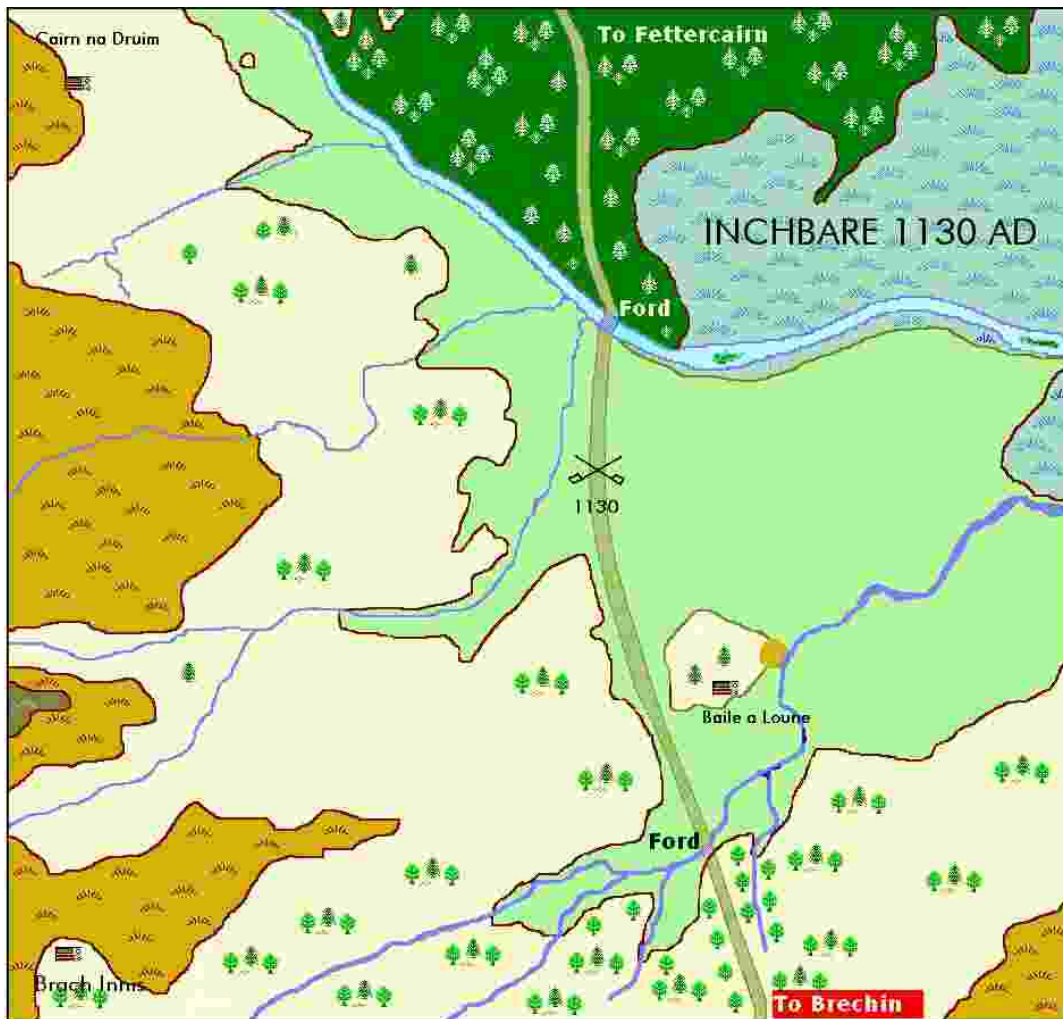


**The Battle of Inchbare AD 1130.
By Niall U'Aislainn.
5 October 2002**

Location: On the flood plain of the river North Esk just over the ford by the Island of Inchbare. Gaidhlig 'Innisbeur,' [Island of the pinnacle] pronounced 'Inschbor' Ordnance Survey sheet 45 grid reference 606658 which is just before the road bridge over the river. Near to Edzell and Stracathro and about 4 miles north of Brechin. The Battle took place on the 16th April 1130. (Note: Dated by reference to the date of death of Queen Maud 7 days later. And a note by John of Fordun that the battle took place the day before St Simeons day.)

The attempt by the rightful heirs of Kenneth MacAlpin to regain the usurped throne of Scotland



The Battlefield map of Inchbare Circa 1130 AD.

The Historical background to this battle.

