

# GALLOWAY: LOCALITY AND LANDSCAPE EVOLUTION

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Writing of Scotland as a whole, Stuart Piggott has suggested on more than one occasion<sup>1</sup> that

To understand a people, one must first understand their country. Without a knowledge of the routes of access and of egress by land and sea, of the regions of mountain and moorland over against those of forest and flood plain, of the conditions of climate and natural environment — in a word, without a geographical setting — any study of human communities in past or present times must be a meaningless abstraction.

This certainly rings true of Galloway, which traditionally embraces what was in pre-Regionalisation days Wigtownshire and the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright, from the Mull of Galloway in the west to the River Nith at Dumfries in the east. Though this south-western corner of Scotland has an undeniable character of its own, its identity does not reflect an internal homogeneity. Instead, it arises from characteristic juxtapositions of contrasting elements. As Geoffrey Stell remarked recently,<sup>2</sup> the heart of the region is a subtly different blend of all the scenic qualities which visitors expect to find in Scotland at large. There is a rugged mountainous core, with crags, corries and dark forests reminiscent of the Highlands; rolling sheep-speckled moorlands look typical of the Border country; and in its lowlands are farmlands with as fertile soils as any in the Merse.

Gordon Donaldson<sup>3</sup> tells us that an uncharitable seventeenth-century visitor remarked that the map of Scotland looked like a pillory-coat, bespattered by dirt and rotten eggs. The present-day traveller, flying over Galloway, may perceive more attractive garb: the uplands as a rumpled tweed coat in rich moorit browns, with the coastal lowlands as a neatly worked scarf patterned in many greens, tossed down between the tweedy roughness of the interior and the sleek grey silk skein of the Solway.

## SCALE AND MARITIME LOCATION

A flight over the area can also give a feeling for the compact size of Galloway, and of its relationship to the lands and seas around. Even from the low altitude of the little commuter flight from Dublin to Edinburgh, one finds that one can take in the whole panorama from Dumfries to Stranraer in one sweep of the eye. Indeed, those who toil wingless up the Merrick (at 2764ft, 843m, the highest peak in southern Scotland) reckon that on a good day they can see not only Goat Fell in Arran, but Ben Lomond, the English Lakeland peaks, and the Mourne in Ireland. Even from sea-level on the Solway, one can look across not only to Cumbria but to the Isle of Man; and Ulster is just twenty miles across the water.



*Fig. 1.1 Galloway viewed as a centre of sea-routes and as part of the Irish Sea province.*

By simply using their eyes directly, our medieval and indeed prehistoric forbears may well have had a better perception of Galloway's location than our map-ridden generation. As Innes Macleod puts it:<sup>4</sup>

To look at a map of Scotland on its own is a sure and certain way of starting with a false sense of the geography and history of this south-west corner . . . it does seem to be tucked away on its own, rather a long way from 'important' Scottish towns and cities, and involving a long journey through the moors and hills of Ayrshire and Dumfriesshire to get there.

Historically, at many periods it seems more profitable to regard Galloway as less of an out-of-the-way corner of Scotland than as an intrinsic part of the Irish Sea province, in terms of economic, political and demographic links. As Stuart Piggott pointed out,<sup>5</sup> we have to take access and egress by water as well as by land.

For Galloway, sea links and river access were of considerable importance from prehistory right through until the coming of the railways. This Victorian invention heralded the shift for traders and travellers alike to land-based thinking, which has been consolidated so completely in the present century by modern road transport. By and large, however, in Galloway the rail and road links which have developed over the last century and a half have grown to serve the pre-existing communities, which had evolved during the long previous eras when water transport was of much greater local significance. Thus, though today movement by water figures little in the lives of the people of the region, appreciation of its importance in the past gives a necessary insight into the settlement pattern we now see.

In the days of small coasting traders, under sail and latterly under steam, the string of sheltered inlets and river mouths along the Solway gave havens for craft plying in and out of the Clyde, across to Kintyre, and to the Hebrides beyond. Cumberland, Lancashire and Cheshire were familiar neighbours, and in the 18th and 19th centuries, merchants from Wigtown and Kirkcudbright formed partnerships in commerce and insurance with their opposite numbers in Whitehaven and Liverpool. There were more possibilities then than now if one wished to travel directly from Kirkcudbright or Stranraer to Peel in the Isle of Man, or on to Denbigh, Caernarvon and Anglesey in Wales. Galloway seamen were trading regularly in and out of Dublin, Down, Antrim, Derry and Donegal. By no means all of the trafficking figured in official records. Galloway's long and complex coastline bordering the North Channel, Irish Sea and Solway Firth gave great scope for those plying illegal trades, and from what one gathers of the scale of the smuggling tradition, it is hardly surprising that Robert Burns's service there should have inspired 'The Diel's awa' wi the Excise Man'. With the Isle of Man on the horizon, temptation must have remained great for a century after Burns, for it was not until 1876 that Man was brought within the orbit of British Customs regulations.

