



## Object of the Newsletter

*To promote the appreciation of fine Scotch Whisky, the area from which it comes, the people that inhabit the land and it's history. By the way, I am merely expressing my opinion on the whiskies I am tasting, as you know, everybody has one.*

I now a look at the Abhainn Dearg single malt (Aveen Jarræk, Red River in English) 10-year-old Single Malt which I tasted in Scotland a couple of months ago.

This one is a little unusual in a number of ways, not least the hint of mint, which I have only ever tasted in one other Whisky, a very rare Glenfiddich, and to my surprise, no peat or smoke. The distillery started in the 1850s and only ran for two years, then was restarted in 2008. The distillery is also the most remote Scottish distillery, on the isle of Lewis (see map page two). So, would I buy it? Yes I would, but at the moment you can only get it in the UK, that includes the internet, they will only mail it to UK addresses. The distillery is small with a small output, hopefully that will change as they become better known.

[You can buy Abhainn Dearg Single Malt for around \\$65.00 a bottle.](#)

### Tasting Notes

**Nose** - Mint, vanilla & citrus

**Palate** - Mint, ginger & oak

**Finish** - Mint, herbal & oak

*"Slainte Mhath"*

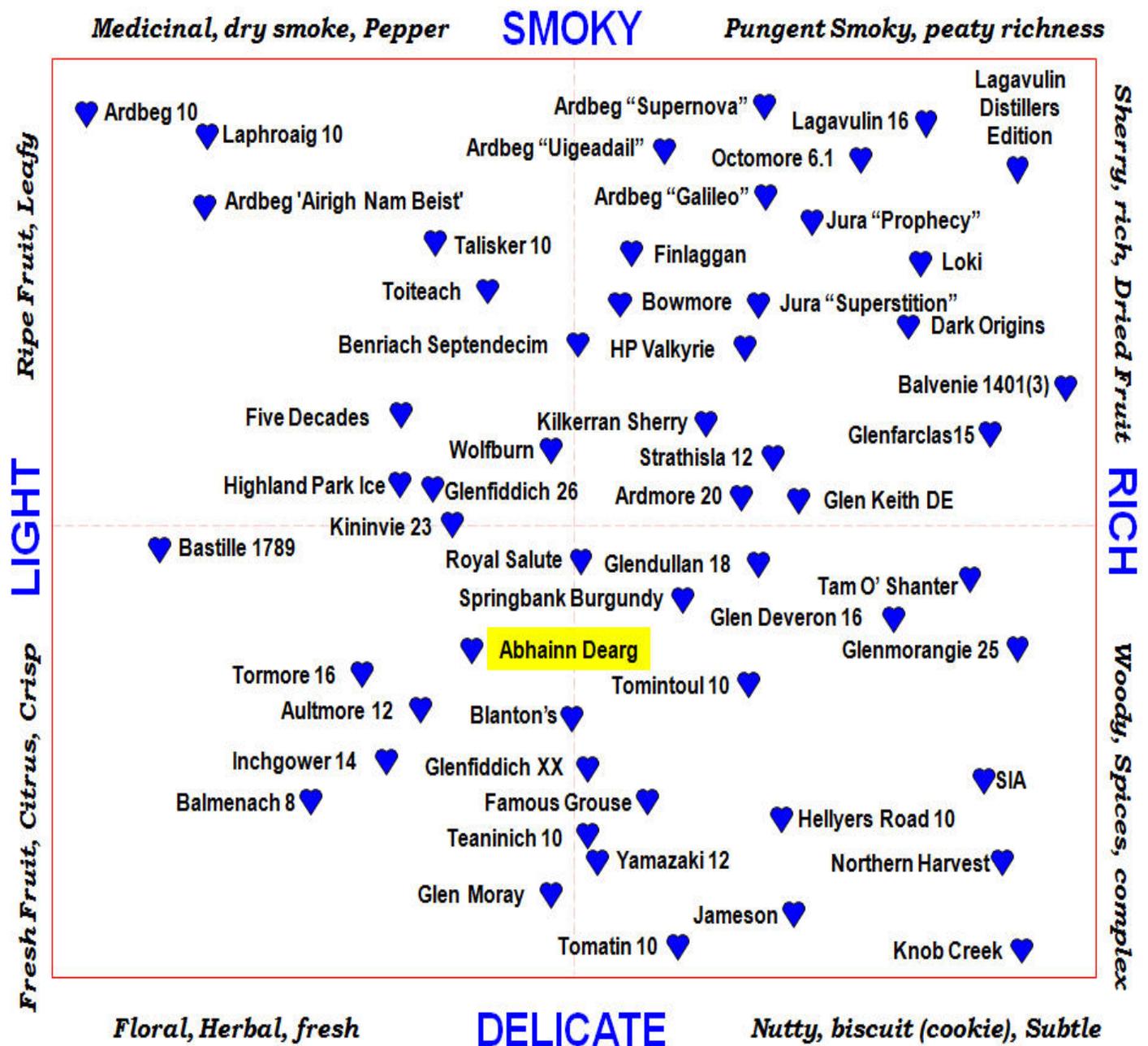
*Paul Bissett*







Below is a simple guide to help you choose your single malt Whisky, and the flavor notes you should expect from it. Being Scottish I recommend you find a likely candidate and try it in a bar before buying the whole bottle. This Issue; [Abhainn Dearg single malt](#).





## **ABHAINN DEARG DISTILLERY**

The Isle of Lewis' only legal distillery, in its capital Stornoway (and named after it), only ran for two years in the 1850s. After that, Lewisians had to import their Scotch from the mainland, or maybe source it from illicit local operations.

All of that changed in 2008 when Marko Tayburn built a distillery at Red River [Abhainn Dearg] on the western coast of the island making this officially the most remote whisky-making site in Scotland.

Hebrideans are resourceful by nature – they have to be – so when it came to the stills, Tayburn didn't go, like everyone else, to Forsyth's of Rothes but designed and built them himself, modelling them on an old illicit still he had discovered.

In addition there is a pair of small mash tuns, wooden washbacks (all bought in) and a fermentation regime which lasts for four days.

The stills have elongated necks which look a little like witches' hats and thin descending lyne arms which run into external worm tubs.

A mix of unpeated and peated spirit is made.

In December 2018 the distillery launched its first 10-year-old single malts – the oldest whisky to be produced by a legal distillery in the Outer Hebrides.

<https://scotchwhisky.com>





