

5000 YEARS IN 5 HOURS

(Walking with the archaeologist through the Sma Glen)

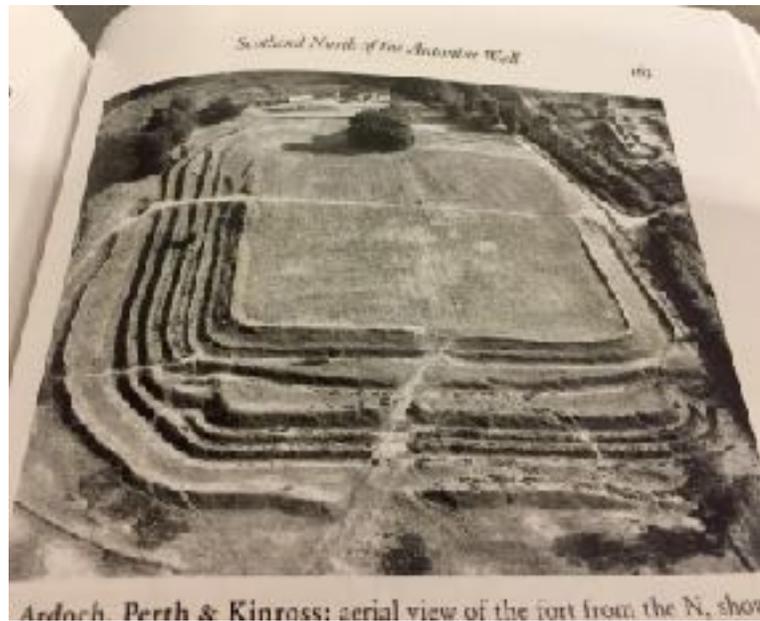
I have travelled many times through the Sma Glen, always careering past in a fast car unaware of its archaeological treasures. Gavin Lindsey from Perth & Kinross Heritage Trust changed all this.



With boundless enthusiasm, energy, erudition and eloquence, he introduced us to the Glen's fascinating layers of history with four fascinating sites, an exercise in empathy in every way.



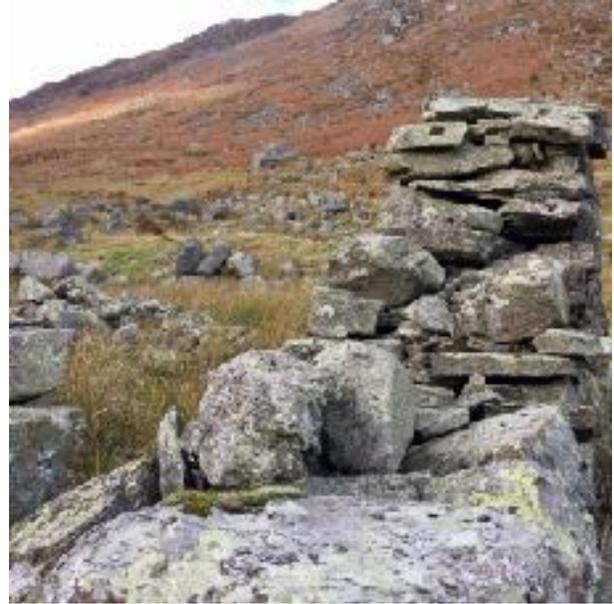
Clack Na Tiompan is a funeral cairn from Neolithic times used through generations for interring the dead. A solitary remaining Standing Stone still guards its entrance. Quartz circle the mound. A scatter of stones indicate the long tail. Seemingly, only skulls and thigh bones were excavated indicating maybe sky burials. Many people, honoured in death by grieving relatives. People like us. Gavin quipped, "How does it feel to be pre-historic?" Quick a a flash an elderly lady retorted, "My grandson already thinks I am!"



Next in time is the Roman Hill Fort at Fendoch. One of many military bases built along the Gask Ridge during the Flavian period to supervise supply lines, its outline is remarkably well preserved making it easy to imagine Roman soldiers living and working in this green valley beside the sparkling River Almond. Did they fraternise with local people? No doubt. Especially on long-awaited pay days quaffing ale, gambling, laughing and exchanging stories. But the fort was not in use for long. Dismantled efficiently, only the platform remains. And an eerie echo of marching feet and clanging armour.



Many centuries later the sounds of soldiers could be heard again. Following parts of these Roman lines, General Wade built a system of military roads to ensure George 1 could control his unruly Jacobite subjects. The bridge over the river here has been extended but it is still a testimony to Wade's engineering skills. Work was only possible from April to October. One story tells the tale of two soldiers frightened out of their wits whilst standing beside an extremely large erratic stone called Ossian's Rock when they saw the ghost of a dead comrade or was it the much-heralded Bard himself?



Closer to our own time, ruined buildings from the Faerm Toon on the Craignavar Estate, present a picture of pre-Clearance life. Again it's easy to imagine laughing voices, conversations, playing children and the noise of sheep and cattle, the latter often sharing part of the croft. These tenants of the Laird worked his lands in a feudal system that went back to the Middle Ages. But they also had communal strips, their own 'commonwealth' and shared what looks like a jacuzzi but actually is a pit for drying grain. They didn't own much but they did own their roofs and took them when they moved. Only tumbled down stone walls remain.

The Sma Glen resonates with past lives. But you need to discover them on foot. Many thanks to the Drovers' Tryst for organising such a great Walking Festival. Again!