

The nights'll draw in...



Sunset at Callanish

IS IT JUNE ALREADY? Aye, what exactly happened to March, April and May? It seems like only a couple of weeks ago that *iScot Magazine* was optimistically breenging into the new decade with a fresh, new, minimalist look kicking off with our *2020 Vision* cover in *iScot 59*. Cleverly, or so we thought, the colouring of the cover text was subliminally predicting that **2020 IS ON**, referring, of course, to the First Minister's assertion that there **would** be a second independence referendum before the year was out. Happy, simpler times...

By the time February, and *iScot 60*, rolled around we were on the attack with our *Westminster's Blitzkreig*

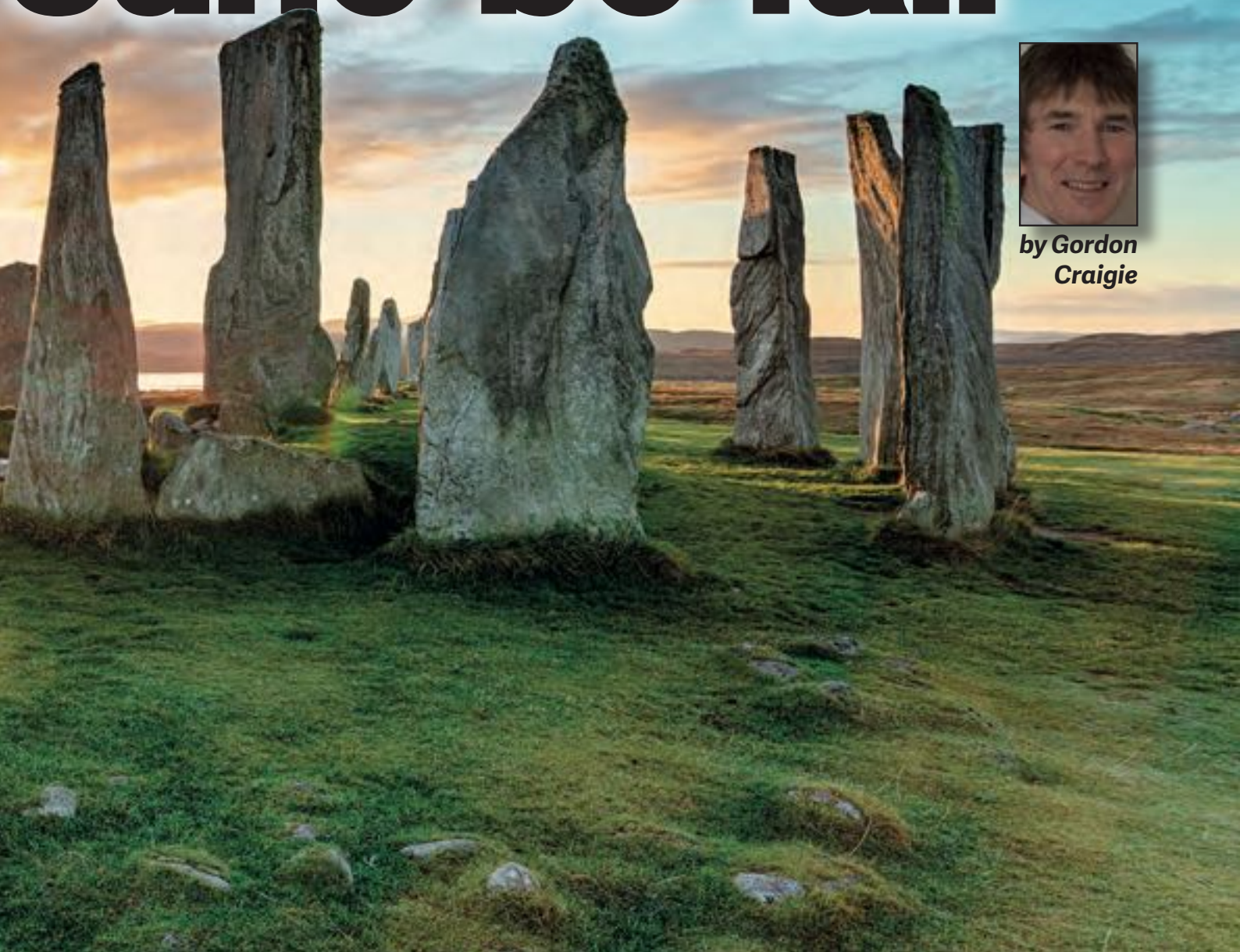
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cover, satirising Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson's continuing assault on our democracy as he refused to even acknowledge, far less consider, the views of the people of Scotland in regard to leaving the EU and, well, everything else really. In that respect, as with every other aspect of everyday life, it was still 'business as usual' as we all went about our daily lives – going to work, flying abroad or planning summer holidays (while we still had freedom of movement), visiting bars, restaurants, cinemas and theatres, playing and watching sport, spending time with family and friends, and all the hundreds of other things that we all, naturally, took for granted. But February was also when the first rumbings reached us that a virus which we all thought was only prevalent in China was something that we should all really be paying more attention to. In the midst of their 'taking back control' and 'EU-baad' obsession, Johnson and his acolytes ignored the tragic news coming out of

