An Tinne Walks

The idea for the An Tinne walks germinated during lockdown chats with musicians. I have always thought that some members of a concert audience relish the idea of talking with the artists and during intervals and after performances they are often keen to meet the musicians. This might be possible at small intimate gigs, like the many SEALL promote, but often it is not ideal for the musicians themselves who might be concentrating on a performance before a show or are tired and want to get home afterwards.

Over conversations, the idea of walks with musicians developed. Many creative folk have favourite places and locations, and if while exploring them, their stories could be meshed with and added to the An Tinne narrative it would make an event. A walk during which people could enjoy an artist's special place, meet, and spend time with them, and have the opportunity to share and talk.

I have long believed people think differently outdoors, discussions and craic, conversation, and debate outside can take all sorts of pathways and likely be as varied as the landscapes and people who are participating. Explorations can be both physical and cerebral

On reflection, I think some of the walks were as important and beneficial to the artists as the audiences, allowing them space to research, explore and share places important to them. Who knows what influence these small adventures may have on future creativity and music.

My role on the walks was twofold, firstly, and most importantly to oversee the safety and physical well-being of participants, some walks were well off the beaten track, and involved

physical effort. Someone had to carry the first aid kit and a map. Secondly, I was asked to document the walks, both by photography and words.

Some of the experiences provided inspiration for my weekly column in the 'local' newspaper the West Highland Free Press. I include some of those writing where appropriate. I have also begun each section with a short description or a link to aid those who might want to explore these places themselves.

Anybody walking these routes should follow sensible procedures, be suitably clad and be able to navigate themselves appropriately. Don't attempt anything beyond your experience and physical capability. Some of the routes might appear straightforward but are still a long way from any assistance in the event of any mishap.

Over the summer months, six musician-led guided walks to the less-well-known beauty spots of the Islands took place around cleared villages across Skye and Raasay, revealing the history of the clearances and entertaining participants along the way.

BORERAIG by
EWAN ROBERTSON

A good path but walking a good distance away from habitation.

Start Point: Cill Chriosd Carpark.
Distance: 12km

A good path but one that travels a fair distance from habitation. We walked to Boreraig and back, but many people extend the walk to make a circular route including Suisnish, returning on the road. This makes for a fabulous long day out. The start point is the Cill Chriosd carpark on the Broadford Elgol B8083 road (Grid Reference 617207) The track heads southeast up the hill where it joins the Marble Line, an old railway line for the mine workings. The path passes these workings and heads south to Boreraig.

There is a good route description of this walk available on the Walk Highlands website at https://www.walkhighlands.co.uk/skye/boreraigsuisnish.shtml

RIGG by
ANGUS MACKENZIE

Shorter walk with no defined path over rough terrain.

Start Point: Pull off A855 3Km north of Storr car park
Distance: 4 km (approx)

Angus Mackenzie is a Canadian who like me has married 'into Skye'. I first really got to know him when he gave me a lift back from Glasgow after a delayed train meant I missed the connecting bus home.

Angus has a wonderful family who all play music so perhaps as moral support he brought them all, with their instruments. I was inspired to take my own fiddle and we had a few tunes sat on a wall of one of the ruined houses. When we fill these old buildings with people, especially youngsters I am always reminded of words by the poet Mary Macpherson**, (**Màiri Mhòr nan Òran) who wrote powerful songs about the clearances. In Nuair a bha mi òg (When I was young) she says how if she would see lively youngsters and music and dance in the houses and glens, she would be as happy 'as when I was young'.

In many ways this was one of the highlights of the day playing music in the abandoned house, but also was the unique opportunity of being able to share Rigg with a man who was 'home' on holiday. He had been raised in a nearby house and was probably the last person to be born in Rigg. He had played in the area as a child in much the same way as Anne explored the cleared village of Greaulinn behind her house when wee. This was part of the inspiration and foundation for the whole of the An Tinne project. There was something serendipitous about the day.

Angus and his wife Eilidh had researched stories and tales the culmination of one actually had its anniversary on the day we explored Rigg.

RAASAY by
ANNE MARTIN

Short walk over rough terrain.

Start Point: Raasay Ferry Terminal
Distance: 2 km (approx)

SCORRYBREAK by
DANIEL CULLEN

A good trail with steeper rocky path sections.

Start Point: Somerled Square, Portree
Distance: 5km (approx)

Daniel is an actor who has run youth projects and directed the amazing drive-in pantomime held in the Sligachan Hotel car park during lockdown. The Scorrybreac circuit (or 'Black Rock' walk) is a well-known and trodden path which we often 'nip' round after shopping in Portree. I often refer to it as the Portree dog walkers walk, but it has an incredible 'bang for buck' with a beautiful route through woods and along the coast and shore. There is one short section where a narrow stone built stepped path leads up a steep slope overlooking the meadows below Toravaig. For some reason here I am always reminded of pilgrim's routes in either Spain, or even India, carrying a stout staff and blanket would seem appropriate.

