Gaelic and Nordic names around Loch Hourn

List of toponyms etc. from around Kinloch Hourn and Barrisdale, as pronounced on our tape by **Peter MacRae** of Invergarry, formerly of Kinloch Hourn. Recorded in September 1995; listed with introduction, translations and comments by **Ruurd & Mieke Groot**; May 1999

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Introduction, translations and commentary

with additions and suggestions from Peter MacRae and his late brother Roddy MacRae – natives of the area, and from Dr Robert F. Smith – who has known the area and the MacRae family for almost 40 years.

❧ We dedicate this booklet to the memory of Roddy MacRae, his kindness and wit ❧

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1 Introduction

For every year from 1991, we – Ruurd and Mieke Groot – have put up our base camp in Kinloch Hourn. Most years we stayed for some six weeks, to hike from our base camp over the surrounding hills and glens — or to go and visit the friends we acquired in the area over the years... Sometimes we put up a wee backpacking tent away from Kinloch Hourn, enabling us to cover a wider area; thus it is that Barrisdale (with double *r*, cf. *Barrisdale* in chapter 5) is another place we have learned to love.

One of the things we like is 'to know where we are', i.e. to keep track of the names of places, burns etc. we come by on our way. These names or *toponyms* were recorded in our diaries and incorporated in the captions by our photo prints. But knowing how to write a name is not enough; we think one also has to know how it should be pronounced – and do it right. And we like to know what it means or used to mean, if that is possible at all.

Over the years, we built up a collection of names and their approximate pronunciation and meaning. Meeting first Roddy and then Peter MacRae, we discovered that our new friends were great sources of knowledge about local toponyms. Both were native speakers of Gaelic and had grown up in Kinloch Hourn on what is now known as the Barrisdale farm. Peter worked that farm for many years with their elder brother Eoin (1903 - 1982); he has conveyed the experiences of their youth, and of his adult life there, to a wider audience with the help of the Scots Magazine (*Kinloch Hourn Remembered*, by Alistair Scott; October 1993).

Meanwhile, Roddy was occupied as stalker and keeper along the shores of the original, now inflated Loch Quoich, on the original, now so fragmented Glen Quoich estate – a life rudely interrupted by his being captured by the enemy in the North African campaign and being held as a prisoner of war in Italy... Of course, when we first met them, Roddy and Peter had moved in retirement to Invergarry long ago.

Peter turned out to be more of a scholar, for he had studied publications on the subject of toponyms, and had a knack for developing his own theories. His brother Roddy, on the other hand, was a witty 'practical expert', at crucial moments putting our wild theorising squarely in the perspective of actual usage and living speech.

In 1995 we made a tape recording of Peter reciting the names from a list we had prepared. The recording was made on a wee journalist's tape recorder, which explains the somewhat tinny sound quality of the recording accompanying our list. This is the more regrettable, as Peter's dramatic voice adds an awe-inspiring echo of history to the words he pronounces. Still, much of that echo remains audible on our copies. Our son Jur, who made the copies at the time, was so impressed with the sound of the recited names, that he used to declaim them aloud when going up or down the stairs.

In addition to the tape copies we made copies of our original list, with for every name an improved note on the probable or possible meaning: partly to please our friends and acquaintances, but also to elicit reactions from

anybody who'd care to give them. Meanwhile we had met the Smiths, who had known the area and the MacRae family since the early sixties. They shared our interest in the area and its history, and Dr Smith has been kind enough to help us with suggestions and additions. With all the help from him and of course Peter and Roddy MacRae, and in some cases from others – local or otherwise, we finally could make this revised third version (even 3.1, in the modern parlance) of our list with comments.

Although the two of us were only given a few years in which to know Roddy MacRae, and even then only during the summer months, it was quite enough to grow fond of him. His death, earlier this year 1999, was a very sad occurrence.

2 Do names mean anything at all?

When looking for meaning in names, we should always be aware that the meaning may have been irretrievably lost in time. Certainly most users of a name aren't conscious of any meaning, most of the time. What does Glasgow mean? Or London? How many people know that, let alone even think of it when using such names? It may appear from our list and commentary that Highland toponyms are special, in that the meanings of so many appear to be derivable at all. If one is of a suspicious nature, one might get the feeling that too many of the names have been adapted in their form or spelling to meanings perceived by a later, perhaps somewhat romantic generation.

We claim no special scholarly authority in etymology – the study of the original form and meaning of words – or in onomastics – the etymology of names in particular. One of us (Mieke) has a life-time experience as a translator; the other (Ruurd) read classical philology, but later switched to physics, a grounding that was applied to researches in the psychophysics of perception – such as how and why the visual surroundings may influence our mind-set and behaviour. These backgrounds gave us some feeling for the subject, but surely didn't make us into onomastic specialists. More relevant will be the fact that together with our son Jur, we published a book on the toponyms of a peat meadow conservation area in our native region, based on our own field research and literature studies.