We must first go back to the times of Malcolm Ceanmor (Malcolm III) who you will recollect was the Illegitimate son of King Duncan and an unknown millers daughter from forteviot. Malcolm usurped the throne with his swords edge as under the ancient laws of Tanistry, he had no legitimate right to be king. In 1069 Malcolm III married Princess Margaret sister of Edward Atheling, the true Saxon claimant to the throne of England. Queen Margaret then started to make major changes in the Celtic Court, She imported Roman Catholic priests and churchmen from England and worked tirelessly to transform the Church of the Ceill De (Columban Celtic church) into becoming a part of Roman Catholicism, St Peter instead of St John of Jerusalem.

Other Languages began to be used in the Court which gradually pushed Gaidhlig into the background and to enforce the dominance of the Roman Church, which, unlike the Columban church was greedy for wealth and political power. To facilitate this takeover, Normans were brought into Scotland in even greater numbers than before. These Normans married Celtic heiresses in order to lay their hands on the fertile and productive farmlands and territories. Harsh, cruel and to the Gaels Inhuman Feudalism was imposed to become the norm. Serfdom instead of the gentler paternalism of the Celtic chiefs. Celtic laws were soon discarded in favour of Roman laws, Celtic Titles such as Mormaor were changed to the Teutonic 'Earl.' The Thanes found their powers and privileges being gradually eroded and then withdrawn as the laws and usages of Tanistry were changed to the law of primogeniture.

Naturally these changes were looked on first with suspicion and later on with downright hostility and a schism now appeared between the Gaels and the Norman dominated court of Malcolm Ceanmor and Margaret. Malcolm III fathered six sons, Edward the eldest, Edmund, Edgar, Ethelred, Alexander and the youngest David. Edward was badly wounded and died of his wounds near Jedburgh after a treacherous ambush killed his father Malcolm Ceanmor and several Scottish notables near Alnwick in 1093. (It should be noted, whilst under a flag of Truce.)

Edmund was simple minded and was immured for the rest of his life in a Roman Catholic Monastery in England as a Monk. Edgar succeeded to the throne eventually with help from English Normans (with promises of lands and honours when he seized the throne) to overthrow his uncle Donald Ban. He reigned for 10 years before dying young, reputedly of over indulging in alcohol. Ethelred was for purely political reasons appointed Abbot of Dunkeld which was a Celtic Church foundation, thus making him primate of the whole Celtic Church. He was soon converted to their way of thinking and became a priest himself! He then married, (Celtic priests were allowed to marry) a daughter of the late King Lulach who had been murdered by Malcolm Ceanmor.

Ethelred recognized that his Saxon name was totally unacceptable to the Gaels, and quickly changed it to Eth (Aed) and styled himself as MacEth which later became over time MacAoid (Mackay). For this act he was disinherited by Malcolm Ceanmor. It should be noted that being disinherited, did not debar his sons from claiming their rights, as we shall later see.

Alexander now became king after his brother and reigned for seventeen years, dying it is believed of pneumonia. David the youngest of Ceanmor's sons inherited the throne, becoming David I of Scotland. He took the throne at a time when the great schism between the Gaels and Norman Scots was now so wide, it was becoming unbridgeable. It was not surprising that the resentful Gaels, seeing their Language, Church, and way of life threatened by an alien culture, began a series of small uprisings. Due to the constant 'Hosting' of the Vikings and internal bickerings, no concerted effort was made to unseat the Norman dominated Court. To make matters worse David 1st Brought in large numbers of the sons of his Norman friends from England and settled them on lands confiscated from the rebellious native Scots and Gaels.

We must return to the Mormaor of Moray's father, Aed (Ethelred) who had three children: two sons, Angus and Malcolm, and a daughter, Gruaidh. Angus became Earl of Moray after his father died. He revived his late father's claim to the throne, not only that his father was the Elder brother of David 1st but also that the Celtic Moray Mormaordom was the true line of Celtic kings. Angus made contact with other Celtic Mormaors, Earls and Warlords such as Somerled Lord of the Isles, whose brother Malcolm's wife was Somerled's sister. Malcolm the Mormaor of Ross, a highly experienced warrior against the Norsemen, was enlisted. He also attempted to get the Galloway men to rise with him. Somerled turned him down flat, telling Angus that he and his brother were untried in battle and any attempt would fail. The Galloway men, though nothing loth to engage in a bit of Pillaging and looting did not consider Angus a wise leader and an unknown quantity when it came to battle. However, Fergus of Galloway and about 300 of his mounted men, sailed to Kintyre to join the Moray men to take part in the uprising and act as scouts for Mormaor Angus.

