

SLATEST GOES VIRAL

Edition 23 – June 2020

WELCOME!

In order to help support the community during the Coronavirus restrictions, Slate News will be produced more frequently and distributed online. We are therefore looking for articles for a July edition.

The deadline for the next edition is Saturday 27th June, please send items in in the normal manner:

Via e-mail to rileyrob@btinternet.com

Into the Black Letter Box at the village hall

Or via Facebook @SlateNews

THANK YOU EVERYONE!

RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS

Since the first week in April the Random Acts of Kindness (RAK) initiative has seen approximately 125 RAKs being delivered throughout Ballachulish, Glenachulish and Lettermore.

There has been much variation in the nominations, from individuals to couples, workplaces to families and new babies whilst other groups in our community are acknowledged weekly by way of home baking or fruit baskets.

All are delivered by a cheery group of volunteers who are always on hand to surprise someone and make their day.

If you would like to nominate any one individual or group, please feel free to get in touch and if you wish it to be anonymous it can be.

As we move into the weeks ahead we will be looking specifically for more crafty, arty people, knitters, crocheters, young or old, male or female, anyone who can make interesting and unusual RAKs. We really would like your help and are happy to assist with the cost of materials. Often a personalised gift is the best and most memorable.

Thank you to everyone who has helped so far.

Jo Watt

kindness
IT COSTS NOTHING, BUT
MEANS EVERYTHING.



After many visits from Mickey, Minnie and many of his other friends (below), Mickey decided to take a week off at the end of May, and instead sent his good friends from the clubhouse, Donald and Daisy Duck (above) to visit us instead. Special thanks to Colin MacDonald for providing the transport!



C

Ballachulish Community Support Group

Someone who cares about you has nominated you to receive a Random Act of Kindness.

We can help - contact us

- for befriending calls, groceries & prescription collection, or to to nominate someone else for a Random Act of Kindness, call 01855 811999
- for our foodbank, call 01855 604311

facebook.com/covid19balla/

SPREAD
Kindness
INSTEAD



TEN WEEKS IN

We have now had to Endure?, Enjoy? Certainly Experience Lockdown for 10 long weeks, but we hope you will agree that there is a lot we should be thankful for.

Firstly, as far as we are aware no one in the local community has suffered adversely from Coronavirus itself, although there have been cases in the wider West Highland area.

Secondly, the weather. After the horrendous start to the year with torrential rain day after day, the last 10 weeks have been, for the most part, dry and bright, with some long sunny days and 2 periods of very warm weather. This fine weather has allowed us to get outside, without contravening the lockdown guidelines, and make the most of our time.

Thirdly, the community has really pulled together to help and support each other. Whether friends, relatives, neighbours or erstwhile strangers, we have come together (virtually) to ensure that everyone receives the help and support that they need. Many fruits of the resilience team's hard work are highlighted elsewhere in this edition of Slate, as are some of the excellent village improvement works that have been carried out by volunteers. Many other, rather dull, behind the scenes tasks have also been carried out.

Lockdown is now starting to ease. A few of us are returning to work (some never stopped of course), and over the coming weeks things will start to get back to normal, hopefully culminating in mid August when the schools start back. Unfortunately, however, with so many people in the local area working in the tourism and outdoor activity industries, this may be too little too late. Community Resilience is therefore not a short term project, and we can already foresee the food bank, wellbeing bank, and other projects being continued to the end of the year and beyond. As long as there is a need and volunteer support we will be here for you.

VILLAGE HALL NEWS

Ballachulish Community Association are currently fully engaged with Community Resilience, but that doesn't mean that the Village Hall has



been forgotten about. For starters, it is Foodbank HQ and also playing a key role in allowing items to be dropped off and collected without contravening lockdown guidelines.

On top of that, the foyer is enjoying a makeover, and plans are afoot to do more painting outside, and other maintenance tasks as and when people are available. We hope that this all means that when the hall is allowed to resume 'normal' use, it will be in tip top condition for all of our regular users.



