

**A River’s Journey, Jake Williams**

Episode 1

Jake: That tune’s called the Deveron Reel, it's about the River Deveron that flows from the Cabrach area in like West Aberdeenshire, right to the sea at Banff and the tune's quite well known, it's, a lot of dance bands play it for like Scottish country dancing. We're at the bridge at the Deveron beside the upper Cabrach Church and there's quite a decent sized river by now, you wouldn't want to wade it unless you had to, but it's been gathering water from about, I don't know, six miles or something since its source down to here. And then every every few yards, there's another little trickle of water comes in from some bit in the side. So by the time you get even here, it's a half decent sized little river. Well, that's the bridge there and that's the mill there. It's really well fallen down, but you can still see if we walk over, you can still see where the, where the mill wheel had been. And, um, this other side here, that's target shooting practice place for the for the grouse shooting people, or I suppose for a long distance target like that it must be for deer shooting, I think, because the grouse is closer the way they do it. I think they sit on that wooden thing and shoot across it, that white thing I think.

Angela: How old do you reckon this bridge is?

Jake: Oh, I don't know. I'm sure if you're a like historian of building, you could tell, with the kind of, what do you call them, buttresses at the end? Slightly, wee bit unusual I think. There used to be a thing here, a kind of weather station thing, I dunno if it's still here. Oh aye, I don't know. I don't know what it does, it's measures the wind or the depth of the water or something.

Angela: Oh it's there, I see it.

Jake: This bridge here. I think it's just come down from a flood. But I don't remember anywhere there was a bridge, so I don't know where it, I don't know where it came from. It's just lying there as if it was, it must have just come down from the, that must have been the height of the water when the river was flooded and then it crashed there and stayed.

Angela: I bet it was [inaudible] when the snow melted.

Jake: It was quite big. Yeah. And it's seen, along the, like the next bridge near the pub there's, the water was all across the fields. But it doesn't do any harm in fields like that. You know, they've been flooded every year for centuries, I suppose.

Jake: And that's the church and the manse up on these little raised, little hills looking down on the river.

Angela: So is this area, and I was just thinking about the land and how it's owned and...?

Jake: Oh well, I don't really believe in folk owning more than you can, more than you can kind of live in yourself. I don't see why, you know, somebody, especially here, where there's no, hardly any farms lived in or something. What is the point of being the boss of the whole area if there's nobody to kind of boss around? I suppose there's a few employees, a few gamekeepers. And I think that's about it.

Angela: Do you think it's like a power thing Jake?

Jake: It just seems a bit misdirected, I mean even if you're a power thing, you want to be, like a general or a boss or something. But there's nothing. There's nothing to really boss, you're just like a, or some money to burn at the grouse shooting. I suppose the people pay for that. I'm told they pay quite a lot to do it. And there's pheasants see, in these trees, look, there's three pheasants walking along the fence there. I don't really know the business. I think that they all come from a hatchery or something, or some of them go wild and live, but I don't think they'll have many generations in the wild. I think the smart ones get away. But they're not, they're you know, they're pretty tame. They're not I mean, I've never tried but believe they're not hard to shoot. If you're reasonably good at shooting, they, you know, they don't move very fast I don't think.

Angela: And so so they’re bred to shoot, aren’t they.

Jake: And they're fenced. See that blue thing. That's a some kind of corn in there. So they they're used to hanging around because they're getting fed.

Angela: Ah right ok. Then of course there's like questions around what it's doing with the environment. You know,

Jake: It's a fashion that just changes from century, I've just been reading, I haven't finished yet, the history of Glenn Tanar, that's off Deeside, it's like south of here. And it's a really interesting book because it changed from like century to century. Essentially, they made a fence that was easy to get in and hard to get out because of the way they sloped the fence, a sloping fence. So the deer could jump in and they couldn't get out. So then they'd have the, they would have the deer, they would capture them from round about. And then there was a change of like economics and stuff because they wanted the deer for shooting and whatever else. And then there was a change in the, I dunno, about nineteen hundred or something. There was a change, and they sloped the fence the other way, so the deer would get out and wouldn't get back in, and then some kind of cull, to round them up and shoot a lot of them to encourage the trees. I think it was maybe because the trees, there was more economics in the trees because there was a shortage of wood. Must have been when the World War was on, they had like they felled loads of trees to make decks of ships and ammunition boxes and stuff. They just needed an enormous amount of wood. And of course it all got wasted because it was, you know, ships got blown up and stuff and they just had to build more ships and get more. There's loads of wood in ships. And I don't suppose they would, ships would be all metal and plastic now. Yeah, so I think that was what changed. So they wanted rid of the deer because there was loads of money in the in the forestry. I think that's the way it changed. But I think it's a fashion anyway. The whole...

Angela: So is this like farmland, would you say? I mean, there's sheep on it. It doesn't feel like very, very heavily farmed, though? This feels like it's sheep grazing.

