

## Celtic Fringe – 12 month Report by Project / Subject, 2005 -6

### 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.

Additional to the above, the last year has been notable for the appearance of a Wester Ross marketing group called “Tourism@ Wester Ross”, comprising the four main tourism focused organisations in the region. This initiative stemmed from discussions between Celtic Fringe and Highland Council, and we feel that there are many benefits to the area by developing the joint marketing and promotional opportunities that T@ can bring to this area. “(see separate project description on Page 3 )

### General Membership services / development:

Membership numbers are showing a steady picture with numbers at 89. Over 80 of those are attached to our list server ([discussions@celticfringe.org.uk](mailto: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](mailto:douglasg@ecosse.net)**

And remember, it’s up to yourself as the email recipient to let us know if this has changed over the last year – a huge amount of people gaily change their addresses and website on a regular basis without ever realising that organisations they belong to aren’t aware of these changes!

Of these members, 78% are now on a standing order arrangement for fees related to the website and CF in general – 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.

Finally, we have had a marked increase in the Lochcarron-based membership, with six new members joining over the last few months. We’d like to welcome all of them on board, and trust they find this report of interest.

**And absolutely finally** – As the project co-ordinator, I am always available to contact for any feedback, comments or suggestions. Contact details are as follows:

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

# Completed!

## Activities Guide (Update)

This project was undertaken in conjunction with the UTBA (Ullapool Tourism / Business Assoc.), whose help and assistance throughout was greatly appreciated. The finished product featured 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.

**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)**

During 2005, the guide was made available through our website, and has resulted in a steady flow of requests to supply this, albeit generally at one copy per enquiry.

*“I have found the guide book to be very useful. As a result, I have added a couple of days in and around Applecross. It looks like a must do. Between your guide book and the web, I wish I was already there”.*

**Mike Dorsett, Alabama.**

*(One adverse comment was received on content, concerning the references to Gruinard Island. The committee discussed this at length, but decided to leave the content as is for this edition. References to Gruinard – and the infamous experiments carried out there – are part of local folklore, and a source of great interest for many visitors. Additionally, there are many similar references existing in books and the Internet. However, the actual wording will be re-examined for future editions).*

## Long term Marketing Strategy Development

With welcome funding from RACE, and assistance from the other tourism groups in the area, there is now a long term marketing strategy in place for Wester Ross as a whole. This has never been achieved before, with the result that each individual area within Wester Ross has tended to pursue its own targets for marketing and promotion. The work was carried out by Perth - based “Tourism & Leisure Solutions”, a family concern with a wide range of similar work throughout the Highlands and Scotland as a whole. The final result was a comprehensive proposal (nearly 100 pages!), but with a summary available as a considerably smaller document. The proposal basically contains what should be a guide to promoting and marketing Wester Ross for the next five years, along with costings, a number of sub-projects to be prioritised and actioned, and an in depth look at the past, present, and potential future of the area.

This should now be our regional “blueprint” to follow for the foreseeable future.

*Celtic Fringe had a specific function within the Strategy Development, with preparing the marketing brief, forwarding this to a list of consultants, selecting the consultant, then supporting them throughout the six month period of work.*

## Ongoing!

### Tourism @

Tourism@ was formed to potentially take forward joint projects which affect the whole of Wester Ross. It 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. The group is supported by regular meetings between the four groups, with regular attendance from SNH, Highland Council, Visit Scotland, and support from others such as NTS and RACE. The private sector has been present at several meetings as well, and Rua Reidh Lighthouse, The Celidih Place, and Loch Torridon Hotel have provided much valued input to the group. T@ has managed to source funds from the European NEST project which each of the groups can tap into to progress projects which fit NEST criteria. (see next item). A “portal” website carrying links to all the individual members is in production just now and will be launched shortly.

At present, individual projects comprise training initiatives, an examination of the prospects for developing a “brand” for the area, and various information and literature options. These last mentioned will be aimed at increasing awareness not only for the visitor, but also for those active within tourism here. All too often, we don’t really know much outwith our own village or community!

*Tourism@ was initiated through discussions between Celtic Fringe and Highland Council*

### NEST

This stands for Northern Environment for Sustainable Tourism. Wester Ross is part of a collective of Sweden, Iceland, and Finland all of whom are looking at ways of developing their National Park areas (although we do not have a national park as such here, we have a National Scenic Area – hence our involvement.)

The NEST partners came over to Wester Ross for a visit last May to see what was happening here. Unfortunately, we consequently dumped several metric tons of rain on each and every one of them during the trip, so we can only trust that they were sufficiently impressed with what they saw that this didn’t matter too much for them! Finland were the next hosts, with a visit to Koli National Park in October (full report available if required), and Sweden will follow later this year with a look at the Hoga Kusten (High Coast).

At the time of writing, a website is due to open which carries all details of the partners and their projects at [www.nppnest.org](http://www.nppnest.org). If you look at this within the near future, please bear in mind that although the site is in English as a parent language, the content is actually formed from four different languages, so some of the grammar and spelling etc may not be quite what you expect!

