

Highland Council Tourism Seminar
Dec. 2008

Background:

These annual events are aimed at giving the industry and HC councillors the opportunity to hear of tourism related developments over the past year, and to enable networking between all who attend. The specific theme this year dealt with how the area has benefited from Events and Festivals, and the idea was to presumably give folk some ideas about how they could apply the ideas to their own community. And, being slightly cynical, to allow us all to hear what a howling success the “Year of Homecoming” will be! And yet – it might just succeed.

For the second year running, numbers of those attending appeared slightly down on previous years (*my eyesight is fading as the years advance ,however, so please be charitable and allow for a small miscount!*) and there were about 60 or so folk in the Council auditorium to begin with – a mix of trade representatives as well as a number of Councillors and individuals. This was against an actual delegate listing of 75. Apart from Celtic Fringe, no other local organisations appeared to be represented, though Fiona Cameron was there from the “Gairloch Gathering” point of view.

The speakers.....

So as not to ramble too much, we’ll look at the main points from each speaker rather than a blow-by-blow account. (Email contacts and website addresses at the end of this report)

First off the starting line was **Torquil Macleod**, who is the current chairman of **Events Scotland**.

ES are in the business of promoting and assisting some of the bigger events in Scotland – examples being the Ryder Cup in 2014 (*which gives you an idea of how far in advance these things are planned.....though if theories surrounding the long count Mayan calendar is correct, this won’t matter too much*). Other major events that they have assisted have been Rockness, Belladrum, and a large number of sporting events. 340 events in total, bringing a value of approx: **£200 Million** into the country.

Anyway, ES operate funding programmes as well, for both National and Regional events. The overall criteria here is that these events must aim to maximise media exposure for Scotland, and a successful application can mean up to £25k for regional events.

They have also developed a long-term strategy for event tourism in Scotland, covering from 2009 – 2020, so if you are considering planning an event, then it would be worth a look. (download information on this at the end of the report)

Director of Highland 2007, Fiona Hampton, was next.

You might well say “Highland 2007?” – that’s history, surely! Not so gentle reader, not so. Highland 2007 as an entity may well be in the past now (and in the past it shall remain)....but many aspects of what was a highly successful programme are being carried on in what has become the H2007 “Legacy” programming. This is an ongoing funding programme, with the aim of developing a year round calendar of events for

the area. Up to £500,000 is available each year to successful applicants, and the Legacy programme is expected to be in great demand.

As examples of the most successful events helped so far, Belladrum was again quoted, along with a variety of other attractions such as the Fort William Mountain Bike Challenge, Moray Firth Flotilla, Locally, the Culloden Visitor Centre, and the Mussel festival.

If anybody needs convincing about the value of these events, Belladrum creates £1.5m annually, the Mountain Bike Challenge exceeds that at nearly £2m, and collectively, all the events put together come to a figure of 43,000 extra overnights each year, and a huge £6.1m extra spend.

Lastly, Fiona indicated that there are several new websites coming on stream shortly, dealing with a variety of information on both events and Highland culture (info at end of report)

But it's not all about mega events and giga fests, oh no.



We heard from the Ullapool Book Festival, coming up to its fifth year. Joan Michael (one of the events originators) spoke about how “passion” is one of the major driving forces behind a successful event – don’t have an event just because you think the area could do with it, *do it because you really believe in the concept.*

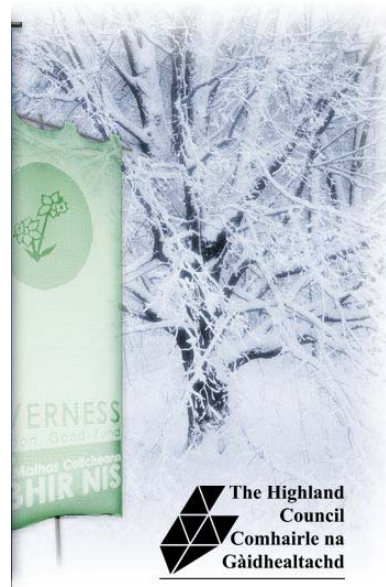
In the four years since it started, the event has grown steadily in stature, and now occupies a regular slot on the Ullapool scene. It attracts a small (by festival standards) but enthusiastic crowd into Ullapool, and fills a vital section of the “shoulder” months outwith peak period – have a few of these throughout the year, and your shoulder period dip vanishes!



Like the BF, **Sea Cromarty Sparkle** is a community driven event. The idea came from a household survey into what Cromarty folk would like to happen in their own area. This culminated in two month long festivals (as in two festivals, each lasting

one month) that link together summer, winter, and the sea – one celebrating Cromarty’s marine heritage; the other in early winter, lighting up the dark nights with drama, fire and folklore.

Rather than blethering on for ages here, the website says it all and more, with loads of photos from the events that have taken place to date – there’s also an explanation of the background, contact details etc. Flip quickly to the last page on this report, where you’ll find the website.



And finally, the **Inverness Winter Festival:**

No, I hadn’t heard of it either, but there are notices and signs all over Inverness now! This event is aimed squarely at the business of getting folk into the Inverness and surrounding area during the winter months – a laudable aim. I don’t know about your home community, but I can think of several in the Highlands that feature “Closed for the Season” as part of the visitor attraction drive! Despite years of trying, there are still many issues surrounding the seasonality of our tourism product, so I think anything aimed at improving this has to be supported.

