

The Royal Commission on
the Ancient and Historical
Monuments of Scotland

Scotland's Rural Past
Final Evaluation Report
Executive Summary

Scottish
Cultural
Enterprise

September 2011

1. Introduction	3
2. Baseline measures	3
3. Key objective 1: developing skills.....	3
3.1 Participant survey findings	3
3.2 Case study findings.....	3
3.3 School project findings.....	4
3.4 Conference findings	4
4. Key objective 2: increasing confidence.....	4
4.1 Participant survey findings	4
4.2 Case study findings.....	5
4.3 School project findings.....	5
4.4 Conference findings	5
5. Key objective 3: collecting information	5
5.1 Participant survey findings	5
5.2 Case study findings.....	6
5.3 School project findings.....	6
5.4 Conference findings	6
6. Key objective 4: encouraging research	6
6.1 Participant survey findings	6
6.2 Case study findings.....	6
6.3 School project findings.....	7
6.4 Conference findings	7
7. Key objective 5: fostering value	7
7.1 Participant survey findings	7
7.2 Case study findings.....	7
7.3 School project findings.....	8
7.4 Conference findings	8
8. Key objective 6: empowering people	8
8.1 Case study findings.....	8
8.2 School project findings.....	8
8.3 Conference findings	9
9. Increasing awareness and concern in relation to rural settlements.....	9
9.1 Case study findings.....	9
9.2 School project findings.....	9
9.3 Conference findings	10
10. Developing knowledge of RCAHMS and its work.....	10
10.1 Case study findings.....	10
10.2 School project findings.....	10
10.3 Conference findings	10
11. Internal impacts within RCAHMS.....	11
11.1 SRP's role and operation within RCAHMS, 2006-11	11
11.2 SRP's legacy: the future of community archaeology at RCAHMS	11
12. Conclusions and recommendations	12
12.1 Conclusions	12
12.2 Recommendations	12

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Scotland's Rural Past (SRP) was a national five-year project running from 2006-11 that was established to raise awareness of Scotland's rural heritage by encouraging and enabling local people to discover, explore, share and help protect their local rural heritage. It was set up in response to a perceived need to secure the future of medieval and later rural settlements in Scotland and to find out more about this key element of the nation's historic environment, in a way that engaged local people and volunteers.
- 1.2 This SRP project evaluation executive summary is structured according to each of the key evaluation components:
- Baseline measures
 - Effectiveness in delivering key project objectives
 - External impacts on the wider public
 - Internal impacts within RCAHMS

2. Baseline measures

- 2.1 Performance indicator target setting served a useful purpose in the early stages of SRP by focusing attention on key measures of success as the project was implemented and developed. However, the team soon found they could deliver much more in the timeframe and budget than was originally anticipated.

3. Key objective 1: developing skills

SRP aimed to deliver this objective by developing skills to sustain continuing involvement and engagement in historic rural settlements

3.1 Participant survey findings

- 3.1.1 All forms of training courses successfully developed participants' skills. For example, 90.1% of fieldwork and 83.5% of historical document research training participants rated training sessions' skills development impacts at the top of a five-point scale.
- 3.1.2 The skills gained by participants were likely to sustain continuing involvement and engagement with work of this kind. Sample feedback from 12 training courses showed 83.8% rated their level of inspiration to participate in SRP and use their newly developed skills at the top of a five-point scale.

3.2 Case study findings

- 3.2.1 Case study evaluation backs up the positive participant survey findings. In every case the programme of training delivered significant skills development impacts. For example, at Glen Muick in Aberdeenshire training activities acted as a springboard, providing the basic knowledge and understanding from which the local SRP group was able to undertake sophisticated field research. The skills were used in clear and direct ways – in the period between the training and follow-up evaluation one year later, the Glen Muick

team plane tabled three sites and carried out detailed 'rough surveys' of eight more.