Although for small vessels the coves and little estuaries were ideal for running contraband or more mundane cargos for the local communities, their havens and channels are hardly scaled to the demands of modern container ships. Neither are the rivers, though these used to be busy with craft wending their way through the fields as far as Palnackie, and indeed Dalbeattie up the Urr, or Dumfries up the Nith. Even the smaller of the steam coasters of half a century ago were reaching the limit of practical access, and woe betide those which did not pay close attention to the tides and sandbanks. Dr C. V. Wayne has recently published a delightful volume of first-hand reminiscences of the coasting trade, in which Captain Owen Spargo illustrates this vividly.

In 1930 he was 2nd mate on SS *Kyle Firth*, heading for Palnackie, which still then had a thriving trade in grain and animal feed, with coal and general cargo coming in from the Mersey and fertilisers from Continental Europe. This was despite the winding channel (with a rock called the Porter Stone on a horseshoe bend). It was so shallow that for steamers it was regarded as a 'Spring Tide Port', i.e. only workable when tides are at their greatest amplitude. Since the Spring Tides were almost over, the captain of the *Kyle Firth* took the risk of sailing by night from Kirkcudbright, though this was customarily regarded as a daylight port.

The crew arrived on board well 'lubricated' . . . , and the Captain and Pilot supporting each other . . . After we had been steaming for about an hour . . . I was ordered to let go the anchor. The mate then told me 'you don't need watches here . . . she won't drag; how true that was. I got up at six o'clock the next morning, and I could not see the sea! We were high and dry on a sand bank . . .

The next tide took them off, but they lost a propellor blade on the Porter Stone:

We eventually arrived at Palnackie but . . . she took the ground in the middle of the river and remained fast. With the tide falling and the following day's tide smaller still, she was 'neaped' and would have to remain where she was for about a fortnight . . . the swans swimming peacefully around her.<sup>6</sup>

Though as Geoffrey Stell<sup>7</sup> rightly points out, places like Kirkcudbright and Garlieston still maintain a traditional seafaring atmosphere, they and the many other agreeable harbours which are Galloway's legacy from earlier centuries are now mostly limited by their miniscule scale to local fishing craft and yachts. Loch Ryan, however, offers a haven of a quite different order of size. Portpatrick, outside, had been the usual option for a direct Galloway-Ulster crossing in the days of sail, but as the wreckage of the outer harbour there shows, it is vulnerable to westerly gales. Stranraer, sheltered within Loch Ryan, took over with the coming of the Irish steam packet and ferry service. It soon developed some of the characteristics of a major port, including the dubious distinction<sup>8</sup> of being one of the few

country towns in Scotland with a prostitution problem. The women congregated there to cull cash from homeward-bound Irish navvies. During World War II the size of the secure roadstead offered by the loch led to Cairnryan being refurbished to become a terminus for trans-Atlantic convoys. Though the naval connections of the area have faded, Stranraer has retained its importance to the present day as the commercial port offering the shortest sea-crossing between Britain and Ireland.

### **THE EVOLUTION OF GALLOWAY'S SCENERY**

Having given some thought to routes of access and egress, let us now take the next steps advocated by Piggott, and consider the combinations of terrain and climate which have provided the Galwegians with their characteristic environment.

