

A new road between Lochailort and Kinacarra.

The Highlands Archives Centre in Fort William has astonishing records about earlier requests for a road to be built between Kinacarra (Glenmoidart) and Kinlochailort. These records were archived by the Cameron-Heads of The Castle, Lochailort. (D271/B/II/3/ii/d, D271/B/II/3/ii/g and D271/B/III/6). There is a huge collection of letters received or written by them about a road proposed in 1897 to connect Glenuig, Smirisary and Roshven with the railway station proposed to be built at Kinlochailort for trains between Fort William and Mallaig. The station opened there in 1901. There is a huge map in the records of the road proposed in 1899 and records about groups of locals petitioning for the building of a roadway to the station. The road had to go through estate lands and was approved of by the landowners of Glenmoidart, Glenuig and Roshven estates, but the Cameron-Heads refused to let the public have access in front of the castle and the plans seem to have reached failure by June 1921. The estimated cost then was £21,500. There seem to be no further records in the archives about a roadway until February 1934 and then there are new plans for the road to be built on a causeway on the bay in front of the castle. There are a number of letters from people from Acharacle and Ardnamurchan which press for a roadway to Kinlochailort and point out that they have only very expensive ferry transport on Loch Shiel to get to the railway station at Glenfinnan and what a long walk it was from the ferry pier to the station there, and how the timing of a connection between boat and train was hopeless. The Council disapproved of the high cost that the new roadway would be and in March 1935 there is a letter in the Archives from Inverness County Council to the Cameron-Heads saying that a road from Glenmoidart to Kinlochailort had been turned down even after they had taken out the request for a branch from Glenuig to Smirisary. They said that the council had decided they could only support the building of a bridge between Ardgour and Corran and that that would provide good access to the big world for the people of Moidart! After lots more petitioning in the 1950's the road from Lochailort to Glenmoidart was finally approved of in 1963 and opened on 26th July 1966. But the Corran-Ardgour bridge has never been built.

The Oban times has a large collection of letters in 1919 about there being two new roads built in Moidart. They were found by Jean Cameron and retyped by Gordon Barr :-

Articles about Moidart Roads 1919.

THE LAND OF MOIDART
HARDSHIPS OF ISOLATION

By a Correspondent

Oban Times, 25th January 1919

In view of the many advances in inland transport promised and projected by the Coalition, it is important that the district of Moidart should have her needs made known, that it too, may receive its due need of official attention in the days of reconstruction.

Few parts of the country have suffered more in past years from want of the means of communication with the outside world. For

parts of the country remain undeveloped— few, very few parts have been left in such a state of hopeless isolation, unable to obtain a market for its products; unable even to produce except in the heartless, careless manner of those who live from hand to mouth.

Roads Wanted.

While other parts of the country are calling for light railways, for canals and waterways to open up the land and develop its industries we in Moidart not so far advanced, are merely asking for roads. The only means of communication with a railway station is by Loch Shiel, and even this very indifferent means of transport is available for only a small part of the district. The tiny mail and passenger boat leaves Atharacle daily for Glenfinnan at 9.30 a.m., and returns at 3.30 p.m. During the rest of the day and night we are literally debarred from visiting the outside world. We are in a land by ourselves, apart, unable to go elsewhere, no matter what our needs, unable to leave home no matter what important business may call us elsewhere. To the hermit in love with his lonely cell, or to the student enamoured of solitude, Moidart would no doubt be a paradise, but to the crofter or the smallholder, who can only live by bringing the results of his labour to the market, it is little short of prison. True there is a road round by Salen and Strontian to Glenfinnan, a distance of over sixty miles, or to Fort William by crossing Loch Linnhe at Corran— a distance of forty miles — but in the first place, this is but a poor substitute for a direct route, when a direct route of twenty miles in length is feasible; and, in the second place, or what use it is to the people of Smearisary, Glenuig and Roshven who have to march for miles and miles over a roadless waste before they arrive where the road begins. To a stranger arriving to this part of the country, the first thought that comes is out of order as to what the County Council is doing.

The district is not unpopulous, but like other places in the Highlands where similar (even though not such extreme conditions prevail) depopulation is proceeding apace. The younger generation has found that life at home is but a disadvantage, and that the conditions under which it has to be lived are next to intolerable. Slowly but surely the manhood of this district is reluctantly making its home elsewhere, and Moidart is left to mourn over the empty cottage and the dismantled steading, which might both have been teeming as of old. And what is that remedy? The answer roads, roads, and more roads.

Let the country be opened up and the country will have a chance to prosper. Let it be made practical for the smallholder to bring his farm produce to the market, and the small holder will bring all his native energy to the fore and treble his output. Let it be made possible for the worker on his little farm to earn his livelihood by selling the produce of his farm, and the produce will be forthcoming. The first necessity is roads.

Two Possible Routes

There are two possible routes, both of which are quite practicable, both of which should be immediately attempted. A local road already exists from Dorlin round by Mingarry and Dalnabreach to Kinlochmoidart. Here it abruptly ends and a narrow and dangerous footpath conducts the weary traveller onwards to Glenuig. Turning to the left he finds a good road for a short distance to Glenuig House, after which, if he desires to continue his journey to the township of Smearisry, he has to be contented to make his way as best he can through the moor with a slippery stepping-stone here and there to help him on his way. Did he turn to the right at Glenuig he finds another footpath onwards by Roshven and Alisary to the railway station at Lochailort. What will most impress the traveller in his peregrinations is the curious combinations of facts— that while it is hardly possible to imagine a worse road than we have here, yet it would be comparatively easy to make a good one. True, it would not be all child-play engineering, but only very second-rate difficulties and obstacles would have to be overcome. It would cost much money, you may say. True, it would cost a certain amount, but money spent in an enterprise which will enhance the productivity of a country is not money thrown away, but money laid out at a high rate of interest. This is the first proposed route along which a road could with little difficulties be

made from Kinlochmoidart to Glenuig to Kinlochailort, with a road branching off to the left at Glenuig, joining the township of Smerisary to the main road.

