

Kyle Rhea Ferry Glenelg - cattle slip, pier and re-sited Sandaig Lighthouse (c) R. Paxton

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Kyle Rhea Ferry - Glenelg to Skye - Telford 1818

Readers of Dr. Johnson's Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland may recall his having in 1773 to sleep on hay in his riding coat in the inn at Glenelg . . . "Mr. Boswell being more delicate laid himself sheets with hay over and under him and lay in linen like a gentleman"! The next day they were ferried to Armidale.

Last year my attention was drawn to the unlisted historic Kyle Rhea ferry by the owner of its Glenelg slip James Watt who wishes to preserve it in use and, following an approach to Historic Scotland supported by PHEW Scotland, the Glenelg slips were listed category C(S). Following further research in Edinburgh and on site a fuller case recently has been put to Historic Scotland on behalf of the Panel with a view to an 'A' listing for the complete ferry and facilitating the authentic repair of this 191-year-old outstanding transport facility. It is mostly in excellent original state.

There has been a ferry at this site, the narrowest crossing to Skye, from the earliest times. The ferry also had a robust national military connection with nearby Bernera Barracks for several decades from c.1750. However, the case for an 'A' listing of its present structures is primarily based on the ferry being an integral part of a national route from Edinburgh to and across Skye for many years from its completion by the Highland Road Commission in 1818 and before. Also, for

its first class design and build documentation and provenance [Telford/Mitchell/Davidson] and, not least, the extraordinary context of its probably unique separate slip which accommodated up to 8,000 swimming black cattle annually for nearly a century - a trade dubbed by the late Professor A.R.B. Haldane, 'once a vivid and vital part of the life of Scotland'.

The ferry slips were finely executed in 1818 for £1,146 by one of Telford's best Highland Roads contractors, John Davidson, whose skill and integrity were praised by the poet Southey after an inspection of his work with Telford in 1819 [Journal 1929]. The adjoining Glenelg Road [built 1814-19 over Mam Ratagan pass by John Read for £8,806] has a remarkable 90m long and at least 5.5m high in places retaining wall at the Glenelg slip approach which is deserving of inclusion in the group listing.

The present ferry boat with its swivel deck is now rare and also of considerable interest. During my inspection in July (in fine weather!) its operation at the slip, overlooked by the relocated Old Sandaig Lighthouse [D.A. Stevenson 1909] and cattle slip with the former Ferry Inn in the background, provided an historic transport experience of great quality and charm.

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