Daniel had us meet in the centre of Portree and immediately inspired a lot of thought by showing us old pictures of the village, but also by reading a poem he had written. This was to be a walk discussing more recent issues, more recent changes and indeed just walking though Wentworth Street involved recollections of how the shops had changed, how there are more tourist shops and how 'You can't' buy a pair of knickers in Portree'. It almost took us as long to walk through the village as it did to complete the circuit there being so much to discuss, so much modern memory. Tourism and the influx of money from away purchasing property for letting has created a housing crisis especially for young locals, young workers who are being priced out of the market. This is increasingly being referred to as the 'modern clearances' and became a continual theme of conversation.

Amazingly when in the woods, while resting by some rocks, an old carving was discovered, a name and possibly a date, swinging the discussion back to an older history. There were younger folk on this walk and lively debate continued for some in the Tongadale Hotel over refreshments.

We began this walk in the centre of Portree and explored some of the streets, walking up the hill to the left of the Bosville Hotel, and then taking the next right to the Fire station, where there is a short path down to the road junction which takes you to the traditional start of the walk on the road to the Cuillin Hills Hotel, over the river on the shore (Grid Reference 488439). We walked anti clockwise, but for those not familiar with the route clockwise might be easier, taking the tarmac path along the shore, past the sailing club which follows the coast to then zig zag up through the woods. It is a good and well-trodden path but is quite rocky in places. At Toravaig there is a path junction, turn left to head back to Portree and the Hotel.

There is a good description of the route at
https://www.walkhighlands.co.uk/skye/scorrybreac.shtml

LOCH SLIGACHAN by
INNES WATSON

A defined, rough path with some small burn crossings.

Start Point: Sligachan Hotel Seumas' Bar car park
Distance: 12Km

I perhaps got to know Innes most during a job with a film crew, although a fine guitarist and fiddle player he also landed a part in a television series about favourite walks. He says he actually wanted to take the film crew along same route we were to take, the drove road from Sligachan to Braes, but producers and directors ended up persuading him to lead another route. His dry but cutting sense of humour and razor-sharp wit alongside his obvious passion for the area meant that we would be guaranteed a great day out.

I had never walked the route, and Innes had told me it was a good path with one or two river crossings. These burns I had seen in spate from the main road across the loch, and if there was a lot of rain, I suspected they might be impassable. This gave me the excuse to walk the route on my own the week before, as a familiarisation exercise, but also a sneaky solo day out.

It is a superb walk, passing a couple of beautiful waterfalls, one hidden in trees and the journey is a classic chance to see a familiar place from a different viewpoint. We have all driven the road between Sligachan and Sconsor countless times but walking the path on the far side of the loch adds another layer of experience and memory which can be drawn upon each time we take the more usual route by road.

Innes met us in the car park with his dog, and along with the posse of local and some now regular participants there was a family on holiday from California. I thought a lot about their experience after the walk, they were only on Skye for three days but had booked this walk along a route which was by no means one of the 'top five' tick list tourist destinations.

But they met Innes, they met a group of locals, they had conversations about the clearances, they heard Anne sing, they worried about Innes' dog who was mislaid for a while. They learnt about the drove road and sat in the ruins of the original inn. They discussed the moving of cattle, and how it might have been, as well as having the normal day to day banter and chat that walks inspire. it might have been the best day of their holiday.

After my familiarisation walk the week before we decided it might be prudent to leave my minibus at Braes enabling some to be driven back, half of the group opted to have Anne taxi them back to the hotel, while a few of us returned along the same path.

We often yearn for circular walks, being able to return to a start point a different way, but in truth there and back has a difference of 180 degrees and is such creates another contrasting viewpoint, another angle, another gaze.

Innes had arranged for Peter Morrison, piper with the Peat Bog Fairies to join him for a session in the Sligachan Hotel where they kindly played a few of the tunes I know, at a pace I could cope with, so even my fiddle had another outing.

Unless a lift can be arranged, or some complicated shuttling with cars this is a 'there and back' walk starting at the Sligachan campsite walking along the old drove road to Braes (where a car could be parked to halve the walk but increase the driving) Cars can be parked at the hotel carpark on the junction of the A87 and A 863. There is a good sized car park near the bus stop to the north although if used I think it is only appropriate to have a drink on your return (Grid Reference 485299) The half way point (or end if you park a car) is at the 'Braes road end' (Grid Reference 525330)

The walk begins through Sligachan campsite but is fairly indistinct until the main burns are crossed, then there is a well-defined but rough track. The only old ruins that are passed are marked by a tree and are the site of the original Inn.

https://www.walkhighlands.co.uk/skye/sligachanloch.shtml is the link to another description of this walk.

