

The Inventory of Historic Battlefields

The Battle of Inverlochy I

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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Inventory of Historic Battlefields

INVERLOCHY I

Alternative Names: None

September 1431

Local Authority: Highland

NGR centred: NN 126 750

Date of Addition to Inventory: 14 December 2012

Date of last update: N/A

Overview and Statement of Significance

The first Battle of Inverlochy is significant as part of the major struggles between the Scottish monarchy and the Lords of the Isles in the 15th century. The Lords of the Isles held enormous influence and authority in the western Highlands and the Western Isles, which caused problems for a number of Scottish Kings. The Battle of Inverlochy was the culmination of six years of effort by King James I to bring the Highlands fully under his control.

The first Battle of Inverlochy is one of several battles fought by James I in his attempts to reduce the extensive power of Alexander of Islay, Lord of the Isles. In September 1431, Donald Balloch, younger cousin of Alexander, sailed up Loch Linnhe and landed at Inverlochy, where the King's forces were stationed. Balloch attacked the Royal forces from the south, while Alasdair Carrach of Tor Castle launched a simultaneous attack from the north. Alexander's forces inflicted one of the most serious defeats ever suffered by a Royal army in the Highlands. After he lost this battle, James I was forced to make use of Alexander's power as Lord of the Isles to control the region, rather than continue to attempt to break the lordship's hold on the region.

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 *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 Inverlochy I is defined on the accompanying map and includes the following areas:

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- Tom na Faire, the hill from which Carrach's archers inflicted heavy casualties on the Royalist army.
- Inverlochy Castle, where the Royal army was camped at the beginning of the battle.
- Na Liosan, the level ground of the playing fields between Tom na Faire and the River Lochy where fighting may well have occurred.
- The River Nevis which forms the south-west boundary of the area.
- The Allt a'Mhuilinn which forms the north-west boundary.
- The aluminium works where artefacts related to the Battles of Inverlochy I and II are reported as having been found.

Historical Background to the Battle

The Royal army was camped at Inverlochy Castle, between the River Lochy and the hills just south-west of the castle. They were unaware that they were being approached from two directions. Donald Balloch and his brother, Ranald Bane, had summoned their kin to meet at the Isle of Carna in Loch Sunart. From there, the combined force set sail northward through Loch Linnhe, landing two miles south of Inverlochy. Alasdair Carrach, Balloch's cousin, had been forced to retreat from Inverlochy Castle by the arrival of the Royal army and was in the hills to the north, awaiting the arrival of Donald Balloch.

Having seen Balloch approach, Carrach's bowmen moved undetected into position on Tom na Faire, the hill to the south-east of the castle. The Royal army needed provisions, and Mar had sent some of them out to forage for supplies and gather cattle. Donald's army seized the opportunity for a surprise attack. Balloch attacked the Royal forces from the north-east, while Carrach launched a simultaneous attack from the other side. Alasdair Carrach's bowmen on Tom na Faire shot down onto the Royal army's flank, with the archers said to have inflicted the worst damage on the Royal army. Meanwhile, Balloch and the remainder of Carrach's men charged from either direction, trapping the King's force between them. The action very quickly degenerated into a series of small skirmishes across the landscape, during which the Earl of Caithness was killed. The Royalist army suffered heavy losses, while the MacDonalds only had very light casualties.

Events & Participants

The Royal army was led by the Earls of Mar and Caithness. Alexander Stewart, Earl of Mar, was the illegitimate son of the Wolf of Badenoch and was a similarly predatory noble who had taken his earldom by force in 1404; he had fought against Domhnall MacDonald, Lord of the Isles, in 1411 at the Battle of Harlaw, when the Stewart army had managed to hold the field against the onslaught of the MacDonalds. He survived James I's purge of Albany's relatives in 1424 and had been appointed Admiral of the Realm of Scotland. He remained the most important of the north-eastern lords until his death in 1435.

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The Earl of Caithness was Allan Stewart, a grandson of Robert II by his second wife. His father was Walter Stewart, 1st Earl of Atholl, who had actively pursued the release of King James I from his detention in England. However, he subsequently conspired in the murder of James I in 1437 and, as a result, was tortured over three days in particularly gruesome fashion before his execution in Edinburgh.

Donald Balloch, the 18-year old son of John Mor and young cousin of Alexander of Islay, Lord of the Isles, who was now chief of the Macdonalds of Dunyveg and the Glens, fought alongside Alexander's possibly illegitimate son, Alasdair Carrach of Tor Castle, in reaction to the arrest of Alexander. Following the victory at Inverlochy, Donald Balloch extracted revenge on Clans Cameron and Chattan for siding with the King by ravaging their lands before fleeing to Ireland. He was declared an outlaw and James I was determined to see him punished despite his exile. A head purporting to be Donald's was sent to James I by Hugh Boy, Chief of the O' Neills of Ulster; the King's honour was restored and he no longer pursued Donald. However, it transpired that the head did not belong to Donald, who was later involved in several further actions against the Stewarts before his death in 1476.

Alasdair Carrach appears to have been known by Alexander's previously bestowed title of Lord of Lochaber, but some Lochaber lands and Keppoch lands, including Glen Roy and Glen Spean in Brae Lochaber, were granted to Malcolm Mackintosh of Clan Chattan by the King, who had stripped the lands from Lochaber and gifted them to Mackintosh as a reward for his loyalty during the Battle of Inverlochy. Mackintosh managed to retain the lands even after the death of the King, when Alexander confirmed the land grant on 21 February 1443; he also granted Malcolm the Castle of Dingwall in November 1447, which led to tensions between the Clan Chattan and the MacDonalds for centuries to come.

