

Iomairt an Obain – Business Units

In 2013, the Trust secured over £500,000 in funding from the Big Lottery, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar to build business units. The high cost of construction in Harris and the perceived lack of demand have meant that no commercial developer has ever considered this sort of development. As a community development trust, we have managed to convince the funders that if the units are built and made available with economic rents, then businesses will come, bringing with them new employment opportunities.

One of the original aims of the Trust is to increase employment opportunities. This project is not so much about building business space as creating the right facilities to attract businesses that will create new jobs and training opportunities for the North Harris community.

Contractors started preparing the ground for the three new architect-designed properties in July and since then over 1600 tons of rock has been excavated to create new access and level plots for the buildings. The Iomairt an Obain development consists of three 66 square metre larch-clad units, which have been designed to be energy efficient with plenty of natural light and their own solar panels for generating electricity. Each unit has a workshop area, office and toilet and is designed for business and light industrial use. They are scheduled to be completed at the end of January 2015. The North Harris Trust is now seeking applications from prospective tenants.

Monan Windfarm

By the time you read this, we may very well have the first of three turbines erected on site. Over the last couple of months, local contractors have been working on site to build a new 1.2km track up the hill to the turbine sites. Late in October the concrete foundations were poured. These are now curing, in preparation for the arrival of the towers from Germany. The first turbine has been shipped from New Zealand. It will be on site at the end of November. Our hope is that there will be a break in the wind to allow the complete turbine nacelle with blades to be lifted to the top of the tower. The two remaining turbines are due in the new year.

QUICK UPDATES

• Maraig Micro-hydro Scheme:

We have now nearly spent all of our C.A.R.E.S grant on securing the appropriate permissions to develop this small-scale hydro scheme. In October we received a connection offer from SSE. They will allow us to connect 50kW of generation to the grid next December. Anything bigger will require the new under-sea cable to be installed to the mainland. Planning and SEPA permissions are due shortly. The next stage will be deciding how we fund the project.

• Buna hydro:

After much too-ing and fro-ing between solicitors we await the final contracts that will give the Trust a share-holding in River Generation Limited, the Joint-Venture company that will develop the scheme. Planning permission has been received for a revised pipe route and final pricing from civil and mechanical/electrical contractors has been received. We still hope to do some work over the winter period, but in-river construction will now have to wait for the spring when the water levels drop.

• Huisinis Gateway:

Planning permission has now been obtained for a new building to replace the toilets at Huisinis. The planning also covers new carparking and the conversion of a quarry further along the road into a campervan parking area. The project has been costed at £250,000. We are now on the search for funding.

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Clockwise from top: Hardy group of walkers on the Cleit Ard walk; Raft Race final; Segways at Glen Meavaig

2014 Mountain Festival

The 2014 Isle of Harris Mountain Festival took place this year from 13th to 20th September. The programme was bursting full, with a huge variety of events, and everyone who took part was treated to perfect weather right through the week. The big guided walk of the week was the Clisham Horseshoe— a cloud inversion for most of the day meant we were walking on the hill tops above a sea of cloud billowing through the glens. Accompanying us was long-distance walker, author and photographer Chris Townsend. The evening events were opened by author & broadcaster Alastair McIntosh. Festival regular Laurie Campbell presented some of his latest work, and biologist John Love gave a presentation about Hebridean naturalists.

Six teams took part in the Festival Raft Race, along with a good turnout of spectators who enjoyed a barbeque put on by the Harris Hotel. Other water-based activities included Sea Kayaking in West Loch Tarbert and the powerboat tours of Loch Seaforth, provided by the Scaladale Centre. Segway Hebrides ran Segway trips up Glen Meavaig and a set of Mountain Training Association accredited Hill & Mountain Skills Award courses were run by the Outdoor Learning team from CnES.

We had some pretty special wildlife sightings during festival week. On the Eagle Walk, a sea eagle came and did an incredibly low fly-over right above the group. A minke whale and porpoises were sighted off Scalpay during the walk out to the lighthouse, and an otter ran right past the whole group by the path through Glen Cravadale on the community walk.

Overall around 560 people attended all events, including approximately 40 people who had come to Harris specifically for the festival, up from 25 the previous year. This is a pretty significant figure, as one of the main aims of the festival is to provide a boost to tourism at the end of the season. We would like to thank everyone who attended, and all the organisations who supported the festival. Thanks also to John Muir Trust, Marine Harvest and Bòrd na Gàidhlig for funding the event.

If you have any ideas for next year's festival, please get in touch by emailing info@harrismountainfestival.com. Keep an eye on www.harrismountainfestival.com for updates. Hope to see you all next year!