3.3 School project findings

- 3.3.1 At each of the school-based project case studies, evaluation found that pupils' new and existing skills were developed through participation. For example, project activities at Dunkeld Primary School were highly cross-curricular and facilitated learning across a variety of disciplines. As well as carrying out research into all aspects of nineteenth century life in Perthshire, the participant schoolchildren developed creative skills through building shoebox dioramas, writing stories and creating artworks.

3.4 Conference findings

- 3.4.1 Presentations at the first SRP conference in 2008 were characterised by great enthusiasm mixed with high levels of dependency on the expertise of the SRP team. By contrast, at the 2011 conference the project work undertaken by presenting groups was largely carried out independently and was of a high standard, the groups demonstrated a highly uniform understanding of the key skills of recording and surveying, and all of the project representatives spoke about their plans for undertaking similar work in future.

4. Key objective 2: increasing confidence

SRP aimed to deliver this objective by involving people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities, and increasing participants' confidence in doing fieldwork and research

4.1 Participant survey findings

- 4.1.1 SRP training courses were successful in increasing participants' confidence in undertaking recording and surveying: 78.7% of fieldwork training participants rated the extent to which it increased their confidence to undertake recording and surveying at the top of a five-point scale.
- 4.1.2 Training courses achieved their objectives of preparing participants to use the techniques learned to push forward their own SRP-related work and research. For example, 74.3% of historical document research and 57.9% of fieldwork training participants rated their preparedness for undertaking their own fieldwork and research at the top of a five-point scale.
- 4.1.3 SRP appears to have reached out to relatively limited sections of society. Sample profile data (not including those from schools projects) suggested SRP participants were: mostly above 55 years of age; marginally more likely to be female than male; mostly resident in rural or village settings in the Highlands or Argyll and Bute; largely long-term resident in their local area; likely to have retired from work; and likely to have completed formal study in SRP-related subjects such as archaeology, history or architecture

4.2 Case study findings

- 4.2.1 Case study evaluation found that in every case the programme of training showed signs of improving participants' confidence. For example, at a fieldwork course at Sleat on Skye, observation revealed that participants grew in confidence and began to have greater faith in their own perspectives and abilities to interpret historical sites as the course progressed. This was very much due to the trainers' skill in putting participants at ease and encouraging them to make suggestions.

4.3 School project findings

- 4.3.1 Schools' SRP projects offered significant confidence building opportunities, and case study evaluation shows they were successful in this regard. For example, increasing confidence was one of the major successes of the Braemar Academy project. First-year pupils in the young archaeologist club introduced older members to plane tabling, which developed their confidence; the project gave several individuals a sense of empowerment and ownership; the project built on RISK (an English department project) and helped develop confidence in research and note-taking; the opportunity for pupils to make presentations at Braemar Castle and to pitch fundraising ideas to businessmen engendered confidence; and it was a good project for helping with the transition from primary to secondary schools, as pupils from feeder schools initially met up and worked together on the project whilst in Primary 7.

4.4 Conference findings

- 4.4.1 The presentations at the 2011 conference demonstrated clear improvements in the confidence of project groups. In 2008 many of the presenters apologised for their lack of expertise in surveying and recording, but the tone at the final conference was anything but apologetic – a great deal of confidence was shown in what the communities had brought to the project in terms of discovering sites, researching them and creating follow-on activities. Whilst continuing to pay tribute to the help they had received from the SRP staff, all groups showed confidence in their abilities to continue the work.

5. Key objective 3: collecting information

SRP aimed to deliver this objective by collecting and making accessible information, thereby promoting both physical and intellectual access to the rural historic environment

5.1 Participant survey findings

- 5.1.1 SRP training courses succeeded in encouraging participants to collect information and make it accessible. For example, 69.2% of heritage interpretation workshop participants rated their inspiration to plan interpretation activities for local sites at the top of a five-point scale, and 100% of those attending the site photography workshop rated their inspiration to do more at the top of a five-point scale.

5.2 Case study findings

- 5.2.1 Case study evaluation found participation had a positive influence in encouraging and enabling participants to collect information. At Ben-a-cheilt in Caithness, for example, the project leader collected a great deal of information to be used for her university dissertation and in exhibitions for Scottish Archaeology Month and Highland Archaeology Festival, where she will be leading a site visit.

