



Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd

Services To Raasay

December 2012



The island of Raasay, part of the parish of Portree, lies off the east coast of Skye and is separated from it by the Sound of Raasay. It runs roughly north to south for about thirteen miles and over a great deal of its length is three miles wide. The island's highest hill is Dun Caan which rises to 1456 feet and can be seen for miles around. Along the east coast is a series of cliffs which fall sharply into the sea, but the land to the south west is low and fertile – that is where most of the population of 180 live today.

The first successful paddle steamer in Europe, the *Comet*, first sailed 'doon the watter' two hundred years ago, in August 1812. It was over thirty years before Raasay was served by steam – until then, from time immemorial, it relied on sail for its transport. In June 1846 the *Mary Jane* was built for James Mathieson (later Sir James) of Lewis and called after his wife. She commenced plying between Glasgow and Stornoway. - en route she called at Raasay, lying at anchor in the sheltered Churchton Bay while small boats ferried goods and passengers ashore.

David Hutcheson, with his brother Alexander and David MacBrayne as partners, took over most of the West Highland services in 1851. They placed the *Duntroon Castle* (1842) on the run from Glasgow to Portree and so she was the ship which served Raasay. Meanwhile the *Mary Jane* was sold for Clyde service, and, in an agreement with Sir James Matheson, the first *Islay* (1849) extended her voyage from Glasgow and Islay to Skye and Stornoway, calling at Raasay en route. In 1853, the new *Chevalier*, quite a superior vessel, took over from the *Duntroon Castle*. Raasay, then, was served by two steamers of different companies working in tandem.

Sconsier looking towards Raasay







Loch Bhruisda at Sconser

“

This was the time of the American Civil War and the *Fingal* was snapped up by the Confederates

The first stone of a 'new pier' on Raasay was laid in May 1854 and the pier which was to last for several years was soon in use, not just by the regular steamers but also, more importantly, by vessels having to do with the iron works on the island. Its longevity is despite its almost being washed away in heavy seas in December 1858.

Sadly, the *Chevalier* did not last long, as she was wrecked on Iron Rock in the Sound of Jura in November 1854, and replaced by the first *Clansman* (1855). She lasted until July 1869, when she too was wrecked after grounding on Deep Island off Sanda. Traffic was so heavy at this time that the service was doubled, the second steamer being the *Dolphin* (1844), followed by the former Irish steamer *Stork* (1851) in 1858 and the first screw steamer to serve Raasay, the new *Fingal* in 1861. This was the time of the American Civil War and the *Fingal* was snapped up by the Confederates as a blockade runner after only a few months. Her replacement was the first *Clydesdale* (1862) and she continued as one of the

main bi-weekly Glasgow-Stornoway steamers for some twenty years. Meanwhile the *Clansman* was replaced by a screw steamer of the same name: the second *Clansman* (1870) was on the run for almost forty years. In late 1881 she was joined by arguably the greatest of the Glasgow-Stornoway steamers, the first *Claymore*. Raasay was thus served by two of the finest all-the-way passenger; mail, cargo and livestock steamers for many years.

Meanwhile, a very important development has to be recorded. On 19 August 1870 the Dingwall & Skye Railway reached Strome Ferry on Loch Carron and the first railway to the West Highland seaboard was opened. A pier was built and, though it was all of fifteen miles from Kyleakin, the nearest point on Skye, a steamer link was vital to the success of the new venture. David Hutcheson had refused to entertain providing a connecting steamer and so the company had themselves to look to second-hand tonnage. They found two ageing screw steamers. The *Oscar* (1850) and *Jura* (1857) were duly

purchased and commenced a daily service to Portree and a weekly one to Stornoway – calling at Raasay of course. After only three months the *Oscar* ran on to the rocks near Applecross; the company decided that one vessel would suffice and that the connection for Stornoway could be made with the Hutcheson steamer at Portree. Traffic was very sparse, the islanders preferring to travel by the Hutcheson steamer to and from Glasgow. A smaller vessel was therefore called upon and the company bought *PS Carham* (1864) from the North British Railway in 1872. Although she sailed uneventfully over the next two years, by the end of 1873 she was in a bad way, and so the company decided to buy the screw steamer *Ferret* (1872), which had been in the Irish trade. She became the main service vessel, although the *Carham* was retained for various ancillary duties. It was a great relief to the Dingwall & Skye when the Highland Railway bought over their two ships in September 1877, but finances did not improve and they continued to make a heavy loss.

