

Caleb Graham '23
Drum Travel Award

Scottish Folklore and the Collective Conscious

My purpose for researching in Scotland would be to investigate how Scottish folklore has shaped the collective consciousness of Scottish people. While Scotland is a well-known Protestant country with schools requiring religious songs at assembly and church attendance during Christmas and Easter, the Scots remain wary of various, non-Christian spirits that supposedly inhabit the island. Much of Scotland's mythic corpus relate to different fairies and the Fair Realm. From kelpies to selkies, the blue men of the Minch to the nuckalavee, Scots have passed on folktales for generations, warning their children not to upset their Fae neighbours. However, with the rise of social media as well as the feeling that the world is more connected than ever and therefore, less local, have these stories been passed down the same way as before? Do tales of the Scottish Fae remain an integral part of the Scottish collective consciousness?

Over the summer, I plan to research how these folktales, myths, and legends have affected Scotland's collective identity in the past and how individuals continue to connect with the mythic corpus relating to the Fair Realm. Among other things, I wish to discover if there is there a generational gap in folkloric knowledge among present-day Scots. As someone who grew up in Scotland, I want to understand more about how these stories have shaped my knowledge of the world and that of my peers. Growing up, I remember being taught 'stranger danger' using a story about a kelpie, and other tales that instructed me about the landscape and how to avoid the *sìth* (fairies) of Scotland. As Scotland is predominantly a Christian country – especially within *Gàidhlig*-speaking communities – I am curious to see whether the ancient narratives about the Fair Folk remain an integral part of Scotland's collective conscious, and how they have been transformed.

I would start my research by visiting the School of Scottish Studies Archives at Edinburgh University. The school was established to collect the folklore and traditions of Scotland, so I believe the archives will enable me to better understand the recurring themes of Scottish myths, at least as developed by professional folklorists. This would allow me to read several different versions of the tales that have previously been recorded, including ones written in Scots or *Gàidhlig* that one cannot find elsewhere. I would also like to travel to several

locations across Scotland in further pursuit of stories still told *in situ*, including the Kelpies in Falkirk, Loch Ness, the Island of Lewis, and perhaps others, to see how the landscape of Scotland has shaped – and continues to shape – its folkloric traditions. I would add to what I have learned in the archives by speaking to locals in these areas, asking about their knowledge of Scotland’s mythic, fairy corpus and what is their current relationship to these tales.

I intend to use my findings as a launching point for my honours thesis in Anthropology. I would discuss the themes and structures found in the Scottish mythic corpus, using Claude Lévi-Strauss’s structuralist analytic categories and James Frazer’s theory to look for repetitive themes and important messages being passed down the generations through myth. I would follow this by discussing what I learned when visiting the different sites, and what locals told me about their own experiences with folktales and the fairies of Scotland. I also intend to collect Scots and *Gàidhlig* ballads to share with my field collaborators. With my ability to speak *Gàidhlig*, I am in the unique position to be able to do an extended analysis of a ballad or two for my project, as well as add to the Franklin and Marshall archives with translations and recordings. This would give me a good base to take my work further once I reach graduate school where I plan to study Celtic folklore and balladry.