

## The Mackenzies and the Battle of Glen Shiel



2019 marks an important anniversary for the Mackenzies given the important role that their chief and many of the clan played at the Battle of Glen Shiel in June 1719. It is my intention here to concentrate on the new findings by my brother Kevin and me which pertain in particular to the Mackenzies' involvement in this significant historical event.

It was soon after war had been declared between the British government and Spain in December 1718 that the Spanish had seen the benefit of resuscitating rebellion in order to increase pressure on the British, and a new Jacobite invasion was planned, in which the attainted young Marquis of Seaforth now had nothing to lose by playing a major part in the military action that ensued.



The young William *Dubh*, fifth Earl and second Jacobite Marquis of Seaforth painted when in exile at the Jacobite Court of St Germain

The main Jacobite invasion force was to be commanded by James Butler, 2nd Duke of Ormonde, disembarking in the South West of England, with the intention of marching on London to dethrone George I; whilst a diversionary force was to be mounted in Scotland, commanded by George Keith, 10th Earl Marischal.



George Keith, 10<sup>th</sup> Earl Marischal by Pierre Parrocel

Thus, was the least-known of the several attempts to place Scotland's ancient dynasty back on its rightful throne set in motion.

Back in Britain, a nervous Whig government sat watching and waiting. However, their fears were quickly dispelled. Unfortunately for the Stuart cause, this second Spanish Armada met a similar fate to that of King Philip in 1588. The "Protestant winds" blew once again to protect Britain's coastline from foreign invaders. Nevertheless, Marischal and his diversionary force had sailed too soon for the news to catch up with them, and they continued to head for Stornoway on the island of Lewis. It was here that the Mackenzie chiefs had for the last hundred years ruled as kings in all but name. A council of war was held at the Seaforths' hunting lodge, Stornoway Castle



*A view of the harbour at Stornoway from above Seaforth Lodge, painted for Lord Seaforth by James Barrett in 1798*

and a quarrel ensued as to what course to take: whether to wait in the islands for the remnants of the invasion fleet, or to land on the mainland in Mackenzie country and press on using Seaforth's clansmen to capture Inverness. In the Duke of Mar's contemporary account we find a seemingly ever-present sense of caution and all-pervading pessimism in the young Marquis but in the end a more reckless course of action prevailed: after Cameron of Lochiel and MacDonald of Clanranald arrived, adding support, the Earl Marischal ordered the Spanish frigates to put to sea on 4<sup>th</sup> April. However, the three ships sailing from Stornoway for Loch Alsh on the mainland were then forced by contrary winds to put into Gairloch, the home of one of Seaforth's Mackenzie cousins.



The young Sir Alexander Mackenzie of Gairloch, 2<sup>nd</sup> Baronet, who appears to have housed some 400 Spanish troops in his west coast mansion

