.

MANY SIGHTINGS of unusual creatures have turned out to be cases of mistaken identity. There are many rare but identified sea creatures in Scottish waters which might confuse a witness, especially in rough seas or poor lighting. Basking sharks are common on the west coast.

Blue and killer whales are not uncommon. Huge squid are sometimes seen and may reach greater lengths than the 25-footer washed up in Yell, Shetland, in 1949. Eels, oarfish, leatherback turtles, ocean sunfish, seals and otters and long strands of seaweed

have also no doubt contributed to "sea serpent" sightings.

There have also been a shameful number of hoaxes which usually consist of lurid and horrifying accounts of brave crews overcoming fabulous monsters. A letter to the 'Glasgow Evening News' on 28th April, 1877, described the capture of a huge creature at Oban by the residents of the Caledonian Hotel. The whole account was fabricated by some drunken residents of one of the seaside hotels there. The green-haired beast which engaged the good ship 'Bertie' off Fetlar in Shetland competes with the 300-footer which gave some Peterhead fishermen such fun in 1893. Not to be outdone, the Fraserburgh trawler 'Glengrant' in 1903 managed the shotgun slaying of a curly-haired creature which conveniently disappeared.

Hoaxes are anything but mysterious but one of Scotland's great "Sea Serpent" mysteries has never been adequately explained.

In the autumn of 1808, a huge sea beast was washed up in Stronsay, Orkney. It was measured at 56ft in length, having a long thin neck of 15ft, several pairs of fins or "legs" and a long mane. Its discovery sparked off a long enquiry involving many leading scientists, writers and even poets of the day.

Many drawings were made of the remains of the creature and the vertebrae were preserved for future study. A study of those vertebrae in 1933 concluded that they were those of a basking shark whose decayed re-

mains had caused the confusion about the length and shape of the creature. In truth, nobody can really prove what those honest Orkney fishermen measured and described all those years ago since the average size of basking sharks is considerably less than 56ft.

Yet despite all these seemingly reliable accounts over the years, critics point out that there has never been any reliable scientific evidence of the existence of unknown sea creatures in the form of skulls, skeletons, teeth or even scales. However, we have had one near-miss.

In 1851, Mrs MacIver of Scourie and several local fishermen saw a huge serpent in the Bay of Griess near Scourie. It was shot and nearly captured and several of the creatures curious green scallop-sized scales came into Mrs MacIver's possession. She passed these on to a physician and scientist, Mr DW Russell. Dr Russell hoped to convince the London establishment that he had finally obtained tangible evidence of unknown sea creatures. However, when his great moment came to produce the evidence, he could not find the scales anywhere and concluded that they had disappeared during the long and complicated flitting down to London.

Perhaps some dusty pawnshop in Soho holds the clue to that most elusive mystery of all — the identity of the elusive great serpent of the sea, one which Scottish ministers, doctors and fishermen have sworn exists despite threats of ridicule and professional censure.

Below is an extract from Alexander Nicolson's "History of Skye" (published in 1930). It tells of the bloody battle that took place on the Snizort River in 1528 between the MacDonalDs of Sleat and the MacLeods of Dunvegan. The battle appears to have been fought on an around St Columba's Isle, the site of MacNeacail's Aisle.

Donald Grumach, son of Donald Gallach, and of Agnes, widow of Torquil MacLeod of Lewis, succeeded to the chiefship of the MacDonalDs of Sleat about 1518. For twenty long years the fortunes of his clan had been at a very low ebb; and it was a lucky stroke of fate that had raised a man of such ability, resource, and determination as Donald Grumach to the headship of the clan. In order to strengthen his position, he entered into a bond of manrent with Campbell of Cawdor, brother of the Earl of Argyle; and this alliance obliged him to accompany the vacillating Scottish lords in their abortive incursion into England in 1523.

It was shortly before that time that a transaction was effected which was to invoke the bitterest animosity between the MacDonalDs and the MacLeods; and to involve these rival clans in internecine strife for many a year. This was all caused by a grant made during the regency of the Earl of Angus, who had married the queen mother to Alexander of Dunvegan, of the lands of North Uist, and of Sleat - possessions which the MacDonalDs considered as essentially their own; and the young chief of Clann Uisdean was not the man to allow such an action to go unchallenged.

He accordingly mobilised a vast army in Skye, and in Uist, and aided by a considerable force of the MacLeods of Lewis under John MacLeod, whom he afterwards help to become chief of Siol Torquil, a descent was made on MacLeod's lands, the first objective being the expulsion of that clan, and all their kin, from the district of Trotamish. The allies landed on the northern shores of peninsula; and they proceeded systematically to drive the MacLeods out of the whole region. Terrible atrocities were committed. No quarter was given; and the panic stricken inhabitants, leaving all their effect behind them, were in headlong flight. After having undergone intense suffering, the main body of the fugitives at the length arrived at Skaebost. There they sent forward the survivors of their women and children, closed their ranks and determined to arrest the pursuit at the ford of the river. Maddened by the cruelties they had endured, they swore an oath that each would exact the uttermost vengeance on the MacDonalDs; and having chosen the most favourable position, they wrought terrible execution on their foes as the latter were endeavouring to cross the flooded river. But by sheer pressure of numbers, the stubborn gallantry of the MacLeods was ultimately overcome, and the much-reduced band was once more in full flight for the east. So great was the carnage that it is said the scene of the fight was in consequence called "Achadh na fala," or the "Field of Blood", and, as the heads of the slain combatants were carried down the river, they accumulated in a deep pool near the estuary since known as "Coire nan Ceann", or the "Cauldron of Heads".

The MacDonalDs then decided to discontinue the pursuit; and they proceeded to plunder the lands of the MacLeods. This was carried out on a vast scale, and, after several days of foraging, an enormous booty came into their possession. on the way home the lonely echoes of the Coolins were stirred into unwonted activity by the lowing of herds and the lusty shouts of exultant warriors making for Dun-Sgathaich.