

Deep Roots: “Bonnie Gallowa’ ”

by Wilma Heberling

“Bonnie Gallowa’ “ is a song that was recorded and made famous by Moira Anderson. It describes a part of Scotland that few people talk about. Tourists clamor to the Highlands and Islands. They descend upon Edinburgh, Stirling, and Glasgow with gusto. Even the Borders get more respect than Galloway. Yes! Galloway is the Roger Dangerfield of Scotland.

Wha but lo’es the bonnie hills
Wha but lo’es the shiny rills
Aye for thee my bosom fills
Bonnie Gallowa’
Land o’ darkly rolling Dee,
Land o’ silvery winding Cree,
Kissed by Solway’s foamy sea,
Bonnie Gallowa’

Galloway is that portion of Scotland that lies in the extreme southwest. It is composed of Wigtownshire, Kirkcudbright (pronounced “kirkoobry”) and the southernmost portion of Dumfries.

Galloway is beautiful. It has rolling valleys, steep hills, sparkling, white sandy beaches, and rushing rivers. It even has its own breed of cattle, the Belted Galloway, which is a black beast with a wide white band around its mid-portion. They are unique to the region. It is a land of surprising diversity.

Do you like art? Well, the town of Kirkcudbright could be called the “Santa Fe” of Scotland. It is an artists’ colony producing some of the finest works hung in Scotland’s galleries. Are you a bibliophile? The town of Wigtown is known as Scotland’s book-store capital with more book shops per square mile (1.6 km) than any other metropolis. Religious historian? The Isle of Whithorn is the home of “Candida Casa,” the monastery dedicated to St Ninnian (360AD-432AD), the Christian Celtic saint, traditionally known as the apostle of the Picts. He was spreading the Gospel more than a hundred years before St. Columba, in Iona. Ninnian was a Briton who studied in Rome and returned to Galloway to preach. History buff? Well, here is the home of the Douglas’s (one of it’s main towns is called Castle Douglas), the Maxwells, the Gordons. Galloway is strewn with castles, old fortifications and ruins. Bruce battled here at Glentworth. It is in Galloway that the Covenanters hid out in caves trying to preserve their lives and their religion.

What else is there? Long ago there were lead mines, the tailings of which, long covered with whin and bracken, form rounded rolling hills good for toboggan rides in winter. The mountain Cairnmore of Fleet keeps its snow cap into March. During WWII, several Luftwaffe planes crashed into Cairnmore because of its unusual air pockets that caught pilots unawares.

There are also great forested areas developed by the Scottish forestry commission. The climate of Galloway is as good as it gets in Scotland, tucked away in the southwest, guarded by the Gulf Stream and the land mass of Ireland. At the very tip of Galloway is Stranraer, where you can catch the ferry to Ireland. Summers are warm and produce bluebells, rhododendrons and roses in profusion. You will not find finer beaches anywhere.

Wha 'mang Scotia's chiefs can shine,
Heroes o' the Douglas line,
Maxwells, Gordons, a' are thine
Bonnie Gallowa.
Land o' birk and rowan tree,
Land o' fell and forest free,
Land that's aye sae dear tae me,
Bonnie Gallowa'