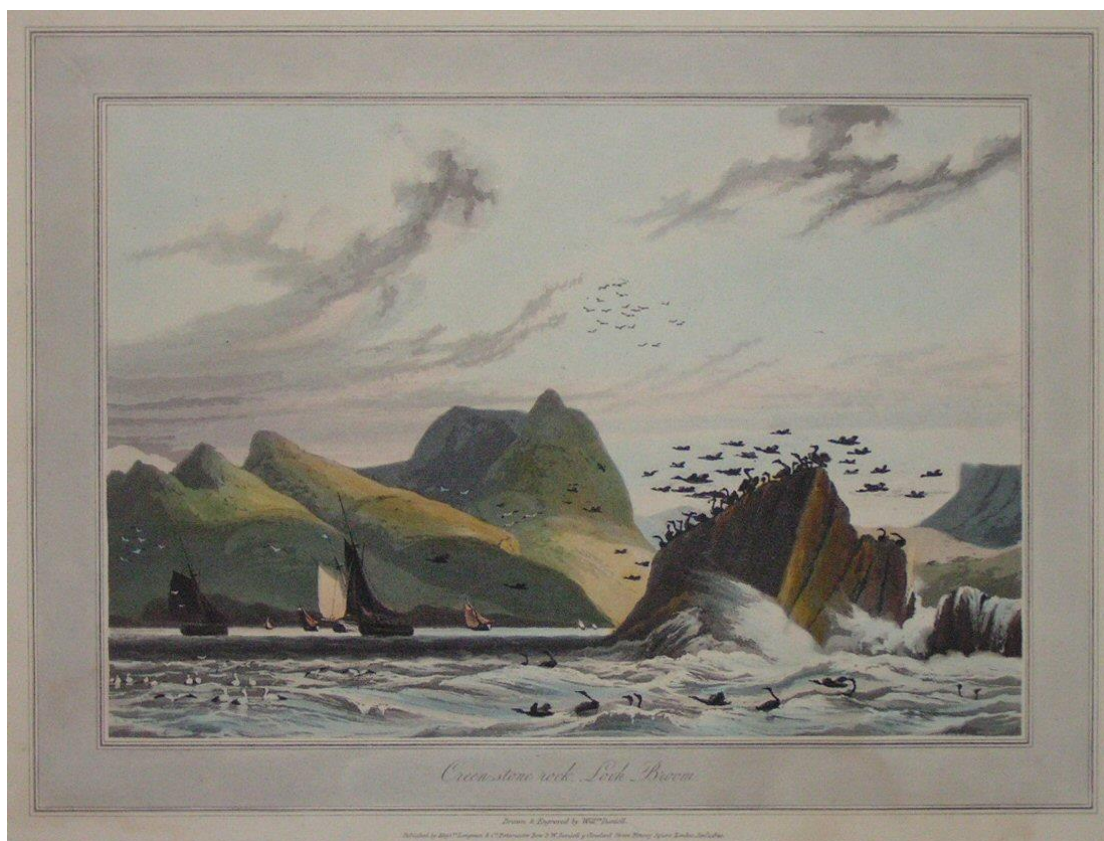
In the National Archives at Kew there survives amongst the British Government records a copy of a letter from one "George Monroe of Cullrain" (whom we can identify as George Munro, 1st of Culcairn, son and heir of "the Blind Baron" of Foulis and who was one of the Hanoverian commanders who later played a prominent part at Glen Shiel), dated 13<sup>th</sup> April 1719. The secret intelligence reported in his letter, which appears hitherto to have gone entirely unnoticed by historians, was as follows:

"Upon Sunday the 5<sup>th</sup> of April the late E Seaforth landed from the Lewis with a great many Gentlemen, and 800 forreigners (whose livery is blue and white) at Polow in Garloch [sic]. 400 of which march'd by land to Kintaile, and the other 400 staid at Stankhouse which is Gairloch's principal House." The "Stankhouse" was the name of the ancestral west coast residence of Seaforth's cousin, Sir Alexander Mackenzie of Gairloch - before he built the present day seat of the family on higher ground, which he named Flowerdale.



*Flowerdale, the west country seat of the Gairloch Mackenzies*

The Jacobites are in the various contemporary accounts described as effectively marooned on the mainland from 30<sup>th</sup> April onwards and there is absolutely no further reference to the ship in which Seaforth had reached Lewis and which had landed at Gairloch on the 5<sup>th</sup>. So what happened to it? A clue is provided by John Dixon's well-informed and extremely detailed guide to Gairloch, published in 1886, which mentions the tradition of a Spanish ship being wrecked on the Greenstone Point, and presumes this must have been part of the Armada of 1588. However, Dixon would not have been aware of Munro's letter.



Aquatint by William Daniell of the Greenstone rock, off the Greenstone Point, in the vicinity of which it would appear that Seaforth's ship the *Fidèle* is likely to have been wrecked.