sune be fair



by Gordon
Craigie



Italy that the virus was here in Europe and it was real and it was lethal. We know they 'knew' because it is recorded that they had Cobra meetings about it, the high-level meetings that are only called in times of crisis. We also know that Johnson didn't bother his backside to attend these meetings, and that by the end of the month his official spokesperson was authorised to reassure us all that the risk to individuals "remains low" and that, "We are well prepared for UK cases, we are using tried and tested procedures to prevent further spread and the NHS is extremely well prepared and used to managing infections." That's aged well!

So, when we arrived at *iScot 61* in March, we think we reflected the mood of our readers and indeed the entire population of Scotland with our *Pause Button* cover. The French artist Edgar Degas is credited with saying that "Art is not what you see, but what you make others see" which is, I suppose, another way of saying that meaning

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is in the eye of the beholder. That was certainly the case with this cover as there were different interpretations even within *iScot Towers*! Ken thought it represented a pause on Indy Ref 2 campaigning while I thought it was promoting the, then still new, concept of social distancing! Any other ideas readers? Either way, I think we got the mood right as, in the face of a global pandemic and horrendous stories of what was about to confront us all, it was clearly time for a wee bit of reflection and consideration of how best to react to all of this in order to save lives and return to some kind of normality as quickly and safely as possible.



Stamp for our Scottish passports?

iScot Magazine's very own Scottish Passport cover!



Each of us will have handled this quite surreal period in our own way, but one thing that we probably all have in common is our total admiration, respect and gratitude for everyone who works in the Scottish NHS. And let's not forget all the other essential workers who have continued to make their vital, yet often undervalued, contribution to maintaining our society and wellbeing – emergency services, healthcare workers, teachers and childcare providers, postal workers, shopworkers, delivery drivers, transport workers... and everyone else that has just kept on keeping on, helping us all to do the same. That's why our iScot 62 cover last month simply said *Thank You – To All Our Essential Workers, Stay Safe.*

Some people might think we just throw this magazine together – how very dare you! – but we take our mission to recognise and promote the best of Scotland and to educate, inform and entertain our independently minded supporters very seriously indeed. We recognise that we're a long way short of returning to a completely normal lifestyle, but we can now begin to see the green shoots of recovery and we're grateful to the First Minister and the Scottish Government for their stewardship through this terrible period. And that's why in this issue, iScot 63, we've chosen to feature our wee pal Ciara once again on our front cover, as she provides what we think is an aspirational and positive message. Ciara is young, brave, defiant and undefeated, and ready to confidently reclaim the future, and the freedom, that is rightfully hers and ours.

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Ciara standing proud in 2014
Photo © Ciara's mum!





Pssst – anybody wanna buy a bike?

As far as regaining our independence is concerned, 2020 may no longer be on but the road to 2021 should certainly be opening up again as of now...

If anyone was in any remaining doubt about Scotland's place in the so-called *Precious Union*™ then witnessing the events of the last few months must surely have removed that uncertainty. Just as with the entire Brexit charade, our elected representatives have been either excluded or ignored when decisions have been made about health, welfare, education, economics, lockdown restrictions, you name it. In the areas where we already possess separate systems, or devolved responsibilities as the British Nationalists like to (grudgingly) call them, it is clear that the Scottish Government has acted decisively and effectively. Nicola Sturgeon has fronted every – never forget that, every – national briefing personally and has calmly, rationally and systematically described where we are, what we're going to do, and why we have to do that. She has been, rightly, cautious as her priority has clearly and obviously been to save lives. We can paint all kinds of extensions and caveats around that but that has, thankfully, been the central theme of every decision made by the Scottish Government, to save lives. Can anyone truthfully say the same of Westminster?

In the middle of March, the Scottish Government formally announced that it had paused work on preparing for an independence referendum later in the year in order to, "focus all available resource on current and future demands in what is an unprecedented set of circumstances". In the same announcement it encouraged the UK Government to take similar action with regard to Brexit, a request that was, unsurprisingly, completely dismissed. Some people in the wider Yes movement have viewed that decision to pause as flawed, arguing that there has never been a better time to press ahead with our opponents, the UK Government, 'distracted' and with the different priorities of Scotland and England have never been highlighted in sharper focus.

