

LOCATION OF THE MACNACHTAN SETTLEMENTS ON DUBH LOCH©

There has been some confusion about the exact locations of the Macnachtan settlements on Dubh Loch and there are no clear directions in the literature. Dubh Loch is a small loch that drains via a short river into Loch Fyne, a couple of miles north-east of Inveraray, Argyll. Researchers agree there is a six-foot high oval mound 50 by 70 feet covering the ruins of a castle and yet there is no photo or drawing of the mound. Matthew Cock wrote a chapter about the castle in a 1995 publication but only included a photograph of some nearby trees. My conclusion is that there was a castle or fort on a crannog that is now part of the south-eastern shore of Dubh Loch and a graveyard nearby on the southern shore where one or two large trees stood for many years [GetaMap (<http://getamap.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/getamap/frames.htm>) shows a crannog just off the southern shore of Dubh Loch (search Inveraray and navigate northeast)]. The latter site lies within the Argyll Estates and seems like a good place for a marker. If the marker were planted twenty meters due east of the sole remaining tree, it could refer to “one or two trees that stood for many years twenty meters west of this marker.” The marker plate could be oriented east-west with the inscription facing south, so that a reader facing north easily could alternately look at the text, north up the loch across the Bank of Graves and north-east at the mound. I have attached some photos of the mound taken from a distance and hope to get some close-ups. It is not near a road, may be surrounded by soggy ground and best viewed from a boat on the loch. In examining references to the Dubh Loch castle, a good place to start is the book “Dunderave Castle and the Macnachtans of Argyll,” by Matthew Cock, Dunderave Estate (1998), Chapter 7: “The Dubh Loch Castle.”

ANALYSIS OF COCK’S REFERENCES

Cock puts reference numbers at the end of certain sentences. Here are the sentences and my analyses of the references [my comments are placed within square brackets if they interrupt a quote].

REF. 54. “The MacNachtans must have grown fond of their island site on Loch Awe [Fraoch Eilean] and decided to build another island castle here on the Dubh Loch, for though now part of the shore-line, at that time the mound they chose was completely isolated.”

Crannogs were artificial islands built in a body of water for residences or forts. After centuries of desertion, they take on a distinctive rounded green shape, as seen in the one in Loch Awe, still surrounded by water (Fig. 1). When I visited Dubh Loch in June 2007, I included in some photographs what looks like a crannog on the eastern shore line of Dubh Loch, not far from the lone tree (Figs. 2-3). Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Scotland (RCAHMS), *Argyll. Lorn.* 262, n. 2. Web site <http://www.rcahms.gov.uk/>

A search of the Canmore database under the “Dubh Loch” site for a “castle” produced one result in Glen Shira, Argyll and Bute—RCAHMS record card NN11 SW5: http://www.rcahms.gov.uk/pls/portal/NEWCANMORE.NEWCANDIG_SITE_A_LIST.show?p_arg_names=puid&p_arg_values=109890 with two prints and drawings: DC 24581 plan 1990 and DC 24803 plan 1984. DC24803 from the Argyll 7 collection is a 1984 pencil plan on a scale 1:400, organization and copyright RCAHMS. DC24581 is a pen plan publication copy of DC24803. No digital information is currently available for this site on-line but the plan can be purchased. It is unknown whether this will be different from the map on the Inveraray Castle Web site (<http://www.inveraray-castle.com/pages/content.asp?PageID=120>). A telephone call to RCAHMS might determine if *Argyll. Lorn.* 262, n. 2 is something different.



Figure 1. This crannog in Loch Awe, after being deserted for centuries, is green and rounded.

REF. 55. “It was only in the mid or late 18th century that the area around the Loch became less marshy, when the river bank was cut straight and the outflow of the Loch into the *Gearr Abhainn* (Short River) widened, after a freak flood had carried a mass of gravel and silt down from the moor and choked the bridge.”

Could this have turned a crannog just off-shore into a shoreline mound?

Archibald Campbell, *Records of Argyll*, 44ff. “Records of Argyll. Legends, Traditions, and Recollections of Argyllshire Highlanders Collected Chiefly from the Gaelic. With Notes on the Antiquity of the Dress, Clan Colours, or Tartans, of the Highlanders,” Campbell, Lord Archibald, Edinburgh 1885, is available on the Web but costs about \$500 used.

