

Tartans are described according to the purpose for which they are named:

**CLAN TARTANS** are patterns for general use by clanspeople. It is not uncommon to find a Clan tartan of recent origin described as "Ancient Clan tartan."

**DRESS TARTANS** were originally worn by the ladies of the Clan who desired lighter colored patterns. As a rule they had white as the background color and were variations of the Clan pattern.

**MOURNING TARTANS** were worn for the purpose for which they were named. They were generally of black and white.

**CLAN DRESS TARTANS** woven in light weight material as "DRESS" tartan. Clans who do not possess a dress tartan usually wear the Clan pattern, in light weight material, as a dress tartan, but this does not justify the description of a Clan tartan as a "Dress" tartan.

**HUNTING TARTANS** are worn for sport and outdoor activities. Brown, black, dark blues, greens and grey are generally the predominant colors. The colors are arranged so that concealment in the woods and heather.

**CHIEF TARTANS** are the personal tartans of the Chiefs and should never be worn except by the Chief and, if he allows, his immediate family. His clan members would wear the tartan he directs, which was usually very much like his.

**DISTRICT TARTANS** are probably the oldest of our tartans from which Clan tartans may have developed.



## Tartans

What is a tartan? Tartan is a woven material, generally of wool, having stripes of different colors and varying in breadth. The arrangement of colors is alike in warp and weft -- that is, in length and width -- and when woven, has the appearance of being a number of squares intersected by stripes which cross each other, this is called a 'sett'. By changing the colors; varying the width; depth; number of stripes, differencing is evolved. Tartan patterns are called "setts" and by this is meant the complete pattern, and a length of tartan is made by repeating the pattern or sett, over and over again.

The history of tartan, while interesting, is also controversial, and from time to time discussion has arisen regarding the antiquity of Clan tartans. Arguments are generally involved and can only be understood by those who have studied the subject in depth.

References to tartan in early literature supply ample proof that tartan was worn many centuries ago. What may be the earliest written reference to tartan is contained in the accounts of the treasurer to King James III, in the year 1471 where mention is made of tartan purchased for the use of the King and Queen of Scotland.

It is improbable that the early tartans were as gaily colored or as tastefully arranged as were the tartans of later years. The skill of the weaver and the availability of plants likely to supply vegetable dyes were the chief factors in determining the colors of a tartan. Colors used would be restricted to the plant dyes found within the various districts. The early tartans would have been similar to a checked, muted material of wool. As chemical dyes became more common, the weavers enlarged their range of colors and introduced more colorful variations to the old patterns. When limited to vegetable dyes, the people of each district were forced by circumstances to use the same colors in their tartans and it is probable that the people of the various districts were recognized by the colors in their tartans.

District tartans, as these early patterns are called, might also have served as the Clan tartan, because the people inhabiting Clan districts were, as a rule, members of the same Clan. However there are many instances whereby many different Clans lived and functioned as member of the district. By adding a stripe of different color or by varying the arrangement of colors it is thought that branches of the Clan evolved

their own tartans, yet by the similarity of pattern, they displayed their kinship with the main Clan.



*The earliest image of Scottish soldiers wearing tartan, from a woodcut dating from 1631*

What may be the earliest recorded reference to a Clan tartan appears in a Crown Charter of 1587 to Hector MacLean of Duart, wherein the feu duty payable on the lands of Narraboll, Islay, is stated to be "sixty ells of cloth, of white, black and green colors." These colors correspond to the colors in the tartan we now call MacLean hunting, but it is doubtful if their exact arrangement was the same as that in use at the present time.

Written evidence regarding the use of Clan tartans prior to the Battle of Culloden are not available. It is generally supposed that each Clan had a special pattern of its own which was worn by the clansmen of the Clan as a means of identifications and as a symbol of the Clan kinship.

After the Jacobite defeat at the Battle of Culloden in 1746 the Government determined to purge the Highlands of all unlawful elements and to destroy the Clan system. Accordingly an Act of Parliament was passed which not only aimed at the complete disarming of the Highland Clans but made the wearing of tartans a penal offense. This section of the act was strictly enforced:

*I, \_\_\_\_\_, do swear, as I shall answer to God at the great day of Judgement, I have not, nor shall have in my possession any gun, sword, pistol or arm whatsoever, and never to use tartan plaid, or any part of the Highland Garb; and if I do so may I be cursed in my undertakings, family and property, -- may I be killed in battle as a coward, and lie without burial in a strange land, far from the graves of my forefathers and kindred; may all this come across me if I break my oath."*

This was an especially cruel oath by Highlanders, because most were still Catholic and to 'lie without burial, and blessing, etc'. , was a devastating punishment.

