



# Clan Cameron “ Basics ”

**The Clan:** The Scottish clan of “yesteryear” was quite simply a collection of individuals of a given surname (often “related by blood”), living somewhat in close proximity to one another, united under a common chief. Others have defined clans as “those of common stock.” In many instances septs, (“broken” men from other clans who sought the protection of another chief) were also considered part of the clan.

The Clan Cameron has a recorded history from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, although unsubstantiated histories have its “roots” reaching back to the “supposed” first chief, Angus Cameron, living about the year 1000. They resided in the “Cameron Country” of Lochaber, an area roughly 12 by 16 miles, near the present town of Fort William, in the Scottish Highlands. The history of the Camerons, as a Scottish clan, is an extensive and often combative one, for that was how men learned to survive and live another day.

**Chief:** In each clan there were several “subaltern” tribes (in Clan Cameron’s instance these would be the Camerons of Letterfinlay, Glen Nevis, Callart/Lundavra, Erracht and Clunes). Each tribe “owned” their dependence on their

own immediate chieftain, but all agreed in owing allegiance to the Supreme Chief of the Clan. In “ideal” circumstances, they looked upon it to be their duty to support him in all his endeavors.

Clan Cameron is fortunate to have a hereditary chief, descended directly from the earliest days of Camerons living in Lochaber. Since the year 1528, the chief of Clan Cameron have been called “Lochiel.” If you had a Cameron ancestor living in Scotland, odds are that they followed an ancestor of the present Lochiel as their chief. The XXVI hereditary chief of Clan Cameron, who like so many ancestors, resides at Achnacarry, in Lochaber, is Colonel Sir Donald Hamish Cameron of Lochiel, KT, CVO, TD.

## Tartans:

There are four basic tartans, which are utilized by the Clan Cameron, each of which is usually found available in “modern” (bright and lively colors), “weathered” (softer hues), and “ancient” (supposedly more authentic colors) variations.

*“Basic” Clan Cameron:* This sixteen green squares upon a red background sett, with a bright yellow bordering, is for general use by all members of Clan Cameron. If one tartan had to be singled out for general use by Camerons worldwide, “Basic” Clan Cameron would be the one. As is the case with most clan tartans, this is one from the Vestiarium of Scoticum in 1834, which was accepted by the then Lochiel. It very much resembles an old red and green square sett in the West Highlands Museum in Fort William, although there are some variations.

*Cameron of Lochiel:* This red and blue tartan is similar to that worn by the 18<sup>th</sup> Chief, Donald “The Gentle Lochiel” Cameron, in a portrait hanging at Achnacarry. It was first illustrated in 1810 in Wilson’s Collection. This is

the personal tartan of the Chief and his immediate family; as a rule, it should not be worn by clanfolk.

*Cameron of Erracht:* Said to have been designed by the wife of Donald, 7<sup>th</sup> of Erracht, in 1793 (there are many theories as to its origin, none of which seem entirely satisfactory). This combination of the Cameron tartan and that of McDonald of Keppoch (her tartan) uses a deep red, dark blue, green and a fine gold line. It was created for the use of the original 79<sup>th</sup> Regiment, later known as The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders, raised in 1793 by their eldest son, General Sir Allan Cameron, K.C.B. Regardless of its origin, this tartan has been in use by The Cameron Highlanders since their late-eighteenth century inception. It is often used as a day or "hunting" tartan, because of its "serviceable" colors. At times it has been strictly reserved for use among the regiment, but is now in wide use among Clan Cameron.

*Hunting Cameron (of Lochiel):* With its soft shades of green and blue, this tartan is not listed as being "restricted" in its use. It was devised because the "Basic" Clan Cameron tartan was considered too bright for shootings, stalking and hiking. Designed in 1956, it was based on a description of the tartan worn by the clansmen who fought under Sir Ewen Cameron, 17<sup>th</sup> Chief, at the battle of Killiecrankie.

## Crest:

Central to the Clan Cameron crest are the five arrows, "united" with one another with gules ribbon or band. This crest goes back to pre-1745, when it replaced the old "dexter arm" crest (which was still used interchangeably with the "5 Arrows" into the mid-twentieth century). These two crests, and their mottos on the surrounding strap, may be used by clansmen to denote their clan affiliation.

The “5 Arrows” represent the five branches of the clan “under” the leadership of the Camerons of Lochiel during the early/mid-eighteenth century, namely:

- 1) MacMartins or Camerons of letterfinlay
- 2) Camerons of Glen Nevis
- 3) Camerons of Callart and Lundavra
- 4) Camerons of Erracht
- 5) Camerons of Clunes

**Motto:**

The present motto of the Clan Cameron is “Aonaibh Ri Cheile,” which roughly translated means “Unite,” or “Let Us Unite.” This motto is usually used in conjunction with the more accepted “5 Arrows” crest, and is presently used on the Armorial Bearings of Cameron of Lochiel.