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Community Meetings

We recently held a series of four community meetings across the Estate to give us an opportunity to engage directly with the community. The purpose of these meetings was to keep residents informed as to the work we are currently involved in and to give an outline of what we hope to achieve in the future. The meetings were also a good opportunity to gather feedback from the community as to their opinions on the Trust's work and on any other projects or work which they feel we should be engaging in. The meetings were held in Amhuinnsuidhe, Scaladale, Scalpay and Tarbert. The Trust manages the Estate on behalf of the community, so close co-operation with local residents is very important. If anybody has any questions or ideas they wish to share with us, please feel free to drop into the office, write to or email us, or give us a call; contact details can be found on the back page.



Question and answer session at Scalpay Community Consultation Meeting

Scalpay Update

As indicated in the last issue of Caraidean we have been engaged in lengthy discussions with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar with regard to leasing the Scalpay School Buildings and the Care Unit for a 1 year trial period. We have now secured a lease for the Care Unit and have a sub-tenant in place for a six month period. The lease of Scalpay School is proving more challenging as we have had to overcome some hurdles related to the Change of Use Planning process. We have sub-tenants lined up ready to go into the building once planning permission is approved.

New Land Manager

After the departure of our previous Land Manager Mark Lazzeri, four individuals were interviewed for the post in June this year and Mr Gordon Cumming was appointed as the new Land Manager. Gordon is originally from Lanarkshire but has lived in Harris for over 15 years and is married with two children. Gordon has a vast amount of experience in Land Management and we look forward to working with him.

JMT Volunteers

During the week beginning 8th September, we hosted another work party of volunteers from the John Muir Trust. They spent the majority of the week in Glen Leosaid, clearing out the drainage ditches along the footpath all the way up to the bealach. As well as this they also carried out a thorough beach clean around the shore of Loch Meavaig and on the beach in front of Scalpay Lighthouse! Thanks once again to all of the volunteers for their hard work.



Beach clean at Scalpay Lighthouse

Bunavoneader Whaling Station

The work to resurrect a conservation project at the Bunavoneader Whaling Station has been ongoing since our last issue of Caraidean. This culminated in an application being submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund in September for £1.3 million which represents 90% of the total project cost. The HLF operate a two stage application process, we will receive a decision on our first round application in December and, if successful we will then complete a second round application early next year.

The whaling station had been identified as a priority when the Trust was first formed and a lot of work has gone into the project to bring it to this point. If successful the grant funding will be used to do a number of works across the site including the repair of the sea wall and the stabilisation of the boiler house chimney. It is also our intention to install interpretation on site and have it open to the public



Amhuinnsuidhe Cairn

On the hill directly behind Amhuinnsuidhe Castle stands a Cairn which contains the ashes of Sir Samuel and Lady Sophia Scott who owned the North Harris Estate from 1883 until Sir Samuel's death in 1944. In recent years the cairn had sustained a substantial amount of damage due to its exposed location and a lightning strike. This cairn marks an important part of the Estate's history and so it was felt important that it should not be allowed to fall into disrepair. The Trust therefore began negotiations in 2013 with the Western Isles Health Board who currently own the cairn to have it repaired. This has proved to be a very challenging project due to the exposed location of the cairn. Mr James Crawford, a local stonemason, has skilfully carried out the repair work to the cairn, which was finished this autumn. The result is very impressive and the cairn has been brought back to its former majesty. Now that the repair work is completed the cairn is being transferred into the Trust's ownership. The Trust aim to ensure that the heritage and culture of Harris is protected and saved for future generations and the Amhuinnsuidhe Cairn is an example of how we are achieving this.

North Harris Trust 2015 Calendar

Our 2015 Calendar is now available to buy. We produced desk calendars this year as it was felt that last year's calendar was a little too large. The calendar contains a selection of images taken on the Estate throughout the year and showcases our magnificent wildlife and scenery. The Calendar is priced at £4 and can be bought from either the Trust Office or online, via our website.

Guided Walks & The North Harris Eagle Observatory

Every year our Ranger Service leads a programme of guided walks from April-October. The programme is designed to promote Harris' fantastic natural and cultural heritage, and to help people to enjoy the outdoors. This year we had over 600 people attending a total of 58 walks. The North Harris Eagle Observatory has also been very popular, we estimate that 6000 people have visited the Observatory over the last year.

North Harris Red Deer Herd

Last November a helicopter and team were hired to count deer on North Harris and neighbouring Estates. The results indicated that the population of red deer was about 820. This is a 20% drop compared to the previous count carried out in Spring 2012. Deer numbers were also down on neighbouring Estates. The decline is attributed to increased stalking pressure, high natural mortality and possibly the migration of deer to the north. Responding to these figures the NHT will not be stalking any hinds this Winter to enable a rapid recovery of the population.

North Harris Common Grazing Mapping

The exercise to register all 16 common grazings on the Estate was completed in September after 18 months of hard work. The lack of official maps in croft related issues poses a real difficulty for North Harris Crofters and the Trust. Registering croft land is very worthwhile and a number of local Crofters have already completed their registration. All registered crofts and common grazings can be viewed via the online crofting register at www.crofts.ros.gov.uk/register/search