

AGM – ATLANTA, 2007

Thanks to all the people who contributed photos and facts

Tuesday, October 16th

 “On the Road Again” . Where was Willie Nelson when I needed him? I desperately wanted someone to sing this song as I left my house on Tuesday morning. It was 6:00 a.m., dark, and chilly, as I made my way to Buffalo to commence my trip to Atlanta and another AGM.



Views of the Peace Bridge from Canada

I learned a major lesson at the Border... **never** say you are going to an AGM meeting of the **Clan** Graham, say you're going to a convention. As soon as the word **Clan** left my mouth, the demeanor of the border guard changed, his buddy leaned over and peered into my van and I was brusquely interrogated about the meaning of AGM, and how long I would be away. He frowned and said, “A week is a long time for a meeting!!” I explained that people from all over the States and Canada would be there, the meeting would only take one day and then we would be on side-trips and excursions. They stared at me and I stared right back.....then they let me go on my way. Did they think I was part of a Scottish terrorist cell?? I think Bonnie Dundee struck terror in some hearts a long time ago, but I didn't think we Grahams were much of a threat in this day and age.

Driving through the Appalachian Mountains is always a glorious experience and I had hoped that I would see an artist's palette of autumn colours, in the

trees that covered every mountainside. This was not the case, as the weather had not been cold enough to cause this to happen. There was the odd tree that had changed colour and, of course the Sumac was on the fringe of the forest, ranging in colour, from pink to crimson. I travelled to Summersville, W. Va. and that is where I stayed for the night.



Wednesday, October 17th.

I left very early the next morning and watched the sky lighten as the sun was rising. Heavy mist, like massive clouds, filled the valleys. When I arrived at the New River Bridge, the cloud of mist was tall enough to curl over the edges of the bridge, presenting the illusion that you were driving over the clouds. I guess that's as close as *I'll* ever get to heaven.



Picture this, in the early dawn, with the mist swirling around your car as you drive over the bridge.

The New River Gorge Bridge is a steel arch bridge in Fayetteville, West Virginia. It is 3030 feet long, and for many years the longest arch bridge in the world. Its arch extends 1,700 feet and is part of U.S. Highway 19. This bridge spans the gorge, and the New River, at a height of 876 feet and is the highest bridge in North America and the second highest in the world.



This is a picture of the old bridge, over 800 feet below the canyon rim. Locals say that the completion of the new bridge cut the travel time from 45 minutes to 45 seconds.

Even though the highways became busier and busier, the further south I drove, (and it seemed like there were a million trucks on the road), I reached the hotel without incident.

I checked in, and then went right to the hospitality room to get my registration material. It was like old home week when I arrived, being greeted by all the people that I have met at different AGMs. After a drink or two, some of us headed to the hotel restaurant for dinner, Edwin & Helen Graham, Bill & Sheila Richardson, Royce and Kathy Graham and me. Lou Dean and Bob Howard arrived halfway through our dinner and sat at the table next to us. I decided that this had to be an early night as I had been driving for two days and I'm not as young as I used to be!!

Thursday, October 18th

8:00 a.m. was the time we were all to arrive for a Continental breakfast, before the Officer's meeting, at which, His Grace, the Duke of Montrose,

was in attendance. It was a very productive meeting, and some of the items discussed were; an Electronic newsletter, the Clan Graham Society buying a commemorative stone, to be placed in the new visitors entrance at Culloden. Also discussed, were all the future AGMs and an announcement, by Richard, that he would not continue as President after his present term ended. I am sure these minutes will be described in greater detail and the decisions of the meeting placed in the Newsletter. After the meeting, we gathered in a special banquet room in the hotel, and had an amazing lunch.





While the officers attended the meeting, there was a coach ride available to join the Duchess and tour the Governor's Mansion with a luncheon at Swan Coach House.

That evening, a dinner was planned on a paddle wheeler boat at Stone Mountain. We had to meet in the lobby by 3:30 to drive to Stone Mountain and try to avoid the rush-hour traffic. I was driving and Sami Graham (who lives in the area) was my navigator. Sheila and Bill Richardson and two other ladies were passengers. The highway was very busy, but there were no delays and we arrived at 4:05, which meant that we had a couple of hours to kill, as the boat didn't leave until 6:00. The first things I saw, after leaving the car, was a gaggle of Canada Geese and in the distance, Stone Mountain. This was a beautiful setting and we went inside, while others sat outside on the patio, having drinks and chatting until the boat was ready to leave.