Another possible route is by the side of Loch Shiel to Glenfinnan, where it could join the Fort William-Mallaig road, and where a railway station is to be met with. This projected road presents but few engineering difficulties, while its effects on the future development of the country are simply incalculable. Why should both roads not be made, and at once? We have waited long enough for this minimum of civilisation; are we to wait much longer? Both roads were projected many years ago; both projects were abandoned, be it noted, on account of any insurmountable obstacles that engineers wot?? of, not because the need was not urgent and fully recognised; not because of the financial burden such a scheme would entail (The money was forthcoming), but because some of the neighbouring landed proprietors did not quite see their way to approve of the project! Was it, I suggest, lest their privacy should be disturbed for a few months of the year by the country being opened up; was it perhaps lest the deer should be frightened?

This is our chief grievance here in Moidart, the extent (?) of roads, our inability to move elsewhere when the occasion arises, the impossibility of getting our farm produce to the market. And anyone who reads this article will, I feel sure, agree that it is a real one. If the stream of emigrants from the Highlands is to be checked, and checked it must be if we hope to save the country—we must make the conditions of life there at least tolerable; we must make life as much worth living there as elsewhere. The Land Court, or whatever body is to inherit its powers (Minus, let us hope, its "wait and see" policy) will have to muster its strength and exert its powers to make it that a former process is reversed, and that the deer goes out and the man comes in. It will have to see that the land is once more put in its natural use and that the industrious and thrifty small holder will have every encouragement to make good. In Moidart, as elsewhere, its work is cut out for this department of reconstruction.

ISOLATION OF MOIDART
(TO THE EDITOR OF THE "OBAN TIMES")

27th January 1919.

Sir,- The article in last week's "Oban Times" on the "Isolation of Moidart" and the question of its roads, etc., is all that could be desired for a clear, fair statement of the condition of affairs in that district. Anyone who took an interest in the work of our local District Tribunal during the past two years can remember the evidence produced in connection with the hardships of the population in Glenuig, Smerisary (sic) and other parts of Moidart.

There is not much call for a road alongside Lochsiel (sic) from Moidart to Glenfinnan, as the facilities there can easily be improved by having a larger and speedier boat, but the road outlined by your correspondent from Kinlochmoidart, via Glenuig and Roshven to Lochailort, is most urgently required, if the long-neglected wants of these districts are to be met.

The conditions prevalent at the late General Election amply proved the entire isolation of Moidart, when it is made known that the laird of Moidart was the only elector from the district that registered a vote at Arisaig on the 14th December last.

Perhaps your correspondent is not aware that the people of Glenuig, Smerisary, Roshven, as well as Ardnish, have a grievance that hits them much harder than the want of roads, viz., the action that was taken a number of years ago in depriving them of the proper facilities of a landing place with their boats at Inverailort.

It is to be hoped that every assistance will be rendered to the people in restoring a right they enjoyed from time immemorial, and I am almost certain every proprietor will join hands with them in pressing the responsible authorities to get matters adjusted to their original conditions.

The people of Moidart district have sacrificed much of their best manhood - there are few doors but the War has left its sad tale of death - and therefore deserve the most liberal consideration by the State, in seeing that their lot in the future is made as fit for living in as any other part of the country. On several occasions it has been my privilege to visit the districts, and nowhere in the Highlands can a more hospitable and kindlier people be found. On my last visit, after landing at M'Vicar's Island, and climbing the hill a bit, we met their much-respected Provost, escorted by two young lads from Glenuig, who were assisting him along the rugged path, and this was none other than the public highway, for a little further on we met the Moidart police constable on his rounds. I agree with your correspondent that any question of privacy or deer preserve can have no place at this time of day, even in these parts. Men must have the first place; but my information is that when this road was engineered on a former occasion, some of the lairds subscribed very handsomely, and no doubt they will do so again. - I am etc.,
A Lover of Moidart.

THE ROADS OF MOIDART
[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "OBAN TIMES."]

28th January, 1919.

Sir,- I read with interest your correspondent's letter about Roads for Moidart. His statement that the money was forthcoming to make two roads to Moidart needs substantiation, which I have no doubt he will willingly give. As the existing Fort William-Mallaig road is almost derelict from want of funds and labour, it is not common sense to talk of making new roads until we are certain that there are enough funds to keep the present ones in decent order. It would be interesting to know in whose coffers are secreted the large sum which your correspondent says was forthcoming for the construction of the proposed new roads. Was it a Government grant or private enterprise? The proprietors are accused of having wrecked the scheme by private objections, but was the scheme ever laid before the proprietors of the district in concrete form, and were they informed that the funds for the construction of the proposed roads were then in hand? If so, when and by whom?

Has your correspondent any estimate in his mind as to the probable cost of the suggested roads? He promises a high rate of interest on the cost owing to the productivity of the country to be opened up - what form would that productivity take, and how would the high rate of interest be guaranteed?

In conclusion, I would again point out that if the existing roads cannot be kept in a condition of suitable repair, it would be folly to construct new ones.- I am, etc.

A Seeker for Information.

THE ROADS OF MOIDART
[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "OBAN TIMES."]

February 8th, 1919.

Sir,- My object in writing the article on the Land of Moidart and its State of Isolation, which you kindly published in a recent issue of the "Oban Times," was that public attention might be called to the fact that our means of transport here and of communication with the outer world are anything but adequate; that for this reason this part of the country has suffered terribly in the past, and that it will remain to the end an undeveloped land, unproductive and full of hardships, unless a remedy is forthcoming. The remedy I suggested was the construction of new roads, and I suggested two routes which might be followed and which present no great engineering difficulties. Your correspondent "A Seeker for Information," has rather denied any of these facts, nor has he

impugned my suggestions. As the other tit-bits of information which he seeks, although possibly of some historical interest, are quite beside the point, I do not see what can be gained for the roads of Moidart by their discussion.

