

# **The Atholl Highlanders are off to New York**

**The UK's only private regiment, The Atholl Highlanders, raised and commanded by the Dukes of Atholl, and based at their ancestral home of Blair Castle in Highland Perthshire, have announced that they will be taking part in New York's Tartan Day Parade on 5 April 2025.**

This will be the fourth tour of the US by the Atholl Highlanders, and the last tour took place in 2012.

The 62 strong contingent of Atholl Highlanders, including its Pipe Band and support staff, will visit Washington, Boston, and the Massachusetts town of Athol, which claims a historical connection to the Atholl Highlanders, and New York City for the parade when the Grand Marshal will be Scottish actor, Alan Cumming.



The Atholl Highlanders have not marched in the Tartan Day Parade before, and will take part with their band, which consists of ten pipers and nine drummers.

The contingent will arrive in New York on 3 April, wearing Clan Murray Tartan, ready to march in the Tartan Day Parade on 5 April, before attending a ceilidh on Saturday evening. The

following day the Highlanders will parade at the British Embassy in New York.

Touring the East Coast of America, to coincide with New York Tartan Week, was the idea of His Grace, The 10<sup>th</sup> Duke of Atholl, who funded the very first trip in conjunction with the Murray Clan in 1987, visiting Boston, Athol, Concorde, the Loon Mountain Highland Games, New York, Washington, plus the Virginia Military Institute at Lexington and Williamsburg.

After the 10th Duke died, and the title moved to John Murray in South Africa, an Atholl Highlanders' Council was created, which went on to operate a Tour Fund. It allocated money that the Atholl Highlanders received as payment for Duties at the Keepers of the Quaich, and through the Atholl Gathering, towards overseas tours, which usually had a link to the Murray family and/or Blair Castle itself.

Subsequent tours followed, in 2000 and 2012, visiting other destinations such as Quebec, Toronto, and Bermuda, along with the Massachusetts town of Athol, an approximate 90 minute drive from Boston.

In the mid 18<sup>th</sup> Century, Athol was chosen as the place to settle by an emigrating Scot, John Murray. Becoming a prominent businessman and landowner, he named the town Athol to remind him of his Scottish roots in Highland Perthshire. Although his connection to the Murray Clan remains unfounded in Blair Castle archives, the town, has, since the Atholl Highlanders first American tour in 1987, developed close links with the Regiment, and Blair Castle. After the regiment paraded at The State House, Boston, during its 2012 tour, a ceremony officially recognised the town of Athol's 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, and 6 June was declared "Athol Day".

On this forthcoming tour, local Athol families will host pairs of Atholl Highlanders in their own homes for four nights,

before the regiment returns to Scotland. The organising committee reached out to Athol three years ago realising that hosting provides a more personal experience than a hotel, and enables everyone to gain a deeper understanding of each other's culture.

The host families will be instrumental in organising cultural and educational visits to local schools and businesses in Athol and the surrounding area. They will also transport the Atholl Highlanders to parades, and other trips and activities during their time with them, including the Girardi's River Rat Race, a canoe race on the Athol-Orange River. Once again, as on previous trips, the Athol Highlanders will take part in the State House Parade in Boston on 11 April.

Their packed itinerary includes a parade at the British Embassy in Washington, a Black Rose Dinner in Athol, and a Legion Spaghetti Supper.

With Atholl Highlanders often recruited through their family lines, there are presently six sets of brothers in the regiment and its band, together with three sets of father and sons.

RSM Graham Jack, an Atholl Highlander since 1977, and a veteran of three previous USA tours, commented on the forthcoming trip: "We are all really looking forward to this incredible trip. Although many of our members have been on a US tour before, each one always offers something new. This time, it's the honour and privilege to march in the Tartan Day Parade, which came about through our previous Adjutant, John Bullough, planting the seed of the Regiment joining the Tartan Day Parade in New York. It will be an amazing experience for us all, one that we will never forget, and particularly poignant and memorable for the Atholl Highlanders attending for the first time with their sons, and for our many sets of brothers."

Graham, who can trace his family ancestry regarding the Murray Clan back to the Battle of Culloden, went on to say: "On behalf of the Atholl Highlanders, we'd like to take this opportunity to thank the extremely hospitable host families in Athol who look after us so well. Many of us have become firm friends, with visits taking place outwith official tours, something we are sure will continue into the future. This year's itinerary in Athol will be particularly fun with some of our members taking part in the Athol Rat Race, a break from the formality of other tasks. We always welcome the chance to get right into the heart of the community through the school and business visits too."

Graham said: "We'd say to any of Americans who love their history, and who'd like to find out more about the Atholl Highlanders, to make the very worthwhile trip over to Scotland to visit us at Blair Castle. May is a fantastic time to come, as we have our annual Military Parade and take part in traditional Highland Games. It's a true Highland spectacle not to be missed!

"The regiment was actually formed to fight American Independence on behalf of the Crown, which is another fascinating fact. However, they ended up in Ireland and never made it over to get involved in the conflict. Now, we are happy to say that we enjoy the best possible connections to the USA!"

Stephen Leckie, Chair of VisitScotland, said: "For VisitScotland, New York City Tartan Week has proved a valuable means of engaging visitors and businesses through a celebration of Scottish heritage and culture. Tartan Week offers VisitScotland not only the opportunity to promote Scotland as a destination but to also showcase our fantastic cultural ambassadors such as the Atholl Highlanders.

"North America is Scotland's largest international market, and we know that our history and heritage are a huge draw for our

American visitors. We wish the Atholl Highlanders well as they bring a taste of Scotland to the US east coast.”