This could well account for the "Spanish ship" wrecked on the Greenstone Point, as it would have contained Spanish troops. Indeed, if it was and this occurred during the storm on the night of 6<sup>th</sup> April, that would make perfect sense of why a total of 800 Spanish troops were, on landing at Poolewe, divided into two groups of 400 with one of these parties going to the Stankhouse and the other, as Munro confirms, being those who (clearly at some time before he wrote his letter on the 13<sup>th</sup>) "march'd by land to Kintaille". Given the length and circuitous nature of the overland journey, this would then explain such an otherwise strange thing for the latter group to do.

In fact, from a little-known contemporary Spanish source it seems that William had then taken the opportunity to go east on a recruiting drive in the heartland of his clan territories. The Marquis of Saint Philip in his commentary on the year 1719, contained in his "[Comentarios de la guerra de España e historia de su rey Felipe V, El Animoso](#)", recorded what can be translated as follows:

"The squadron from Spain was in pieces, heading in different directions. A thousand men, for the most part catholic irish, arrived in Scotland, in Polelum [Poolewe], Gairloch and Kintail, together with milords Marisc[h]al, Seafort[h] and Tullibardin[e], landing on that shore on 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> April... Eight days afterwards Seafort[h] entered Bracaam [Brahan], where he issued notices to friends and vassals to come in assistance, and to the city of Imurnesa [Inverness], so that he was welcomed without opposition. These men took over a castle of no importance and some other posts; afterwards being joined by up to two thousand vassals, a much lower number than first envisaged."



Poolewe was also the nearest harbour to Kersary and Inverewe, the west coast landholdings of Sir Colin Mackenzie of Coul, whom we know to have raised 200 men to fight in the 'Nineteen Rising. The

Duke of Mar's account gives further corroboration to this itinerary by reporting that on 29<sup>th</sup> April "my L' Seafort wrote a note to L' Tullibardine that a party was come to Inness [Inverness], and were to be joined by some disaffected Highlanders to surprize them in Lochalsh, desireing proper measures might be taken to prevent any such attempt", and that Seafort was present when the British war ships arrived on 9<sup>th</sup> May (Mar records that "my Lord Seafort declared he could bring out no men, while the men of war were about his co[a]st").