When the boat was ready to leave, we were piped onboard to start our leisurely cruise around the lake. There was a cash bar, and after getting underway, the buffet was opened. We had Southern fare of fried chicken, corn on the cob, potato salad, baked beans, and brownies for dessert. I was introduced to Sami's wife Jean-Marie, as she joined us for the boat ride. We cruised up and down Stone Mountain Lake until 8:30. At night, the carving on Stone Mountain was illuminated and I tried taking pictures of it, but they weren't good enough to publish. It was a good evening and we piled back in the car to return to the hotel.



The roads around Atlanta are really busy with lots of fast traffic and I was glad that Sami knew where we were going, because I had to keep my eyes on the road. We were doing so well, and then I suddenly reached a spot, when we exited, where the roadway split and I was on the right and should have been on the left. We ended up in a residential area and Sami said, “I don’t know where we are.” I pulled into a driveway to turn around and another van followed us. Bill thought that they were some of our group from the boat. We finally reached a busier street and I saw a beer store and said, “I’ll go over to that beer store and we can ask directions.”

What was I thinking?? I must have had a momentary brain freeze, because men don’t ask directions do they?? as Sami said, “No, we’ll get a beer”, and Bill Richardson said, “We’ll get more than one.” The words were no sooner out of his mouth than a van pulled up beside us and we saw that it was the Ericksons. Wayne Erickson said, “Where are you going?” “I’m trying to get back to the road that I missed.”

Guy said, “It’s right behind you.”

He led us to the right road and when I asked them why they would follow me, since I was a stranger in the area, they said it was because Sami was from the area, and was in my car. We had some laughs about this, but it was only the first of a few times that I was lost, navigating the convoluted roads of Atlanta. I was glad to be back at the hotel and no hospitality room for me tonight.

Friday, October 19th



This is the day that we have our luncheon with our Chief, the Duke, and his wife, the Duchess. Gary Emanthu piped the Duke and Duchess into the luncheon, and was the personal piper to His Grace. For the AGM and Highland games, he performed the historical duties of a Chief’s Piper.



Alex Beaton sang a few songs.

At eight o'clock, that evening, while some of our group attended the Sponsors' Reception, the rest of us went to a banquet room and looked at all the items that would be up for auction. While there, we were encouraged by Cliff and his helpers to spend some money to play Campbell's Castle. This is the game that we played last year and you start out buying a Scottish trivia or historical question. If you answer it correctly, you move on, to try your hand at throwing darts to get you out of Campbell's Castle, which is a row of 'Porta-Potties'. If you are successful, you advance to the safety of Mugdock Castle.

Norris Graham (Arizona) and Bill Graham (California) were like a comedy team and had the room in laughter, as they sold boxes for more money than the contents. Popping bubble wrap went for a dollar a 'pop'. Norris was chased and cajoled throughout the night to sell his Hawaiian shirt to Kim Stephenson from Tennessee. According to Cliff, the auction brought in \$2,700.00. We also had a 'voluntary donation' request, to help pay for the Culloden Stone. We had that money in no time at all.



When the Duke and Duchess arrived at the auction from the Sponsor's Reception, Bill Richardson made a presentation of a walking stick that he had carved for the Duke.



Saturday, October 20th

The Stone Mountain Highland Games started at 9:00 a.m. and I took off, by myself, to go to the Park. There were lots of people, Clan tents, apparel vendors and crafts tents, so there was a lot to see. The Duke and Duchess were piped on stage by 2 pipers from the Atlanta Pipe Band. Gary Ermutlu escorted the Duke and Duchess to their seats and then joined Richard, who was the standard bearer. A choir of young people sang the National Anthems of Great Britain, U.S.A and Canada, while the massed band stood before the stage. After introductions, The Duke formally opened the games.



There were many Grahams, milling around the tent, which had a place of prominence beside the stage. After mingling with our group, I decided to take a walk and see the sights. The first person I saw was a man holding a falcon and he graciously posed for a picture.





I had heard about Stone Mountain and had seen some pictures on the internet, but that didn't prepare me for my first look at the mountain. My first thought was, *This really is a mountain and it is a huge stone!* It looked like some giant had plopped it on the ground. I had to learn more, so Sheila Richardson and I took the aerial car to the top of the mountain and walked around on top of it.



It was fascinating and I had to learn more about this ‘stone’ mountain, and here’s what I found out about it.