Battlefield Landscape

The battle took place on the coastal plain at the northern end of Loch Linnhe, in an area adjacent to Inverlochy Castle. The precise location is unclear from the sources, but it was probably in one of two areas: the area which now includes the aluminium works; or on the area of flat ground by the River Lochy, known as Na Liosan, which is now occupied by playing fields and the railway. A significant feature of the battlefield landscape was the hill Tom na Faire that lies to the south-west of the castle.

Archaeological and Physical Remains and Potential

It is reasonably likely that archaeological evidence remains. There are reports that material from both of the battles of Inverlochy was recovered during construction of the aluminium works and donated to the West Highland Museum, Fort William, though no records are currently available for find location or nature of the material. Hand-to-hand fighting in a defined battlefield area would result in the deposition of a variety of physical remains from clothing, armour and weapons. Carrach's archers were a significant

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element of the fighting, which means that arrows are likely to be present, although many will have been collected up after the battle because of their value. Iron artefacts, including arrowheads, may not survive particularly well in the soil conditions of the Western Highlands.

Cultural Association

There is a traditional pibroch, *Piobaireachd Domhnull Dubh*, which commemorates the battle. One of Sir Walter Scott's songs, entitled *Pibroch of Donald Dubh*, is based on this traditional MacDonald pibroch. It is also known as *Black Donald*, *Black Donald the Piper* and *Black Donald's March*, and it records the events of Inverlochy I in 1431.

Select Bibliography

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Pollard, T. and O. Oltean. 2007. *Fort William and Inverlochy Archaeological Project (Historic Conflict in the Highlands): Data Structure Report*. Glasgow: GUARD.

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The Inventory of Historic Battlefields - Boundary

Inverlochy I

September 1431

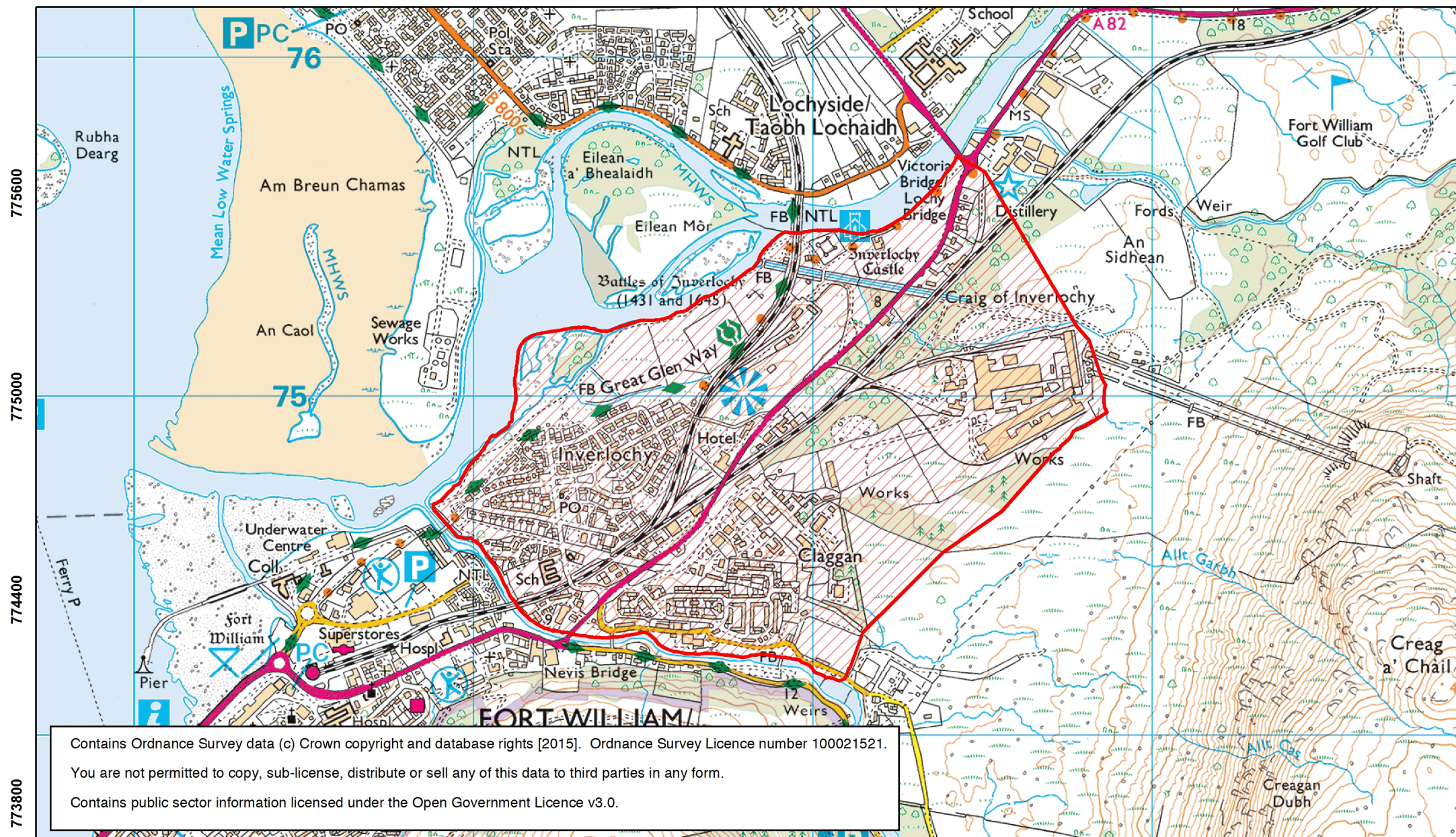
Local Authority: Highland

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