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Thistle Epistle

September 2024

Burns Night 2025



Mark your calendars! The best party of the winter, the Society's annual Burns Night Dinner and Dance, is coming up in January on Saturday the 25th - Burns' actual birth date. It will be held at Mukogawa Commons, the same venue as for the past several years, and will feature the full program: the haggis ceremony, the Selkirk Grace, sit-down dinner, piping and drumming, the toasts to the lassies and the laddies, the toast to the Immortal Memory of Robbie Burns, highland and country dancing, the Grand march and social dancing, and a full no-host bar including a fine selection of scotch whiskies.

Preparations are well under way for the 2025 event, and full details will shortly be emailed to members.

Changes on the Society's Council



In the last edition of the Thistle, we noted that Clint Hill, our webmaster, and Barbara Bley, our Vice-president, were leaving, and we asked if any of our members would be willing to fill either of these vacancies. I am happy to report that our appeal was successful.

Chris Barton has agreed to take on the position of webmaster. Chris has a strong background in information technology management and has all the skills the position requires. Chris has been a supporter of our Scottish community, including helping, along with his family, with the set-up and take-down for the Spokane Highland Games.

Caleb McDougall is taking on the role of Vice-President. Because the opening is the result of the resignation of the incumbent, the appointment is made by the President without the need of an election, and Caleb will serve out the remainder of Barbara's two-year term, at which point he will be eligible for re-election in his own right. Caleb is a long-time member of the Spokane Scottish Country Dancers.

The Vice-President fills in for the President when required, but is also the chief organizer of the Society's Burns Night event - no small task, as I am sure all those who have attended previous Burns Nights will realize.

Thanks to both of these gentlemen for stepping up, and helping keep Scottish culture alive and well in our region. I am confident they will both do a fine job.

Highland Games



I'm happy to share that this year's Highland Games, which took place on August 3rd at the Spokane County Fair and Expo, had sunny and warm weather, without being too hot as initially forecasted. However, the total attendance this year was considerably lower compared to last year, mainly due to the forecast of extremely high temperatures. Nevertheless, the event was still filled with exhibits, vendors, music, and athletics.

Kids' games were reintroduced this year and received positive feedback from both parents and children.

Additionally, the Vikings joined us for the first time, providing an educational and enjoyable experience.

We also had an increased number of bagpipe competitors, resulting in a great Massed Bands performance.

We were delighted to have our beloved sheep herder, David Imas, return for a herding exhibition, as well as the Clydesdales, which are always popular with attendees. Unfortunately, the highland coos were not present due to safety concerns related to the forecasted high temperatures.

The opening ceremonies were hosted by Ian Roberts, who always brings joy to the stage. We are grateful for his years of cheerfully running our opening and closing ceremonies. Chieftain of the Day, Aaron Stratton, was recognized for his commitment to supporting Scottish American culture locally, particularly for his dedication to piping at our events.

The Daughters of the American Revolution joined us for the first time this year, adding to the diversity of our clans and clubs area.

Both vendors and clans reported having a good time, with many planning to return next year.

The day was filled with musical entertainment including performances by the San Francisco Scottish Fiddlers, Hunter Koss, Free Whiskey, Crooked Kilt, and Deep Roots.

Our dance competition was successful for the second year since COVID-19, and we hope that it continues to grow in the future.

We had a great turnout of athletes, and the field was busy with multiple events throughout the day.

Overall, it was a fantastic day celebrating our heritage with competition, demonstrations, and music.

We want to express our gratitude to our sponsors and the many volunteers who supported the Games. Without them, we could not have had such a fun, informative, and engaging day.

Looking ahead to 2025, it is crucial that we gain additional support in committee member roles. Currently we have an immediate need for someone to take on the role of Treasurer. If you have a financial background and would like to help continue our strong Games tradition, we'd love to hear from you. We will also be looking for candidates for other officer positions this coming January, when the Association's Annual General Meeting takes place, the most notable being that of Games Chair.

