

Celtic Fringe – 12 month Report by Project / Subject

General Situation / Background:

Celtic Fringe have a project co-ordinator in place at an average rate of 8 hours per week. The remit of this post is to provide services towards the general running of the organisation, maintain the email based listserver, and to progress any proposals that come from the committee and membership. During the past year, we have successfully completed two major projects, commenced two new ones, and maintained a healthy membership despite some difficulties along the way.

It should be pointed out that activities have been continuing at a lower pace than usual during the last few months due to other work commitments on the co-ordinators time. These were outwith tourism, and finished towards the end of February, hopefully leaving us with a productive 2005 year ahead of us.

General Membership services / development:

Membership numbers are showing a continuing ascent, with numbers at 91 now, with over 80 of those attached to our list server (discussions@celticfringe.org.uk). And for those who are sitting there wondering what on earth a “listserver” is - it’s a method by which members can all be kept in touch at the press of a button (or sending of an email!).

Note: If you USE email, but know nothing about the list, then this is because we are not aware that you have an e-mail facility – please let our co-ordinator know about this by forwarding a note to douglasg@ecosse.net

Of these members, well over half are now on a standing order arrangement for fees related to the website etc – this is a much more efficient method of payment, saving time and trouble for all concerned, and has streamlined the administration by quite a large extent.

There were several problems in the running of the list server this year, due to the appearance of messages on several occasions containing comments or language that some found offensive. It is one of the difficulties that everybody who uses e-mail must inevitably confront, and all we can really say on the issue is that this facility must remain relatively free of restraints if possible, so as to encourage free speech or opinion. However, the committee are looking at the practicality of monitoring messages prior to putting them into the public eye, and will reach a decision on this very soon. We also considered offering a training course on email usage to members, however interest in this was really too low to pursue.

Nevertheless, please let me know on douglasg@ecosse.net if you would be interested in this, and we’ll get back to you.

Despite this, the committee and the vast majority of the members still regard email as the most effective way of communication, however, so we shall continue to use this as before.

And so, on to the projects themselves. *What’s been happening?*

(Pauses. Sharp intake of breath.....a muted roll of drums can be heard in the background. In the distance, an elephant is heard trumpeting.....(Surely not? In Gairloch?????). Must be a misprint.

Completed!

Footpath Research Activities

With funding assistance from CED / RACE / Highland council, Celtic Fringe carried out a major piece of research into the bewildering array of paths and trails covering the region. Local man Ian Leslie carried this out the majority of this work, and was so comprehensively whacked at the end of this, he took a years holiday!!!! (Currently in Australia or similar, and via Europe and Africa). The result of this project means that we now have access to a wealth of data relating to both existing and potential footpaths in the area, their condition, and how they interconnect with each other. This information can now be used in future to develop trails, information for visitors, and any access related projects by Celtic Fringe or others. **(Full report available on request)**

Activities Guide

This project was undertaken in conjunction with the UTBA (Ullapool Tourism / Business Assoc.), whose help and assistance throughout has been greatly appreciated. By our normal standards, this was quite a large-scale proposal, with an overall budget of some £16,000, and once again funding came from RACE / CED / Highland Council. The finished product features a full colour quality booklet of over 40 pages packed with information on activities in Wester Ross – who provides them, contact details, maps, useful telephone numbers, photographs etc. The booklet and an accompanying pocket handout (listing and describing over 20 activities in the area) are packed in a plastic wallet, with the entire pack retailing at £4.50. These are now on sale, and will feature strongly throughout the next two seasons.

NOTE: The pocket handout is FREE to any of you that carry out publicity drives, or if you simply want to display this as a piece of visitor information to take away. Full-scale booklets are available at the wholesale price of £3.00 (Retail £4.50)

The project has a three - four year lifespan, by which point income from sales of the booklet should have reached a point where a reprint is achievable without the need for further funding – unless there is a major departure from the existing format or information.

(Full information on either the proposal or its development history available on request)

Conference at Cromarty, end of March 2004

Towards the end of December 2003, we approached Highland Council with a proposal to hold a series of meetings that would involve all parts of Wester Ross. The purpose of this was to try and identify common issues that affected the area as a whole, and see if they could be tackled through joint working between Tourism related organisations from across the area. Coincidentally, it turned out that HC were thinking exactly the same thoughts!!!!

The end result was a two day conference / seminar in Cromarty, attended by nearly 30 people representing community groupings, tourism operators, and Highland Council / RACE etc. The location was chosen to give a sense of neutrality, and also to allow us a chance to have a look at how others tackled tourism. (The Black Isle has experience of several tourism initiatives, and Cromarty itself has a great deal to offer the tourist).