Duror and Glencoe: St Munda's Church of Scotland



We continue to worship during the Covid 19 crisis

Daily Readings and Prayers on our Facebook page

Short video Service every Sunday on Facebook and Youtube

**'Zoom' worship at 10.30 every Sunday morning
(email astoddart@churchofscotland.org.uk for link)**

Phone Rev Sandy if you want to chat (01631 740285)

Scottish Episcopal Church

Reverend Amanda has shared details of the news and activities from the West Highland region. Updated info is published weekly on facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/WHRSEC/>

Alternatively call Revd Amanda on 811633 for details

Roman Catholic Church

each day Mass is celebrated by Bishop Brian McGee on LIVESTREAM. Details of this and other news from the Diocese on their facebook page

<https://www.facebook.com/argyllandisles/>

HOW HAVE WE BEEN HELPING YOU?

From the Ballachulish Community Support Group - a heartfelt Thank You to all of our amazing volunteers - every single one of you.

So what happens in an average day here at CovidHQ? Prescriptions are collected and delivered; shopping is done; meals are delivered; the helpline is staffed and questions answered; Facebook posts are written and messages answered; Foodbank donations are collected, logged and parcels are delivered; those in need of some extra care or kind words are helped; RAKs are coordinated and delivered; beautiful crafts are made; the wellbeing bank is stocked; plants donated, potted up and left for collection; PPE is kept stocked up, the sinks are cleaned and restocked; new plans are made; the Disney walk is coordinated; village tidying is done and odd jobs and DIY tasks are carried out...and all of this while observing hygiene, social distancing and lockdown guidelines!

Thank you everyone who has helped, cared, encouraged, nominated, appreciated - you are awesome ♥

Be kind, stay strong [#belikeballa](#)

Contact Us

Call 01855 811999 or message our Facebook page. Our community volunteers will be on call from 10am - 8pm.

The Important Stuff

Our volunteers will do their best to respond to you as quickly as they can, but responses may take time. Please bear with us.

Please never give financial or other personal data out to someone you don't know, especially over the telephone.

And lastly, we can't stress enough that we are here to help, but remember we are not an emergency response and volunteers are not medically qualified. All medical requests should be directed to the appropriate NHS number.

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HAVE YOU SEEN THIS SIGN?



More importantly, do you know what it means? Don't worry if you don't, because we don't either. At time of going to press all we can find out is that they are being used around Inverness as part of a £750,000 project to improve walking and cycling around the city. Maybe the ones in Ballachulish are just on holiday!

C
Ballachulish Community Food Bank

What?
There is a larder full of food, collected by your community for use in this community so please do not struggle.

Who is it for?
For anyone to receive or donate. No referral necessary, just call us or visit during opening hours.

When?
Tuesdays 4pm-6pm
Fridays 12pm-2pm
Ballachulish Village Hall

Can we help?
Yes! We can arrange a delivery for you or someone you are concerned about. If you can't make it to the hall you can call the confidential helpline.

01855 604311

Whatever your circumstances, we are here to help.
Bring your bag and pop in to see us in the village hall.

Run by Ballachulish Community Support Group

SPREAD Kindness INSTEAD



Ballachulish Community Association SCIO, a Scottish charity No SC023308

PHOTO BINGO!

Throughout May we posted a small piece of a photo every day on the Slate News Facebook page, challenging people to identify them. Below are a few examples, but do you recognise them? Answers at bottom.



C

**Ballachulish Community
Support Group**

WELLBEING BANK

This new community resource is set up at the Shinty Pavillion and will be open each day.

The store is full of supplies to help you pass the time. Please take what you need when you need it. From time to time we will add some treats to the shelves!

If you have items to donate (books, dvds, games, jigsaws, craft supplies etc) please message us via facebook @covid19balla or call 0185581199

Thank you and enjoy!

**PLEASE USE THE HAND SANTIZER PROVIDED
AND RESPECT SOCIAL DISTANCING!**

SPREAD
Kindness
INSTEAD



facebook.com/covid19balla/

Did you get them right?

Patriotic window at Ballachulish Hotel

Riverside bench in Park Road

Old Street Lamp in Loanfern

Stone shed at St Johns Old School in West Laroach

COMMUNITY TIDY UPS

It is so encouraging to see the amount of tidy and clean up activity that continues in our community but so frustrating that members of our community are still gathering stuff that gets thrown out of cars and people's pockets.

This is just a snapshot of some of the fantastic work that has been done in recent weeks, so Thank You to everyone who has been working hard around the village.