REF. 56. “No masonry remains above ground to give any clue as to the appearance of this early castle, though probing has indicated that there is a considerable amount of stonework under the ground.” For archaeological surveys of the Dubh Loch Castle see:

(a) RCAHMS, *Argyll. Mid Argyll and Cowal. Medieval and Later Monuments*, 262 (no. 122).

This reference looks similar to No. 54 above.

(b) Marion Campbell and Mary Sandeman, “Mid Argyll: An Archaeological Survey”, a 125-page paper extracted from the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 1961-62, vol. 68, no. 535. This is available used from Abe Books for \$24.

(c) RCAHMS record card NN11 SW5 (see Ref. 54 above). The description of the Dubh Loch castle here uses the same words used by Hugo Millar (see Other References 1). It is not clear who first wrote them.

Figure 2. If you stand to the right of the lone tree at the southern tip of Dubh Loch you can just make out a small crannog on the eastern shore, center right in the photo.

REF. 57. “Written records are no more helpful in giving a picture of the Dubh Loch Castle. While Pont’s map of circa 1583-95 marks the island, that he calls Ylendow (‘Black Island’), as being occupied, there is no further mention of the site for the next 300 years, until Archibald Campbell’s *Records of Argyll* (1885).”

MS maps by Timothy Pont (c. 1583-96):

(a) NLS Adv. MS 70.2.9

(b) Reproduced in J. C. Stone, *The Pont Manuscript Maps of Scotland* (1989), no. 14.

(c) Archibald Campbell, *Records of Argyll* 36ff. (see Ref. 55 above).

The Pont maps are online from the National Library of Scotland at: <http://www.nls.uk/pont/specialist/pont14.html> (Fig. 4).

The Pont map of Inveraray shows the “Castel of Inyreya” and “Dundarraw” both in the positions we know today for Inveraray Castle and Dunderave. The Notes say “... symbols used by Pont for settlements ... are ... rectangles to the south of Loch Awe and in the west.” Pont shows two “settlements’ at the southern tip of Dubh Loch.

1. There is a small diamond marked “Kilsuckor” just west of the river’s exit from Dubh Loch. If his map of Dubh Loch was the same as the 2008 map of Dubh Loch on the Inveraray Castle Web site this would correspond with the site of the “old MacNaughton Castle.” But what does “Kilsuckor” mean?

2. There is a small rectangle just offshore from this diamond, called “Ylendow” (Ylen = island, dow = black) where the Inveraray Castle map shows a crannog.

The two settlements have slightly different orientations, but it is difficult to deduce exact directions because it is a rough hand sketch. If you search “Inveraray” on Google Earth (<http://maps.google.co.uk/>) and navigate a satellite view northeast, the shape of Dubh Loch seems to be the same as in the Inveraray Castle map, but there is insufficient resolution to show the crannog site. What is clear from the satellite view and photographs and a personal visit in 2007 is there is no small island in Dubh Loch near the southern shore. However, it is useful to have the crannog marked on a map, if it is to convey that one used to be in the Loch in this region.

REFS. 58, 59. “The Dubh Loch Castle did have a relatively short life, being abandoned after about 100 years of occupation. Various oral traditions ... give little reliable evidence, though they do show the low ebb of the MacNachtan’s fortune... *The MacNaughtons were gradually beaten back, until somewhere in the 15th century their representative was a girl of eighteen years of age, with no nearer relation than a second cousin to support her or her claims. She lived in the MacNaughton Castle, on the promontory of the Duloch, Glenshera ... there was an old fortalice of the MacNaughtons, and then the plague came; the girl who was the heiress of the place died of it ...*”

58. Archibald Campbell, *Records of Argyll*, 69 (see Ref. 55 above).

59. J. D. S. Campbell. Marquess of Lorne, *Adventures in Legend, Being the Last Historic Legends of the Western Highlands* (Edinburgh, 1898), 249.

Amazon Books credits this latter book to John Douglas Sutherland Campbell Argyll but did not have a copy available. Abe Books credits it to George Douglas Campbell, the Marquis of Lorne and had a used copy for \$82. The legend, supposedly recorded in 1885 and 1898, has the castle on a “promontory” of Dubh Loch. Pont’s map made between 1583 and 1595 shows a settlement on “Black Island” in Dubh Loch. I wonder how long it had been called Black Island. Could this have happened after the Black Plague arrived? (Ref. 55) tells us that the southern end of Dubh Loch silted up in the mid- to late 18th century, which could explain why a settlement on an island just offshore between 1583 and 1595 turned into a “promontory” in a legend recorded between 1885 and 1898.





