

Traditional place names around Deeside

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A First Glance at Gaelic in the Local Landscape

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In this presentation I shall look at two aspects of the Gaelic toponymic heritage of the area – settlement names and mountain/hill names. It's important to make the following point: in Badenoch and Strathspey, as in most of the Highlands, the late survival of Gaelic meant that Ordnance Survey collectors obtained names from fluent speakers of the language. The place-names of these areas are therefore largely in pure Gaelic, and thus relatively easy to interpret. Upper Deeside is similar, although with more Scots (Doric) elements. However, as one moves into the lower parts of Deeside, the old Gaelic names became modified by the Scots language, because of language shift in those communities, before collection by the OS; the modern forms are thus more difficult to interpret. Place-name scholarship requires an examination of early recorded forms of the names.

In the absence of that, we must use intelligent interpretation of modern forms, combined with a knowledge of topography and aspect, land-use, history, ecology and folklore to try to work out the original. The following are drawn from OS maps of Birse and the country to the west and north-west of the parish, into the National Park; many interpretations lack early forms or local pronunciation.

Settlement Names:

Elements:

Baile farm, fermtoun, permanent settlement
modified **bal, ball, balle, bali, balli, bally, bel, bella**
translated **ton**

Local examples:

Belwade (older form Belwadd)

Balnacraig hist. Benacraig	<i>Baile na Creige</i>	the farm of the crag
Ballogie	<i>Baile an Lagaidh</i> <i>hist. Baile an Logaidh</i>	the farm of the hollow
Balnagowan	<i>Baile a' Ghobhainn</i>	the township of the blacksmith
Balfour	<i>Baile Phùir</i>	pasture farm
Balnacoil	<i>Baile na Coille</i>	the farm of the wood
Ballochan	<i>Baile an Lochain</i>	the farm of the lochan
Balnahard	<i>Baile na h-Àirde</i>	the farm (adjacent to the) headland
Balnaboth	<i>Baile nam Both</i>	the farm of the booths/huts
Belrorie	<i>Baile Ruairidh</i>	Rory's/Roddy's farm
Balintober	<i>Baile an Tobair</i>	the farm of the well

Achadh field
modified ach, auch

Local examples:

Auchenhove		
Auchnafoy		
Auchaballa	<i>Achadh a' Bhalla?</i>	the field of the wall
Auchabrack	<i>Achadh Breac</i>	speckled field
Auchlossan	<i>Achadh Losan?</i>	field of herbs

Mountain/Hill Names: There are over a hundred generic terms for hill, mountain or elevated ground, far too many to explore in a few minutes! We'll select just a few that are relevant to this area. Some have given their names to settlements.

Mon, Monadh upland, extensive hill
modified mount, mounth

Local examples:

Mount Battock hist. Monbattain	<i>Mon Badag</i> <i>Mon Badan</i>	hill of heather tufts
Monrae	<i>Mon Rèidh</i>	level upland
Mount Keen hist. Month Kyin	<i>Mon Caoin</i>	gentle upland

Creag crag, hill, rock, rocky hill
modified craig

Local examples:

Creagantoll	<i>Creag an Tuill</i>	the hill of the deep corrie
Creagandummie		
Craigendinnie	<i>Creag an t-Sionnaich</i> <i>Creag an Teine</i>	the hill of the fox the hill of the fire
Craig Lash		
Creaganducy		
Craig Brawlin	<i>Creag nam Braoilean?</i>	blaeberry hill?
<i>Creag na h-Iolair</i>		the crag of the eagle
Craigmahandle	<i>Creag na h-Anaile</i>	the crag of the breeze
Craigrae Beg	<i>Creag Rèidh Bheag</i>	small level hill
Craig Dhu	<i>Creag Dhubh</i>	dark crag
Craigendarroch	<i>Creag an Daraich</i> <i>Creag nan Darach</i>	the crag of the oak(wood) the crag of the oaks

<i>Creagan Riabhach</i>		brindled hill
<i>Creag an t-Seabhaig</i>		the crag of the peregrine falcon
Craig Coilich	<i>Creag a' Choilich</i>	the hill of the cock (blackcock?)