Additionally, we need multiple committee members in areas such as graphic design, web design, publicity, and set up/tear down lead apprentice. We aim to keep the Highland Games growing and thriving for years to come, and this can only happen with volunteers stepping up and contributing to the success.

If anyone is interested in joining the Spokane Highland Games Planning Committee, becoming a sponsor, or volunteering, please visit our website at www.spokanehighlandgames.net.

Until next year,

Wendi Johnson

Spokane Highland Games Chairperson

Picnic

More than twenty members came to the Society's annual picnic on August 24th. As usual it was hosted by Doug and Janet Malcolm, and was a fun event. Doug provided the sausage, chicken and pulled beef BBQ, and attendees provided a good variety of side dishes and desserts. We hope that more of you next year will come and take advantage of this free event.



Spokane Fall Folk Festival



Angus Scott Pipe Band, Lake City Highland Dancers, and the Spokane Scottish Country Dancers will be performing at the Spokane Fall Folk Festival again this year. Our group is one of the few which has been there every year since the inception of the Festival, which is now in its 29th year.

The Scottish performance will be in the Small Gym, at 12:15 pm on Saturday, November 9th. This will be different from the past two years, when the Festival did not use the gym, due to budget restraints.

The Festival takes place during the entire weekend of November 9-10. There are musical and dance acts from around the world, as well as vendors of international goods and musicians jamming in the common areas. Best of all, it is free! Hope to see you there.

St Andrews Day



Scotland celebrates its patron saint, St Andrew, on November 30th. Previous issues of the Thistle have discussed St Andrew, his links to Scotland, and the Saltire - Scotland's flag with a white diagonal cross on a field of blue.

The Scottish government is trying to gain greater recognition of St Andrew's Day, both in Scotland itself and in Scottish communities throughout the world. The Society responded to a questionnaire from them asking how the day was celebrated here. Currently the Society does not have any particular event, though in the past we have had a Kirkin' o' the Tartan. The problem with any celebration on November 30th in the USA is that it almost always coincides with Thanksgiving. Although there is no formal event, it is a day when we particularly encourage members to sport their tartan.

Highland Dance



After a busy summer, classes are starting back up at Lake City Highland Dance (LCHD), with many new students starting classes this fall.

During the summer dancers competed in, and placed well at, multiple competitions. These include the Spokane Highland Games, The Pacific Northwest Highland Games in Enumclaw, Prosser Scottish Fest, Kelso's Highlander Festival, as well as many more throughout the Northwest and even Canada. All dancers took home numerous awards and trophies.

For the fall there are a couple more competitions coming up in Portland, McMinnville and Seattle.

Outside of competition, LCHD had a very successful performance at Coeur d' Alene's Art on the Green, giving dancers a chance to perform prior to the competition at the Spokane Highland Games. Many dancers compete in the choreography competition at the Spokane Games, and the Art on the Green performance gives them a chance to run through their choreographies and dances in front of an audience before the Games.

At the Spokane Highland Games, after the competition in the morning LCHD dancers also gave a performance at the main stage. We even had a Missoula dancer performing. The afternoon performance is always fun, as the competition jitters are over. It also allows us the opportunity to introduce highland dance to those who may not know much about it, or may have missed watching the competition.

The Missoula Highland dancers performed at the Bitterroot Games on August 17th, after the unfortunate cancellation of the Highland dance competition at these Games.

LCHD is looking forward to up coming performances at the Fall Folk Fest in Spokane and our holiday performance in December.

Lake City Highland Dance will be opening their new studio in 2025! We haven't had our own space since 2021, and have been renting studio space ever since. Plans are underway for a new studio in the Coeur d'Alene area, with more classes to be added after opening. Donations are greatly appreciated and tips are helpful on where to buy cheap flooring, mirrors, etc.

