

Salmon stations around Easter Ross Peninsula

By Douglas Gordon

Information from Will Paterson.

Charlie & Dan Paterson ran the salmon stations they had about 80 men working for them and

The salmon season ran from 11th February to 26th August then they went to the harvest on the land. In February when the men were first taken on they were mending nets, boats and gear ready for netting season, they employed about 80 men for all the 16 salmon stations. Stretching from near the north Sutor below Castlecraig farm on Moray Firth round Tarbatness Lighthouse to Dornoch Firth and Paterson Island near Inver. The salmon bothies at Tarrel and Kinyaka were burnt down some time during the 1970s, they were made of wood and Will Paterson rebuilt the Tarrel with concrete blocks.

There was a salmon station away out in the Morrich that they were asked to close it down and got paid by the air ministry not to fish for salmon there about 1930s, so Charlie and Dan Paterson sunk big posts into a sand bank and built a platform that was 6 feet (2 metres) above high tide when the sand bank was submerged and built a bothy on top of it and the coble could be tied next to platform.

When they were not busy they filled sand bags and built up sand bank and eventually covered it. They covered sand bags with old nets to help the marass grass to grow and called it Paterson Island, now the bothy is 200 metres from the sea and it is across the Inver River from mainland and now Paterson Island is joined on to the Morrich More. It was not as good as the old site for netting salmon which must have been out near Innis Mhor Island but not sure where about it was. There is no sign of the old bothy out past Innis Mhor.

The salmon cobs needed 4 men to row them and in some cases 6 men, some of them also had a drop down keel with a mast for a sail. So that is why there is so many bothies at salmon stations then horse and cart could take them to Balintore. The Bothies along below Nigg hill they had to be hauled up steep bank to the top to be loaded on to horse and carts. Then once the motorised salmon coble came they were able to take them by boat back to Balintore, which made such a difference especially when seas were rougher.

Salmon coble at Rockfield being rowed by 4 men



There was Ice houses to keep salmon fresh and the ice would be gathered in winter and the Portmahomack Ice houses got their ice from Loch Ballone near the golf course and Bindal Duck pond which was down at the bottom of Bindal Farmhouse garden just beside the field and road to go down to castle and Moray Firth Mast. The ice had to be 6 inches (150 mm) thick before they broke the ice up with axes and sledge hammers and put into horse and carts and they were put down a chute into a hole in roof of Ice house, these ice houses which were built into hillsides so they were below ground to help stop ice melting for the salmon season when it started.

Salmon station list

Paterson Island. Bothy and salmon netting station

Drumancroy. Bothy and salmon netting station also known as Balchladich.

Balnabruach. Salmon station nets only

Portmahomack, Bothy, Salmon station and Nets

Camas. Bothy, salmon station and nets

Wilkhaven. Bothy, salmon station and nets

Castle. Salmon station nets only

Rockfield. Salmon station and nets

Tarrel. Bothy, salmon station and nets

Skarvak. Bothy, salmon station and nets

Hilton. Salmon station and nets

Balintore. Salmon station and nets

Nose or Balnagown. Bothy, salmon station and nets

Coves. Salmon station, nets only.

Kinyaka. Bothy, salmon station with nets

Castlecraig. Salmon station nets only

Below is an aerial photo from Google earth by Nick Vass of Salmon Bothy at the Nose or Balnagown.



Salmon stations and Bothies by Nick Vass

I have attached a word document with a map. You can see where a channel was created and it looks like the area to the right was terra-formed as well.

It may have been to trap salmon as there is a line of rocks across the 'mouth' which may be there to help string a net to trap any fish in the lagoon formed.

It may have served the Balnagown station but it is not that close and/or the coves but I don't know that. I think I remember my father saying that they had blasted the path round the Nose but I am not sure. The term dyke was used to designate a line of nets. There would be 12 (I think) nets with their leader in a full dyke. Latterly the Nose was just 2 nets close in. They often had 2 nets just out from the harbour.

Tommy's dad worked kingyaka (I think for the Mains) before working either Balintore or Hilton possibly for the Paterson's.

There was a bothy where the stream comes down from Easter Rarichie. The concrete base is slowly disappearing. There are chains and steel wire in the stream. I think there used to be a winch there too, to take salmon up cliff to top so they could be collected by Horse and cart to go to Balintore.