Jake: Well, the field just at the top of that hill there, there's a big field and there's quite a lot of highland cattle in that. And I think they, I don't know if they sell them directly for meat or for crossbreeding with other breeds of cattle, but there's some reasons. I don't understand the economics, but there's some reason why the hairy Highland cows with the big horns and that, why they're worth keeping. Here, there's loads of big meanders, just walking from here to the Grouse Inn would be about, I don't know, five miles, but it would be like 10 miles if you walked around every curve in the river. Angela: It's travelled quite far to where we are now, hasn't it?

Jake: From maybe five or 10 miles from the source to here.

Angela: So which, you know, the hill of the source? Is it a hill, is it a Monroe, where is originates?

Jake: It's well, it's marked on the map as the Full Mire, which I think is a great name for it. And it is pretty, pretty boggy. And it's an interesting kind of place because there's muddy kind of holes and it's not really it's not a major swamp, but it's maybe a mile across and it's the you can't really tell exactly where the river starts because it kind of goes over ground for a bit and then it goes underground into kind of heathery, muddy hole and it comes back up just a few yards further on, you know. So it's you know, it's an interesting place to ramble about. And nobody goes there. You never, I mean, I doubt if he would meet anybody there. And then you can't exactly tell, exactly where it starts. But there's Grant McBain, he lived, I think he lived in the Cabrach all his life. And he told me that there's like a raised bit like a little flat-ish hill, just at the, somewhere in this boggy place that, and that's like the watershed. So that if you see if you poured a bucket of water on the very top of this little hill then half of the water would come this direction and come downstream to into the Deveron. But the other half, it was exactly on the top of the hill some of the water might go the other direction, like, south whatever that would be, southwest. [pheasant calls in background]

Jake: And it would go down into the Glen Buchat burn and then down there to the Don and into the sea at Aberdeen. And the water that comes this way? It comes down the Deveron. And then it would go down into the sea at Banff, between Banff and Macduff. So that in theory the source here would be like exactly the watershed. But I've never, I've looked for that hill, and I've not spent a lot of time looking, but I'd like to find...I'll go again. And just, it's nice place to go in the summer and just wander about and look at things. There's salmon in there, but only sometimes of year I think they go away. I think they go away to sea a lot. I have seen, my pal Jim's pretty keen on fishing and stuff and he's taking me to see, not to catch them, but just to see them. And we've seen, you know, quite a lot here. And in the wintertime, you see sometimes you just see a kind of little wave going across the pool, where you get a flat pool. You just see a little ripple going across and that's the fish going just under the surface and no more. In other places where there's a little, tiny little waterfall, just a kind of rush-y bit, sometimes you see the fish like swishing up between two stones.

Angela: Is that two birds of prey Jake, above the trees there?

Jake: Oh, yeah, three. There's another one coming from the left. I don't know that birds of prey very well, I think it might be buzzards, I don't really know.

Angela: Oh, it's beautiful when the sun comes out.

Jake: Almost promises it's going to be summer eventually.

Angela: It's been a long winter, ey?

Jake: Well, it's not that long because it was late starting, the winter this year. It was summer right into, well, the swallows. in my shed always go away the weekend of the Braemar Gathering. So that's very early September. And this year they were a whole month late going away. They were like about 1st of October there was still one or two swallows still hanging about. So we've got a month cut off the beginning of the winter. So I suppose it's fair that we've got, still start of May, and we're still at the end of the winter.

Angela: That's right. So when will they come back Jake?

Jake: The swallows? They usually come back the last week in April, but I've haven't seen any yet.

Angela: So there must be on their way. Hehe, nice to see them back, though.

Jake: Oh, yeah I like them alot.

Angela: So has that happened, just ever since you've lived there, they've just come and gone, come and gone.

Jake: Yeah, they come every year, and they there's plenty spaces where they like. The doors in the shed don't fit right and there's spaces for them to get in and have a nest up in the rafters. And, and then one time they, I've got a photo somewhere, one time I seen them in my porch and they were, they kept coming in just with bits of mud and stuff and sticking it onto just a tiny thing. There's a light bulb or something in the porch and they were just trying to make a nest. And that was obviously, looked to me impossible to make a nest. So I put up a wee shelf, with a wee bit of metal, right beside where they were trying. And they did build a nest and they reared some wee ones and I got some photos of the wee ones looking out. It was only like just above head height in the porch and they picked that place, but they never came back to that place again. Well, I've got a booklet, I write down. It's like a diary, one of these desk diaries from nineteen something but I write down when I remember. Usually I forget. The first, you know, the first cuckoo or the first some date like that and then I try and, so then I know what if I see. Oh I can't even think of any examples. If I see some particular flower or something then I know it might be time to go to pick some berries somewhere else or to, you know, do something like that. That's just normal really. Because just folk used to say that there's all kinds of coincidences, you know, that happen like the cuckoos. Well, here's an example anyway. The cuckoos arrive at the same time as that cuckoo spit hatches on the grass, you know, and it's kinda like frothy stuff with a little grasshopper that lives inside this bit of like froth. And some people call it cuckoo spit because of that. It's just a coincidence, it happens these grasshoppers at the same time as a cuckoos arrive and I start singing. But I don't think there's any connection.

