John Stuart to Thomas Pennant: further description of Arran

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Arran[1]

The island of Arran.[x 1] from Skredan [† 2] N. to Bennan[‡] point [3] S. is 23 miles long.

Goatfield,[# 4] Greenan-aol,[xx 5] Ben-nuish,[†† 6] Kem-na-callich,[# 7] and Ben-varrain[## 8] are the most considerable mountains in it. The first of them is reckoned the highest. The upper half of it consists entirely of solid rocks curiously heaped upon one another, and, like most of the high hills in the W. isles, has too little soil and too little moisture to afford nourishment to any other plants but lichens and mosses. Eagles and tarmachans are almost the only birds known to frequent it's naked and craggy summits. —

The principal lakes in this island are Loch-vachry,[x 9] Loch-na-hewray,[† 10] Loch-Iersay,[‡ 11] and Loch-tanna.[# 12] Of these L. Iersay is the largest. — The chief rivers are Avon vore,[xx 13] the river of Mony-vore, of Asdail, Torrylin, Sledry,[†† 14] Machry and of Sannox.

The principal birds known as natives of Arran are Eagles, Ravens, Hooded Crows, Pigeons, Tarmachans, Black Cock, Grous, Plovers, Starlings and Wheat-ears. The Quadrupeds are a few Stags, Rabbits, Otters, Shrew-mice and Bats. There are no Hares, foxes, pole-cats, hedge-hogs or moles.

Though the greatest part of the island is still very much in the state of nature it may be reckoned as one of the signs of some little progress in improvement, that the partridge, a bird formerly unknown there, has lately visited it.

The chief grain cultivated is Oats, about 5000 bolls of bear sown – little pease – no less than 1000 bolls of potatoes planted.

The manures used are horse-dung, sea-tangle, Fern, coral and shell-sand.

Oats and pease are usually sown about the end of March, lint-seed about the middle of April, potatoes from the middle of April to the tenth of May, bear from the middle of that month to the end.

The common increase of oats is that of three grains from each seed sown, of pease 4 or 5; of poratoes, 12.

There are about ten or twelve hogsheads of lintseed sown annually. The common return is that of a stone and a half of undrest flax from each peck sown.

The linnen-yarn manufacture yields 300 £ annually – black cattle, 800 £ — and by herring fishing the Inhabitants make about 400 £.

The common price of a milk-cow is from 40 to 50 shillings Sterling — of a horse, from 2 £ 10 s. to 3 £ — of a sheep, 5 shillings — of butter, seven-pence p$^{r.}$ lib. — no cheese sold.

The Duke of Hamilton's lands, who is the chief Proprietor of this island, are divided according to some very old valuation into 132 marklands. The farms or possessions of which there are 92 in all, consist commonly of one or two of these mark-lands. They support in whole 1050 horses, 3103 milk-cows, 1601 yeld beasts, 11100 sheep, and 346 Goats.

The Indurance of leases is generally for 19 years. The farms are managed in a manner somewhat singular. Each of them is commonly possessed by 10 or 12 or more tenents, who by their leases are bound conjunctly and severally for the payment of their rents to the Proprietor.

The produce of the grain in this island does not nearly serve the inhabitants, for at an average about 500 bolls of oat-meal are imported annually; neither are there horses enough reared for the purposes of labour, for it is computed that there are to the value of 300 £ of them imported yearly.

There is no wood of any size in Arran, though from the thriving plantations at Brodwick it is evident that with proper care it could be easily reared. Timber is imported yearly to the amount of 150 £.

Fuel is scarce — Each horse-load of peats sells at four-pence. An ordinary Tenent's family consumes eight or ten score of these loads in a twelvemonth, besides 100 loads of dry mossy sods, or scrawls, as they call them.

A day-labourer in this island is pound ten-pence in winter, and a shilling in summer, without dyet, or half that money with it. During the harvest-shearing men-servants are hired at 1 £, women are paid from 4 pence to six-pence p$^{r.}$ day, with their maintenance — shoe-makers, six-pence p.^{r} shoe — smiths a penny p$^{r.}$ lib.

The inhabitants are generally industrious. During the month of Aug$^{t.}$ they are busied in fishing herring on the coast — from Aug$^{t.}$ to the middle of October, at harvest. From that time to the middle of Nov$^{r.}$ the men are employed in cutting brackens or ferns for thatching their houses, and manuring their potatoes, ground-women in dressing their flax, and spinning woolen yarn. From Nov$^{r.}$ to May the men spend the day in making herring-nets for sale, and at night knit stockings — the women are busied in spinning linnen-yarm. — For some weeks in summer, they retire with their cattle to the shealings or summer grazings.

The long life, which *Martin* distinguishes the inhabitants of this island for, is now unknown, few of them attaining to 80 or 84 years of age.

The diseases that are most prevalent among them are Pleurisies about the end of harvest and spring. — They are but seldom troubled with the Jaundices or agues — The small-pox, measles and chin-cough visit them commonly once in the seven or eight years.

That according to *Martin's account* the inhabitants of Arran require still a treble dose of Physick is not very certain, but that they may at times lose with safety an extraordinary quantity of blood is confirmed by every year's experience. D$^{r.\ Fullerton}$ receives a pension from the family of Hamilton for which he is obliged to take the tour of the island twice every twelve-month in order to bleed all his Grace's tenents. For this purpose, when the day is fair; all the people of each village assemble in one spot, and a pit is dug in the ground, into which the blood is let from each arm is allowed to fall into one common mass.

The natives have now all laid a side the true Highland dress. Neither plaid, Kilt nor Tartan-stockings are worn by any of them. — The Galic language is universally spoken by them, though many of them understand less or more of the English tongue.

The monuments of Antiquity in this island are few and inconsiderable —

S.W. from Brodwick castle there are two Druidical stones set on end, and a little W. from them lies a gravestone twelve feet long, having the rude figure of a man's head drawn near the West end of it. Under it Mac-Bhrolchin, in the Heroic age, is said to have been buried

In the Churchyard of Shiskin [x 15] S[t.] Mal-Jes's [† 16] tomb is still pointed out. He is said to have been co-eval with Columba and to have come over along with him from Ireland. He resided in the island of Lamlash, and served per vices in Shiskin, where he at last died, being then 100 years old.

Lamlash

This island consists of half a mark-land, maintains two horses, eight milk-cows, three yeld-beasts, 100 sheep and 40 Goats — sows 4 bolls of Corn and 3/4[ths] of a boll of potatoes. ——[17]

Arran

Editorial Notes

[1] This manuscript does not bear a date, but is mentioned by Stuart in his letter to Pennant on May 12th 1773: 'I send you one half of the Remarks upon Arran by the same Post; but inclosed under another Cover.'

Authorial Notes

[1] x In Galic Arr-inn.

[2] † Sgreadan.

[3] ‡ Beinnean. i.e. little mountain.

[4] # Gaoil'-bheinn i.e. mountain of the winds.

[5] xx Griannan-Athol

[6] †† Beinn-nùis.

[7] # Ceum-na-caillich. i.e. step of the carline.

[8] Beinn-bharrain. i.e. sharp-pointed mountain.

[9] xLoch-mhachrai'

[10] †L. na-h-iura.

[11] ‡L. Iorsa.

[12] #Loch-tana i.e. the shallow lake.

[13] xx Abhann-mhòr i.e. great river.

[14] ††Slaodrai,.

[15] Seasgainn.

[16] Maol-Jos' i.e. Servant of Jesus.

[17] In the foregoing remarks the names of places are spelt as agreeably as they well could to their English pronunciation; and when there is any material difference, they are written at the foot of the page according to their true Galic orthography.