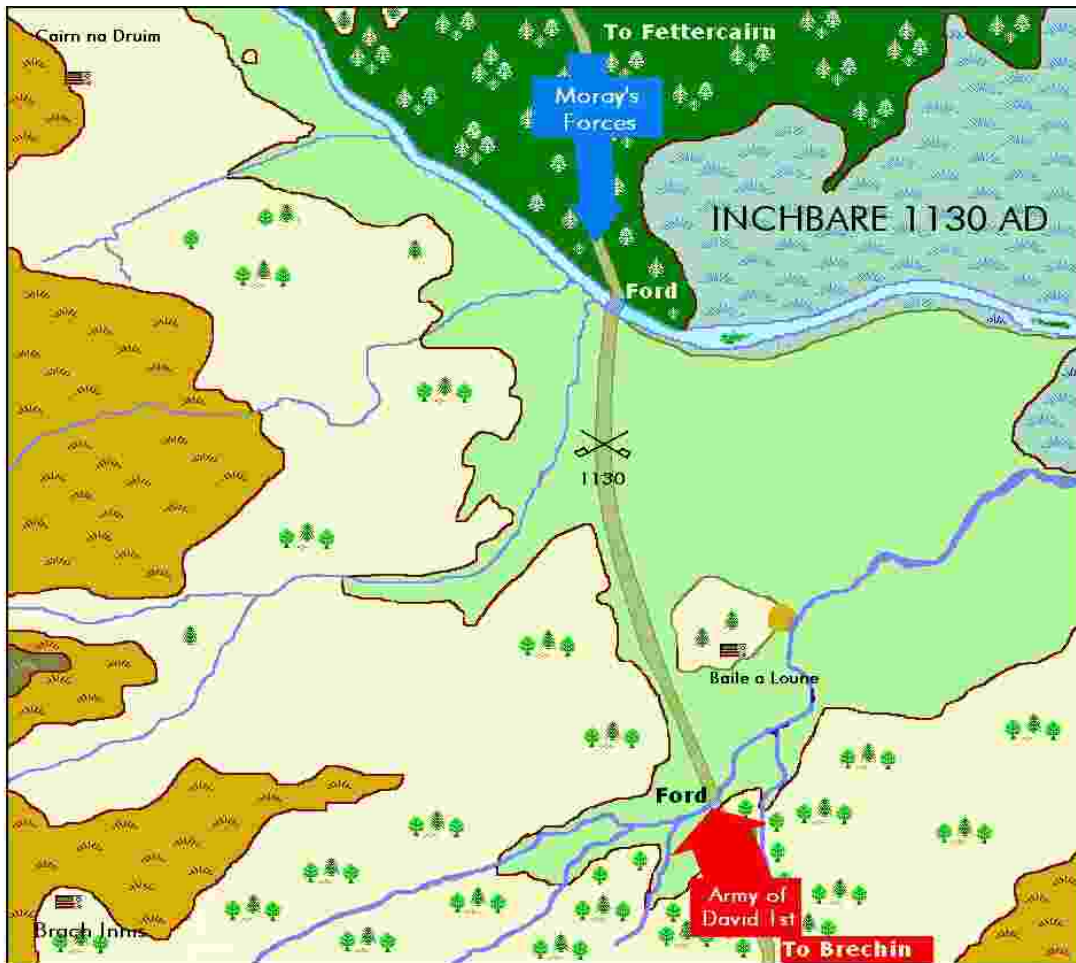
Angus of Moray raises an army

Angus and his brother Malcolm never-the-less raised an army estimated to be no more than 10,000 lightly armed Clansmen [armed with Spears, two handed swords, hunting bows and battle axes,] and the Mormaor of Ross raised another 5,000 clansmen similarly armed. Once Fergus of Galloway joined them at the rendezvous near Torfness (Modern Burghead), they received news that David 1st was engaged in business down in England with his Huntingdonshire Estates and the way was clear to seize the Throne. They marched at the beginning of April 1130, when the passes were largely clear of snow, taking the Strathbogie route south, to Mar and thence over the Cairn of Mounth to Fettercairn. Where they stopped for a couple of days to do