Megan Sargent and Victoria Hawkins

Spokane Scottish Country Dancers



On October 17, we will be hosting a Beginners Night, essentially an introduction to Scottish country dancing. The dances will be kept simple and taught at a pace geared to new dancers. We hope lots of people will join us to try Scottish country dancing for themselves and find out how much fun it is. The class will run from 6:30-8:30 pm (our usual dance night hours) in the church hall of Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church, 1703 N Washington, just south of Indiana, and it's free!

We are making good progress in switching our music source from CDs to MP3 files, having recently acquired a tablet to go with the speakers that Clint Hill generously donated to us. We are grateful to Caleb McDougall who, with help from Sharon McDougall, is steadily working through our collection of CDs to create MP3 files.

We are looking forward to our annual performance at the Fall Folk Festival on Saturday, 9 November, together with the Angus Scott Pipe Band and Lake City Highland Dancers. Details of the Scottish hour appear elsewhere in this newsletter.

Anna Guthrie

Torra Tea



A new Scottish-themed restaurant has opened in Spokane Valley. Torra Tea is located at 11205 E. Dishman-Mica Road, Suite 104C. It has a large menu, which is tea and whiskey forward, and offers tea, spirits and bites with overtures of Scotland woven into everything. The nod comes from the business owner's Scottish heritage that she and her husband both share. Torra Tea is part tea house with elements of traditional tea service but also offers some unexpected tea services such as their night cap tea and Scottish High Tea, which is a supper and more of a 3-course offering. They offer small bites for tea and appetizers specializing in savory pies and galettes (savory slab pies). Other entrees are also available, like bourbon maple beef short ribs and lighter meals like soups and salads.

Our Society's President went and recommends it: he had the sausage roll, with very tasty mustard.

Scottish and Celtic Upcoming Musical Events

Two upcoming events for music lovers which may be of interest to members are coming soon:

The Spokane Symphony's Masterworks concerts



Performances are on the evening of Saturday, October 4th and the afternoon of Sunday, October 5th.

The concerts are entitled "Scotland the Brave". They feature "Glisk" by Aileen Sweeney, a Scottish composer who lives in Glasgow; Christopher Rouse's flute concerto; and Felix Mendelssohn's "Scottish" Symphony # 3.

Mendelssohn was regarded as a young prodigy, both as a performer and a composer. His third symphony, the "Scottish Symphony" was inspired by a visit to Scotland in 1829, when he was twenty. The visit left a great impression on him, resulting in the Hebrides overture as well as this symphony. He sketched out some

ideas at that time for the introduction to the symphony, but then set the work aside until 1840, when he wrote the actual composition - his last, and possibly finest completed symphony.

James Lowe, the Music Director of the Spokane Symphony, has strong ties to Scotland. He graduated from the University of Edinburgh, and he lives part-time in Scotland.

The Society will be having a table at both performances promoting all the aspects of Scottish culture which thrive in our community.

Christmas with The Celts



This concert will at the Fox Theater, on Friday, December 13th at 8:00 pm.

Top Irish musicians have united with the finest Nashville players to create the new sound and energy of The Celts. TC perform a fresh hybrid of Irish Americana which combines their own rootsy originals and tight vocal harmonies with fiery Irish Trad instrumentals. The Celts are award winning lead singer/fiddler Maggie Lander, Ric Blair on vocals, guitar, piano, and bodhran, Patrick D'Arcy (U2, Sting, Josh Groban) from Dublin, Ireland on pipes, whistle, mandolin, Fiachra O'Regan (Waterboys, Bill Whelan) from Connemara, Ireland on pipes and tenor banjo, and Matt Menefee (Bruce Hornsby, Mumford & Sons) on 5 string banjo/mandolin, dobro, and vocals.

