

S.R.Crockett and Loch Enoch.

“Loch Enoch is the goal of our desire. For nights past we have dreamed of its lonely fastnesses.”

Across Crockett’s writing there is not one Enoch but many. There is the summer pearl and the winter darkness. The bridal shore and the burial ground. The loch whose beauty threatens to dissolve like a rainbow the moment you approach it, and the loch where old Meggat Faa will not walk again because of what its shores have witnessed. The place where souls grow larger and simpler, and the place where a man skates for his life across black ice while something grey and bristling gains on him at every straight.

What Crockett does with Loch Enoch — across non-fiction and fiction alike — is the subject of this article. It begins with a comparison: between his way of seeing the place and that of an earlier writer. But it ends, I hope, with the full range of what Crockett made of it. Because no other writer has made as much of Loch Enoch as he did, and it shows.

The Place

Loch Enoch sits on the granite plateau above the Dungeon of Buchan at nearly 1,700 feet, below the Merrick and above a wilderness of lochs that stretches away in every direction. It is not easily reached. The approach either from Glenhead or the Pulscaig Burn means upward climbing through heather and boulder. In both cases the loch does not reveal itself until the last moment, which is, as we shall see, part of the point.

The shoreline is pale granite ground by glaciation into a fine silver-white sand unlike anything in the lower country — an agricultural resource, as we will discover, long before it becomes a literary one. And out on the water, the island that holds its own small lochan: the loch-in-loch, mentioned by every writer who has ever reached the shore as though the place cannot quite be described without it.

Two Ways of Seeing

In 1846, the Reverend Thomas Grierson, Minister of Kirkbean, made the ascent to Loch Enoch and recorded what he found in *Autumnal Rambles Among the Scottish Mountains* (c.1850–51). His account is straightforward: *‘A more desolate, dreary, unapproachable scene can hardly be imagined. All its shores are of granite, bleached by the storms of ages.’* The granite sand he notes as a useful product, *‘much prized for*

sharpening scythes, and carried to a great distance for that purpose.' The loch-in-loch he reports at second hand — the island *'contains a small lake, said to be well stocked with trout.'* He was told; he did not go and look. After his survey, he descended to call at the farms of Buchan and Stroan, was hospitably treated, and returned to his inn at House of Hill in time for supper.

Grierson is a competent, practical writer. His record is honest and accurate for what it is. But it is the record of a man whose purpose was practical: to describe a walking route usefully for other pedestrian tourists. He came looking for difficulty and grandeur and found them. *'Desolate, dreary, unapproachable'* is a negative register — it tells us what the place lacks — and for Grierson's purposes, that was sufficient.

Crockett knew Grierson's account. In his own article on 'Galloway Fastnesses' published in *Leisure Hour* in 1894 and revised for *Raiderland* in 1904 he quotes him directly: Grierson, he notes, recorded the Ordnance surveyors *'hurling great boulders down into the loch'* from the Merrick precipices in their hours of leisure.

The difference between the two writers is not one of accuracy. It is one of purpose and mode of attention. Grierson was a pedestrian tourist recording what he observed with honest practicality. Crockett was a novelist on a landscape research trip: according to John Macmillan's own correspondence, Crockett had been stuck on *The Raiders* until the day he saw Loch Enoch, after which all became clear. He arrived at the loch already half-writing it.

He wrote Enoch into *The Raiders*, but revisited it in his 'Fastnesses' article, which begins long before it reaches Enoch. The approach from Glenhead is itself a literary journey: the guide John Macmillan, shepherd at Glenhead farm, striding ahead; the eagles' abandoned eyrie on the cliff-face; the thunder-carved granite shapes on the ridges; the Murder Hole glimpsed in its circle of black water below. By the time Macmillan says *'Bide a wee, and I will show you a new world'*, the reader has been climbing for pages. The revelation is earned:

'He strides on, a very sturdy Columbus. The new world comes upon us, and one of great marvel it is. At first the haze somewhat hides it — so high are we that we seem to be on the roof of the Southern Creation — riding on the rigging of all things, as indeed we are. Half-a-dozen steps and 'There's Loch Enoch!' says Columbus, with a pretty taste in climax.'

Where Grierson saw desolation, Crockett sees something moving: *'This still evening Enoch glows like a glittering silver-rimmed pearl looking out of the tangled grey and purple of its surrounding with the strength, tenderness, and meaning of a human eye.'* The loch-in-loch that Grierson reported at second hand, Crockett names and colours: *'The "Loch-in-Loch" is of a deeper and more distinct blue than the general surface of*

Loch Enoch, perhaps owing to its green and white setting upon the grassy boulder-strewn island.' He went and looked.

Crucially, Crockett is clear-eyed about the limits of his own luminous description. As evening falls on the way home, he watches the loch change: *Enoch 'turned from gleaming pearl to dusky lead, or, more accurately still, to the dull shimmer that one may see on so unpoetical a thing as cooling gravy.'* He is not pretending it is always a pearl.

All the Enochs

If the non-fiction article unlocked the fiction, the fiction opened every possible Loch Enoch that the article could not contain. It was a source Crockett returned to time and again.