The Witches Grave

In the last issue of Slatest News, we shared some of the history of the 'Witches Grave' behind Croft Road. What we didn't say at the time was the rather untidy and overgrown condition that it was in. Nevertheless, thanks to some hard work by Carol and Stephen MacKenzie from Croft Road the whole area has been tidied up, as these before and after photos show.



Jubilee improvements

On the east side of the village, residents have been hard at work in Park Road and the Jubilee Park, again clearing the moss from the slate paths and doing much needed maintenance and improvement work to the park.



But we have more than just the Jubilee Park in Ballachulish, and for those who had forgotten all about it, the Jubilee Stone near the war memorial has also been given a makeover, by Philip MacLean and Stephen MacKenzie:



AN UPDATE FROM DISCOVER GLENCOE

As part of your community, we wanted to reach out and keep you informed of the local tourism / hospitality businesses now that Phase 1 is with us.



Easing lockdown/tourism in our local area - Phase 1 - Many of our community may know of Discover Glencoe - all the business members are also part and parcel of our local communities and care about them. As a direct marketing organisation for our locality, we are very aware that there are still concerns around tourism and a possible influx of visitors, even though the First Minister's Phase 1 directives were very clear. We wanted to reach out to you to let you know what Discover Glencoe is currently doing as complete lockdown/business closures are now slowly easing:

- Our business members are only opening gradually and responsibly as and when government directives permit
- Currently, this excludes holiday accommodation, hotels/B&B's, caravan/campsites, hostels etc. obviously, businesses can only open when they feel it's right and safe for them to do so
- Our member businesses may not be trading on the first day following any announcement but at a time of their choosing thereafter. Others may open, then decide to close and wait longer...
- We are contacting those of our member businesses who are allowed to open to gather details of planned opening, how they might operate to minimise risk, and other aspects their customers might like to know
- We hope to share that information with our communities too

- We are updating our online info and reviewing our social media reach to reassure returning visitors that we are opening responsibly and safely
- Working within the guidelines and timelines set out by Government
- Encouraging the public to also adhere to those directives to safeguard themselves and our communities

It's important as we, within our communities, all work together. Always. But especially through this reset period, then continue during the restart and recovery phases so Discover Glencoe can provide the best information to visitors thinking of travelling to the Highlands, for a day trip or a staycation... as phases allow.

Also worth noting that not every tourism/hospitality business in the area is necessarily part of our Discover Glencoe marketing group, and we cannot of course influence any that aren't.

M A Preece, Chair, Discover Glencoe

for and on behalf of our Committee and members
info@discoverglencoe.scot

www.discoverglencoe.scot

SOUTH LOCHABER BOWMEN

Archery Club at the Leven
Centre, Kinlochleven

Although we are currently not meeting, please keep an eye on our facebook page for re-activated meeting times and dates as soon as we can.



Archery sessions are run by qualified coaches in both Field and Target Archery.

Find us on facebook: www.facebook.com/SLBowmen.



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Lockdown Opening
10am - 12 midday (Mon -Sat)
 check facebook for opening after lockdown

Old Post Office, Ballachulish, PH49 4JB
 off A82 near Glencoe Tel 01855 811111
toolsandtackle.co.uk

SEEKING PHOTOGRAPHIC PERFECTION!

Nearly everyone these days carries a camera around with them all of the time – in our phones. Many of us therefore like to think we are expert photographers, but for those that don't here is a little insight into how patience and perseverance pays off, thanks to Tim Parkin, with additional historical notes.

