



University  
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# EXTRACTION

## From previous page

Two townships were eventually erected for the prospectors: Baile an Or (Town of Gold) at the foot of the Kildonan and Carn nam Buth (the Rock Shop) at the foot of the Suisgiull. The Kildonan gold rush was certainly more successful than the Fife gold rush but the cold, wet weather, the licence fee and the cost of tools and accommodation, restricted the operation to about the same scale as the other gold rushes. The 10% tax owed to the Crown resulted in few prospectors lasting the year and gold diggings ceased on 1 January 1870. It is unclear exactly how much gold the prospectors recovered as they did not declare all their finds, but it has been estimated that over 400kg of gold was taken over the year – a small fraction of the Australian and American rushes. Since then, prospectors have made several attempts to find the 'mother lode' of gold. Francis Scot Campbell of Islay suggested in 1869 that the hills drained by the Helmsdale and Brora rivers may hold the source, but the truth is still to be established.



Baile an Or on the banks of the Kildonan Burn, near Helmsdale, Sutherland, soon after the 'diggings' were abandoned and the township removed (photo probably taken in the 1890s).

Today it is possible to emulate past prospectors by gold panning in the Kildonan burn, thanks to the Sutherland Estates, who allow panning for a few days at a time. Panning is also possible on the Mennock Water in the Leadhills, with a Buccleuch Estate licence that can be purchased from the Museum of Lead Mining at Wanlockhead.

Images © Neil Clark /The Hunterian, University of Glasgow

Gaining permission to pan for gold elsewhere is more problematic. Guidelines provided by Scottish Nature Heritage ([www.snh.gov.uk/docs/A691325.pdf](http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/A691325.pdf)) suggest that the Crown Estates must be asked for permission before gold or silver is panned in other areas. However, the Crown Estates website explicitly bans all gold panning ([www.thecrownestate.co.uk/rural/minerals/our-portfolio/](http://www.thecrownestate.co.uk/rural/minerals/our-portfolio/)), using the outdated Royal Mines Act and reasoning that panning is known to "damage the aquatic environment and the wildlife" – although this need not be the case.

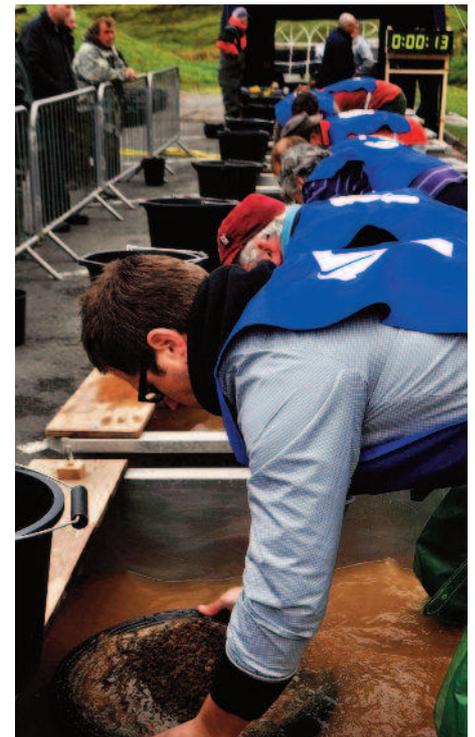
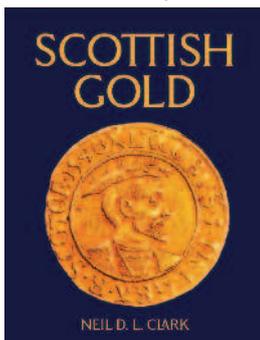
So who owns gold and where does gold panning stand within the law? A couple of acts in Scotland may have relevance. The Royal Mines Act of 1492, set out by the old Scottish Parliament, states that any mine producing three halfpennies of silver per pound of lead belongs to the king (I think this works out as five parts silver to 1,000 parts lead by weight). The Mines and Metals Act of 1592 (Scotland) and its amendments relating to the Abolition of Feudal Tenure etc. (Scotland) Act 2000 afford the landowner the right to mines or minerals. There are codes of conduct for panners available from the British Gold Panning Association ([www.britishgoldpanningassociation.co.uk](http://www.britishgoldpanningassociation.co.uk)), and panners should always abide by the Scottish Outdoor Access Code ([www.outdooraccess-scotland.com/](http://www.outdooraccess-scotland.com/)) when undertaking their healthy outdoor leisure pursuit.

Panning has existed in Scotland since prehistoric times and is an integral part of the rich diversity of uses of the aquatic environment that should be supported, encouraged and protected for the future. The responsible gold panner does little damage to the river ecosystem and may produce more benefits than harm to both geo- and bio- diversity. It would be more productive to develop an environmentally sustainable relationship between

stakeholders in the waterways and an agreed code of good practice to include panners, perhaps along the lines of the Fossil Code (<http://www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/safeguarding-geodiversity/protecting/fossil-code/>). ■

## Further reading

Clark, N.D.L. 2014. *Scottish Gold*. Neil Wilson Publishing, 226 King Street, Castle Douglas DG7 1DS. £14.99. ISBN: 9781906000264



The Scottish and British gold panning Championships take place annually towards the end of May at Wanlockhead in the Leadhills beside the Museum of Lead Mining. 2013 was the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the British Gold Panning Association.

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**A rainbow acts as a dramatic natural pointer to the gold-bearing Crom Allt burn near Tyndrum, Stirlingshire, close to the proposed Cononish gold mine. Scotland's history of gold mining is discussed on page 26.**

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