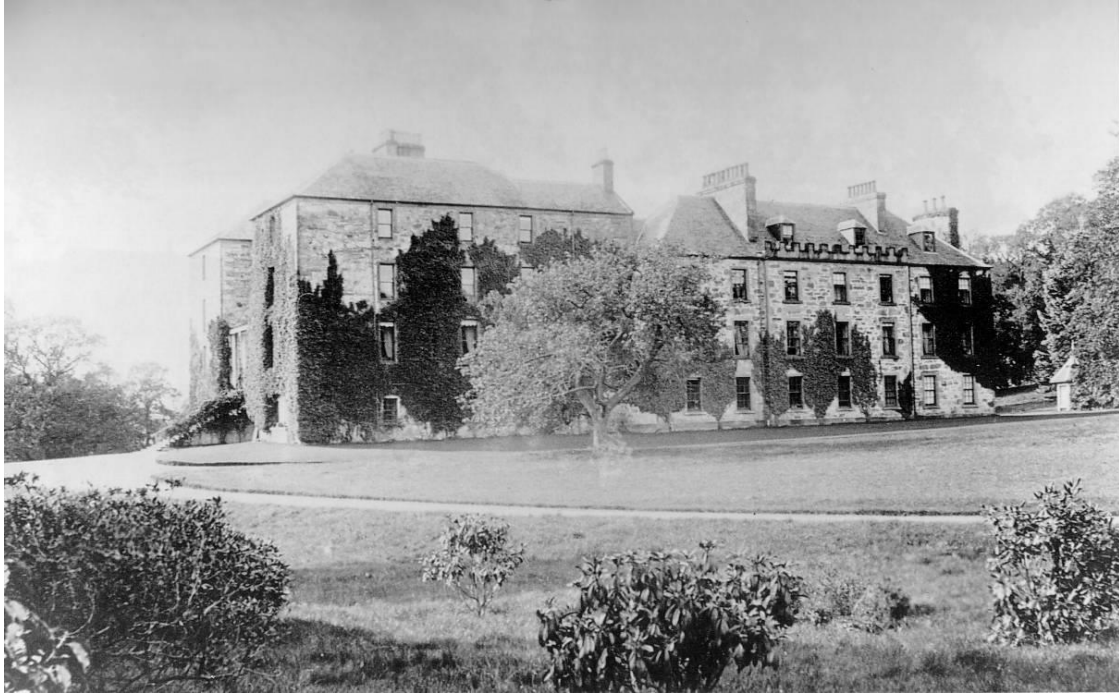


*'Bobbing John' Erskine, Earl of Mar.*

*An engraving after Sir Godfrey Kneller. Mar described himself as a 'Mackenzie bairn.' He initiated the Jacobite rising of 1715 which had such devastating consequences for the clan.*

We also know that Seafort returned from a recruiting drive of his own people ("which he found would be no easie task") with about 400 or 500 men on 7<sup>th</sup> June - only a few days before Glen Shiel was fought on the 10<sup>th</sup> - but this was clearly part of another recruiting drive, in the west, as he confirms that Seafort went recruiting in *Loch Carron* at the end of May. It would appear then that William is most likely to have gone east to his family seat at Brahan very shortly after landing in Gairloch - thus some time between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> April.

And there is yet another piece of intelligence which the authors have stumbled across in the British Government archives that sheds new light on the hushed-up invasion. An anonymous letter from a Hanoverian spy, dated 25<sup>th</sup> April 1719, reports as follows: "Last night being at the house of Mr Jones [who was no doubt a Welsh Jacobite] in Bedford Court his wife with pleasure told me that the Highlanders had joined the Erle of Seafort and taken Inverness by surprize, upon which expressing great satisfaction he drank the Duke of Ormonde's health and said that he was nearer to me than I thought for, for that he was in London and not far from that place ...".



*Brahan Castle, showing Lord Seaforth's modernisation of its former castellated appearance.*

At Brahan William must have swelled his forces by recruiting loyal clansmen. The intriguing significance of this is that not only must William have headed to Brahan very soon after they landed - either from Kintail (on or shortly after the landing in Loch Alsh in mid-April) or more likely, as we have seen, from Poolewe, earlier still, between the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> April - but also that living at the castle with his mother Frances at this time, and running errands for her, was the direct ancestor of the authors of this article, Daniel Mackenzie. The Seaforth estate accounts among the papers of his cousin, the Gray's Inn lawyer, Kenneth Mackenzie record several payments at this time to him for trips to Inverness and a payment "to Danell gone for his men." As Frances's assistant, with landed interests and close family connections in both the Inverness and Gairloch areas, it seems highly likely therefore that our ancestor was involved in Seaforth's recruiting drive.

As to the other body of 400 Spaniards, under Marischal and William Murray, Earl of Tullibardine, having it would appear recovered from their voyage by taking refreshment at the Stankhouse in Gairloch, it was not until the night of 13<sup>th</sup> April that this drastically depleted force managed to reach Eilean Donan in Kintail. This spectacularly beautiful and wild terrain of dark glassy sea lochs that cut into a wilderness crowned with snow-capped mountains was Seaforth's most ancient landholding which had an almost talismanic quality among his clansmen, from whom William could expect unquestioning loyalty.