We have experienced that names of places can be very old, while being perfectly 'translatable' at the same time. Some fields in the area we've researched in the Netherlands, had names that derived from Old Frisian, a language nobody in the area had spoken for the past 600 years. Translating those names was relatively easy, as we were helped by numerous onomastic publications on ancient Dutch-Frisian field and water names. Onomastic research is an interesting occupation in its own right, but of wider interest as it may guide archaeologists to likely spots for digging, and historians in general to a clearer vision of ancient patterns of habitation and land use in general. This circumstance will explain the availability of so much helpful documentation.

For our translations and comments in the present list, however, we have mainly relied on very simple sources: first of course, the people mentioned in the Introduction; then Malcolm Maclennan's *Gaelic Dictionary*, subtitled 'a Pronouncing and Etymological Dictionary of the Gaelic Language' (published by Acair and Aberdeen University, 1925 – 1979..1989).

Furthermore, Peter MacRae and Dr Smith were themselves familiar with other sources, e.g. *Celtic Place-names of Scotland* by Prof. W.J. Watson (Edinburgh, 1926). And of course, our personal experience — legs-on, so to speak — with the actual lay of the land in the present has helped as well.

3 Vagaries of spelling and meaning

As explained in the introduction, our list refers to places we came by while hiking in the area around Loch Hourn. In principle, therefore, all names were copied from the Ordnance Survey maps we used. Of these maps we prefer those of 1:25,000 scale for their detail, putting up with it that the larger their scale, the more maps you need – our tent invariably contains a box with a veritable library of that type, which OS currently calls *Pathfinder*. While it is bad enough that many names as found on OS maps have been irrecoverably anglicised or otherwise corrupted, some of the names have even been assigned to the wrong places, mostly in less frequently visited spots. Attribution of names to spots may also differ on the OS maps at the 1:25,000 scale from their location on the – less accurate – OS maps at the 1:50,000 scale.

A case in point is the area around Aird Chadhachan (between Slat Bheinn and Sgurr a' Choire-bheithe in the Barrisdale estate), where the 1:50,000 map misplaces several names of lochans. The relevant 1:25,000 map (*Pathfinder 236 NG 80/90*) is accurate around here.

Of course, many meanings have been lost in time; and many names have been interpreted differently in different times which was reflected in a change in spelling.

Sometimes we may suspect mapmakers of bygone days, or their employers, of romantically inventing meanings. Pseudo-ancient spellings were adapted to the later interpretations, or just thought up for sheer historical exaggeration. The romanticism of the 19th century rekindled interest in the remnants of dwindling Highland culture – having oneself painted life-size in full Highland regalia became a must for even the most English or completely anglicised absentee landlord – and so produced its share of spurious folklore. Much like we now have the *commercial* exploitation and debasement of history's relics, and all the well-meaning pursuit of *heritage*, a EU-subsidised industry which can be even worse.

We think what really matters, is what seems natural or logical to those who have a living memory of the most recent customary and local Gaelic pronunciations and interpretations. Even so, some speculation about origins etc. can be an interesting pastime...

A source of real confusion is the use of the Gaelic genitive case, as English nouns have no real cases and the Gaelic use of the genitive differs considerably from the way that case is used in German etc. People now even like to name their daughter Mhàiri as it 'looks more Celtic', although this would mean '*of* Mary'; the correct form would be the nominative 'Màiri' — which they indeed use for their pronunciation, and not something like *Vaary*,

if we follow the Sassenach way of representing that Gaelic (and Dutch) labial consonant by *V*. And then, as one in English might say 'A of B', or 'P of Q of R', the Gaelic may say 'B of A' or 'P, Q, R'. Finally, the *h* often encountered in the form words take in the genitive case, may change the pronunciation of the preceding letter (as in *mh*), *or* it may indicate that the preceding letter just vanishes completely from the audible world (as in *th*). Facts like these had a profound effect on how names were handed down orally and finally written down, often in a more and more English-biased context.

Another source of linguistic entanglement is the fact that in these coastal areas one original language must have been some dialect evolved from Old Norse. Names from that may first have been celticised and later anglicised. This process was often further influenced by the English language being more closely related to the Nordic tongues than to the Celtic ones. We may also have to keep in mind that sometimes not *English* as such is the language in question, but the – from ±1200 AD – originally quite separate language *Scottish*, which is much more 'Anglic' and less 'Saxon', and quite related to the Frisian still spoken in the relevant part of the Netherlands: Friesland. The local Celtic dialects in their turn may have contained much that wasn't so much Gaelic (which derives from Old Irish), as Pictish etc.

Finally, people often hand down names of familiar places in a form which means something to them. If in the meantime the language has changed, they may – even intentionally – 'corrupt' a name into something with relevance to their contemporary conditions. Quite often such a change comes down to something like a pun, the meaning of which will be forgotten again by later generations, as the reference of the pun – e.g. a person – is no longer around.

4 List of names with commentary

The list of names we present here is by no means exhaustive. It is actually quite random, as it is based on the names occurring in the diaries we kept of our earlier holidays in the area, in the years 1991 to 1994 (cf. chapter 1, Introduction). The pronunciation or meaning of any other local names, however, may often be approximated from the names present in our recording and list.

