

# The MacLeans in Ardgour

Background as published in 1995 in 'History of Donald & Christina McLean and their descendants' – pages 2 to 5

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## Clan MacLean

Gaelic Name:	Clann Gilleathain (Gillian)
Chief's Patronymic:	<i>Mac-ic 'Eachainn</i> (McLean of Duart) <i>Mac'ill-Eathain Lochabuidhe</i> (MacLean of Lochbuie) <i>Mac-'ic Eoghain</i> (MacLean of Ardgour)
Crests:	A tower embattled argent. A lochaber axe between a laurel branch on the dexter and cypress on the sinister proper (Duart). A battleaxe in pale in front of a laurel and cypress branch in saltire, all proper (Lochbuie)
THE GALLGAELS	
Badges:	Crowberry (Duart) Blueberry (Lochbuie)
War Cries:	<i>"Bas no Beathal"</i> (Death or Life!) and <i>"Fear eile airson Eachainn!"</i> (Another for Hector!). Slogans were used alternately.
Mottoes:	<i>"Altera Memes"</i> (Reward is secondary) Duart <i>"Vincere vel mori"</i> (Victory or death)
Pipe Music:	<i>The McLeans March</i> (Duart) <i>Lament for McLean of Lochbuie</i> (Lochbuie)

The Clan McLean have in their time held extensive lands in the Western Isles and mainland of the Highlands. Traditionally they are descended from a member of the great Irish Geraldine family who was brother to the progenitor of Clan McKenzie, but Mr Skene in his *Highlanders of Scotland* takes the view that they were one of the old tribes transplanted from Moray by Malcolm IV. This could well be true without refuting their descent from a Geraldine. It is too often lost sight of that the early Picts of Moray and those of the North and West of Ireland were one and the same race, with close family ties, as their names prove. It is even possible that some of the great Irish families were descended from savage progenitors in Albyn. It will be noted later that other famous Pictish clans have the same persistent traditions of Irish ancestry.

The clan's earliest-known ancestor was *Gilleathain na Tuaidh* (Gillian of the Battleaxe) who fought for Alexander III against Haco at Largs. Most modern writers fall into the trap of assuming that Gillian of the Battleaxe was so named because of his prowess with that weapon, but the 'Historical Account' of the McLeans by a 'Clan Seannachie' gives a different reason. He relates that this ancestor, after losing his way while hunting deer, wandered about in the hills for days until completely exhausted, hung his axe on the branch of a laurel to mark his last resting-place, then lay down under a cypress bush to die. The axe was noticed by a search-party and the chief rescued. One only needs to glance at the McLean crests to see how this incident has been perpetuated.

Gillian's son, Gillimore McLean, settled in Lorne, and his two sons, Lachlan Lubhnach and Eachin Regenach were the progenitors of the McLeans of Duart and Lochbuie, respectively. The two brothers who lived during the reign of Robert II quarrelled with their overlord, McDougall of Lorne, and thereafter became followers of the McDonald Lords of the Isles who thought highly of them and rewarded them with ample grants of land in Mull. Lachlan married the daughter of the Lord of the Isles, and Hector acted as Lieutenant-General of the latter's army at the Battle of Harlaw where he was killed.

The Lochbuie MacLaines dispute the chiefship with the Duarts, asserting that Eachin Reganach was the elder of Gillimore's two sons, although the Duarts have always taken the foremost place in clan history.

Charles (Tearlach), son of Eachin Reganach, settled in Glen Urquhart and was founder of the *Clann Thearlich*, or Dorgarroch McLeans, sometimes called the 'McLeans of the North'. On being oppressed by the Chisholms this branch, although confederated to the Clan Chattan, appealed to Duan for help, which was readily granted. Thereafter the Chisholms treated them with great respect.

After the forfeiture of the last Lord of the Isles (1493) the McLeans attained great power and held large tracts of land. Their possessions then included the major parts of Mull and Tiree, together with portions of Islay, Jura Scarba and districts in Morven, Lochaber and Knapdale. It was time that they divided into four clans, each independent of the other. They were the McLeans of Ardgour and of Coll, both cadets of the McLeans of Duart, and Lochbuie.

Lachlan McLean of Duan was killed at Flodden (1513) and Lachlan Mor, 14th Chief, was slain at Fraigh Ghruinneirt in Islay (1598) when fighting against his nephew James McDonald of Islay. The lofty mind and great heart of this chief endeared him to everyone who knew him and when he was killed an elegy was composed in his memory entitled 'Gavir nan Ban Muileach' (The wail of the Mull women); a most moving piece of Gaelic poetry.

Sir Lachlan Mor, 17th Chief, created Baronet by Charles I, was present at the Battle of Inverlochy when Argyll was so signally defeated. After Charles was betrayed and executed the 8th Earl of Argyll, backed by the forces of General Leslie, invaded Mull and, although no resistance was offered, wrought disgraceful cruelties and outrages. Sir Lachlan gave himself up to Argyll to prevent further blood-shed, and was imprisoned in Carrick Castle.

