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Reiteach, A Scottish Engagement Rite A Reiteach is said to be an espousal, held before the bans of marriage are proclaimed and sometimes considered as important as the wedding feast itself. But that is a la? ter definition. If a man happened to be out by the roadj cutting aivay small spruce and hardwood, clearing the area • and if you asked his wife what he was up to, she might tell you in Gaelic, "Tha e trang ag obair reiteach," he's busy working at clearing. And that's what a Reiteach was, Joe MacNeil told us, "I guess it comes from the word like settling things, clearing out obstacles, trees and stumps, making the ground tillable,** It was a formal way of asking for a young girl's hand, clearing the ground as to would there be a marriage, who would perform the ceremony and where, probably questions of dowry, where the couple would live • making certain that every? one involved was satisfied with the arrangements. It was probably very important in the preservation of family and community. Today such a practise is all but forgotten, and the last Reiteach on Cape Breton seems to have been that when Sandy Kenny Morri? son of Wreck Cove brought his cousin Alex J, Morrison to speak for him, asking for the hand of Rhoda MacDonald of Skir Dhu • in 1923, To] mmy Peggy MacDonald of Breton Cove, and the wedding of Rhoda MacDonald >f Skir Dhu to Sandy Kenny Morrison of Wreck Cove, 1923 • the wedding a "product of the last formal Reiteach on Cape Breton Island,"" Over the years what must have been a very rich tradition gradually wore away until only the barest outlines of Reiteach was left. It must have been at one time quite a performance. According to Carmina Gadelica. it was for some reason never held on a Friday, The bridegroom-to-be and an older friend, someone respected in the community, would come to the home of the girl he hoped to have for a bride. The father would u- usually know why they had come, but nothing would be said outright. Instead, they would pretend they had come to buy a cow or a horse or a boat • and everything they said would have a double meaning. If it was a boat they were claiming they wanted to buy, they would ask such a question as. Is she broad in the beam? Eventually they would get down to talking about the real purpose of the visit, and when the older friend had finished speaking well of the bridegroom-to-be and asking for a certain girl's hand, the father would then go through the formality of first offering his other daughters. Sometimesj in fact, the offer was quite serious, as he perhaps wanted to marry off a particular daughter and would actually refuse to give up the girl the young man had come for, Malcolm Angus MacLeod of Birch Plain remembered having seen only one Reiteach, He said the table was prepared for a little feast, and everyone except the young girl herself sat at the table. Her chair was left empty at the table. And the young man who wished to marry her had brought an older man to speak for him, and this older man described the future groom's qualities and love for the girl and asked for her hand. And when all other arrangements were made, as the final act of agreement, the young girl would come to the table and sit • and strong drink was available, and the feast was served. Cape Breton's Magazine/20