AT FAILLIE A HASTY CONFERENCE WAS HELD…

Researched and written by Kees Slings, December 2017, The Netherlands

I want to try to establish a reasonably credible locality to the crucial meeting that was held directly after the defeat at Culloden, when Prince Charles announced to his company that he would separate from them and find his own way to safety. Certainty cannot be had regarding this spot. Nothing of this episode in history is sure. Several differing interpretations of the source material are always possible.

First let's consider the Prince's mood. That can't have been terribly good. He probably was a bit paranoid, maybe even afraid for his life. Ever since the turn in the campaign at Derby, so close to London, Charles had been sulky. According to his biographer Frank McLynn he constantly sagged in the back of the army train, sulky and angry and lacking inspiration and energy. He felt betrayed by the man who was responsible for the decision to turn back to Scotland, the chief strategist General Lord George Murray. Again in McLynn's words this old military man was something of a surrogate father figure to the young and dashing Stuart Prince. His real father had not been everything a young and romantic pretender to the English and Scottish thrones could wish for. Lord Murray had sort of stepped in to fulfill that role. Maybe it was a Stuart thing, but Prince Charles could barely accept authority, certainly not from the man he saw as his surrogate father, so he was constantly challenging the general. This challenging behavior increased after Derby.

The outcome of the final battle on Drummossie Moor was greatly influenced by two things. Firstly the decision to make a surprise night raid on the English at Nairn, on the coast of the Moray Firth. That was a decision made by General Lord George Murray and it was disastrous. When the men returned to the moor to no avail, tired and hungry, chaos ensued. Men sought a place to sleep or raided farms for food. Some even returned to Inverness, which was the clan army's stronghold in that phase of the campaign. It certainly wasn't an army preparing for yet another glorious slaughter of Redcoats.

The Prince must have been furious with his senior General, even to the point that he would seek an opportunity to humiliate Lord George. That opportunity came quickly. When it was proposed the battle would have to be postponed and a more suitable terrain would have to be sought Prince Charles refused. He and his Irish retinue thought the moor would be fine as a battlefield. It isn't an unreasonable assumption that he refused to leave the moor just to spite his surrogate father.

However it came to be, it was an even more disastrous decision than the night raid. The English under the Duke of Cumberland shredded the Scottish lines with flying shrapnel, bullets and bayonets. Before the slaughter ended the Prince was led away from the field accompanied by his Irish friends and the clan army commanders, those who were not wounded or dead. A Servant called Edward 'Ned' Burke offered to guide the Prince to safety.

So the group rode south across Drummossie Moor and the mood must have been foul. Many of the fleeing men must have looked at Prince Charles as the one responsible for the death of their clansmen, their friends and brothers. Charles himself must have been torn apart by guilt and hatred for Lord Murray and fear of the other Scots. Maybe he feared their wrath. Whether he came to terms with the campaign's sudden end - in less than an hour his dream of the crown was over - something can be said.

From the Forfarshire Regiment Muster Roll, pages 105 & 106, under Sir James Kinloch:

“Lt. Colonel Kinloch was present at Culloden and in the retreat, when parting with the Prince at Faillie Bridge, along with the two brothers and Major Rattray, they asked him if there was any way in which they could yet serve his Royal Highness. Under the most acute feelings of disappointment, he
replied: ‘There is now no favour you can do me equal to saving yourselves and your friends, by forgetting my ruined Cause: let me live in your recollections, but save yourselves and your friends.’ They most sorrowfully parted, never to meet again.

He clearly felt his cause was over. So to try and revive it from Ruthven Barracks in Badenoch, as was the intention of Lord George and his officers, seems the last thing on Prince Charles' mind at that point. It is possible he felt a deep longing to try and get to the lands of the gentle Lochiel, Glen Arkaig, and thence by Glen Pean to Morar and Arisaig on the west coast, to the Clanranalds at Borrodale whom he trusted and among whom the campaign had begun nearly a year before. Maybe they could help him get back to safety in France. Ned Burke was the right man to lead him through the infamous Rough Bounds to Borrodale.

After four miles of plodding southwards through the moor the company arrived at Faillie on the River Nairn. It was there that the General Wade Military Road between Ruthven Barracks and Inverness, built between 1728 and 1730, crossed the river. The sources, some of whom are quoted on the page about the retreat from Culloden, are divided about how it crossed. Most just speak of the Faillie Ford or the Ford of Faillie. Some call it the Bridge of Faillie. One says the Ford and old bridge at Faillie. Faillie had a good reputation as being the sunniest place in all of the Highlands, but unfortunately a shroud of uncertainty hangs over it as will be seen later.

