

DRUMMER FEATURE ARTICLE

©Jack Fritscher. See [Permissions, Reprints, Quotations, Footnotes](#)

Kill or Be Kilt: How I flung my Highland Fling...

SCOTTISH GAMES

Q. What do Scotsmen have under their kilts?

A. EVERYTHING!

by Jack Fritscher

- This entire feature article "... " is also available in Acrobat pdf.
- Author's [historical introduction](#)
- Actual [feature article](#) as published
- [Illustrations](#)

AUTHOR'S HISTORICAL CONTEXT INTRODUCTION



DRAFT VERSION



Written September 12, 1978, and published in *Drummer* 25, December 1978. At the heart of this muscle- bear-themed piece is my question: why is a photograph taken of a straight man by a gay man considered to be a gay photograph when the same straight man shot at the same time by a woman is considered just a photograph? What trickster magic do gay men work shifting shapes with a camera? Did Mapplethorpe's personal homosexuality make all his photographs gay? Can a gay photographer take a straight photograph? Does a photograph's mere publication in *Drummer* make it gay? I think it must—otherwise gay publications would not open with manic disclaimers screaming the appearance of anyone in a photograph in this publication in no way represents that person's sexual orientation.

David Sparrow and I shot several roles of film to get the eight Scots kilts photographs accompanying my text of puns on pages 92 and 93. We took the pictures not far from our country home at the Annual Scottish Games for a long time held every September at the Sonoma County Fairgrounds in Santa Rosa, California.

If our being gay does or does not make these photographs gay, at least our gay taste makes them both homomasculine and heteromasculine. These photographs represent a number of historical firsts. 1) Our photos were the first appearance of a straight kilt in the gay press which is a significant outing because the allure of the kilt—which has always been attractive to gay men, from its earlier version on Roman legionnaires—has since developed in gay culture into a genuine fetish item worn in bars and at events such as the

Folsom Street Fair. “Gay kilts,” however, are rarely genuine; that is they are not usually the expensive tailored tartan of the formal kilt, nor are they correct in the historical wrap-around manner of the movie *Rob Roy* or *Braveheart*. 2) Also in every respect, this is the first article glorifying bearded beefy boy bears. And 3) this is the one of the first times *Drummer* overtly presented straight men as objects of gay desire, which I repeated in “Cigar Blues” (*Drummer* 22), “Prison Blues,” (*Drummer* 21), “Turkish Delight: Wrestling” (Son of *Drummer*), and “Grand National Rodeo Blues” (*Drummer* 26), “Slap Happy” centerfold photographs (*Drummer* 148) which was the first time actual straight men were presented erotically as a gay centerfold.

Over the years, while shooting our digital documentaries of San Francisco street fairs, Mark Hemry and I have watched and documented gay styles coming and going. At the Folsom Street Fair 2001, a kilt maker had a booth where he measured men for his adaptation of the kilt into leather and rubber. At the Dore Alley Street Fair in San Francisco, August 2002, we saw several men wearing beautiful industrial-strength kilts they had made of brown Carhartt gear.

Kilts are very suitable to big men and to bears, although some gay boys—referencing Catholic school-girl plaid-skirt uniforms from the 1950s—swing their little butts in itty bitsy teeny weeny wannabe kilts, somewhat after the style of Jean-Paul Gauthier, the French designer who tried to introduce the kilt seriously as a fashion item. (In the 1970s, Rap Brown???, the black activist, also tore a page from leather culture without so much as mentioning it when he announced he was introducing codpiece pants!) In perhaps the queeniest and gay issue of *The New Yorker* ever, June 5, 1995, author Anthony Lane, who is certainly a queen whether he is straight or gay, cannot resist trashing *Braveheart* as “Men in Skirts.” No matter how well Mel Gibson directed and acted in that film, it was hardly “men in skirts.” (I found this article that went on endlessly and stupidly about kilts by coincidence, because some times the six degrees of separation are only one; for in this *New Yorker* issue, critic Peter Conrad, in his article, “The Devil’s Disciple,” quoted a passage about Robert Mapplethorpe from my memoir, *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera*, and thus the whole issue was brought to my attention.)