If at all possible, each name in the list is followed by an approximation in English of its probable or guessed meaning. For (parts of) names of which we have no idea of any meaning, we give a simple question mark. Further, we use the following symbols:

( ) additional meaning or explanation
< > ellipsis made explicit
(?) great uncertainty on our part
≫→ comments etc. (on separate lines)

Abhain Chòsaidh
  river of Gleann Còsaidh (sheltered, cosy glen)

Achadh Luachraich
  field of the rushes
  ≫→ This is the name of the estate at right from the trunk road, when approaching from Invergarry, just before one turns left for Kinloch Hourn onto the Tom Doun road.

Aird Chadhachan
  top of the narrow, steep pass

Allt a' Chaolais Bhig
  burn of the small narrows

Allt a' Choire Reidh
  burn of Coire Reidh (flat corrie)

Allt a' Choire Uidhair
  burn of Coire Odhar (dun-coloured or dappled corrie)

Allt Ban
  white burn

Allt Coire Slat Bheinn
  burn from corrie of Slat Bheinn (twig or stick hill)

Allt Coire Dhorrcail
  burn from Torquail's corrie
  ≫→ Dhorrcail should be spelled Thorrcail, according to Peter MacRae.

Allt Coire Mhalagain
  burn from corrie of Malagan (?)

Allt Coire Mhicrail
  burn from Ranald's son's corrie
  ≫→ cf. Coire Mhicrail

Allt Coire nan Cnàmh
  burn from the corrie of the bones

Allt Coire Peitireach
  burn from Coire Peitireach (?)

Allt Coire Shùbh
  burn from the corrie of the berries

Allt Coire Shùbh Beag
  burn from the little corrie of the berries

Allt Gleann nan Eun
  burn from the glen of the birds

Allt Loch an Lagain Aintheich
  burn from loch of the sandy hollow

Allt Lochan an Fhigheadair
  burn of small loch of the knitter

Allt Slochd Nighinn Bheathain

burn from pit of Matheson's (?) daughter
≫‣ Slochd is anglicised spelling for Sloc, cf. Slochd Nighinn Bheathain and *Bachd* for *Bac*.

An Caisteal
the fortress (or castle)

Aonach air Chrith
ridge of trembling (?)

Aonach Sgoilte
split ridge

Bac nam Fòid
bank of peat

Bac nan Canaichean
bank of pedlars (?)
≫‣ From an original spelling *Bac nan Ceannaichean*, i.e. bank of the merchants. Itinerant merchants used to go around selling and buying. 'Pedlars' are often mentioned in local tradition as victims of murder and robbery. They would be warmly welcomed for the night, to be sounded out about their wealth and – if judged profitable – misdirected next morning, to be ambushed on the way. The names *Drochaid Allt a' Bhodaich* and *Allt a' Bhodaich* (from *bodach = old man*, so *bridge of old man's burn* and *old man's burn*, both half-way the pass between Loch Quoich and Kinloch Hourn) are sometimes suggested to refer to the same tradition, the old man in question having been such a pedlar. Also suggested, however, are the meanings *bank of dolfins* and *bank of little dogs*.

Bachd Mhic an Tosaich
bank of Macintosh
≫‣ *Bachd* is anglicised spelling for *Bac*, a bizarre rendering of the original pronunciation, cf. *Slochd*.

Bealach an Lapain
pass of the cripple

Bealach an Toteil
pass of the smoky ‹ mists or fogs ›
≫‣ Thus if we correct *Tot-* into *Toit-*, a root meaning *smoke*, or the way fog or mist may appear from a distance. Even now, the local situation makes this a plausible interpretation. When we interviewed Roddy MacRae, he talked about the veils often hanging over this bealach and over Sgurr a' Bhac Chaolais. On the rim of the bealach a certain rock then may remain visible, guiding a climber from Coire Reidh. We have personal experience of these conditions.

Bealach Caol na Droma Mòire
pass of narrows of big ledge (?)

Bealach Choire Rèidhe
pass of Coire Reidh (flat corrie)

Bealach Coire a' Chaorainn
pass of the corrie of the peat chunk (?)
≫‣ but cf. Coire a' Chaorainn

Bealach Coire Dhorrcail
pass of Torquail's corrie
≫‣ *Dhorrcail* should be spelled *Thorrcail*, cf. Allt Coire Dhorrcail.

