

The Inventory of Historic Battlefields

The Battle of Mulroy

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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MULROY

Alternative Names: Maol Ruadh

4 August 1688

Local Authority: Highland

NGR centred: NN 270 819

Date of Addition to Inventory: 30 November 2011

Date of last update: 14 December 2012

Overview and Statement of Significance

Mulroy is significant as the final major engagement which can be classed solely as a clan battle within Scotland. Shortly after Mulroy is fought, the political climate is transformed by the so-called Glorious Revolution and the nature of clan life and warfare in the Highlands is transformed along with it.

The Battle of Mulroy is known as the last clan battle. It was fought between a force of Highlanders from the MacDonalds of Keppoch, along with allies including Camerons and Macmartins, against the army of Lachlan Mackintosh, with support from his Clan Chattan allies and several hundred Government infantry.

Despite Mackintosh's advantage of numbers, the Highlanders were able to defeat his force and even capture Lachlan himself. However, they were forced to release him when soldiers moved to attempt his rescue and over the coming months the MacDonalds would face a campaign of brutal reprisal, until the Government forces were recalled in the build up to the Glorious Revolution.

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 Mulroy is defined on the accompanying map and includes the following areas:

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- The summit of Maol Ruadh, on the southern slopes of which the battle took place. The MacDonalds may have approached their final position from the northern side of the hill, taking them close to the summit on their approach.
- The lower southern slope of Maol Ruadh, including that part of the village of Roybridge to the west of the bridge. This area may have included the location of Mackenzie's original position, the night before the battle.
- The flood plain of the Rivers Roy and Spean on which the fort is probably located, on the Motte and Bailey castle built on a natural gravel terrace on the western bank of the Roy. Keppoch House is located on a higher terrace, though the location of the original house, present in 1688 and razed during the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion, may have been in a slightly different location (the present house was built in 1760s).

Historical Background to the Battle

When his forces gathered at the end of July 1688, Lachlan Mackintosh ordered the construction of a fort near Keppoch House, physically claiming the land that the law upheld as his. The Rivers Spean and Roy were running high and it was not possible to cross them (the accounts are vague as to whether the builders were trapped on the MacDonald side of the rivers). As the construction of the fort continued, Coll MacDonald's force gathered, shielded by the hills of Glen Roy. Captain Mackenzie of Suddie was dispatched from Inverness to aid Mackintosh.

Mackintosh's force, commanded by Captain Mackenzie, had to wait until the first week of August before they had the opportunity to meet with their enemies. Upon crossing to the north of the Spean and to the west of the Roy, they found their enemies arrayed on good ground on the slope of Maol Ruadh.

The night before the battle, Mackenzie's men were drawn up in battle array between the fort and the MacDonalds on the hill. During the night, the number of MacDonalds and their allies increased from around 200 to 600 or 700. The next morning the two forces met on the slope of Maol Ruadh. The MacDonalds and their allies, who were positioned on the high ground, executed a classic Highland charge down the slope towards the Mackintoshes. While some accounts describe the MacDonalds discharging one volley before charging forward to meet their foes with drawn swords and Lochaber axes, another quite detailed account describes a fire-fight lasting for up to an hour (MacBane). The fighting resulted in many casualties, including Mackenzie and several leading members of Clan Chattan, before the Mackintoshes were routed.

The regular troops of Mackenzie's force returned to their garrison at Inverness, carrying with them some of the wounded. The MacDonalds captured Lachlan Mackintosh and his family, along with his possessions and supplies that had been moved to the old fort near Keppoch House.

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Mackintosh was forced into a written agreement regarding the tenancy of the MacDonald lands, but the prisoners were hastily released before they could be rescued.

Events & Participants

As the Battle of Mulroy was a clan battle, albeit with national resonance, it is perhaps unsurprising that none of the participants were major national figures. However, the main opponents were important figures within the Highlands, with Coll MacDonald, a former university student, perhaps representing a more forward looking generation than his foe Lachlan Mackintosh.