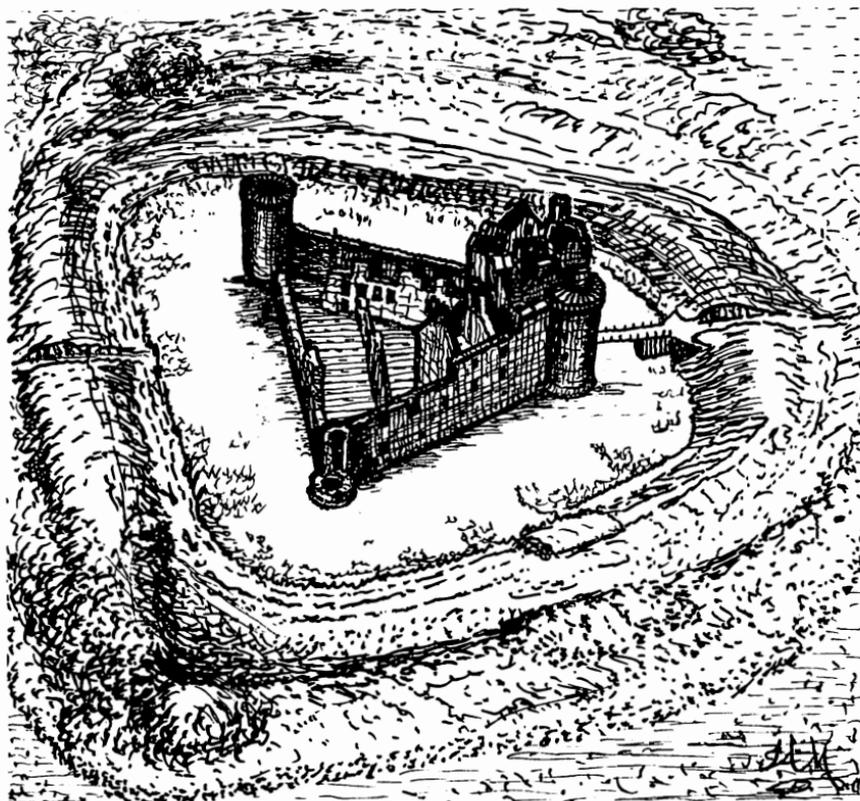
Space here does not allow a detailed descriptive 'setting of the stage' area-by-area within Galloway for the human action to be played out in the later chapters. An attempt will therefore be made to identify processes in the physical development of the terrain which have produced characteristic landscape elements. The aim in this is to provide keys the reader may use in their own interpretation of the scenery of areas of Galloway of particular interest to them.

We suggested above that the relationship of land and sea has been perceived in different ways at different phases in the history of Galloway. As in so much of Scotland, however, although the way that the terrain has been recorded and utilised has changed radically in the brief span of recorded human activity, the basic layout of the region (and indeed much of its topographic detail) reflects events long antecedent to its human past. Beneath our cultural imprint of field-patterns and settlements, the ancient structure of the bedrock provides the bones of the landscape; during the past few million years, these have been both sculpted and fleshed out in the processes of the Ice Age, and by sea-level changes.

An appreciation of even the sheer age of the rocks can give insights into the aspects of the cultural landscape, such as the characteristic nature of the preferred building stones. In Galloway, some of the bedrock is more than five hundred million years old, and little is less than half that age. This makes the Alps (which have only appeared during the last sixty-five million years) seem young, and puts us back into periods when the whole layout of the land masses on planet Earth were very different from what we are familiar with now. Thus, the agreeable pinkish stones of Caerlaverock Castle or Sweetheart Abbey reflect tropical sunlight beating down on red desert sands, long before the dinosaurs lived, when our part of the Earth's crust lay down by the equator. Nearby, Locharbriggs Quarry, close to Dumfries, once provided around half the freestone used by Scottish masons, and its desert colour dominates street after street of the more stylish tenements in Glasgow. Dumfries itself stands over a basin of Permian sandstone, dating from around two hundred and fifty million years ago.

This not only gave good quality artesian water for 19th-century industries there, but more red sandstone for the architects of its Victorian and Edwardian prosperity.

Structural basins like this in the bedrock have often been eroded out to give hollows in the terrain, and an appreciation of their layout can give an insight into the pattern of the Galloway landscape. Thus, the southern part of the Dumfries basin is now drowned by the Solway, creating the bay between Caerlaverock Castle (with its once-tidal moat) and Sweetheart Abbey. Then from there to Abbey Head (south of Kirkcudbright, named after Dundrennan Abbey) the sweep of the coast follows the northern margin of a flooded basin of Carboniferous and New Red Sandstones, with the more resistant rocks of Bengairn and Criffel rising immediately inland. Wigtown Bay may have a similar underlying structure. In the west, much of Luce Bay and Loch Ryan appear to have been eroded into a basin of Permian sandstones. The repeating pattern does not cease there; Belfast



*Fig.1.2 Caerlaverock Castle; sketch from an aerial viewpoint.*

Lough and Strangford Lough match the New Red Sandstone basin around Stranraer, just as the tougher materials of the Ards Peninsula in County Down provide a structural counterpart for the upstanding Rhinns of Galloway.

These ancient sandstones of Galloway are soft enough to encourage elaborate carving, so they were used extensively in the medieval ecclesiastical architecture of the area. Sometimes, however, it was felt necessary to employ some of the stronger rocks of the region, though they were more difficult to work. Thus, for example, Sweetheart Abbey also made use of granite, from close-by Criffel.

We tend to assume from their use in architecture that all granites are outstandingly durable, but this is not so. It is certainly true that the main highland areas of Galloway are associated with granites, emplaced during the Caledonian mountain building period (around four hundred million years ago, in Old Red Sandstone times). But as the plutons of granitic material were intruded at depth into the country rock, they baked and metamorphosed the pre-existing sedimentary strata. The intrusions are thus surrounded by 'metamorphic aureoles'. It is another key to understanding the scenery of Galloway to realise that these zones of heat- and pressure-tempered metamorphic rocks have sometimes proved even more resistant to erosion than the granites which they surround.