## **A journey to Abhainn Dearg distillery on the Isle of Lewis**

By Ian Buxton

I have such intense childhood memories of the conjoined islands of Lewis and Harris – of the memorial stone for a dead whaler's faithful dog; of my father's tense and nervous glances as his car was winched into a net and onto a ferry; of fishing with high explosives; of my mother's attempts at Gaelic; of abandoned cars and rotting steadings – that the 21st century reality came as a shock.

Abhainn Dearg may, in fact, may be the most interesting of all Scotland's island distilleries. I had arranged to visit on a Monday, or so at least I thought. It was soon apparent that, despite the visit having been arranged by email, we were not expected and the distillery gates sported a large 'closed' sign.

Ignoring this, I drove confidently in, and parked opposite some drab and unprepossessing buildings where we were met by Laura. After some confusion and an increasingly desultory conversation punctuated with anxious glances towards the office, she went to fetch the distillery's founder and owner, Mark Tayburn, who in a further twist was on the phone and evidently not expecting us, though Laura did a fine job in concealing that as we proceeded to the maltings. And this is where the fun starts. You must understand that Abhainn Dearg is not like any distillery you've ever visited or will ever visit, unless you spend much time in the company of the criminal classes. Whilst Abhainn Dearg is legal, fully licensed and entirely above board it is also the closest you will ever come, or probably want to come, to an illicit distilling operation. Imagine an abandoned fish farm with all the glamour of a failing Siberian tractor collective. For one thing, it has the authentic island air of disarray and abandonment that I recalled from my childhood visits and which, I will admit, gave me considerable pleasure to see. Bits of equipment, some evidently relevant and others such as a broken outboard engine not immediately so, were scattered at random. Everything looked homemade and temporary.

There was a noticeable lack of health and safety notices and the regulation government signs that bedeck other sites. No one appeared to be wearing standard issue company clothing. Our friendly guide, now on familiar territory and more animated, was in jeans and a smart blue sweatshirt decorated with the Uig Chessmen. I thought it was all perfectly agreeable and cheered up enormously, all the initial awkwardness behind us. The malting consisted of a small room containing a large open tray or trough on legs, under which there was an old wood-burning stove (aka an exothermic oxidizing reactor). This was, curiously enough, burning wood as we stepped inside, the heat from which was directed to the tray on which was spread a quantity of freshly malted barley. Faint wisps of steam rose upwards.