Coll MacDonald was the fifteenth Chief of Keppoch. He was a committed supporter of James, who also commanded the army of highlanders at Mulroy in 1688 and was with the Jacobite armies at Killiecrankie the previous year and at Sheriffmuir in 1715. He had been Chief since the death of his father Archibald in 1682 and inherited from him the dispute of land and tenancy which had first caused Lachlan MacKintosh to successfully press the Privy Council for a commission of fire and sword in 1681. Coll was studying at the University of St Andrews at the time of his succession, a clear indication that the upper strata of the highland clans were not the uncultivated mountain men which Lowlanders generally regarded them to be. Initially, he sought to resolve the situation through negotiation but when this failed, and indeed led to him spending some time in jail, he was equally capable of demonstrating that there was also warrior's blood flowing through his scholar's veins.

In 1688, Mackintosh had the commission of fire and sword renewed but this time it came with the added value of assistance provided by royal troops based in Inverness. These men were under the command of Captain Kenneth Mackenzie of Suddie, who was mortally wounded during the battle, dying on his return to Inverness. Lachlan Mackintosh was also taken, along with his wife and family whom he had brought with him, but was released very soon after, perhaps in anticipation of the reprisals which were inevitable given the defeat delivered against government troops.

Ironically the best known figure at Mulroy was not a clan chief or military officer but a private soldier. Donald MacBane was a private soldier, present at the battle of Mulroy in 1688 and Killiecrankie in 1689, immortalised his exploits in his memoirs, and in doing so provides one of the most detailed accounts of the battle at Mulroy (his mention of an hour long fire-fight is interesting as it flies in the face of traditional models of clan warfare which would have a single volley fired before muskets were thrown down and swords drawn). He ran away from both battles and if his entertaining writings are to be believed, he made the famous jump from one side of the River Garry to the other at Killiecrankie to evade the pursuing Jacobites, at the place now remembered as Soldier's Leap. He would go on to run a brothel and become an instructor in fencing (also publishing a manual of swordsmanship) and on his death he was buried in the garrison cemetery in Fort William.

The battle is also notable for the presence of Lady Mackintosh, who was taken prisoner by the MacDonald's. It was not unusual for armies to have

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women travelling with them on campaign but it is unusual for them to be recorded by name.

Battlefield Landscape

The description of the location of Mackenzie's men between the fort and the MacDonalds on the high ground of Maol Ruadh, or Mulroy would place the fighting on the southern, lower slopes of the hill. The slope of Maol Ruadh has not been developed, although a recently cleared strip of tree plantation may coincide with part of the initial MacDonald deployment, with the fighting perhaps taking place on the lower slopes below this. The village of Mulroy may have impinged on some areas of activity, which might include Mackenzies initial position on the night before the battle but the prospects for the fighting itself to have taken place on the slopes above are good as the accounts suggest Mackenzie advanced towards the MacDonalds prior to battle being closed.

Remains relating to what appears to be the fort which was twice slighted can be seen on the lip of the bailey associated with the motte and bailey castle mounds located around 250m to the south-east of Keppoch House.

Archaeological and Physical Remains and Potential

Despite the small scale of the engagement, it is probable that archaeological evidence remains. 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. The recovery of large amounts of musket balls would add credence to MacBane's account of an hour-long fire-fight.

Physical remains on the site include the abandoned fort foundations. A site visit carried out in support of this report may have shed important new light on the location of the fort. Some 250 m to the south-east of the present Keppoch House (c. 1760s, the original was burned to the ground during the 1745 Jacobite Rising), are the remains of what appears to be a motte and bailey castle (NN 2705 8077), which is known locally as Keppoch Castle (NN28SE 2). There is however some disagreement as to whether this feature, which is built into a natural gravel spur on the west bank of the River Roy is a medieval castle or a fortification first built by the 6th chief of MacDonell of Keppoch in the early sixteenth century. Whatever the case, it seems likely that this impressive feature provided the basis for the fort which Mackintosh attempted to build on the site. The outer rim of the bailey has what might be a later bank running around it and there is some suggestion of square/rectangular earthen structures within.

A rigorous reinterpretation of the battle using archaeological survey techniques, such as topographical and metal detector survey, would illustrate the details of the battle that are not found in written source material.

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Cultural Association

Given its clan character it is not surprising to find Mulroy remembered in number of songs, poems and tunes. The pibrochs called *Latha na Maoile Ruadh* (the Day of Mulroy, also known as Isabella Mackay) and *Blar na Maoile Ruaidh* (the Battle of Mulroy) were composed in celebration of the MacDonald victory. There is also a more modern reel called the Battle of Mulroy and a Gaelic song titled *Thàinig sgeul o'n àrmait*.

