

Lochbroom and Coigach MacAulays

We cannot access any oral History of the Lochbroom MacAulays and so are dependant on research from documents recording other Clans and events of that time.

Particularly entwined with the MacAulay Saga is that of Clan MacKenzie of Kintail.

Lochbroom MacAulays would appear to be a Branch of Ardincaple MacAulays as the Island MacAulays were not structured as a Clan at that time, emerging much later.

There are claims that the Lewis MacAulays are of Norse origin based on Mac prefixing Olaf, or Olaf, Olay etc. and by a similar line of deduction claims are made that MacAulays of Lochbroom and Coigach are also Norse because of the proximity of Ullapool a Norse word meaning Olave's steading.

Several factors mitigate against such a conclusion:

MacAulays of Lochbroom and Coigach had a land grant from King Alexander II, for faithful service to the King long before Lewis folklore starts the Lewis MacAulays about 1450 with Dugald ancestor of John Roy MacAulay.

Lochbroom and Coigach MacAulays were in the thick of the battle against King Haco the Norse King supporting Alexander III at the Battle of Largs, while the population of the Islands supported the Norse King. The district known as North Argyle consisted chiefly of the possessions of the ancient monastery of Appercrossan, or Applecross, founded by Saint Maelrubha in 671. South Argyle extended from Loch Carron to the Firth of Clyde. The Composite, that is North and South Argyle were subjugated by Ferquhard in 1222 in a campaign known as the conquest of Argyll.

In 1267 William Earl of Ross attempted to seize "The Castle of Ellandonan". His claim was refused by Kenneth MacKenzie of Kintail, who was joined by the MacIvers, MacAulays, MacBeolans and Clan Tarlich, the ancient Inhabitants of Kintail, in refusing to surrender, the Earl of Ross attacked the Kintail men and was defeated and driven back with great slaughter. Especially mentioned in the MacKenzie Saga were the brave MacAulays of Lochbroom.

On the 2nd October 1262 King Haco of Norway landed with a large force on the coast of Ayrshire where he was met by a gallant force of fifteen hundred Knights, splendidly mounted, many of them in full armour, accompanied by a numerous army of foot carrying spears, bows and arrows and other weapons of war. The whole force led by the King Alexander III in person. In this memorable engagement we are told that the Scots commenced the attack. The right wing was composed of the Argyle, Lennox, Athole and Galloway men, who led the way with a furious onslaught which forced the Norse left-wing to give ground and swing to their centre where Alexander was in close combat with King Haco. The Norse King was in danger of being killed or captured so he broke off the combat and retreated and so began the rout of his army. They lost somewhere about twenty thousand on the field and many on the longships which floundered in the coming storm.

There can be no doubt that the Lochbroom and Coigach MacAulays were in the thick of the battle as were the Ardencaple MacAulays who had an added desire for revenge on the Norse raiders who had savagely attacked their Clan Lands.

After the battle Alexander III of Scotland and Magnus IV of Norway met, in consequence of which an entirely new organisation was introduced into the Hebrides. Then inhabited by a mixed race composed of surviving natives and of the descendants of successive immigrant colonists of Norwegians and Danes who had settled in the country. Duncan MacAulay was a great friend and ally of Murchadh Dubh na h'uaigh or Black Murdoch of the Caves from his way of life. Murdoch was very young when his father was executed at Inverness, by the Earl of Ross. Duncan MacAulay who then owned the district of Lochbroom, had charge of Ellandonnan Castle. The Earl of Ross was determined to execute Murdoch as he had done his father, and MacAulay, becoming apprehensive as to his safety, sent him, then quite young, accompanied by his own son to the protection of a MacKenzie relative, MacDougall of Lorn. While there the Earl of Ross succeeded in capturing young MacAulay and in revenge for his father's gallant defence of Ellandonnan during Kenneth MacKenzies's absence, and more recently in thwarting his futile attempts to take the stronghold, he put young MacAulay to death.

Young Murdoch MacKenzie who bravely escaped with his life, left Lorn and sought the protection of his Uncle, MacLeod of Lewis. The murderer of young MacAulay was Leod MacGilleandrais, a dependor of the Earl of Ross. He possessed himself of MacAulays lands, Lochbroom and Coigach, whereby that family ended. After a period of silence, when his enemies thought he had perished, Murdoch of the Caves returned with two great MacLeod Galleys and a sufficiently large force to trick Leod and put him to flight.

MacGilleanders and his party were overtaken at a place called to this day "Featha Leoid" or Leod's Bog where they were all slain, except Leod's son Paul who was taken prisoner but later released upon plighting his faith that he would never again trouble MacKenzie or resent against him his father's death.

Black Murdoch of the Caves married the daughter of his loyal friend and guardian Duncan MacAulay, bringing into his possession Lochbroom, while he disposed of Coigach to his cousin MacLeod "for his notable assistance in his distress" which lands they both retained but could obtain no charter from the Earls of Ross pretending that they fell to themselves in default to male heirs, the other in retaining possession, in right of his wife as heir of line.

Through Duncan MacAulay's daughter her son succeeded to the lands of Lochbroom and Coigach, granted to MacAulay's predecessor by Alexander II. The name MacAulay disappeared by absorption into the new line, but far as I have been told still remain. There can be no doubt that the MacAulays of Lochbroom and Coigach, by their staunch defence of Ellandonnan Castle against the Earl of Ross and by their subsequent support of Robert Bruce substantially influenced the course of Scottish History.