

THE CHISHOLM TRAIL

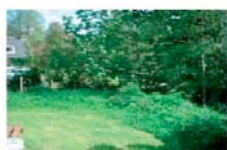
Map Reference: Ordnance Survey 404396 to 413408

Who are Clan Chisholm?

It is most likely that the first *de Chesholme* was one of the knights of William the Conqueror, arriving in England in 1066. Scottish society, in the 150 years following the Norman conquest was a crucible in which two dynamic cultures, Celtic and Anglo-Norman were increasingly intermingled. Out of this the fiercely independent Scots character was formed. David I was the youngest of the three sons of Malcolm Canmore and Saint Margaret - the sister of Edgar Atheling - grew up at the Norman court, where his sister had married Henry I. David had a policy of gaining the allegiance of Norman knights by giving them tenancies in areas under his jurisdiction. According to clan tradition one of these knights was *de Chesholme*. By the end of the thirteenth century the *de Chesholmes* were prominent in David's early territories around Roxburgh and Berwick.

By the early fourteenth century Alexander *de Chesholme* was called 'Lord of Chesholme in Roxburgh and Paxtoun in Berwickshire. His son married the daughter of another border laird, Sir Robert Lauder of the Bass. In 1329 Sir Robert became Justiciar of the North and Constable of the royal stronghold, Castle Urquart, and acquitted himself so well he was given lands near Elgin and Nairn. Robert Chisholm's son inherited these lands from his wife. Through successive marriages tenure of Erchless, Lovat (which later passed to the Frasers by marriage), Beaul, Struy, and Crochail in Strathglass were added to the patrimony of the Chisholm. A clan legend states that the lands in Strathglass were acquired around 1400. Although many chiefs lived at Erchless, they took their title from Comar in Strathglass which they held outright - Erchless remaining a tenancy till much later. On the 13th March 1538 James the V of Scotland confirmed the land grant of Knockfin, Comarmore, Easter and Wester InverCannich, the two Breakachies and the woods and forests of Affric Coulavie and Breanulich to John Chisholm - the new barony of Comarmore!

Visitors to the area can acquaint themselves with the Chisholms of Strathglass by following a trail of key landmarks. This is the Struy area. It is hoped to add to this with a Cannich/ knockfin Chisholm Trail after further research.



Site of Hanging Tree



Old Estate Office



Erchless Burial Ground



Sacrificial Stone



Drover's Patch



Chisholm Arms



Chisholm Stone



Erchless Castle

1. THE CHISHOLM STONE

The Crossroads at Struy

Start from central Strathglass, at the point where the crossroad from Struy joins the Eskadale road. Find a standing memorial stone - a rough stone slab, about 6' high, with an inscription which the passer by may not be able to make out, and if he does he may not be much the wiser. The stone stands where William Chisholm said goodbye to his wife, Christine Ferguson, before Culloden. He was standard bearer to the Chisholm of Chisholm.

According to local lore his widow hoped he would come back until she recognised her husband's old coat on a travelling tinker. She composed the song "Mo Run Geal Og" (Cumha Uilleim Siosail) - "My Fair young beloved" (A Lament for William Chisholm), a composition of great emotional depth which is a classic of it's period.



2. THE CHISHOLM ARMS

Turn right, then left over Struy bridge to Leishmore

This was an inn and ale house mainly used by the drovers. After one man was killed in a fight Miss Chisholm of Chisholm closed the inn and later had it re-opened as Struy Hall. This was the hub of the village prior to television and was used for all types of entertainment, including a strong badminton club and reading club in the library. The building was converted into a dwelling in 1970, Leishmore, and is still owned by the Erchless Estate.



3. DROVER'S PATCH (No Man's Land)

Carry on along the road & watch out for the hazel trees on your right.

A small area, suitably sheltered by hazel trees beside the River Farrar, where drovers coming from Glenmoriston south by way of Guisachan would rest their sheep and cattle before going to the markets at Muir of Ord or Falkirk. The drovers rested at the Chisholm Arms.



4. HANGING TREE

Go back to the Bridge and turn left to the Cnoc Hotel

To the west of the Cnoc (hillock) used to stand an enormous beech tree where miscreants and perpetrators of evil deeds were hanged. In Gaelic the translation of this area is Court Hill. Death by hanging was carried out for murder until the 20th century but in earlier centuries sheep-stealers, for example, would be hanged.



5. OLD CHISHOLM ESTATE OFFICE

The Cnoc Hotel

It is now the Cnoc Hotel, converted in 1970/71 from four dwellings. 'Cnoc means small hill or 'hillock.' The east wing was the Estate Managers office. The Chisholm Estate comprised two patches of land. The largest in Strathglass included the whole of Glen Affric. On the East this area was bounded by the Grants, and in the North, the Fraser lands stretched through Eskdale towards the North end of Loch Ness and Inverness. The smaller patch of Chisholm lands was nestled in a pocket in the Fraser lands along the Beaully Road.

6. THE SACRIFICIAL STONE

Carry on along the road to Erchless Castle: hunt on the other side of the road!

The hangman's home was over the hill from the sacrificial stone.

Look out for stones like this in the area. There are several you will find lying around forgotten in a field. E-mail us to give us the location of any more you find, enclosing a little map. We are not too sure it is a sacrificial stone, but similar stones are known until recent times for draining blood from carcasses. Some of us can remember pig killing on similar stones.

Other stones which have holes in have been used as grind stones for sharpening knives - with an iron band through the middle, secured at both ends and covered with water they whizzed round to sharpen scythes for hand cutting corn.



7. ERCHLESS CASTLE

The original Erchless was a typical Norman-Scots L-shaped keep, dating to the early 14th. century. However it has been altered and added to throughout it's history - most extensively in the 17th, century, and is a fascinating - if exasperating - compendium of history for the architectural student. It has quaint turrets and oriole windows, a hidden turnpike stairs and a pillared portico.

The 'tower house' architecture is typical of the 17th. century, the upper windows are Georgian and there is a late 19th century baronial addition.



8. CHISHOLM GRAVEYARD

In the Chisholm graveyard at Erchless you will find some very fine carved crosses and gravestones. Watch out for the large Celtic carved crosses, the obelisk and count the carvings of the Chisholm crest - feros ferio - with a wolf's head.

