

## CHAPTER 3

### **Kenneth of the Nose, Chief 1338—1350.**

The next chief, after Ian Murdoch, was another Kenneth, Coinneach na Sroine, or Kenneth of the Nose, so called because of the large size of his nose. This Kenneth married Fionnaghal, a daughter of Torquil Macleod of Lewis and his wife Dorothea, who was a daughter of the Earl of Ross.

If the Mackenzies had ever previously owned the lands of Kintail, by 1342 they were certainly, once again, back in the hands of the Earl of Ross, for William, the fifth earl, granted a charter of “the ten davachs of Kintail” to Reginald, son of Roderick of the Isles. This charter was confirmed by King David II in 1344. This also suggests that perhaps the Mackenzies had not always supported the king.

Around this time the Mackenzies living in the western part of Ross became involved in a battle with the Earl of Ross who raided Kenlochewe, carrying off spoils. He was supported by clan Munro and the Dingwalls. Kenneth pursued the raiders recovering the spoils and killing some of the insurgents. The Earl was displeased by this affront to his dignity and power and set out to correct this matter once and for all by showing the populace who was boss. He successfully hunted down the luckless Kenneth and captured him. He further demonstrated his supreme power in the Western Highlands by having the Mackenzie chief executed at Inverness. So much for the descendant of King John! William followed up by granting the Mackenzie lands of Kenlochewe to Leod MacGilleandreis, who was instrumental in Kenneth's capture. Soon after this it appears that the chief of the clan Mackenzie was living in an island castle in Loch Kinellan near Strathpeffer in Easter Ross and it was from this base that the clan was to advance westward once again to Kintail.

Kenneth of the Nose had three bastard sons in addition to two legitimate boys. His legitimate heir, Murchadh Dubh na h'Uagh, or Black Murdoch of the Cave, was still a child on succeeding his father as chief in 1350. Some references say that Kenneth was executed as early as 1346.

### **Black Murdoch of the Cave, Chief 1350—1375.**

During Kenneth's problems with the Earl of Ross, the castle of Eilean Donan was successfully held against the earl's efforts to seize it by Kenneth's friend, Duncan Macaulay of Lochbroom. Macaulay was apprehensive for the safety of both Black Murdoch and his own son, also named Murdoch, so he sent Black Murdoch to his grandfather, Macleod of Lewis together with his son to Macdougall of Lorn. Young Macaulay was seized and murdered by the earl's vassal Leod MacGilleandreis, the same man who now possessed Kenlochewe.

Black Murdoch grew into manhood and it is said he resorted among the caves around Torridon and Kenlochewe hoping to take his revenge against Leod MacGilleandreis; hence the name Murchadh Dubh nan Uamhag, or, Black Murdoch of the Cave. Leod discovered that Murdoch was in the vicinity and sought to hunt him down. Murdoch wisely retreated back to Lewis where he stayed for some time awaiting a more appropriate chance of revenge against Leod. He at last set out in a galley with a number of his close supporters and lay in wait for the unsuspecting MacGilleandreis. An opportunity soon presented itself to Black Murdoch when MacGilleandreis and some of his followers appeared. Murdoch and his friends seized the initiative and within a short time the surprised party were overwhelmed and slaughtered.

Murdoch having disposed of the despised MacGilleandreis, returned to his own country where he was welcomed with open arms by his clan who had long supposed him to be dead. He married Isabel, the only daughter of his father's friend, Duncan Macaulay of Lochbroom. It was through this vital marriage that the Mackenzies succeeded to the lands of Lochbroom.

Murdoch now concentrated his attention on preserving and improving his lands until King David II returned from his captivity in England where he had been held as a prisoner since 1346 following his defeat at the Battle of Nevilles Cross. Murdoch laid a complaint against the Earl of Ross for the murder of his father and claimed redress. It seems that he obtained satisfaction since the Mackenzies became at last masters of Kintail and this is confirmed by charter evidence in 1362 of Kenneth's son 'Murdo filius Kennethi de Kintail' (Murdoch son of Kenneth of Kintail). This charter granted by King David, was possibly a renewal of the supposed original grant made to Colin of Kintail in 1266.

Murdoch of the Cave died in 1375 and was succeeded by his son, Murchadh na Drochaid, or, Murdoch of the Bridge.

### **Murdoch of the Bridge. Chief 1375—1416.**

As a result of this Murdoch's marriage to Finguala, the Mackenzies of Kintail acquired the royal blood of the Bruce. Finguala was the daughter of Macleod of Harris and Dunvegan and his wife Martha, who in turn was daughter of Donald Stewart, Earl of Mar and nephew of King Robert the Bruce.