Granted the necessity for new roads and the possibility of their construction, we are naturally more interested in the present and future than in the past. Might I, however, suggest that a remedy for the indifferent state of the Mallaig-Fort William roads might be sought more profitably in other directions than by opposing the construction of new roads in Moidart? It can scarcely be considered a great source of consolation to us here in Moidart to know that those who use the Mallaig-Fort William road suffer somewhat, when we ourselves in going from Kinlochmoidart to Smearisary or Inverailort, or from Dalilea to Glenfinnan, have not even a hard road to travel on.- I am, etc.,

The Writer of the Article.

THE ROADS OF MOIDART
[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "OBAN TIMES."]

17th February, 1919.

Sir,- In reply to the letter of your correspondent, "The Writer of the Article" on February 8th, I would point out that the questions asked in my letter of 28th January were not put for the sake of acquiring useless tit-bits of information, but are very apposite to the question of the making of roads to Moidart.

Your correspondent stated that money had already been provided for such roads and that money spent on such roads would bear good interest. It is in the interest both of the roads and of public morality to know what has become of the money he states was already provided for the purpose of constructing these roads, and it would be an encouragement to invest money now in the construction of these roads if subscribers were informed how the roads would be remunerative. Perhaps, having regard to the population of Moidart as it appears in the valuation roll, your correspondent regards the making of the roads as a purely philanthropic undertaking. In any case, he has published deliberate statements which should never have been made if he is not prepared to substantiate them.- I am, etc.,

A SEEKER FOR INFORMATION.

THE LOCHAILORT FORESHORE
THE "OBAN TIMES.", 15th February, 1919.

A well signed petition from Glenuig, Smearisary, and other districts of Moidart has been forwarded to the Board of Agriculture for Scotland and the Solicitor-General for Scotland, M.P. for Inverness-shire, to the following effect:-*To the Board of Agriculture for Scotland.*

Gentlemen,

We the undersigned, small-holders, fishermen and inhabitants of Glenuig, Smearisary, etc., in the Parish of Arisaig and Moidart, humbly beg to petition the Board of Agriculture to investigate into the hardship we have had to undergo for many years.

Ever since our right on the foreshore for landing our boats was taken from us, at the head of Loch Ailort, alongside the public road, near Inverailort Castle, we have been deprived of a right our forefathers possessed from generation to generation.

The present owner of Inverailort estate has erected an iron fence, and built a private boathouse on said landing-place, which necessitates much needless labour to the petitioners, and this is the safest and nearest point for landing, especially in stormy weather.

As there is no roadway to Glenuig for carting or vehicular traffic, we entirely depend on the water-way for getting our foodstuffs and necessities of life from Lochailort Station.

We, therefore earnestly entreat that the Board will have our request thoroughly investigated, in all its details, so that it may result in our having matters adjusted to what they originally were.

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Oban Times 8th March 1919
THE ROADS OF MOIDART
[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "OBAN TIMES"]

February 22 1919

Sir- Before replying to "A Speaker for Information's" letter in this week's "Oban Times" I would like to voice my admiration of your excellent leader on Highland Reconstruction Schemes, in which the case for the Highlands is clearly and concisely put forward and at the same time to express my gratitude - in which doubtless many of your readers will concur - to your paper for so admirably exposing the necessities of the Highlands, and so clearly suggesting the remedies.

During the four and a half years, now happily ended, in which the case for civilisation was being tried on the battlefield of Europe, Africa and Asia, you, Sir, were both the guide and mouthpiece of the Highlands, arousing patriotism and clearly indicating to the Highlander where his duty lay. Now, in the days of reconstruction, we hope to have you again as our leader and our guide in our endeavour to obtain for our native land at least the minimum of well-being which is necessary in order that life may be worth the living, and without obtaining which we would be tempted to think that our many sacrifices had been in vain.

With regard to the structure of "A Seeker for Information," I would ask him to read, quietly and calmly, my article on "The Land of Moidart" to which he refers. My words to which he takes exception were :-

Both roads were projected many years ago; both projects were abandoned . . . not because of the financial burden such a scheme would entail (the money was forthcoming), but because, etc

His version of what I wrote according to his last letter is:- "Your correspondent stated that money had already been provided for such roads." I leave it to your readers to solve the enigma of how "A Seeker for Information's" version corresponds with what I actually wrote. "Forthcoming" and "already provided" have, I think, different significations. That the money was forthcoming, no one who is in any way conversant with the circumstances will deny, whether it was to have come from rates, or from Government grant, or from private enterprise of landlords, or from a combination of all three. That any offers made or increase of rates contemplated should have been withdrawn or abandoned when the project was defeated does not appear in any way antagonistic to "public morality."

"A Seeker for Information" takes exception to another statement of mine which appears in the article to which I referred above, thus:-

It would cost much money, you may say [the construction of the roads suggested]. True, it would cost a certain amount, but money spent in an enterprise which will enhance the productivity of a country is not money thrown away, but money laid out at a high rate of interest.

This statement he quotes (or travesties?) as follows:- "Your correspondent stated . . . that money spent on such roads would bear good interest," and "it would be an encouragement to invest money now in the construction of these roads if subscribers were informed how the roads would be remunerative." Does your correspondent imagine that the proposed roads to Moidart would

be run on the same lines as a limited liability company? The suggestion is, no doubt, a brilliant one, but I really cannot claim it as my own. It is, indeed, so pathetically brilliant that one is forcibly reminded of some of the most entrancing pages of "Gulliver's Travels." I still, of course, uphold the truth of my statement, which I have quoted above. It certainly is not proved false by merely being misquoted by "A Seeker for Information." Your own plea in your leader on Highland Reconstruction Schemes, for the restoration of pre-war postal services to the Hebrides, that "it is the public convenience that counts, not the size of the Postmaster-General's surplus" is, mutatis mutandis, very applicable to the case of the Moidart roads, and supplies a sufficient defence of the scheme which advocates their construction.

