



Which are the authentic Campbell tartans?

Many Campbells and members of the Septs of the clan ask that question upon first becoming interested in their heritage. Unfortunately, many ask the merchants selling tartan goods and sometimes are misled. *There is only one authority on the correct tartan or tartans of a clan: the Chief of that clan.* Not even the Lord Lyon King of Arms or the Scottish Tartan Society claim such authority - they are merely archivists of tartan history, a complex field.

Here is how the 12th Duke of Argyll, father of our present Chief, summed up the official position on Campbell tartans as it has been declared consistently for well over one hundred years by successive Chiefs of Clan Campbell:

“. . . the only tartans which I recognize are, firstly, the one you see me and my wife wearing, which goes under various names, such as ordinary Campbell, ‘Ancient Campbell,’ etc., and all members of our clan . . . are entitled to wear it.”

“Let me get rid once and for all, of the thought that there is a ‘Campbell of Argyll’ (tartan). While it is true that the Sixth Duke introduced a white line to his plain Campbell tartan to differentiate himself from the rest of the Campbells, (he being the chief and entitled to do so), he was the only member so to do and the rest of the family thought he was rather pompous to do it.”

“Campbell of Breadalbane - fine”

“Campbell of Cawdor - fine”

“Campbell of Loudoun - fine”

“Campbell of Glenlyon - I have never heard of it”

“Campbell of Loch Awe - this is plain ridiculous, as we are all Campbells of Loch Awe originally. Apart from anything else, I have never heard of a Campbell of Loch Awe tartan, nor do I wish to do so.”

“There is no Dress Campbell”

“There is no Hunting Campbell”

To summarize, then, just four setts are authorized Campbell tartans: ‘Ancient,’ or ‘Campbell, Campbell of Breadalbane, Campbell of Cawdor, and Campbell of Loudoun. To be faithful to Scottish tradition, only those descended from the houses of Breadalbane, Cawdor and Loudoun

should wear the tartans belonging to those houses; all other Campbells and members of other Campbell septs should wear ‘Ancient,’ or Campbell tartan, which is composed of threads of only three colors: blue, green and black, with no overstripes of any other color.



Ancient Campbell is the same as Black Watch tartan. Indeed, as Alastair Campbell of Airds, former Chief Executive of Clan Campbell, indicates in his authoritative book *Campbell Tartan*, the Black Watch tartan may well have been adopted as the clan's tartan because so many members of the clan were already wearing it, owing to their service in the regiment.

The Black Watch tartan is today usually made in darker shades of green and blue, while Ancient Campbell is made in lighter, brighter shades. Some Campbells wear the lighter Ancient Campbell for day wear and the darker Black Watch for evening and 'formal wear' - the important point being that they are the same tartan. Remember, it is the "sett," or thread count, of a tartan that distinguishes it from other tartans, not the comparative lightness of darkness of their colors, which in early days could vary greatly due to the unpredictable nature of vegetable dyes. So, *caveat emptor*,; before you buy

anything purporting to be Ancient Campbell or Black Watch tartan, *be sure it has the correct sett*. Note that Campbell tartan is a double sett. This means that it takes twice the distance to repeat the pattern as a single sett, or a basic square pattern. Look at the double tramlines, pairs of narrow black lines like railroad tracks. Moving across the tartan left to right, there is one double tramline in an area of blue, an area of green with a single line, an area of blue with two double tramlines, followed by an area of green with a single line. This completes the pattern, which is the same up and down as it is across.

For further authoritative information on Campbell tartans, including color illustrations of the four authorized tartans and many of the unauthorized tartans, consult *Campbell Tartan*, by Alastair Campbell of Airds, available from the Clan Campbell Society (North America) Store, the address of which many be found in the *Journal of the Clan Campbell Society, North America*.

The Sett of the Campbell Tartan

Blue	Black	Blue	Black	Blue	Black	Green	Black	Green	Black	Blue	Black	Blue
24	4	4	4	4	20	24	6	24	20	22	4	4

The Clan Campbell Society (North America)

Region 1 website: <http://ccsregion1.org>
 CCS, NA website: <http://ccsna.org>