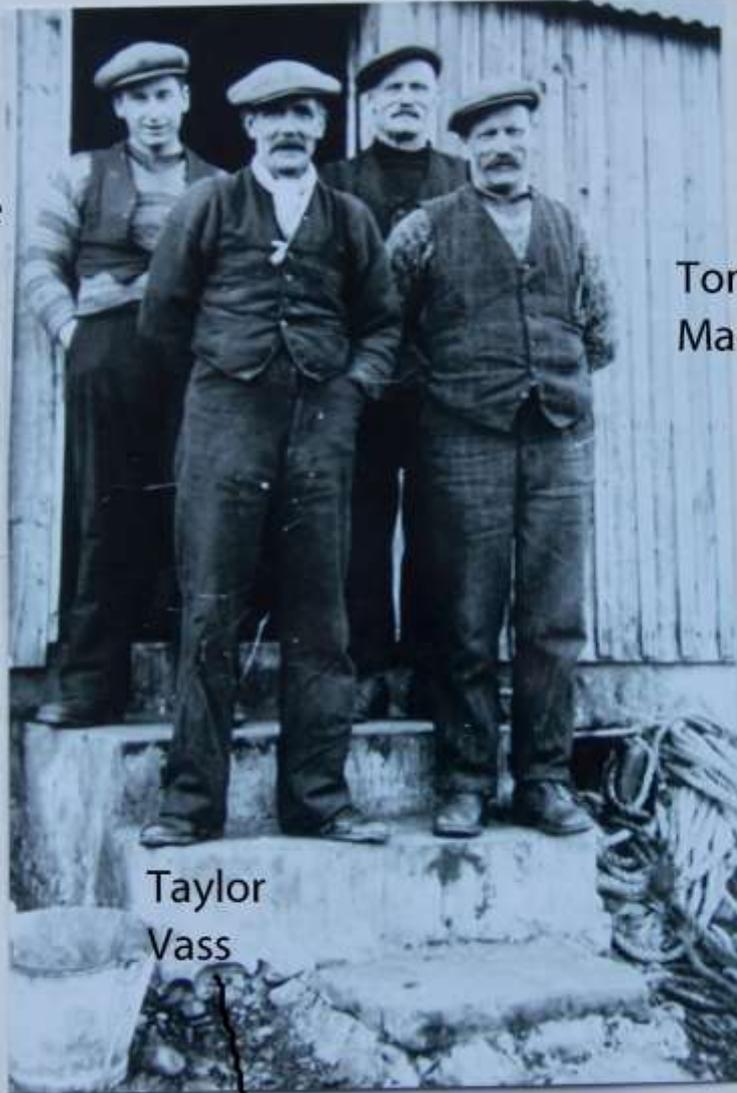
Tommy Mackenzie sent me this photo of Kinyaka salmon bothy, he also named most of the Salmon bothies on Balintore side for me but did not know of Paterson Island and some on Portmahomack side and Will Paterson named them all.

Tommy remembers 2 salmon Bothies at Kinyaka and when you see all the netting stations they had to work they would have needed 2 salmon bothies.

Kinyaka Bothy

Billy Mackenzie (Hughy's
father ?)