Surely one of the most important lessons which the war has taught us is that the development of even out-of-the-way corners of the country proves beneficial to the country at large, and that the sum-total of the country's prosperity is that of the least advanced of its component parts. I am glad to see, however, that "A Seeker for Information" no longer suggests that the construction of roads to Moidart is contrary to the dictates of common-sense, as he deemed it to be on January 28th. In one sentence of his last letter he seems to be concerned not only for "public morality," but for the "roads to Moidart" as well. Perhaps some other means of remedying the state of the Mallaig-Fort William road has suggested itself to him more apposite and more helpful than opposing the construction of roads to Moidart would seem to be, and more in concert with "public morality," I hope, than misquoting my article. - I am etc.

The Writer of the article.

THE ROADS OF MOIDART.
[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "OBAN TIMES."]

8th March 1919.

Sir,- I cannot understand what motive the "Writer of the Article" can have in refusing to reply in a straightforward way to my three questions, viz.:-

- (1) From whence the money was forthcoming for the making of roads to Moidart?
- (2) In what form and when was the scheme for the making of these roads brought to the notice of landlords, who, according to the "Writer of the Article," wrecked the scheme from paltry and private motives?
- (3) While I agree with the general proposition that money spent in an enterprise which will enhance the productivity of a country is not thrown away, but money laid out at a high rate of interest; still the proposition presupposes a productivity capable of meeting the cost of the enterprise, and I ask where the productivity and high rate of interest are to be found in Moidart?

I am, etc.,

A SEEKER FOR INFORMATION.

THE ROADS OF MOIDART
[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "OBAN TIMES."]

15th March, 1919.

Sir,- I not unnaturally expected that "A Seeker for Information" would not continue his quest until he had first offered some word of apology for having grossly misquoted my article. Perhaps it was not desirable that he should do so, since he still perseveres in his bad habit. I did not say in the article referred to that landlords wrecked the scheme, but that "the scheme was abandoned

because some of the neighbouring landed proprietors did not quite see their way to approve of the project." I said once, advisedly, I really cannot undertake to instruct "A Seeker for Information" in the meaning and significance of English words and phrases. This is the special province of our primary school teachers. I have already furnished, and, I think, in "a straightforward way," the first two items of information which your correspondent "seeks" to-day, or at all events as much of them as was affirmed or suggested in my article of January 25.

A local committee lately appointed to forward the project of obtaining a road for Moidart, has undertaken to answer the third query. I am really surprised that the question is asked. With a large amount of land capable of being cultivated, with rich fishing grounds near at hand, with an industrious and energetic people, surely we have both the material and efficient causes of productivity in our midst.

Will "A Seeker for Information" venture to definitely state that either of these causes is wanting? What is wanting is not productivity but the means of making what is actually produced pay by having it sent to a suitable market. I am sorry to see that "A Seeker for Information" appears to be opposed - his statements are so indefinite that it is somewhat difficult to judge - to a project which will certainly open up a large tract of country, and is in every way calculated to give the inhabitants an opportunity for social and financial improvement, which has, unfortunately, been lacking in the past.

Perhaps I am unwittingly doing "A Seeker for Information" an injustice. Perhaps he is really in favour of the scheme and anxious for its fruition, and is merely striving by the method of Socratic irony to make the necessity appear the more patent, and the peculiar needs of Moidart the more widely known. If this surmise is correct, I shall feel happy that I have, however, unconsciously, co-operated with him.- I am, etc.,

THE WRITER OF THE ARTICLE.

THE PRODUCTIVITY OF MOIDART [TO THE EDITOR OF THE "OBAN TIMES."]

15th March, 1919.

Sir.- A correspondent calling himself "A Seeker for Information," in to-day's issue of the "Oban Times," asks where the productivity of Moidart is to be found. If the query arises from a mere academic love of discussion, we should allow the matter to pass without a reply, but as it appears to be a challenge, we feel that we would be wanting in the performance of the duty entrusted to us, by the inhabitants of Moidart, of forwarding the project of obtaining a road to this district, were we to remain silent.

By "productivity" we presume that "A Seeker for Information" means, in the first place, land capable of cultivation. In Moidart we have huge tracts of such land - at Roshven, Glenuig, Smearisary, Kinlochmoidart, Dorlin, Mingarry, Dalnabreach, Langal, Dalilea and Coul. No doubt the Board of Agriculture will be willing to inform your correspondent as to the exact acreage. The land is partly cultivated, of course, but far less than possible and desirable. Cultivation has been hampered and hindered by the lack of efficient means of transport and of communication in general with the outside world. No suitable market is available for our produce; we have no suitable means of bringing into the district those farming appliances which have been used, with such good results elsewhere. Besides a large amount of arable land in the places mentioned above, there is in each also an abundance of hill pasture and rough grazing.

Another great unexploited source of Moidart productivity is to be found in the rich fishing grounds adjacent to our shores. The fishing industry is undeveloped because we have no suitable means of transport, on which we can depend to get our fish to a

railway station. A suitable road to a railway station would give us the means of transport and communication which is absolutely necessary in order that these sources of wealth may cease to be merely potential and become actual. We do not anticipate that "A Seeker for Information" will deny that the people of Moidart have the industry and energy which the human element has always to furnish in any scheme of industrial development.

It may not, we think, be outwith the scope of the title we have prefixed to this letter to mention that there is in the district water power, in abundance, capable of being utilised and which is at present, to a great extent, going to waste.

Finally, we may add that we have the hearty approval and active co-operation of some of the landlords of Moidart in our object. These should be competent judges of the productivity, or otherwise, of the district. They have very generously offered land free for the purpose of the road.- We are, etc.,

THE COMMITTEE FOR THE ROAD TO MOIDART

THE ROADS OF MOIDART.
[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "OBAN TIMES."]

