



# Songbook

[Home](#)

[Songbook](#)

[Albums](#)

[News](#)

[Gigs](#)

[Biography](#)

[Discography](#)

[Promo Gallery](#)

[Reviews/Articles](#)

[Links](#)

[Contact/  
Bookings/Online](#)

[Shop](#)

## DESTITUTION ROAD

*Words and music by Alistair Hulett (Pub. AMCOS)*

*The time in Scotland known as the Highland Clearances was a government led assault on the non-English speaking tribal societies - the clansfolk, that had existed there for countless centuries. From its inception in 1792, when it was called in Gaelic by its victims Bliadhna nan Caorach, meaning The Year Of the Sheep, till it finally ended nearly eighty years later, this was a period of incredible violence and cruelty carried out in the name of modernisation.*

*Wool was seen by the clan chiefs as a better source of profit than rent, and the government agreed. Many sold their lands to southern capitalist farmers while others carried out the clearings themselves. In all cases the military gave assistance in what amounted to a programme of 'ethnic cleansing'.*

*Hard on the heels of The Year of the Sheep came The Year of the Burnings, when any hope of return was put to the torch and destroyed. Capitalist farming methods and the introduction of sheep to the glens gave rise a process of physical and cultural genocide that has left the Scottish Highlands barren of its human population to this day. The passage out of the Highlands in those times was known as The Destitution Road.*

D G D  
In the Year Of The Sheep and the burnin' time  
D Bm A  
They cut our young men in their prime  
D G D  
The old Scots way was a hangin' crime  
D A D  
For the Gaels of Caledonia  
A D  
There's a den for the fox, a hedge for the hare  
G D Bm A  
A nest in the tree for the birds of the air  
D G D A D  
But in a' Scotland there's no place there for the Gaels of Caledonia  
D G D  
But there's no use getting' frantic  
D G A  
It's time tae hump yer load  
D G D  
Across the wild Atlantic  
D A D  
On the Destitution Road

The bailiff came wi' the writ and a'  
And the gallant lads of the Forty Twa  
They drove ye oot in the sleet and snaw  
The Gaels of Caledonia  
When yer house was burned and yer crops as well  
Ye stood and wept in the blackened shell  
And the winter moor was a living hell  
For the Gaels of Caledonia

The plague and the famine they dragged ye doon  
As ye made yer way tae Glesga toon  
Where ye'd heard o' a ship that was sailin' soon  
For the shores of Nova Scotia  
And ye sold yer gear, ye paid yer fare  
Wi' yer heid held high though yer heart was sair  
And ye bid farewell forever mair  
Tae the glens of Caledonia

The land was cleared and the deal was made

[Listen and download](#) [Download as Word doc](#)



[MP3](#)

[DOC](#)

Noo an English lord in a tartan plaid  
He struts and stares as the memories fade  
Of the Gaels of Caledonia  
And he hunts the deer in the lonely glen  
That once was home to a thousand men  
And the wind on the moor sings a sad refrain  
For the Gaels of Caledonia

Chord Chart:

Verse

D /// I G / D / I D /// I Bm / A / I  
D /// I G / D / I D // A I D /// I  
A /// I D /// I G / D / I Bm / A / I  
D /// I G / D / I D // A I D /// I

Chorus

D /// I G / D / I D /// I A /// I  
D /// I G / D / I D / A / I D /// I

Playing Tips:

I do this song in the key of D live and on the songbook MP3. The two recorded versions, on *Cat Among The Pigeons* and *Dance Of The Underclass*, are both in E. I played the RJ version in D shapes (Standard Tuning) with a capo at the second fret, while the solo arrangement was done in C Modal Tuning (CGCGCC) capoed at the fourth. It also works well in DADGAD.

Nowadays I do it in DADEAB, but you can still use the standard tuning shapes to play it in D, or transpose it down into C and capo at the second fret to return it back up to D. This means you avoid the tricky Bm shape, which is a barre chord. In C shapes this becomes an Am, which is far simpler to form.

Transposing is very easy. Just go back one letter in the alphabet for each chord. D becomes C, Bm becomes Am, G becomes F, A becomes G etc. There's nothing to it, really and it works for changing into any key. For finding out some basic chords in DADGAD refer to the *Alternative Guitar Tunings* page in this Songbook.