



The Battle of the Pass of Crieff

This tune has different names and a cognate link with ‘MacKay’s White Banner’ and perhaps other tunes (for which see ‘The MacKay’s Banner’ in the 2001 series).

There are published settings in

--Uilleam Ross’s *Collection* (pp.75-7);

--and C. S. Thomason’s *Ceol Mor* (p. 255);

and manuscript settings

--by Colin Campbell in the Nether Lorn Canntaireachd, (i, 22-4) with the title ‘Bhratich Bhan’;

--Peter Reid, (f.20), with the title ‘MacLean of Coll’s’;

--Angus MacKay, (i, 81-82), with the title ‘Bior-linn Tighearna Cholla. The Laird of Coll’s Barge’;

--Colin Cameron, (ff.84-5), with the title ‘Baiteal Bealloch na’n Cràdh The Battle of Bealloch na’n Cràdh (Pass of Grief)’ [sic];

--David Glen (ff.322-324), with the titles ‘The Battle of the Pass of Crieff’ and ‘MacLean of Coll’s War Galley’;

--and Robert Meldrum, (ff.61-64), who also gives two titles, the same as David Glen’s.

Angus MacKay set the tune as follows:

Bior-tinn Tighearna bholla.

The Laird of holla Marge.

The musical score is presented on ten staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a 2/4 time signature. The main melody is written across the first three staves. The first variation, labeled 'var. 1st.', begins on the fourth staff. The second variation, labeled 'var. 2nd.', begins on the sixth staff. The third variation, labeled 'var. 3rd.', begins on the eighth staff. Performance markings such as 'Bis' and 'Doubbling' are placed above the notes on several staves. The score concludes with a double bar line on the tenth staff.

The image displays a handwritten musical score for Piobaireachd, consisting of 14 staves. The notation is dense and includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. Key performance instructions are written in italics: *1/2* at the top, *no* on the third staff, *no* on the fifth staff, *no* on the eighth staff, *no* on the tenth staff, and *no* on the twelfth staff. The piece concludes with the instruction *D.C. Adma. Al. Fine* at the bottom of the final staff.



Many may feel that the most attractive setting of the tune is that given in Uilleam Ross's *Collection* as follows:

CATH BEALLACH NA CRUIDH.
BATTLE OF THE PASS OF CRIEFF

Slow. *biss*

biss Thumb var

1st var *biss*

biss 2nd var: *biss*

biss Doubling 2nd var:

biss Tribling 2nd var. *biss*

Taorlaidh. *biss* 1st time 2nd time

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biss 1st time 2nd time

Doubling of Taorluidh.

biss

Trebling of Taorluidh.

biss

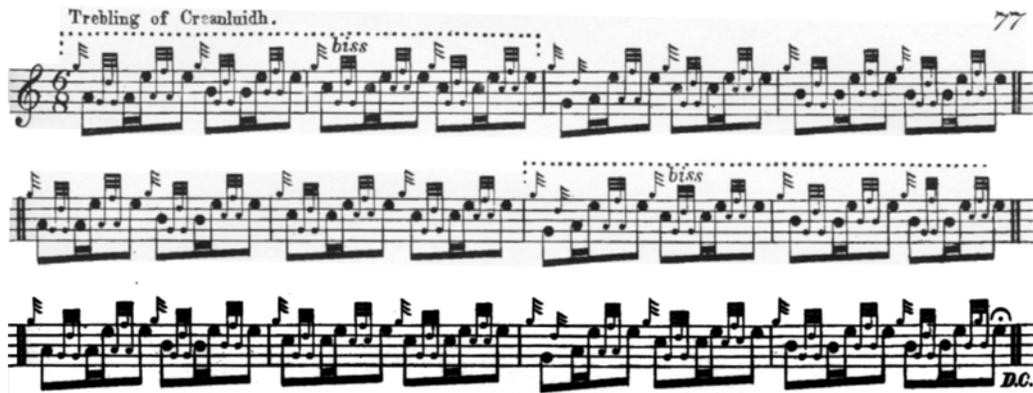
Creanluidh.

biss 1st time 2nd time

Doubling of Creanluidh.

biss

D.C.



Commentary

In many ways this tune typifies the inconsistent and inaccurate editing which make the Piobaireachd Society scores such a barrier to the understanding of the music. The editorial notes say ‘Angus MacKay’s setting has been adopted for the text’ (PS, i, 17), but MacKay’s title is discarded without explanation and his note values suffer frequent silent alteration. Archibald Campbell abandoned the 3/4 time selected for volume one of the Society’s second series in favour of quadruple time for the ground in his arrangement in the Kilberry Book; most of the other editors opt for 3/4 and 6/8.

The ‘Pass of Crieff’ title has also created problems. As we see above, Colin Cameron calls it ‘The Pass of Grief’, reading ‘Cràdh’ literally as ‘pain/anguish/torment’. When the Piobaireachd Society first adopted the title, Lt. John McLennan, G. S.’s father and teacher, wrote to the *Oban Times*: ‘We have this year “Battle of the Pass of Crieff” for competition, and after a searching enquiry, I find there is not a “Pass” within twenty miles of Crieff. I have read seven books on Perth and Perthshire, including two large volumes by the Marchioness of Tullibardine on the “War of Perthshire” and failed to find any trace of it’. (‘The Piobaireachd Society’s Music’, 02/04/1921, p.3. McLennan is referring to *A Military History of Perthshire 1660-1902*, 2 vols. Perth 1908, which was edited by the Marchioness Kitty, who composed the classic 6/8 march ‘The Scottish Horse’ and later became famous as the ‘Red Duchess’ of Atholl. It was she who gifted Duncan Campbell of Foss’s ‘Skinner Manuscript’ to the National Library of Scotland, indexed by her sister-in-law, Lady Dorothea Stewart Murray). Interestingly, Robert Meldrum also notes in his manuscript, ‘There is no such a place as the Pass of Crieff’ (National Library of Scotland, Acc.11151, f.61).

There is, however, a Pass of Creach, *Bealach nan Creach*, which lies in Kildonan, in Sutherland. The minister of the parish, the Rev. Alexander Sage gives an account of it in the *Old Statistical Account of Scotland* (1791-99):

Towards the north-west, in the height of the parish ...there is a place called *Bealach-nan-Creach*...The hill road, called *Bealach-nan-Creach*, on the west side of Bein Mhadugh, signifies the *Pass* or *Streight of Spoils*, depredation, or booty. During the establishment of the feudal system, when the McKays were proprietors of Strathnaver, in the parish of Farr, great



numbers of cattle were carried away from the Highlands of Sutherland, on this side of the county, through this pass, from which it derived its name. Such depredations were not considered as acts of spuilzie or theft, but the effects of bravery and reprizals. Near the foot of Bein Ghrim-mor, and not far from the Bealach, there is an extensive green field, (now used as a shieling), called *Inis Chomhraig*, or *the Field of Contests*; where there are many small hillocks, covered with moss and heath; and also a larger cairn, called *Carn-an-Teichigh*, the *Cairn of Retreat*. In this place, it is supposed, the people of Sutherland engaged with the McKays, to get their cattle brought out of their hands, before they had time to cross the Bealach, and could get them landed on the Strathnaver side, where, to risk an engagement, would have been attended with greater danger.' (pp.407-8).

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