

Scottish Traditions and Culture

THE HIGHLAND GAMES

It is believed that the origins of the Highland Games came from the 11th century when King Malcolm III (infamous for killing MacBeth) held a contest in the Braes of Mar to find the fastest runners and toughest fighting men. Other Games events have been added over the centuries, perhaps stemming from social events such as weddings and from the simple amusements of working men.

THE TARTAN

It is thought that a crude version of the tartan, a striped linen shirt, was introduced to Scotland by invading Irish in the 7th century. By the 16th century the breacan, Gaelic for tartan, had developed into the criss-crossed colored threads of what we know today as a tartan. Back in the 16th century, tartans identified the area in which a man lived and since families of the same name tended to congregate in the same straths and glens, an area tartan became associated with a particular family or clan name.

Today there are nearly 200 tartans, each one clearly attached to a clan and anyone entertaining ideas of creating a new tartan must have it approved by the Scottish Lyon King at Arms and by the Standing Council of Scottish Chiefs.

THE HAGGIS

Contrary to popular belief in some regions, haggis is not shot seasonally on the moors. This greatest of Scottish savouries is the result of painstaking culinary expertise. Generally regarded as Scotland's national dish, haggis has been described by the immortal Scottish poet, Robert Burns, as the "great chieftain of the pudden race. However, the preparation of haggis is not for the squeamish. You must finely chop the heart, lungs and liver of a sheep, add onions and oatmeal, and sew it all up into a sheep's cleaned stomach bag. Boil for about 3 hours, but be sure to prick the bag here and there as soon as it starts to swell. You wouldn't want it to explode!

The tasty dish is served hot from the pot with neeps (turnips) and tatties (potatoes), and traditionally washed down with whisky. On festive occasions, such as St. Andrew's Night, the haggis is majestically piped into the dining room by a resplendently clad Scottish bagpiper.

THE CLAN

The Gaelic word, clann, means children and describes a group of Scottish families that historically carried the same name, wore the same tartan and lived in the same area. Each clan had a chief who ruled the families and looked after their needs. In return the clansmen worked and fought for the chief.

This system worked well for centuries and then began to break down when Scottish and English monarchs intervened. Bonnie Prince Charlie led an uprising in 1745, but King George II successfully destroyed the power of the chiefs a year later when he won the Battle of Culloden.

Nevertheless, today's large clan associations maintain the romance of the old tradition and there are more than 80 chiefs who still wield a mild rule over the conduct of clan societies.

LEARN A LITTLE BROAD SCOTS

Impress your friends by using a few of these Scottish words in your everyday conversations.

Auld	old
Aye	yes
Bairn	child
Brae	side of a hill
Burn	stream

Ceilidh	party
Firth	narrow inlet
Inch	island
Kirk	church
Laird	landowner
Sassenach	English (not a term of endearment)
Sporran	Leather purse worn on the kilt
Thane	Chief of a clan
Wee	small