

Pròiseact Loch Croispol - Loch Croispol School History Project



This is a project created and run by Durness Development Group, a registered Scottish Charity. Aspects relating to archive searches, contextualising the findings within the region and exhibiting findings are being carried out in partnership with The Mackay Country Community Trust, another local charity operating in the north west mainland formerly known as The Province of Strathnaver or Dùthaich Mhic Aoidh. Over a 2 year period (2009 – 2010) a team of academics, local experts and interested volunteers are investigating the history and archaeology associated with this rather unusual Schoolhouse in the parish of Durness.

The abandoned Schoolhouse is located at the southern end of Loch Croispol not far from the modern Balnakeil Craft Village and would have originally sat within the township of Cnoc Breac. It was constructed in the early 1760s and appears to have fallen into disuse in 1861.

The study area which extends north from the Kyle of Durness to Balnakeil Bay is an area of Durness Limestone. That means it is a very fertile corner of Mackay Country so not surprisingly there are a number of ancient remains such as hut circles, a chambered cairn and old homesteads already identified.

Archaeological excavations in the Loch Borrallie area in 2004 and 2005 revealed buildings of late medieval origin. This work yielded evidence of the sites being reused from the Norse period through into the 1600s. Pottery shards, a spindle whorl and pieces of worked red deer antler reveal early industry, Norse links and later trading links.

The current work focuses on a later period from the mid 18th into the late 19th centuries and will reveal evidence of what are often called 'pre-clearance' settlement and landuse patterns – patterns from before the creation of the crofting system and associated settlement patterns with which we are so familiar today. The current townships were laid out in the course of the early 19th century and are organised in a very different way socially and spatially from the previous tenure system.

At the heart of all of this is the Durness Parish Schoolhouse itself. It is believed that a very early school was funded and run by The Scottish Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SSPCK) around 1708. This school does not appear on the list of SSPCK schools from 1748 however. By the 1760s the Parish School which is the focus of this study was in operation. By 1845 the parish had 3 other schools in addition to the original Parish School on the shores of Loch Croispol.

For more information, to attend events or to get involved:

www.durness.org/Loch_Croispol/

www.northsutherlandarchaeology.org.uk

e-mail: mackaycountry@arcinfo.co.uk Facebook Group: Loch Croispol School History Project

Facebook Page: Mackay Country - Dùthaich Mhic Aoidh

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