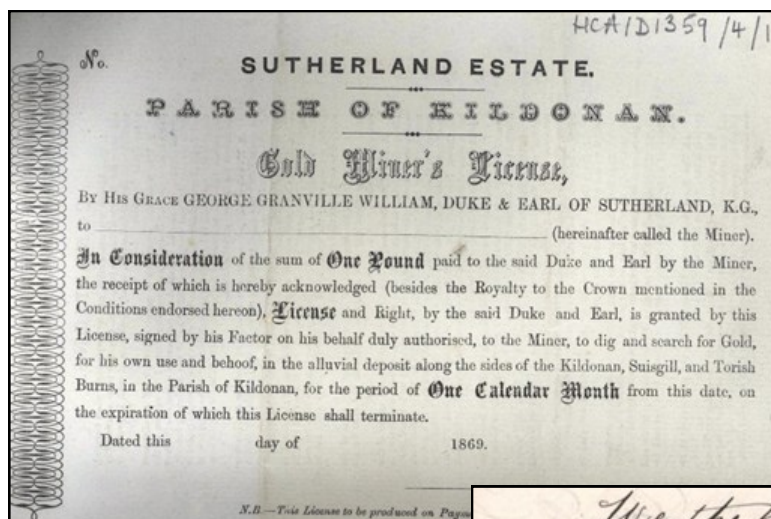
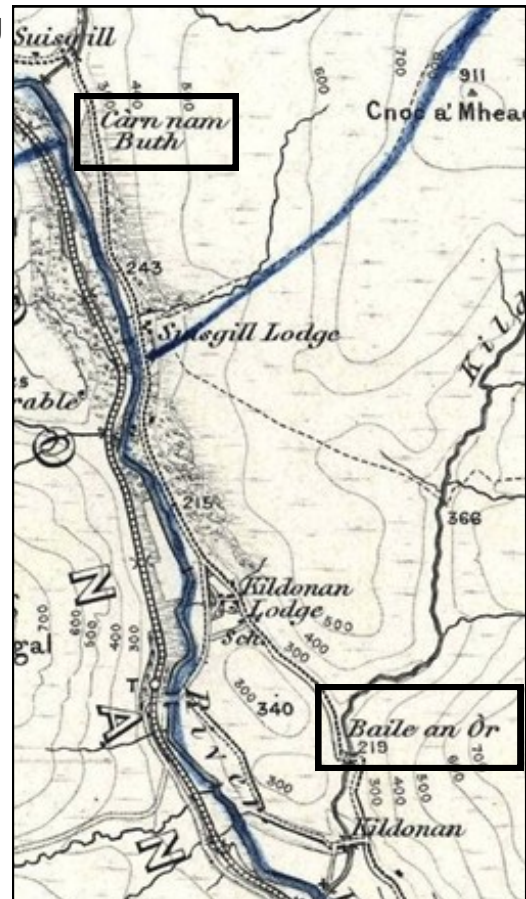


The sleepy town of Kildonan shot to fame with the discovery of gold in the area in 1868. Although not the first time gold had been discovered in the region, which was in 1818, it was certainly the most widely known gold rush in the area. The revelation came when Robert Nelson Gilchrist, a local man who had spent some years in the Australian gold fields, discovered a high concentration of gold in the Kildonan and Suisgill burns. After this was announced in local and national papers, hundreds of people flocked to the small area in the hopes of making their fortunes, 600 people at its peak in early 1869.

Due to the sudden influx of travellers to the region, small townships were set up to house the miners. Baile an Or, meaning 'Town of Gold' in Gaelic, was set up on the banks of the Kildonan Burn and Carn na Buth, 'Hill of Tents' in Gaelic, was set up on the Suisgill Burn.

As the land to be panned for gold was owned by the Duke of Sutherland, licences were granted by him to each miner for a £1 a month, with an additional 10% royalty to be paid on any gold found on the site.



After these charges were levied the rate of hopeful miners dropped significantly but many remained.

Unsurprisingly, there were petitions with over 100 signatures sent to the Duke in an attempt to bring these prices down.

We the miners of Kildonan and Suisgill find that the Gold Diggings under the present circumstances are not remunerative enough to pay the present License and Royalty, we therefore humbly pray that your grace would consider the matter with a view to a reduction of the same,

KILDONAN GOLDRUSH

August and September 1869 saw the number of miners drop further to around 50 as herring season provided alternative employment and by the end of 1869 the Gold Rush came to an end with the permits being discontinued.

The Gold Rush saw a short revival in 1911 after a plea citing the tough economic times facing the people of Kildonan saw the Duke open the Gold fields again.

The inhabitants of Helmsdale & surrounding district - at present are in a most destitute condition. The fishing industry on which they were entirely dependent - has been for the last sixteen years, a complete failure. There is practically nothing doing. Ever since the Kildonan & Suisgill Burns were closed to Gold prospectors the people have cast longing looks towards those burns & rightly or wrongly they

My Lord Duke,

In reply to Your Grace's letter

I much regret your decision to open the gold diggings at Suisgill and Kildonan, because from what I have seen of alluvial washing in Australia I am afraid that similar work on the Helmsdale will ruin the river for sport. It appears a pity to bring about this result for what has proved a failure in the past and is not likely to be more successful in the future.

These plans, however, caused significant upset from local tenants of the land and even more 'disappointment' from London, as is illustrated in the many letters the Duke received on this announcement.



The Gold Rush left its mark on Kildonan and the story has reverberated through the years. In 1989 Inverness' Eden Court Theatre saw a production of 'The Gold of Kildonan' which went on a Highland Tour.



Even today, the former site of Baile an Or is still known by that name and continues to play host to hopeful Gold panning every year.