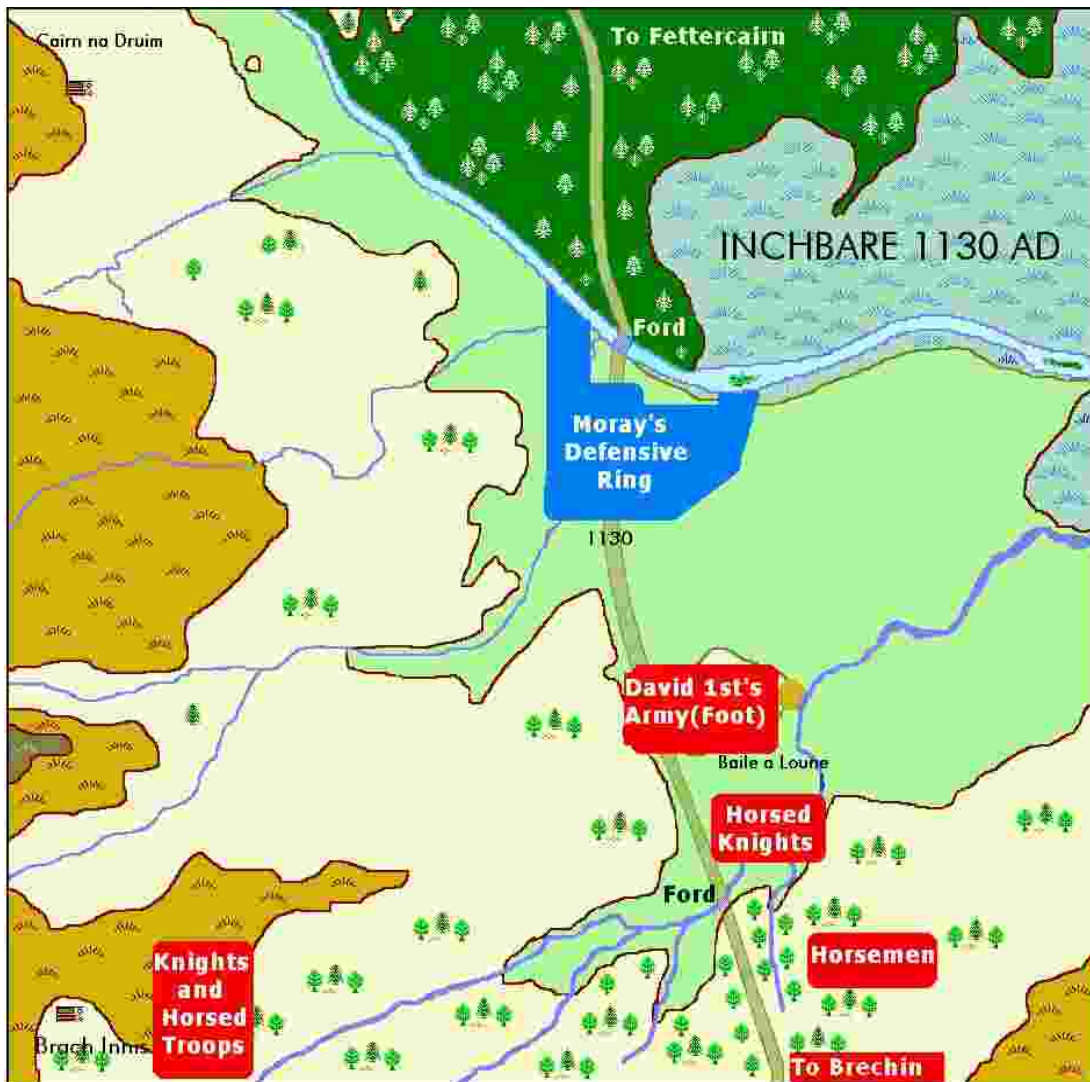
some pillaging and amassing a herd of cattle which was immediately sent back to Moray. The Moray men then moved into the Edzell and Stracathro areas, making their base in the extensive woodlands north of the river North Esk. This area made a good base to do more pillaging and cattle liberating from the rich farms and lands thereabouts.

The High Constable musters his forces.