## **A journey to Abhainn Dearg distillery on the Isle of Lewis cont.**

A day before, this barley had lain on the floor slowly germinating, just as it should, roughly where Laura was now standing. So, despite the apparently ramshackle arrangements, this was a perfectly functional malting, albeit one totally reliant on manual labour at every stage. As, indeed, every malting would once have been. What I couldn't work out was how the malt was peated, but the explanation was simple: apparently, the fire was loaded with peat, the flue disconnected and the door closed, at which point the room filled entirely with smoke, some of which was absorbed into the malt.

It was, I was forced to concede, an effective if rudimentary system, though singularly unpleasant for the first person to return to the smoke-filled room when more fuel was needed for the fire or the process was thought to have gone on long enough. Of course, peating levels will vary from batch to batch, but if variability is something you prize then this is hardly a problem. What was both impressive and gratifying to know is that the barley itself came from Mark Tayburn's own fields near Stornoway, making this endeavour truly local. He is currently growing and malting Golden Promise and Concerto varieties from his own fields. I hope and expect even older heritage strains, perhaps some bere, will be trialled in the future.

At around this point, a profusely apologetic Mark materialised to continue the tour. Onward then to mashing, fermentation and distillation, all housed under one roof in an adjacent building, also more functional than decorative in architectural style. The stark and uncompromising façades of these facilities will come as a shock to anyone accustomed solely to the more sanitised, picture-postcard surroundings of Scotland's larger distilleries – which is to say, the vast majority of them. But this must surely represent the purest, most primitive form of legal distilling that it's possible to see anywhere in Scotland, and thus the single step that I took from the courtyard to the still house not only vindicated every one of the 60 awkward and tiring miles of the drive from Tarbert but acted as a kind of time machine to a simpler age.

If the replica Sma' Still at The Glenlivet, which on Speyside Festival days is fired up for the curious, is a gateway to the smuggling of illicit drams across the Cabrach, then the Abhainn Dearg stills represent the point of transition from a furtive and clandestine craft tradition of skulking in bothies in remote glens beyond the reach of authority to the early first mechanisation and the beginning of mass production. Think of this as 1823 if you will, and try to imagine a distiller acquiring his first licence and taking the hesitant step to legitimacy and the public acceptance of more than a strictly parochial and local community. Abhainn Dearg is therefore a distillery of an importance and significance considerably greater than its modest scale and, I would submit, of more consequence than it actually realises. This is a distillery still expressing the original soul of whisky and the robust, self-reliant spirit of this island. It is a rare and precious thing. Not that everything here is make do and mend.



## **A journey to Abhainn Dearg distillery on the Isle of Lewis cont.**

The stills may bear a curious resemblance to repurposed hot-water cylinders but Mark proudly led us to one of the distillery's rambling sheds which houses a discreetly located but sophisticated, modern hydro-electric power scheme. Water is 'borrowed' from a hundred yards or so up the Red River, passed through a turbine, electricity generated and the water returned to the main stream. Mark also proudly noted that his small group of buildings was the first and only human construction on the river. Behind the site lie the mountains of Brinneabhal and Cleite Leathern. The Red River, fed by storm-driven Atlantic clouds that have not seen land for more than 3,000 miles, runs through open moorland. There is no habitation and no agricultural activity on this land; arguably, therefore, this is as pure a water source as may be found anywhere in Scotland.

There is a modest tasting room here, where you may sample and buy the Spirit of Lewis and the Abhainn Dearg single malt. The new-make spirit is heady stuff. I can imagine it taken from a tin cup in some remote bothy after a hard day in the mountains, or to provide the energy to pull from the kelp-draped-deep creels laden with sea-blue lobsters. Aeneas McDonald's immortal words came to mind: 'there are flavours in it, insinuating and remote, from mountain torrents and the scanty soil on moorland rocks and slanting, rare sun-shafts'. Moorland rocks and slanting, rare sun-shafts speak eloquently of Lewis. The landscape is strange and unfamiliar, with bare rock poking everywhere through the thin soil. This is a harsh and unforgiving land, not without its own stark and austere beauty, but composed of the same granite that makes up the moon. Mark left us abruptly. A friend's bull had broken out of its field and he was needed as part of the rescue party. It was the perfect end to a visit that was itself perfect in so many entirely unexpected ways. Whiskies Galore: A Tour of Scotland's Island Distilleries by Ian Buxton is published by Birlinn (£16.99, hardback), [www.birlinn.co.uk](http://www.birlinn.co.uk)

Read more at: [www.scotsman.com/news/a-journey-to-abhainn-dearg-distillery-on-the-isle-of-lewis-1-4671522](http://www.scotsman.com/news/a-journey-to-abhainn-dearg-distillery-on-the-isle-of-lewis-1-4671522)