The geological term for Stone Mountain is ‘Granite Monolith’ and this happens to be the largest exposed granite monolith in the world. This is a direct quote from the Stone Mountain Memorial Association pamphlet, “About 300 million years ago, intense heat and pressure forced molten rock upward to simmer about 2 miles beneath the surface of the earth. Gradual cooling resulted in uniform, compact, granite crystals. 200 million years of erosion have left an 825-foot granite dome, covering 58.3 acres of the plateau.”

Stone Mountain is 1,683 feet above sea level and 825 feet above the surrounding land. The exposed granite covers 25 million square feet or 583 acres, and is near the foot of the Appalachian Mountains.

The mountain is a natural target for lightning and the lightning bolts leave saucer shaped depressions 4 to 6 inches across. We are seeing only the tip of Stone Mountain, as it is still connected to the channel from which it spewed.

When the granite decomposes, it becomes fertile soil and becomes home to the Confederate Daisy.

The carving on the mountain is a capsule of American history, depicting three Southern heroes of the Civil War, Jefferson Davis, Generals Robert E. Lee and Thomas J. ‘Stonewall’ Jackson. These figures measure 90 X 190 feet on a carved area that covers three acres. The carving is recessed 42 feet into the mountain and is 400 feet above the ground. It is impossible to comprehend the size of the carving when you look at it from the ground.

After the games, we all prepared for the formal event of the week. After the guests arrived, Gary Ermutlu piped in the head table and after the head table was seated, he piped in the Haggis, which was carried by Ken (Campbell) Stephenson. Richard addressed the Haggis and the roast beef meal began. Gary was MC for the evening and acted as the Chief’s Bard. His presentation was called a Brosnachd (pronounced Broznakh) and this is something that was traditionally performed and it was the telling of the great deeds of the clan’s ancestors and past Chiefs. Everyone was encouraged to unsheathe his Skean-Dhu, and if you didn’t have one, a knife or fork was acceptable. Each time, during the story telling, the great deed or a great

Graham was mentioned, we raised our weapons and yelled in approval. Whenever the name of Campbell was mentioned, boos and catcalls filled the room. Mike Campbell Stephenson and his wife, Kim, were great sports about all of this, as he waved a white napkin on the tip of his knife. They certainly added to the humour of the interactive reading.



Kim and Mike Campbell Stephenson

Roger Graham assumed the duty of the ancient ‘Harper’ and played his guitar as he led all the guests in a sing-a-long.

Sunday, October 21

Another day was planned to attend the games and some people opted not to drive out to the Park again. I was one who ‘opted out’ and went shopping for gifts to take home to my family.

That evening there was a wonderful barbeque at Richard and Kate’s home. We had ‘pulled’ pork and beef, baked beans, cole slaw, potato salad and banana pudding and peach cobbler for dessert. This was the most delicious meal!! People left about 8:30 and went back to the hotel to get ready to leave the next morning.



Monday, October 22

I started for home, driving in a misty rain that became heavier, as I proceeded north. The people in Georgia and the Carolinas were praying for rain, since they hadn't had any since June. Six to eight feet of the banks were visible in the lakes and rivers that I passed. Boat docks were fully exposed with the water beyond their reach.

Tuesday, October 23

As I drove further into the mountains, I could see that the trees had finally changed colour and they were backdrops for the Angus cattle that grazed in the valleys. The rain continued to increase and, at times, made driving more challenging, as vision was restricted to the car ahead. I finally reached the border and re-entered Canada without incident.

Home at last, and I have a full-blown cold! I was glad that I didn't have to go to school the next day. Early to bed and lots of 'Vicks'.

This was a busy, interesting, and well-planned event and I would be remiss if I did not give full credit to the following people.

Kate & Richard and Jeremy Dick. Kate and Richard's daughters and sons-in-law, Kiersten and Mac for the accounting and registration packages, Beau and Clare for the barbeque at Kate and Richard's. Evelyn and Troy for the Saturday and Sunday lunches at the Games, with help from some of the ladies of the clan.

Cliff Fitzsimmons for his organization and co-ordination of the events. He was also involved in fund raising, and hotel negotiating and was helped by Sami Graham and his friends from Tennessee, Mike and Kim Stephenson.

Chip Bryan, who set up the tents and banners, with the help of Marcus Fitzsimmons and his cousin, Jenny. These people also helped in the Hospitality room. Sue Graham also provided food for the hospitality room. Barbara Warren sold \$2,500.00 worth of Mugdock merchandise.

I hope I haven't left out any names, but thanks again to Cliff, as organizer, and all the people listed. Cliff tells me that ALL expenses were covered. Bravo!!

The next AGM in 2008 will be held in California and I hope to see my old friends and make some new ones.

See you there!!