I take the view that both sides are correct, and that is not to sit on the fence but to be realistic about the situation we're currently in. The Scottish Government



Independent Republic of Scotland?

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has to continue to, in the first instance, save lives, and that should be totally without distraction. It also has to continue to govern the whole country, including those who do not vote SNP and/or do not yet support independence. And, it has to continue to steer us all, individuals and businesses, through all of the complications of lockdown towards, gradually, as close to our 'normal' lives as we are likely to get in the immediate aftermath of this pandemic. All of that has to be undertaken against a backdrop of hostility from Westminster and British Nationalist politicians, some of whom have the sheer effrontery to sit in, while being not fully accepting of, our Scottish



Ally Heather, Billy Kay and Gary Robertson at Tannadice filming *Rebel Tongue*
Photo sourced via Twitter, photographer unknown

Parliament. We constantly have to mitigate bad Westminster decisions, cope with their backtracking on funding commitments, and, tediously, explain to people who should know better that most of the pompous, bravado-fuelled announcements broadcast unquestioningly by the State Broadcaster are not applicable in Scotland because, well, we're a different country? Hello!

It's clear from that last paragraph that I am, broadly, supportive of the Scottish Government's official position on all of this – they have to do what they have to do. But I'm also completely in agreement with the notion that the rest of us in the Yes movement can multitask – we can simultaneously support the Scottish Government in their current actions, to save lives, while starting to gather momentum for the next phase of our independence campaign. Because there's the thing, it's **OUR** independence campaign, not the Scottish Government's. What can we do? Well, each and every one of us can be guided by the words inscribed on the walls of the Scottish Parliament at Holyrood – *Work as if you live in the early days of a better nation*. One small thing we've been doing in our house during lockdown is watching more Scottish TV programmes and films. As I've said often enough in these pages, there is virtually nothing that could persuade me to watch news programmes from the State Broadcaster, but there are increasingly more gems of native Scottish culture appearing, normally hidden away on the BBC Scotland channel (that appears to have been set up to fail). Now, you may not think this affects anything in any important way, but our experience is that it is hugely refreshing to hear Scottish voices as

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the norm. From documentaries like Ally Heather's *Rebel Tongue* and Cora Bissett's *Scotland – Contains Strong Language*, to comedies like *Scot Squad* and *Two Doors Down*, or more niche offerings like *Bad Influencer* and *Shelf Isolation*, there's a growing number of opportunities to hear our own accents and humour in a natural setting. We're all aware of the tokenism in most of the mainstream channel offerings, when the occasional Scot appears as the drunk/junkie/hard-man, where our accents are offered up for ridicule, or subtitled, or both! We are so accustomed to having our everyday entertainment beamed into our homes from another country that for years we've just accepted that that's the way things are. Well it doesn't have to be that way, and that simple commitment to watch, and support, Scottish programming will go a long way to boosting our collective morale, and eliminating any lingering *cringe*. Same goes for music – the wonderful Amy Macdonald attracted a huge YouTube audience in early May (getting on for 100,000 views to date) when she livestreamed one of her concerts from last summer, in Schaffhausen, and you could feel the love for Scotland from the Swiss crowd. And she didn't need subtitles!



Amy Macdonald has attracted almost 100,000 viewers to her YouTube gig during lockdown
Photo © Sandra Rohrer at sandrarohrerphotography.com



Ladies and gentlemen – Your sock-puppet PM with his puppeteer!

Here at iScot, we like to think we're doing our bit every month, keeping this fine magazine going and keeping supporting like-minded people in whatever it happens to be that they're doing to advance the cause. We'll keep on publishing articles that educate, inform and entertain. We'll promote Scottish history, culture and language. We'll air alternative views on topical subjects and explore what life could be like in an independent Scotland. Most of us don't want our newly independent state to be a watered-down version of Wastemonster, we want something far more democratic and egalitarian, so what could that look like? We'll explore constitutional and governance issues, currency, monetary policy, taxation, education, welfare, health and social care, renewable energy, international relations, and anything else that will support the modern version of our ancient nation. *iScot Magazine* consistently disproves the 'too wee, too poor, too stupid' trope beloved of the British Nationalists, and we'll continue to do that.