Many died because of the 'wearing of the tartan', and 'not giving up their weapons', just as many died in Ireland for the 'wearing of the green'.

In 1782, the ban on tartans was removed, but by this time the Highlander had become accustomed to the dress worn in other parts of the country and showed no great enthusiasm to rush into tartan clothing. Tartan had, in fact, become only a memory. Many of the old weavers had died out and with their passing old patterns were forgotten.



In 1822 King George IV (above) visited Edinburgh and the Highland chiefs were persuaded to attend the levies and other functions, all attired in their Clan tartans (a majority did not go). Almost overnight tartan became popular and families, who probably had never before worn tartan, (and hated the Highlanders), became the proud possessors of family tartans.

Tailors and manufacturers alike were seldom at a loss to "find" a clan or family tartan, but the bitter truth is that these so-called ancient tartans 'were invented for the occasion' (and they are being invented again for the occasion). Two gentlemen, known as the Sobieski-Stuart brothers, and who claimed to be grandsons of Prince Charlie, supplied details of tartans to many Clan chiefs and heads of families, claiming to have obtained their information from some sixteenth century manuscripts in their possession. Their failure to produce the manuscripts for examination cast doubts upon their information and when in 1842 they published a book on tartans called the Vestiarium Scoticum it was dubbed a forgery.

The greatest number of our tartans today are less than 100 years old; a fairly large number may be dated to the opening years of the nineteenth century, while only a very small number are of more ancient date.

## Tartan Day

Tartan Day (part of Scotland Week) celebrates the existing and historical links between Scotland and Scottish descendants in North America. In the United States there are over 30 million people who claim Scots descent. Tartan Day is held on April 6, the anniversary of the date on which the Declaration of Arbroath was created in 1320.

The Declaration of Arbroath was a declaration of Scottish independence, and set out to confirm Scotland's status as an independent, sovereign state and its use of military action when unjustly attacked. It is in the form of a letter submitted to Pope John XXII, dated 6 April 1320. Sealed by fifty-one magnates and nobles, the letter is the sole survivor of three created at the time. The others were a letter from the King of Scots and a letter from the clergy which all presumably made similar points.

Tartan Day is now part of the North American calendar. Supporters of the event call it a signal of the strengthening Scots-Canadian/American relationship in the 21st century. The Tunes of Glory Parade in 2002 saw 10,000 pipers and drummers march through the streets of New York. One of Scotland's national treasures, William Wallace's sword, left Scotland for the first time in 700 years and was flown to New York for the Tartan Week celebrations of 2005.

## The Tartan Day Resolution of the United States Senate

*Senate Resolution 155, March 20th 1998*

*Whereas April 6 has a special significance for all Americans, and especially those Americans of Scottish descent, because the Declaration of Arbroath, the Scottish Declaration of Independence, was signed on April 6, 1320 and the American Declaration of Independence was modeled on that inspirational document;*

*Whereas this resolution honors the major role that Scottish Americans played in the founding of this Nation, such as the fact that almost half of the signers of the Declaration of Independence were of Scottish descent, the Governors in 9 of the original 13 States were of Scottish ancestry, Scottish Americans successfully helped shape this country in its formative years and guide this Nation through its most troubled times;*

*Whereas this resolution recognizes the monumental achievements and invaluable contributions made by Scottish Americans that have led to America's preeminence in the fields of science, technology, medicine, government, politics, economics, architecture, literature, media, and visual and performing arts;*

*Whereas this resolution commends the more than 200 organizations throughout the United States that honor Scottish heritage, tradition, and culture, representing the hundreds of thousands of Americans of Scottish descent, residing in every State, who already have made the observance of Tartan Day on April 6 a success;*

*Whereas these numerous individuals, clans, societies, clubs, and fraternal organizations do not let the great contributions of the Scottish people go unnoticed:*

*Now, therefore, be it Resolved, That the Senate designates April 6 of each year as "National Tartan Day."*

Until next month...

## Sláinte