

Deep Roots
by Wilma Heberling
Rob Roy MacGregor (1671-1734)

He was a blend of patriot-like William Wallace, outlaw-like Robin Hood, and Frontiersman-like Davy Crocket. He was a man of honor who was also a bandit, cattle rustler, and head of a black-mail racket. He has been written about by Daniel Defoe (“Highland Rogue”, 1723), and Sir Walter Scott (Rob Roy” 1818). Movies have been made about him such as “Rob Roy--Highland Rogue” in 1954, and the 1995 film “Rob Roy” that had something of the success of “Braveheart.” The Rob Roy visitors center in Callander draws in a quarter of a million visitors a year. Just who *was* this man?

Rob Roy was born in February, 1671, near Loch Katrine. He was the third son of the 5th head of his clan, Donald Glas MacGregor. His mother, Mary, was a Campbell. His name, Rob Roy, is an English translation of the Gaelic *Raibeart ruadh*, “Robert the red,” because of his red hair. He grew up to be extremely strong and was said to have long powerful arms. He was a Jacobite, and at the age of 18 took part in the battle of Killiecrankie in 1689. This battle was a triumphant win for “Bonnie Dundee” Lord Claverhouse, who was later chased by the Covenanters. His Clan name had been outlawed in 1603 by James VI (Ist) because of their openly Jacobean leanings, and was again proscribed after Killiecrankie. To circumvent this, Rob took his mother’s name, Campbell.

He set himself up as a dealer in black cattle, driving them from the Highlands to the markets in the lowlands. He earned a good reputation for this, and soon became quite wealthy which enabled him to buy land at Craigmoyston and became laird of Inversnaid, on Loch Lomondside.

In 1711, things started to go wrong. He had raised a large amount of money from the Duke of Montrose and other Gentry, to buy cattle to drive south to fatten overwinter for the spring market. He sent his drover (a MacDonald) to bring them back. The drover sold the cattle and absconded with the money.

Overnight Rob was bankrupt and wanted for theft. Montrose took out a warrant against him, and when Rob didn’t appear in court, he was outlawed. All his lands were confiscated and his wife and children evicted. Thus began his private vendetta against Montrose. He took up the life of a bandit and rustler, raiding Montrose’s lands whenever possible. He put himself under the protection of the Duke of Argyll, who was happy to have his own “hit man” to settle old scores he had with Montrose.

Rob Roy supported the Earl of Mar during the 1715 Jacobite rising. This act caused him to have a price put on his head. He was hunted down at every possible opportunity. Gradually the heat went out of the hunt, and three years after Defoe published *Highland Rogue* in 1726, Rob Roy was granted a royal pardon.

He died aged 63 on December 28, 1734, at home in Inverlochlarig Beag, and was buried in Balquhidder. By this time he had become a national hero and most of the heads of the clans of the Highlands attended his funeral on New Year's Day, 1735. In the churchyard of the roofless Old Kirk in Balquhidder there is a headstone with the MacGregor arms inscribed: "MacGregor Despite Them!" Rob Roy got the last word.