Willie
John
Mackenzie



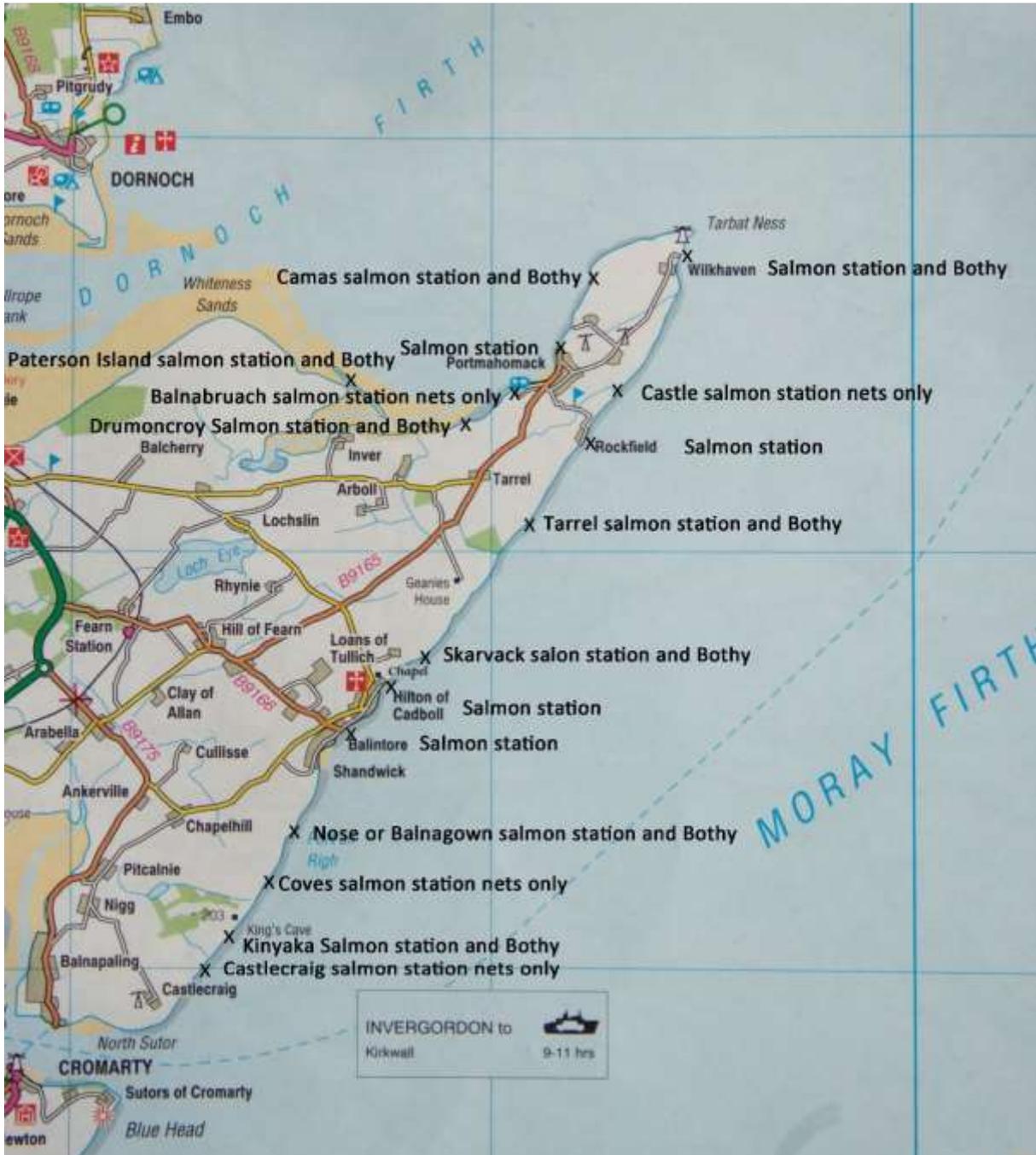
Tom
MacKenzie

Taylor
Vass

(Bochal's Father ?)

Tom Mackenzie's father & grandfather

Below is a map showing all the salmon stations around Easter Ross Peninsula which the Paterson's run



Below is photo of salmon Fishers at Rockfield from William Paterson



Dave Kate Andrew Donald Act
Mackay Mitchell McDonald Patchy



Will Paterson (snr)

Paterson Island Bothy painted 1990. Got this from William Paterson



- William Paterson remembers crossing the Inver River at low tide west of Inver below Newton to go to Paterson Island and he serviced this tractor every year and painted it to keep rust away from salt water, also he renewed steering ball joints as salt water soon corroded them so they needed replaced every year.
- Below is a drawing of salmon nets set for an ebb tide from William Paterson



salmon nets set for an Ebb tide

I remember as a young boy asking what happened to all the salmon lying on shore with one bite out of them and I was told, that is what the seals do, they take a bite out of the best bit and leave the salmon to die and then they rot on sea floor to be eaten by crabs, lobster etc.

Seals were controlled at one time as they caused so much damage to salmon numbers and nets which effected fishermen's livelihoods, so they were shot when they were spotted near salmon nets or in the nets as it was dangerous to try and pull a net in with a seal in it, so it had to be shot with a rifle.

Scottish government brought out rules for the salmon netting season for 2015 was from 1st April to 26th August. They had nets out at Portmahomack, Drumincroy and Tarrel. They had a good season at Portmahomack where they caught a lot of salmon. Now for 2016 all salmon netting is banned, it could be 3 years maybe 5 years or it might be for ever. Politicians now decide what you can do and can't do.

William Paterson had one lot of nets out at Portmahomack this year 2015 and had electronic seal scarers to keep seals away from nets where they can cause a lot of damage to nets and salmon in nets by damaging them and taking bits out of them making them unsaleable. That was a big problem years ago the damage seals caused then they were allowed to shoot a seal that had got into the net as it is like Fox of the sea very dangerous and caused thousands of pounds worth of damage to nets, which had to be replaced or repaired if possible. Never mind the damage to all the salmon in the net making them unsaleable and killing them.

Salmon coble and salmon nets off Portmahomack. 27th August 2015 Hugh Docherty checking nets for salmon, he told me a net can be 55 fathoms long so it would be 300 feet long.



Portmahomack Salmon Bothy and Ice House, with old Nuffield tractor for bringing boxes of salmon and nets and gear up from Salmon coble



I have heard that the Scottish government has banned all salmon netting from next year 2016 , if you are caught putting a net out to catch salmon you will go to jail, the salmon are to be left to feed the seals. An industry has been destroyed by a government which had been going on for generations. All the gear, boats and tackle they have bought over the years can no longer be used for catching salmon. People have lost their jobs and livelihood.

Douglas Gordon 8th September 2015