



[The Stowaway - A Body Found in Southern Pairc (1887)]

Even now more than a century after the event, the people of Lochs still talk about the body that was discovered in Southern Park on 2nd August 1887. The body and his grave are normally referred to as that of the stowaway, or the fireman, to this day, and there are only a few people still left in Lochs who know the story of the stowaway.

However, his death is registered and there is therefore no doubt that such a person existed, even although the details of who he was or where he came from are not known. His death is noted in the register on January 1888 as an unnamed man about 30 years old whose body was found at 'Colbal Hill' in Southern Park on 2nd August 1887. He is referred to as the fireman.

At that time people were under the impression, rightly or wrongly, that the law of the land required that human remains be buried near where they were found. Probably that is why there are single graves to be found here and there. There is a grave on the writer's croft called 'Donald's Grave', and no one knows who Donald was.

It is said that Joseph Platt, who took over the tenancy of the sporting estate of Pairc in 1886 when the Park Sheep Farm was converted into a Deer Park, made enquiries with a view to identifying the remains. He approached the Federation of Shipping to see if they knew of any ship that might have been in the vicinity of Pairc at that time.

They were not aware of any ships being there and in the circumstances Mr Platt provided a coffin for the remains and gave it a decent burial where he was found, not far from 'Buthinish/Gearraidh-Riaghsaigh', near the southern shore of Loch Shell, not far from the 'Black Burn'. The grave is marked with two cairns of loose stones, one at each end of the grave. The place is well known to gamekeepers and others who move about in that district.

Once again we proved the value of duly noting oral tradition in our search to record as much as possible of the fast disappearing local history of Lochs. We approached four well informed local people in Park and Balallan, who were not only informed of this event, but the oral tradition agreed substantially, except that some thought it was during the summer season that the stowaway was seen and spoken to by gamekeepers, while others maintained that it was the winter with snow on the ground and the man was leaving footprints in the snow as he walked.

The Brollum gamekeeper at that time, whose name was thought to be Mr Munro, came upon the stowaway sleeping under one of the estate fishing boats at the fresh water loch 'Lacasdal'. The man explained that he was a stowaway who came from a ship in the area of 'Loch Claidh' at the southern tip of the Park Peninsula, and that he was making his way to Stornoway in order to get another ship. Mr Munro and his gamekeeping party noted that the man had food and they advised him to follow the estate workers, who were visible in the distance walking northwards towards Loch Shell and the Eishkin shooting lodge.

When these estate workers reached the lodge they reported that they had seen a man walking alone well behind them but they had no idea who he was. Apparently the management of the estate did not do anything about the stranger and the matter was forgotten until a body was discovered the following year in an advanced state of decomposition. Everyone then recalled the story of the stowaway.

It is not clear how the man came to be called a fireman unless he referred to himself as a fireman. That raises the question of whether the so-called ship from which he came was a sailing ship or a steam ship. No reference was made to language and presumably he must have been an English speaking person.

The gamekeeper stationed at Valamus maintained that there was a ship at anchor at that time in his area, and that he thought it might have been a foreign ship. A glance at the map indicates that if a man came ashore from a ship somewhere in the Brollum/Valamus area and set course for the head of Loch Shell, he would very likely pass near Loch Lacasdal.

The body was said to have been found by Douglas Thorneycroft, a brother of Jessie Platt, when he was out shooting with a party not far from Buthinish.

Whether it was summer or winter when the man was seen walking towards Loch Shell and Eishkin Lodge, it is a puzzle why a young man of about 30 years of age would perish so near to human habitation.

Also, although he could not see Eishkin Lodge from where he died, he could see the Eishkin Estate yacht 'Transit' moored near Eishkin Lodge, and therefore local people were wondering why he did not try to attract attention by lighting a fire or something.

The year 1887 was the year of the famous Park Deer Raid, but that was in November, so there was no question of the two events being related in any way.

[ends]

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