*Celtic Fringe is providing the website liaison between the four countries involved.*

### Bedroom Folders

Several years ago, we produced what has variously been referred to as a “Bedroom folder” or “Accommodation Pack”. 1000 of these were produced, and contained information on a range of attractions and activities that could be undertaken while staying in the area. Many of these are still in regular use even now, and have proven a durable and popular product.

However, it was felt that the time had come to replace these. The end result of this will be a completely redesigned folder covering the whole of Wester Ross, and carrying a much wider range of information than the original, including several individual booklets. As well as

activities, attractions, there will be info on walks – flora and fauna – history and culture – maps, phone numbers, and websites – and much more besides.  
Launch date for these will depend on a variety of influences including funding, therefore although this *should* be April 2006, we will review this on an ongoing basis.

### **Accommodation Survey**

Along with the above project, we are currently surveying the amount of accommodation available in Wester Ross, where this is located, and what percentage can be found in Hotels, B&B or Guest houses. Why?

Because nobody actually knows this! Although each group (UTBA / LADBA etc) knows how many members it has, and who those members are, there are little or no statistics available for the area as a whole. Relating this to items such as the bedroom folders, this makes it very difficult to work out how many are required and how these can best be distributed throughout the area. *This leads on to the next project, which is:*

### **Creation of an effective method of information dispersement in remote areas**

Previous attempts to effectively distribute and sell leaflets and guides within such a remote area have always fallen victim to the nature and geography of Wester Ross. Such distribution is invariably uneven, lacks impact, and requires a great deal of input over the lifespan of the item in terms of time and effort. This has a significant effect on information availability to the tourist, and leads to a situation where there is a great deal of information available, yet comparatively little is known about what resources there are. In tandem with this, there are repeated problems with storage of such items, and of how best to track where all the leaflets etc actually go. We aim to try and solve this issue partly through using the information gathered above, and seeing how this can be applied to the problem. It is hoped that a proactive network of information sites can be built up across the area, which would hold an up to date list of all available literature covering Wester Ross, and to then be able to access this according to local demand.

## **Proposed!**

### **Slow Down Mk 2**

The original “Slow Down in North West Scotland” booklet has now run its course, however a number of visitor centres and retail outlets have called for this to be relaunched.

Provisionally, therefore, and with the spirit of joint working with other groups in Wester Ross we will be looking at a new booklet which will expand slightly to take into account the whole area. The original format, level of information provided, and general “feel” of the booklet was thought to be exactly what visitors to the area were looking for, and we will therefore be looking at something quite close to the original.

Timescale here is not likely to be until later on this year, however, after the work above has been completed. Should we proceed, then the new booklet will be ready for 2007.

*All booklets etc will follow guidelines to be agreed with the other members of T@, so that we can gradually build a common identity for literature, rather than a profusion of contrasting colours and styles*

## Other Info and Activities

### Website:

It was decided earlier on this year to stay with the current format and style: Although quite simple, it is aimed at providing clear information to potential visitors, many of whom might not use English as their first language. The site always comes up within the first set of results visible, and as such, meets the requirements of such a site.

The way websites operate is not always clear to everybody, and we would like to emphasise to all that an enquiry might not always arrive on your doorstep directly from Celtic Fringe. It can equally stem from the multitude of links that are carried nowadays by almost every website. Therefore, your booking can come from an initial visit to a UK wide site based in London, then through to Highland Council, to VisitScotland, to Celtic Fringe. Or, it might go from VisitScotland to a site that looks at Scottish geology, then through a myriad of other sites including Celtic Fringe, and eventually to your B&B or Guest House. Visitors are not always clear about the differences between the official tourist organisations and the community tourist groups or individuals that operate here - so, our priority is to make the site visible to search engines and to make sure it appears on the list of results that greet the web traveller. Which it does!

**And if you are a member - check your advert / entry for accuracy and up to date info. If there is something that needs altered, contact me on [douglasg@ecosse.net](mailto:douglasg@ecosse.net).**

### List server and Member Communications:

The list server has been fairly quiet of late, however there have been a number of items up regarding reports on conferences and other newsworthy items. The list server is there for everybody to use to communicate news, views and opinions to everybody else - so feel free to make use of this. Just remember that as soon as your message is posted, *everybody* has the option of reading it.....so beware of the possibilities for causing offence. You can always contact me directly on [douglasg@ecosse.net](mailto:douglasg@ecosse.net) whereupon I can then forward the message if appropriate. Like the comment earlier on about having an email address BUT not telling us, if you use email but do not appear to be on this yet would like to be – ask! It's free!

*If you have e-mail, use it, use it well, and use it wisely. It's a great tool!*

### Representation of members, Celtic Fringe, and Wester Ross:

We are regularly being asked for input and feedback to a variety of programmes and events. Examples might be Highland Council's annual tourism seminar, the Tourism Innovation Group, AimHi, and VisitScotland meetings. And there are several others! If you haven't heard of them, don't worry! The point is that they all exist, they are part of the Tourism scene across Scotland, and feedback to them all helps maintain our profile here in Wester Ross.