Red Hector, 18th Chief, was present with his clansmen at Inverkeithing in the battle against the Cromwellian General Lambert. In the thick of the fight he was shielded by seven brothers. All of whom gave their lives in his defence. As each brother fell another stepped into his place calling out "Fear eille airson Eachainn!" (Another for Hector!) and this latter became one of the clan's war cries. It is sad to relate that Hector also was slain and the sacrifice of the brothers was in vain.

Probably no clan is richer in historical anecdote, folk-lore and legends than the McLeans, and although there is no space here to tell the legends of heroes like *Murrachaidh Gearr* (Dumpy Murdoch), *Eoghainn a' Chinn Bhig* (Small headed Hector) or *Ailen nan Sop* (Alan of the Straws), these can all be found in books such as *The Island of Mull* by John McCormick, and are well worth reading.

The cadet branches of Clan McLean are almost as numerous as their legends and to attempt their description would occupy many pages. The possessions of the Brolas family, who succeeded to the Duart name when the direct line failed in 1600, became so mortgaged that towards the end of the 18th century, the Duke of Argyll having bought up most of their debts, the lands passed into his hands. It can be said, however, that successive Campbell lairds have proved good landlords and done much to benefit the islanders of Mull.

The McLeans of Coll lost their lands in 1856, also owing to financial embarrassment, while the Lochbuie properties passed from their hereditary ownership during the present century for the same reason.

Until comparatively recently Ardgour was practically the only clan possession still in the hands of the McLeans, but in 1912, after Duart castle had been a ruin for 220 years, Sir Fitzroy Donald McLean, 26th Chief, effected a restoration. It took him sixty years of planning, working and striving before he was able to carry out this task, and clansmen from all over the world came to see their Chief enter the modernized version of his ancient home. Their accents were many and varied, and only a few knew a word of the Gaelic, yet they proved conclusively that time and space meant nothing when the voice of their Chief and ties of blood were calling them back to their native land. Their one possible regret was that their Chief had reached the venerable age of 77 before achieving his objective, and could not, therefore, be expected to enjoy the fruits of his labours for long - but they had no cause for such foreboding. Most of the guests at the Clan gathering were, in fact, in their own graves when Sir Fitzroy again called his clansmen around him to celebrate his 100th birthday. He was in his 102nd year when he died in 1937.

The present Chief is the 28th of Duart, and there is a Clan McLean society with headquarters in Glasgow.

# Ardgour, Blaich & Duiskey - Douglas MacLean's story and impressions of 1975

In the year 1420 Donald MacLean, his wife and family were living in a cave in North West Scotland. He approached the Lord of the Isles and asked that he be rewarded for fighting that he had done on behalf of him. On being asked what reward he desired Donald answered "Some land". The lord of the Isles answered somewhat enigmatically - "Jump where the wall is lowest." Donald wondered what was meant. Searching around he found that the 100,000 acre estate of Ardgour was weakly held by Clan McMaster who was an elderly man.

Donald and his followers raided "Ardgour" and McMaster was slain, and his son was captured and hanged from a nearby tree. The ferryman was captured too and begged for mercy saying "I did not help McMaster." Donald's motto was "Victory or death." He told the ferryman, "Some day my enemies might catch up to me, and I might wish you to row me over the ferry. The man who is not for me is against me". So they hanged the Ferryman too and settled the estate - 70 years later King James gave them title to the land, the Barony of Ardgour.

The property has been handed down to the eldest son or next brother for 560 years. Today it is occupied by Miss Catriona MacLean after 16 generations. In 1700 the 8th Laird divided the property and gave the North East portion to his second son and created the Barony of Blaich. This became our branch. Came 1745 and Prince Charles landed at Glen Finnan and rallied the clans to march on London to claim his father's throne. Many Blaich McLeans joined the rising.

The Ardgour MacLean claimed that he was too old and stayed out. This enabled him to keep his lands when the Prince was defeated. It is claimed that there is no truth in the rumour that he sat on the fence yelling "Come on Charlie" or "Come on Butcher Cumberland" depending on which side was making the best progress. A great march toward London, a dreary retreat back to Scotland, a bitter defeat at Culloden and bloody reprisals by the victorious English followed.

Twenty six years later Donald was born, being our immediate ancestor who arrived at Holdfast Bay in 1937.

He grew up to lease the Duiskey Estate. From owning 100,000 acres the family now leased 12,000 acres. Donald grew oats and barley, raised cattle and had interests in herring fishing. Hard times convinced him that there might be better living in Australia. Strife with revenue officers over distilling may have helped his decision.

Today the 45,000 acre estate Ardgour is owned by Miss Catriona MacLean an elderly spinster who lives in her three storey home in a style similar to Clunies Ross of Cocas Keeling. The estate is on the shores of Loch Linnhe (see maps), and is divided into Home Farm, two leased farms and two Dower Houses. One was occupied by a sister of Catriona and the other, "Ardvulin" is run as Bed and Breakfast and Tourist accommodation. There are a number of crofts of 4 to 16 acres and some Common Land. In the Glen there is a small village consisting of school, store and cottages. Scattered over the estate are 10 workmens' cottages for the farm workers. Further along the shore Ardgour Village consisting of the ferry terminal for Corran Ferry where it crosses the "narrows," also a Pub, a Post Office, numerous cottages and a Church, and a Graveyard.