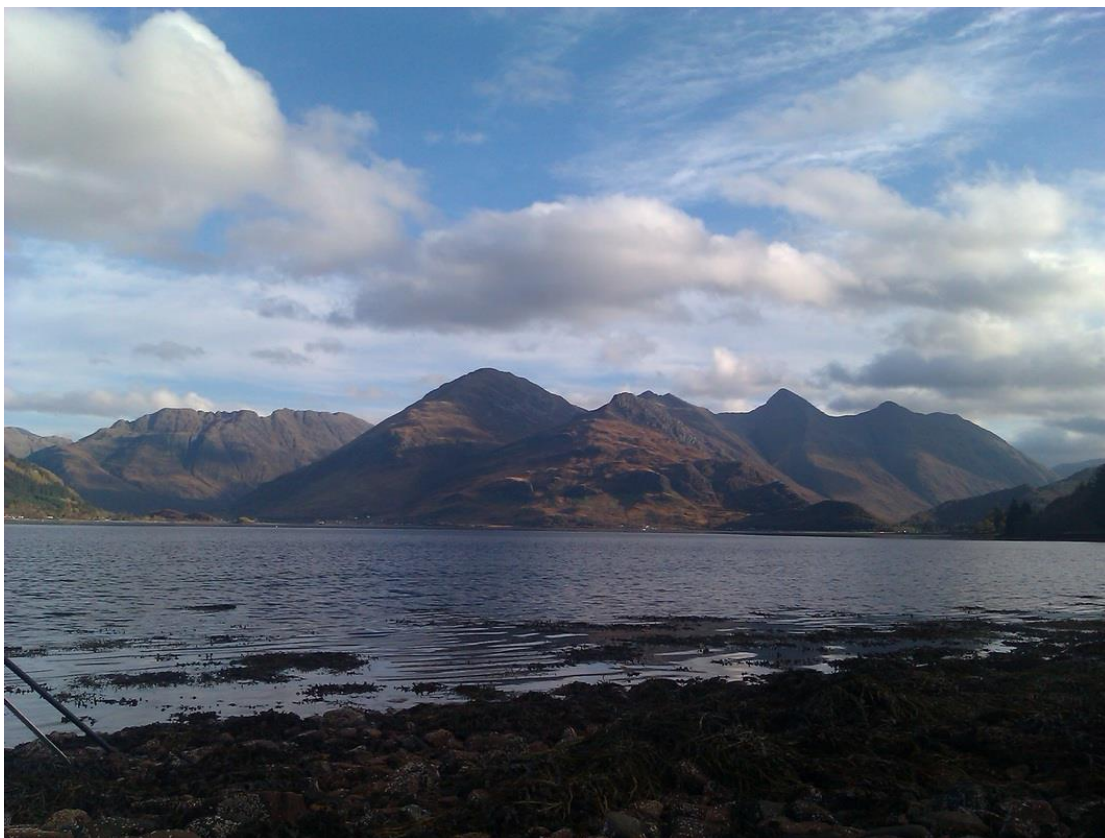


Furious at having had to endure the spineless bickering of his comrades in arms, William was often singled out for his loyalty and valour at Glen Shiel in the face of considerable adversity. Holding firm as disaster followed upon disaster, in order to stop the government's General Wightman's advance from Inverness, on 9<sup>th</sup> June, Tullibardine and Seaforth took up a position at the end of Loch Duich, in Glen Shiel, at a choke point where the steep-sloped glen narrowed to a pass which could be dominated by gunfire from the hills. Glen Shiel, then as now, was a grand and desolate U-shaped glacial valley which ran inland in a south-easterly direction, skirting the vast southern slopes of the mountain range now known as the *Five Sisters of Kintail*.



*Castle Eilean Donan.*

*William Daniel's aquatint, showing the ruined state of Eilean Donan Castle following the Battle of Glenshiel.*