Scottish Politics



Well, unlike in more of of the previous issues of the Thistle than I would like, at least this time I don't have to report a change of First Ministers in Scotland! In 2023 it was Nicola Sturgeon who went, then in 2024 so did her successor, Humza Yousaf. He was replaced by John Swinney - who is still there. However, all is not plain sailing for Swinney and the Scottish National Party (SNP). In the July 2024 British general election the Labour Party won in a landslide. It garnered 412 seats, out of 586, a gain of over 200. The Conservatives lost 251 seats and their vote share dropped by 20% to 24%. Labour's vote share increased by only 2% in the UK as a whole, but in Scotland it increased by 17%. There was a radical change of representation of Scottish MPs in the British Parliament: Labour increased from 1 seat to 37, while the SNP dropped from 48 to 9. Labour's popularity in Scotland poses a major threat to the SNP, who have a minority of seats in the Scottish Parliament and can only continue in office by forming coalitions with other minority parties. This is becoming increasingly hard to do: the government lost two votes in the Scottish Parliament in one day.

The SNP has been in power since the 2014 referendum, and the state of affairs in Scotland has greatly worsened over that period. The perception is that the SNP has concentrated on the independence issue to the exclusion of everything else. This has led to crises in education, the national health service, and the economy. More than 10 percent of Scottish population is living in severe poverty. Swinney's finance minister is cutting social service and education budgets due to the poor financial position of the government. The Scottish Government hoped that the new UK Labour Government would bail them out, but the UK Government is short on resources as well. The basic governance issues of education, the NHS and the economy are topmost in people's minds, with independence not figuring highly.

Part of the financial and economic problems may be laid at the door of Brexit. Economists agree that leaving the EU has had a negative effect. The UK's Office of Budget Responsibility estimates that the economy is 4% smaller than it would have been had the UK stayed in the EU. Since 2020, when the UK

formally split off, it underperformed all of the other G7 members. The value of the pound dropped by over 10 %, which has the effect of raising prices, while real wages were down by nearly 3%. The UK's pre-pandemic economy was 90% the size of Germany's; it dropped to 70%. Unfortunately the new Labour government's plans to increase taxes on the rich by taxing their world-wide income is leading to an exodus of the wealthy individuals, and the companies they run.

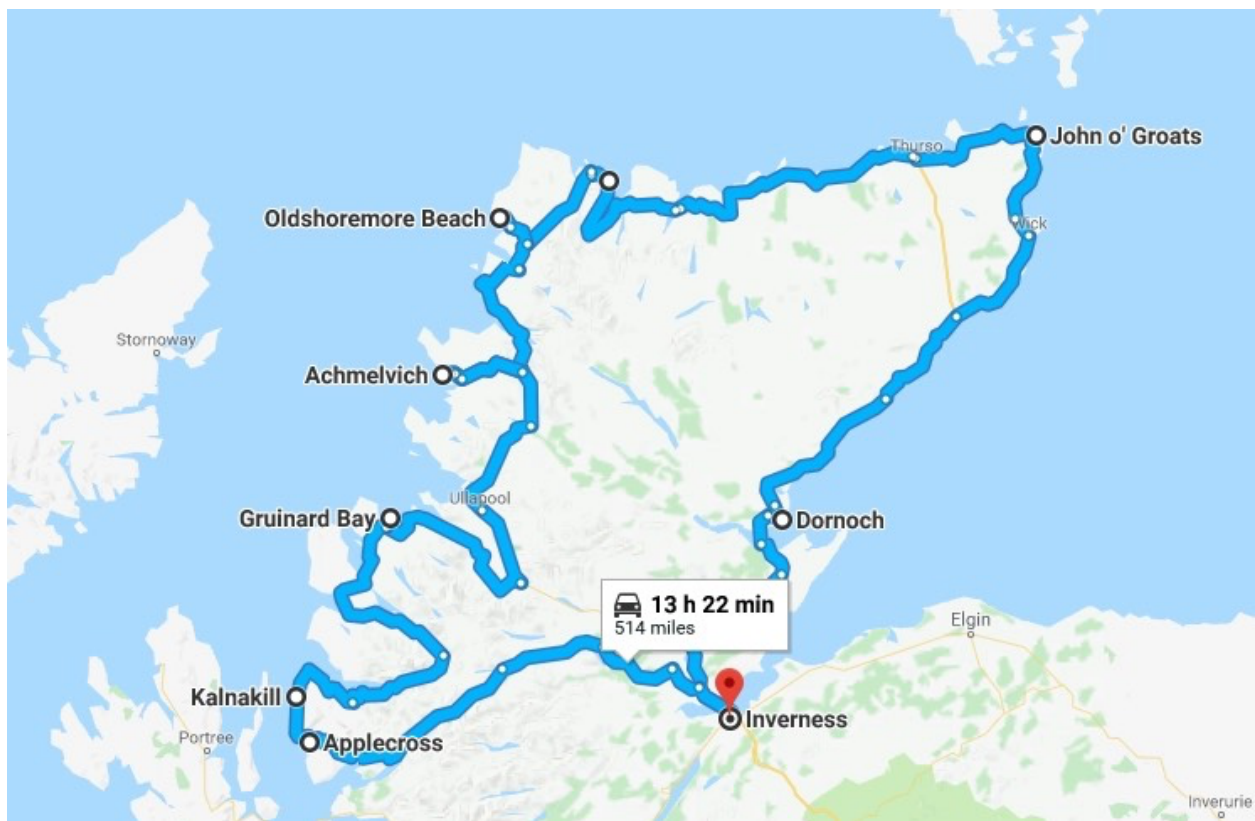
Scotland's argument for another referendum after the 2014 one was that what they voted for in 2014 - staying in the UK as part of the EU - no longer applied, and they could do better leaving the rest of the UK and rejoining the EU. Maybe if Brexit has had such a negative economic impact, they should look more closely at the independence issue.

