



The Northern Times

Pròiseact Loch Chroispol - Loch Croispol School History Project

PRESS RELEASE



Artist Impression of Schoolhouse around mid-1800's.

Over a 2 year period a community based project has engaged a team of academics, local experts and interested volunteers to investigate the history and archaeology associated with a rather unusual Schoolhouse in the parish of Durness and the environment in which the building is situated. The abandoned Schoolhouse is located at the southern end of Loch Croispol not far from the more 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, 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. The work focused on a period from the mid-18th into the late 19th centuries and has revealed evidence of what are often called 'pre-clearance' settlement and land use 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 explained in a presentation from Dr. Bangor Jones “From Clanship to Crofting” This is included in a comprehensive report with concise results on the specific features and information aimed at interest and education at several levels which has been completed by Dr Issie MacPhail with input from Graham Bruce.

The project has reached its main aims raising the awareness of the heritage value of Loch Croispol Schoolhouse and historical features in and around the locality with research into archival materials and archaeology involving experts and local volunteers. Glasgow University Archaeology research division (GUARD) carried out a programme of trial trenching and along with several interesting artefacts related to the school found, in the dig, a 4,500 year old arrow head!

Throughout the project there have been opportunities to learn about the heritage through a programme of targeted activities and events with workshops and group sessions with involvement of the children from the local schools who have visited and participated in the archaeology and exhibitions. A permanent legacy has been created of historical interpretation that will help people to learn about heritage.

From the results a local trail directed by audio, an artistic portfolio, an exhibition, a permanent record of the project on line accessible worldwide, Training in several historical recording techniques and production of informative interpretive leaflets to complement the interpretive panel at the school house

This project was supported through funding from Historic Scotland, Highland Legacy Fund and Heritage Lottery 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 have been 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. The new interpretation panel will be unveiled in Durness on Sat 22nd January 11.00am at the old schoolhouse followed by a guided walk round the trail using the new leaflet and mobile phone based audio trail. Exhibition of art inspired by this work plus selected highlights from the archaeology, ecology and history discoveries. DVD describing the archaeology, history and ecology will follow 1pm till 4pm in Durness Hall



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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