Travel in Time Revisiting places from the past

Lochaber, Scotland Estelle Slegers Helsen

TRAVEL IN TIME Revisiting places from the past

LOCHABER, SCOTLAND

Photography by Then - © W. S. Thomson Now - © Estelle Slegers Helsen

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6 | FORT WILLIAM | The Railway Station, the Station Hotel, Grand Hotel, Highland Hotel, Macrea and Dick's Bus Station and MacBrayne's Bus Station from the pier | Let's See Fort William and Lochaber (Cameron Square edition), p. 10

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62 | RANNOCH MOOR | Loch an Achlaise on the Moor of Rannoch looking to Clachlet and Meall A' Bhuridh | Let's See the West Highlands (Kilmallie House edition), back cover

The then and now pictures are printed side-by-side. On the left are W.S. Thomson's photographs with his original captions. On the right are Estelle Slegers Helsen's remakes with updated captions.

As a history researcher, I have unravelled the life of W.S. Thomson (1906-1967), a forgotten entrepreneurial Scotsman operating at the forefront of colour photography. From the late 1930s to his sudden death, aged 61, the photographer roamed his beloved country to capture the beauty of landscapes. He published his work in two pictorial books, 'The Highlands in Colour' (1954) and 'Colourful Scotland' (1956), in his series entitled 'Let's See' and 'Beauty Spots' and as postcards. When a friend gave me a copy of 'The Highlands in Colour' in 2019, the quality and the classical approach of Thomson's pictures struck me.

I have always been fascinated by the aspect of time and the transience of life. Photography is an ideal method of capturing one single moment in time. Comparing two or more pictures taken from the same place within a time frame of a minute, a day, a season, a year, a decade, a lifetime, or a century reveals what has changed and what has not. The Travel in Time project tracks places through time. By showcasing the old and new pictures side-byside, the differences become apparent and reveal the effect of time. Using both as visual cues, I then gather recollections from local people, all blending into stories of historical interest, which I give back to the local communities.

Hundreds of W.S. Thomson's photos have been printed, but as far as I know, no archive of his original black-and-white negatives or colour transparencies has survived. For this first booklet, I wandered in Thomson's footsteps with a selection of photographs he had taken in Lochaber. Why Lochaber? Thomson lived in Fort William and nearby Corpach from 1946 to 1961. There he was a well-known photographer, who also produced family portraits in his home studio, took school pictures in the local area and provided images for the printed press.

A family member has very kindly granted me permission to publish W.S. Thomson's photos. This Lochaber series was made possible with the support of the West Highland Museum in Fort Williams and a grant from the Year of Stories 2022 Community Fund. I would also like to thank everyone who has shared their recollections. To read the stories and find the locations on a map, please visit www.travelintime.uk.

GLEN NEVIS





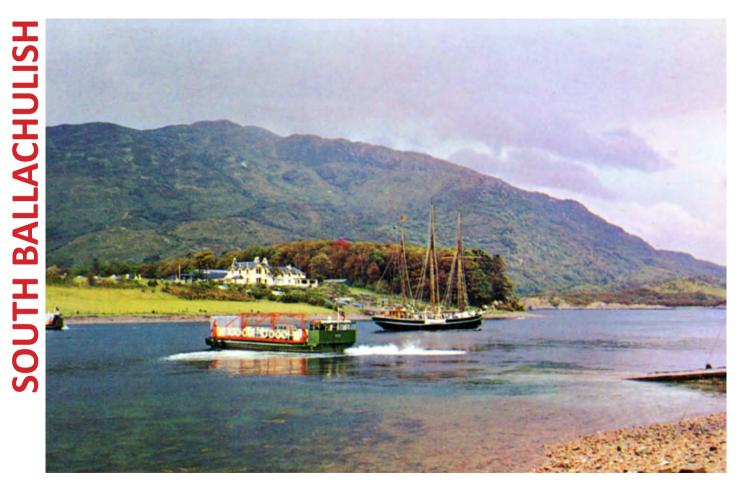
View looking south-east to Sgùrr a' Mhàim and Stob Bàn



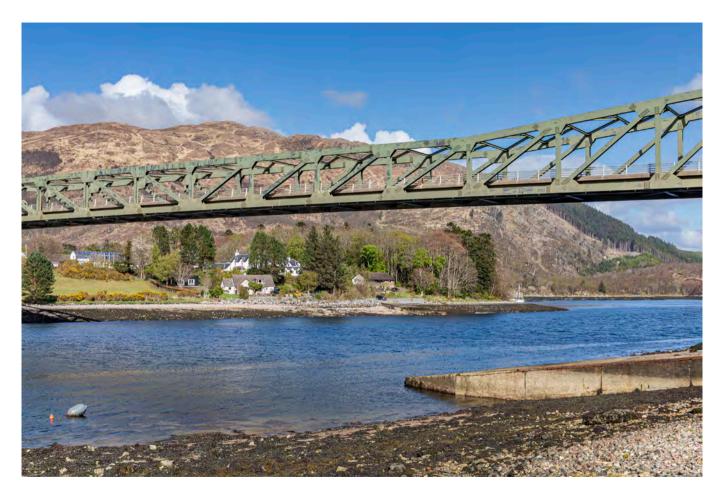
Ardnamurchan Lighthouse, the most westerly point of the mainland of Scotland



Point of Ardnamurchan with Muck, Rum and the Lighthouse from Dubh Rubha Mòr



The "Prince Louis" from Gordonstoun School passes through Ballachulish Ferry



Ballachulish Bridge and Loch Leven Hotel, North Ballachulish

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Travel in Time is a photography and story project. The old photographs and postcards and new remakes taken from the same spot served as visual cues to talk to local people, asking about their recollections and sharing their stories of the past, present and future of the places featured. This booklet, with 30 then and now pictures covers the Lochaber area in West Scotland.

You can find the stories at www.travelintime.uk.

William Sutherland Thomson MBE (Glasgow, 1906 - Isle of Skye, 1967) was a Scottish photographer who roamed his beloved country. As a proud and entrepreneurial Scotsman, he published books, booklets, and hundreds of postcards depicting Scotland in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. During his life, he lived in Glasgow, Kirkwall, Fort William, Corpach and Edinburgh.

This booklet is a homage to his work.



www.newtraces.uk - UK £ 7.50



© Family archive

Estelle Slegers Helsen (Belgium, 1965) is a photographer and history researcher who has contributed to various social and cultural projects. Her passion is connecting people to each other, their roots in the past and present, and the beauty of life itself. Travel in Time is her latest project, revisiting landscapes, streetscapes and seascapes from the past. She has been living in the UK since 2018.

You can find her work at www.newtraces.uk



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