The NC500



Most visitors to Scotland visit Edinburgh and Stirling, and many go as far north as Inverness and Skye. For enthusiastic motorists - or motorcyclists and cyclists for that matter - why not try going further north on the NC500 - the North Coast 500 mile route.

The NC500 was designated as a tourist route in 2015. The main route is actually a bit over 500 miles, and begins and ends in Inverness. As you can see from the map, it can be done in one very long day, but that is certainly not recommended: it is a journey, not a race. A minimum of 5 days is recommended, but longer is better. One can follow just the main route, but there are many interesting diversions from it that one can take.



The scenery, particularly on the west coast, is maybe the main attraction - Sutherland has been described as “the last great wilderness in Europe”. However, there are many other attractions along the route. A few among many:

- Distilleries, such as Glenmorangie, Clynelish and Old Pulteney;
- Castles such as Dunrobin, Sinclair and Ardvreck;
- Bird sanctuaries such as Handa Island;
- Natural features such as Smoo Caves and the stacks at Dunnett Head;
- The garden at Inverewe, a beneficiary of the warm Gulf Stream;
- Engineering feats such as Kylesku Bridge.

If you go, spring and fall are the best times, being less crowded, and the weather is not too chilly - though bear in mind we are talking about Scotland, its sometimes fickle weather, and its wetter west coast. Summer may be warmer, but busier - and the midges come out. Increasingly popular are winter trips: much less busy, though there is the risk of roads closing due to snow, and some hotels close from November to March.

The area has become a popular draw for car clubs. It is not unusual to be driving along a one-lane-with passing spots road and come across a cavalcade of ten or more Porsches.

If you do decide to go, you can rent a car in Inverness, though it will be more expensive than renting in Edinburgh airport. You probably won't be able to find some of the exotics such as Porsches and Aston Martins which frequent the route - and if you do, you probably can't insure it. However the Ford we rented worked perfectly well, and along the roads in the region supercars can't go any faster than any other car.

Also, bear in mind that you need to plan ahead. There are many types of accommodation, but many are booked well in advance.

If you are interested, “NC500” typed into your search engine will bring up a wealth of information.

We thoroughly enjoyed our trip on the west side; I'm sure you would too.



Balnakeil Beach, near Durness