5.3 School project findings

- 5.3.1 Involvement with SRP had a positive effect in enabling schools not only to collect information but to share what they have found with others. At Uyeasound Primary School in Shetland, the pupils prepared a 'Hamefarin' (Shetland homecoming celebrations held every 25 years) exhibition of their work, establishing connections with a school in Australia, and sharing experiences with visitors from the Ardnagaul SRP project in Perthshire.

5.4 Conference findings

- 5.4.1 SRP's annual conferences played a key role in encouraging promotion of both physical and intellectual access to rural historical environments. On the intellectual front, each year around 150 participants learned about the rural archaeology of medieval and later rural settlements across Scotland from other project group presentations. In addition, many groups also displayed exhibitions of their work at conferences, and the conference environment played an effective role in enabling peer-to-peer encouragement for collecting and disseminating information relating to Scotland's rural historical environment. In terms of physical access to the rural historical environment, each year the SRP team and RCAHMS staff led popular guided walks as part of the conference programme.

6. Key objective 4: encouraging research

SRP aimed to deliver this objective by adding value through encouraging self-supporting projects, including applied research into values, cultural landscapes, archaeological and historical themes and community engagement techniques

6.1 Participant survey findings

- 6.1.1 SRP participation encouraged volunteers to carry out their own research. For example, 87.6% of those attending historical document research training rated the extent to which they thought they would make future use of archive resources at the top of a five-point scale.

6.2 Case study findings

- 6.2.1 Case study evaluation found that in most cases SRP delivered on this objective. For example, the Arrochar SRP project was highly successful in stimulating further research programmes, and these programmes have been formally recognised: the project won the Robert Kiln Trust prize for best

amateur archaeology project and was highly commended at the British Archaeology Awards.

6.3 School project findings

- 6.3.1 SRP schools projects delivered significant impacts relating to this objective. At Dunkeld Primary School, for example, research skills development was broad, incorporating online, literature, pictorial and map-based investigation into a range of themes including food, housing, transport, clothing and games. This, in turn, impacted significantly upon the pupils' knowledge and understanding of life in the area over the past two hundred years.

6.4 Conference findings

- 6.4.1 Many projects at the 2011 conference detailed high-quality project work they had undertaken after receiving SRP training, and they spoke of plans for the future. There was a general sense that so much more remained to be discovered.

7. Key objective 5: fostering value

SRP aimed to deliver this objective by enhancing knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the recent past, including those qualities that are intangible

7.1 Participant survey findings

- 7.1.1 Participant survey feedback from the skills workshop about presenting material to the public suggests SRP fostered value by inspiring participants to produce publicity material. Moreover, the 2009 survey distributed to all SRP participants found SRP fostered value in a number of other ways: 89% improved their knowledge and understanding; 59% became more interested in conservation; 47% passed on what they had learned to others; 43% made new friends; 30% gained confidence; 28% pursued new heritage learning activities; 23% got more involved with their local communities; and 18% used what they had learned at work or in studies

7.2 Case study findings

- 7.2.1 SRP case studies uncovered a number of ways in which the project fostered value. At Glen Muick, for example:
- A visitor centre display was put in place about historical life in the Spittal complete with artist's impression of the township in its heyday
 - A heritage trail and leaflet enables visitors to examine and understand the local archaeology, and these have been picked up and followed by hundreds of people
 - Information gathered was being used to install an 'interpretation boulder', complete with artist's impression, to direct walkers to the trail in the visitor

centre (since only around half of visitors to the park currently enter the visitor centre)

- There was an intergenerational focus in presenting SRP-related findings – for example, an interactive talking kettle tells a historically-based story when placed on the ‘hot plate’
- There were plans to develop a schools project based on living history
- SRP findings provided an interesting and guaranteed option for estate visitors since the archaeology is there every moment of every day, unlike birds, deer and other wildlife

7.3 School project findings

- 7.3.1 The schools-based case studies also showed SRP fostered value. Through the Uyeasound Primary School project, for example, SRP fostered value by: updating existing historical records; increasing pupils’ awareness of Unst’s most famous historical figure, Captain John Gray; developing links between pupils’ family histories and the island they inhabit today; and establishing connections between the school and other schools and groups from Scotland and the wider world.

