

The Road to the Isles

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Chorus

1. A far Cuillins is pullin' me away
As take I wi' my cromach to the road.
The far Cuillins are puttin' love on me
As step I wi' the sunlight for my load.

Chorus

Sure by Tummel and Loch Rannoch and Lochaber I will go
By heather tracks wi' heaven in their wiles.
If it's thinkin' in your inner heart the braggart's in my step
You've never smelled the tangle o' the Isles.
Oh the far Cuillins are puttin' love on me
As step I wi' my cromach to the Isles.

2. It's by Shiel water the track is to the west
By Ailort and by Morar to the sea
The cool cresses I am thinkin' of for pluck
And bracken for a wink on Mother's knee.
Chorus

3. The blue islands are pullin' me away,
Their laughter puts the leap upon the lame.
The blue islands from the Skerries to the Lews
Wi' heather honey taste upon each name.
Chorus

"The Road to the Isles", also known as "The Bens of Jura", "The Burning Sands of Egypt", "The Highland Brigade's March To Heilbronn" is a famous Scottish traditional song. It is part of the Kennedy-Fraser collection and it appeared in a book entitled **Songs of the Hebrides** published in 1917, with the title by the Celtic poet Kenneth Macleod. The tune associated with "The Road to the Isles" was an air played by Malcolm Johnson of Barra on a chanter and composed by Pipe Major John McLellan of Dunoon (originally titled "The Burning Sands of Egypt").

The lyrics mention first the hills of the Isle of Skye (whose memory is calling the traveler west); then the successive locations he will pass on the way across the Western Highlands and Inner and Outer Hebrides. The locations mentioned are (in this order): the Cuillin Hills (on the Isle of Skye), Tummel (in Perthshire), Loch Rannoch (in Perth and Kinross), Lochaber (to the west of the Scottish Highlands), Shiel (near Fort William), Ailort (near the Sound of Arisaig), Morar (near Loch Morar), the Skerries (rocky islets - in this case, just off Skye) and the Lews (near Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis).

A "cromach" or "cromack" is a shepherd's crook or stick.

"Tangle", or sea tangle, is oarweed or similar seaweed.

The tune was used by Ewan MacColl for his rambling song "Mass Trespass 1932", a forerunner of his song "The Manchester Rambler".

It was also recorded by Gordon Bok which is where I first learned it.