The safety of the Kingdom was in the hands of David's High Constable, Edward De Morville the son of Earl Siward. On hearing of the uprising, he immediately called on the Nobles and Norman landowners for military support and to rendezvous at Forfar. He realized that mounted troops were the key to victory and the most effective weapon at his disposal was the armoured Norman Knight. He was joined by the Cospatric, Earl of Dunbar with nearly 800 Mosstroopers, Lightly armoured cavalry on smaller horses, very nimble and fleet footed. Constantine, the Earl of Fife brought over 400 Norman knights and nearly 1000 foot soldiers. Other Lords and nobles soon arrived and the High Constable had a respectable force of 3,500 Horsemen and knights and about 5,000 foot soldiers armed with short swords, axes, flails and spears, but no bowmen.



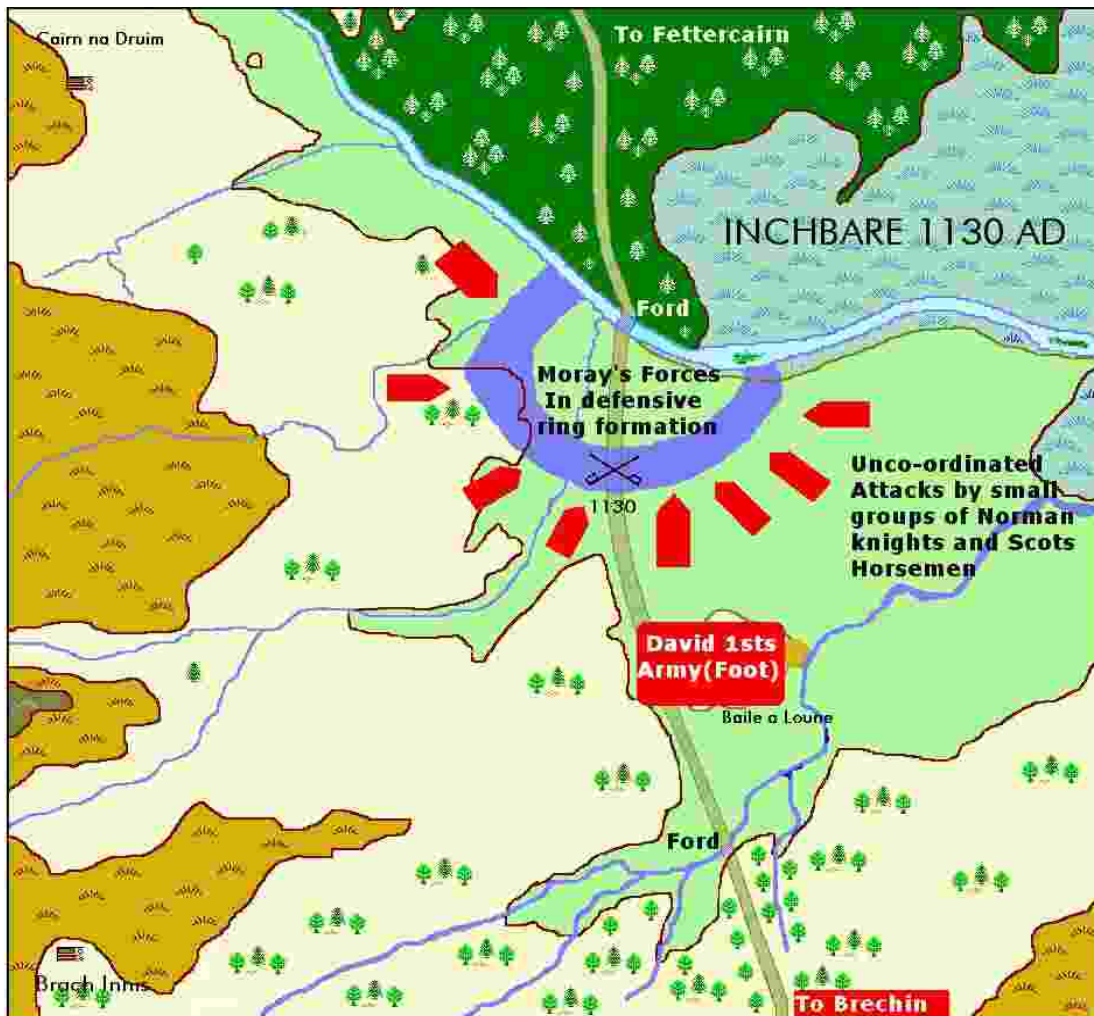
By the 14th April his forces were mustered at Forfar and mounted scouts were sent out to find the Moray men. First Contact was made on the Hill named Lundie (sliabh na Leann dhe, Hill of Gods meadow.) Between several of Dunbar's scouts and those of Fergus of Galloway. A short Tulzie took place in which perhaps a couple of men on each side were slain before the survivors galloped off with the news. The Constable reckoned that the Moray men were moving towards the ford at Inchbare on the River North Esk and the wide flat flood plain on the south side of the ford was ideal for mounted action. Angus and the Constable both sent out scouts to probe each other positions and the constable allowed his foot soldiers to be seen but concealed his cavalry behind a nearby hill to make Angus believe that he was only facing a small force of 5,000 men to oppose his army of 15,000 men.