7.4 Conference findings

- 7.4.1 Evaluation undertaken at SRP conferences showed participants were keen to engage with professionals in order to foster value and enhance their knowledge and understanding of 18th and 19th Century rural history in Scotland.

8. Key objective 6: empowering people

SRP aimed to enable people to become more effective participants in decision-making affecting their local community

8.1 Case study findings

- 8.1.1 Case study evaluation revealed a number of ways in which SRP had empowered volunteers. For example, the term ‘empowerment’ summed up the meaning of the Arrochar SRP project to its leaders: by providing support, guidance and encouragement, it enabled the community to discover its history for itself and to record and communicate findings to the wider world by submitting them to the national record.

8.2 School project findings

- 8.2.1 Schools projects were also successful in empowering participants. The Braemar Academy project, for example, gave less gregarious individuals a sense of empowerment and ownership. A class teacher said that, before SRP, archaeology meant ‘Indiana Jones’ to most pupils, but that now when they think about the subject, they talk about building features such as cruck

frames and rounded corners, and what this means about the construction period and the way of life of inhabitants. They now have the ability to understand and interpret the landscape in which they live and have grown up, and that is very empowering – it helps them understand the place they live in. This project also demonstrated how SRP could draw in a range of community partners such as the mountain rescue service, local businesses and visitor attractions to give school pupils a cross curricular project of value to the whole community.

8.3 Conference findings

- 8.3.1 The 2011 conference presentations gave a number of good examples of strong community ownership of SRP projects. For example, the High Morlaggan project was one where two volunteers became interested in community archaeology through SRP and went on to involve their local school – broadening the scope of the project to embrace arts and other elements – culminating in the excavation of their site to recover artefacts. In their speech they strongly advocated community archaeology is strengthened at the grassroots through partnership working with academics and public bodies.

9. Increasing awareness and concern in relation to rural settlements

Evaluating SRP's effectiveness in increasing awareness and concern in relation to rural settlements was established as a priority in the evaluation planning process.

9.1 Case study findings

- 9.1.1 Case study evaluation shows participation in the project had direct impacts in increasing awareness and concern in relation to rural settlements on volunteers, and that in those cases where projects were developed these impacts often extended into local communities and beyond. At Glen Muick, for example, the project significantly raised awareness of the Spittal Township. Previously, only a handful of visitors had any knowledge of the township's existence out of more than 120,000 walking past each year. Now, all that enter the visitor centre are exposed to information about this settlement, and an interpretation boulder provides information for all who walk by.

9.2 School project findings

- 9.2.1 School-based case study evaluation also found the projects increased awareness and concern among pupils and the wider communities since project information was shared via exhibitions and other channels. At Uyeasound Primary School, SRP has played an important role in helping children to understand that the 'ordinary' can nevertheless be significant and important. By linking in to other aspects of Unst's history, such as the modest abandoned home of Captain John Gray of the SS Great Britain, the school has been able to add weight to this message.

9.3 Conference findings

- 9.3.1 The community presentations at the 2011 SRP conference all demonstrated high levels of awareness and concern in relation to rural settlements. There was also a great deal of interest in the conference presentation by Colin McLean of the Heritage Lottery Fund, suggesting SRP project participants are keen to carry on project work with future heritage benefits.

10. Developing knowledge of RCAHMS and its work

Evaluating SRP's effectiveness in developing knowledge of RCAHMS and its work was established as a priority in the evaluation planning process.

