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Megan and Tess McLeod join North Room Group for 2006 Jubilee Clan Parliament.

Dear Clan Folk!

For me the MacLeod Clan has always been something a bit distant that my dad is interested in, and although being the secretary of MacLeod clan of South Australia, his enthusiasm for it has never quite worn off onto my two sisters or me. So when he suggested that my older sister Tess and I travel to Scotland and participate in the North Room Group at the world clan gathering I just thought 'Oh yeah, a trip overseas, and we will get to see our castle! Yes please dad!'

In fact my expectations were very limited, since dad has never been to Clan Parliament himself and all we had to go on was the information from the Clan McLeod magazine and website. It explained to us that the Associated Clan MacLeod Societies from Australia, Canada, Germany, England, France, New Zealand, Scotland, South Africa and the USA met every four years at Dunvegan for a week of parliament. And as part of parliament a programme is run for clan youth aged 18 to 25, and was named North Room Group (NRG) because originally in 1965 the group would meet in the North Room of Dunvegan Castle.

Tess and I didn't need much convincing that it would fun and exciting, oh and that it would at least give us a bit better appreciation for our heritage, so we set off for the 15th Clan MacLeod Jubilee Parliament.

The NRG program is actually run over two weeks; the first week requires participation in a service project before the week of parliament begins. Our project was based on the Isle of Harris where we had to make our own way to a remote place called Scaladale. Information about Scaladale and transport on Harris was fairly scarce so I was a little apprehensive about this part of the trip. Flying from Edinburgh to Stornoway and then finding a bus to drop us at Scaladale built the anticipation for meeting the rest of NRG group.

We arrived safely at Scaladale Centre on a Saturday afternoon and by night when the rest of the group had made their way there we were feeling very comfortable with our fellow clan youth. Our scheldule for the week was also a little ambiguous but on that first night we were told by Ruari Halford – MacLeod that Sundays in the Hebrides are definitely not a day for work, so we enjoyed a fun day at beach and getting to know everybody. In our group were 4 Australians, 3 New Zealanders, 2 English, 3 Americans and 1 Canadian.



2006 NRG. Back: Callum, Kirsteen, Amy, Marget, Becs, Colin, Megan, Daryl, Pete, Brian, Tim. Front: Christy, Tess.

Our service project was to dig drains in the peat for the Millennium Forest Trail situated on the hill behind our accommodation at Scaladale Centre, both run by the North Harris Trust. The work was not hard, our accommodation was very serviceable and we enjoyed a fantastic week of sight seeing around Lewis and Harris. It was through this, and socializing with other clanfolk staying on Harris, particularly Ruari, that we started to learn about the depth of history, something I have had no grasp of living in Australia's young society. The bare landscape really struck me, and through this I learnt of the social upheaval and land clearances in the 1800's, which led to the migration of people to Australia. My appreciation for life in the highlands and our history grew.

Throughout our week on Harris we joined in on the first of the Parliament gatherings. We enjoyed a formal clan dinner, and we were introduced to the McLeod chiefs. This Jubilee Parliament was the first Parliament that all three MacLeod chiefs attended. Then on our final night on Harris I experienced my first Clan Ceilidh at Tarbert and was genuinely excited by the enthusiastic story telling and folk dancing. A couple of our NRG group members joined in with bagpipes and fire twirling.

The next day we caught the ferry to Skye for the beginning of Parliament at Dunvegan.



Callum MacLeod pipes our way across The Minch.

NRG had duties throughout the week to ensure that Parliament ran smoothly, but it was ensured that these would not impede on our own enjoyment of the event. We were still able to participate in all the outings and parliament sessions we wanted to, and although the last thing we wanted to do after a long day was pack up after the Ceilidhs and set up for the next day, it never took long, and there were always people still at the pub when we got there. In fact, not only was helping with the running of parliament a fair compromise for paid accommodation, but being part of NRG always provided a happy and comfortable social setting that I could rely on, without which there would have been times when I felt a little bit awkward and lost. There were a lot of other benefits to NRG as well; we were given our own privately guided tour of Dunvegan Castle, left-overs from all the morning and afternoon teas, and a lot of genuine interest and compliments from the whole clan.

Our knowledge of our clan and Scottish history grew with every outing and event held on Skye. There was Waternish, the site of one of the famous MacLeod/MacDonald battles, where Tess demonstrated a lady's dramatic escape from the burning church, and Whiskey tasting where we happily participated in a long-standing part of Scottish life.



In the story the desperate escapee lost a breast to get through the window to raise the alarm. Tess wasn't that desperate.

By the final Ceilidh, we were so used to men in kilts it became unusual to see someone in pants, we knew all the folk dances from the workshops and previous ceilidhs, and were confident enough to perform a NRG skit about the Clan's most treasured possession, the Fairy Flag.

It was a truly sensational experience, and I'm looking forward to chatting more about it at our next gathering in October at 'Nalang.' and Bordertown.

Sincerely, Megan McLeod.

*MacLeod's Tables from Dunvegan.*