REF. 60. The legend continues: “Some merchants selling linen are said to have brought a plague into the glen; several persons died of the same, and in the death roll were some of the occupants of the castle. In a panic, the survivors fled, having buried those who died near the castle. The place is still know(n) by the name of Bruach-nan-naighean, the Bank of Graves. The castle was then shut up, and never again inhabited. It was eventually pulled down, and Dunderave [sic] built. Two flagstones used to mark the graves. These were there not many years ago, and are probably still there.”

Figure 3. From just left of the tree here is another view of the crannog, center upper right, on the eastern shore.

- (a) Archibald Campbell, *Records of Argyll*, 37 (see Ref. 55 above).
- (b) Re the plague graves see Peter MacIntyre, *Inveraray. Its Scenery and Associations* (1909). Abe Books had a copy of this for \$30 that has been ordered.

Cock took a photo (Fig. 5) titled “*Bruach-nan-naighean, the Bank of Graves,*” showing two trees on the southern shore of Dubh Loch in 1995, in the same spot where the Inveraray Castle map shows the castle site. He does not say how he concluded this is the location of the Bank of Graves, but I agree with him it is the most likely. It now seems clear the castle was on a crannog and the burials were made on the southern shore. Later, the crannog became attached to the eastern shore as a promontory. It would be nice to find the two flagstones; excavations on the bank may turn up something interesting from the graves. I have a photo of the same two trees in 2004 (Fig. 6) and one in 2007 (Fig. 7) that shows the larger tree has disappeared. The smaller one seems to be in its last throes and this might be a good site for a marker, provided it points to this spot as the Bank of Graves and the one-time location of the trees and indicates the position of the castle site. Peter McNaughton was told on 21 January 2008 by his son, Michael, who is knowledgeable about trees, that these were European Ash, known as Rowan Ash in the U.K. (*Fraxinus excelsior*).

REF. 61. “The exact date when the Dubh Loch Castle was abandoned is uncertain. Archibald Brown, in his *History of Cowal* (1908), says that it was in 1560, while Angus MacNaghten reckons that it was some eight years later, though neither gives evidence for these dates. Although one 19th century tradition places the event in the 14th century, the MacNachtans were only in the region towards the end of the century. Since their next castle at Dunderave was built as late as the 1580s, a date in the 16th century seems more likely.”

- (a) G. Archibald Brown, *History of Cowal* (1908), 43. Amazon and Abe did not register this title.
- (b) H. A. MacNaghten, *The Chiefs of Clan MacNachtan and their Descendants*, 43.



Figure 4. The Pont Map (1583-1595) shows Inveraray Castle, Dunderave, a settlement (rectangle) on the southern shore of Dubh Loch and one just offshore (National Library of Scotland).

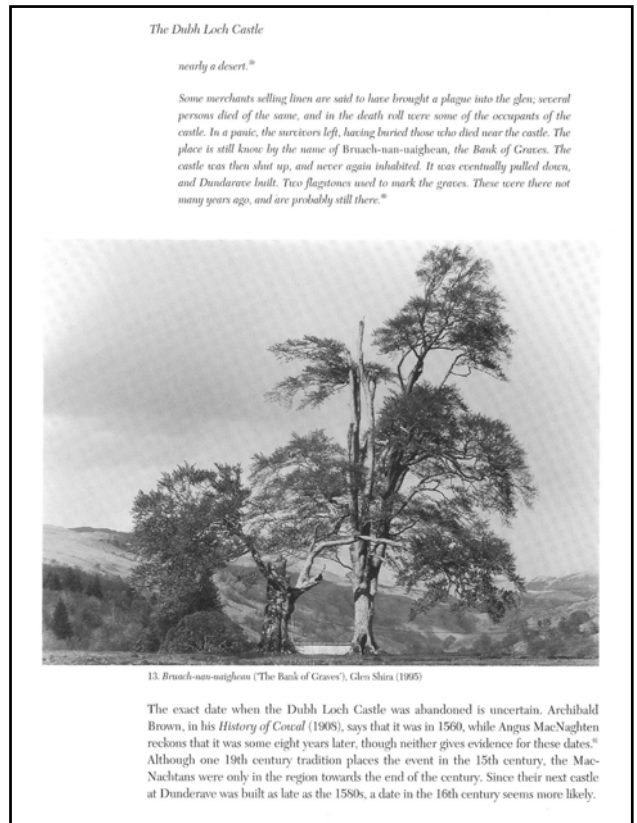
In my copy of this latter reference, Angus does not refer to Dubh loch on page 43 but says, on page 27: “The inscription over the lintel of Dunderave gives the date 1596 [actually 1598] and it is reasonable to assume that the castle was rebuilt at that date, possibly using the stones from the older building [at Dubh Loch], which had been abandoned for a century or more.” Hence Angus seems to place the abandonment closer to 1496, which is closer to the date Cock relates from the legend (“somewhere in the 15th century”). If indeed the Dubh Loch castle was only occupied for 100 years it may have been built at the end of the 1300s. The Clan was granted the charter for Fraoch Eilean in Loch Awe at the end of the 1200s. The sources for habitation and abandonment periods of 100 years on Dubh Loch are not clear.

