

Tribute to Norman MacCaig



Photo courtesy of the BBC

Comedian Billy Connolly, fiddler Aly Bain and award-winning novelist Andrew Greig were caught in a blizzard while filming a tribute to their friend, the great Scottish poet Norman MacCaig (1910-96).

To mark the centenary of MacCaig's birth, the trio undertook a journey to find the elusive trout of MacCaig's favourite fishing spot – the Loch of the Green Corrie, 1,600ft up a mountainside in Assynt in the North West Highlands, where he spent every summer for 40 years “filling my camel's hump” for the rest of the year in Edinburgh.

Their quest, which was filmed for a programme to be screened on BBC Scotland and BBC Four over the autumn winter period, was hit, however, by a massive overnight snowstorm at the end of May.

Despite terrible conditions, the trio were determined to resume their fishing bid the following morning but, as Billy said: “Could Norman no'like Jamaica or something?”

Nevertheless, he later admitted: “I'm glad I came here. I think it was a terrific idea. The night made it an ordeal but, until then, it was absolutely terrific. I nearly set fire to my sleeping bag – it was that cold!”

And he gave the thumbs up to the Loch of the Green Corrie: “It's a strange place. I do like it. It's got a haunted sort of feel to it.”

Aly Bain was similarly upbeat: “I remember Norman talking about up the Loch of the Green Corrie, but I never went fishing with him so this was payback time for me – to go

fishing where he went.”

Andrew Greig, whose book about MacCaig, *At The Loch Of The Green Corrie*, has been high on the Scottish best-seller lists, added: “Being here in Assynt for anybody who knows Norman’s poetry is like living inside his skull!”

As well as the fishing expedition, the hour-long programme, which is being made by Glasgow-based Pelicula Films, features tributes, anecdotes and readings of favourite MacCaig poems by friends and fellow poets including Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney, Liz Lochhead, Alasdair Gray and Douglas Dunn.

The programme is one of two co-commissions between BBC Scotland and BBC Four, which feature in the latter’s autumn winter season (announced today, 25 August).

The other programme on Peter Howson will transmit on BBC Scotland under the ArtWorks banner.

Filmed over two years, this portrait of Peter Howson, by Hand Pict, follows the painter as he tackles a major commission for Glasgow’s Catholic cathedral and tells the story of his turbulent life from Eighties stardom to his religious-themed work today.