As a ritualist, I often return to the scene of homomascuine events, whether it is a Folsom Street leather fair or the Scottish Games. In 1990, twelve years after David Sparrow and I shot the Scots, Mark Hemry and I shot both video and color photographs in the same stadium. (Mark Hemry won me from David Sparrow in a card game.) One of those 1990 Fritscher-Hemry photographs was selected by the British art critic Edward Lucie-Smith as the final photograph in the coffee-table photography book the British publisher named *Jack Fritscher’s American Men*. The photograph was titled “Actual Prison Guard, American Kilt, 1990.” In fact, the kilt photograph on page 62 of *American Men*, published 1995, is almost identical to the kilt photograph on page 93 of *Drummer* 25, published 1978, proving that I’ve spent a lifetime on my knees between men’s ankles shooting up at them to heroize them by the angle which makes them larger than life. Stephen Sondheim knew this angle when he wrote in his ’70s musical, *A Little Night Music*, “my body’s alright, but not in perspective and not in the light.”

Critic Howard Watson in his article, “The Sexual Allure of the Kilt,” which appeared in *The Bear Opus*, Volume 1 Number 2, 2001, wrote: “As Edward Lucie-Smith explains in his introduction to *Jack Fritscher’s American Men*, ‘Such photos [the kilt photograph] tell us nothing about the sexuality of the subject, but much about the image-maker’s own reactions to the world....It is Fritscher’s overall vision which makes them erotically charged.’ [Watson and Lucie-Smith perhaps answer the question: the photographer makes an otherwise straight photo “gay.”] To cut a long theory short,

beauty is in the viewfinder. As George Mazzei, former managing editor of the American version of *GQ Magazine* has explained, the erotic charge of the kilt is the nudity underneath its pleats, or rather the assumption of nudity. Fritscher's photograph, 'Actual Prison Guard, American Kilt, 1990' captures perfectly the charge of the kilt as an athlete is engaged in throwing the hammer at a Highland Games. The Lycra stretch shorts he wears under his kilt add a sensual frisson, rather than detracting from such a magnificent sight, as the referee watches on."

The way the photographer watches on.

My one regret with these photographs is that while shot in glorious color, the publishers could only afford to print black-and-white so that the photographs have never really been seen in full intensity. Historically, budget has been the bane of gay magazines because cheap printing means cruddy reproduction of otherwise excellent photographs. I hope one day some enterprising obsessive finds all the originals of all the photographs ever published in *Drummer* and restores them to their proper glory.

And, yes, I own a formal woolen kilt which, in the season between Halloween and Christmas, I wear with relish, and no undershorts. –Jack Fritscher, 14 August 2002

**The feature article was written September 12, 1978,
and published in *Drummer* 25, December 1978**

Kill or Be Kilt: How I flung my Highland Fling...

SCOTTISH GAMES
Q. What do Scotsmen have
under their kilts?
A. EVERYTHING!
by Jack Fritscher

WHEN A SCOTTISH REGIMENT pulls on its tartan kilts, you've got a good shot of bearded, beefy men in full military uniform. Thick wool socks hug thicker calves. Muscular thighs rub hairy against tartan plaid.

A good Leg-Man can whiff it up, beyond measure, when every little breeze seems to whisper, "Those knees!" Especially when these Loch Ness monsters in white Ballantine teeshirts play out their Games in California, at Santa Rosa, near Petaluma, the Arm-Wrestling Capital of the World.

This kind of Scotch Guard works well on sweaty sheets. Preferably after a hard afternoon in the sun: picking up poles, weights, and other Olympic-size equipment. The athletics is only as hot as the athletes.

After all, a gay man can go to a straight event for a peep at a bonnie lad or two and not be picked up by Scotland Yard for what he's thinking.

HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE THIS MATERIAL
www.JackFritscher.com/Drummer/Research%20Note.html

A little Scotch. A little Scotch: broth. A little Scotch: meat. A guy could get off!
Scot-free.

©1978, 2004 Jack Fritscher

ILLUSTRATIONS

[Home](#) | [Search](#) | [Quotation & Research Guides](#) | [Email Jack Fritscher](#) | [Webmaster](#) | [Help](#)

Copyright 2007 by Jack Fritscher, Ph.D. & Mark Hemry - ALL RIGHTS RESERVED