17th March, 1919.

Sir,- I think it is but fitting that "A Seeker for Information" should either directly challenge one or more of the definite statements made by the writer of the article which appeared in your columns on January 25, and which dealt with the urgent necessity and feasibility of road construction in Moidart, or desist from hinted opposition. If he is acquainted with the land of Moidart he cannot but know how greatly the want of a road is felt here. He must also be aware that the district contains large tracts of land capable of cultivation. To ask, then, where the productivity of Moidart is to be found is irrelevant. If he is ignorant of the conditions prevalent here, and merely registers his opposition to the construction of roads until someone chooses to supply him with certain items of information which are to a great extent quite beside the point, then his opposition is without point. I am, etc.,

INTERESTED.

LOCH SHIEL STEAMER SERVICE AND THE ROADS OF MOIDART
[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "OBAN TIMES."]

March 31, 1919.

Sir,- Being fairly intimately acquainted with the topography of Moidart, I would suggest that the end desired might be reached at a mere fraction of the cost by reviving the steamboat service on Loch Shiel and by instituting a similar service between Samalaman and Camus Driseach, calling at Roshven and Penveanach (sic.). This latter would also serve Ardnish and might be extended to Eigg. To make the Craig road fit for motor lorries would be a big undertaking, and would be of use only to Glenuig, Smirisary and Roshven. Kinlochmoidart and all the south of it are within five miles of Salen by road, while Kinlochailort would be twelve miles.

I am a good deal puzzled how much land is supposed to constitute a huge tract. I read of huge tracts of land capable of cultivation at Roshven and Coul, among other places.

I think the "Writer of the Article" is mistaken about the history of the road. The project for making it was raised forty years ago and was turned down because the proprietors would have had to stand the whole cost, which they could not afford. There were no deer in Moidart in those days. - I am, etc.,

BEALACH AN DUN.

THE ROADS OF MOIDART
[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "OBAN TIMES."]

April 7, 1919.

Sir,- I am quite willing to accept the statement of your correspondent "Bealach an Dun" that forty years ago there were no deer on Moidart. What your correspondent dignifies with the name of my "history of the road," does not go so far back into the dim past as forty years ago. The road was projected when the Mallaig railway was being laid - and even years later - and the project was abandoned on both occasions for the reason I have given in my article of January 25.

Your correspondent's suggestion of a double steamer service as a remedy for the isolation of Moidart will not bring about the "end desired," nor will it even distantly approach that much-wished-for consummation.

I hope, Sir, that you will once again permit me to recapitulate the "end desired" in Moidart:-

(1) To connect the outlying districts of Moidart, viz. Glenuig and Smearisary, with one another and with the rest of the district, viz. with Kinlochmoidart, Mingarry, etc.;

(2) To provide some efficient means of transport between Moidart and a railway station.

A road from Kinlochmoidart to Glenuig and Smearisary would bring about what is required in (1) a continuation of this road from Glenuig to Lochailort would provide what is required. (2) The steamer service suggested would not meet either necessity.

I do not quite understand what is meant by "reviving the steamer service on Loch Shiel." This service is at present neither more nor less than that what it has been since it was inaugurated. A "similar service" for the other side is not practicable. There will be required a boat very dissimilar to that which plies on Loch Shiel to face the storms of the open sea. Moreover, we ought really to remember that Moidart is not, geographically an island. Let us leave then that means of transport which is suitable for a part of the mainland. Let the islands have an improved steamer service with the mainland, and let the different parts of the mainland be connected together by roads or railways. we have had enough - especially in the Highlands- of fitting of square pegs into round holes. Where roads are feasible - and the Craig road is certainly feasible - do not let steamer services be pressed on upon us.

"Bealach an Dun" informs us that "to make the Craig road fit for motor lorries would be a big undertaking, either from a financial or from an engineering point of view, which it is not, "to make it fit for motor lorries," then let it be made fit at least for a wheelbarrow. The Craig road Kinlochmoidart to Glenuig would benefit not so much Glenuig and Roshven as Kinlochmoidart and the whole of Moidart and Ardnamurchan as well. Surely "Bealach an Dun's" statement to the contrary was a slip. It is really the continuation of this road - to Smearisary on the one hand and to Roshven and Lochailort on the other - that is calculated to benefit those places through which it runs and which it connects with a railway station. The reason that your correspondent gives for his assertion viz., that Kinlochmoidart is distant only five miles from Salen while it is twelve miles from Lochailort, is very misleading, although no doubt unintentionally so. To go to Salen is to go further away from a railway station, the nearest by road being Glenfinnan, sixty miles distant, or Fort William (by crossing Loch Linnhe at Corran) forty-five miles distant. With a road from Kinlochmoidart to Lochailort, Salen is thus brought over forty miles nearer a railway station, while Kinlochmoidart is brought nearly fifty miles nearer. The people of Moidart are, I think, very modest in their demands. They have asked for only one road when two would, as a matter of fact, prove an inestimable boon to their district. Surely they will obtain this modest minimum they have asked for.

It is really pathetic to note that the improved train service from Glasgow to Mallaig makes matters worse for Moidart and, I may add, for Ardnamurchan. The boat does not now reach Glenfinnan in time to catch the train to Mallaig, which comes in an hour later. One has to leave Glasgow now at 5.30 a.m., unless he is desirous of passing a night at Glenfinnan before proceeding

homewards. The afternoon train, on alternate days, is for us one of the envied conveniences of the outside world. - I am, etc.,
The Writer of the Article.

THE ROADS OF MOIDART
[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "OBAN TIMES."]

14th April, 1919.

Sir,- I am surprised that the "Writer of the Article," if he has local knowledge, should accept "Bealach an Dun's" statement that 40 years ago there were no deer in Moidart. Why! The deer is an indigenous animal, and has always been in Moidart. I can only take it that what "Bealach an Dun" means is that there were no deer forests in Moidart 40 years ago, which, being reduced to simple fact, means that the deer were always there, and were still on the ground though the country was put under sheep. The death-rate of sheep make them a non-paying proposition owing to the fact that there is no wintering for them in Moidart.