The Isles

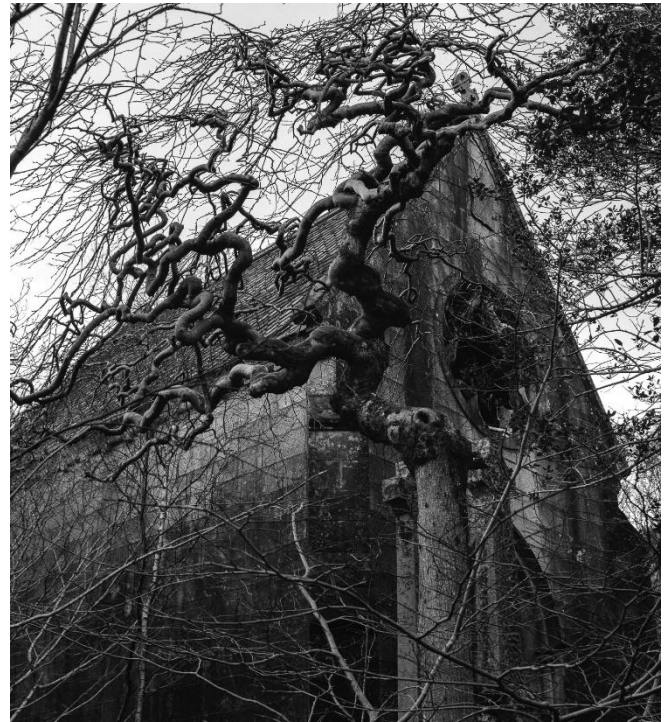
I've wanted to capture an image of Eilean Munde and Eilean a Chomraidh in the mist for some time, but most often it would either be too much mist or not at all. On this day we had had quite a hot spell and overnight it had rained. As the sun came out, the mist rose and I popped down to the bridge above the Isles of Glencoe and waited for the mist to be in the right position. The usual problem is the messy hillside behind the isles distracting but just as I was about to leave, the mist moved backward, hiding the background and the first burst of sunshine of the day hit the island. A magical moment!

We all know a little of the history of the Islands in Loch Leven, many of us will own, or at least have read the Glencoe Museum booklet on Eilean Munda.

The largest of the islands is Eilean Munda, the Burial Isle, traditional burial place for the Stewarts of Ballachulish, MacDonalds of Glencoe and Camerons of Callert, each clan having their own landing place and burial areas. The island takes its name from St Fintan Mundas, who was related to St Columba and born in the second half of the 6th Century, he died in 635. He established a church on the island for the local communities, and this church, although replaced several times over, remained the main worship point for the communities around Loch Leven until the late 17th or early 18th centuries. The island remained the main cemetery into the 19th century.

Nearby is Eilean a Chomraidh, the island of discussion, where local disputes were settled, before the disputants sailed up to Eilean nam Ban, the island of covenant, near Kinlochleven, to ratify the agreement.

The Mausoleum



I had been visiting the area around the mausoleum quite a few times, photographing the deciduous trees below on the banks of Loch Leven and exploring the sea shore, but I had never managed to get a good photograph of the mausoleum itself. There are too many trees to get a clear photograph but on this occasion, I decided to make a feature of my obstacle and use what I think is a contorted willow to frame the front of the building.

The Carness, Cameron or Callert Mausoleum sits at the top of a knoll on the north shore of Loch Leven, just over a mile east of St Brides Primary School. It is accessed down an overgrown path opposite the forest road before the Kinloch road drops back down to the shore, and is a fascinating place. Believed to have been built in the second half of the Nineteenth Century, it features some flamboyant Gothic details, fine stained glass and marks the final resting place of the Camerons of Fassifern and Callart, and members of the Lucy family. Although now sadly neglected, it is still an important local landmark.



DEVELOPING THE YOUNG WORKFORCE - WEST HIGHLAND

Will Salmon Find Me a Career?



WEST HIGHLAND
Developing the
Young Workforce

Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) West Highland which covers Lochaber, Skye and Wester Ross is providing a series of employer-led online events to showcase the employment opportunities that are currently available locally. The first event in the calendar will present an insight into career opportunities for young people at Mowi, the world's leading seafood company and the largest producer of farmed salmon, on Wednesday 17 June at 14:30.

This upcoming event is aimed at school-leavers but also open to all young people out of school up to the age of 28 years old, those who may have been made redundant, are unemployed, or simply looking for a career opportunity or change. Teachers, parents, and carers are also welcomed to join and learn about the opportunities available.

To sign up to this event or for further information about other ways that DYW West Highland are encouraging employers to promote the world of work for young-people head to our website at www.dywwesthighland.org or on Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/DYWWestHighland/>

WILL SALMON FIND ME A CAREER? BOOK YOUR PLACE TODAY
WEDNESDAY 17 JUNE 1430 - 1530 LIVE VIA ZOOM

DYW WEST HIGHLAND
Developing the Young Workforce

MOWI
is Goodness.

TAKE YOUR PARTNERS

How often have we said during the past few weeks 'never before'? What an uncertain time for all of us.

