

Turraidean dubha's an linnidh

Black turrets in the Sound

A report on Trident nuclear submarine exercises  
between Skye and Wester Ross

Scottish CND  
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Thogadh ron a cheann  
Agus cearban a sheol,  
Ach an diugh anns an linnidh  
Togaidg long-fo-thuinn a turraid  
Agus a druim dhubh shliom  
A' maoidheadh an ni a dheanadh  
Smur de choille, de lianagan's de chreagan,  
A dh'fhagadh Screapadal gun bhoidhche  
Mar a dh'fhagadh e gun daoine.

A seal would lift its head  
and a basking shark its sail,  
but today in the sea-sound  
a submarine lifts its turret  
and its black sleek back  
threatening the thing that would make  
dross of wood, of meadows and of rocks  
that would leave Screapadal without beauty  
just as it was left without people.

Excerpt from "Screapadal" by Sorley Maclean<sup>1</sup>.  
Screapadal is on the island of Raasay overlooking the  
submarine exercise area.

## INTRODUCTION

Around Gareloch on the Clyde estuary the impact of the latest nuclear submarines is very conspicuous. The Faslane base has been expanded and surrounded by a 12 feet high fence with razor sharp wire and TV cameras. Police constantly patrol the perimeter along the public road to Garelochhead. The presence of nuclear submarines around the shores of Skye and Wester Ross is less obvious.

There is a large modern building by the long road than winds round the peninsula of Applecross. On the Island of Rona there is a top secret centre full of complex computer equipment. The presence of submarines in the Inner Sound near Raasay is sometimes betrayed as they come to the surface after hours under water.

This area has already been used by many nuclear powered submarines, some armed with Polaris nuclear missiles. Soon it will be used to test out the Leviathan of nuclear submarines, Trident. Not only are these submarines designed to cause even more destruction than their predecessors, but they are also dangerous in peacetime. In its determination to acquire the most potent weapons of mass destruction the government have ignored the dangers that these vessels will bring to Scotland, and particularly to the Clyde estuary and the waters around Skye.

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8th December 1992

## PRESENCE OF SUBMARINES AROUND SKYE

### Submarine exercise areas

The British Underwater Test and Evaluation Centre (BUTEC) is an underwater range where submarines fire torpedoes. The range covers an area of 10 square miles to the east of the island of Raasay. Within this area torpedoes are tracked by 15 hydrophone arrays. The danger area around the range extends to 130 square miles<sup>2</sup>.

Rona Ranger is a sonar range in the Northern part of the Inner Sound. This has facilities to listen to the sound characteristics of individual submarines and surface ships. Each vessel has a particular noise signature which can be electronically recorded. This is an Admiralty Marine Technology Establishment<sup>3</sup>.

Submarines transit to and from these areas, normally keeping to the West of the Isle of Skye approaching the range area from the North. Submarines also travel around the West Coast of Scotland on exercises. Polaris submarines use the Minches in passage to and from patrol areas.

### Shore facilities

The range control centre for the BUTEC torpedo range is at Rhu -na-Lachan in Applecross. An underwater cable links the control centre to the hydrophones. The movement of vessels on trials and support craft is controlled by radio from the control centre. There are also computers to interpret data from the range<sup>4</sup>.

On the Isle of Rona there is an operations building and a pier in Loch a'Bhraige. Trials in the Rona Ranger sonar range are controlled from these facilities which cost £1 million to build and were operational in 1978<sup>5</sup>.

Near Kyle of Lochalsh is a shore support base for the range area with a pier and helipad. Torpedoes are stored on the site. There is also radio direction finding equipment<sup>6</sup>.

### Visits to the Inner Sound by Trident

BUTEC and Rona Ranger will be used by Trident submarines. New submarines undergoing Contractor's Sea Trials normally visit the area<sup>7</sup>. Contractors Sea Trials of the first Trident submarine, Vanguard, started on 22nd October 1992 and are expected to continue into January 1993. Later in 1993 this submarine will begin a period of Royal Navy trials which will last for over a year. This second series of trials will test the tactical handling of the submarine and regular visits to the Inner Sound are likely throughout 1994<sup>8</sup>. The three other Trident submarines under construction will also be scheduled to visit the area<sup>9</sup>.