Australians at Parliament 2010



The 16th Clan MacLeod Parliament

Wed. 21st July. Showers all morning, clearing in the afternoon but still cloudy. Wendy & I arrive at Inchnadamph Hotel, early afternoon. Emma Halford-Forbes, Parliament Registrar and husband Jamie arrive soon after and speedily handle the necessary paperwork. A trickle of MacLeods quickly turns into large numbers, quite a few we know from Parliaments past. Total for the Assynt tour is 41, many staying at our hotel, others at a nearby lodge and some have rented private accommodation.

Thursday 22nd July. Sunny. Two small buses and a couple of cars take us to the Lochinver Tourist Centre where we see very interesting displays of the local area, bird life, geology, history and more. On to Ardvreck Castle where a local historian tells of the history and preservation of this wonderful Clan MacLeod Castle. Our clan historian Ruari Halford-MacLeod adds to the history and in particular explains how

Inchnadamph Hotel



our clan acquired these lands from the MacNicols, held them for many years, finally losing them in 1672 to the MacKenzies, through financial mismanagement and a final battle leading to eviction. A nearby ruined manor, Calda House, was built by the MacKenzies in 1726/27 at extravagant expense, held just 10 years and then lost to the Earl of Sutherland who bought up the MacKenzie debts and had them evicted. A visit to the historic Inchnadamph Church was enhanced by the stories of our local historian. The current church was built in 1743 and used until 1972 but there was at least one earlier church on the site. The graveyard holds the burial vault of the MacLeods of Assynt. The drive around Loch Assynt takes us past an island where a ruined fort has been found by archeologists, there is speculation this was an earlier stronghold of the MacLeods of Assynt.

We visit the memorial stone to the Rev'd Norman MacLeod at Clachtoll. This is the man who led his followers from famine in Assynt to Nova Scotia and when, after 30 years, famine again cursed his flock he took some 600 to Waipu in New Zealand. Next stop was Stoer where local Ranger, Fiona Saywell, joins us, this time specialising in geology. This area, in the 19th century, helped develop theories leading to modern geology. Scientists of the time could not explain how older rocks managed to be sitting on top of younger ones. The discovery of what is called the Moine Thrust where fault lines caused the younger rock to slide down and under the old rock set the geological world ablaze with excitement. Expeditions to the area went on for many years. Names of some 30 geologists participating in an expedition in 1912 are shown in a reproduction of the Inchnadamph Hotel's guest book. Addresses are from Universities in USA, France, Switzerland, Russia, Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales. Tonight is our Official Dinner at the Inchnadamph Hotel, happy company, many in kilts, an excellent meal and absolutely brilliant sunset.

Friday 23rd July. Stunning weather continued, 25°C. Morning trip was to Lochinver to visit the Assynt Leisure, Sport, Youth & Learning Centre, a wonderful facility. Community groups raised £65,000 over 15 years and then qualified for support from the National Lottery and European Community, increasing the funds to the £1 million needed. Afternoon, a boat cruise on Loch Sku to see wildlife, including seals and their pups, and learn further of the local geology and history. Our boat guide was fantastic with an endless repetoire of local stories and jokes. Evening saw the group split up with some going to the restaurants of Lochinver while others stayed back at Inchnadamph Hotel.

Saturday 24th July. Goodbye Assynt, fine weather for the first hour and a half of our drive south, then steady drizzle for the rest of the day. We leave Inchnadamph at 9.20am, some good and some bad road sees us arrive at Portree for lunch and a bit of shopping just after 1pm. Business finished and we are at Dunvegan at 3pm. Immediately we meet Charles & Vaughan Cooke and shortly after Rod & Pat McLeod. We are all staying at the Dunvegan Hotel. Off to the Village Hall for registration where we see Brian & Jill McLeod and Brian's brother Donald McLeod, wife Kath & their son Mark, all of Newcastle. Registration offered choices for workshops in Gaelic, Ceilidh dancing and for music groups to meet and play together, perhaps to rehearse for Ceilidh performances later in the week. Just on 200 MacLeods attended the Dunvegan Parliament.

Sunday 25th July. Drizzle greets us for church but the Minister cheers us with a 100% MacLeod themed service. Lunch of salmon, cold meats & salads in the Village Hall, followed by the opening ceremony. Here we have a three part parade each lead by a piper. Firstly the Chiefs are piped in Chief Hugh, MacLeod of MacLeod; Chief John, Macleod of Raasay and ACMS President, Malcolm Macleod deputising for Chief Donald of the Lewes. Secondly the Presidents of the National Societies. Finally we had banners of MacLeod of Talisker and MacLeod Tartans. Brief talks were delivered by Chief Hugh on progress at Dunvegan Castle and Chief John told us of happenings on Raasay.



Ruari Halford-MacLeod explains history & construction of Ardvreck Castle



Chief Hugh at Opening

The Stanley McLeod Memorial Lecture saw a presentation by Museums Galleries Scotland on Remembering Scotland at War, excellent stuff, you can see what we saw via their website www.RememberingScotlandAtWar.org.uk
Our traditional group photo was next and we Aussies stayed behind for our own special 'Aussies at Parliament' picture. After dinner, a social in the Village Hall gave a chance to meet some local Dunvegan residents.