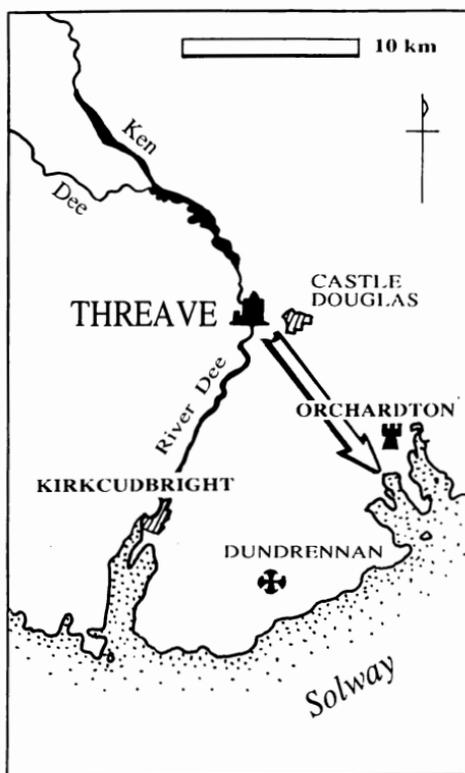
Thus, the heart of the Criffel granite massif has been hollowed out by glaciation. Similarly, the outcrop of granite by the Cairnmore of Fleet (711m), has been ground out by the ice to form the scenery at the western extremity of the area. Just north of the Mull of Galloway itself, where an intrusion gives the spectacular cliffs of Crammag Head and Laggantallach Head, it is sedimentaries toughened by metamorphosis which form hills that ring the worn-down granite.

The most striking example of this pattern forms the highest part of Galloway. A figure-of-eight-shaped intrusion of granite runs for almost 20km from Loch Doon to Loch Dee. There, only the ridge of Mullwharchar (692m) is of granite; the higher surrounding peaks are not. These include the Merrick (as we noted, at 843m the highest peak in southern Scotland), the Rhinns of Kells (813m), Shalloch on Minnoch (768m) and Lamachan Hill (716m). They all lie on or around the metamorphic aureole. Their material was once vulnerable sedimentary rocks such as shales and flagstones, but it was transformed by the heat and chemical action associated with the intrusion of the granites into resistant schists. They form a rugged ring around the central Mullwharchar ridge. The white granite of that is relatively tough, but between it and the metamorphics there now lies a trench 500m below the peaks, with a moat of lochans. This has been excavated from tonalite, a less resistant variety within the granite.

The repeated glaciations of the last two or three million years have

certainly had a major role in sculpting the present landscape, by picking out differences in the hardness of the bedrock. Dr Grahame Jardine believes, however, that the present drainage system of Galloway shows hints of origin as far back in pre-glacial times as the mid-Tertiary, say thirty million years ago. As time passed, the initial pattern was modified not only by the interplay between glaciation and geological structure, but by river captures.

For example, the waters of the Ken and Dee converge, and combine on a south-easterly heading. Though the resulting river now turns away to the south-west, a through valley continues on a south-easterly course past Castle Douglas to the coast of the Solway at Orchardton Bay. It would seem that the original outlet that way was superseded by the present south-westerly one into Kirkcudbright Bay. Threave Castle is set at the elbow of capture, where it dominates the bifurcation of the valley system. It thus seems that pre-glacial events have set patterns of natural routeways which have helped to set the stage for strategic decisions in medieval times.



*Fig.1.3 Threave Castle; sketch-map showing site in relation to routes created by river capture.*

In reconstructing past landscapes and interpreting historical events in Galloway, it has to be kept in mind that the drainage pattern has been changed in very recent times by reservoir and hydro-electric schemes. The major Clatteringshaws Loch is artificial; many other mountain lochs have been extended by dams; and instead of draining to the Ayrshire coast, Loch Doon now discharges into the Solway, *via* a mile-long tunnel to the Dee and the artificially-deepened Loch Ken.

Compared to the works of man or of rivers, in Galloway, as in so much of Scotland, it is clear that the dominant land-sculpting agent has been the ice of the Quaternary Ice Age. We do not know how many glaciations there have been, but Galloway was certainly wholly buried in the ice sheets many times. Erratic boulders of Loch Doon granite were carried up onto the tops of the Merrick and the Cairnsmore of Fleet; Cairnsmore and Criffel boulders are to be found in Cumberland (and indeed pieces of Ailsa Craig have been carried past Galloway as far as Snowdonia!).