Bealach Coire Mhalagain
pass of Malagan's (?) corrie

Bealach Coire Sgoireadail
pass of Coire Sgoireadail (?)
≫‣ cf. Coire Sgoireadail

Bealach Coire Thollaidh
pass of the intruding (?) corrie

Bealach Duibh Leac
pass of the dark slab

Bealach Fraoch Choire
pass of the heather corrie

Bealach Mhinniceig
pass of ?
≫‣ spelling probably corrupted

Bealach na Craoibhe
pass of the tree

Bealach na Faire
pass of the sentry

Bealach Sgurr an Lochain
pass at the peak of the small loch

Beinn Bhuidhe
hill (of) yellow
≫‣ or *hill (of) pleasant*

Beinn na Caillich
hill of the old woman

Beinn na h-Eaglaise
hill of the church

Beinn Sgritheall
hill of scree

Buidhe Bheinn
yellow hill
≫‣or *pleasant hill*

Cadha Mòr
great narrow and steep pass
≫‣This not really very high pass above the Stalkers Cottage and the lodge of the Kinloch Hourn estate, is steep and rough. No amount of reciting the normally so powerful mantra 'I will *not* get into a sweat' will prevent the outbreak of profuse transpiration when one is ascending this sample of Highland torture, as Joe Potter — famous Birdman of Kinloch Hourn — will testify.

Cadha nam Bò Ruadha
narrow and steep pass of the red cow

Caolas an Loch Bhig
narrows of the small < end of the > loch

Caolas Mòr
great narrows

Carnach
rocky place

Carn Màiri
stony heap < of > Màiri
≫‣This name should be spelled *Carn Mhàiri*, the 'of' expressed by the genitive case of *Màiri*. Màiri was the Barrisdale woman of legend, who didn't want to leave at the time of the Clearances, so they finally poisoned the mussel banks that were her last sustenance. People from Arnisdale will still pronounce the initial *Mh*, saying *Vaari*, with the *v* as *W* in Dutch *Willem*.

Carn Mòr Coire Mhàlagain
big stony heap of Malagan's (?) corrie

Carn nan Caorach
stony heap of the sheep

Ceum na Leth-coise
steps of going toe-for-toe
≫‣From experience we can confirm this name is a good description for the so

designated descent from Ladhar Bheinn by way of Stob a' Odhair.

Cluanie
green plain
≫‣an anglicised form of *cluaineag*

Cnap an t-Sear
knob of the east side (?)

Cnoc Dubh Achadh Arsgalain
dark knoll of the field of the high shieling
≫‣The word *Arsgalain* probably derives from *Ard-sgàlain*, which might also mean *superb shieling* (when we take 'high' in an abstract sense).

Coile Mhinniceig
woods of ?
≫‣cf. Bealach Mhinniceig; *Coile* should have been spelled *Coille*

Coille Lochain Coire Shùbh
woods of small loch of the corrie of the berries

Coire a' Chaorainn
corrie of the peat chunk (?)
≫‣possibly better: ...of the *rowan*

Coire an Lochain
corrie of the small loch

Coire an Spidein
corrie of the peak (?)
≫‣cf. Spidean Mialach

Coire Dubh
dark corrie

Coire Dhorrcail
Torquail's corrie
≫‣*Dhorrcail* should be spelled *Thorrcail*, cf. Allt Coire Dhorrcail.

Coire Glas
grey corrie

Coire Lair
corrie of the mare

Coire Leacach Mòr
great corrie of the slabs

Coire Mhalagain
Malagan's (?) corrie

Coire Mhicrail
corrie of Ranald's son
»‣The name of this corrie, high above the burn delivering life-giving water to Skiary, refers to Alasdair Ranaldson Macdonnel, the 15th chief – known from the famous portrait by Sir Henry Raeburn, but surely even more from the lids of boxes of shortbread. He turned up in Edinburgh for the visit of George IV in 1821 at the head of his fully armed 'tail' of retainers, to the alarm of the citizenry. He is reputed to have been the model for the character Fergus MacIvor in Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley*. He died prematurely in an accident near Corpach, when leaping ashore from an early steamer in 1828. His estates were left in a poor condition, which eventually led tot their abandonment by his successors. He had attended Cambridge University and his act of being a remote Highland chief was quite fake; even the romantic author Scott regarded him as an anachronism. Alaisdair made a great fuss about the construction of the Caledonian Canal: thus he maintained that Loch Oich belonged to him, to the extent that he could drain it if he liked, and so initially he wanted an embankment built down the middle of the loch to shield his home from passing traffic. His brother, Sir James Macdonnel, fought at Salamanca and Vittoria and became famous for his distinctive deeds at Waterloo; he ended up quite a real general. (All details of this entry were provided by Dr Smith.)

Coire na Fiar Bhealaich
corrie of the sloping (meandering?) pass

Coire nam Plaideachan
corrie of the small plaids

Coire nan Cadha
corrie of the narrow, steep pass

Coire nan Cnàmh
corrie of the bones

Coire nan-Eiricheallach
corrie of the hidden stolen cattle (?)
»‣The last part is sometimes also spelled *Eiricheallch*; that version was interpreted as 'corrie of the lazy shepherdboy' by Peter MacRae, when he was young. But *eirich* (rouse) and *ealloch* (burden) don't seem quite to fit.

Coire nan Leac
corrie of the slab

Coire Odhar
dun-coloured (or dappled) corrie

Coire Peitireach
corrie ?
»‣The meaning is unknown; the spelling may be corrupt.

