

Exploring the Westie Trail In the West Highlands of Scotland

By Ineke Rühland

In May 2004, we made a one-week journey through Scotland exploring the roots of the West Highland White Terrier breed. We had already been to Poland exploring my husband Bill's genealogy and the Netherlands and Germany for mine, so we felt it was time to explore the genealogical roots of Fritz, our seven-year-old Westie. The truth is, we love to travel and this gave our trip a leitmotif and added some mystery and intrigue. Unfortunately we had to leave Fritz at home because of the quarantine rules for the United Kingdom which, although less rigorous than in the past, still dictate that he would have had to travel in cargo. We decided not to take that risk, and were reassured that he would be well taken care of by a very responsible neighbor who dotes on him.

We consulted our Westie books and the internet beforehand to determine where we should go. We particularly enjoyed a little book from 1911 that we found second-hand on Amazon called "*The West Highland White Terrier*" by Holland Buckley. We decided the most important places to explore would be Poltalloch and Roseneath in the West Highlands. Both are mentioned as the origins of the Poltalloch Terrier and Roseneath Terrier respectively, predecessors to the West Highland White Terrier.



Map of our Westie Destinations

We started our trip in Glasgow, where we spent one evening sleeping off our jet lag, leaving the next morning in our trusty little rental car, a silver Vauxhall Corsa. We special-ordered an automatic transmission because changing gears with your left hand seems like too much of a challenge when you're also trying to concentrate on keeping left and not turning into oncoming traffic! It takes at least a day to get used to driving on the lefthand side of the road, but is well worth it because this trip would not have been possible without a car.

We made the half-day journey to Oban in glorious sunshine, driving along many lovely lakes, including Loch Lomond and Loch Etive. We had decided to stay in Oban because of its central position in the West Highlands and availability of hotels. Tourism is definitely the main industry in Oban, with dozens of hotels and guest houses dotting the town, and numerous dining options. We stayed four nights at the Roseneath Guest House, a well-run place serving an excellent Scottish breakfast every morning.

Our first trip was to Poltalloch, located on a point on the Sound of Jura, which feeds directly into the Atlantic Ocean. It is more of an estate than a village, with about half a dozen houses scattered alongside the large estate of the Malcolm family. This is where Colonel E.D. Malcolm lived with his "Poltalloch Eleven" of Westies when he organized the official recognition of the Westie breed in 1905.

Upon arriving in Poltalloch, we could see the ruins of a mansion in the distance and, further down the road, a private drive leading to Duntrune Castle. At first we didn't know what else to do since we didn't want to be nosey parkers! After exploring all the country lanes in the area, we saw a gardener working near the rather imposing gate leading to Duntrune Castle. Summoning up our courage we approached him and told him about our quest to explore the Westie Trail. He replied, "You mean the Poltalloch Terrier?" (hah!). He explained that Colonel E.D. Malcolm's grandson, Robin Malcolm, currently lives in Duntrune Castle. He is the current chief of the Clan MacCallum/Malcolm. According to the gardener, no Westies remain, just an old sheepdog. :-)

He thought it probably would not be a good idea to knock on the door of the castle (neither did we), but he did encourage us to go in and see the garden. He was obviously proud of his handiwork, as well he should have been because the garden was nothing less than magical. Although small compared to the public gardens we visited throughout the country, this became our favorite garden in Scotland.

Duntrune Castle is visually stunning, with parts dating to the 12th century. We discovered there are six cottages on the estate that Robin Malcolm rents out on a weekly basis, and they are very charming. We would have stayed in one of the cottages had we known about them, and it would have given us an excuse to speak to Robin Malcolm and maybe even get a peak at his grandfather's old Westie photos. Sigh ... we'll leave it for other Westie lovers to explore in the future (but please report back!). Check out www.duntrune.com if you're interested in renting one of the cottages. Our retirement dream for the (distant) future is to rent the Stag Cottage for two or three weeks and focus on writing and art projects.