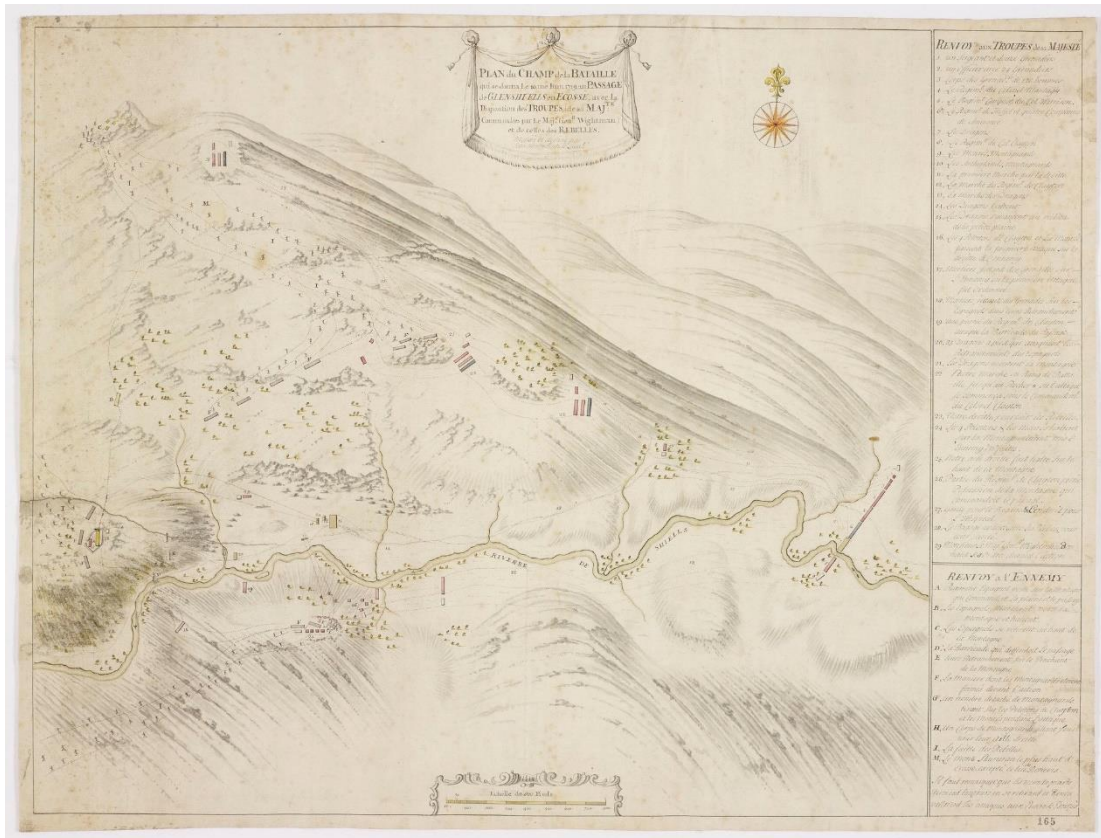
*The Five Sisters of Kintail from the Mam Ratagan Pass on the other side of Loch Duich. These mountains tower above Glenshiel, where the most dramatic of the events in Coatimundi's life story*

were soon to be played out. Kintail was the ancestral homeland of William Mackenzie, Marquis of Seaforth (his secondary title was Baron of Kintail).

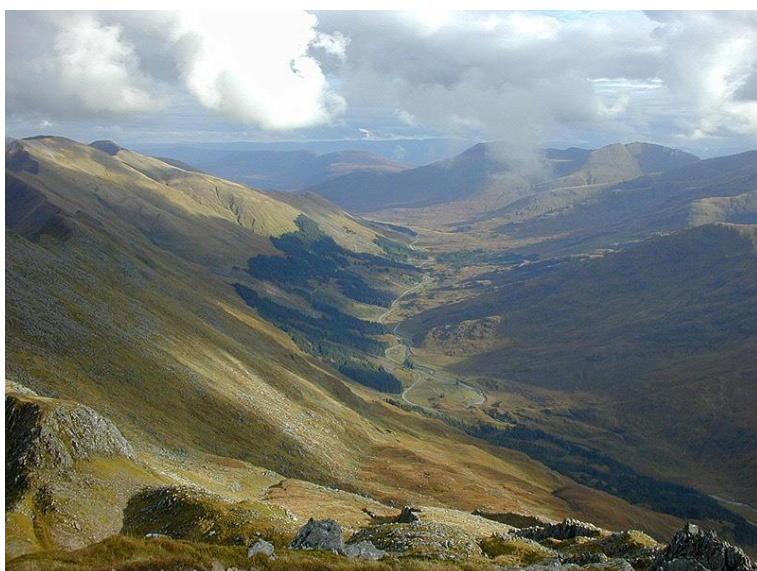
Here, in these remote mountains, took place the last pitched battle ever to be fought against foreign troops on British soil.