Coire Reidh
flat corrie

Coire Sgiath Airigh
corrie of wing/shield (?) of the shieling
»‣but cf. Sgurr Sgiath Airigh

Coire Sgoireadail
corrie ?
»‣An old form of the second part was *Sgoire a' Dail*, still to be seen on an old print in one of the buildings at Kinloch Hourn. This might be constructed as meaning *brow of the dale*, or *dale with a brow*, which would be quite apt. Of course, the Gaelic *dail* derives from an Old Norse root.

Coire Shùbh
corrie of the berries
»‣*shùbh* is genitive of *sùbh*; cf. Loch Hourn and Coireshubh

Coire Shùbh Beag
little corrie of the berries
»‣cf. Coire Shùbh

Coire Slat Bheinn
corrie of Slat Bheinn (twig or stick hill)

Coire Uaine
green corrie

Coireshubh
< hamlet at the > corrie of the berries
»‣There is still a ruin here, in the pass between Loch Quoich and Kinloch Hourn, just before one reaches the latter. At this point is the ancient eastern boundary of the socio-political Knoydart (see the comments with that entry); cf. the original spelling in Coire Shùbh.

Coire Torr an Asgaill
corrie of the mound
»‣or *corrie of the armpit*

Coire Toteil
  corrie of the mists (fogs)
  ≫‣cf. Bealach an Toteil

Creag a' Mhàim
  rocks of the smooth pass

Creag Bheithe
  rocks of the birches

Creag Coire na Fiar Bhealaich
  rocks at corrie of the sloping pass

Creag Meagaidh
  rocks of Maggie (?)
  ≫‣i.e. if taken as short for Margaret – nice to have your own rocks, by the way

Creag nam Damh
  rocks of the stag

Cuillins
  ?
  ≫‣The meaning seems to vary according to the opinion of individual historians and linguists. It may have to do with hollies, but we're afraid the meaning of this ancient name has been lost.

Doireleathan
  < hamlet at the > broad grove
  ≫‣originally *Doire Leathain*, cf. Sgurr an Doire Leathain

Druim a' Choire Odhair
  ridge along the dun-coloured (or dappled) corrie

Druim Coire nan Eirecheanach
  ridge of corrie ?
  ≫‣ meaning unknown; the spelling may be corrupt

Druim Fada
  long ridge

Druim na Geid Salaich
  ridge of the foul bunch
  ≫‣Thus, if we take *Geid* as the genitive of *Gad*, and *Gad* as a 'general collective'.

Druim Seileach
  ridge of the willow

Dubh Lochain
  dark (of) small loch

Dubh Lochan
  dark small loch

Eas Coire nan Choire
  falls of the corrie of the corrie
  ≫‣This is the name as printed on the OS maps. But it is almost certainly a 'misprint' for *Eas Coire nan Cnàmh*, cf. the next entry.

Eas Coire nan Cnàmh
  falls of the corrie of the bones
  ≫‣Our reconstruction of the previous name; cf. Coire nan Cnàmh.

Eilean Mhogh-sgeir
  island of the hand-shaped (?) reef
  ≫‣Herons are nesting here now.

Faichem
  ?
  ≫‣meaning unknown; corrupted spelling?

Faichemard
  upper Faichem
  ≫‣or 'top of' Faichem; cf. previous entry

Faochag
  wee whelk

Fhuarain
  < peak > of the green spring
  ≫‣Its full name must be *Sgurr an Fhuarain*, just like other hills of similar name.

Fiar Bealach
  sloping (or meandering) pass

Fraoch Bheinn
  heather hill (or *foreboding hill*)

Fraoch Choire
  heather corrie (or *foreboding corrie*)

Gairich
  < peak of the > continued shout (?)
  ≫‣if taken as originally spelled *Gàirich*

Gairich Beag
  little Gairich

Gearr Garry
  short < river > Garry (?)
  ≫‣Cf. Glen Garry from *gleann garaidh*: possibly *glen of the copse* or *thicket*. But Invergarry would be from *inbhir garaidh*, *cove at the mouth* or *confluence of (the River) Garry*.

Glac nan Sgadan
hollow of the herring
≫‣ Catching herring used to be a booming business in and around Loch Hourn. Overfishing made the locally spawning subspecies extinct, as happened in many places all over Western Europe.

Gleann an Dubh-Lochain
glen of the small dark loch

Gleann an Guiserein
glen of ?
≫‣ possibly from a personal name

Gleann Còsaidh
sheltered (cosy) glen

Gleann Dubh Lochain
glen of the small dark loch

Gleann nan Eun
glen of the birds

Gleann Unndalain
glen of ?
≫‣ *Unndalain* sounds like something to do with a hinge, hazards Peter MacRae.

Glen Dessary
glen that is open to the South
≫‣ spelling corrupted

Glen Toman Odhar
glen of the dun-coloured (or dappled) hillock

Gleouraich
< hill of > ?
≫‣ The spelling is certainly corrupted; some think the name refers to some 'uproar', but it may also be connected to a 'frown'.