While we were still on the Poltalloch estate, we ran into a neighboring inhabitant who encouraged us to go and see the chapel, which is left open. It is the burial place of many generations of Malcolms, all designated with plaques and descriptions of their lives. Many were war heroes. He also told us about an old kennel behind one of the houses on the estate that used to breed Westies. We drove by it later but from our limited vantage point, it did not appear to be in use.



The Malcolm Family's Duntrune Castle at Poltalloch

We also managed to take photos of the ruined Jacobean-style mansion located near the chapel. This is the house in which Colonel E.D. Malcolm lived in

1905 when he had his famous "Eleven for Scotland" pack of Westies, and when he organized the official recognition of the breed. We suspect he lived here rather than the castle on the estate, which by far predates it, because it was more comfortable. The house is now in ruins because the roof was removed and it was abandoned in the 1950's, apparently due to high property taxes. What a shame, because the house is gorgeous.



Colonel E.D. Malcolm's Jacobean Mansion at Poltalloch

It was very interesting to study the Westie terrain at Poltalloch. We could visualize Colonel Malcolm's Westies tearing through these fields, and chasing badgers, foxes and otters. Although quite rocky, the land is lushly verdant and surrounded by water.

We would hold forth that Westies thus should have the right to wear the Malcolm tartan, which is navy, green and black, with red and yellow striped accents.

Next stop on the Westie Trail was Inveraray, where the Duke of Argyll has a castle open to the public. He is the head of the Clan Campbell, and the highest ranked aristocrat in the Argyll area. When the Duke of Argyll had a castle in Roseneath in the 1800's (about 50 miles away), it had a kennel for Roseneath Terriers, one of the ancestral strains of the Westie. Unfortunately there was no sign of Westies in any of the portraits or photos in Inveraray Castle, so this proved to be a dead end. Interestingly, the guard was able to tell us about Roseneath Castle, which used to belong to the Duke of Argyll but had now apparently been turned into a trailer park.

Inverary Castle was still lovely and interesting to visit, and the town was also worthwhile. We ran into a local inhabitant walking a Westie named Clyde, and

she informed us that the town of Inveraray has a population of about 550 people ... and six Westies!



The Duke of Argyll's Inveraray Castle

Even though we were discouraged by the guard's description of the current state of affairs at Roseneath, we still wanted to explore the Roseneath Terrier connection, so off we went to Roseneath. It is located on Roseneath Bay, which has become a popular summer vacationing spot. Unfortunately the Duke of Argyll's Roseneath Castle was abandoned during the Second World War, at which time it was used as one of the headquarters of the U.S. forces. It was demolished shortly afterwards and turned into a vacation trailer park.



Roseneath Castle Park Today

There are currently hundreds of trailers and no sign left of the castle except for numerous old photos in the central coffee shop/bar. What a shame because the photos showed that it was quite magnificent in its day. Another run-in with high property taxes in the 1950's. Our prior literature search mentioned a kennel on the Roseneath estate and also mentioned the name of a breeder, George Clarke, but we never managed to find tangible evidence of the historical

Westie connection at Roseneath. We did discover a modern-day Westie named Snowy (see photo).

Our last destination on the Westie Trail was the National Library in Edinburgh to do a literature search on Westie history. There are two parts to the library: one building is a lending library freely open to the public, and the second has older manuscripts and books open only to accredited researchers. According to the index files, all of the interesting books were located in the latter building. We brazenly said we were writing an article for the San Francisco Bay Westie Club, which allowed us to get a researcher's pass valid for a month. Although we had no real prior plan to write anything, the ensuing guilt has resulted in this very article. ;-)

We found some great things, including an extensive article written by Colonel Malcolm in 1906. He's a very scholarly writer, and was clearly very fond of his Westie brood. He wrote that both his father and grandfather had Poltalloch Terriers, and he could personally avow that they were at Poltalloch since at least 1846. In fact, he speculated that their history went back to at least 1600, when James the First of England made his famous request to have half a dozen "earth dogges or terrieres" from Argyll sent to the King of France. We made a photocopy of the article and will make a digital copy available.