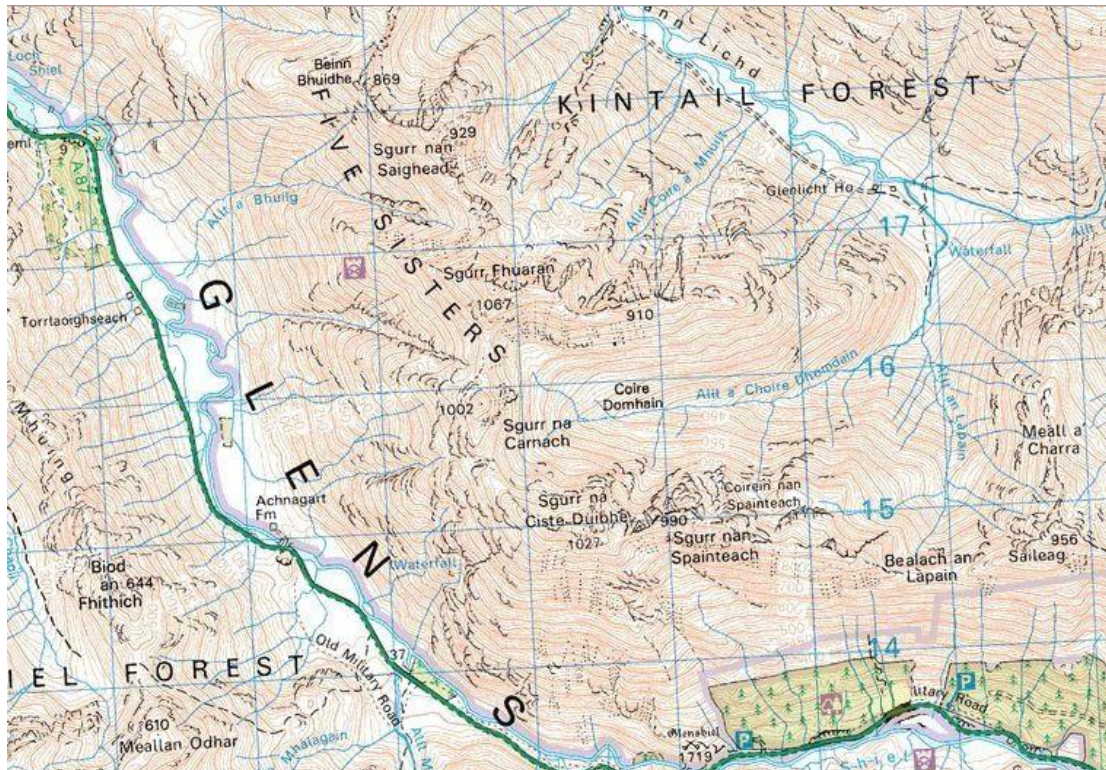
The Battle of Glenshiel at its height, by Peter Tillemans. A plan of the battle, made by Lieutenant J H Bastide, was in the Duke of Marlborough's possession and survives at Blenheim Palace; another copy is at Windsor Castle. This battle is depicted looking eastwards down the valley, viewed from the opposite direction to that of the previous image. The men in white and yellow uniforms on the right are clearly intended to represent the Spaniards on the slopes of *Sgùrr nan Spainteach*, with the men in the patch of smoke at the highest level being Seaforth and his *montagnards* - the Five Sisters' peak of *Sgùrr na Ciste Duibhe* towering above.