Innis na Craige
green place of the rocks

iolair
golden eagle
≫‣ not a place name, of course; this word was added for our interest in its pronunciation

Knoydart
fjord (-land) of Knut (?)
≫‣ This is probably from a Old Norse name, like Sunart, also someone's fjord. Dr Smith remembers it was Eoin MacRae (the elder brother of Roddy and Peter), who suggested

this derivation. The way the person's name *Knut* might have evolved into the *Knoyd-* spelling is unclear, but the Norse connection is of interest, as *Barrisdale* and *Arnisdale* are Norse as well, and possibly Runival (chapter 5) too. Nowadays, most of the time the name Knoydart is used as a name restricted to the westernmost part: the peninsula, but cf. the earlier entry Coireshubh for its original boundaries, which included Kinloch Hourn and Skiary. The inhabitants, originally totalling some 1300 — before the Clearances — used to be quite sea-oriented; contacts with Glenelg etc. were easier than over the rough hill terrain with land-bound Glengarry. Note the clear pronunciation of the leading *K*.

Ladhar Bheinn
prong (of) hill
≫‣ A quite apt name, as this westernmost Munro of the Scottish mainland is indeed two-pronged, or even three-pronged. Another, related meaning of *ladhar* is *hoof*; if that was the intended meaning, the name might refer tot the whole horseshoe-shaped Ladhar Bheinn 'system'. A typical example of semantic multipurpose application of ancient names! Incidentally, if the name is interpreted a referring to a *prong*, that would indicate the name was given by people not usually looking at Ladhar Bheinn from the East. As one can hear on the tape, *Ladhar* is pronounced as a single syllable; when speaking without emphasis, locals say something like *Lurven* for the whole name, with a *v* as the *W* in Dutch *Willem*.

Loch a' Choire Bheithe
loch of the birch corrie

Loch a' Coire Uaine
loch of the green corrie

Loch Beag
small < end of the > loch

Loch Bealach Coire Sgoireadail
loch on the pass of Coire Sgoireadail.
≫‣ cf. Coire Sgoireadail

Loch Coire nan Cadha
loch at the corrie of the narrow, steep pass

Loch Coire nan Cnàmh
loch at the corrie of the bones

Loch Coire nan Crogachan
loch at the corrie of ?
≫‣The *Crogachan* part may refer to many
things: from a dish or earthen vessel,
through an aged ewe, to a shrivelled branch.

Loch Coire Shùbh
loch at the corrie of the berries
≫‣Some Sassenachs will commit the atrocity
of calling this loch the *Monkey-tree Loch*.

Loch Fearna
loch of the alder tree

Loch Hourn
loch of the gap of the berries (?)
≫‣Must be severely corrupted, as in Gaelic
the *h* can't be used as an independent letter
and it certainly would never be used as the
first letter of a word. But cf. nearby Coire
Shùbh, so the name may have been some-
thing like *loch shùbh bearn* or *loch shubh-
bhearna(ch)*, the basis of this translation. A
possibility might be *Loch a' Chuirn*, i.e. *Loch
of the Cairn*. The sometimes encountered
explanation as *loch h-iuthairne* for *loch of hell*
is probably just a romantic fancy – albeit one
preferred by Aileen Cameron...

Loch Quoich
Loch Cup
≫‣Thus if we interpret the pre-anglicised
form *Loch Cuaich* as referring to the cup-
shaped 'system' of glens forming the various
parts of present-day Glen Quoich. One
might also think of *loch of the cuckoo* (*cuaich*
as genitive of *cuach* = *cuckoo*), a bird by
now indeed numerous on the grassy slopes
from Invergarry to Ayror, as it usurps the
nests of the even more numerous local
meadow pipits for its own eggs. But one
might argue that in ancient times the cuckoo
would not have been as abundant as it is
nowadays, as the slopes of the cup-shaped
area and the borders of the original loch
would have been covered in trees and
bushes, so that the plethora of meadow
pipits we find here now would have been
absent.

Lochan an Fhigheadair
small loch of the knitter

Loch an Lagain Aintheich
loch of the sandy hollow
≫‣The sand referred to is still in evidence
nowadays.

Lochan Charn nan Caorach
small loch of the stony heap of the sheep

Lochan nam Breac
small loch of the trout

Lochan na Stairne
small loch of the noise

Lochan Torr a' Choit
small loch of the mound of the small boat
≫‣cf. our remarks with the Torr a' Choit

Lùb an Achaidh Dhuidh
bend at the dark field

Luinne Bheinn
hill of ?

Màm Unndalain
smooth pass of ?
≫‣cf. our remark with Gleann Unndalain

Maol Chinn-dearg
bald red head

Meall a' Chait
lump of the cat

Meall an Spàrdain
lump of the nesting places

Meall an Uillt Bhain
lump of the white burn

Meall Buidhe
yellow lump
≫‣or *pleasant lump*

Meall nan Eun
lump of the birds

Meallan Odhar
small dun-coloured (or dappled) lump

Mulloch Gorm
blue-green height

Saileag
heel-step

Sgurr a' Bhac Chaolais
peak of the bank of the narrows
≫‣To Donald 'Silver' Cameron, stalker etc.
at Kinloch Hourn, this name appears quite
obscure, and we must agree.

