

isle of eigg heritage trust



URRAS dualchais eilean eige

Cairdean Eige Newsletter

Winter 2015

NEWS NEWS NEWS

2015 has been a year for change, transition and settling into the new! Our medical service certainly ticks all those boxes! We are now partnered with the Skye practice with a doctor visiting every Tuesday and 2nd Thursday. A doctor can be spoken to by phone in office hours and cover is provided out of hours by NHS 24 or in emergency situations 999. This has seen a rise in helicopter airlifts or lifeboat call outs and has definitely taken time to feel cared for and safe until the initial problems have been ironed out with the new service over the year. One thing is clear that the first responder scheme is becoming a vital part to our emergency procedure and enough gratitude can never be given to the small number of residents that volunteer their time all year round. The Isle of Eigg Heritage board of directors has had a major shuffle seeing the younger generation getting involved. We have also had to say a fond farewell to our long standing Chairperson, John Hutchison. Community advocate is a rather understated title he gave himself has tirelessly assisted Eigg over the years and has been involved in environment and land reform movements in the highlands and Islands for over 20yrs. Amanda Bryan has been brave enough to step into John's shoes as our Trust Chairperson, a hard act to follow but we have every confidence that Amanda will do us proud! This year has also seen the retirement of John Chester as the Scottish Wildlife Trust wildlife warden. John Chester has been one of SWT's longest employees and arriving on Eigg in April 1986. John is planning on staying on Eigg but I imagine even more rare to spot now he doesn't have to lead the weekly wildlife walk! Although it's a comfort to know the SWT are planning on recruiting a new ranger for the summer months, but again it is mighty boots to be stepping into! We also wish Hilda Ibrahim all the best in her retirement as Headteacher and look forward to welcoming the newly appointed cluster Head for Eigg and Muck Primary School planned to move to Eigg in the New Year. The Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust is still running a popular and successful volunteer programme, more info can be seen on www.volunteeroneigg.co.uk. Plans have started to be discussed, as it will be our 20th anniversary in 2017. A real mark of achievement and reflection on how far our wee community has come in such a short length of time. At this time it is unsure how we are going to mark the occasion but we do know one thing for sure we will have a damn good ceilidh and a well deserved dram or two! In amongst all the rest of the projects and progress there have been sad farewells to residents moving on, welcome to new residents arriving, new house builds, weddings and 2 babies born. Another busy year!

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their support throughout 2015 and wish you all a very Merry Christmas and even happier 2016!



Congratulations to Ewen and Jacqueline Kirk, married in May 2015

Earth Connection Centre

As another year comes to a close it is always useful to review your work's successes and failures. We ran 4 very successful courses this year - yoga, wildlife discovery, beekeeping and a working holiday. Participants really enjoyed staying at the Centre, eating home grown, vegetarian food, and the mixture of practical and theoretical learning we offer. Having time out to explore the island was very important to people and learning more about the Eigg community. The downside to our courses, was not enough people. We need to improve our publicity - this is a work in progress! You can help, by telling your friends and family about us, and our website: www.earthconnections.co.uk We also made new links with University of Strathclyde this year with a visit from the sociology department, who were studying the relationships between food production, job security and renewable energy. They have a partnership with a university in Brazil, so there was a very dynamic mix of people from Brazil and Glasgow discussing a wide range of environmental issues. One student has written her dissertation on Food Production on Eigg, and they are hoping to visit again next year and give more input into a food policy for the island. A big improvement for us this year, was the purchase of 2 electric buggies. No more pushing heavy wheelbarrows up the hill! They are brilliant for carrying all our heavy loads of seaweed, wood, shopping etc. We also purchased more solar water heaters from the island's Big Green Challenge Fund, to add to our existing home made ones. Bob has been away quite a lot this summer helping a Medicin san Frontiers ship, which has been rescuing refugees in the Mediterranean. Whenever I get frustrated with the daily ups and downs here, I just have to remember what these people are having to endure. The links between war, poverty and environmental destruction are all very clear to see. Setting up this Centre is our own small way to help raise awareness about global problems - and hopefully find some solutions. Lets hope for a more peaceful and positive 2016.