10.1 Case study findings

- 10.1.1 SRP brought groups and individuals into direct contact with RCAHMS and its resources in ways they had not been previously. In some cases, participants were already aware of the Commission without ever engaging with it, and in others involvement in the project made people aware of RCAHMS for the first time. SRP gave a human face to the Commission, although in most cases participants were aware of a clear distinction between SRP and RCAHMS. For example, at Strachur, evaluation at the initial training session found there was very little awareness of RCAHMS and the work it does. Follow-up evaluation a year later found awareness had been increased through training sessions, attendance at one of the conferences and by sharing information with the Bute partnership project. However, participant engagement with RCAHMS remained largely indirect, coming almost entirely via direct engagement with SRP.

10.2 School project findings

- 10.2.1 SRP brought several schools into contact with RCAHMS for the first time, and the team's work in sustaining contact and offering support to schools' project work increased awareness of the Commission in school education circles.

10.3 Conference findings

- 10.3.1 In 2008 some community groups making presentations were pleased with the help they had received from SRP staff but rather uncertain how this related to the wider work of RCAHMS. At the 2011 conference, representatives of RCAHMS made clear statements about the strength and nature of this relationship, and the concluding remarks by RCAHMS chief executive Diana Murray were particularly well received. Many participants are likely to remain engaged with the Commission and to utilise its resources so long as it continues to promote community archaeology through SRP-related resources, channels and activities.

11. Internal impacts within RCAHMS

Evaluating SRP's internal impacts within RCAHMS was established as a priority in the evaluation planning process.

11.1 SRP's role and operation within RCAHMS, 2006-11

- 11.1.1 Recent years have seen a new and increasing focus on community archaeology. SRP offered RCAHMS an excellent opportunity to develop its work in this area, and to showcase its potential for delivering priority outcomes.
- 11.1.2 As a standalone, funded, time-limited project, SRP necessarily always had its own separate identity within RCAHMS, but it became as much a 'significant part' of the organisation as any project conceivably could. As an organisation, RCAHMS responded well to SRP on the whole. The project was widely embraced by RCAHMS' Surveying & Recording section in particular, and other sections within the organisation also grew to understand and support SRP's role over time.
- 11.1.3 RCAHMS has traditionally been viewed as highly professional and largely inaccessible to the general population, but SRP opened it up to wider public engagement whilst maintaining the Commission's high professional standards

11.2 SRP's legacy: the future of community archaeology at RCAHMS

- 11.2.1 Internal and external perceptions of RCAHMS' role have changed markedly over recent years, and this is largely attributable to SRP's impacts as a project combined with a wider shift towards community engagement priorities at governmental funding levels.
- 11.2.2 At the 2011 SRP conference, the RCAHMS chief executive made a number of key pledges which hinted at profound SRP impacts in changing the ongoing role of the Commission. These pledges included establishment of a permanent community liaison post within the Commission, continued encouragement of community recording and surveying, similar smaller community projects in future, ongoing equipment loans to local groups, new applications for resources, future skills workshops, a fully maintained and developed SRP-style website, and another community archaeology conference in 2012.
- 11.2.3 In terms of RCAHMS' organisational structure, the establishment of a permanent community liaison post hints at maintaining continuity in the move from the SRP to the post-SRP era, but concerns remain that one non-dedicated community liaison post is insufficient to satisfy the demands that five years of SRP has established amongst volunteer groups.
- 11.2.4 SRP has changed RCAHMS' organisational culture, and the priorities and actions of the Commission over the next few years have a fundamental part to play in dictating the extent to which SRP's legacy within the organisation will continue to shine or to fade away.
- 11.2.5 An important new project for RCAHMS should, in many ways, take over where SRP left off: the partnership project between the Commission and the

Cairngorms National Park is expected to have community engagement at its heart, and will seek to examine the urban landscape of Aviemore as well as the surrounding rural environment, making it inclusive in terms of the demographics of potential participants.

