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Opening extract from

The Story of Scotland Inspired by the Great Tapestry of Scotland

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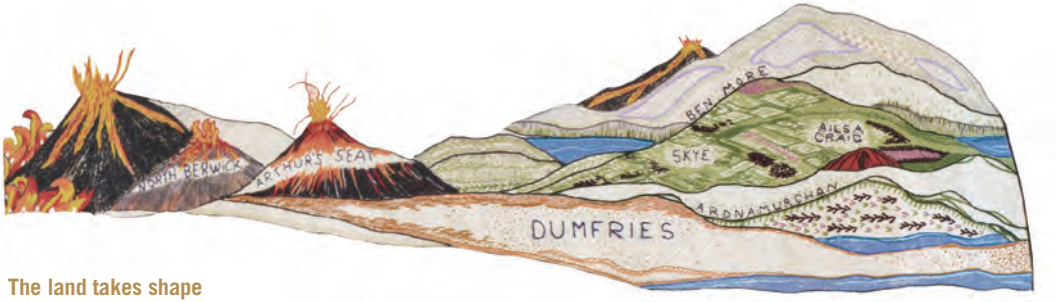
IN THE

THE EMPTY OCEAN

Imagine you are treading water in the sea. You look around. There is no beach nearby, nor land of any sort. It's just you and the Iapetus Ocean. It stretches off in every direction as far as the eye can see.

You are swimming in the exact spot where Scotland should be. Except this is 450 million years ago and Scotland doesn't exist yet. But don't worry, that's about to change. Gigantic land masses are going to appear and smash into each other with terrific force. If you stick around you will be pulverized. It won't be pretty. Luckily, you've got to be somewhere else.



The land takes shape

You're up in the sky, looking down. Volcanoes have spewed out amazing varieties of rock and two land masses called Laurentia and Avalonia are colliding, causing the ground to crack. These cracks are known as 'faults'. They include the Great Glen and the Southern Upland Fault. Scotland is taking shape but it's still got a long way to go.

BEGINNING

THE JOURNEY NORTH

Hundreds of millions of years race past. Scotland is a swamp, a desert, a seabed and a volcanic hellhole that gets yanked around the Earth's crust. Finally, it cools and finds its proper place.

The time is now only 11,000 years ago. But no people actually live here. It's not hard to see why. The country is covered in an immense sheet of ice, about a mile high.

When the ice melts, scarring the landscape as it does so, people start to arrive from the warmer south. These are the early Scots and they come here by walking across a great land bridge connecting Britain to the rest of Europe.





Ice fishing

Our ancestors have come here to hunt animals that wander north as the ice melts. With simple tools people make warm clothes and go ice fishing.



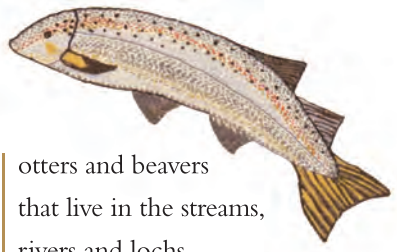






ANCIENT SCOTS





PEOPLE OF THE WILD WOOD

It is still more than 10,000 years ago and most of Scotland is a wild wood. Only the windswept Highland peaks rise above this damp jungle.

Watch out, there are dangers amid the trees. If you hear charging legs you'd better climb for it. The auroch is a giant beast with horns two metres long, and the wild boar has tusks that can kill.

Wolves, wildcats and bears prey on the fish, waterfowl, otters and beavers that live in the streams, rivers and lochs.

The people of the wild wood hunt these creatures for food, adding deer and elk to the menu. They also gather vegetables, fruits and nuts.



Welcome home

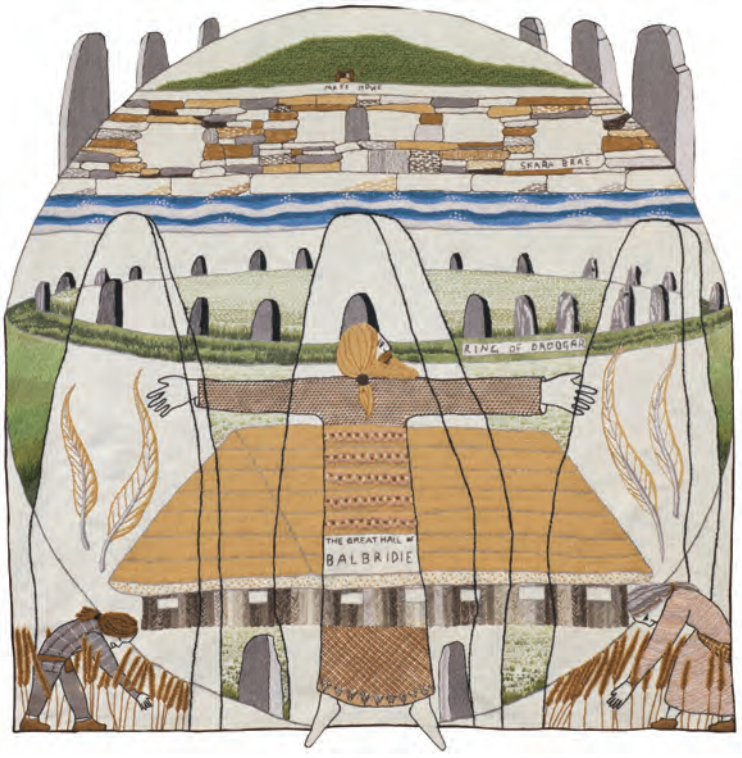
The earliest Scots live in tents. Take a look inside one: there's room for a family. Children sit on the oval-shaped floor and help an adult make spearheads from a stone called flint.