Dancing, as every other type of social gathering, came to an abrupt halt in mid-March. The last get-together was our theme night, Roaring 20s, Ballachulish Style. With the hall suitably decorated, we all enjoyed a great fun evening of dancing and, of course, 20's style food.



There is no definite date for our winter session to start, so let's wait and see.

The RSCDS is hosting Zoom classes on Wednesday evenings, 7-7.30pm. They encourage ghost dancers to make up the numbers. It is quite challenging, but I haven't fallen over – yet!

The Marian Anderson Band, who were booked to play at our annual dance, kindly rescheduled. It will (hopefully) be held on 13th February 2021.

Stay safe everyone, *Mary Michie*



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HELP FROM EWEN'S ROOM

Being under lockdown is making it even harder for lots of folk to feel OK. We've already spoken to several people who are finding this an incredibly tough time. So if that's you, please do feel you can phone for a chat. Or text. Or leave a message.



**Ringling the Ewen's Room
Helpline is FREE on**

0800 689 3317

You can also text us on

07537 431637

Our volunteers are available from
5pm to 10pm Monday to Friday
12 noon to 10pm on
Saturday and Sunday

 **EWEN'S ROOM**

**Promoting Wellbeing
and Mental Health**

RESILIENCE FUNDING

We are delighted to announce that we have secured funding from two sources, namely the Supporting Communities Fund and Lund Trust.



Supporting Communities Fund - Ballachulish Community Association SCIO welcomes news that it has secured funding from the Scottish Government, via Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), to support the work of Ballachulish Community Support Group during the COVID-19 crisis, from the Supporting Communities Fund.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise is distributing the Supporting Communities Fund in the Highlands and Islands, on behalf of the Scottish Government, for all eligible community anchor organisations, who play an active role in providing services within communities across the region. Through this funding we are being supported to deliver our community response to the COVID-19 emergency.



Lund Trust - the donation from Lund Trust, a charitable fund of Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin, will also be vital in supporting the efforts of the Ballachulish Community Support Group as we work to improve the wellbeing and morale of our community.

Co-op Opening Hours

Please be aware that the Co-op is currently closing at 8pm. They are also giving priority to vulnerable people from 8-9am each morning, except 10-11 am on Sundays.

RBS Operating Hours

The RBS mobile van is not visiting the village at present, however the branch in Fort William is open from 10-1pm Monday to Friday.



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Ballachulish Rainbow
playgroup wishes all our
attendees well and is looking
forward to when we can return to normal

Contact Alice Wilson - 07709100618

THE FORGOTTEN ARMY

By 10am on June 12th 1940, as the remnants of the 51st Highland Division stood on the cliffs high above St. Valery-En-Caux, surrounded by Rommel's Panzer Divisions, they had suffered huge losses and casualties. The French had surrendered earlier that morning. With no possibility of evacuation or support, with his men exhausted and virtually out of ammunition, Major General Victor Fortune took the difficult decision that surrender was the only option for the brave 51st HD, the army which was left behind and ordered to stand and fight on with the French, after the BEF was evacuated from the beaches of Dunkirk.

At 10am, on June 12 this year, more than 200 pipers from 16 countries have signed up to play 'Heroes of St. Valery', a pipe tune composed by Pipe Major Donald MacLean from Lewis, in honour of those who fought and fell. This tribute will ensure that their courage and sacrifice will never be forgotten. Pipe Major MacLean joined the Seaforths in 1940, and was attached to the 51st Highland Division.

The 51st Highland Division, which consisted of five Highland Regiments, The Black Watch, Seaforths, Gordon's, Queen's Own Cameron's, and the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders is often referred to as The Forgotten Army, the army who was left behind, ordered to fight on when their comrades in the BEF were evacuated from Dunkirk. Many English soldiers were also brought in to increase the numbers in these regiments.

The 51st Division embarked from Southampton to Le Havre in January 1940 as part of the BEF. On the 28th March three brigades were moved to reinforce French Divisions who were further to the east from where most of the BEF were stationed. They were deployed to hold defensive lines along with French troops, against the German invasion of France, and were placed under the command of the French Army along the Maginot Line, but instead of attacking there, as the French expected, the Germans moved across Belgium and headed for the North West coast of France.