David Hutcheson was by now an old man; he retired in 1876, his brother followed in 1878 and from 1879 David MacBrayne assumed the role of sole partner; the company being thus renamed. One of his early acts was to overcome Hutcheson's reluctance to get involved in Strome Ferry: from 19 April 1880 he took over the steamers and provided a daily service to Raasay and Portree. The ship he provided at first was the *SS Lochiel* (1877) but during the summer season the vessel to be seen on the run was the *Glencoe*, none other than a rejuvenated and re-named *Mary Jane* which had visited Raasay while on the Stornoway route thirty years before. Circumstances were such that the *Glencoe* was in some seasons required as an excursion steamer out of Oban and from 1883 to 1884 and from 1886 to 1887 the Strome Ferry mail boat was none other than the *Clydesdale*, which was a very familiar sight in Raasay, having been one of the Stornoway 'cargo' steamers.



Loch Bhrusda at Raasay

In 1891 MacBrayne bought *PS Great Western* (1867) from the Great Western Railway and two years later, renovated and renamed *Lovedale*, she was commissioned on the Strome Ferry run, remaining there for some ten years. It was during this period, in November 1897, that the Highland Railway won through to Kyle of Lochalsh, a very short distance from the Isle of Skye across the narrow Kyle Akin: the *Lovedale* was in place for the first voyage from Kyle to Raasay and Portree. In 1901 the North British line opened to Mallaig, on the coastline some distance south of Kyle, and the mailboat now terminated there several times per week, although the actual mail contract remained with the Highland Railway.



MV Raasay

The Glasgow-Islay steamer *Islay* was lost in 1902 and the *Lovedale* saw out the last couple of years of her life as her replacement. The Portree-Kyle-Mallaig roster was entrusted to none other than the *Lochiel*, which had been David MacBrayne's first ship on the Strome Ferry route. She only lasted on the run, however, until 1905, for in

that year another veteran returned to the Raasay and Portree route, namely the *Glencoe*. She had been serving Islay from West Loch Tarbert and had been displaced by a new steamer, *PS Pioneer*. In the following year, incidentally, David MacBrayne retired – David MacBrayne Ltd was set up with his son, David Hope MacBrayne, as chairman. A less conservative approach could be discerned – for example the internal combustion engine made its appearance both in new tonnage and in land vehicles – but the new partner to the *Claymore* on the run from Glasgow was a 'glorious anachronism'. The *Clansman's* replacement *Chieftain* looked more like a millionaire's yacht but still had to handle the cargo and livestock transported to and from Raasay and the other islands. During this period, in 1913, a new substantial pier at Suisnish, a little to the south of Churchton Bay, was constructed by Robert McAlpine & Sons, once again mainly for the iron ore industry. Later, the steamers began calling there instead of the old pier:

All changed in 1914 when Great Britain declared war

on Germany, the conflict continuing until 1918. The services from Mallaig and Kyle to Raasay and Portree and to Stornoway were combined and were entrusted to *SS Sheila* (1904), MacBrayne's first triple expansion steamship, which had replaced the ageing *Clydesdale* on the Stornoway mail service. The changed circumstances in 1919 dictated that the *Chieftain* was too expensive to run and she was sold. The *Claymore's* roster changed and she now left Glasgow every ten days on the 'Skye and Mainland' route; she was partnered by a cargo only vessel which became the *Locheil* (third of the name). It was not until 1920 that the *Glencoe* returned to Skye on a regular basis; she and the *Sheila* proceeded from Kyle to Mallaig on alternate days to save each of the mail vessels sailing daily up and down the Sound of Sleat, passengers transferring at Kyle as required. Disaster struck on New Year's Day 1927 when the *Sheila* ran aground and became a total loss. As a result of this and the loss of two other crack ships under similar circumstances MacBrayne became bankrupt and the company had to be

rescued jointly by the LMS Railway and Coast Lines Ltd. One of the conditions of the new mail contract was that new ships had to be built, the first being a screw ship for Stornoway, the last steamship to be built for the Company – in 1929. This was the *Lochness* and when she took up the run the timetable changed significantly so that it was no longer possible to interchange passengers with the *Glencoe* at Kyle. The old paddler therefore had to sail for Mallaig every day. It was also in 1929, incidentally, that the *Locheil* was called away from the Stornoway cargo run to be replaced by an old Coast Lines boat originally named *Grouse* (1891) but rechristened *Lochdunvegan*. It was in 1930 that the *Claymore* herself was withdrawn after fifty years. Her place was taken by steamer which was ten years her senior but whose boilers were in a better state of repair. She became known as *Lochbroom*. Both cargo steamers which called at Raasay were therefore changed in two years.

