Caen Highland Township – 1813

A farming community before the Clearances

Image: Longhouse and farm buildings at Caen as they may have seemed in 1813 (Credit: Open Virtual Worlds).

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the inhabitants of many small farming communities in the Scottish Highlands were forced to leave their homes. Under the guise of improvement landlords drove out traditional subsistence farmers and created a much less densely occupied landscape. One of the communities affected by this process of 'clearance' was the township of Caen in Sutherland.

Caen was located in the lower part of the Strath of Kildonan. This area was cleared particularly brutally by representatives of the Duke of Sutherland between 1813 and 1819. Several families resisted the clearances and soldiers were sent from Fort George to maintain order. Today only a few foundations indicate where a thriving farming community **once stood**. This reconstruction shows the Caen township as it may have looked in 1813, just before the families who lived and worked here were forced out from the Strath of Kildonan.

How Did We Know What to Reconstruct?
Recent excavations (including a community dig) have revealed much about the people who lived at Caen before the Clearances. This archaeological material was combined with nineteenth-century maps and documents to inform the reconstruction of Caen in 1813. The project received extensive advice from Jacquie Aitken (Heritage Officer for Timespan), as well as drawing on the research of Keir Strickland (University of the Highlands and Islands).

How Was the Reconstruction Created?
The buildings were originally modelled using SketchUp. They were then imported into Unreal Engine 4 (a platform for creating 3D virtual worlds). Videos and other media were created from the landscape in Unreal.

How Has the Reconstruction Been Used?
The reconstruction of Caen was featured in the *Real Rights* exhibition at **Timespan** in Helmsdale. The current reconstruction improves on an **earlier digital representation** of Caen created in OpenSim, which was also exhibited at Timespan.

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This reconstruction was part of the **CINE** project for digital heritage in northern environments. The project received funding from the European Union's **Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme**.

How to Access the Reconstruction?
There is a video preview of the reconstruction on **Vimeo**.

A 360 tour of the reconstruction can be found on **Roundme**.

The full reconstruction can be downloaded for Windows devices **here**.

Discover More
Information held by Historic Environment Scotland about the excavations at Caen can be accessed via **Canmore**.

You can see how Caen looks today on **Google Maps**.

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