The remarkable fortitude of Seaforth and his men, who stood the artillery assault for three hours, was afterwards recorded by both sides, but their situation was forlorn by the time reinforcements finally arrived. These included Rob Roy, the historical hero of Sir Walter Scott's celebrated novel, and one of his sons. Seaforth was it seems wounded in the shoulder part of his upper arm (the contemporary reports variously say arm and shoulder) during the fire fight, and the left flank began to retreat, despite the efforts of Rob and the MacKinnons, who also moved up to assist. But Rob, seeing the Mackenzies retreating, quickly followed suit, along with the Camerons who were sent up the hill from the centre. The entire Jacobite line collapsed rapidly as the formidable battery of cohorn mortars ripped through the rebel ranks.



View taken from the north side of the glen and looking eastwards down Upper Glen Shiel from *Sgùrr na Ciste Duibhe*. Both Seaforth's men and the Spanish were positioned up on these slopes - Seaforth behind the rocks just below the summit where this was taken. An approach direct to the summit can be made via the *Bealach na Spainteach* ("the pass of the Spaniards") by following a line directly in the centre of the picture, much of it on an old stalkers' path.



Bastide's map of the battlefield, followed by a modern map of the Glen Shiel region, showing the configuration of the *Five Sisters of Kintail* mountain range above Glen Shiel.

By 8 pm most of the Highland units had fled, vaporising away into the mountains. Tullibardine, who was in command of the centre, managed a disciplined retreat by the Spanish troops, who apparently escaped without loss. Other Jacobite commanders made good their escape also, no doubt relying on local knowledge of the terrain from Black William and his clansmen. Despite the obvious strength of the Jacobite position, the doggedness of the government assault against a largely inexperienced Jacobite force - which was faced with the dilemma of standing their ground when others were seen to be leaving the field - ultimately ensured a government victory.



The summit of *Sgùrr na Ciste Duibhe*, from which Seaforth and his party escaped during the night after the battle, is one of the highest, and when viewed running from west to east, the fourth of the mountain peaks that make up the *Five Sisters of Kintail*.



The view from the top of *Sgùrr na Ciste Duibhe* across the *Five Sisters* ridge towards Loch Duich, showing *Sgùrr na Carnach* in the centre and *Sgùrr Fhuaran* on the right. This is the panoramic view which Seaforth and his *montagnards* had across the region from their vantage point. This also shows the dangerous route which the badly wounded Seaforth and his party would have had to take during the night had they crossed the ridge westwards along the crest of the *Five Sisters*, rather than

eastwards across *Sgùrr nan Spainteach*, down the back of the ridge and then north to the valley of *Gleann Lichd*.

Finally giving up all hope of a successful resistance, William was carried over the mountains into Knoydart under cover of dark. Knoydart was the territory belonging to McDonnell of Glengarry and there William “skulked” with a £2,000 price on his head and presumably recovered from his wounds either in the care of his aunt the elderly Mary, Lady Glengarry and her husband, or else in a safe house provided by his relatives’ retainers.



View westwards down Loch Hourn towards the mountain of *Ladhar Bheinn*, above Barrisdale Bay. This is the view which would have greeted William as he descended towards Kinloch Hourn from the Corryvarligan Pass.



*The bay of Berrisdale in Loch Hourne.*

Drawn & Engraved by Wm Daniell.

Published by the Author, 17, Pall Mall, London. Sold by W. Daniell, a Dealers, 10, Fleet Street, London. See Catalogue.

Aquatint of 1815 by William Daniell, showing Berrisdale harbour. The small white house which can just be seen on the left is Barrisdale House, the house which by then had replaced the earlier building, burnt down in 1746.

We know that William and his retinue then took a ship to Lewis and thence we know that he escaped "in disguise" to "the continent". In a further letter that we discovered at the National Archives at Kew, written by a Captain Lingen of the Drake sloop, we last hear of our brave chief being chased by this Irish sea captain, sailing fast and heading towards Spain and exile once more.