The *Glencoe*, at 85 by now almost the world's oldest steamer, was withdrawn in 1931.



All changed in 1914 when Great Britain declared war on Germany



Waverley and Loch Striven at Raasay 2011



Waverley at Raasay 2011

“
At the commissioning of the *Loch Arkaig* ambitious plans to introduce car ferries into the MacBrayne fleet were announced.”

Another of the new ships, the Diesel Electric Vessel *Lochfyne*, had become the Oban excursion steamer; displacing *PS Fusilier* (1888). It was this old paddler which took over the mantle of Portree mail steamer; thus becoming Raasay's main link with the mainland. She only lasted three years, however; before she was sold out of the fleet. The *Lochfyne* had been so successful that a second such ship was built – the *Lochnevis*. She took up the Portree mail run in July 1934 and remained on it until the Second World War.

War broke out in September 1939; it was in April 1940 that a boom was erected across the Sound of Sleat and Mallaig and Kyle were cut off from each other. The *Lochnevis* remained on the Portree-Raasay-Kyle service until the end of November; when she was requisitioned as a minelayer. As in the Great War, Raasay was served by the Stornoway mail steamer; the *Lochness* calling three days per week. She frequently ran quite late because of her cargo commitments and late trains. The *Lochnevis* was not free to return to Skye and Raasay until late November

1945, once again from both Mallaig and Kyle. Her calls at Raasay soon became established at 0830 on the morning run to Kyle and Mallaig and 1605 on the return. In most years, the *Lochnevis* disappeared from Portree and Raasay three times – early in the year for her own overhaul, in the late spring when she relieved on the Islay route and in the late summer when she was employed on special livestock sailings. Her relief was normally one of the Inner/Outer Isles diesel ships of 1930, the *Lochearn* or *Lochmor*, but occasionally the passenger vessel *Lochfyne*.

MacBrayne's announced in the summer of 1958 that the grossly uneconomic Portree mail service should be withdrawn. Following the end of rationing in the early fifties there had been a huge boom in private car ownership and almost all traffic to Skye now went by the car ferry service between Kyle and Kyleakin where new and more substantial turntable ferries were periodically added to the route. Raasay could be served by a converted MFV linking it with Portree. The islanders of Skye and

Raasay were unhappy with this arrangement and a compromise had to be reached. The *Lochnevis* was indeed withdrawn in April 1959 but the redundant *MV Lochinvar* (1908) replaced her. However, she was a disaster in her new role and did not survive past October. Meanwhile MacBrayne's bought a wooden inshore minesweeper dating from 1942: she was stripped, given a new lightweight aluminium superstructure and renamed *Loch Arkaig*. She took up the Portree-Raasay-Kyle service in April 1960, extended to Mallaig in summer. An innovation was that she sometimes offered evening cruises from Portree – to Raasay among other places.

At the commissioning of the *Loch Arkaig* ambitious plans to introduce car ferries into the MacBrayne fleet were announced. As a corollary, the Company purchased the following year a small pilot boat *Valonia* (1947) to serve the Small Isles of Eigg, Muck, Rum and Canna, as the traditional service would no longer be given. Renamed *Loch Eynort*, she was indeed commissioned in 1964 but

on the Portree-Raasay-Kyle route (not extended to Mallaig). Being smaller and slower than the *Loch Arkaig*, she was not exactly popular. Meanwhile it was the *Loch Arkaig* which attended to the Small Isles. One of the new hoist-loading car ferries, the *Clansman* (1964), in the same year introduced a dual-purpose facility from Mallaig to Armadale in the south east of Skye, offering seven crossings daily. Traffic on the passenger run to Portree fell even further. It came as no surprise, therefore, that in 1965 the Portree-Raasay run was combined with the Small Isles roster with the *Loch Arkaig* once again. This was more acceptable as she was 50% faster than the *Loch Eynort*, but the service was no longer daily. Interestingly, the *Loch Arkaig* offered in 1966 a special 'car ferry' service from Kyle to Raasay on Fridays and Saturdays during her lay-off time.