Select Bibliography

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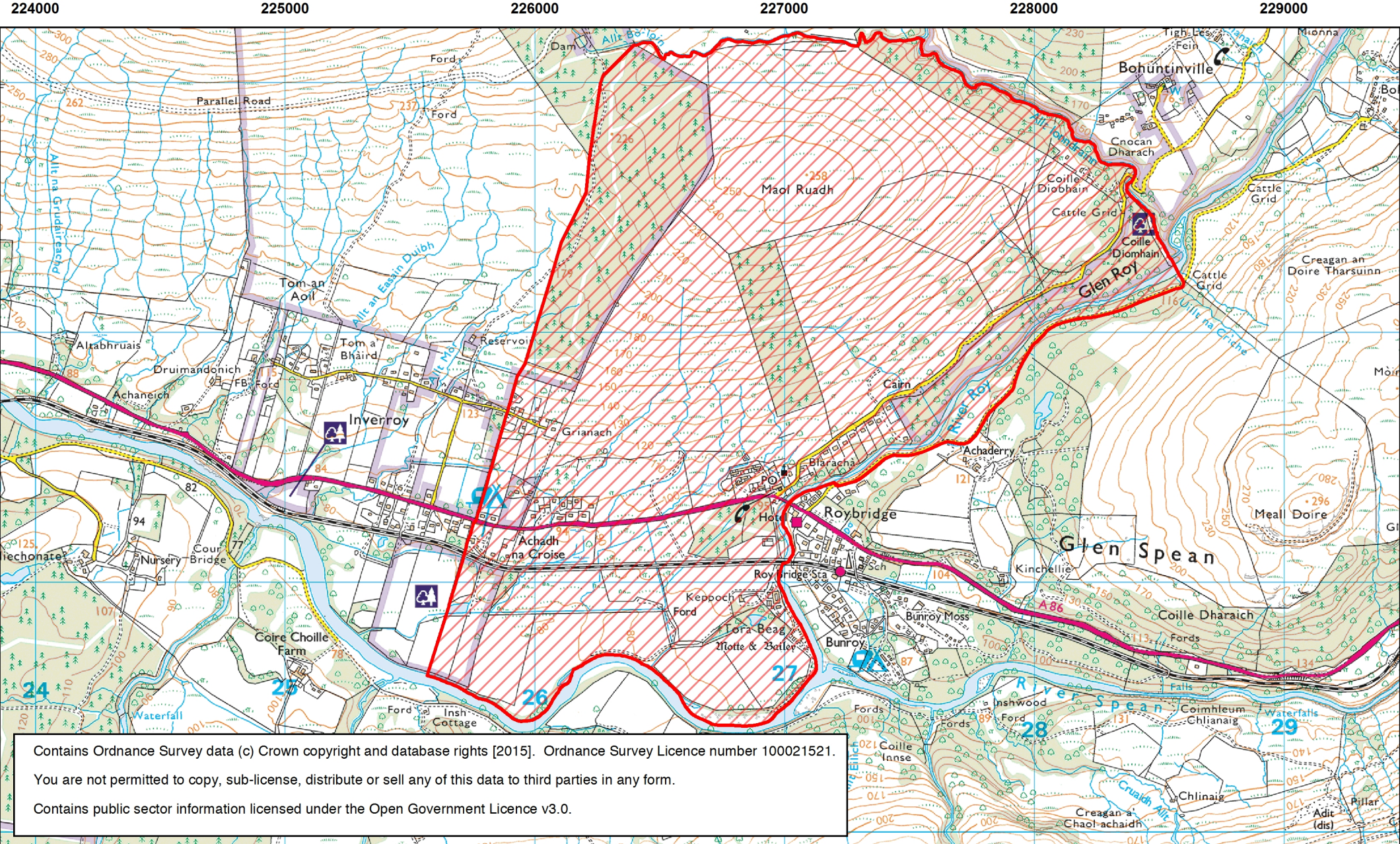
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The Inventory of Historic Battlefields - Features

Mulroy

4 August 1688


Local Authority: Highland



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