The other part of the IWF philosophy, is that they have decided they will not be dependent on external grants, and that this must be self sufficient (or presumably as close to that as possible). They have studied other Northern based festivals, and looked at the Icelandic Festivals Association in particular. They started off with a “Fish Soup Festival”...literally, “come and try my local soup in my own home” - many communities in Iceland have their own speciality. This has now developed into something that attracts 45,000 people at the last count. (And if you know anything about the total population of Iceland, that is a serious number of people!)

Anyway, planned for Inverness are such items as citywide projections, a Christmas ceilidh trail, Ness Islands to have a really special lighting display, Hogmanay celebrations, and proposals to stage the worlds first Highland games each year. This is quite clever actually! The idea is that the USA – Scotland - and New Zealand will all link up via TV / Web etc, and play a simultaneous set of games – ie the first of the year. I think the idea was to commence this at 3am or something, although that sounds a bit ambitious for a variety of reasons!

And now.....**Sue Crossman, of the Tourism Innovation Group:**

Formed in 2002, The Tourism Innovation Group (TiG) is a private-sector led group, which aims to stimulate tourism operators into taking action to INNOVATE, to COLLABORATE and grow the tourism economy. Well, that's what it says on their website anyway!

My own experience of TiG is mixed: They operate at a fairly high level, work with the big hotel and sector groups, and get involved in big events, big occasions. They also regularly invite us to attend at events etc, which always seem to involve Celtic Fringe having to fork out several hundred pounds for the privilege. So, we haven't been to many! However, on the plus side, some of their thinking is actually quite innovative, and they have a wide range of connections and industry resources to call on – along with the ear of many ministers!

Sue talked about how it is crucial to deliver an event on the basis of six key actions:

1. Aim the right event and the right people (ie Know your market)
2. Have a clear team / event leader
3. Deliver an *experience* – not just an event
4. Integrate with the local community
5. Establish a clear media strategy, remembering that “Quirky” often means national media interest
6. Understand and measure the local impact, using this for future change. After all, some people did not come – Why?

Finally, with fanfare of trumpets and assorted noisy things: Highland Council! What direct actions and initiatives come from this direction?

The speaker was **Colin Simpson, HC's Tourism Co-Ordinator**. Through this annual report, I have said before that the Council are actually extremely supportive and proactive in their commitment to tourism in the Highlands area. This has not changed in the last year, and if anything, their enthusiasm has increased. At the moment, they have a raft of initiatives that they are moving forward with:

- The “Winter White” campaign
- Spring 09 promotions
- Accessible Adventure
- The Inverness – Dusseldorf air route
- Visitor Information Provision
- Tourism Group Development – assisting joint working
- Events
- Quality Initiatives (like our own brand)
- Refurbishment of Visitor facilities

It was clearly stated by Colin that HC have a long-term commitment to this most important industry, and are keen to work with local groups and businesses to achieve real long-term benefits for the region.

To summarise:

2009 / 10 are going to be important years: The Year of Homecoming – although seemingly raising only a barely tangible ripple of interest up this way so far – will bring in a significant amount of visitors to the area – we should be ready for this, and we should also perhaps be far more aware than we are about the various funding streams and programs available to promote events and festivals. HC are keen to support these, and the industry generally recognises the importance of these events in increasing visitor spend. Do you?

Addresses / websites / other info:

Events Scotland:

www.eventscotland.org

Long term Strategy for Event Tourism: (This is a general ES download page, and also gives details about Grant programmes etc)

www.eventscotland.org/index/downloads.htm

Highland Legacy Funding Programme:

www.highland2007.com

Fiona Hampton's email, for further info or if you want to discuss a proposal first of all:

fiona.hampton@highland.gov.uk OR 01463 702007

The new Highland Culture website: **NOTE: Still to go "live" at time of writing**

www.highland-culture.com

Ullapool Book Festival:

www.ullapoolbookfestival.co.uk

Sea Cromarty Sparkle:

www.seacromartysparkle.co.uk

Inverness Winter Festival:

www.invernessfestivals.com/winter08/index.php

Icelandic Fish Soup Festival:

www.icelandtouristboard.com/page.php?13

Well I can't find a specific website for a soup festival, but this site has a positive explosion of other Icelandic festivals with a bizarre selection of subjects:

Thorlaksmezza, New years Eve, Thorrablót, "Buns day" (sounds better as "Bolladagur"), the ominous sounding "Bursting Day", Beer Day, Flight of the Puffling, Gay Pride, Food and Fun, Big Fish Day....it goes on and on!

Tourism Innovation Group:
www.tourisminnovation.com

And last but certainly not least:

Highland Council Tourism Development Dept:
www.highland.gov.uk/leisureandtourism/tourismdevelopment/?wbc_purpose=Basic_Elections

(Includes contact details)



Celtic Fringe Tourism Association



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Joined the Wester Ross brand yet? Why not? Full details can be obtained by clicking on the logo at the Celtic Fringe Home page:

www.celticfringe.org.uk

Douglas Gibson, Celtic Fringe Tourism Association, Dec. 2008