So the company crossed the Nairn at Faillie and took to the military road that would bring them to the relative safety of the formidable Ruthven Barracks on its medieval motte near Kingussie on the Spey.

There is a possibility that Prince Charles never intended to cross the river in his present company. The idea to separate from them and flee west with his trusted little retinue and led by Ned Burke must have fermented in his mind during the ride south from the battlefield. He probably spoke to his most trusted aid O'Sullivan and then made his decision. To go west he would have to remain on the west side of the river and seek either of the two military roads that led from Inverness to Fort Augustus at the other end of Loch Ness. One clinging to the southeastern shore of Loch Ness, the other a bit more land inward passing by Loch Mhor. On the latter lay Gortuleg House - now called Gorthleck Mains - where he hoped to speak to Lord Lovat and get some counsel, and some rest and refreshments.
Probably against his secret intentions he did cross however, but as soon as they had arrived at the Eastern shore of the Nairn he announced an ad hoc strategic council to tell Lord George Murray and the other commanders and officers to proceed to the Barracks while he himself would turn west. He would send messengers to acquaint them with his further plans.

All but one of the known contemporary sources are frustratingly vague about the event of Prince Charles leaving Culloden. And Frank McLynn, who in his masterly Bonnie Prince Charlie, a tragedy in many acts (1988) writes in such detail about the whole campaign and about the state of mind of Prince Charles, doesn't even mention it at all. But there is one book that tries to shed some light on the matter.

_The Prince, when he at last left the field, was accompanied by his chief counsellors and friends, and a considerable body of horse, and followed by the foot of the portion of the army who took this direction. They crossed the Nairn at the ford and old Bridge of Faillie, on the old military road, between five and six miles from the battle-field, and about 50 yards west of the present bridge. Passing a peat moss till they got on firm ground, a council was held in a field by the roadside, close to the Allt Ruadh, about 500 or 600 yards south from the river. There was a large body of men present._

_(Culloden Moor and story of the battle, with description of the stone circles and cairns at Clava, by the late Peter Anderson of Inverness (1867)_

Since Peter Anderson's text is by far the most detailed of all the known sources let's do some close reading. Firstly, was it a ford or a bridge? Anderson says both which is a bit awkward. All the others say either a bridge or a ford or don't mention the means of crossing the Nairn at all. Wasn't Anderson sure himself? He has more discrepancies in this short text. For instance he mentions 'close to the Allt Ruadh.' There is a burn flowing into the Nairn at that point but it isn't called Allt Ruadh, it's called Allt na Fuar-Ghlaic. There is an Allt Ruadh tributary to the Nairn, but that stream is four miles to the north at Clava, very near the battlefield.

Could the writer have confused the two burns? That seems unlikely. His book's subtitle is _with description of the stone circles and cairns at Clava_. These are situated but a few hundred yards from that Allt Ruadh. If he did proper fieldwork, which we must assume he did, then he would have been very well acquainted with the burn flowing past the stone circles and cairns at Clava. So unless he
simply made a typographical error by confusing the two burns' names, he knew of another Allt Ruadh, near Faillie.

(From MacFarlane's Gaelic Dictionary: Allt means 'stream or brook' and ruadh means 'reddish': Allt Ruadh could mean 'red brook or stream. Fuar means 'cold'. Ghalic is not listed in the dictionary but glaic is and means 'valley or hollow' so Allt na Fuar-Ghalic could mean 'cold brook or stream in the hollow or valley')

There is a mountain stream converging with Allt na Fuar-Ghalic and they converge about '500 or 600 yards south of the river.' Only it is called Midlairgs Burn, not Allt Ruadh. Still again, the Ordnance Survey Name Books say of this stream 'it is an anglicised gaelic name.' This text was written between 1876 and 1878, about ten years after Peter Anderson wrote his book. There is the possibility that 'anglicized gaelic name' meant it was renamed with the anglicized name of Midlairgs Burn, after the Midlairgs Farm, and that the original Gaelic name was Allt Ruadh, meaning Red Burn. Maybe in the nineteenth century, when Anglicization began to occur, people found it confusing to speak about Allt Ruadh at Midlairgs when another Allt Ruadh, at Clava, was only a few miles downriver. So they adopted Midlairgs Burn as an alternative name. It's all rather vague. But maybe Anderson knew the original Gaelic name and used it in his book. It's a thin thread but still unbroken.

So, with the Allt Ruadh discrepancy more or less out of the way we return to the main question, ford or bridge? More close reading is required.