Honor rolls and gravestones record many MacLeans - the Christian names are repeated - Alexander, Donald, Hew, Hugh, Ewan, John, Archibald, etc. Further along is another MacLean cemetery. Rowan trees guard the entrance. Near the ferry terminal is the Lighthouse, "Tigh Solus" to guide the shipping through the loch at its most dangerous point.

Nearby 2 keepers cottages are let as holiday and tourist accommodation. The visitors book records many MacLean names over the years. This is the heart of my MacLean country.

I think that there would be 1,000,000 in a population of 7,000,000. The estate is mountainous country, 200 acres of flat pasture are cut for silage. This is stored in a huge barn. Cattle are penned under cover at each end, for the winter. They push the steel gates forward, and so the operation is a large scale self feeder. On an occasional fine day, they are turned outdoors, as in summer. Then comes the mighty task, compared only with the Greek myth of Hercules, of clearing the stables. The sheep gradually come down from the Highlands, as the snow falls. Deer run, in a more than semi wild state. They are shot in season, culling the herd for venison.

The Estate of "Blaich" is east of Ardgour, separated by a high range, and extends along the shores of Loch Eil and Loch Shiel. Extending north towards Glen Finnan, which is marked by a beautiful monument, and a celebration is held annually, to commemorate the attempt by Charles Stuart and the Clans to regain the throne. Nearby is Duiskey Estate, now owned by an absentee English Landlord. This was Donald McLean's.

Southward along the shore are a number of deserted crofts, and a few occupied. Continue around, and one comes to better and more prosperous holdings, including the farm of Dougal MacLean, one of the eldest local inhabitants. It is difficult to trace relationship. We are now opposite Fort William, with Ben Nevis in the background Cross the loch, or follow the narrow road to Corran Ferry.

Records state that many MacLeans were dispersed {to Canada, New Zealand and Australia. The late Donald McLean, of Burgess and Philby ill-fame is listed as a distant cousin.

No trace of the "Duisky" home remains. A later home is used as a cow shed. Further up the glen, is the huge stockage, why so large, surely they never had enough sheep and cattle to fill it. The huge barn is falling to ruin. The stones are the largest that I have seen in farm building. (Surely not designed by the same architect as "Stonehenge".)

There are no residents. Cattle, deer, and game birds occupy the land. The Forestry Department grow Sitka Spruce and develop other experimental plots.

## Some further history - Compiled by E. M. Stevenson.

In my volume of *"Scotland's Rainbow West"*, by J. J. Bell, published 1933, there is a similar version of the story told by Douglas MacLean in 1975, but with some variations, Ardgour is described as being separated from Fort William, Invernesshire) by Loch Linhe, with a ferry between the two. Ben Nevis, Scotland's highest mountain, dominates the skyline behind Fort William in the Lochaber district. There is no town of that name.

Ardgour means "Height of the goats". McMasters, the owner in 1420, had annoyed the Lord of the Isles, MacDonald. A grandson of MacLean of Duart, Island of Mull, was visiting Ireland when he learned that this MacDonald (his kinsman - MacLean's grandmother was of the MacDonald Clan) was giving land away. In my version he was Ewen, not Donald, and he hastened back to his galley but on arrival back in Scotland he found he was too late, no land remained.

However, the Lord of the Isles said so brave a young man deserved some and why not help himself. When Ewen enquired "Where?" MacDonald murmured "Fuich", the old name for Ardgour territory. With less than a score of followers Ewen sailed up Loch Linhe at night and arrived at Ardgour House, not far from the three storey one of the present, at midnight. He was refused admittance, so Ewen killed him on the spot and dealt with the son later. So all of Ardgour passed from MacMasters to McLeans.

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- SOURCE : This biography is an extract from "The History of Donald & Christina McLean and Their Descendants" which was published in 1995 – page 2 to 5.
- COLONIALISTS : Christina and Donald McLean and their ten children migrated from Argyllshire to South Australia in 1837. This was in the earliest years of the colony. The McLeans initially settled near Adelaide where they grew the first wheat crop in SA. Then in about 1840 they pioneered the Strathalbyn area. There are now well over 20,000 descendants spread across Australia and elsewhere.
- CHANGES : Please contact us with additions, corrections or suggestions about any part of this family tree.
- CONTACT : Visit our website [www.christinaanddonaldmclean.com](http://www.christinaanddonaldmclean.com) or Strathalbyn Museum phone 08 8536 2656 to discover more about your family – and about privacy and copyright.

## More detail

To explore all this further, have a look at the following research notes which are in the 'Small Print' directory of the left of the home page:-

- F20: The Chiefs of Clan MacLean – from 1200s up the present
- F25: "Jump where the wall is lowest" – 1420
- F30: MacLean lairds in Ardgour – 1420 to the present
- F35: McLean lairds of Blaich – 1480 to 1758
- F40: Clan MacLean in the Jacobite Risings – 1715 & 1745

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Map showing Fort William, Douskie & The Isle of Mull