The tent poles are tree trunks and the walls are made of turf and bracken. More people are outside, cooking over a fire. Others are away to hunt and gather firewood.

Westray wifey

On the island of Westray this small figure is carved from soft sandstone. She is under four centimetres high and fits in the palm of your hand.





MYSTERY OF THE SKY GODS

It's 5,000 years ago. The land bridge to Europe has been flooded by the North Sea. Newcomers arrive in boats. The latest are farmers who grow crops like grain to make porridge. They keep animals in pens instead of chasing them around.

This makes the food supply more reliable so people have time to think about other things. Like, why does the sun and rain help things grow? Are the sun, clouds and stars gods we should worship? Farmers build stone monuments in order – perhaps – to celebrate such mysteries.

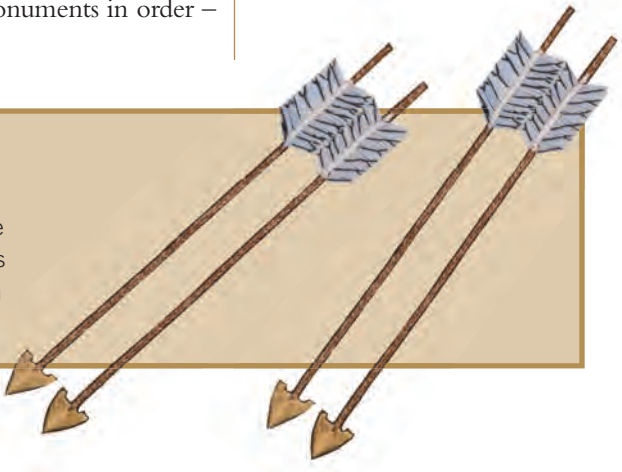


Protect and survive

Over time, homes become safer from attack. A crannog is a round house built on a wooden pier, protected by a loch. Its cone-shaped roof rests on a stone wall.

Weapons and tools

Weapons and tools are made from stone, wood, animal skins, bones, horns, and the antlers of deer and elk. A flint stone makes an axe head, a bone becomes a needle, a horn a drinking cup.





LAND OF

STRANGER COMES ASHORE

It's 320BC, and time to meet our first official tourist. His name is Pytheas, he travels by boat and he is Greek. The ancient Scots had visitors before now, but they left no surviving record of their journey.

Pytheas actually sets out from France, and sails around the whole island of Great Britain. When he reaches Scotland he takes a detour north to Orkney, Shetland and perhaps beyond. He also gives Britain a name – Pretannike – which means Land of the People with Tattoos. A colourful bunch.

Pytheas's Boat

It's called a curragh and is made from animal skins stretched over a wooden frame. An expert local mariner sails it as far as he can. Then Pytheas gets off and catches another one.



The navigation stones

Pytheas visits the Isle of Lewis. At the stone circle of Calanais he uses a stick called a gnomon to measure how far north he has come.



THE FREE

THE SWORDSMAN FACES THE ROMANS

It's now 83 AD and three legions of Roman soldiers are marching into the heart of Scotland. The Roman Empire has conquered southern Pretannike – renaming it Britannica – and now they're here to try to enslave the north.

At a place called Mons Graupius the Roman leader, Agricola, faces a man they call Calgacus – 'the swordsman'.

Calgacus leads the Caledonians – the people of the land later called Scotland. He gives a speech about the importance of freedom before his warriors clash with the invaders who would take that freedom away.

Spears fly and swords clank against shields. The Romans are victorious. But this is only one battle, and the surviving Caledonians are still free.



The Frontier of Rome

The Romans fail to crush the Caledonians and instead build walls to keep them out. The first is ordered in 122 AD by emperor Hadrian. It separates most of present-day England, which has been conquered, from Scotland, which has not.

Another wall is built by the next emperor, Antoninus Pius, who tries to redraw the boundary of Roman Britain as a line between the Forth and Clyde rivers. But the Caledonians cause too much trouble and the Romans withdraw south again.

