

*Our award-winning photojournalist  
Tom Langlands takes a stroll around  
Kingairloch Estate*





The 14,000-acre Kingairloch Estate lies on the west side of Loch Linnhe and forms part of the Morvern Peninsula - the most southerly of Scotland's West Highland peninsulas.

On the day I travelled there by car the Corran to Ardgour ferry crossing that would have delivered me within a few miles of my destination had experienced technical problems and wasn't running. My heart sank at the prospect of a 90-minute detour via Fort William. In reality, the additional time spent travelling on mostly single-track roads served only to reinforce the remoteness and beauty of this corner of Scotland.

The Morvern Peninsula has a history that

includes a Viking settlement at its southern tip and, by the 15th century, a Clan Maclean of Kingairloch stronghold at Glensanda Castle. By the end of the 17th century fortunes had changed and most of the former Maclean lands were now in the possession of the Campbells. The Macleans were supporters of the Stuart claim to the throne, and many fought and died on the battlefield at Culloden after which the remnants of the clan on the Morvern Peninsula established a new settlement on lands that now form part of the Kingairloch Estate. These were difficult times and, in 1812, the majority of the population - some 500 persons - headed by Sir Hector Maclean (7th Baronet of Morvern



and 23rd Chief of Clan Maclean) emigrated to Pictou, Nova Scotia in search of new beginnings.

Sitting in the office of estate manager Kevin Masson and looking out over fields of sheep to Loch a' Choire and beyond to Loch Linnhe with its backdrop of Grampian Mountains, it is difficult to imagine anything other than an idyllic, peaceful environment.

Kingairloch Estate was acquired in 2022 by Gaëtan and Bénédicte Hannecart and their four daughters, a family from Belgium. The family has a long-established track record in property development with a specific emphasis on communities and social cohesion. It is that "sense of place" that attracted them to this corner of Scotland, to provide somewhere where they could relax as family and with friends. As Masson explains, "This is a working estate and farm. It is not a hotel although we welcome those who wish to holiday in any of the 10 cottages that are available to rent. From the outset the new owners established four guiding principles that exemplify their approach to their custodianship of the estate." Those principles are highlighted within each of the estate's rentable properties and are pinned in a prominent position on the wall of Masson's office:

**Hospitality:** To be a friendly, unique place for our family, friends and guests to enjoy in a leisurely way.

**Activities:** To offer our guests many outdoor activities in this beautiful part of Scotland.

**Environmental Stewardship:** To invest in the preservation and improvement of the scenery, the strengthening of wildlife and biodiversity, and the architectural harmony of the buildings.

**Community Engagement:** To engage and involve the local community and be respectful of Highland traditions.





Masson has a degree in geology and has worked within the oil industry across the world, including 16 years on offshore sites. He is quick to add, “I grew up in the Cairngorms, spent 17 years as a mountain rescue volunteer and have enjoyed a work balance that has always included working on Highland estates. I have a passion also for helping develop community resilience projects - a necessity within the fragile communities of the Highlands.”

Rebecca Mackellar is the Holiday Cottage and Administrative lead and, along with her partner Sandy, looks after the farm. The day I first met her she was in a field helping deliver spring lambs. Her passion for the area is obvious, “I have lived here for over 20 years and my father ran the farm before me. This is my home, and it is the landscape and the animals that make this place special.” The estate is currently home to 130 Cheviot sheep, 10 Dexter cows - the smallest breed of British cattle — one Aberdeen Angus bull, and six Highland cows. For Mackellar it’s about quality and sustainability, “When crossed with the Aberdeen Angus bull the Dexter cows produce a larger, native hybrid with exceptional quality beef. Likewise, the free roaming Highland cows produce high quality meat while the sheep and lambs form a large part of what we produce, providing an essential source of income.” As well as managing the estate Masson is responsible for the red deer stalking that provides game hunting opportunities, controls a burgeoning head of red deer, and provides a source of venison. In addition to shooting, some limited freshwater angling is available and

sea loch fishing is on the doorstep. Other sources of income include rent from property, three hydro-electric stations that supply energy to the national grid, and a small amount of commercial forestry.

The main property on the site is Kingairloch House. Although altered many times over the years, the original building was constructed by the Macleans of Kingairloch and can trace its origins to the late 17th century. To the rear of the main house lies a late 19th century/early 20th century walled garden of considerable character. In the early 2000s - under previous owners - an application to convert the walled garden into an indoor swimming pool stirred the ire of Macleans around the world, especially those in Nova Scotia who were descendants of the Kingairloch immigrants from 200 years ago. Worldwide objections to the proposals were received and permission was refused. Today, the walled garden is being restored to its former glory by Richard Van de Peer who is also responsible for the Kingairloch House policies and parklands. The day I caught up with him he was digging forkfuls of seaweed collected from the shore into vegetable plots - a method of fertilizing soil that has been used for centuries in coastal locations. With a background in environmental science and ecology along with experience gained working for the Soil Association, Van de Peer is equally passionate about his role at Kingairloch, “It’s about understanding and caring about what we eat and how we cultivate things. Here we grow everything from seed using only natural means to fertilize the land and to maintain good soil quality. We intend

to add a small orchard and to construct a large, sensitively designed greenhouse along one wall to further increase the range of foodstuffs and plants that can be grown.” With an emphasis on sustainability, it is a source of pride that meat, fruit, and vegetable “food miles” are restricted to no more than one mile from source to table with all the produce of the estate being available to those who visit as well as those living and working there.

The garden now produces vegetables almost all year round and it was a joy to witness the old place being brought back to life in such a meaningful way. Plans to reopen a Boathouse Restaurant on the Loch a’ Choire shoreline are at an advanced stage. This will facilitate the creation of a high-quality, locally inspired menu utilizing the best produce of land and sea. Incurring minimal ‘food-miles’ will further enhance Kingairloch’s produce-quality and sustainability credentials.

*During my time at Kingairloch I saw red deer, golden eagles, wild goats, and coastal otters, as well as a plethora of birdlife unique to this type of environment.*

The cottages for rent are all unique in what they have to offer with several enjoying stunning lochside views and the likelihood of waking in the morning to see red deer outside the windows. The small, white-walled, mission church on the shoreline is a place of peaceful contemplation and would make an idyllic setting for a wedding - something Masson would happily consider. As a former Balmoral Estate bagpiper, he even suggested he would be happy to pipe for such an occasion.

Kingairloch is a special place of outstanding beauty but what struck me most of all was a sense of belonging - a team of individuals that felt like a family with a deep connection to the land. The sense of community resilience that Masson had referred to was evident everywhere.

**Story by Tom Langlands**  
*Images courtesy of Tom Langlands Photography and Kingairloch Estate*

[www.kingairloch.co.uk](http://www.kingairloch.co.uk)  
[www.tomlanglandsphotography.com](http://www.tomlanglandsphotography.com)