



Wolfstone Kilt Company

P.O. Box 496 • Washington, Virginia 22747

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The Great Kilt "Breacan-feile"

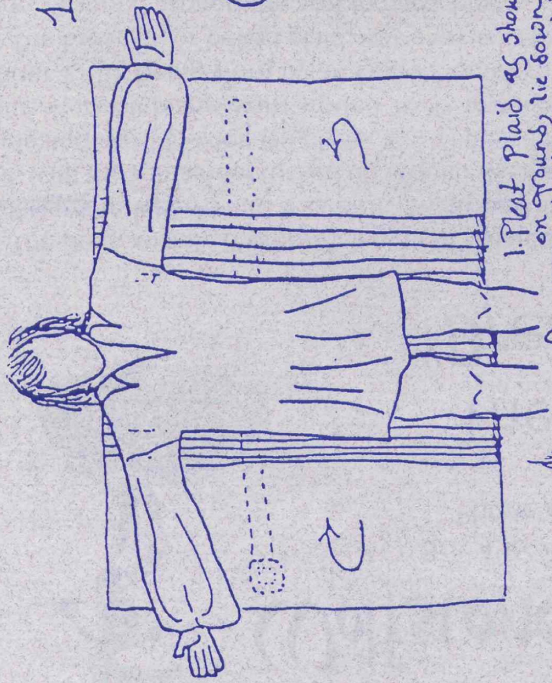
The Breacan-feile is simply a length of tartan material (plaid refers to the garment itself, tartan to the cloth, sett to the design) between 5 and 8 yards in length, and about 54 to 60 inches wide, that is pleated and belted around at the waist, with the remainder tucked up around the body and belt to form "panniers", and a cloak. The feile-beig is simply the pleated waist-to-knee length section of this same garment, with the pleats sewn in place. Though there are claims for the short kilt being worn around 1620, and again in 1639, the first well-documented appearance of the feile-beig is about 1720, being worn by an English foundryman as an improvement over the unweildy breacan-feile.

The breacan, or belted plaid, was a very useful garment, as it could serve as cloak, tent, and blanket, and even as armor, wrapped around the arm to parry blows.

To wear the kilt, one must first spread the plaid out on the ground and, leaving about a fore-arm's length or slightly more on either end, pleat up the center, as shown in the sketch. Then, slide the belt (preferably wide and fairly strong) under the pleated breacan about at its midpoint. Now, the fun part: Either VERY carefully lift the whole unit and belt it around your waist, or lie down on it so the back of your knees are slightly below the edge of the fabric, and pull one end across the body. Cross the other over that, belting it securely around the waist. I recommend the latter method, unless you're in a big hurry and are not concerned about a sloppy job. Now stand up. You will now have essentially a tartan skirt about your waist, in two layers. The top layer's corners get pulled up and tucked into the belt in front, while the rear portion gets pulled up across the back. The uppermost portion of the latter is drawn up over the left shoulder, while the lower, drooping edge is drawn up under the left arm, these two ends then being pinned together at the shoulder. This "cloak" should drape loosely, and not pull or bind anywhere. Some recommend pinning the plaid to the doublet or shirt, but I disagree with this practice, as it puts a great strain on the shirt or doublet fabric. With the plaid this looped around the arm, one can easily free one's arms for activity, or shed the entire kilt if need be, without fumbling for a troublesome pin; this also agrees with period practice of warriors doffing their plaids at the start of a charge.

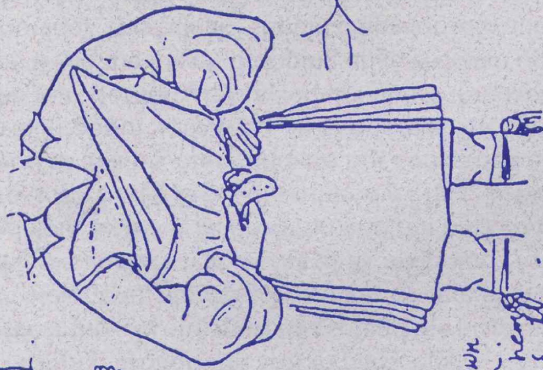
Clan setts apparently were the invention of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Most of the surviving portraits and tartans from the pre-1780's show no correspondence with any modern "clan" tartan, nor is there any indication of any clan tartan system existing prior to the 1780's. An example of this is the remarkable painting by David Morrier portraying some of the action at the battle of Calloden Moor, 1746. Believed to have been done with Scots prisoners as models, this painting shows eight highlanders charging the British line; among these eight Scots are distributed at least eighteen (more have been counted by scholars with access to the actual painting for close examination) different setts in their jackets, kilts, stockings, and trews. None of them are modern clan tartans. Likewise there is an interesting series of paintings done by Richard Waitt between 1714 and 1725, portraits of several members of the clan Grant, including a Champion, Alister Grant, and the Piper, William Grant. The tartans of these two men are similar, but not identical, and neither corresponds with any modern "Grant tartan". The rest of the series depicts a different sett for each subject, none of which are worn today as Grant tartans.

While there doesn't seem to be any indication from 1703 system in the Renaissance period, there is at least one description could be recognized by his plaid, and that the setts varied throughout the Highlands according to area. It is entirely possible that the availability of a particular sett would be limited by the dyes available and the patterns that the local weavers were familiar and comfortable with. Other than this possible restriction in availability, a Highlander apparently chose tartan the way we choose fabric today: what is wanted, what is available, and what is affordable. Sae, be ye a Cambell or a Cameron, waer wha' ye will, an' dinna wairy!



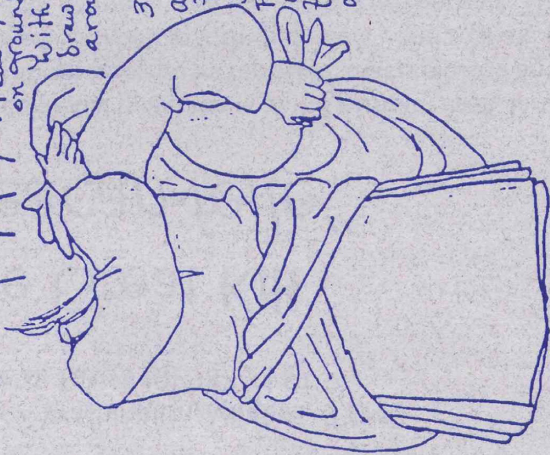
1.

1. Place plaid as shown on ground, lie down. With knees at hem of braw either end of plaid around and belt it in.



2.

2. Stand up, letting loose ends fall. Now, gather each end up and across and tuck into belt, forming flanniers or pocket flanniers or pocket.



3. Gather up a portion of the back long section, and pull the ends up around the arm as shown.

4. Pin the section in place over the arm, and arrange whole until it hangs comfortably.



The Sporran and Birk may be suspended either from the waist belt, or from a separate belt; the latter I find to be the most convenient.



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