Murdoch of the Bridge earned his name by an incident in which his wife fell, or was pushed, over the bridge of Scatwell into the river Conon. Some versions of this story state that the perpetrators of this act were flatterers of Murdoch who were concerned that his wife had not born him children and there would be no succession. Other versions say that Murdoch himself pushed his wife into the river. Whatever occurred Finguala survived the fall and made her way back to her house where it was discovered that she was in fact pregnant. Her husband was delighted by this discovery and everyone lived happily ever after! One cannot help but

wonder what the unfortunate Finguala must have thought about such unbecoming treatment for one of royal descent, but the legend, unfortunately, does not investigate that aspect of this story.

Fact or fiction, Finguala certainly gave birth to a son who was to become an important chief of the Mackenzie clan and was to lead it to unparalleled growth and power under his leadership. He was Alexander Ionraic. But more of him later.

During the regime of Murdoch of the Bridge, his clan seems to have lived quietly, though he was one of sixteen Highland chiefs who accompanied the Earl of Douglas to England and fought at the Battle of Otterburn. The English were defeated at this battle and Sir Henry Percy, the famous Hotspur of history, was taken prisoner.

This period in the Highlands was one of great turbulence. It was the era of the infamous “Wolf of Badenoch”, the son of Robert II and great grandson of Robert the Bruce. It was the era of bloody battles and of numerous feuds. The biggest and most famous battle took place in 1411 as a result of Donald, the Macdonald Lord of the Isles, leading a massive army to seize the earldom of Ross which Euphemia, Countess of Ross, had resigned in favour of her grandfather, the Duke of Albany. Donald claimed that Euphemia, who had become a nun, had no right to dispose of the title and that it should have reverted to her aunt Margaret. Margaret just happened to be Donald's wife, and therefore Donald claimed that the title of Earl of Ross should come to him in right of his wife !

Donald decided to force the issue. At the head of ten thousand men and allied with the English, who supplied him with a superior fleet, he caused havoc across Scotland taking everything before him. The Lords of the Isles had long resisted any dependence upon the crown of Scotland. In ancient times their region had been a local kingdom under the high king of Norway. Macdonald still regarded himself as King of the Isles but this view was not shared by the Scottish monarchy. In this instance, however, the strength of the forces arraigned threatened to dismember the kingdom of Scotland once and for all. The King of Scotland at this time, James I, who was 15 years of age, happened to be a prisoner of the English and was to remain so until 1424. Scotland was in the hands of an ambitious regent, the Duke of Albany, who was now Earl of Ross. He was in no hurry to pay the required ransom to have young King James released.

The Earl of Mar led the resistance against Donald's deprivations and, accompanied by many of Scotland's knights and prominent families, they met with Donald at the Battle of Harlaw. This battle was a disaster for the Earl of Mar and his followers against the Highland horde and many of Scotland's most famous families were wiped out. Donald's “victory”, however, cost him the loss of 900 men.

The Duke of Albany took this critical situation in hand and marched north seizing the castle of Dingwall. From this base he proceeded slowly to recover the whole of Ross. Donald retreated back to the Isles and abandoned his claim to the earldom of Ross. He was also forced to give up hostages to secure his future good

behaviour.

Murdoch Mackenzie played no part in this revolt. Threats were made by Donald, but to no avail. Murdoch was reasonably safe in Eilean Donan Castle and he had little cause to support Donald.

Murdoch died in 1416. He was succeeded by his son Alexander Ionraic.

### **Alexander the Upright. Chief 1416—1491.**

Alexander `Ionraic', or `the Upright', as he was known, was the son of Murdoch and was the first clan chief of the Mackenzies with the royal blood of Robert the Bruce in his veins. He was born around the year 1401 and his first marriage was to Lady Agnes Campbell, the daughter of the Earl of Argyll. He later married Margaret Macdougall of Dunolly.

In 1427 King James I of Scotland summoned a parliament at Inverness and the young Alexander Mackenzie was one of the barons who attended from western Scotland. King James had spent 18 years as a “guest” of the English until he was eventually freed in 1424. He firmly believed that as king he had to demonstrate his authority and he set about removing from power some of the fractious barons and earls. He arraigned the mighty Duke of Albany for treason and following a trial by a court of his peers he was found guilty and executed together with his two sons. Similar treatment was handed out to some of the Highland chiefs as they arrived to attend one of James' parliaments. By the time King James was eventually murdered in 1436 he had reduced the number of earldoms from fifteen to eight of which only four remained in the hands of the original families.

