

Grappling with the past on a journey across oceans

IHAVE just returned from a trip to the western islands of Mull, Inch Kenneth and Iona to see various friends. It was so good to get away for a little while.

On arrival to Griban, Mull, the caretaker of Inch Kenneth took us across to that special island by boat. It was a wild and wet journey!

However, we were greeted with warmth by our friends at Inch Kenneth House and enjoyed a delicious meal and hospitality that has been absent from my days for a while, as it has been for many.

That inner warmth spilled over into the following days where we experienced wonderful sunny weather as we approached the longest day of the year.

The beautiful surroundings are breathtaking. I stood in awe when golden, amber light hit the cliffs, or a bird broke the still water, causing ripples to stretch far and



Northern Drift

By Monique Sliedrecht



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wide across the reflective Sound.

On a grassy bluff looking out to Mull, I considered the travellers to these places in many years past, including Columba and the other Celtic pilgrims, who came to Scotland during troubled times and against many odds, journeying through rough waters in a curragh, to found a spiritual community which had a huge influence on the early history of Scotland.

It is 1500 years on since Columba's birth, and many people still travel to Iona to remember this remarkable saint.

I've been reflecting on this crossing of oceans and the cultural impact of many peoples from different lands. As we pass Canada Day on July 1, thoughts arise



Monique on Inch Kenneth, looking over to Mull.

Picture: Tze Hung Seeto

of the expanse of this 'new' country so influenced by Scotland and other nations.

Many people I meet here have relatives living in Canada - people who travelled across a wider stretch of sea to start a new life in a new land. My Dutch parents settled in Ontario in the 70s and it is where I spent my childhood, up to the age of 18.

It is the 153rd anniversary of the Constitution Act of 1867, which established Canada as a country. In actuality, Canada is a whole lot older than 150 years!

Long before British and European settlers showed up, this land was inhabited by Canada's First Nations. It is a country with a rich and deep indigenous history that is only just being acknowledged.

My own experience teaching Navajo children in New Mexico was the beginning of a huge respect in my life for indigenous culture.

On my return to Freswick, I learned about the discovery of 751 unmarked graves in Saskatchewan's residential school property of the Cowessess First Nation, mostly of children. It is a difficult time of reckoning for Canada because of these tragic discoveries, all within living memory.

The spirit of a people is in its language and culture. When that is ripped away, a whole nation suffers. Every country needs healing, and Canada is clearly no exception. There has been some discussion of cancelling Canada Day in

light of these grim findings, but maybe it is a chance to mark a new era, which must involve justice and profound self-examination. I hope this will be a time to find healing, and to work towards reconciliation.

The story of Columba begins with a battle where 3000 lives were lost and, according to tradition, he took responsibility for those deaths and, in a spirit of penitence, he set out to create a new order of peace.

Just like the ripples on the sound at Inch Kenneth, the events of the past echo and ripple towards us, calling us to a different and more harmonious world.

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YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE AN EXPERT TO ENTER!

In previous years we've had three categories, small, medium and large gardens in the Inverness area. For 2021 we're going to run the competition throughout Inverness, Ross-shire, Caithness, Sutherland and Moray. There will be one winner for Inverness & Ross-shire, one winner for Caithness & Sutherland and one winner for Moray.

This year we are asking you to send in a short video clip of your garden. All entries will then go to a judging panel and the finalists will be featured across our local newspaper websites in August where our readers will be able to vote for the winning garden in their area.

Please send in your short video of no more than 60 seconds by Friday 30th July 2021.

Three lucky winners will receive Gardening Gift Vouchers.

For any enquiries in regards to the competition and to submit your video please contact emma.glass@hnmedia.co.uk

Normal Highland News and Media competition rules apply.

Garden
OF THE YEAR
2021