Monday 26th July. Drizzle all day. Our first ACMS meeting takes place in the Village Hall, on time 10am. A goodly roll up, about 80. Malcolm, ACMS outgoing President, gave an outline of the structure, funding and work of the organisation. Reports were read and adopted. The meeting concluded around 11.30am and then sub-groups were formed to discuss clan matters and to report back later in the week. A nice lunch followed then off to Orbost. There, several stalls offered a selection of produce and crafts. Interesting to see the piggery, where the livestock are a cross between the Tamworth breed and wild animals. Highland cattle heifers up close & personal gave a wonderful photo opportunity. Current owner of Orbost House is a keen archeologist who showed off his finds and told of the history of the house. The Varkasaig Beach BBQ, hosted by Rachel & Keith Jackson was transferred to the Village Hall due to the weather.


Bench Seat donated by Clan MacLeod Society (NSW)

Tuesday 27th. On and off drizzle. Morning for some was continuing Gaelic lessons, Ceilidh dancing or sub-committee meetings. Wendy & I took the time to visit Dunvegan Castle and gardens. Here we could see the changes brought about in the three years since Chief Hugh has taken over. Around half the Castle is shrouded in scaffolding and plastic sheet as the roof repairs progress. Internally, new rooms have been opened and changes made in others. The gardens have been improved and expanded. You will love the positioning of the bench seat we donated, right in late Chief John's favourite part of the gardens. Sitting there, you have a straight ahead view of the most lovely waterfall in the entire gardens. The sight and sound of the cascading waters are just magic. Afternoon saw two bus loads of MacLeods visit the Clan Donald Centre at Armadale in the South of Skye for the first time in 20 years, very impressive with an excellent historic display. The evening whisky tasting, silent auction and Tartan Challenge were great social occasions. The Tartan Challenge allowed Clan members to share their traditional, historic or contemporary uses of tartan and the silent auction, an opportunity for bargains.

Wednesday 28th. A little sun but still lots of drizzle. Today the MacLeods visit the Isle of Raasay between Skye and the mainland. Hundreds, including many MacLeods, left the island during the clearances of the 1800s. Buses are provided from Dunvegan to a vehicular ferry which runs from Sconser on Skye to Raasay, others, including Wendy & I, take their car to the ferry terminal. On Raasay, piper, Vaughan Cooke, leads the group ashore, headed by Chief John, MacLeod of Raasay and his daughter, Hannah, as banner bearer. A full day includes a special exhibition in the new village hall, inspection of the restoration of an historic mill and official opening of a new historic walk dedicated to Raasay emigrants. Along the walk are five monuments dedicated to those who emigrated to other parts of Scotland and to USA, Canada, New Zealand and Australia.
For some, a walk along Calum's Road is their highlight. Calum MacLeod, when the local council refused to build a road to the North of Raasay, bought a second hand book about road building and did the job himself over twenty years. His story has been made famous by a recent book of that name. At evening, a ceilidh in Dunvegan Village Hall.

Thursday 29th. Cloudy but no rain, a little sun. A meeting to hear recommendations of the sub-groups, formed on Monday started the morning. These were delivered by members of the NRG. All were appreciated and no doubt many will be adopted. Afternoon saw the trip to the MacCrimmon Cairn at Borreraig. The MacCrimmon family, a Sept of Clan MacLeod, were the World's leading piping family in both tuition and composition. They conducted their piping school near this place through 300 years (c. 1500 - 1800) and 10 generations. At the cairn we enjoyed the music of Euan MacCrimmon, one of Scotland's pre-eminent pipers. In the evening, harpist Uta Stratling told the tale of the Fairy Flag, later a concert dedicated to the late Chief John, 29th Chief of MacLeod, again featuring Euan MacCrimmon plus gaelic singers Seamus Campbell and Arthur Cormack.

Friday 30th. Rain, clearing late afternoon. Officers for the next four years were elected at our morning ACMS meeting. For Charles & Vaughan Cooke and Wendy & I lunch is at the Stein Inn on Waternish. The Stein is reputedly the oldest inn on Skye dating back to the 1600s and today it's packed including several tables of MacLeods. A climb of MacLeod's Tables for this afternoon, was called off due to the slippery conditions, to the relief of many and disappointment of a few. It was Australia's turn to serve afternoon tea, we decorated with Aussie flags & inflatable kangaroos and had some give aways. Final event for Parliament was the Ball. Finery came out. Three pipers lead the Grand Parade. Scottish dancing ruled the floor to the wonderful music of Derek McLeod and his band. A break just after 10pm and the pipers lead everyone 100 metres down the road where a huge fireworks display lightened the night. Back to the ball for more dancing before goodbyes are made.

Saturday 31st. For those staying an extra day or so, a visit to the Dunvegan Village Show is well worth the time. In the afternoon a drive around Trotternish had us bumping into many MacLeods keeping the Parliament spirit alive.


Dancing in Dunvegan Village Hall