The Dispositions of the two opposing forces at the commencement of the Battle. Moray's forces are Blue. David 1st's are Red.

Mormaor Angus takes the bait.

Angus, against the advice of Malcolm of Ross, rose to the challenge. Malcolm of Ross advised caution and to send out the Galloway men as scouts to find out how many and where the Constables men were located. Angus, immature, headstrong and inexperienced sent out a few handfuls of scouts before marching his army over the ford (Now bridged by the Westwater bridge) at first light. As the morning mists lifted they saw the steady advance of the Constables 5,000 foot soldiers and they formed up into a great mass to carry out their usual mass charge. This tactic would have utterly destroyed the inferior force arrayed against them but for one factor. A group of Norman horsemen seeing the enemy forming up, became impatient and attacked. The Constable then had no choice but to send in the rest of his horsemen.



Impetuous Norman knights initiate action and suffer for it.

Mormaor Angus defends his position most ably.

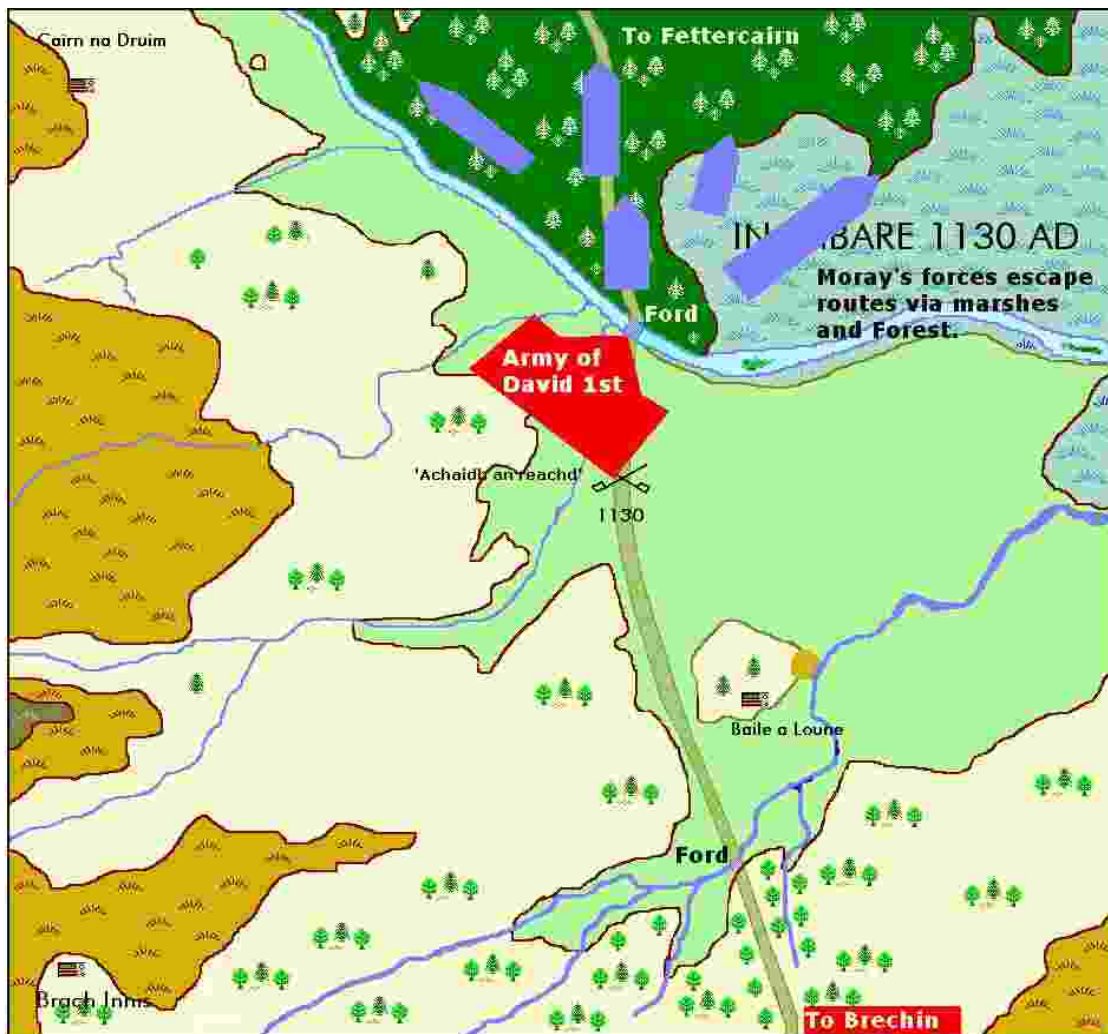
On perceiving the horsemen charging towards them, the Moray men used the tried and tested tactic of forming an impenetrable hedge of their long spears (Forerunner of the Lochaber axe) supported by bowmen, and clansmen in the back rows armed with poleaxes, axes and dirks prepared to dash out to disable the horses as soon as they reached the line of spears, by either hamstringing or disemboweling them causing the horse to fall and leaving the prostrate rider to be finished off with a dirk thrust or poleaxe blow. The Constable was forced to watch as knights and horsemen were dragged down to their deaths. Certainly some of the clansmen died as well but the casualties were fairly equal on both sides. If Angus could keep his nerve and do nothing rash, then he would win this battle of attrition.