Sgurr a' Bhealaich Dheirg
peak of the red pass

Sgurr a' Chlaidheimh
peak of the claymore

Sgurr a' Choire-bheithe
peak of the birch corrie

Sgurr a' Gharg Gharaidh
peak of the bitter (?) thicket

Sgurr Airigh na Beinne
peak of the shieling of the hill

Sgurr an Doire Leathain
peak of the broad grove
≫‣ cf. Doireleathan

Sgurr an Fhuarain
peak of the spring

Sgurr an Lochain
peak of the small loch

Sgurr Beag
small peak

Sgurr Coire na Feinne
peak of the corrie of the soldiers (?)

Sgurr Coire nan-Eiricheallach
peak of the corrie of hidden stolen cattle (?)
≫‣ cf. Coire nan-Eiricheallach

Sgurr Dubh
dark peak

Sgurr Fhuaran
peak < of the > spring
≫‣ Maybe the name was originally *Sgurr an Fhuarain*, like elsewhere.

Sgurr Leac nan Each
peak of the slab like a horse (?)

Sgurr Mòr
big peak

Sgurr na Carnach
peak of the rocky place

Sgurr na Ciche
peak of the nipple
≫‣ The *sgurr* part should probably be spelled *sgòrr*, according to Peter MacRae. A sgòrr is a steep, pointed sgurr.

Sgurr na Ciste Dubh
peak of the dark coffin

Sgurr na Ciste Duibhe
peak of the dark coffin

Sgurr nan Coireachan
peak of the corries

Sgurr nan Eugallt
peak of the deadly < dangerous > (unclimbable) burn
≫‣ The southern slope, called just *Eugallt*, is indeed formidably steep and raggedly cut through with numerous rocky gullies.

Sgurr nan Saighead
peak of the arrow

Sgurr na Sgine
peak of the knife

Sgurr nan Spainteach
peak of the Spaniards

Sgurr Sgiath Airigh
peak of wing (or shield) (?) of the shieling
≫‣ This is the 'mapname'; it has probably been pronounced something more like *Sgurr Skiary* for ages, cf. the name of the original hamlet along the path to Barrisdale. There are sources deriving this from original *Skithe's shieling*, i.e. shieling of Skith(e), a Norse name. Of course, any 'reconstructed spelling' would be a more or less plausible guess, but the Norse element certainly has its attraction, as relics of Norse personal names abound around here, as in Barrisdale (cf. *Barrisdale* in chapter 5), Arnisdale and probably Knoydart (*Knut*). Cf. *Runival* in chapter 5.

Sgurr Thionail
peak of the gathering

Slat Bheinn
twig (or *stick*) hill
≫‣ a *slat* is a thin, supple branch

Slochd Nighinn Bheathain
pit of Matheson's (?) daughter
≫‣ *Slochd* is anglicised spelling for *Sloc* – another bizarre rendering of the original pronunciation, cf. names with *Bachd* for *Bac*. 'Pit' may mean 'gorge'. The daughter in question may have met her death here. This place is as exotic as the name looks...

Spidean Dhomhuill Bhric
  peak of spotty Donald
  ❭❯ *Spidean* is unclear in origin, but certain enough in meaning: *peak*.

Spidean Mialach
  lousy (?) peak
  ❭❯ cf. the previous entry

Sròn a' Breun Leitir
  'nose' of the inhospitable slope
  ❭❯ The word *sròn* is still in use with stalkers as a technical term for the nose of a red deer. It is often used figuratively in the name of rounded promontories.

Sròn a' Chuilinn
  'nose' of the hollies
  ❭❯ cf. Sròn a' Breun Leitir

Sròn Glac na Gaoithe
  'nose' of the windy hollow
  ❭❯ cf. Sròn a' Breun Leitir

Sròn Lice na Fearna
  'nose' of the slab with the alders
  ❭❯ cf. Sròn a' Breun Leitir

Sròn na Geid Salaich
  'nose' of the foul bunch
  ❭❯ cf. Sròn a' Breun Leitir

Stob a' Chearcaill
  upright post of the circle
  ❭❯ The term 'upright post' is the standard nickname for steep conical, or 'pyramidal'

hills. Note how the particular hill of this entry looks, when walking to the West along the Barrisdale river in Glen Barrisdale (cf. *Barrisdale* in chapter 5). The 'circle' part may refer to its shape *from* the West.

Stob a' Choire Odhair
  upright post of the dun-coloured (or dappled) corrie
  ❭❯ cf. Stob a' Chearcaill

Stob Dhorrcail
  upright post of Torquail
  ❭❯ *Dhorrcail* should be spelled *Thorrcail*, cf. Allt Coire Dhorrcail.; for *Stob* cf. Stob a' Chearcaill.

Stob na Muicraidh
  upright post of the swine herd
  ❭❯ cf. Stob a' Chearcaill

Tom nan Ràmh
  hillock of the oar

Tomdoun
  brown hillock
  ❭❯ originally spelled *tom donn*

Torr a' Choit
  mound of the small boat
  ❭❯ A shape name? On the bank of the lochan near the 'mound', even nowadays a small boat is kept...