Angela: Do you want to have a walk down?

Jake: Yeah. Where do you want to go?

Angela: Well, I thought we could maybe, do you want to go up to the mill?

Jake: There's nothing particular. It's just a ruined mill.

Angela: No, that would be really interesting if. So this is the weather station, Jake?

Jake: I don't know what it is, because you can see where there's a wire or a pipe goes down to the bridge. There must be some kind of floating thing under the bridge that just measures the depth of the water or something. I don't know. It's been here a good few years. Whatever it is. It's a box.

Angela: Does it say anything on it? Oh hang on, flow monitoring station. Oh is it the James Harden Institute?

Jake: Aye must be.

 Angela: So do you reckon this water now, yeah, how old do you reckon it is?

Jake: The water is a zillion, million years old. [laughter] The mill, I don't know. That's lovely once you get in the shelter here. Out of the breeze in the sun. Great. I'm always hoping to find caves hidden in caves because I look over when you see a big boulder like that, I'm always looking round, just always believe I'm going to find it. That's all the cartridges from the shooting practice. They have a whirly thing that launches them and they've got like a little, just like little plates and they've got a catapult thing that throws them, but with a spin so the fly like a Frisbee. And then you're meant to shoot them as they're flying past you. It must take a good bit of practice to do that.

Angela: Oh, look at this, this is incredible. And what do you think the waterwheel was used to turn?

Jake: I think it would be for turning like two big stones to grind up corn. I think.

Jake: But there's no machinery or anything left inside. It would all have been taken for scrap the metal bits at some stage. That's where the mill wheel must have been and then the axle must have gone through that hole into the inside of the building. And that's where the axle must have come through from the wheel into the inside, but then what happened inside, I dunno.

Angela: Timber roof?

Jake: It's got a good roof. I don't know what the economics was, whether that one family would be the mill, own the mill I don't know, but I don't know how it worked. Or whether the big house was the owner of the mill, that the people have to pay rent for the mill? I really don't know.

Angela: So many birds Jake! What was that little yellow...?

Jake: I think it might be a wagtail, see when you watch on the stone it did wag its tail [laughter] That might be a clue. You can't really see anymore where the water came in. It must have been some kind of dam to make water leave the river and come along here. See this flat line here must have been where the water came in. But I don't know, maybe there was a, there must have been a big ditch there, and it must have just filled up with mud and grass and stuff over the... since it's not been working, I don't know. But you walk up there, but you can't really see anything, but you can't really see how they made the water go down that bit? No, I think this here would have been an escape for the water if there were a couple of repair in the mill wheel, or they weren't working it sometime they would send the water down that gap, instead of going down here I think.

Jake: Do you want to walk up to there?

Angela: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Brilliant. Really, rapid-y along here, isn't it.

Jake: It's lovely this bit, you'd like to swim here if you were brave enough. There must have been a dam across here or something that would make the water come down this way. Or something, it's pretty hard to tell. I don't know how that would have worked.

Angela: No, I think you're right.

Angela: But this bit's so much higher than the river and the stones, it's not just mud. So there must have been, I don't know. Angela: It's been built up?

Jake: The kind of place I'm always looking, I'm looking for a cave, I'm always sure I'm going to [inaudible]

Angela: What is it about a cave that you want to find?

Jake: I mean, it's just, a damp, you know, it's just, I've always liked having gang huts and tents and, you know, just hide-y away places.

Angela: What have you got, [inaudible]?

Jake: But yeah, [inaudible]. I think we might be, well that's a rowan tree, you can see the leaves are coming at the same time as the flowers are coming out.

Angela: And this, this hill here with the little pointy bit?

Jake: That's the Buck, the Buck of the Cabrach. You can see it from a long, long way. You can see it from as you're coming of the road, just coming out of Elgin you see it and it's a long way. It must be like 30 miles. But you can, but you can see if you recognise it. I mean, it's just another hill on the skyline, but you can recognise that little pointy bit on the top and there's, it's a nice walk to go up there and you can see for a long, long, long way from there. And then there's a dance tune called the Buck of the Cabrach, and it's in Scott Skinner's book, you know, the famous fiddler. It's in his book. And so he's meant to have made up the tune. But I don't think there's any words or anything. It's just like a dance tune. It's called the Buck of the Cabrach anyway.

[banjo music plays then falters]

Jake: I knew the tune, I better start again.

[banjo music plays over the sound of the Deveron River]

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