The "Writer of the Article's" statement as to mileage calls for explanation, if he can see his way to give an explanation. Ardgour to Salen is 21½ miles, and from Fort William to Corran Ferry 8¼ miles, which is under 33 miles, not 45 miles. Salen to Shiel Bridge is 3½ miles, Shiel Bridge to Glenfinnan by daily steamer 17 miles - in all 20½ miles. The "Writer of the Article" cannot substantiate his statement that Salen is 30 miles by road from Glenfinnan. He surely does not suggest the Ardgour-Corran Ferry-Fort William route is a short cut to Glenfinnan? Even that route is under 50 miles, not 60. A road already runs up Loch Shiel as far as Dalilea, and can be continued to Glenfinnan with fewer engineering difficulties than even the proposed expensive wheelbarrow track on the Craig road.

I note that the "Writer of the Article" is bad at answering questions. "Bealach an Dun" asks for a description of the huge tracts of country at Roshven and Coul, to which the "Writer of the Article" gives no answer. Anyone acquainted with the district knows that agriculture can never be a paying matter in a country with such a rainfall and so little soil.

The questions I put in my letter of the 8th March, having drawn from your correspondents - "The Writer of the Article" and "The Committee for the Road to Moidart" (a body whose stake in the country should be established by their published signatures if their opinion is to have any weight) - only a lengthy general statement with no facts or statistics. - I am still,

A Seeker for Information.

THE ROADS OF MOIDART
[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "OBAN TIMES."]

April 19, 1919.

Sir,- I am not in any way bigoted on the subject of deer in Moidart forty years ago. Neither am I greatly interested in the life history of mammals. I am quite as willing to accept the statement of "A Seeker for Information" in this week's issue of the "Oban Times," that there were deer in Moidart forty years ago, as I was to accept that of "Bealach an Dun" in last week's issue, that there were not. I do not subscribe to either statement. I am merely not sufficiently interested to contradict either. It is all very much beside the point which is the pressing question of transport and communication with the outside world for the district of Moidart.

In my article of January 25, I said, with regard to the want of a direct route by road between Moidart and a railway station:-
"True there is a road round by Salen and Strontian to Glenfinnan, a distance of over sixty miles, or to Fort William by crossing

Loch Linnhe at Corran— a distance of forty miles – but in the first place, this is but a poor substitute for a direct route, when a direct route of twenty miles in length is feasible; and, in the second place, or what use it is to the people of Smearisary, Glenuig and Roshven who have to march for miles and miles over a roadless waste before they arrive where the road begins. I still uphold that the distances there given are correct."

I still uphold that the distances given are correct. That I repeated them in my letter of April 7, with Salen as the starting point, without having made the necessary subtraction of ten miles (the distance from Salen to Kinlochmoidart) was a mistake which I regret from the point of view of mathematical accuracy the argument which I advanced last week against Salen as a terminus for those who travel from "Kinlochmoidart and all to the south of it."

The only continuous road from Moidart to a railway station is that which leads to Glenfinnan, and the shortest distance is not sixty miles. The road to Fort William is not continuous (Corran Ferry intervenes), and the distance in this case, is forty-five miles. If there is any other road, I would be greatly obliged if "A Seeker for Information" would let me know where it is. It is irrelevant to tell us that the distance by the Loch Shiel boat is only seventeen miles. Probably by airship it would be even less. The steamer service on Loch Shiel, as I have already pointed out, is neither suitable nor sufficient for the needs of the district. Moreover, it can be utilised by only one side of Moidart. The road along Loch Shielside to Glenfinnan was one of those which I suggested in my letter of January 25, and for which I was duly "strated" by "A Seeker for Information," mainly on the ground that the Mallaig-Fort William road was in a somewhat indifferent state. I am glad to see that he now repents of his precipitancy, and that he advocates this route. Perhaps after a few weeks time, he will reconsider his argument of April 14 against the possibilities of agriculture as a "paying matter" in Moidart, viz., that there is "such a rainfall and so little soil." While it is true that we have had during the last two years, a fair amount of the former, we would not be doing justice to facts did we not assert that there is abundance of the latter also.

It is not correct to say that there is little soil in Moidart. Even in Coul - where there is less than in elsewhere - there is sufficient arable land for two good-sized holdings. Roshven contains a good deal more. Will "A Seeker for Information" kindly state the number of acres? I am sorry I have not the number at present. And what about Dalilea and Kinlochmoidart, which contain huge tracts of arable land? What about Dorlin, and Mingary, and Langal, and Dalnabreach? Smearisary and Glenuig support at present twenty families of crofters; and there is besides a home farm at Samalaman.

I really cannot accuse "A Seeker for Information" of having any local knowledge. Did I do so, I am afraid that I would, by implication, represent him as endeavouring to do what Socrates - the father of seekers for information - was accused of doing, viz., of making the worse appear the better argument.

I understand that the "Committee for the Road to Moidart," who subscribed a letter which appeared in the "Oban Times" a few weeks ago, is a body publicly appointed at a meeting of the people of Moidart held at Kinlochmoidart on February 13, and of which a report appeared in the "Oban Times" on February 22.- I am, etc.,

The Writer of the Article

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THE ROADS OF MOIDART
[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "OBAN TIMES."]

22nd April, 1919.

Sir,- As a supporter of the Kinlochmoidart to Lochailort road, I crave for a few words in reply to "A Seeker for Information's" letter appearing in a recent issue of the "Oban Times."

It is quite obvious that "A Seeker for Information" has got the idea, wherever he acquired it, that a road from Dalilea, to Glenfinnan would serve the requirements of Glenuig and Smearisary every bit as well as a road to Inverailort, and that the cost of its construction would be less. I ask him to submit facts in support of his statement.

