



Before Telford

Communication was poor with no roads suitable for wheeled vehicles. Drivers and travellers used existing tracks. Maps show that there were inns at Kincardine and Culrain.

The Firth and major rivers were crossed by ferries using cobbles, yawls and boats, fording or swimming cattle because there were no bridges. We know of ferries at Bonar, Portinleck (Invershin), Tighnever and Ochtow. The main ferries for going north or south were at Meikle Ferry near Dornoch and Little Ferry near Golspie.

The population was considerable, but the large parishes meant many people had difficulties attending church services.



Map by Joseph Avery for General Wade, c. 1730, showing tracks before Telford. ©National Libraries of Scotland

Telford's building works in the Kyle of Sutherland

Telford built a network of roads, bridges of all sizes, and a church and manse at Croick between 1811 and 1827. His roads form the basis of the present road network. The key element was the crossing over the Firth. Ferries were proposed at both Portinleck (Invershin) and Creich, but ultimately it was decided to cross at Bonar replacing the ferry with a bridge. The innovative iron bridge at Bonar and masonry bridge with sluice gates at the Mound allowed travellers north or south to avoid using Meikle and Little Ferry.

Tollhouses were built to collect money for repairs, including one at Bonar. None remain, but some of the milestones erected can still be seen, most probably dating after Telford's time.

At Croick Telford built a parliamentary church designed to seat 200 and a manse nearby. Together they cost £1,426.

Some of the Telford remains in the area survive and can be visited as shown on the map overleaf.



After Telford

Telford completely changed the area, improving communication, offering employment and skills, leading to the growth of Bonar Bridge and travelling facilities.

Telford's roads removed the need to use inconvenient and dangerous ferries. The quality of the road network allowed both wheeled vehicles and cattle. The Highland Mail Coach from Inverness to Thurso via the bridge now ran daily, and local mail services were also established.

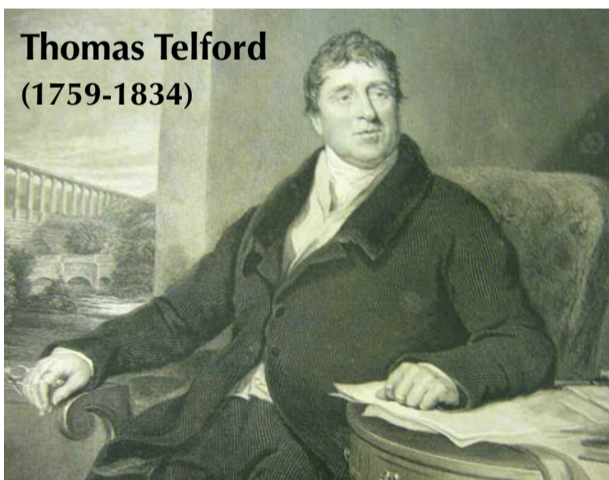
Inns opened at Clashmore, Bonar and Ardgay, and others expanded to provide accommodation and food for commercial travellers and tourists.

The building of the roads gave local employment, leading to skilled masons and workmen. New trades were able to set up. With the opening of Bonar Bridge, the village expanded. By 1834 it was already a place of considerable trade, where the Great Kyle cattle market was held yearly.

With the building of Croick church people in remote glens were able to attend regular worship.

The Commissioners of Roads and Bridges final report in 1862 concluded that they left the Highlands 'with wealthy proprietors, a profitable agriculture, a thriving population and active industry... and the condition of every class of people improved.' - but locals who were cleared from their lands might have disagreed with some of these statements.

Thomas Telford (1759-1834)



Thomas Telford was a Scots-born engineer, project manager and poet who changed the face of the Highlands.

He was involved with inspecting harbours and fisheries from 1790. After 1802 he turned to improving the transport network. He and his teams also worked elsewhere, especially in Wales, Shropshire and Sweden.

Telford took an advanced approach, keeping a tight rein on finance and requiring tenders for work. Landlords were required to contribute half the costs to the schemes, and they then benefitted from better communication.

Roads were only one aspect of Telford's work. He also built piers, harbours, canals (from the impressive Caledonian Canal to the simple Dingwall one), churches and manses and even towns such as Pultneytown in Wick. At the end of his work, over 1000 miles of roads and over 100 stone bridges were completed.



This leaflet was produced in 2014 by a group exploring Telford's work in the Kyle of Sutherland. Over several months participants researched Telford's activities, visited remains, documented an unrecorded Telford bridge, and produced a display, this leaflet and a geocache.

The courses and events were organised by ARCH (Archaeology for Communities in the Highlands), with funding from the Robertson Trust and the E.ON Rosehall Community Fund managed by Foundation Scotland. Participants would like to thank Highland Council Archives. Further information about the sites described in this leaflet, as well as others in the area, can be found in the binder of resources deposited in Bonar Bridge Library and Kyle of Sutherland Heritage Centre.