Norah Barnes

History Society

Eigg held a seminar on the 19th and 20th of April 2015 re-evaluating St Donnan's importance in early Scottish history. The St Donnan Seminar brought together academics from Glasgow, Stirling and Aberdeen university marking the end of the Kildonnan Archeology project funded by the Heritage Lottery fund which succeeded in identifying the location of St Donnan's early monastery by Prof John Hunter and his team (see www.spanglefish.com/eigghistorysociety/kildonnanproject) The seminar started on Sunday 19th with a guided walk to the Holy wells of Eigg and concluded with talks by the Aberdeen Funeralscape team, Professor Thomas Clancy and Dr Sally Foster, who stressed the importance of the site. A mass in honour of St Donnan was then said on Monday 20th, at one time the day when Donnan's death was commemorated throughout the Gaelic speaking world, followed by a guided visit of the Kildonnan site with members of the Eigg History Society. Prof Clancy reminded the seminar participants that unlike other Scottish saints, little is known about Donnan, except for the manner of his death by fire along with his 52 companions. What is known however is the huge impact of their death at the time. Sources from the 7th, 8th and 9th centuries also indicate that Eigg was a prominent church community, whether it remained or was re-established after the massacre of 617, and that Iona kept a keen interest in it during these centuries. The ornate 9th century cross in Pictish style found on the site also suggests the presence of a scriptorium on Eigg indicating active continuity of a Gaelic / Pictish Christian community within a Scandinavianised political world. The cult of St Donnan which is attested by many places round about Scotland, corresponds largely indeed to areas which in the 9th, 10th and 11th century fell under Scandinavian power. The converted Viking settlers may very well have adopted the cult of Donnan as an "expiation cult" for a saint who died a martyrdom much like the deaths the Vikings had inflicted on many churchmen in the first onslaught of the Viking age. One way or another, in the centuries before 1100, Donnan of Eigg had become a prominent saint within the community of saints in Scotland.

Camille Dressler

Eigg Primary School

My final year at Headteacher at Eigg Primary School has certainly been full. As part of our latest work towards our 4th Eco-School Green Flag, we have been busy planning to upgrade the playground, thanks to Awards for All for funding us. We have a new climbing frame and basket swing due any day now; when all is finished we will also have a giant sand pit, paved area for ball skills and water near the school garden. We are already enjoying our renewed raised beds and mud kitchen.

Last March saw both Eigg and Muck schools having a great week in Edinburgh, thanks to funding from Access to Education. It was such good fun that we applied to repeat the trip in Glasgow next March – and received funding again. I have had a brilliant ten years as Headteacher here and will retire with lots of great memories of pupils past and present, and, especially, the superb people I have been so fortunate to have on my team.

Hilda Ibrahim



New babies.. Colm born April 2015 and Arlo born September 2015

Wildlife Watch

The summer of 2015 proved to be the wettest, coldest & most miserable for at least 30 years & this had a profound effect on the islands wildlife. With the bitter temperatures & almost incessant cold rain most flowering plants were at least three weeks late in appearing & this had an obvious knock on effect on the insects that rely on them. This weather induced dearth of insects itself had a major effect on many breeding birds & species such as Swallows, tits & warblers had their worst breeding season in many years. Late flowering apart the dreadful weather resulted in many plants appearing in much reduced numbers & even normally abundant species such as Heath Spotted & Northern Marsh Orchids were relatively very thin on the ground. Oddly though most of the orchid species found on the island did flower during the summer & a total of eleven different varieties were logged. However if it was an indifferent summer for plants it was an abysmal one for dragonflies & butterflies with several species of the former failing to appear at all. Butterfly numbers too were very low though, in direct contrast, moth recording proved very productive with no less than 16 species added to the islands list. Amongst the more notable moth records were sightings of four different species of Hawk-moth, a first Small Isles record of the rare Red Necked Footman & the phenomenal numbers of Magpie Moths occurring in July when tens of thousands were present on the moorlands. Overall it was a pretty dire breeding season for birds with a combination of the weather, the lack of insects & the continuing scarcity of Rabbits affecting species as diverse as Eiders, Buzzards & most small passerines. There were though occasional successes with Red Throated Divers raising two young, Golden Eagles fledging a lone chick & two pairs of Hen Harriers rearing five young. A pair of White Tailed Eagles too appear to have set up territory though it remains to be seen whether they will begin nesting. Overall 2015 was a reasonably good year for scarcer migrant birds with the star of the show undoubtedly being the islands first Bee Eater which appeared briefly in Cleadale on June 24th. Other notable records included the islands 3rd Little Egret (Oct 22nd), passage Pomarine & Long Tailed Skuas, a probable Yellow Legged Gull (June 2nd), a Firecrest (Nov 20th) & a Pied Flycatcher (Oct 12th) Inevitably mammal recording on a small island is pretty restricted so it was most unusual to log a new species. However this did occur in late June when work with a bat detector in Cuagach revealed the presence of a colony of 'Soprano' (55 kHz) Pipistrelle Bats. Offshore it was a fairly productive year with good numbers of Minke Whales & Common Dolphins (groups of up to 200 animals) regularly recorded. Basking Sharks proved as enigmatic as ever with a sudden surge of sightings in late July-August then an almost overnight disappearance.

John Chester