

# Scotland

9 May 2024

Scottish Highlands

## Digging into the Auld Sod (the Highlands)

### HARRY POTTER COUNTRY

When Harry Potter boards the train back to Hogwarts School in the movies, this lake — Loch Shiel at Glenfinnan — in the Scottish Highlands serves as the filming backdrop. Two more pictures in this letter, all taken from this spot, will show you more.





## Hairy Cows

That's the Scots' pronunciation of "hairy cows," or, more properly, Highland cows, the first registered cattle breed in the world and developed in Scotland. They are well adapted to harsh Highland winters. This photo was kindly provided by our Highlands bus tour friend from Utah, Becky Sodenkamp.





## Forest and farm

The Highlands, carved by glaciers during the Ice Age, has never been a great place for crop cultivation because of its thin topsoil. The clan chieftains who owned the land switched to sheep and cattle farming, which required much less labor, and prompted them to force their fellow clan members and tenant farmers off the land. Today the Highlands are thinly settled.





## MacBeth and McBeath

"It's spelled many different ways but it's all the same name," Arlene MacBeth, whose fiancé is chef at The Cabin Restaurant & Take Away in Mallaig, told Emily, daughter of the late Rodney McBeath Moak. "We're cousins."





# Mallaig harbor

About 660 people live in this fishing village on Scotland's west coast, the turnaround point for our all-day Highlands bus tour from Glasgow.





# Hogwarts School

The mountainside on the right is the same mountainside where St Mary & St Finnan Catholic Church stands in my [third Scotland newsletter about the Presbies](#). But if you've seen the Harry Potter movies, you'll recognize that Hogwarts School has been added to this view through computer-generated graphics.

# Notes on photos

**SOURCES:** Underlined words link to them.

**HARRY POTTER COUNTRY** — The historical fantasy TV series *Outlander* and the movie adaptations of JK Rowling's seven Harry Potter novels both used the Scottish Highlands, in the northwestern part of the country, as their backdrops. The Highlands were home to the Scottish Clans, whose ancestors came from Ireland and spoke Gaelic (pronounced "gallic" in Scotland).

**HAIRY COOS** — Because they are so gentle, farm families used to bring a "coo" into the house on cold winter nights so they could sleep together and keep warm. No joke. "Don't roll over, Fiona. Those are my kids."

**FOREST AND FARM and MACBETH AND MACBEATH** — Between 1750 and 1860, there were two mass migrations from the Scottish Highlands to the United States and Canada — particularly to Nova Scotia (New Scotland) — called the Highland Clearances. "It is debatable whether the Clearances could be considered as genocide," says a historical research document contained at the museum in the Highlands town of Ullapool, which does not name its author. "But from [a first-person account by crofter Donald McLeod] they would certainly appear to be an early instance of ethnic cleansing, for although both the dispossessors and the dispossessed were Britons, Highlanders were regarded as foreign, as Erse (Irish), with a culture, language and traditions distinct from the rest of Britain." They included both of Emily's Scottish ancestors mentioned in my first newsletter. These Highlanders were tenant farmers forced off the land by their wealthy Clan chieftain landowners, who were falling into debt. One of the places these dispossessed Scots came to was a settlement near Winnipeg, Manitoba, where a wealthy Scottish nobleman, Thomas Douglas, the 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Selkirk and a major stockholder in the Hudson's Bay Company, got the company to grant him 120,000 square miles / 300,000 square kilometers of land for the Red River Colony. Lord Selkirk was a Lowlander and humanitarian bothered by the plight of the Highlanders and Irish. His colony, which became known as the Selkirk Settlement, was where Alexander McBeath, one of Emily's ancestors, arrived with his wife and eight children in 1815 after crossing the Atlantic on the sailing ship *Prince of Wales*.

**MALLAIG HARBOR** — This is a major ferry hub for people traveling to the Small Isles and Hebrides. The public schools here serve students from Mallaig and surrounding towns, including those from the Small Isles of Eigg, Rùm, Muck and Canna, who live in the school hostel during the week because it takes too long by ferry to go home each night.

**HOGWARTS SCHOOL and HOGWARTS EXPRESS** — The people that you can see have flocked here because they are a) "foamers" or "trainspotters," people who foam at the mouth over anything to do with railroading, or b) Harry Potter fans. The Jacobite Steam Train that goes across the Glenfinnan Viaduct daily, in addition to regular ScotRail service, is an 84-mile roundtrip between Fort William and Mallaig for folks who, for those and other reasons, enjoy riding restored antique trains. The train is named for the Jacobite Rebellion, which the monument in **HOGWARTS SCHOOL** commemorates. The rebellion, part of the Jacobite Risings, lasted from 1689-1745, which was essentially a bloody struggle in the Highlands between Protestant and Catholic Scots over which form of Christianity would be established as the nation's favored faith. "Jacobite" comes from Scotland's King James VII / England's King James II ("Jacobus" is Latin for "James"), the last Catholic king. Supporters of Prince Charles Edward Stuart, better known as Bonnie Prince Charlie, James VII/II's grandson, tried to help him regain the throne held by Protestant King George II. They failed.





# HOZWARTS EXPRESS

It's officially known as the Jacobite Steam Train, which carries tourists but this day is being pulled by a diesel locomotive. It is crossing the Glenfinnan Viaduct on its way to Mallaig. If you could turn around to see what's at your back, it would be the previous picture and the cover photo.