He also refers to the poorness of the Moidart soil. That is correct, for the land there can compare favourably in productiveness with the surrounding districts. Owing to the Deer Forest craze, Moidart had no chance to show whether sheep rearing would be a paying concern or not; but if tried I fail to see why it would not pay as well as it has done in the surrounding districts.- I am, etc.,

Local.

THE ROADS OF MOIDART
[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "OBAN TIMES."]

28th April, 1919.

Sir,- May I say that I quite agree with "The Writer of the Article" that the Craig road ought to be made "fit at least for a wheelbarrow." The District Council is ready enough to exact road rates from Moidart, but grudges every shovelful of gravel in return. Moidart, of course, is not an island, but that is no reason for not using its excellent waterways. Water transport is more efficient and more economical than road transport.

I would not have mentioned deer but for the above correspondent's statement that the road "for which the money was forthcoming," was not made because the proprietors thought it would frighten the deer. Deer may be indigenous, but when a stag was killed on Kinlochmoidart about 1868, it was the talk of the countryside as a thing that had not happened before within living memory. I do not think another was killed there till 1884.

"Local's" letter takes our breath away. All Moidart was under sheep till quite recently. The "deer forest crash" did not begin in Moidart until long after it had attacked the surrounding districts.- I am etc.,

Bealach an Dun.

THE ROADS OF MOIDART
[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "OBAN TIMES."]

London, 3rd May, 1919.

Sir,- As an interested outsider, knowing the Moidart district of the West Highlands well, I have for weeks past read the correspondence in your columns regarding the Roads for Moidart.

It is very easy for people who have not heavy road rates to pay to clamour for roads at the ratepayers' expense. It is idle to pretend that with the rainfall of Moidart and the shallowness of the soil, any agricultural export can be looked for which would repay the enormous expense of engineering a road either down Loch Shielside or from Inverailort to Kinlochailort. The "Writer of the Article" is evidently new to the district, or he would not write of Moidart as if it ranked agriculturally with fruitful Lowland

land, where the rainfall is 28 or 36 as against Moidart's normal 80 inches.

The fishermen of Glenuig have Mallaig and its railway as a market, and in this respect they are better off than many fishing communities on the West Coast who have to take their catches a much longer distance to market. In this connection I would ask, why does the fishing population of Mallaig consist principally of East Coast fishermen? Why does Mallaig, with its road and railway and its harbour, not maintain a population of West Coast fishermen, I do not wish to see an East Coast settlement at Smearisary such as easy access to markets has produced at Mallaig. The population, Agriculture and Fishing production of Moidart do not justify the outlay of thousands of pounds of public money or a heavy increase in the road rates, already far too high, and yet wholly inadequate to keep the existing roads in order. Moidart is, in proportion to its production, at present well served by a steamer on Loch Shiel, maintained by a patriotic proprietor, and by the high road of the sea. I am, etc.,

Dispassionate.

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THE ROADS OF MOIDART
[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "OBAN TIMES."]

10th May, 1919.

Sir,- While supporting the construction of the Craig road, "Bealach an Dun" still advocates as a cheaper means of transport a steamer service to the western shores of Moidart. Of course, water transport, where systematically carried out, is a far cheaper means of transport than overland, but after a careful comparison of the steamer and railway rates to the Moidart district, I am rather inclined to support the latter.

To make the Craig road fit for a wheelbarrow would not be so expensive an undertaking as some of your correspondents maintain, and neither should the cost of its construction prove such a stumbling block when it has the approval of the district ratepayers. Some of the district proprietors would also handsomely subscribe on this occasion, as they did when the proposal was first made.

I am rather surprised that the killing of a deer at Kinlochmoidart in the year 1868 would create such a sensation in the surrounding district, for deer, roe-deer and fallow-deer were to be found in the adjoining districts previous to the year 1868.

Will "Bealach an Dun" kindly submit dates as to when the wilds of Glenforsland and Glenaladale were denuded of their fleecy flocks, I am, etc.,

Local.

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THE ROADS OF MOIDART
[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "OBAN TIMES."]

19th May, 1919.

Sir,- For "Local's" information, Glenforsland was cleared of sheep in 1901; Glenaladale some three or four years later, but I have no note of the precise date.- I am, etc.,

Bealach an Dun

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IN 1963 THERE WAS A FINAL DECISION TO BUILD A NEW ROAD

The Glasgow Herald, Friday April 12th 1963, has an article about the Moidart Road construction to begin:-

"MOIDART ROAD

Government approval for the proposed new tourist road in Moidart linking Kinlochmoidart and Inverailort was announced yesterday.

The scheme, which has been hanging fire for years, will qualify for a 75 per cent. Government grant towards the approved cost, estimated at £841,500.

The new road will be about 12½ miles long. It will close an awkward gap in the road system of Moidart and open up a scenically attractive part of the Western Highlands running by Loch Moidart, through Glen Uig, and along the shore of Loch Ailort.

It is expected to prove to be a popular outlet north-eastwards for tourist traffic in the adjoining Morvern and Ardnamurchan districts.

In the wider road pattern the new section of road will complete the link between the Salen-Inversanda-Drumfern trunk road (A861) bordering Sunart and Ardgour and running along the south shore of Loch Eil and the Fort William-Mallaig trunk road (A830) running along the north of Loch Eil.

The scheme has been prepared by Babbie, Shaw and Morton, Glasgow, as consulting engineers to Inverness County Council. The contract for the work has been awarded to William Tawse, Ltd., Aberdeen.

The road is the second new scenic route to be authorised under the 1959 White Paper on Highland policy. The first, the Shieldaig-Torridon road closing the "Balgy Gap" in Westar Ross, is due to be opened this summer."

