

CULTURE: Austrians say they invented our tartan

By Marc Horne

TARTAN-barmy Austrians are ditching lederhosen to make a claim on our national dress.

Cheeky alpine archaeologists claim they started wearing tartan 1,000 years before the Scots.

The Tyrolean tall-tale has led to the kilt becoming the most fashionable outfit around the beerkellers and cafes of Vienna.

And bravehearted residents of one Austrian village have even formed an honorary unit of the North-east's traditional regiment: The Gordon Highlanders.

Stores across the central-European nation are now selling "traditional Alpine" kilts and sporrans alongside leather shorts, feather hats and Arnold Schwarzenegger souvenirs. Austrian kiltmaker Thomas Retzl claims fragments of an ancient tartan kilt were found near Carinthia.

Herr Retzl said: "The tartan sample was dated to at least 320 years BC - over 1,600 years earlier than the oldest Scottish tartan which was made in 1,300 AD.

"The Celts originally came from continental Europe and that backs up our claim to have had the kilt first."

He is now hoping to export his alpine kilts across the globe - including Scotland. He said: "We worked with a Scottish firm in the Borders to get the expertise but our kilts are designed in Austria and are better quality than some in Scotland.

"We are doing a roaring trade."

His most famous client is Austrian TV star Armin Assinger who has started presenting their version

of Who Wants to be a Millionaire in a 'Carinthian Kilt' outfit.

Scottish culture has taken a hold across Austria with several communities forming Caledonian associations.

Residents of the tiny village of Donnerskirchen, south of Vienna, have paid their own tribute to the military heritage of North-east Scotland.

They have formed the Gordon Highlanders of Austria and hold regular Highland festivals.

Sporran legion

Chief Christoph Gansbacher said: "Once on a windy and cold September evening a number of young fellows decided to establish a club. "The mystery and allure of Scottish history, tradition and culture was so overwhelming that we formed a Scottish club."

The Teutonic tartan army looked to military history to find a name and influence for the group.

Herr Gansbacher said: "The fighting capability of the Scots has been recognised all over the world.

"There was one regiment famed for their dedication and loyalty that inspired our unit, the Gordon Highlanders."

Meanwhile, Chris McLeod of Aberdeen kiltmaker Alex Scott was not worried by the continental competition. He said: "The Austrians are welcome to try, but the kilt is firmly established as our national dress and an internationally recognised symbol of Scotland."

I'LL BE MAC: How Arnie would look in Highland dress.

