

The Inventory of Historic Battlefields

The Battle of Glenlivet

Designation Record and Summary Report

The Inventory of Historic Battlefields is a list of nationally important battlefields in Scotland. A battlefield is of national importance if it makes a contribution to the understanding of the archaeology and history of the nation as a whole, or has the potential to do so, or holds a particularly significant place in the national consciousness. For a battlefield to be included in the Inventory, it must be considered to be of national importance either for its association with key historical events or figures; or for the physical remains and/or archaeological potential it contains; or for its landscape context. In addition, it must be possible to define the site on a modern map with a reasonable degree of accuracy.

The aim of the Inventory is to raise awareness of the significance of these nationally important battlefield sites and to assist in their protection and management for the future. Inventory battlefields are a material consideration in the planning process. The Inventory is also a major resource for enhancing the understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of historic battlefields, for promoting education and stimulating further research, and for developing their potential as attractions for visitors.

Designation Record and Summary Report Contents

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NGR Centred	Archaeological and Physical
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GLENLIVET

Alternative Names: Balrinnies; Glen Livet; Glenlivet

3 October 1594

Local Authority: Moray

NGR centred: NJ 240 290

Date of Addition to Inventory: 14 December 2012

Date of last update: 27 January 2016

Overview and Statement of Significance

The Battle of Glenlivet is significant as an example of the ongoing struggles within Scotland between Presbyterians and Catholics, which colours much of Scotland's history after the Reformation, and the relentless efforts of the kirk to eliminate the Catholic faith from the country. It also highlights in microcosm the complex nature of the relationships between Catholic and Protestant powers across Europe at this time, and the labyrinthine political manoeuvrings which occurred as a result. It is also significant as the first battle in the Highlands of Scotland where artillery appears to have played a part in the action, and archaeological evidence of this may well survive on the battlefield.

The Battle of Glenlivet (deriving from the Gaelic - Glen [*glean*] - a deep narrow mountain valley of the slippery smooth place [*liobhaite*]) was considered at the time to be a religious battle between the Catholic forces of George Gordon, 1st Marquess of Huntly, and Frances Hay, 9th Earl of Erroll, and the Protestant army of Archibald Campbell, 7th Earl of Argyll. Following a protracted period of intrigue, during which time Huntly was, on several occasions, implicated in plotting with the Catholic Spanish against James VI, the Earls of Argyll and Atholl were commissioned with the Lieutenancy of the North to deal with traitorous Jesuits returned from abroad accompanied with strangers and supplied with money to 'stir up public weare'.

This programme of suppression escalated with a punitive campaign, led by Argyll, against Huntly and other rebel lords and clan allies. The two sides encountered one another high on a hillside near Ben Rinnes, where Huntly had effectively laid an ambush for Argyll as he climbed the hill. In the ensuing battle Huntly used his horse to great effect in the confined space of a pass and entirely routed Argyll's troops. According to one tradition a weeping Argyll was led from the field. Rather than risk going into battle against the king Huntly threw himself on the king's mercy and went into temporary exile. He was a consummate survivor, however, and it was not long before he was back in the country and in the king's favour.

Inventory Boundary

The Inventory boundary defines the area in which the main events of the battle are considered to have taken place (landscape context) and where associated physical remains and archaeological evidence occur or may be expected (specific qualities). The landscape context is described under

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battlefield landscape: it encompasses areas of fighting, key movements of troops across the landscape and other important locations, such as the positions of camps or vantage points. Although the landscape has changed since the time of the battle, key characteristics of the terrain at the time of the battle can normally still be identified, enabling events to be more fully understood and interpreted in their landscape context. Specific qualities are described under *physical remains and potential*: these include landscape features that played a significant role in the battle, other physical remains, such as enclosures or built structures, and areas of known or potential archaeological evidence.

The Inventory boundary for the Battle of Glenlivet is defined on the accompanying map and includes the following areas:

- The north-facing slope of the massif on the upper part of which the battle site is located. This area is likely to accommodate the route taken by Argyll up to the ridge where the battle was fought and also accommodates his line of retreat as he departed along the same route.
- The south-facing slope of the massif which includes the route presumed to have been taken by Huntly on his advance to contact, though it is possible that he ascended the slope from the north but in advance of Argyll. In any case it is likely that his force was concealed on this slope as Argyll climbed the other side.
- The eastern and western boundaries encompass a sufficient area to permit the manoeuvre and deployment of both armies before, during and after the battle.