The German troops and Panzer tanks closed in on the BEF. The 51st were ordered back west to defend the line along the River Somme. Fierce fighting ensued around bridge points around Abbeville with very heavy losses and casualties. Meanwhile Operation Dynamo, the evacuation of almost 400,000 men of the BEF from the beaches of Dunkirk, was over by June 4th. The 51st Division were almost 100 miles from Dunkirk making the possibility of their evacuation impossible. The remaining BEF soldiers were ordered to fight on with the French Army, and from the 5th June the Germans now concentrated their full force on them. Two companies of 7th and 8th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders with a group of Norfolks found themselves cut off from the rest of their regiment.

By the 6th June after Abbeville, the 51st Division was reduced to half its fighting strength and on that day the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders took their worst number of casualties in a single day in the long history of their regiment. The 51st fought on against all odds and enabled other remaining BEF soldiers to escape back to Britain from ports and beaches elsewhere on the French

coast. Although the 51st still held hope that they too would be evacuated, they were ordered to stay and fight on with the French. Their heroic fight allowed General Charles De Gaulle and hundreds of French troops, among others, safely escape to Britain and eventually rejoin the fight for their country.

The 51st and the French courageously faced the might of superior German weapons, and Panzer tanks, the British issue rifles being no match for the German machine guns. With all ammunition and supplies running low and a lack of proper rations and rest, the 51st were being pushed back and encircled. Major General Fortune recognising the desperate position his men found themselves in managed to organise evacuation of a group of the 154th Brigade. The rest bravely fought on with continued heavy losses.

The German Panzer Tanks under Field Marshal Erwin Rommel were almost upon them as they were pushed towards St. Valery-En-Caux from where Fortune hoped his exhausted men might eventually be evacuated by the Royal Navy who arrived there with other small boats on June 10th. Unfortunately the 51st had yet to reach there, and the boats were forced back out of port to await another chance to rescue the men. The hope for the 51st ran out when heavy fog set in making it impossible for the boats to come in again towards the beach and reluctantly the Navy had to abandon their efforts. On June 11th the German tanks and troops continued to fire on the 51st who took further dreadful casualties.

On June 12th at 8am the French forces surrendered and although Fortune considered fighting on to try to make it to other ports to the south, he realised the situation was now hopeless, and so to avoid further losses, he had no option but to also surrender at 10am to Rommel.

In total almost 10,000 brave men of the 51st were marched off to POW camps over the course of their long fight in France in 1940. These men spent the remainder of the war in German camps, apart from a few who famously escaped. The now popular Scottish Dance 'The Reel of the 51st' was created in one of the camps.

This however was not the end of the 51st Division as they regrouped and saw further action in North Africa at El Alamein where they fought and defeated Rommel, in Italy, and back in Normandy in 1944, where the 51st Highland Division returned, this time to triumphantly liberate St. Valery.



POWs in STALAG 9C CHRISTMAS 1941

Callie Kemp. Middle of middle row 5th from left (or right)

THE BALLACHULISH THREE ESCAPE

Ballachulish men were serving with the 7th and 8th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders who found themselves cut off from the rest of the 51st Division near Abbeville. These included Sandy 'Blood' MacDonald, Willie Kemp, his brother Callum 'Callie' Kemp, and Ginger Wilson of North Ballachulish. Their company was surrounded by German soldiers and under very heavy fire. They took cover in the grounds of an old chateau believing in vain that they would be relieved by French troops. They held out for several days until the 7th, with no relief, taking heavy casualties and rapidly running out of ammunition, food and water. Callie Kemp had been hit and wounded on the 6th. Early on the 7th June, the Germans launched a ferocious attack with machine guns and tanks. The Argylls being sitting targets had no option but to surrender. The Germans allowed them to bury the men who had died in the grounds of the chateau. The wounded were taken up from the cellar, Callie Kemp among them, and taken away in German ambulance units. The others were marched off in fours as POW.

Their arduous march began and as they passed through villages and towns, the French would run out into the road to offer whatever they could for the men to eat and drink. Willie Kemp, Sandy MacDonald and Ginger Wilson had made contact with each other and decided to attempt an escape. They kept some food hidden in their tunics having been given quite a lot by the people in Bruay. Near Cambrien French women came out with buckets of water to replenish the prisoner's bottles and in the scramble for the water the three seized their chance dodging behind the women and into a garden. They lay there behind a wall until the column marched off. When they eventually stood up a young French boy came out from the house and indicated that they should get rid of their uniforms. He brought out sets of civilian clothes and a spade and his mother brought food. The three buried only their helmets as they feared that leaving their uniforms might bring reprisals on the mother should they be discovered. Armed only with pages torn from the boy's school atlas, they headed off carrying the uniforms in a bag, and later hid them in a ditch.

