

Forest Heritage Scotland

Discover your roots in Scotland's forests

www.forestheritagescotland.com

The Viking Invasion of Otter Ferry *by Patsy Dyer*

Long, long ago at the time when the Vikings were invading Scotland, there was a king in Argyll called Constantine and he was a very wily, strong warrior. He had set, all along the coast, spies to watch out for an attack coming from Ireland or the Isle of Man where Vikings had their strongholds.

One day, he was informed that a spy had seen hundreds of ships in a fleet coming over from Ireland. Quickly Constantine rallied his army and he marched north to where he was certain the Vikings would choose to land. This is a site on Loch Fyne called Otter Ferry. The name otter not meaning the soft, silky creature that lives between the water and the shore, but otter in Gaelic, translated, means a promontary of land, jutting out in to the sea, and there at Otter there is a long sandbank that goes out for mile into Loch Fyne and at low tide it is a sandbank as wide as a small country lane.

When Constantine and his army arrived at Glendaruel, above Otter, they hid amongst the trees, waiting. Constantine thought what a very clever place it was to land. Such an excellent breakwater where the Vikings could moor all of their ships on the leese side, where they could disembark and be ready for battle.

As he stood watching the boats coming up Loch Fyne, he realised by looking at the signs painted on the sails, that it

was King Ragnald that was in charge of this onslaught and that his brother Godfrey was in charge of the vanguard. There were two other divisions. One of the bloodthirsty chieftains and one of the Jarls. And the boats came up the loch to Otter Ferry.

But whether or not Ragnald suddenly had seen this huge host of an army in amongst the trees or not, Constantine saw that they turned about and went back down the loch and turned round Ardlamont Point and went up the loch on the other side, Loch Rool. Quickly Constantine called the most clever and stealthy members of his army and sent them down Glendaruel to watch out for Ragnald and to prepare for an ambush. Ragnald disembarked from the boats and walked up the glen and ever since then that area has been known as the Valley of the Danes.

Constantine watched the boats as they landed on Otter Ferry and the warriors disembarked. He saw that the three divisions were now two divisions. They were sent north of Otter and south of Otter, and he realised that the plan was for the Vikings to cut him off from the main body of his army but he was prepared and the Annals of Ulster record that the Albans and men from northern Saxon were very well prepared for the battle and it's true that north of Glendaruel, Constantine's army met with both divisions of the Vikings and a terrible battle continued to follow.

There were swords and axes on shields. The shouts and cries of war and battle resounded through the forest, and the shouts and cries of men dying and it is said that every one of the Vikings was slaughtered and their bodies cast into the river til the river was boiling with blood and since that day has been called the River of Red Blood. Following that battle, Constantine and his army turned round and travelled north to the top of Glendaruel where

they knew they would meet Ragnald's army. Ragnald had thought he would be able to attack Constantine from the rear but just as he saw the army come into view, Constantine's army that had been hiding in the forest, descended and he was attacked from the rear and the terrible battle continued at a ford known to this day as the Ford of Skulls. Many men fell. Men from Scotland, men from Viking Ireland and the ford til this day is called the Ford of Skulls for there were so many dead and slain and left in the fields.

Ragnald realised that was unable to win this battle and he pulled the horn from his pocket and he blew the horn and called the remains of his army and they went down towards the top of the loch and they raced down the glen, chased by Constantine and his army. Those that were able to, got into the boats and they set sail to Ireland and Constantine and his men, they raced down cheering, as far as they could and they stopped at a rock called the Rock of Resting as they watched the boats leave the land of Scotland and return back to the stronghold in Ireland.

It's said that Ragnald, when he returned to Ireland defeated, didn't last very many years and was killed by his own men but Constantine and the men of Otter Ferry and Glendaruel celebrated for many days their great victory and their are songs and stories about Constantine and the battle that are still sung and told today.

This is the transcript of the audio file available at
www.forestheritagescotland.com