The Royal forces made charge after charge with the same effect. Casualties mounted up inexorably and some notable names fell in these charges. The Cospatric Earl of Dunbar and Constantine Earl of Fife had fallen by the early afternoon and the Royal forces were becoming tired and demoralized. Then Angus responded to a challenge from a Norman knight and was struck down and killed. Malcolm MacEth his younger and inexperienced brother was now in command and started to lose his nerve. At this point, the Mormaor of Ross stepped in, took command of the Moray forces and continued the fight. Shortly afterwards some Galloway scouts reported the presence of a great host of Knights and horsemen coming up to join the Royal forces. In fact these were reinforcements of some 2400 horsemen from the Merse who were late in joining the Constables army. The Earl of Ross was now facing certain calamity, His men must have been totally exhausted and any massed attack by 2,400 fresh horsemen could only have one result. The fence of spears would be broken and then the horsemen would be in a position to massacre the Highland clansmen. The Mormaor of Ross then decided to disengage his forces whilst he still could and retreat in good order.

Note by Military Strategist.

The Norman High Constable of Scotland was not a highly experienced warrior, being both relatively young and a protege and friend of King David 1st. He was in a position of great authority beyond his level of competence. He also had limited understanding of tactics and strategy. He made a major error in not keeping all his Mounted forces together in one place. Instead, he split them up into three or possibly four groupings to avoid bickering between the Norman lords as to who had precedence and command of what forces they had with them. He failed to assert his authority, and to be fair, it is unlikely that the highly experienced warriors like the Cospatric would have obeyed any orders he gave. He compounded the error of not having strict control of his horsed army by sending in his foot soldiers in the latter stages of the battle where they were bloodily repulsed by the highland warriors with their superior battle skills and weaponry.

He should really have kept them all together in one group under an able and highly experienced leader like the Cospatric Earl of Dunbar. He would have done so, but for the fact the Norman contingent would not fight under Dunbar's command as the Cospatric was a Northumbrian Saxon! Had the Constable's plan worked, of tempting the Moraymen into attacking his inferior numbers of foot-soldiers who were gathered on an island of higher ground, commanding the battlefield at Baile a Loune (Ballownie) and then unleashed his horsemen, the outcome would have been a rout and the Moraymen would have been massacred. When this plan failed, his only recourse would have been to muster all his Horsed forces into one big wedge and smashed through the Moraymen's lines to take the ford and cut off their retreat. Casualties amongst the front ranks of the Norman Knights and Horsemen would have been heavy, but the remainder would have broken the line and the Moraymen would have been totally destroyed in the melee. At this point the Constable would have sent in his foot soldiers to make certain the Mormaor of Moray's defeat.



