



The Loss of the Crew of the 'Rìbhinn Donn' (1922)

In November 1922, 5 Calbost landless families prepared to settle in Steimreway. As one of their numbers, Kenneth Mackay of 7 Calbost was the skipper of the fishing boat 'Rìbhinn Donn' they loaded that boat with timber, bales of straw for thatch, etc.

The 5 Calbost land raiders were:

Kenneth Mackay	born 1885	1 of 3 families sharing croft 7
Donald Morrison	born 1867	1 of 6 families sharing croft 9
Neil Morrison	born 1863	1 of 6 families sharing croft 9
Murdo Finlayson	born 1889	1 of 3 families sharing croft 10
Angus Finlayson	born 1874	1 of 3 families sharing croft 13

On the day that was set aside to transport the building materials to Steimreway, 1st November 1922, 3 young men who were keen to take part in the adventurous trip accompanied the 5 land raiders. They were:

Iain 'Neill' Morrison	19-year-old son of the above Neil
Iain 'Dhomhnuill' Morrison	20-year-old son of the above Donald
Kenny Mackay	15-year-old nephew of skipper Kenneth.

It was arranged that Donald and the two young Morrison boys take out the rowing boat known as 'Geola Ruadh' from Calbost beach with stores including bales of straw, and rendezvous with the 'Rìbhinn Donn' in the passing at Calbost Bay. Allan Finlayson of 8 Marvig, another land raider, was to join the group, but he slept in.

The 'Rìbhinn Donn' and the rowing boat met at Calbost Bay as arranged, and the rowing boat was taken in tow, on a fine morning with a favourable wind. The boats were making good progress, but the wind was rising. By the time they were abreast of Loch Shell, the wind had reached gale proportions.

Suddenly, the sail of the 'Rìbhinn Donn' was torn badly and the crew lowered it quickly to repair it, including Donald who came out of the rowing boat to help. The two young men declined to come out of the rowing boat, and in fact young Kenny wanted to join them, but his uncle made him stay in the big boat. The boats drifted helplessly out to sea in the offshore gale.

The men worked feverishly to repair the sail, and after a while a Fleetwood whitefish trawler named 'Glen Bervie' came and offered to tow them into shelter provided the skipper came on board the trawler to act as pilot.

When the trawler moved forward, and the towrope strained, the rowing boat listed and the two young men, along with the bale of straw they were sitting on, were thrown overboard. They were good swimmers, and at first they clung on to the floating bales of straw, but unfortunately they left the bales of straw in order to swim back to the 'Rìbhinn Donn'. They were almost in reach of a lifeline when one of them disappeared under the water followed by the other.

Everybody was devastated with the dramatic suddenness of the double tragedy.

Eventually, after days of anxious waiting, the bodies were recovered.

As a result of the tragedy, four of the five land raiders withdrew from going to Steimreway. Donald Morrison was the only one who pressed on with plans to settle in Steimreway despite the fact he had lost his son. His family remained there for twenty years until the isolation of no roads, schools, or facilities forced them out.

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