In *The Dark o' the Moon* (1902) Crockett speaks through his narrator Maxwell Heron: *'It is pleasant to be on Enoch-side when the sun shines — not so marvellous, indeed, as to see its surges through the driving snow-swirls as the short fierce afternoons of winter close in.'* Both are true. Both are Enoch. He continues: *'Still, even so, and in the summer weather, there is ever a sense up there that somehow heaven is near, and the evil things of the earth remote...where Enoch is held up to the firmament as upon a dandling palm of granite rock by Nature, the Great Mother, the souls of men seem insensibly to grow larger and simpler, if not conspicuously wiser.'* Then the scene opens out:

'Beyond to the west, the massive buttresses of the Merrick descended to the water's edge in myriad scarp and counterscarp, bastion and piled earthwork...Green snatches of turf, narrow selvage of granite-sand shining silver white, granite piers stretching out every way half across...fret and babble and lisp of live water all through this bright stirring autumn day — while above, continuous as the wavelets, the swoop and cry and blithesome clangor of muirfowl. Such was Loch Enoch as we saw it. And the sight has remained in my mind, from which so many things more important have utterly faded.'

But *The Dark o' the Moon* also carries old Meggat Faa, and her voice is different altogether. When Silver Sand suggests she might walk the white beaches of Enoch again, she refuses in horror: *'Never on this side of Daith's river will the e'en o' Meggat Faa...seek to rest on the bluidy shores o' Enoch, or on the Pit o' Sheep frae whilk was ta'en oot nae fewer than seventeen bodies o' strong men.'* The same shore. The same silver sand. The same loch, but soaked in a different history entirely.

The Raiders (1894) gives us Patrick Heron's Enoch, and it refuses any single register. On one visit he finds *'a wild, tormented chaos of greyness'* — waves lashing a rocky shore in no mood for pearls. On another *'I saw a weird wide world, new and strange, not yet out of chaos — nor yet approven of God; but such a scene as there may be on the farther side of the moon, which no man hath seen nor can see.'*

This is not the loch of the summer pearl or the dandling palm of granite. This is Enoch in winter. Crockett knew that too, and he did not flinch from it.

Silver Sand (1914), published on the day Crockett died, is the prequel to *The Raiders* — showing the young man who is already the old man of the earlier novel. Juliana Stanley comes to Loch Enoch for the first time and responds as the summer visitor always does:

'Juliana slipped from her pony at the sight of the blue lake set in its granite frame, with the dainty white beaches of silver sand, the like of which are not to be found in Scotland...She had not dreamed of finding anything so fair in this high wilderness of moor and mountain. So she went down to walk by the waterside, fearing (as all must who look upon Enoch from a distance) that such beauty must vanish into nothingness, as when one walks towards the end of a rainbow.'

The rainbow does not vanish. She is handfasted to John Faa — Silver Sand himself — at Lochenochside. But *Silver Sand* also closes at the loch:

'They buried her in a sunny dale by the waterside of Enoch, just where a burn tinkles away half hidden among the heather. The snow was not all melted yet, but the spot was sheltered and the frost had not bitten deep. The sparkling white of fresh fallen snow marked all the precipices of the Merrick, and outlined the black arrogance of its Spear, to which, because of its steepness, no snow clung.'

Bridal ground and burial ground in the same novel, on the same shore. Crockett does not resolve the two. He simply places them alongside each other and lets the loch hold both.

The Sand

The silver sand itself — Grierson's agricultural resource — runs through all of this as a quiet thread. In *The Raiders*, Silver Sand teaches Patrick Heron about his three grades of scythe-sharpening sand: Skerrow sand for coarse work, Valley sand for corn on the braes, but Enoch sand finest of all — *'the best, the keenest, and lies closest to the blade...used for the mowing of meadow hay, which is hard to win, because it has to be cut about the Lammas time, when the floods come.'* He holds it up like fine gold.

The sand that Grierson noted as a practical fact in 1846, carried to a great distance for sharpening scythes, has become, in Crockett's hands, one man's name, his livelihood, and the founding detail of his identity. Geology into character: that is one way of describing what Crockett does with the real Galloway landscape across his writing.

The Enoch You Find

Grierson found what he came looking for: a hard walk, some useful description, and a place honest enough to call desolate when it was desolate. There is nothing wrong with that. It is simply a different relationship with a landscape than the one Crockett had.

Crockett had been there in imagination before he arrived in person. He had John Macmillan to show him the new world. He arrived while writing *The Raiders*, looking for landscape inspiration and the loch answered him accordingly. What he produced — across the Fastnesses article, the *Raiderland* revision, and the three novels, is the complete Loch Enoch: summer pearl and winter nightmare, bridal shore and burial ground, a place of souls growing larger and simpler, and a place of seventeen bodies in the Pit of Sheep. All real. All Enoch.

'Such was Loch Enoch as we saw it. And the sight has remained in my mind, from which so many things more important have utterly faded.'

The texts discussed in this article are all available through the [S.R. Crockett Online Museum archive](#).