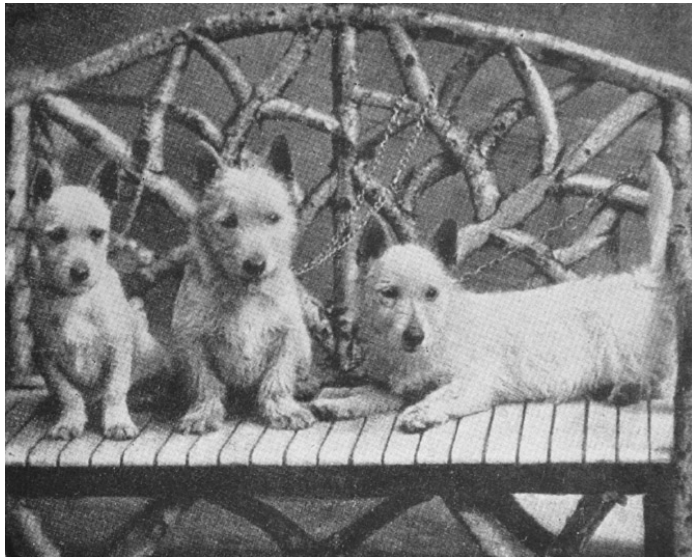
A very promising article on the Westie breed from *Harpers & Queen* in 1899 had been cut out of the volume (Westie bandits!). Perhaps we'll check that one out at the British Museum in London next time we're there. We love any excuse to travel!

We managed to take some digital photos of some of the oldest images in the books:



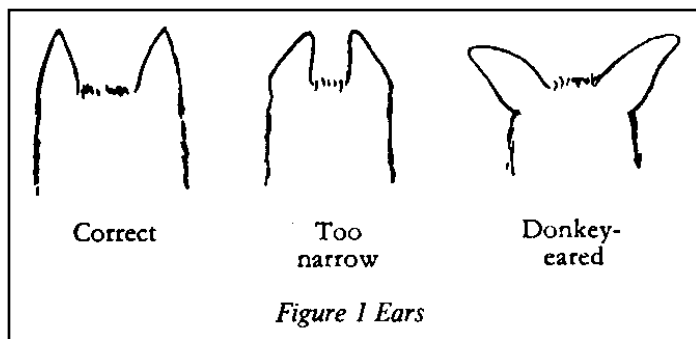
Colonel E.D. Malcolm with his Poltalloch Terriers, c. 1905

We recognize the rocky terrain from the Poltalloch estate!

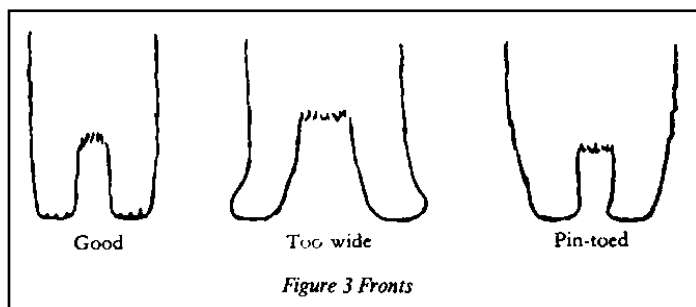


Three Roseneath Terriers in 1899

We loved these Dilbert-style drawings we found of the Westie standard. For the ears ...



... and legs



We're relieved that Fritz is both "correct" and "good", even if he isn't a show dog. ;-)

It became clear to us that the Westie is a very celebrated and loved dog breed in Scotland. Any of you who have visited Scotland will have found an unlimited supply of Westie souvenirs throughout the

West Highlands and all of Scotland. Our informal survey revealed that stuffed Westie toys outnumber the Scotties by at least three-to-one. ;-)

And still, we were expecting a little more. In our minds' eye, we expected to see hundreds of little Westies running across the hills and dales of the West Highlands. The reality is that you see hundreds of sheep. Or perhaps we were expecting to stumble across a charming, little museum honoring the Westie. Okay, we're dreamers, but maybe one day?

If you would like to see a photo slideshow of our exploration of the Westie Trail, or a separate slideshow of our non-Westie related photos of Scotland, please feel free to visit our website:

<https://www.osuchphotography.com/Photographic-Adventures-Outside-the-US/Scotland-2014>



The Magical Garden at Poltalloch