Figure 5. Matthew Cock took a photo of these two trees on the southern shore of Dubh Loch for his book published by Dunderave Estate in 1995 (page 28).

REF. 62. Cock speaks of outbreaks of plague in Scotland between 1564 and 1585.

J. F. D. Shrewsbury, *A History of Bubonic Plague in the British Isles* (Cambridge, 1970), 206-210, 255-263. A paperback version of this book is available from Amazon Books for \$44 and from Abe Books for \$37. Plague broke out in Scotland at various times. Scots invading northern England in Autumn 1349 brought back plague with them (http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/middle_ages/black_10.shtml) and regular outbreaks occurred in Glasgow until late in the 17th century, perhaps the worst being between 1646 and 1648 (<http://www.clyde-valley.com/abubonicplague/index.htm>).

REF. 63. “Before the *Garr Abhainn* was widened, the Dubh Loch must have been a breeding ground for disease, for the *Records of Argyll* states, ‘even in dry weather the old fosse remains to this hour swampy.’” Archibald Campbell, *Records of Argyll*, 37 (see Ref. 55 above). Webster’s Dictionary defines “fosse” as a ditch or moat. The latter seems peculiarly apt for a castle, if not a salubrious place for a home.



OTHER REFERENCES



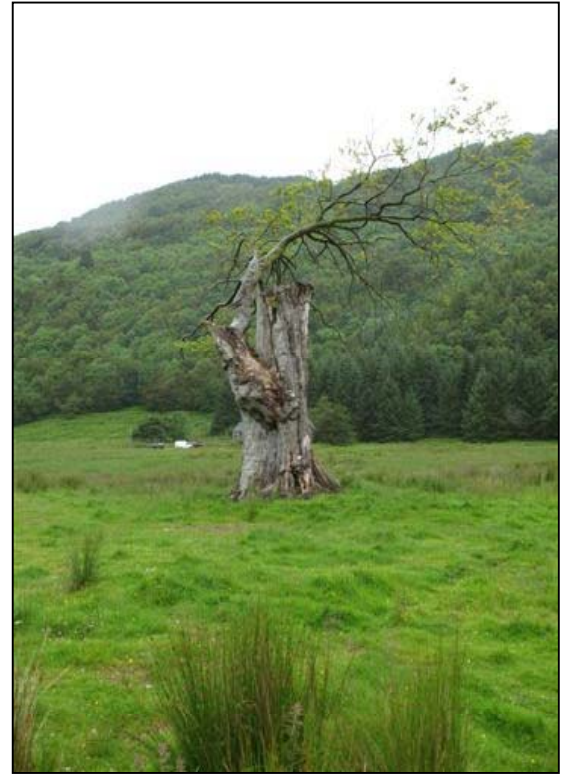
Cock did not refer to Hugo Millar [1], who wrote in detail about the castle at Dubh Loch in 1964, with impeccable credentials. Millar says “The location of the castle lies east of the river’s exit from the loch, and is on the point of a low, triangular shaped green promontory. In his Bibliography, “Articles, Dissertations and Pamphlets” on page 161, Cock did acknowledge Millar’s article on Fraoch Eilean, published in 1965. Also Cock does not refer to Duncan McNaughton’s book of 1977 [2], which mentions the Dubh Loch castle, although he does acknowledge Duncan’s 1967 article on John MacNaughton.