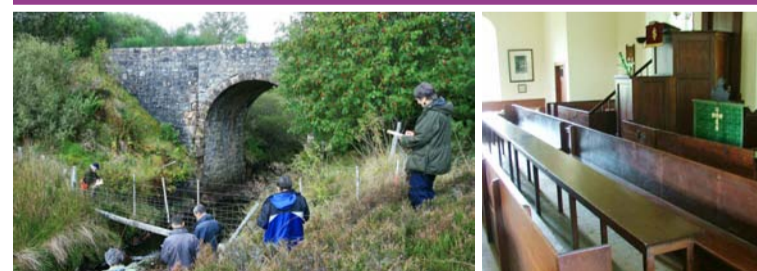
ARCH - www.archhighland.org.uk
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Thomas Telford Trail



AROUND THE KYLE OF SUTHERLAND



Thomas Telford Trail

AROUND THE KYLE OF SUTHERLAND

Shin Bridge

This road bridge was not built by Telford, but by the county in 1822. However, Telford advised on the plans created by John Mitchell, his chief inspector. It was part the county's road from Lochinver, designed to link to Telford's Bonar Bridge to Tongue road.



Geocache

As part of the project geocaches have been placed at some of the sites on the trail. See www.geocaching.com

Invershin Milestone

This milestone is located a short distance to the south of the inn. It is of concrete, as are all on the north side of the Firth, so must date much later than the roads. It is situated near the old ferry crossing of Portinleck.



Croick Church



Croick Church and Manse

The government built 32 churches and 41 manses in the Highlands and Islands, all to a standard design. The church at Croick is one of the smallest but preserves many internal fittings. Note also the window etched with names of crofters evicted from their land. The gate near the bell tower leads to a field where remains of a two-thousand year old broch can be seen. The single-story manse down the road is now a holiday home.



The Easter Fearn bridge presented obvious challenges to build. Although it appears to be a classic Telford bridge, it was rebuilt in 1839 after the original washed away in floods.



Milestone



Toilets



Parking



Sites of Toll Houses



Site of Inns

Key



Viewpoint

WC



Toilets



Parking



Sites of Toll Houses



Site of Inns

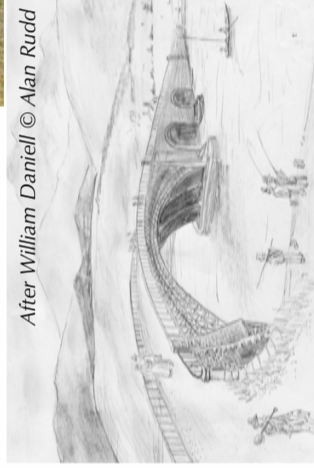
Lairg Station

Bridge over the Allt na Fearnna Mor

This previously unrecorded bridge is of a classic Telford design. It carried road traffic until the 1990s. Much of the route between Bonar Bridge and Lairg has been redirected. Access along old road, to the north of the layby.



After William Daniell © Alan Rudd



Bonar Bridge

The bridge at Bonar was one of the first iron bridges in the country, and was immediately considered an iconic and beautiful structure when it was built in 1812. It withstood flood and collisions by logs, ice and ships until floods swept it away in 1892. A plaque erected shortly after it was built can be seen on the north side of the current bridge, which is the third bridge at this location.

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Carron Bridge

The Carron Bridge was built by Alexander Thomas Muirson in 1818 for Ross & Cromarty County over one of the major river crossings to the south of the Firth. This route would have been used to carry materials when building Croick church. The bridge has a small gated arch, probably to allow animals to go under it.

Parking on the south side of the bridge.



Easter Fearn Bridge

The Easter Fearn bridge presented obvious challenges to build. Although it appears to be a classic Telford bridge, it was rebuilt in 1839 after the original washed away in floods.

Park and view with great care.



Ardvannie Milestone

This milestone opposite the layby is one of several surviving on the south side of the Firth. Unlike the ones to the north, they are of stone, with destinations chiselled into the faces. Its date is unknown, but probably post-Telford.

The Mound

At the Mound, Telford built a long causeway and a bridge allowing travellers to bypass Little Ferry. The bridge has innovative sluice gates to prevent sea water going into Loch Fleet, but allowing fresh water to flow out. As a result, land was reclaimed for cultivation. Currently the area is also renowned for its birdlife. One of the original winches from the gates can be seen at HistoryLinks Museum in Dornoch. Later the causeway also carried the Dornoch light railway from the Mound to Dornoch.



Little Ferry Culvert

Highland roads had to cross many small burns. This small culvert could well be the original built by Telford on the road leading to Little Ferry. Despite Telford's safe roads bypassing Meikle Ferry and Little Ferry, both crossings continued to be used into the 20th century.



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Park on verge on shore road - culvert is on farm track towards the ferry

Please take great care when parking and crossing roads. Note that many structures may be unsafe. Please respect private property, and close any gates.

1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 miles