They crossed the Nairn at the ford and old Bridge of Faillie, on the old military road, between five and six miles from the battle-field, and about 50 yards west of the present bridge. Passing a peat moss till they got on firm ground, a council was held in a field by the roadside.

After crossing the river the company had to pass a peat moss. What, no road? They crossed the bridge and then left the road that led to Ruthven Barracks to plod through a peat moss? Very unlikely. From Canmore.org is this description of the Bridge of Faillie.

A substantial stone bridge of one arch in a good state of repair. The bridge is 4.7m wide at its centre over side walls 0.9m high and 0.3m thick. On the north bank of the Nairn 42m west of the above bridge is the end of a causeway 7.0m wide and 2.0m high. At the base of it some large stones are exposed suggesting the remains of an abutment. Salmond's statement (Salmond 1938) is probably based on this, but on the south bank of the river there is nothing to be seen of any remains of a possible bridge.
This infers the present bridge was a replacement of an older one. It was probably built some twenty years after the old one disappeared. The river Nairn is known for its fearsome floodings. In the nineteenth century several took place that completely destroyed bridges and farms with farmlands, drowned cattle and even took heavy machinery. During one such flooding Craigie Inn was threatened to be taken down by the furious waters. Only a large tree that got stuck to the rocky shore diverted the water somewhat, so the Inn was spared. Nairn Bridge itself once was destroyed by a flooding. And though it isn't known that a flooding took away Faillie Bridge in any source, it seems highly likely that it did. Traces of an abutment were found on the west side, 42 meters southwest of the present bridge. None were found on the other shore.

All this combined tells a plausible story. During a terrible flooding that took place in the years between 1730 and 1746 the Old Military Bridge was torn off its abutments, of which the southeast one disappeared completely. Even the carse, the low lying lands on that shore, was flooded, probably not for the first time either, leaving a peat moss of some four hundred meters stretching from the river to that part of the military road to Ruthven that survived. The stretch of road leading from the old bridge to some four hundred meters to the southeast across the carse was destroyed together with the bridge. And when in later years a new Faillie Bridge was built some fifty yards to the northeast of the old one, along with a new stretch of road to connect it with the still existing military road southeast of it, the new road was laid over the remnants of the destroyed one. A current map clearly shows this. A curious curve to the right leads to the new bridge. So the new road at least in part is in fact the old military one.
Since the road had completely disappeared on the low lying southeast shore of the Nairn, the company had to tread through a peat moss. Passing a peat moss till they got on firm ground, a council was held in a field by the roadside, close to the Allt Ruadh, about 500 or 600 yards south from the river. There was a large body of men present.

The carse of the River Nairn at this point is roughly 400 meters wide. On its southeastern side the ground rises. Even on the carse itself some meadow land is a bit higher than its surrounding land. One such a mound or knoll of higher ground is clearly visible today. It lies 'by the roadside.' It lies 'close to the Allt Ruadh.' And it is big enough to allow some 500 horse to take a break from all the plodding through the marshy carse and have a council.

One last piece of 'evidence' remains to help put the stamp of authenticity to the proposed council spot. We return to the Forfarshire Regiment Muster Roll, pages 105 & 106, under Sir James Kinloch:

"Lt. Colonel Kinloch was present at Culloden and in the retreat, when parting with the Prince at Faillie Bridge, along with the two brothers and Major Rattray, they asked him if there was any way in which they could yet serve his Royal Highness. Under the most acute feelings of disappointment, he replied: ‘There is now no favour you can do me equal to saving yourselves and your friends, by forgetting my ruined Cause: let me live in your recollections, but save yourselves and your friends.’ They most sorrowfully parted, never to meet again.

And from pages 148 to 153: “Major Rattray took part in the battles of Falkirk and Culloden, being among the last to leave the latter field. When Prince Charles was taking farewell of his followers at Scatraig, Bridge of Falie, Major Rattray took part in the conversation with His Royal Highness as narrated in the sketch of Sir James Kinloch.”

The Prince was taking farewell of his followers at Scatraig, Bridge of Faillie. Today close to the proposed spot is Scatraig Premium Concrete Products. There is a Scatraig on Ordnance Survey Map of Inverness-shire & Skye Sheet 020 (1872-1881). It probably was Scatraig farm. More important is the distance between the farm and the council spot. How big can this distance be to still merit 'at Scatraig?' On the OS map and Google Maps it is roughly 100 meters. So I would say 'at Scatraig' is an excellent description of the council spot.

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Scatraig Works with the council spot across the military road
Allt Ruadh/Midlairgs Burn bridge from the north

Allt Ruadh/Midlairgs Burn bridge
Bridge from the south looking at the council spot