Alexander was one of the fortunate chiefs who remained in the king's favour and he was appointed Commissioner for the south of Ross. He established himself in the castle of Brahan near the town of Dingwall and from this base he oversaw the expansion of the clan's territory. The process of good marriages and acquisition of property served the Mackenzie clan well for a long time and steadily the power and influence of the Mackenzies grew.

Following the elimination of the Duke of Albany, the earldom of Ross came into the hands of the Macdonald Lords of the Isles. Alexander, the son of Donald, achieved his late father's ambition. The earldom carried the ownership of vast properties in western Scotland which resulted in the Mackenzies and other clans becoming vassals instead of kinsmen to the Macdonalds. The new earl of Ross continued to hold the title of Lord of the Isles and the Macdonald clan became so powerful that they frequently came into conflict with the king who was relatively powerless against their uprisings.

Alexander, Lord of the Isles, was succeeded by his son John who is described by his clan historians as a “meek and modest man”. His meekness was more than made up by his son Angus Og. Angus rebelled fiercely, not only against

the king, but against his father. John at some point appointed Angus his lieutenant and representative and the ungrateful Angus promptly declared himself Lord of the Isles. There are records of a great sea battle which was fought between John, Lord of the Isles and his son Angus at Bloody Bay in north-east Mull.

Angus next carried out an invasion on Atholl. If this were not enough Angus allied himself with his father and, supported by the English and the Earl of Douglas, sought by a treaty dated 1462 to overthrow the kingdom of Scotland and share in the spoils. Nothing came of this dangerous scheme. But in 1473 Angus was again up in arms and was such a thorough nuisance that even his father decided that it was time to call a halt to these activities. He was concerned that the irresponsible actions of his son could lead to the destruction of his house. John succeeded in recovering his title of Lord of the Isles with the assistance of some strong allies but the king retained the earldom of Ross and some other privileges and lands as the price of his remission. The lords of the Isles held the earldom of Ross from about 1436 to 1475.

Angus Og was not finished, however. He headed his clan against the Earl of Atholl, but the earl was joined by the Mackenzies, Mackays and Frasers and this alliance smashed Angus at Lagebread. Angus escaped but his clan suffered enormous slaughter. The king eventually declared forfeit the title and possessions of the Lord of the Isles. Angus and his father died within a short time of each other leaving no powerful leadership and things became quiet on the Macdonald front for a few years.

It was partly due to the refusal of Alexander Mackenzie to support his superior, the Earl of Ross, against King James I which laid the foundation to subsequent royal favours for the Mackenzies at the expense of the mighty Lords of the Isles.

There is further evidence that the Mackenzies were in possession of the lands of Kintail in 1471 when “Alexander of Kintail” appears as a charter witness. In an earlier charter, said to have been dated 1463, but now unfortunately missing, John, Lord of the Isles and Earl of Ross, gave Alexander Mackenzie of Kintail the lands of Garve and Kinlochluichart to defray expenses in making peace between the king and the earl. It therefore appears that by 1471 the Mackenzies, under the leadership of Alexander the Upright were in possession of lands in eastern and central Ross—shire as well as Kintail in western Ross.

Alexander Mackenzie the Upright was undoubtedly one of the greatest of the clan chiefs building as he did the power of the clan while staying a loyal subject of his king. He eventually died at Kinellan at an advanced age. It is believed he was buried at Iona.

There is some doubt as to the actual year of his death which has been given by different authorities as 1472, 1488 and 1491. Duncan Warrand believed 1472 to have been the most likely year, though the Earl of Cromartie states it to have been 1491.

Alexander Mackenzie had three sons, the first two from his first marriage:

1. Kenneth Mackenzie of Kintail. He became known as Coinneach a Bhlair, or, Kenneth of the Battle, for his leadership at the Battle of the Park in 1491. He was knighted by King James IV.
2. Duncan Mackenzie. He is believed to have been the ancestor of the Mackenzies of Hilton and Loggie.
3. Hector Roy Mackenzie. The ancestor of the Mackenzies of Gairloch, Letterewe, Mountgerald, Lochend-Portmore, Muirton-Belmaduthy and Flowerburn. Hector was to play an important part in clan history when his elder brother Kenneth died. He held the wardship of his nephew, John Mackenzie of Kintail, until he reached his majority. More of him later.