The uplands of Galloway contain classic examples of landscapes of glacial erosion: lochs like Doon and Trool occupy troughs gouged from the bedrock by the ice (Loch Trool's valley is of the characteristic Alpine U-shaped cross-section); the cold north-eastern faces of the Rhinns of Kells and the Merrick are bitten into by corries, where snow patches developed into small glaciers.

With the scenery having been reworked again and again by numerous glaciations over at least two million years, we cannot now tell how far the features of glacial erosion we see in Galloway are the product of the last major period of glaciation, or of former phases. Certainly, the whole of the Scottish mainland was completely buried by an ice sheet around 20,000-18,000 years ago. This retreated in stages, and Galloway may have become ice-free by (or soon after) 14,000 years ago (dates are in uncalibrated radiocarbon terms). But between 11,000 and 10,000 years ago (i.e. just 9-8,000 bc) there was a sharp cold spell. Many valley glaciers developed in the Scottish Highlands, and one which pushed into the lowlands from the trough where Loch Lomond now lies has been used to name this stage.

In Galloway, Dr Roger Cornish<sup>9</sup> has mapped eleven little glaciers dating from this Loch Lomond Advance, around the Merrick, Corserine and Loch Doon. Most occupied north- and east-facing corries, and apart from two which covered two and three square kilometres, the rest were less than one sq. km. in area. Their effect on the broad view of the present landscape was therefore limited; but they are a salutary reminder that even in Galloway (which we tend to think of as the bland South-West of Scotland), Ice Age conditions prevailed as recently as 8,000 bc, when elsewhere in the world various peoples were well on the road to the domestication of plants and animals, and what we consider as the roots of civilisation.

So far, we have been considering glacial erosion. Though there is certainly plenty of evidence of this, the distance of the area from the main centres

of ice accumulation means that we see neither the fjord-coastline of Highland Scotland, nor the intractable ice-scoured bedrock landscapes of the crofting counties. Instead, it is the deposits left by the ice which often dominate the scenery and land-use potential of the Galloway lowlands. There, the bedrock is often thickly plastered with glacial drift. There are many lochans and boggy hollows even now in the depressions in the boulder clay, despite the canny drainage work of generations of farmers, and in the past there were certainly many more.

Particularly in the western lowlands, the feeling of being in the Irish Sea province (an impression encouraged by both the structural and the cultural links) is enhanced even further by tracts of landscape dominated by drumlins. These are rolling hillocks of glacial till, streamlined by the ice sheet. They occur elsewhere in Scotland (parts of Glasgow are built on them), but on this side of the North Channel they seldom dominate the eye as much as they do in the country around Wigtown. Folk who have retired to Galloway to escape the troubles in Ulster have remarked that they often feel that they are back in the landscape of County Down.

The end, around 8,000 bc, of the latest phase of glaciation in Scotland

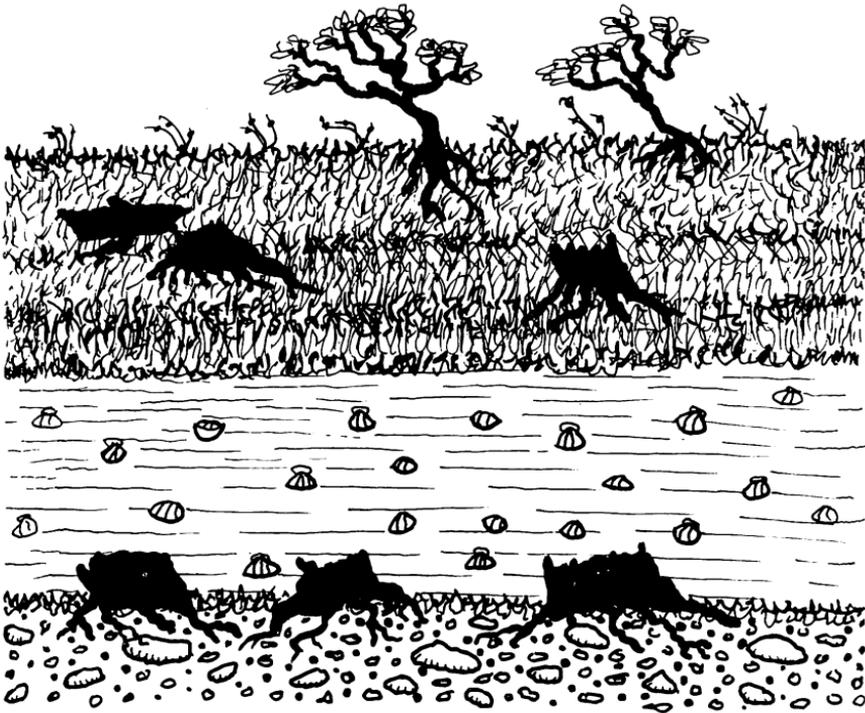


Fig.1.4 *Lochar Moss; stratigraphic change as reported in the old rhyme: 'First a wood, then a sea / Noo a Moss, and ever will be.'*

did not mark the cessation of major structural changes in the landscape of Galloway. It is not just modern scientists who have appreciated this. The antiquary Daniel Wilson noted a century and a half ago that the locals had a rhyme about Lochar Moss:

First a Wood and then a Sea,  
Noo a Moss, and ever will be . . .