Despite everybody present there coming from Wester Ross, this was the first time that many had been given the opportunity to meet up and talk about the “Wester Ross” situation, and it was a highly productive couple of days.

Hopefully, there will be long term repercussions from this, and we are at the start of a period where the region can work together more effectively than before.

A direct result of Cromarty has been one of the current projects, called “Tourism@”, of which details are given below.

Ongoing!

Tourism @

Tourism @ has sprung directly from Cromarty. One of the early decisions from there was to look at forming a relatively loose organisation to represent Wester Ross as a whole in matters of tourism. There were several meetings then held between a number of those who were at Cromarty, with the result that Tourism@ now has a core team comprising a representative of the UTBA, Celtic Fringe, LADBA, and GALE – basically, all the major organisations in the area with a focal interest in tourism. An early decision was taken NOT to be a membership organisation, but simply to represent Wester Ross in tourism matters, and to advance work and / or projects that promote the region at home and abroad. Celtic Fringe have not pursued an interest in being the lead organisation, but regard Tourism@ as an equal and joint exercise. Tourism@ is gradually moving forwards, although the main project has somewhat taken over for just now, as it has to be engineered to a very tight timescale.

NEST

This is the first significant achievement of Tourism@, and is a project which has obtained assistance through Highland Council and the Northern Periphery Fund. To cut a long process short, we have obtained funding to research into developing 6 projects over a three year period. Each proposal should have demonstrable benefits for the area as a whole, and be compatible in its aims with similar projects across our partner countries in the NEST – Finland, Iceland, Sweden, and Norway. The funding per project approximates to £3000 , and is NOT for running the actual project, but to research and develop ideas that can then be successfully turned into action with the benefit of this research. The first ideas are on the table, and include addressing the decline of river and loch fishing, improving transport, developing a marketing strategy for Wester Ross, and arranging discover – your – own - neighbourhood visits between different communities. How often has a visitor asked you what there is to see at the opposite end of WRoss, and you can’t actually answer? Finally, a series of seminars / training events (some of them multi national, with visits from the partner countries) will take place throughout the three year period, leading to exchanges of ideas and practical experiences between all parties.

The first of these seminars is taking place at the end of April, hence the schedule mentioned previously. During this period, a number of visitors from the partner countries will be visiting Wester Ross to see how we handle many tourism related issues here. Full details will be announced shortly.

Brand Essence Wheel

With input from HOST, this is an ongoing exercise to develop an identifiable logo and statement which can be used by all groups and tourism operators in the area. The BEW has been used for many years by multi national organisations to promote their brand in the world market, and HOST are assisting us to put this to use here. Several meetings have taken place so far (in conjunction with other areas of Wester Ross), and the process should result in an image that can then be used to market this area effectively by everybody active in tourism within the area.

(For a complete illustration of the wheel for Wester Ross, and how the idea works, just ask!)

Work Proposed:

- The Cottage Industries of Wester Ross

Without doubt, many visitors to the area are unaware that there is such a wealth of arts & craft production that goes on here. There are many people living here that generate income from a wide variety of industry covering everything from smoked fish, painting, stained glass, ornaments, & clothing. Where are they all? I don't know myself - and I doubt very much that *you* know the location of everybody in Wester Ross either! The proposal is to produce a definitive guide along the same lines as the "Activity Guide", mentioned earlier.

(This was also in the last 12 month report – however, the Activities guide came first, and took a bit longer to develop than expected!!!!) The proposal has now reached the point where we are applying for funding at the moment. Actual time until the finished article is here should be considerably shorter than the Activity Guide, since we now have the benefit of that experience behind us.

- Redevelopment of the Website

Our current site has been with us now for a number of years, and while it has performed beyond initial expectations, we are at the stage where we are considering an overhaul. The proposal is not necessarily for the main accommodation content to alter significantly, as it presents clear information that a non-English speaker can follow without difficulty. However, there are several options available to extend the site into specific areas such as walking, photography, niche sports and attractions etc, and we will be looking at these as the months progress.

- NEST & Tourism@

Clearly, these have the potential to provide a valuable range of projects that can benefit the entire area during the next few years. Most of the work here will be in conjunction with other organisations, but Celtic Fringe will ensure that its members have as much input as possible to the proposals as possible. Your ideas will be not only appreciated, but will be paid attention to!!!

So let's have them.....