### **Kenneth of the Battle. (Coinneach a Bhlair) Chief 1491—1492.**

Alexander Mackenzie's eldest son and heir was Kenneth Mackenzie of Kintail. He is of particular interest to clan historians since his effigy, clad in full plate armour, is probably the earliest known surviving likeness of a Mackenzie. The tomb with his effigy is situated in the ancient roofless shell of the priory at Beaully in Inverness-shire which was built by Hugh Fraser of Lovat (1416-1440). Prior Mackenzie is known to have repaired the buildings and it is recorded that he died in 1479. Prior Mackenzie's tomb is also to be found in the ruins of Beaully Priory. Some traditions hold that this prior was a natural son of Alexander Ionraic.

The inscription carved in the stone of the tomb of Sir Kenneth Mackenzie of Kintail reads:

hic . iacet . kanycus . mkynych . dns . de . kyntayl . qi . obiit . vii .  
die . februarii . ao . di . / m cccc . lxxxxi.

(Here lies Kenneth Mackenzie Lord of Kintail who died the 7th day of February, A.D.1491).

He actually died in 1492, 1491 being the year in the old church calendar. He was otherwise known as “Kenneth of the Battle” for the part he played in the Battle of the Park, (Blar na Paire).

Another and similar 15th century tomb to that of Kenneth of Kintail with the effigy of a lady of the Mackenzie clan can be seen among the ruins of the old Abbey of Fearn in Easter Ross.

Kenneth was known to be a tenant of certain lands in Easter Ross. According to the Exchequer Rolls of 1480 he failed to pay his rents. Lord Lovat

was his cautioner (or his surety in Scots law) and he had the estate of Kynnell (Kinnellan?) appraised from him (i.e. valued and put up for sale) as a result of Kenneth's non payment of rent. Kenneth claimed he had a charter from the Earl of Ross of the lands of Moyne and elsewhere in Easter Ross but he could only produce a copy of the supposed deed. It is claimed by some historians that Kenneth was a native of Easter Ross and not of Kintail. Nevertheless, his importance as clan chief grew following the forfeiture of the earldom of Ross in 1476 and he came to possess Kintail, probably through inheritance from his father. Howsoever these lands came to be acquired, the Mackenzie chiefs were thereafter known as the Mackenzies of Kintail.

The Mackenzie clan seems to have run into some trouble with Lord Huntly in 1499, who was at that time, the Sheriff of Inverness. It appears that the clan had undertaken a little plundering in Strathglass and Ardmeanach which had upset some of the local people. Although Kenneth was dead in 1499, he himself had certainly cast covetous eyes on the Redcastle estate in Ardmeanach and successfully wrested it away from Rose of Kilravock. Legal title to the Redcastle estate was acquired later.

Kenneth was first married to Margaret, a granddaughter of Alexander, Lord of the Isles and the Earl of Ross. This marriage was arranged by Alexander Ionraic who believed that such a union would help cement peace between the Macdonalds and the Mackenzies. The Lord of the Isles approved and the wedding duly took place.

Subsequently, Alexander of Lochalsh, a kinsman and heir apparent to the Lord of the Isles held a great feast at Balconie to which he invited all of his dependants and many of the more powerful of the Highland chieftans. Kenneth turned up to these festivities somewhat later than the other guests, bringing with him forty able-bodied men, but he was not accompanied by his Macdonald wife, Margaret, which was held to be an insult by Lochalsh. There was insufficient room in the Balconie house for all of the guests and Kenneth was provided with lodgings in the kiln. It was now the turn of Mackenzie to feel slighted and in a fit of anger he struck out at one of the Macleans of Duart who had been entrusted with the accommodation arrangements. This hot-headed action by Kenneth was immediately seen by the servants as a deliberate insult against their Macdonald chief and took up arms against the guest and his companions. Kenneth and his men decided, wisely, on a quick retreat.

Seizing some conveniently located boats, Kenneth and his men escaped and made their way to the humble home of a Macdonald tenant, who, they learned, had no surname. Kenneth was still boiling with rage at the affront to his dignity and asked the tenant to put him up overnight and if he would agree to adopt the name of Mackenzie he would receive the protection of the clan. The tenant agreed to this proposal and Kenneth was able to declare that he had slept that night under the roof of one of his own name. Honour was preserved!