Perfectly accurately, they had observed stratigraphy which expressed the interaction there between land- and sea-levels: a forest had been drowned, and buried in marine clay with sea-shells; then when the mud-flats eventually emerged above sea-level, they were colonised by a peat bog.

When the last ice left Galloway, world sea-level was low, because of the amount of water still locked up in the glaciers elsewhere. But the land-level in Galloway was also lower than at present, because of the isostatic depression caused by the weight of the superincumbent ice during the previous glacial episodes. For several millennia, a race ensued between the rising ocean and the rising land. Sometimes the ocean won, and there were extensive inundations of Galloway's coastal margins; sometimes the land drew clear, exhibiting raised beaches above the contemporary tideline. Although ocean level tended to be uniform from place to place (water finding its own level), differences in isostatic loading and response meant that the land-level movements vary, and former shorelines are thus often tilted. The local histories of relative level change therefore also vary, not only between Galloway and other parts of Scotland (depressed differentially by the ice) but even along the length of the Solway.

In Galloway, between the headlands of ancient rocks we are repeatedly confronted by long stretches of mud-flats, marshes, raised beaches and carse lands (raised estuarine deposits like those of the Forth and Tay). For many years, Dr Grahame Jardine has played a leading part<sup>10</sup> in working out the interplay between land- and sea-levels which has given us the present coastal landscape. In the following summary, based on his investigations, dating is by radiocarbon (uncalibrated), and heights are given in terms of Ordnance Datum (OD), which is modern mean tide-level.

Between 9,000 and 8,000 years ago, mean relative sea-level was two to four metres below OD at the eastern end of the Solway, but about one metre above OD in Wigtown Bay (this tilting of the shoreline is due to differential land movement continuing after that date). For the next millennium or so, the rise of the world ocean level appears to have outstripped the upward movements in Galloway. By about 7,200 years ago (i.e. 5,200 bc) the sea had attained its maximum lateral extent in south west Scotland during our post-glacial period. It had not, however, reached its maximum height. It was still rising, but the Lochar Gulf ceased to be affected by salt water about 6,600 years ago (c. 4,600 bc), possibly because of the growth of sand and gravel bars about its mouth. Elsewhere in the

Solway, the main post-glacial transgression did not finish until around 5,600 years ago in the east, or 5,000 (i.e. 3,000 bc) in the west.

It was not just around Lochar Moss by Dumfries that these level changes had major topographic implications. Wigtown Bay formerly extended almost to Newton Stewart, but was then filled in with carse clays, which were capped by the Moss of Cree when they eventually emerged above sea-level. Raised beach deposits can be traced across the isthmus between Luce Bay and Loch Ryan, suggesting that the Rhinns of Galloway were cut off from the mainland in late glacial and early post-glacial times. Indeed,

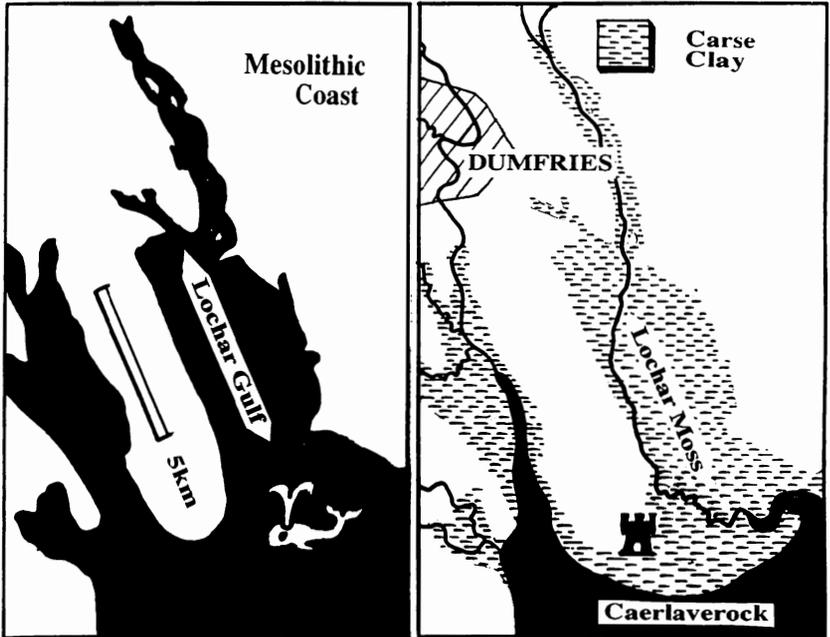


Fig.1.5 Dumfries, the Nith Estuary and Lochar Moss; sketch-map showing shoreline change from mesolithic to modern times.

