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The Waterfall of the Black Sheep

(Eas nan Caorach Dubha)

by John MacFarlane

In the late 18th and early 19th century, this wood where we are standing would have been full of the sounds of trees being knocked down and cut up because this was a place where the charcoal burners and foresters from Taynuilt came to make charcoal which was then taken back through a network of paths in this glen to the furnace at Bonawe where it was used to help in the process of making iron.

They lived out here all summer and the place would be full of heaps smouldering away with the charcoal gradually cooking inside. And the people lived in tents around with their families during that time.

Well, it was not all hard work here because there was a lot of distilling went on in this area, illegal distilling, and they used their black pot stills up in remote areas of the forest where there were waterfalls which could be used to cool the thing down and to cause the distillation to happen.

And, on one occasion, the gaugers were out hunting for one of these pot stills and they found a tailor there who was obviously engaged in distilling and he ran off down through the glen, with them in hot pursuit. When they got to the burn or the river which was in spate, there was no way across, they thought, and they thought they had him. But the tailor was quite a big man and he made an

enormous leap from the south bank on to a central rock in the river and from there another prodigious leap right on to the north bank and got away leaving them standing there frustrated beside the bank.

There was another occasion of course, where they were quite successful and that was up at a place called Eas nan Caorach Dubha which is right up at the back of this wood where we're standing now and it was a place where they had several pot stills. And the gaugers came across the pot stills there. Nobody there but there was a great big barrel of whisky lying there so they were delighted and put the thing on to cart somewhere and took it away to Kilchrennan where they were staying overnight at the White Inn.

They were on the first floor but what they didn't know was that the foresters and charcoal burners had come very quietly that night into the Inn itself. They'd bored a hole up through the roof of the ground floor, the ceiling, into the room and into the barrel itself and were able to fix a pipe and draw the whisky off down into the crocks, that they, the earthenware crocks that they had got assembled down there and that's what they did and they spirited the spirit away, as it were, and in the morning, when the gaugers woke up, it was an empty barrel in the room.

And I bet that made a good story around these camp fires in Glen Nant when they were drinking their illegal whisky,

This is the transcript of the audio file available at
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