

Battle cry for Killiecrankie to stop highway development

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Scots seeking help from Nova Scotians to help stop highway development



A group in Killiecrankie, Scotland is reaching out to Nova Scotians to sign a petition to stop a highway development from crossing a historic battleground. (CONTRIBUTED)

In a plea thrown across the Atlantic, a group of concerned Scots are asking Nova Scotians for help.

George MacLean is asking Nova Scotians to sign a petition to protest a highway project which would slather concrete over the killir field of Killiecrankie near Pitlochry, the site of the first Jacobite battle in 1689.

Outnumbered by more than two-to-one, the Jacobites took on the government army on the fields of Killiecrankie. At the end of the bloody day — July 27, 1689 — more than 2,000 men were dead and the Jacobites claimed victory.

“Our aim is to draw the attention of individuals and groups from the Scottish diaspora to the plans to destroy one of the key historic sites in Scotland,” said MacLean. He is with the group Killiecrankie 1689, made up of residents who live in a nearby village. “Once is gone, it will be gone forever.”

Instead of swords, these rebels are using signs and collecting signatures. Transport Scotland wants to twin the road, and the window for public comments closes on Jan. 23. MacLean said they’re not against upgrading the road but they don’t want key features of the battle site to be buried. The battlefield boundary is large but what’s considered the “blood field,” where the most of the action happened, is small and only one mile (1.5 kilometres) long.

“Killiecrankie is a beautiful part of Scotland and each year we commemorate the battle with re-enactment groups from the U.K. and Ireland taking part,” said MacLean in an email. “This has an ongoing economic benefit to our little village and there seems to be little point in any battle activities carrying on once the site is destroyed.”

It should mean something to many Nova Scotians as well. Killiecrankie was the first Jacobite battle but Culloden (in 1746) was the last. The Jacobites suffered a spectacular defeat and many Scots later escaped to Nova Scotia.

“This is a very romantic period for Scots at home and abroad. Many of our Canadian cousins still maintain links with the old country as witnessed by the thousands who travel here each year retracing their ancestry, attending Highland games and clan gatherings,” MacLean said.

“In Nova Scotia and P.E.I. our exiles (in English described as the Children of the Barley) still sing songs of parting and of the homeland both in English and Gaelic. It really would be a shame yet another part of our ancient heritage being destroyed.”

This issue definitely connects with Gaelic Nova Scotians said Beth Anne MacEachen. She’s president of The Scots cultural society — which was founded in Halifax 1768 — and she said she’s spreading the news.

“It’s definitely an important battlefield for them and a purposeful endeavour. This battle was the first battle for the Jacobites and the reason most of the Nova Scotian Gaels are here is because of the fall of the Jacobites,” she said.

MacEachen also teaches Gaelic at Citadel high school. She frequently takes students on class trips to Scotland and she's passed Killiecrankie while driving on the A9, but has never stopped there. Instead they usually visit Culloden. But when the next trip comes around, MacEachen said she wants to stop at Killiecrankie.

"I know the membership of The Scots will be interested in all of this. I'm not sure how many members we have but we have connections throughout North America and we're the oldest Scottish society in North America and this is our 250th year," she said.

There is an on-line petition and template documents to register objections on www.killiecrankie1689.scot (<http://www.killiecrankie1689.scot>).

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