former shoreline remnants on the Rhinns themselves suggest they sometimes only showed as a string of islets. In phases when the area emerged, and stretches of sandy seabed were exposed, coastal dunes built up. Those around Luce Bay surpassed 15m (50ft) in height, and sand-blows can reveal Mesolithic sites.

As we have seen, in parts of Galloway the main post-glacial transgression did not culminate until around 3,000 bc, i.e. a millennium or so after the local arrival of Neolithic peoples, and only perhaps five hundred years before bronze working is evident. The complex interaction of land- and sea-level changes went on long after the local maxima of the transgression.

Thus it is by no means only during the Mesolithic that we have to take into account the possibility of the changes in coastline when considering the environments of settlement sites.

Even in the later era of the fully historical period, when the amplitude of contemporary natural change is much diminished, we cannot afford to disregard these earlier events. Their legacy of deposits and landforms has implications for the patterns of historical and indeed present-day coastal land use and settlement. Sometimes their influence has been negative, and sometimes positive. Where they can be stripped of peat and drained economically, the old estuarine muds of the carse lands can provide fertile soils. Sometimes, however, the task has proved daunting, as in the case of the Lochar Moss, the largest of these areas. Though the peat there was once used for industrial as well as household fuel (and, more recently, bagged for horticulture), reclamation has only proceeded around the edges. In contrast, elsewhere the admixture of raised beach materials or blown sand has helped to lighten the texture of what would otherwise have been heavy soils of glacial boulder clay, so that they drain better and warm sooner in the spring.

### **CLIMATE AND LAND**

Ameliorating factors such as these have especial importance, because of the particular nature of Galloway's climate. To those who dwell elsewhere in Scotland, conscious of their snell winters, the climate of the south-west has a reputation for blandness. Summer holiday visits reinforce this impression, with images of lush lowland greenery. But compared to what we are used to on the east coast of Scotland, upland bleakness starts low in Galloway. Improved land reaches only up to about 500ft (just 150m) above sea-level; and often three-quarters of that 'improved' land is under permanent grass even down by the coast, because of the combination of the rainfall with the heavy clay soils. These lowlands of Galloway have been nicknamed the dairy-farm of Scotland, but above, we move rapidly into sheep country: S. R. Crockett's Galloway of misty hills 'of brown bent and red heather . . . and grey gnarled thorn'.

Dr Joy Tivy<sup>11</sup> has made a comparative study of the upland vegetation of Galloway and the Border Country lying to the east. The higher rainfall and the humidity of the west, and its greater cloudiness and exposure, favour peat growth more than in the relative rain shadow to the east. Thus, in the Galloway mountains the quality of the grazing is poorer, with more bog myrtle, purple moor grass and deer sedge than in the dryer grasslands of the high Border Country. The higher level of precipitation on the Atlantic side held true during the Ice Age too, and the resulting rather more severe glacial activity there has left more patches with sparse soil cover. Compared to the better Border sheep-runs, in upland Galloway only half the density of stocking is possible, five or more acres being needed to support one ewe. It is perhaps not surprising that much more of the hill land has been

turned over to forestry than in the more productive east. Glen Trool Forest Park alone runs to over 100,000 acres.

On the eastern side of Scotland, even as far to the north as Aberdeenshire, cereal crops can be grown successfully at considerably higher altitudes than in Galloway. This is despite notably colder winters. The seeming paradox is due to the oceanic influence on Galloway's climate, compared to the relative continentality of the east coast climate. It is not just the way that the weather coming in off the Atlantic gives high rainfall, and persistent cloud cover which inhibits evaporation. Having a major ocean up-wind tends to lower the amplitude of the march of temperature through the year.

Thus, in the winter, the more 'continental' east coast tends to cool down to a greater extent, while the great mass of ocean water responds slowly and holds up the temperature in the west. This gives Galloway its blander winter. Unfortunately, this is of scant advantage for arable farming, since little crop growth occurs then.