- 11.2.6 One potential consequence of SRP's success in engaging members of the public with the project and RCAHMS – and which RCAHMS should strive to negate – relates to great expectations built up through five years of intensive community engagement, which could lead to disillusionment in future if the Commission fails to meet these.
- 11.2.7 Community archaeology can enhance but not replace the work of professionals, and RCAHMS needs to ensure the correct balance is achieved in future

12. Conclusions and recommendations

12.1 Conclusions

- 12.1.1 Scotland's Rural Past was a beacon community archaeology project, meticulously planned, expertly delivered, and providing tangible and valuable outcomes
- 12.1.2 A great deal of SRP's success was directly attributable to the highly skilled individuals who combined to form the project team.
- 12.1.3 Performance indicator target setting served a useful purpose in the early stages of SRP, but the team soon found they could deliver much more in the timeframe and budget than was originally anticipated.
- 12.1.4 SRP surpassed even the most optimistic expectations in delivering its key objectives. Moreover, it made a strong and positive contribution in increasing awareness and concern in relation to rural settlements, and opened RCAHMS up to public engagement.
- 12.1.5 SRP impacted on RCAHMS' future strategic focus as well as its organisational culture. If properly resourced, funded and prioritised, RCAHMS has the opportunity to embrace community archaeology and lead the way in facilitating professional-amateur partnerships.

12.2 Recommendations

- 12.2.1 With its success, SRP has set the bar high: it should be used as a benchmark against which future community engagement project targets are measured and exceeded. Improvements can still be made in certain areas: for example, SRP aimed to 'involve people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities', but participants were disproportionately of retirement age living in rural environments with prior historical and archaeological education or interests.

Recommendation 1:

RCAHMS should use the performance data gathered throughout SRP to set more demanding and more specific targets in future. It is particularly important that where broad inclusivity is specified as an objective, accompanying project planning mechanisms and measures of success are established to deliver and monitor this.

- 12.2.2 It is important that SRP's successes are effectively translated into and sustained in the Commission's future work programmes. The measures announced to date are welcome but should not be viewed as the totality of SRP's legacy. Opportunities still exist to secure funding from streams such as HLF to deliver outcomes that are closely aligned with RCAHMS' remit and priorities.

Recommendation 2:

RCAHMS should, in partnership with others, seek to establish an ambitious follow-up project or series of inter-linked projects as a successor to SRP. This successor should be of national significance and have community engagement at its heart. It should build on SRP's successes, but also broaden it out to embrace new periods or environments for historical and archaeological exploration, and to increase its potential to engage participants from under-represented socio-economic groups.

- 12.2.3 SRP has built up a significant online infrastructural legacy, and RCAHMS' intention to maintain and develop the website is welcome and important. Reliance on and engagement with new technologies is likely to continue to grow, and this will have a role to play in ensuring volunteers and amateurs from across Scotland and beyond connect with and maintain contact with RCAHMS.

Recommendation 3

RCAHMS should think innovatively in developing plans for future project work and for increasing community engagement. SRP drew on field technologies such as GPS in its field training programme and developed technologically-driven activities such as geo-caching. RCAHMS should similarly consider ways it can genuinely and meaningfully use digital technologies to further its own objectives and draw users towards using its resources, for example by exploiting growth in the use of smart phone technologies.

- 12.2.4 Any future community engagement programmes should not lead to abandonment of existing relationships built up with community groups and individuals over the past five years. Networking and collaboration channels need to be maintained in order to maximise the project's legacy potential.

Recommendation 4

RCAHMS' community liaison manager should be provided with adequate resources and support from within the Commission to ensure relationships with SRP groups and representatives are maintained and strengthened, particularly in ensuring that when they submit findings, good-quality validated records continue to enter the national record.

12.2.5 SRP's school project work matched the success of the wider project and had a near-perfect fit with the Curriculum for Excellence, offering valuable learning opportunities that differed from those that could possibly be offered in a classroom environment.

Recommendation 5

Experiences, project planning materials and school project outcomes should be collated and used to guide all future RCAHMS work in promoting history and archaeology in schools. The Curriculum for Excellence provides an ideal framework for encouraging local history and archaeology projects and, through SRP, RCAHMS now has the opportunity to demonstrate its proven track record. It should be proactive in seeking to deliver archaeology and history activities in an educational context, inspiring and facilitating cross-curricular learning in schools, with wider benefits for local communities.