The Mormaor of Ross skillfully disengages his forces by making a fighting retreat across the ford at Inchbare, thereby keeping casualties to a minimum. His men escape by using terrain where horsed soldiers could not travel. Woodland and Marshland.

The Mormaor of Ross conducts a fighting retreat.

The Mormaor of Ross started to send parties of men back across the ford to the relative safety of the trees and expanses of marshy flood plain on the north side of the ford. He knew that the heavy horsemen could not follow in such terrain. Gradually the numbers dwindled on the south side of the river and the unremitting attacks by cavalry and knights continued unabated. An attack by the Royal foot soldiers was repulsed with heavy casualties and then Malcolm of Ross fought his way back across the ford, suffering casualties all the time but also inflicting losses on the Royal Knights and horsemen. He had abandoned the large quantities of loot and a herd of cattle, which diverted the attention of the Royal forces, who busied themselves by claiming a share of the spoils, thus allowing Malcolm of Ross and the Moray forces to disengage and escape in the gathering mists, darkness and the trees. The exhausted Royal forces did not follow them up.

The Reckoning.

Edward the High Constable wrote in his report that over 4000 rebels had been slain including the Mormaor Earl of Moray and that his own casualties were around 1000 (This figure does not include the conscripted foot-soldiers who were killed, Only the better classes of people were listed!) including the Cospatric Earl of Dunbar and Constantine Earl of Fife as well as over 100 illustrious Knights with names like De Brus, Stewart, Cumming, Comyn, Fraser, Lindsay, Melville, Gordon, Montgomery, De Cheshome, Balliol, De Berkeley, De Meyners, Simon De Ramsay, and Aymer De Warenne. This was a serious loss indeed for King David, for so high a proportion of his Norman nobility to fall in battle against clansmen that they regarded as savage barbarian scum.

The claim that 4000 moray men were slain is suspect. (This Spin doctored figure is probably exaggerated to hide the true scale of the near disaster and mishandling of his battle by the Constable and the true figure is more likely to be around 1500-1800. All in all the casualties on both sides were pretty even and by disengaging in good order, the Moray casualties were kept low. An indication of the state that the Royal forces were in can be deduced from the fact that they failed to follow up the retreating Moray forces, and that they spent several days regrouping at Brechin where they were joined by King David 1st newly arrived from England. The Mormaor of Ross yielded the battlefield to the Royal forces thus giving the High Constable the grounds to claim an outright victory albeit a pyrrhic one! The Historians down the centuries have accepted these propaganda figures as truth, whereas in fact this battle was a close run affair.

Epilogue.

This would not be the last attempt by Gaelic Alba to overthrow the usurping Norman Royal house, many more would occur over the centuries to come. The nearest anyone came to success was Somerled's ill fated attempt to overthrow King Malcolm IV (The Maiden) in 1164. Had Somerled, not been treacherously assassinated by the High Stewards minions, it is likely he would have succeeded. Malcolm MacEth was betrayed for the reward offered for him, and handed over to King David by his own adherents in 1134. For the next twenty-three years, Malcolm was imprisoned in Roxburgh Castle, dying in 1157. Malcolm Mormaor of Ross fled to his highland fastnesses and there remained, living to a good age in his Strathconon and Strathnaver fastnesses. His title and lands were forfeited to the crown, Malcolm of Ross did not care less, the Crown's writ did not run in the Highlands.

Fergus of Galloway returned by sea to his borderlands, defying David to come and get him. David 1st's Wardens made many attempts to apprehend him and eventually Fergus of Galloway crossed the border into England and sought asylum at the court of King Henry. He did return eventually having married one of Henry's daughters which gave him some immunity from the wrath of the Scottish Court.

You can visit the battlefield today although it has not been marked in any way. Follow the B966 road from Brechin (Well worth a visit, especially 'Pictavia.') Eventually you will come to the Westwater Bridge over the River North Esk. 300 metres south of the bridge is the site of the battle at Auchenreoch which comes from the Gaidhlig, 'Achaidh an reachd' which translates as 'Field of great sorrow.' A traditional Gaidhlig way of describing a battlefield. Should a marker ever be erected, then these Gaidhlig words would be most apt. 'Ar euchd airson luaidh sin' translates as 'our deeds speak for us!'