In summer, while the temperature curve can rise quite steeply in areas protected from the influence of a major ocean, the heat-sink effect of the Atlantic now works the other way, and inhibits the rise of summer temperatures in areas such as Galloway. This flattening of the curve means that relatively few day-degrees of energy are available above the threshold temperatures for plant growth and ripening. Everything is more marginal; not only is there less scope for evaporating excess soil moisture, but the cooling effect of increasing height above sea-level becomes critical at a much lower altitude than in regimes where summer temperatures show a higher peak. Crops ripen in the Alps and other inland continental locations at far greater heights than the Merrick, let alone the practical limits of arable cultivation in Galloway. In a European perspective, it is notable that despite the marked contrast in their winters, Galloway has been mapped by Dr Martin Parry<sup>12</sup> as having a much more marginal climate for cereal cropping than Finland, let alone Buchan.

### **LANDSCAPE IMAGERY: IN WORDS AND PAINT**

The landscapes of Galloway should not, however, be regarded merely in such mundane matters as 'land use potential'. At the start of this essay, it was suggested that the region was not characterised by homogeneity. This is to its advantage, in terms of delights for the eye. Galloway gains a particular attractiveness from its juxtapositions of the rich variety of the vistas evolved through the local interactions of climate with terrain, and of people with place. This has made it a ready source of imagery for painters and writers alike. It was to Galloway that the Glesga' Boys (the 'Scottish Impressionists') sallied out from their sooty city at the turn of the century. And many artists, professional and amateur, have followed them since.

Along the Solway, the sea can retreat towards the horizon, leaving the cloudscape reflected in a vast beige mirror of wet sand; but the tide can come racing in, to send gurdy seas surging around rugged headlands, licking

towards caves reputed to be the lairs of smugglers, or worse. The villainous Dirk Hatteraick (adopted by Sir Walter Scott in *Guy Mannering*) seems positively benign compared to the Bean clan of Galloway cannibals. According to John Wilson, a rhymer from Gatehouse, in their cave:

The limbs o' men, women an' weans on the wa's,  
Like beef that is dried were hung up in grim raws,  
An' some laid in pickle fu' sune tae be ta'en  
By that horde in the Hades o' aul' Sawney Bean.

Along the coast, *The Raiders* of Samuel R. Crockett's fiction lurked on a thinly disguised version of Hestan Island, off the mouth of the Urr.

One feels in safer territory when one leaves the wilder stretches of shore for the neat little towns, sheltered by the inlets which were the main focus of their prosperity when the sea was the main highway for legal trade too. Well built from local stone, they combine the couthiness of their miniscule scale with confident and distinct identities. Local pride is evident in the pleasant pretentiousness of many of their 18th- and 19th-century buildings, and harmonious colour washes lend them vividness, even under lowering skies, as many painters have appreciated. Here, too, however, there is a smell of adventure, and violence. This comes out in regional writings, long and short. Consider the laconic epitaph of the luckless James Montgomery of Portpatrick, who perished in 1652:

Sir James by pirates shot, and therefore dead  
By them i' the sea was solemnly buried

The quill of the more verbose Walter Scott turned Gatehouse of Fleet into the Kippletringan of *Guy Mannering*; Robert Louis Stevenson took up Borgue for *The Master of Ballantrae*; and more recently Dorothy L. Sayers brought genteel skullduggery to the area with *Five Red Herrings*.

Both the authors and the artists have found the lowland scenery between the little towns more than agreeable; Thomas Carlyle, that Ecclefechan arbiter of refined taste, fairly frothed about the prospects from the shoreside road betwixt Creetown and Gatehouse. Farther west, painters have caught the whalebacks of the drumlins, netted in a mesh of hedgerows.

If, however, one turns inland, that low limit for the 'improved land' means that one often moves with quite startling rapidity up out of the lowlands, manicured by centuries of canny husbandry, into scenery that has lost little of the wildness which was the legacy of the Ice Age to Highland Galloway. There has been a tradition of wildness amongst the denizens of those uplands, too. Tales of their nefarious doings were combined with graphic descriptions of the moor and mountain landscapes by Crockett in books such as *The Men of the Moss Hags*, *Bog Myrtle and Peat*, or *Raiderland*. John Buchan, too, found the rugged country around the Cairnsmore of Fleet an appropriate setting for the hunting of Hannay in the *Thirty-Nine Steps*.

At the end of his introduction to the *Exploring Scotland's Heritage*

volume on Dumfries and Galloway, Geoffrey Stell commented that the region.

may not have everything, but many of its antiquities stand high in their respective national league tables.

Many of those who explored the area with the Scottish Society for Northern Studies would be willing to extend that judgement from antiquities to landscapes, and most would certainly agree with him that every resident knows, and every visitor will find out, what — in the best possible sense — a fascinating region this is!<sup>13</sup>

### **Bibliography**

Useful general surveys, setting the geological and geomorphological evolution of Galloway in its Scottish perspective include:

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### **Notes**

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