Historical Background to the Battle

On 3 October 1594, Huntly, with around 2000 Highlanders and 1500 cavalry, launched a surprise attack on Argyll's army of between 6000 to 7000 men, mostly Highlanders, high on the slopes of Ben Rinnes. Argyll's men were taken at a disadvantage, with his pike coming up behind with the baggage, while his missile troops were in the front of the advancing force. This allowed Huntly's much feared horse to do their worst, pushing the arquebusiers and archers back on to the main body. Although Argyll's missile troops did fire against the oncoming enemy, the presence of horse to the front and on the flank, along with artillery fire, made their position untenable and soon broke Argyll's force, leaving several hundred dead. There are contrasting reports that Argyll was at liberty to remain and bury his dead on the field after the battle or that he and his army fled the field.

Events & Participants

George Gordon, 1st Marquess of Huntly, epitomised the eventful times in which he lived, with his religious beliefs underpinning his changing fortunes, especially in his relationship with the Scottish crown. He was raised in France as a Roman Catholic, a faith which in post-reformation Scotland would not make his existence and easy one. On the surface he seemed open to change,

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signing the Presbyterian confession of faith in 1588 but continuing to practice his Catholicism and actively engaging in plots with the Spanish to overthrow King James VI, despite at one point having saved his life. While serving as captain of the guard at Holyrood Palace he was arrested when his correspondence with Spanish agents was discovered, but was soon pardoned. The King took the pragmatic stance that Catholic lords such as Huntly could, if kept on side, serve to prevent the Kirk from getting above its station and was himself looking to the Spanish for aid, in the event that Elizabeth I, a staunch protestant, should challenge his right to the English throne, which he was in line for on her death (he became James I of England in 1603). The Kirk was becoming increasingly concerned about Huntly's position of power and his devout Catholicism as well as his continued protection of followers of the Catholic faith and repeatedly pressed James VI to take action against him, but the king refused to do so on the basis that he was a supporter of Huntly, particularly since he had pursued Bothwell on behalf of the king and in the process killed Moray in 1591. When Huntly presented himself for trial for Moray's killing, the King outwardly expressed anger, but privately wrote giving Huntly his support. This was not the last time that the king would treat Huntly with kid gloves. The discovery of the 'Spanish Blanks' in December 1592 brought a charge of treason and though he served time in prison and was also excommunicated he was freed by James in November 1593 along with other rebel lords. After refusing to renounce his faith, however, he was threatened with exile, but in a move that should by then have seemed par for the course he entered into a plot, along with Erroll and the Earl of Bothwell, against the king. The plot failed and Argyll was sent in pursuit of the errant lords, but was to suffer heavy defeat at Glenlivet. Lacking the inclination to carry the fight to the king, Huntly at last went into exile, much of his castle in the meantime being blown up by a vengeful king. The only means by which he could return would be through the renunciation of his faith and submission to the Kirk, an act he was no stranger to, and so in 1597 he returned to the King's favour and in April 1599 was raised to Marquess. The event did not however set the shifting sands of his fortunes and there were still periods of imprisonment and more excommunications to come. Indeed, one of his last acts before his death in 1636, after losing his son to a fire, which may have been murder, and spending a final term in prison, was to declare himself a Roman Catholic.

Despite fighting against the Catholic rebels at Glenlivet, Archibald Campbell, 7th Earl of Argyll, was himself a Catholic, having converted to the faith in his youth – later Campbells were definitely of the protestant persuasion and were to become staunch enemies of the Stuart cause. This fact gives some indication that there was much more to the issues that lay behind the battle than religious faith. The 7th Earl was not the most celebrated of the Campbells and his defeat at Glenlivet has not really helped his memory. He seems to have been a less than happy man, his Gaelic nickname translating as 'Archibald the Grim'. As if to underline this aspect of his nature he surrendered his estates to his son in 1619, though he went on to live until 1638.

Francis Hay, 9th Earl of Errol and Sir Patrick Gordon of Auchindoun were also present at the battle, and both of whom along with Huntly were rebel lords. In

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addition, there were various lower ranking landed gentlemen, particularly from the clans, on both sides.

Battlefield Landscape

The Battle of Glenlivet was fought on a sloping plain just below a ridge of hills. The ridge comprises three flat topped hills named Tom Cullach, Muckle Tomlair and Carn Tighearn. These hilltops are relatively bare, while most of the surrounding slopes have been planted with conifer trees. Several ancient drove roads remain visible as forestry tracks and the battle itself appears to have been fought on such a thoroughfare; the plain is bounded to the east and west by knolls (that to the east known as Tom Cullach), which give the impression of a shallow pass straddling the ridge line north to south. Today, the plain itself, which is the floor of the pass, remains treeless and from here there is a clear view across to Ben Rinnes to the north.

Archaeological and Physical Remains and Potential

There are currently no known physical remains recovered from the battlefield. Although archaeological potential would appear to be relatively high due to the intact nature of the battlefield landscape, there are no records of artefacts or human remains being encountered in the vicinity of the action.

