



Article by Betty MacDougall (1988)

Sorasdal

Perhaps the most popular excursion from Arinagour is to Sorasdal at the terminus of the East End road, the most picturesque part of the island. The thatched cottage at the shore where John MacInnes (Johnny Glaic) lives is the only inhabited remnant of what was a busy community 100 years ago. At that time there were eight families in the township and every inch of ground was cultivated.

John Lorne Stewart bought the main, central part of Coll in 1856 and gradually set about re-organising the land holdings in large dairy farms instead of the crofting townships. A contract was offered to the tenants at Totronald but it involved a steep rise in rent and stringent conditions which they found impossible to meet. In those days there was no security of tenure so there was nothing for it but to pack up and go, either elsewhere in the island or beyond its shores. The same situation faced families in other parts of the island.

The laird of Caolas and the East End was Colin Campbell and tradition has it that when his daughter Colina became aware of the Coll Folk's predicament, she pleaded with her father to do something to help. As the bard MacDougall of Tیره had it:-

"Gu'n d'thug thu fàsgadh dhoibh is nì,
'San tìr 'san robh an comhnuidh;
'S leatsa beannachd muinntir Cholla,
'S iad rì moladh ort.
Chuir Colina impidh theann ort,
Gun bhì mail gu comhnadh,
'S do phiuthar, Sìle, bha i dìleas
Do luchd tìr a h-eolais."

A rough translation would be:

"Since you gave them shelter and help
In the land they were used to
The blessing of the Coll people are with you
And they are praising you greatly.
Colina entreated for them with you
Not to be slow in giving help
And your sister, Sheila, she too was loyal
To the people of the land they knew."

He responded by clearing some of his cattle from the Comaig Estate and offered shelter on his ground to some fifteen or sixteen families.

The great exodus from west to east took place in the summer of 1861. It was a journey over rough tracks, infants carried in arms or in creels hung from the horses' pack saddles. The children who could walk each had a burden to carry. The cattle were driven in front and shelters improvised till the dwelling houses could be erected. The men organised a co-operative system for that; they set to and completed a house one at a time till each family was provided for.

The 1871 census records a community of eight families in Sorasdal, to a total of 51 souls. Seven of the families had an allotment of 15 acres of land - 6 arable but for some reason the MacFadyen family had a double share, 30 acres - 12 arable. They all had to revert to the run-rig system.

There were two families from Arinagour, MacDonald and MacFarlane. The MacDonalds left some time after 1857 and were replaced in the house at the shore by the MacKinnon family from Seann Bhuaille at Cornaig Bheag. From Grimisary came a Campbell family and the MacFadyens, and from Griseabull another Campbell family and one of MacLeans. Two more MacLean families came from the Totronald township. The 1881 census shows seven families totalling thirty-six in Sorasdal, (the MacFadyens having removed to Mull). The census ten years later shows the same seven families, totalling thirty-four and they were still there in 1916, though the total population was reduced to twenty-six.

The intervening years had seen changes. One Campbell family removed to Arisaig on the mainland and were replaced by the Mac Dougalls from Eillearaig. Many younger members of the families left the island to earn their living elsewhere and of course the natural course of events saw many deaths.

When Archibald MacLean from Totronald died, the family desire was for burial with his kin in the west end. This entailed a carried funeral from Sorasdal to the other end of the island, Crosbull. It was said that the turn out for his funeral was so great that when the leaders of the cortege had reached Totronald gate, the line of mourners was still making way round Craig an Fhìrain. Some years later when his widow died, the same traditional burial was arranged. It was a day of dreadful storm and when the company reached Gallanach, farmer Paterson pleaded with them to take the use of carts. Determined to keep to the old style, the offer was rejected and when the men finally reached the South Strand leading to Crosbull, they had to make their way through the waves lashing on the shore.

By 1930 only two families were working the Sorasdal croft, the MacKinnons and the Campbells, a MacLean family having removed to Cornaig Bheag and later to Arinagour Farm. By war-time the Campbells had gone to Mull and the MacKinnons were on their own till they retired.



Mrs Buchanan, Colina Campbell, daughter of Colin, she married Dr Buchanan, the doctor in Tiree. She was the subject of the quotation from the poem. She and then her sons inherited the Caolas and Cornaig estates that subsequently changed ownership many times.

Mrs Buchanan, Colina Campbell



A group of the men working the Sòrasdal crofts, taken before Oct. 1919 for that is when Neil MacFarlane died. Back Row, L. to R. Donald MacFarlane, later a sea captain; Hector MacKinnon, older brother of the twins, there were 2 Hectors in the family; John MacLean, later farming at Cornaig Bheag then Arinagour Farm. (Father of Annie-Jessie, Mrs Sleep); Neil MacLean, of a different family of MacLeans. Front Row, L. to R. Alexander MacLean, brother of the women later known as 'the Dearies'. He was from yet another MacLean family. He built the house that John Crawford rebuilt; Neil MacFarlane, uncle to Captain Donald; Neil MacKinnon, father of the twins; Archibald Campbell.

A group of the men working the Sorasdal crofts, taken before Oct. 1919