They waited in a wood until midnight but lost their bearings in the dark so lay in a haystack awaiting dawn. They awoke to the sound of coughing and found to their horror that they were just across the road from a German Cavalry Camp. On hands and knees they crawled away through the corn fields. Tramping on through fields for hours they reached what they identified as the La Basse canal and followed the tow path until they reached a partially bombed bridge where civilians were crossing. They decided to be bold and simply cross but as they reached halfway, they saw two German sentries on the other side. Fearing that to turn back would arouse suspicion the three carried on but instead of challenging them the sentries shouted 'Bonjour' which the three then returned.

Posing as French refugees proved reasonably successful when they found themselves detained for questioning when asked to show identification papers which of course they didn't possess. Recognising the advantage of being able to communicate freely with each other in their native Gaelic as they travelled, they decided they would keep as far as possible to Gaelic, only using a few French words when necessary. Often they would be ordered by German troops to help load or unload German lorries on their way. One day when trudging along the road as a German convoy was passing, a driver stopped to offer them a lift which they accepted. The three duly jumped up into the back and sat with the German troops all the way to St. Quentin, sharing cigarettes and food.

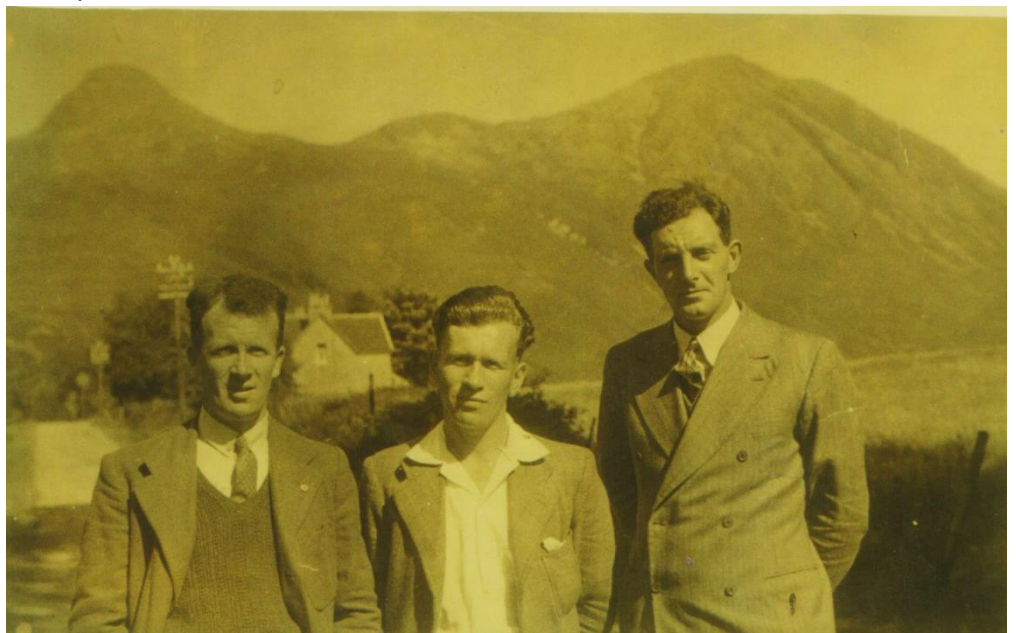
Ever resourceful, near Amiens they picked up an invalid chair and rigged it up as a trailer, filling it with tins of biscuits, tinned fruit, and bottles of rum that they found in an abandoned cafe. The town of Amiens was deserted so they passed through and decided to bed down in a nearby farmhouse. Ginger caught some rabbits and stewed them on the range, while Willie searched outside for vegetables and anything else they might find useful. When Willie returned he found a German soldier had arrived and was sitting with Ginger. They shared their stew with him and off he went after leaving them more cigarettes and a bottle of cognac.