Torran Darrach
  small mound of the oak

5 Some additional names

The names listed below are not to be heard on the tape, but we have discussed them at other times, sometimes with the MacRae brothers or with Dr Smith, but also with other people. Of course, many other names have featured in our conversations, but these seemed particularly relevant:

Allt Ruighe nam Fiadh
>   burn of the shieling-arm of deer
>   ➤ The Gaelic words are probably correctly spelled, but a place called *Ruighe nam Fiadh* itself is nowhere indicated as such on any of our current maps. The burn in question comes down into Coire Sgoireadail from Bealach Coire a' Chaorainn, on the ridge connecting Sgurr Thionail above Wester Glen Quoich to the North, Am Bàthaich ('the barn') over Coire a' Chaorainn to the East, and Sgurr a' Mhaoraich (or rather *Mhormhaich*, see below) to the South. The 'shieling-arm of deer' must be the grassy ridge itself; we do know from our own experience that the ridge and its slopes are now often crowded with deer. The word *ruighe* can be pronounced like *rooye* would, and *fiadh* has to sound a bit like *feeyah*.

Barrisdale
>   dale of Barri (or: dale of Barre)
>   ➤ A Norse name, like Arnisdale means 'dale of Arne'. Real West Coast people prefer the spelling with double *r*, as the maps'll have it, because of the way older people (i.e. the native Gaelic speakers) pronounce(d) it – e.g. the grandmother of Iain Warren, stalker of the Barrisdale estate at the time we write this. Peter MacRae as well is of the opinion that this is the correct spelling. We must note, however, that *Barisdale* with a single *r* is the habitual spelling of present day estate owners, and thus it is the form in which it will often appear in public, as on signs, letterheads etc.

Creag Raonabhal
>   bare rock of the orchard plain (?)
>   ➤ cf. Runival, the next entry

Runival
>   orchard plain (?)
>   ➤ This used to be spelled *Raon Abhall* (cf. previous entry) and pronounced like 'Rön Avall', with ö as *eu* in French *neuve*, v as *W* in Dutch *Willem*, and *all* as *aul-* should be sung in 'Auld lang syne'. It may well be, argues Dr Smith, that spelling and meaning are romantic renditions from mapmaking times of a Norse root. The anglicised form of the name reminds one of the hills Askival and Conival on the isle of Rum – also Norse (the 19th century *h* in *Rhum* was introduced by the Bullloughs when they bought this island, in a romantic fit – or from a severe Victorian aversion to the popular beverage or 'demon drink'). A variant, even more archaic but therefore not necessarily ancient spelling was Roan a' Bhal.

Sgurr a' Mhaoraich
>   peak of the often flooded grassy plain
>   ➤ This meaning is derived from the spelling suggested by Peter MacRae: *Sgurr a' Mhormhaich*. The last word is genitive of 'mormhaich', often anglicised into 'morvich' (there is a place name like that near Shiel Bridge). It was pronounced as *Vohraich*, with *V* again as *W* in Dutch *Willem* and *aich* as usual in Gaelic names – cf. Achadh Luachraich, the second name on the tape. The 'flooded grassy plain', of course, would be the flat area of Kinloch Hourn. The spelling as given on maps would refer to shell-fish, or bait for fishing, which makes no sense to anybody, and which is probably not ancient. The old Bartholomew's map (half-inch sheet for Arisaig and Lochaber) named it Sgurr a' Mhoraire, meaning 'the great man's hill', presumably meaning 'the laird'. Locals felt this was a 'colloquialism', and the MacRae brothers used it as such in conversations with Dr Smith. This type of colloquial usage is probably a case of consciously changing an ancient name into a modern meaning — something we ourselves are quite familiar with in our own all but defunct dialect of Dutch-Frisian. Dr Smith himself suggests a connection with thrift, a pink flower indeed abundant on these high hills in the briny air currents of the West Coast and Lochaber.

6 Epilogue, address etc.

This amateur product can be improved upon considerably. What springs to mind is making a new and extended list, and recording that onto tape with a better sound reproduction. The audio record again might be digitised into separate *.WAV (or *.MP3) computer files for every entry, etc. Together with a hypertext version of the introduction etc., and of the list and the comments, the digitised audio entries might be transferred onto a CD-ROM. Currently, however, plans like that are a bit beyond our time budget...

We are always interested in what others may have to say about, add to, or improve on our modest attempt. Please convey your remarks, suggestions or corrections to:

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Printed versions and/or copies of our tape may be arranged as well, but as we can be very busy, this often entails a long waiting period. Everybody, however, is free to copy this file or the booklet or the tape for non-commercial purposes — provided their original form or format is maintained in its entirety; parts of this file, the booklet or the tape may be quoted or used in other material, provided this file, the booklet and/or the tape are adequately indicated as the source. (These conditions are meant to facilitate future reference and to aid others in their researches.)

Thank you for your interest and co-operation.