- Too wee? Tell that to Denmark, Norway, Finland, New Zealand, Ireland, Estonia, Iceland, Faroe Islands, or any of the other 120 or so countries with populations below 6 million.
- Too poor? Let's expose the unionist evidence of first resort on this one, the infamous GERS figures, for exactly what they are – a set of politically manipulated assumptions introduced in 1992 by a Tory Scottish Secretary, Ian Lang, in order to "undermine" opponents of the UK (admitted to in a leaked document) – and stress that a country with no borrowing powers cannot possibly have a deficit. Scotland, with just over 8% of the UK population, has 70% of its fish landings, 60% of its timber production and 40% of its offshore wind and tidal power – and those are only a few examples (check out *Scotland the Brief for more at tinyurl.com/iscotSTB*). Scotland is the only UK nation to have exported more goods internationally than it has imported every year since records began – whisky exports alone yield around £5bn annually! Oh, and we also have 90% of the crude oil and 63% of the natural gas production in our waters. But, of course, Scotland is exceptional in that we are the only country in the world for whom all of that is a burden – do British Nationalists think oor heids are buttoned up the back?
- Too stupid? Give me strength! I could list all of the areas in which Scots do or have excelled and contributed

enormously to the world as we know it, but just for a laugh, on this occasion let's just disprove by use of a counter-example comparison – Nicola Sturgeon hasn't spaffed the best part of £1 billion on buses that weren't fit for purpose (£320m), or a bridge that was never built (£50m), or an Olympic stadium that had to be repurposed before renting out for only £2.5m per year (£323m), or an airport that was never built (£5m), or a bike scheme that has failed dismally (£225m), not to mention a fantastic public order initiative to employ water cannon, which were subsequently scrapped, unused (£300,000)! No, that accolade falls to the all-round political genius (not!) that is one Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson, while he was Mayor of London! And yet, the people of England still saw fit to elect this clown to his current position as sock-puppet Prime Minister of the UK, giving him a mandate to spaff even bigger sums of money in support of his elitist ideologies while presiding over the worst response to Covid in Europe. I rest my case! ... except to point out that the apparent UK alternatives are not much better, such as Raab, Starmer, or even the odious Gove – does thon no gie ye the boak?

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We can all keep on doing whatever it is we do to keep moving us towards regaining our independence. We can all work as if we live in the early days of a better, independent nation. We can all think differently. But we do have to be accepting of differences of opinion within the movement. There's always a stooshie waiting in the wings to distract us from the main event. Court cases, arguments about Section 30 versus UDI and all options in between, gender issues,



Sunrise at Holyrood – a new dawn for an independent Scotland?

personalities, timing, republicanism versus monarchy, EU and NATO membership, and countless others that haven't yet been dreamed up, either innocently or maliciously. Some of these will be genuine differences that will have to be debated and decided someday, others will be manufactured grievances by malevolent actors – I always say that if the British security services aren't involved, and haven't already infiltrated our movement, then they're not doing their job, and it would be extremely naive to believe otherwise. But the key consideration, irrespective of personal preferences in one aspect or another, is that we cannot even have any of those debates until we regain our independence. To me, the idea that "I'll not vote Yes if it means rejoining/leaving the EU", or "I'll only vote Yes if we're committed to a socialist republic", or "There's no point in voting Yes if that Growth Commission paper is still on the table", is as ridiculous as the people who, back in 2014 said "Ah cannae stand that Alex Salmond" or who now say the same of Nicola Sturgeon. I have enormous respect for both of those individuals, but they are only, to quote the late Robin Day, "here-today, gone-tomorrow politicians"! What we are all engaged in is a cause to return Scotland to its

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rightful, historic position of being a fully independent, sovereign nation-state – arguably the oldest in Europe, being founded in 843 – then we, the people, can decide on everything else. But without independence we clearly will never be able to decide anything of any great significance anyway, so independence **must** come first!

Me? Well, thank you for asking – I desperately want to see an independent republic of Scotland with a written, socially-just constitution that guarantees every citizen the right to free world-class healthcare and education supported by a welfare system that provides home, food and income security, backed by a Scottish central bank and our own sovereign currency. A nuclear-free and environmentally ambitious Scotland that is welcoming and international in outlook, with an open and engaging relationship with our European neighbours, either as a member of the EU or EFTA – I'm open to persuasion. But I fully recognise that this doesn't reflect everybody's vision and that these are debates to be had, and can only be had, after independence is re-established. I would also like to see these debates take place in a modern, democratic way involving some form of constitutional and citizens' assemblies, as successfully demonstrated in recent times by countries such as Iceland and Ireland. I once heard Tommy Sheppard say something along the lines of, "on the first day of an independent Scotland, nothing will have changed except the ability to change everything", and that says it all for me. What a beautiful thought to keep in mind as the nichts start tae draw in!

So, fellow Scots of all persuasions, let's keep our eyes on the prize, stay safe, keep the heid, and haud forrit. Keep supporting independent media and if you think anybody you know would benefit from the wit and wisdom of *iScot Magazine* then please point them towards our subscription offers at: www.iscot.scot/subscribe