The road was finally publically opened on 29th July 1966 and the "Oban Times" of August 4th 1966 has the following article about Kinlochmoidart Road:-

"OPENED BY MINISTER OF STATE

As the ribbon across the new Lochailort-Kinlochmoidart road fell from the scissors wielded by Mr George Willis, Minister of State for Scotland, a new era opened up for the people of Moidart. Previously, Moidart has been served principally by sea, its only land link with Lochailort being a narrow, rock-strewn path no more than two and a half feet wide in places.

The new road, costing £879,000, winds its way over 12½ miles of the most beautiful scenery in Scotland. It is 18ft wide, has no more extreme gradients than a one in 10 near Castle Tioram and Plate Rock, and only one bend tight enough to merit a sign. As well as facilitating mail and medical services for the inhabitants of the peninsula, this new road will be one of the most popular tourist routes of the Highlands, each bend along its way affording the traveller one view after another of surprising beauty.

Growing Determination

"Things are happening in the Highlands today" said Mr Willis in his speech to the assembly company at the opening

ceremony. "For a number of years now there has been growing determination on the part of Governments that the Highlands should be enabled to play their full and proper part in the life of the nation. As a result of this, a new spirit of hope and of growing confidence has been born. Today with the opening of this road, we add yet a little more to the strength of the basis upon which that hope and confidence rest. That is something well worth of being done."

He went on: "This is the second road to be built under the programme of new roads in the Highlands announced in the 1959 White Paper "Review of Highland Policy". The first was the Balgay Gap road between Shieldaig and Torridon in Ross-shire which was opened in September, 1963. This new road which will, for the first time, provide local communities with direct road access to Fort William (their present route being via Corran Ferry or by the daily launch on Loch Shiel), and will serve as a link between Ardnamurchan and the Mallaig district - a journey of 12 now as compared with 66 previously.

"It is the longest completely new road to be built in Scotland since Telford's time, some 150 years ago. With the existing road from Kinlochmoidart through Salen, it will form a great circular route in an area of great scenic beauty. In recognition of this, the Secretary of State for Scotland has agreed that the 10-mile approach from Salen to Kinlochmoidart be upgraded to a class one road. It will now be the A861."

Mr Willis paid tribute to the County Council for their initiative and foresight in pressing for the road to be built; Messrs Babie, Shaw and Morton, the consulting engineers, for devising a sound yet economic scheme which blended so well with the beautiful scenery, and Messrs Wm. Tawse, Ltd. the contractors, for completing the job six months ahead of the contract date despite the remoteness of the area and the difficulty of the terrain.

Live Issue

Introducing Mr Willis, Sir Francis W. Walker of Leys, said that this opening ceremony marked the end of a long and arduous job to get a road through this part of the country. "In 1957 the construction became a live issue, although for 40 years it has been suggested that a road should be built here." he told the gathering that, in the making of the road 210,000 cubic yards of rock had to be blasted and removed, and in spite of this, it had still been completed well within the schedule time of 45 months.

Votes of thanks were proposed by Mr Iain R. Hilleary, chairman of the roads committee of Inverness County Council.

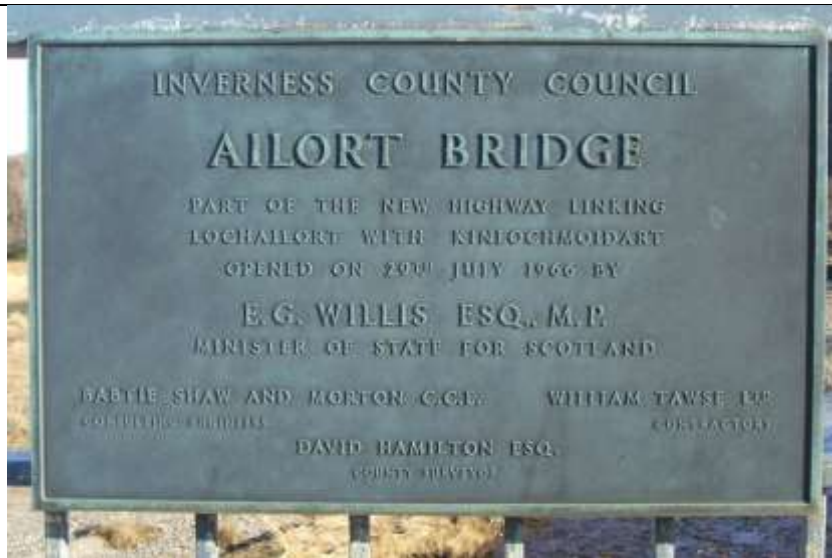
Mr Willis then cut the tape, and unveiled a plaque commemorating the opening on Lochailort Bridge, before the gathering set off to inspect the new road.

At a luncheon given after the inspection, Mr John Paton of Babbie, Shaw and Morton, presented Mr Willis with a decanter and glasses in Caithness glass, and paid tribute to the owner of Lochailort Estate, Mrs Cameron-Head, whose energy and practical assistance had been greatly appreciated in the project.

On his way back from the opening at Lochailort, Mr Willis paid an unofficial visit to the new National Trust information centre opened by Professor Grieve last Monday.

The Oban Times Article of 1966 was donated by the Oban Times office in Fort William and the remaining articles were reproduced by Gordon Barr.

The following section shows some comparisons of the road when it was being built and how it appeared in 2010.



River Ailort Road Bridge Sign

Inverness County Council
 Ailort Bridge
 Part of the new Highway Linking
 Lochailort with Kinlochmoidart
 Opened on 29th July 1966 by
 E.G. Willis Esq., M.P.
 Minister of State for Scotland
 Babbie Shaw and Morton C.C.E.
 William Tawse L^{td}.
 Contractors
 Consulting Engineers David Hamilton Esq.
 County Surveyor





Road opening at Lochailort, 29th July 1966



The new road approaching the single track road at Lochailort Inn







Colin Watt, Engineer for the south section of the road.



















John Musto, Resident Engineer at Lochailort for Messers Babbie, Shaw & Morton.













Hugh Livingston







