



From Sea to Sea: A History of the Scottish Lowland and Highland Canals

Len Paterson

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The peculiar formation of the great Caledonian valley - long, deep and comparatively very narrow, and occupied by a regular chain of inland lakes and extensive arms of the sea - had long suggested the idea of a canal which by connecting the whole might afford the means of a navigable communication between the opposite sides of the island. Indeed so marked were its features in this respect, that it must have been difficult to escape the conclusion that Nature had irresistibly invited the hand of man to the completion of such an undertaking. So wrote a Victorian commentator in the 1840s in a description of the Caledonian Canal. Curiously, this observation was made some 350 years after the construction of Scotland's first canal, which was made to serve God rather than Mammon. Andrew Wood had distinguished himself in the service of James III by repelling an English fleet from the Forth and also withstanding their siege of Dumbarton. He was knighted and given lands at Largo in Fife. Around 1495 he had a canal constructed that allowed him to be conveyed, each Sunday, in his admiral's barge from his house to church! With no history of Scotland's canals currently available Len Paterson set about researching them after the successful publication of his history of the puffer trade having decided to re-assess the important part that Scotland's canals played in that story. This engaging history covers the main canals: Caledonian, Crinan, Forth and Clyde, Monkland and Union covering the last 40 years in particular detail as this is the period over which the canal system, against the odds, had been revitalised. That is the overwhelming conclusion to the story that is now told in this present volume. The peculiar formation of the great Caledonian valley - long, deep and comparatively very narrow, and occupied by a regular chain of inland lakes and extensive arms of the sea - had long suggested the idea of a canal which by connecting the whole might afford the means of a navigable communication between the opposite sides of the island. Indeed so marked were its features in this respect, that it must have been difficult to escape the conclusion that Nature had irresistibly invited the hand of man to the completion of such an undertaking. So wrote a Victorian commentator in the 1840s in a description of the Caledonian Canal. Curiously, this observation was made some 350 years after the construction of Scotland's first canal, which was made to serve God rather than Mammon. Andrew Wood had distinguished himself in the service of James III by repelling an English fleet from the Forth and also withstanding their siege of Dumbarton. He was knighted and given lands at Largo in Fife. Around 1495 he had a canal constructed that allowed him to be conveyed, each Sunday, in his admiral's barge from his house to church! With no history of Scotland's canals currently available Len Paterson set about researching them after the successful publication of his history of the puffer trade having decided to re-assess the important part that Scotland's canals played in that story. This engaging history covers the main canals: Caledonian, Crinan, Forth and Clyde, Monkland and Union covering the last 40 years in particular detail as this is the period over which the canal system, against the odds, had been revitalised. That is the overwhelming conclusion to the story that is now told in this present volume.

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