With a high number of combatants, it is probable that archaeological evidence does survive, although the presence of forestry on both sides of the battle site will have affected the potential for survival. Hand-to-hand fighting in a defined battlefield area would result in the deposition of a variety of physical remains. Spent and dropped ammunition, damaged weapons and personal accoutrements like buckles and buttons would have been lost or abandoned during the action and subsequent flight. There is also the possibility of the recovery of evidence for Huntly's artillery, allowing confirmation of its presence in the battle. Given that 150 horses or so are said to have been killed during the battle, it is also possible that their remains were left on the battlefield along with horse tack and furniture.

Cultural Association

There is an on-site interpretation panel which provides some information on the battle. There is a reasonably large portfolio of ballads, poems etc. relating to the battle, and plentiful written accounts also exist.

Select Bibliography

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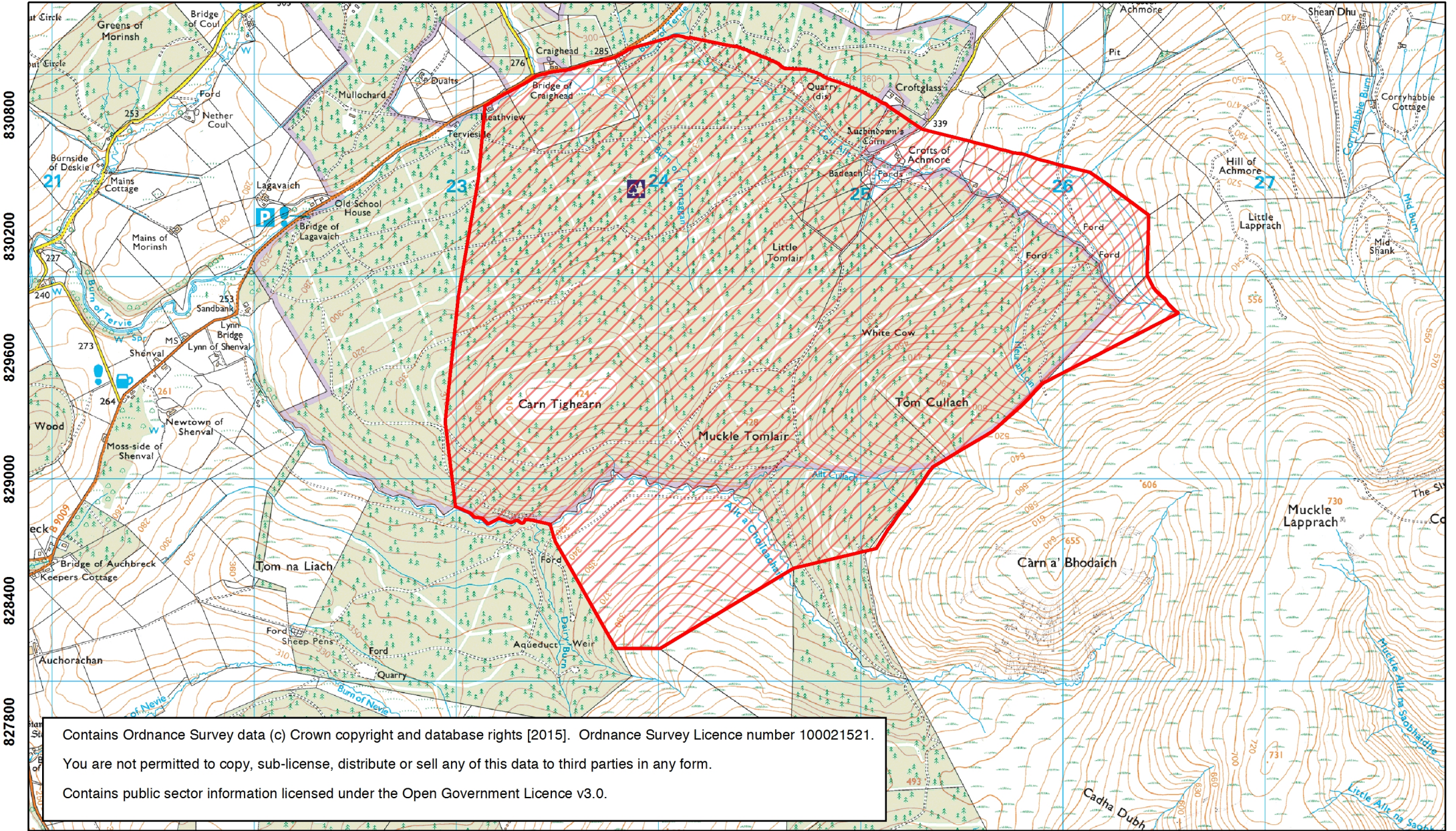
The Inventory of Historic Battlefields - Boundary

Glenlivet

3 October 1594

Local Authority: Moray

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