Their adventures continued. In Aumal they ditched their 'trailer' for bicycles which they discovered in a bombed cycle shop. They found three still fairly fit for the road apart from Willie's which had no tyres, but hunting around he found some solid tyres which he fitted along with a strong wooden box on the back to carry their scavenged provisions. At Rouen they used the bottles of rum to pay a ferryman to row them over the river.

A day or so later however, their fortunes took a more worrying turn when they were held up by German sentries to join Frenchmen unloading a truck load of rifles and equipment. When they finished the Frenchmen were ordered into a German lorry, and the sentry indicated that they were to join them. They

PHOTO OF THE THREE MEN FROM BALLACHULISH WHO ESCAPED IN 1940. Taken on a short visit home after their adventure in 1940, before returning to service.

From left to right. Sandy MacDonald, Ginger Wilson, Willie Kemp



were told that they were being detained. In the morning they were brought before a German commander who first pointed a revolver at each of their heads in turn, which the three took to mean, tell the truth or face the consequences. A French officer acting as interpreter asked them their nationality but the three replying in Gaelic gave answers of, 'I do not know', 'Ardnamurchan' and 'Go to hell!'. More interpreters were brought and the men were questioned in seven other languages, but the men continued to respond in Gaelic. Next an officer produced an atlas and as the pages were turned he ordered them to point to their country of origin. When the Ukraine appeared Willie showed interest. The commander asked, 'Kiev?' but Willie shook his head and pointed to the Caspians to which the commander asked, 'Cossacks?' Willie nodded and after some deliberations the commander said 'Allez', and the three were released. At that stage Germany was not at war with Russia. From that point they agreed that whenever they were asked for papers, or detained, which now happened frequently, they would respond by saying that they were Russian.

As they continued South, all the villages and towns they passed through were occupied by German troops. It was now much more difficult to find food. From Bordeaux they made their way west towards the coast and reached the fishing village of Arcachon. There they asked a local man about the chances of getting a berth in a boat but his advice was to go to Bayonne, where he believed their chances might be better.

On the way to Bayonne they called on the mayor of a small town to ask him to help with food. He called over two German soldiers and told them to detain the three then left in his car. Two French gendarmes appeared and the mayor returned. The three were taken to a nearby prison and questioned by French police with an interpreter but again luckily managed to secure their release.

The final stage of their long journey took them to the Spanish border and across the Pyrenees. Several times they were stopped by Spanish Border Guards, put into Spanish prisons and sent back into France, but getting further west on each attempt and nearer the coast. On their 4th attempt, near Irun they swam a river where Sandy MacDonald was swept away but eventually rescued by the other two. That night they had to sleep in soaked clothing.

Finally after walking over 1000 miles through enemy occupied France, the three Ballachulish men walked into San Sebastian. They approached a Spanish policeman and asked for the American Consulate. He replied that there was none, but pointed them cheerfully to the British Consulate and escorted them to the door. The Consul, who happened to be Scottish, arranged for the men to leave Spain on a boat from Bilbao. They were then picked up by another ship in the Channel. The three Ballachulish men landed back in Britain on the 28th July 1940.

They were awarded the Military Medal for their daring escape. Willie Kemp donated his medal and other items to the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders Museum in Stirling Castle before his death.

The 51st Division continued to play their part in the war and Willie certainly saw action at El Alamein and Normandy. His brother Callum spent the rest of the war in Stalag 9 POW Camp



*STALAG 9C SHINTY TEAM WITH PIPER JULY 1943 Callie Kemp
Top row 2nd from left beside the piper.*

in Germany as did thousands of others of the 51st HD, but as seen in the photograph on the POW postcard above, even there as a Ballachulish man he managed to play his beloved shinty.

Susan Kemp

Sources:

1. 'Capture of C COY 8th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders 5th - 7th June No 14 PI & 15 PI - Account by Cpt. J. D. Ingles'
2. 51hd.co.uk 'The Battle for Abbeville and German counter attack'
3. William Kemp - transcript of his account given to BBC Broadcasting on 6th August 1940

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Ballachulish Community Council, Ballachulish Community Company and Ballachulish Community Association SCIO (SC023308) have worked together to produce this newsletter. Ballachulish Community Association SCIO, Ballachulish Village Hall, East Pier Road, Ballachulish PH49 4LE