Kenneth returned to Kinellan where his aged father, Alexander Ionraic, lived. He was very disturbed to hear of the problems that had arisen and knowing the pride of the Lord of the Isles foresaw dangers of this event escalating into a dangerous conflict. Kenneth, however, refused to listen to his father's wise counsel and quietly pondered his revenge. He was beaten to the punch, however, when a message was received from Macdonald instructing Kenneth and his father, Alexander Ionraic, to quit Kinellan within twenty four hours leaving Lady Margaret, his own cousin, to remove from Kinellan at her own leisure.

The testy and hot-tempered Kenneth exploded at this ultimatum and made his mind up that he would get rid of his wife and send her back to her hated relatives. According to one of the more improbable legends, his wife is supposed to have been blind in one eye and, in order to give the ultimate insult to her Macdonald family and mock her disability, Kenneth is said to have sent her back to her family mounted on a one-eyed horse, accompanied by a one-eyed servant and a one-eyed dog. This deliberate humiliation is said to have upset the Macdonalds still further. This poor lady is also supposed to have given birth to a son and heir, Kenneth Og. He certainly seems to have been a mysterious character and there are doubts that he ever existed. *The Scots Peerage* disposes of Kenneth Og by having him killed at Torwood near Stirling before 1499.

Leaving aside the strange one-eyed wife and her disappearing son Kenneth Og, there is no doubt that Kenneth next married Agnes Fraser. Agnes is believed to have been the daughter of Hugh, Lord Fraser of Lovat. Kenneth and Agnes had four sons and two daughters:

1. John Mackenzie of Kintail, (John of Killin).
2. Alexander Mackenzie. The ancestor of the Mackenzies of Davochmaluag.
3. Roderick (Rorie Mor) Mackenzie. From his natural children descend the Mackenzies of Achilty, Ardross and Fairburn as well as other branches. Roderick was killed at the Battle of Flodden.
4. Kenneth Mackenzie. Known as the "Priest of Avoch". It is believed that the Mackenzies of Kilchrist and Suddie descend from Kenneth and also the Mackenzies of Inverlael, Ord, Highfield, Little Finden, and Corryvulzie. Although Kenneth was a Roman Catholic priest he insisted on getting himself married. The bishop therefore put him trial to have him deposed. On the day of the trial Kenneth appeared with his brother Roderick, who had something of a reputation as a warrior. Kenneth wore his long priest's robes under which he had concealed his large two-handed sword. He whispered



to the bishop, "It is best you should let me alone, for my brother Rorie is in the churchyard with many ill men and if you will take off my orders he will take off your head and I myself will not be your best friend." The sight of Kenneth's sword and of the "ill men" gathered in the churchyard convinced the bishop that there was not too much harm in an occasional priest being married and he duly absolved Kenneth from such red tape.

5. Agnes. She became the wife of Hector Munro of Foulis.

The family histories of both the Mackenzies and the Frasers add yet further colour to the story of this Kenneth and his marriage to Agnes. According to tradition, Kenneth took two hundred of his well-armed men and besieged the home of Lord Lovat, the chief of the Clan Fraser. Lord Lovat was somewhat surprised at this effrontery and demanded to know Kenneth's purpose. Kenneth explained that he had just rid himself of his wife Margaret and he wanted a suitable bride that would bring honour and distinction to his house. He therefore sought the hand of Lovat's daughter Agnes in marriage. He further explained that provided Lovat handed over his daughter he would swear eternal friendship with the Frasers. If, on the other hand, Lovat did not concur with his demands then mortal enmity would result and in this regard he pointed to the armed escort gathered outside Lovat's house.

Whilst it cannot be denied that Lord Lovat was surprised by this unique method of seeking betrothal, he also happened to have no particular love for the Lord of the Isles and what was more, a family tie with the increasingly powerful Mackenzies was no bad thing in these turbulent times. Furthermore he was dealing with an unorthodox and hot-headed young man determined to have his way. Lovat consented to the union, subject to his daughter's concurrence. Agnes herself raised no objection to the suit and they were subsequently married.

The Mackenzies played no small part in the downfall of the fractious and overbearing Macdonald Earls of Ross, and Lords of the Isles and there is no doubt that King James III was particularly grateful to them. Alexander Mackenzie (Ionraic) was actually granted wide areas of land in Strathconon before he died, which had been forfeited by the earl. Other forfeited Macdonald lands were given to the Rosses and Munros.

The struggle for lands and power was a continuing process and the part the Mackenzies played in causing the ruin of the Lords of the Isles while simultaneously adding to their estates did nothing to smooth the relationship between the powerful clans of Macdonald and Mackenzie. The animosity between the two clans and their respective supporters came to a head with a particularly bloody battle which came to be known as the Blar na Pairc.