LEITIR FURA by
HECTOR MACINNES

Good path but walking away
from habitation.

Start Point: Carpark for Leitir Fura Walk
Distance: approx. 8Km

This is a well-defined and easy path but does go some distance from habitation. It starts on the forestry track at a car park which is sign posted from the main A 851 Sleat road (Grid Reference 705161) A kilometre or so along the land rover track there is a left turn (again well marked) onto a good footpath which circles round to the cleared village of Leiter Fura. The return is along the main forest
track. https://www.walkhighlands.co.uk/skye/kinlochforest.shtml

Just the other day a friend posted a Facebook memory, she had been kayaking in Greenland a number of years ago and wrote of an experience. *"The only time in my life I've ever heard complete silence. No running water, no birds, no people, no breeze: nothing. Just 40 degrees of sun, me and my kayak and total silence all around. Totally blew me away. I had to keep stopping to listen again!*".

The world is noisy, and nature is noisy, there are very few silent places, and if they are it is normally only a brief interlude. I am sure my friend in Greenland could have been at the same spot hours before or after and it would have sounded different, there would have been sounds.

I have known Hector for many years, being good friends with his family, he has a wit and an intellect which questions and illuminates. His people originated in Leitir Fura and so it was an obvious destination for his walk. We discussed the movement of people and stories of pirates, but also examined preservation and conservation and the sound of a place. We are so used to the visual world, especially when exploring landscape. We take photographs, often trying to capture a view, but how often do we stop and think about the sound a landscape makes.

Of course, it takes a musician to remind us of this.

An Tinne is a link, and the project revolved around an actual cooking pot chain that came from Greaulin, but also a song book that Anne has guardianship of. Hectors walk inspired me to think about the conservation and preservation of both manuscript and song. The reimagining of the collection of songs is really the sound of the book.

North fearns – Isle of Raasay

Raasay has always been a special place for me, as I worked at its outdoor centre many years ago and met Anne Martin on the ferry slipway. I eventually married her. The choice of walking to Fearns came about due to working with the primary school, and the initial idea was to get the children to lead the walk, this became a little too complicated to fit into the school itinerary. One boy and his parent managed to walk with us, their people had originally come from Fearns.

Many years ago, soon after my mother-in-law had died we decided to visit Keose in Lewis where her people had come from. The old crofter who had the land showed us what would have been the original house some of Annes's ancestors came from, now like so many just rough ruins. Our daughter was wee and was busy clambering over the walls throwing a purple 'Teletubby' cuddly toy whilst balancing on the large stone blocks. The old man looked at this little girl and quietly said, "isn't it amazing to think that her genes came from this

place!" A shiver went down my spine as I felt a connection by blood proxy to this old house, via my own daughter.

These connections are both special and unique, and to be able to share the houses of Fearns with some of its descendants was a privilege.

Anne of course asked the youngster to lead the way to the cleared houses, and he took off like a rabbit through the bracken taking the group on a more adventurous but indeed circular route, returning by a bigger path. There was a largish burn to cross involving 'combined tactics' and resulting in a comment suggesting that some might have thought twice about coming if they had known! Adventure is however all relative and with a slow pace and some extra care there were no mishaps. Anne and the young boy sang the song that the primary school pupils wrote about Fearns, which was also a very special experience. Despite being adventurous, it was only a very short walk from the road, so after returning to the minibuses, there was a decision to drive to the end of the road and walk to Hallaig.

I have some recollection of years ago of possibly abseiling down a waterfall below the village with groups from the outdoor centre, but this was my first visit to the actual houses. Funnily enough as I write this, Anne is on her way to Raasay again as she has been asked to help the children sing the song about Fearns to Princess Anne who for some reason is visiting the island.

This is a very short walk but involves logistics with a ferry so could be included with a stay at Raasay House or a bed and breakfast on the Island. The start of the walk is a pull off on the hill side on the unnumbered road from which heads east from Inverarish to Fearns (Grid Reference 588358). There is a track which heads diagonally down the hill past a house and crosses the burn. The older settlement is below and south of the houses by the road. After exploring North Fearns we drove to the end of the road and walked to the Sorley Macleans's cairn at Hallaig which is a 2.5Km continuation of the road on a very good path which was likely a horse track for people from the 'Big House' in days gone by.

These are links to a description of the walk to Hallaig, the ferry timetable and Raasay House

https://www.walkhighlands.co.uk/skye/hallaig.shtml

https://www.calmac.co.uk/summer-timetables/sconser-raasay