It was in that same year, 1966, that MacBrayne's proposed a car ferry service between Sconser in Skye and Churchton Bay in Raasay but they were vehemently opposed by Raasay's absentee landlord Dr Green. It was almost



MV Raasay

ten years, on 18 March 1975, before an Island Class bow-loading ferry *Eigg*, able to carry six cars, started a new route from Portree to Raasay, landing on the shingle near Raasay Pier. While the *Loch Arkaig* was now able to concentrate on the Small Isles roster, the *Eigg* offered two services daily, at 0800/0900 and 1530/1630. A further Island Class ferry, the *Canna*, took over in January 1976 and on Good Friday that year she handed the new slipway at Sconser: from that date calls at Portree ceased after 125 years. The *Canna* used a temporary slipway at Raasay Pier and so the short crossing so long promised was inaugurated with a minimum of three double runs each day. Two months later her sister ship, appropriately called *Raasay*, took over the service.

Meanwhile both MacBrayne's and the railway company on the Clyde, The Caledonian Steam Packet Co. Ltd., had been taken over, in 1969, by a new quango, the Scottish Transport Group, and it was not long before the two companies amalgamated – on 1 January 1973 – as Caledonian MacBrayne

Ltd. Over the years, the all-the-way cargo services which had been such a prominent feature of the Western Isles services in the early days were phased out, ceasing permanently in November 1976. The next major change occurred in October 2006 when the Company was split into two - Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd (CMAL) which retained ownership of CalMac vessels, piers and slipways, and a vessel-operating company CalMac Ferries Ltd. This latter had to tender to operate the services to the islands and peninsulas of the Clyde and Western Isles: in October 2007 they did so successfully, initially for six years.

1979 saw Raasay slip reconstructed and widened, while a car park was provided. Following press complaints about the infrequent nature of the service, nine double runs were given from 1993 together with a late run on Fridays. A significant improvement occurred in 1997 when the larger *Loch Striven* (1986) replaced the *Raasay* on 28 July and became Raasay's dedicated ferry. No longer required

on the Clyde, she was a boon to the island, as she could carry 12 cars and 199 passengers at 9 knots.

The capacity was thus doubled, although the small ferry still relieved her for some time in winter. Eventually, one of her sister ships, *Loch Linnhe* or *Loch Riddon* acted as relief ferry. In 1999 the Rural Transport Initiative paid for an enhanced service with an extra midday crossing. From the start of the winter timetable in October 2007 passage time was increased from fifteen to twenty minutes. That year the owners of the slipway and pier on Raasay, Highland Council, awarded a contract worth £12 million to Balfour Beatty to construct a new pier 150 metres long (including a 40 metre dog leg to provide shelter), made of unreinforced concrete. The new terminal in Churchton Bay was formally opened by the then Scottish Minister for Transport, Stewart Stevenson, on 17 August 2010, several months behind schedule, the delay blamed on severe weather. It was about 1.5 miles north of the old pier at

Suisnish, which had reached the end of its working life.

In February 2011 the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Keith Brown, confirmed Scottish Government funding to CMAL for the Low Emission Hybrid Ferries Project, which would see the development of the world's first sea-going roll-on roll-off vehicle and passenger diesel electric hybrid ferries in Scotland. Ferguson Shipbuilders in Port Glasgow won the contract and worked alongside Glasgow-based ship design specialists Seatec and electrical specialists Tec-Source to build the two hybrid ferries.

The ferries were designed to use some of the most innovative new 'green' technology, including battery banks supplying a minimum of 20% of the energy consumed on board. They were designed to accommodate 150 passengers, 23 cars or 2 HGVs, with a service speed of nine knots. They were to be powered by small diesel generator sets, feeding power to a 400 volt switchboard supplying power to electric propulsion motors which would turn the propulsion units. In addition two lithium-ion battery banks with a total of 700kWh would be able to supply power to the units reducing fuel and CO2 consumption by at least 20%. The battery banks would be charged

overnight from the mains. The vessel design and power configuration were designed to realise 19-24% savings of power input to the propulsion units over a conventional diesel mechanical solution reducing carbon dioxide, sulphur dioxide and nitrous oxide emissions. Following a competition, the name *Hallaig* was chosen for the first of the new vessels. This is the name of a village on the remote north east coast of Raasay which inspired a poem of the name by the Gaelic writer Sorley MacLean. This is appropriate as the first hybrid ferry, launched at Ferguson's on 17 December 2012, is due to enter service on the Sconser-Raasay route in the summer of 2013, displacing the *Loch Striven*.

Image below: Computer generated model of the *Hallaig*, launched 17th December 2012





Municipal Buildings
Fore Street
Port Glasgow
PA14 5EQ