Tulach small green hill
modified tilly, til, tulloch
translated hill

Local examples:

Tillylair	<i>Tulach an Làir</i>	hill by the low ground
Tillybreen	<i>Tulach Breun?</i>	putrid, stinking hill?
Tilphoudie		
Tillyorn	<i>Tulach an Eòrna</i>	the hill of the barley
Little Tulloch	<i>Tulach Beag</i>	little green hill
Mortlich	<i>Mòr-t(h)ulach</i>	big hill
Tillycairn	<i>Tulach a' Chùirn</i>	the hill of the cairn

Tom rounded hill, knoll

Local examples:

Tombae	<i>Tom Beithe</i>	birch knoll
Tomanarrach	<i>Tom na h-Àraich?</i> <i>Tom an Àirich?</i>	the knoll of the summer grazing? the knoll of the grazier, cattleman, dairyman, shepherd
	<i>Tom na Nathraich?</i> <i>Tom nan Nathrach?</i>	the adder's knoll the adders' knoll
Tom a' Char	<i>Tom a' Chair?</i> <i>Tom a' Chairr?</i> <i>Tom a' Chàthair?</i> <i>Tom a' Charr?</i>	the knoll of the twist the knoll of the bog the knoll of the bog the knoll of the rock, cliff, standing stone
Tom Garchory	<i>Tom a' Gharbh-choire</i>	the knoll of the rough corrie
Tomnakeist	<i>Tom na Ciste</i>	the knoll of the kist/coffin

Some other interesting names and possible meanings:

Calurg (Wood)	<i>Cadha Luirg</i>	slope/pass of the shank (ridge of a hill which gradually extends into a plain)
Boggiefern	<i>Bog na Feàrna</i>	the bog of the alder
Mullochdhu	<i>Mullach Dubh</i>	dark summit
Inneshewen	<i>Innis Eòghainn</i>	Ewan's meadow
Drumgesk	<i>Druim Gasg?</i>	ridge next to the tail of land running out from a plateau
Rhu-na-haven	<i>Rubha na h-Abhainn</i>	the point on the river
Dalwhing	<i>Dail a' Chumhaing</i>	the dell next to the gorge
Baudy Meg	<i>Badan Beag?</i>	small clump, thicket, place?
Baudnacauner	<i>Bad na Conbhaire?</i>	the 'bad' of the dog-handler?
Duchery Beg	<i>Dubh Choire Beag</i> <i>Dubh-chatharaidh Beag</i>	small dark corrie small dark mossy-ground
The Strone	<i>An t-Sròn</i>	the nose
Carnferg	<i>Càrn nam Feurag?</i>	the hill of the small grasses
Slai na Gour	<i>Sliabh nan Gobhar</i>	the hill of the goats
<i>Creag na Slice</i>		the crag of the ledge, slab
Inchmarnoch	<i>Innis Mheàrnaig</i>	St Ernoc's haugh
Knockenzie	<i>Cnoc Choinnich</i>	Kenneth's hill
Cambus o' May	<i>Camas a' Mhàigh</i>	the river bend by the plain
Torphantrick	<i>Tòrr a' Bhantraich</i>	the hill of the widower
Crannach Hill	<i>A' Chrannach</i>	tree-place
Lach na Gualainn	<i>Leac(ann) na Gualainn?</i>	slope of the hill-shoulder
<i>Tom Giubhais</i>		pine hillock
Preas Whin	<i>Preas ?</i>	? thicket
Clachnaben	<i>Clach na Beinne?</i>	the rock of the mountain
Corrie Duff	<i>Coire Dubh</i>	dark corrie
Alltan Roy	<i>Alltan Ruadh</i>	red-brown burn
Fasnadarach	<i>Fas an Daraich</i>	the place of the oak (wood)
Morven	<i>Mòr-bheinn</i>	great hill
The Knock	<i>An Cnoc</i>	the hill
Burn of Aulmad	<i>Allt a' Mhadaidh?</i>	the burn of the wolf
Muckle Ord	<i>Òrd Mòr</i>	big round hill
Auchnashinn	<i>Aghaidh na Sìne</i>	the hill-face of the storm

NB FOR A FULL(ISH) LIST OF GAELIC MOUNTAIN GENERICS AND THEIR MEANINGS, GO TO MY WEBSITE AT

<https://acisd.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/ainmean-bheann.pdf>