

## A letter from Neil McNeill 13/05/2017

On what was a perfect day weather wise I set off to Loch Caolisport and Kilberry which is reached by travelling south on the main road to Tarbert at the head of the Kintyre Peninsula, turning off some two miles from Ardrishaig to the right at Inverneill. It is then a single track road for the rest of the journey. The first point of note and the first of the photos is Auchbrad and is what is said to be the highest standing single span bridge in Argyll crossing the Inverneill burn and built in 1847. It is some 45 feet above the burn itself.



The next photo at the top of a large climb is Loch Arail and this was an active lead mining area until 1790-ish.

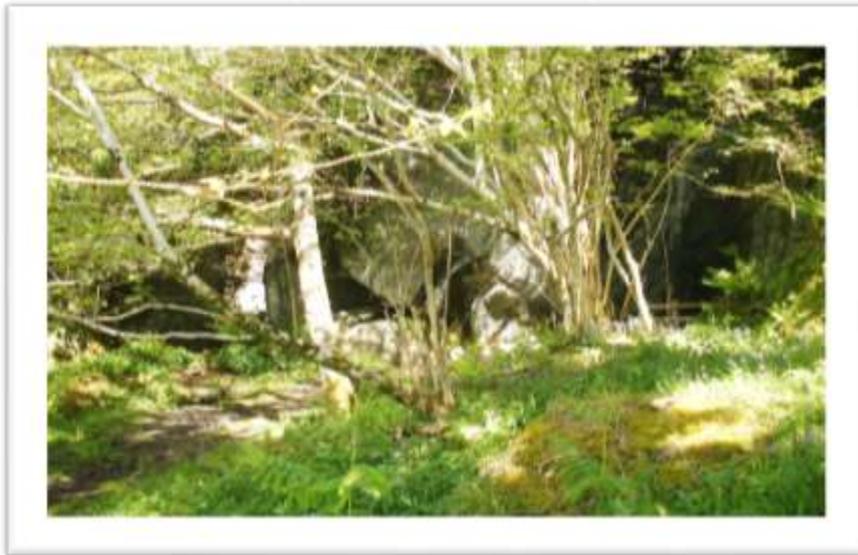


Although I could not find this on a prominent ridge above Achahoish lies the extensive remains of Caisteal an Tor the Castle of the Tower, said to have been at one time the seat of King Conal of Dalriada, friend and kinsman of Saint Columba. It is said Columba came in 563AD seeking royal assent to the founding of his great monastery on the Isle of Iona. In the tiny parish church of Achahoish can be seen an ancient stone font retrieved from St Columba's cave near Ellary.

The famous cave lies about a mile further south along the western shores of Loch Caolisport where by the road side at the head of a tiny sheltered bay stands the ruins of a thirteenth century chapel.



On walking past this and then up a tiny path leads to a strangely convoluted cliff face in which can be seen the gaping mouths of two caves of these the larger is said to have be Columba's holy shrine.



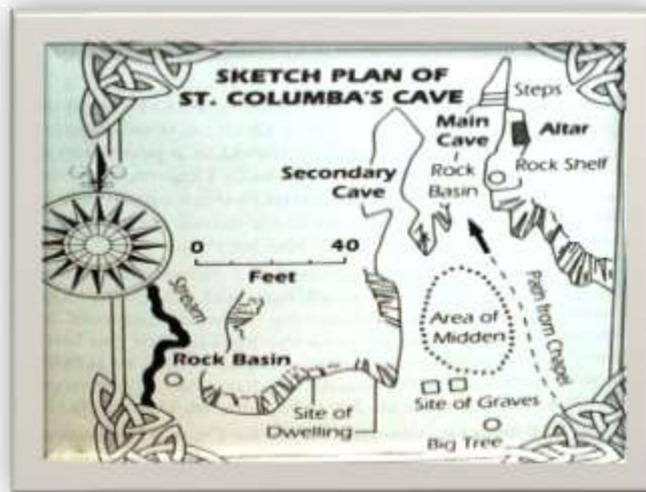
Picture of entrance to both caves taken 12-05-2017

The interior containing a simple stone-built altar above which is carved a clear distinguishable eleventh century cross.





To the right of the altar can be seen a large bowl-shaped hollow, presumably a ritual water-stoup.



From there and retracing my steps back on what is a very narrow one way road with no passing bays to speak of until back on the main single lane road around Loch Caolisport on what is some of the most beautiful scenery helped by a perfect day I reached my next objective which was the old McNeill farm of Ormsary. Lauchlan McNeill (list of rebels in Argyll, 1685-1692)



This is today a very impressive estate farm and much to my surprise right out on the road side is a burial ground mainly for the family of Campbells but I did find two very old McNeill stones. Near the entrance to farm.



Burial ground on Ormsary farm. Three McNeill graves stones that I could find



On leaving this beautifully blue bell covered resting place I carried on to my main objective and that was to see the home of the Crear and Dumamucklach early McNeills. It is well known that back in 1700 Donald McNeill exchanged with the Campbells these two properties for the Isle of Colonsay. We are fortunate to have as one of our own Australian clan member in Duncan McNeill of Darwin, a direct descendant of this family. This family can be traced back as early as 1672 and one latter descendant member of this family was the very well decorated Major General Sir John Carstairs McNeill VC, GCVO, KCB, KCMS (1831-1904) who on reaching retirement became the equerry to Queen Victoria. One of his brothers Duncan McNeill was Lord Colonsay with the line eventually emigrating to Hawkes Bay in New Zealand of which Duncan of Darwin descends from.



This photo shows the modern day Crear farm stead. The building to the left may be slightly older. It is in the correct location on my early Langland map but I was unable to visit to see if there were any signs of earlier buildings.



However this old building does interest me and is on the northern side of the road from Crear and with three fire places indicates to me a more affluent family occupied it.



I indeed had lady luck on my side as I turned for home after visting the Kilberry stones seeing two abandoned old homes such as this one. What stood out to me was the three fire places as in the early days of the period we have been talking about there was a Hearth Tax (1694) and for a family to have three this would say to me that they held some status. On checking on my arrival back home using my very old farm location map I now strongly believe this to be in fact the early home of the Drumamucklach McNeill's.