Discover this remote clearance village in Strathnaver and learn about the stories held within its stones

Rosal is near Syre in Strathnaver, between Bettyhill and Altnaharra. From the B873, turn east onto the B871 towards Kinbrace at Syre. Near the bridge at Syre you’ll see a forest road on your right running alongside the River Naver. The car park is 1½ miles (2.4 km) along this gravel road at grid reference NC 690 426.

A Cruel Clearance
The estate factor, Patrick Sellar, undertook his work with a ruthless efficiency. He was tried for culpable homicide following the death of an aged woman at the nearby Badinloskin. Although he was acquitted of these charges, Sellar is still associated with the most brutal aspects of the clearances. In 1816, he issued a second notice to quit at Rosal, and the last of the original tenants left. Patrick Sellar himself became the new tenant of Rosal and the surrounding area, running a huge sheep farm.

Gloomy Memories
The evictions in Strathnaver became well known, partly due to Donald Macleod. Donald was born at Rosal and lived there until the evictions in 1814. He wrote his accounts many years later, and published them in 1856. Donald wrote in English, but would have spoken Gaelic when he lived at Rosal. You can listen to extracts from his book Gloomy Memories at our bench onsite or at www.xxxxxxxxxxxxx.co.uk

Changin Times
Until 1814, Rosal was a thriving Highland community. But big changes were coming. Elizabeth, Countess of Sutherland owned this land and was more interested in maximising opportunities than maintaining the traditional way of life. She wanted to see ‘improvements’. The residents of Rosal were told to leave. Meat was in high demand for the growing population in the south, and Britain’s woolen mills were expanding fast. Large scale sheep farming promised far greater profits than the tenants could offer in rent. Few people even suggested that the evictions were for the good of the tenants. Few of the people forced to move would have agreed.

The clearances happened all through Strathnaver, and all across Sutherland. By 1870, all the suitable land in Sutherland had been put to sheep farming, and the traditional communal way of life had all but disappeared.

© Crown Copyright 2015
For information on public transport services contact Traveline Scotland, 0871 2002233 or www.travelinescotland.com
© Crown Copyright 2015
Ordnance Survey Licence number [100021242].

For further information contact The Diversity Team, Tel: 0300 067 5046, E-mail: diversity@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

Follow us on:

© Copyright 2015
Uncovering the Past

After the clearances, Rosal remained virtually untouched. In 1962 an archaeologist called Horace Fairhurst carried out an excavation at the site, making Rosal one of the first historic rural settlement sites to be investigated in detail. Horace also recorded seventy structures, including long-houses, barns, outhouses, stackyards and corn-drying kilns.

More recently, impressive new technology has allowed us to discover more about Rosal. Flying over the site with an aerial laser scanner has collected huge amounts of data, which has been used to record the landscape in amazing detail. These computer generated images accurately reveal features which can be very hard to spot onsite.

Securing the Future

The remains of Rosal stand as a memorial to a lost way of life. We work with the local community to preserve this important site and to encourage visits. The whole site is protected as a Scheduled Monument. Please leave it as you find it.

Rosal Revealed

Using a mix of data from the laser scan and aerial photography, the 3D digital terrain model gives us a bird’s eye view over Rosal.

Look for the outlines of the long-houses, barns and enclosures, and the rigs and furrows where crops were grown.

Rosal Clearance Village Trail

Follow this short trail for an introduction to the remains of Rosal township. Don’t miss Donald MacLeod’s Gloomy Memories at the audio bench, an eye-witness account of the evictions.

Rough gravel and narrow grassy paths with some uneven sections. Includes short steep slopes and a gate. Some areas may be muddy and wet.

Explore further: you are welcome to walk around the township. The area can be rough, slippery and wet in places. Please leave the ruins as you find them.

VISIT THE TOWNSHIP

Rosal Revealed

Using a mix of data from the laser scan and aerial photography, the 3D digital terrain model gives us a bird’s eye view over Rosal.

Look for the outlines of the long-houses, barns and enclosures, and the rigs and furrows where crops were grown.