Figure 6. Michael McNaughton took this photo of the two trees in August 2004.

Duncan [2] says on page 31 about his Chapter III “The Chiefs and Their Lands on Loch Awe and Loch Fyne”: “This chapter is based on the detailed pedigree of the McNaughtons of Dunderawe, the life’s work of Niall, 10th Duke of Argyll. The manuscript was made available to Angus Macnaghten and myself by the late Duke, who permitted Angus to make a copy. It is the most complete record available, including references to documents in other collections which have a bearing on the McNaughton chiefs. It also contains a summary of the now destroyed family papers of the McNaughtons.” The 10th Duke died unmarried and childless. It seems the Macnaghtan Clan, squeezed out of Argyll by his people, owes the Duke a debt of gratitude.

Also, on page 16 Duncan lauds Hugo Millar: “There are several descriptions of the castle of Fraoch Eilean. The best, apart from the *Report for Argyllshire* by the Ancient Monuments Commission, is ‘The Castle of Fraoch Eilean, Loch Awe, Argyll’ by Hugo Millar, in the *Transactions of the Glasgow Archaeological Society*, New Series, Part III, pp. 111-128. An earlier description appeared in the *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal* of 1912, giving the Fraoch legend.” *Report for Argyllshire* by the Ancient Monuments Commission is now absorbed by the RCAHMS.

Figure 7. The sole remaining tree, seen here in June 2007, may soon be joined by a permanent marker to tell future generations about the castle, the crannog, the graves and the trees.



1. Millar, Hugo B., “Clan Macnachtan Castles of Argyll,” Clan Macnachtan Association Article No. 5, 1964. Millar quotes two references also used by Cock (No. 55, Campbell and No. 61, Brown). He also quotes two others: “Origines Parochiales Scotiae. The Antiquities Ecclesiastical and Territorial of the Parishes of Scotland.” Two volumes in three, published by W. H. Lizars for The Bannatyne Club, 1854, 1851 and 1855 respectively, Edinburgh. This is available on the Web and costs up to \$1,000. Millar also quotes The Highland Papers Vol. 1, which is available at The Scottish History Society.
2. McNaughton, Duncan, “The Clan McNaughton: A History,” Albyn Press, Edinburgh, 1977.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF DUBH LOCH

Examination of the above references suggests the following as the most likely history of Dubh Loch in regard to the Macnachtan castle. The Macnachtans built a fort or castle on a small island, or crannog, surrounded by water, or at least marshy ground, in the southern end of Dubh Loch. This was a good defensive position, since adversaries could be observed coming from any direction and would have to approach slowly by boat. However, it was not so good for one’s health, especially for an 18-year-old heiress, who these days would be more likely found at clubs in Los Angeles and New York. When the inhabitants were devastated by the Black Plague, the dead were buried at the nearest point on the southern shore at the Bank of Graves. There may have been no room on the island for burials and not much incentive or energy to bury further away. The loch was wider in an east-west direction than it is today, as illustrated by the Pont map made between 1583 and 1595. There was a freak flood that caused the southern outlet to silt up at the bridge. Consequently, the outlet was widened, which drained the loch and made it narrower, giving it a straight edge on the eastern shore where previously it was convex. This narrowing of the loch caused the crannog to become a mound on the eastern shoreline, whether by accident or design, and after centuries of disuse the mound has become rounded and green. The mound—which is not close to a road, may be surrounded by soggy ground and best viewed by boat—has been investigated and the results published, most notably by Hugo Millar. One or two large old trees overlooked the Bank of Graves for many years, and are to be supplemented by a permanent marker. It would be interesting to take a contour map of the surrounding glen and show the shape of the loch as the water level rises one, two and three feet, to see if the shape changes from the current one to one that looks more like Pont’s map made between 1583 and 1595.

CONTRIBUTIONS

It is thought that it might cost quite a lot of money to erect a marker or monument at the Dubh Loch site and we hope that members of our Clan agree it is a worthy project. If you would like to help, send a pledge to the Treasurer, Tim Welborn (tim@cowbellproductions.com), giving the amount, your name, address, telephone number and email address, and stating if you wish to remain anonymous. He will keep a separate record and account of these. Pledges will be published in The Red Banner as we receive them. For further information please contact Ken McNaughton or Jim Porter.

Ken McNaughton (kjmcn@comcast.net) Ellicott City, Maryland

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