

A Hidden Highland cave

Ever since starting my job as a Countryside Ranger based initially in Glen Nevis, I'd been intrigued by the stories of a hidden cave that had saved the lives of several members of the Cameron family after conflict on more than one occasion. I'd seen the cave marked on the map, searched for a glimpse of it when out walking. But I'd never spotted its hidden entrance. After many years I decided it was time to find the cave for myself and discover its secrets. Finding the cave was a little challenge as it is located up a slope on an almost hidden path that when wet can be very slippery and until you are almost on the cave itself and you're not even sure that you have followed the map correctly.

The entrance to the cave has a large boulder in front of it which I had to negotiate in order to enter, once I'd scrambled over the boulder I found myself in a high cavern with an amazing view back over the river, you would definitely see enemies coming long before they saw you, but if they did catch you there would be no escape. It was surprisingly dry in the cavern and would make a good hideout, so I guess it could be this area that the story talks about, but there is more to the cave than first meets the eye, there is a second chamber, accessed through a hole towards the back right of the cave, which leads downwards. For safety I waited to return with a second person to explore this area, but it was worth the short wait as this second chamber is full of rock formations which require careful negotiation. It is amazing, my eyes were wide open, shadows from my headtorch hitting the dark corners and rocks, the temperature not too hot but not too cold either, it was dry though I'm not sure anyone could have stayed in this chamber.

Being in the cave you realise that you are just the latest being to visit this place of ancient rock and that stretching right back to the caves formation the cave has been visited, from wind blown vegetation to bats, humans to wolves, maybe even the odd dinosaur passed by its entrance.

Imagine the stories these walls could tell, the secrets it holds in its walls and floor, tales of the young laird the only survivor of the massacre at Dun Dige with his servant rescuer or the story of Lady Cameron and her son's time hiding from the Redcoat soldiers after Culloden. Maybe the cave was home to the last pack of wolves in the area or a lynx, did early people stumble on the cave and take shelter on a hunting trip or was it a place of spirits or the Cailleach bheur. Maybe bats have roosted in the darkest parts and climbers used its walls for bouldering.

Looking out of the cave its easy to conjure up pictures of the past, feel the fear of Lady Cameron as she was hunted by the soldiers, the cry of her child, only the cave now knows what happened when she was discovered or of the worry of the servant who saved the young laird, hiding, knowing the enemies would kill the child if discovered and whose own dog gave his hiding place up to his wife so he had to leave Lochaber with the child. The presence of Rowan close to the entrance only serves to reinforce the secrets held within the stones of the hidden cave.



Illustration of The Snow Queen by Edmund Dulac.

Cailleach bheur is a celtic goddess associated with the creation of the landscape and with the weather, especially storms and winter.



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I wonder about the future, will the cave remain only visited by the few or become a tourist attraction, armies of tourists on guided walks visiting, leaving more than their footprints, damaging it forever or will it stand the same long after I'm gone, its memories still held within its walls and what of climate change, will it be destroyed by the forces of nature or will new species visit from far distant shores. How many more species will be lost to the cave's memory, wolves, lynx, bear, wild cat, beavers, who will be next!

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