

# SRP Newsletter

## Spring 2007



**Welcome** to the first Scotland's Rural Past (SRP) newsletter for volunteers. We'll be bringing you all the latest news and developments from the project to keep you up-to-date with what's happening across the country. We'll produce this newsletter every six months, and if you have any news you would like to share for future issues you can email the team at [srp@rcahms.gov.uk](mailto:srp@rcahms.gov.uk).

Following the appointment of our four-strong team in October 2006, the first six months have been very busy for all of us. Over the winter, in amongst preparing the procedures for fieldwork and recording, writing guidance notes for volunteers, buying and testing equipment, and familiarising ourselves with the collections at RCAHMS and other archives, we have found time to get out into the field to see and record examples of abandoned rural settlements ourselves. Field trips to the Lammermuir Hills, Ben Lawers and the Cheviots have given us the chance to test out and fine tune the guidance notes and provided an insight into the huge variety of rural settlement remains there are. Now that Spring has arrived we are starting fieldwork in earnest and helping you to set up and get your projects underway.

### **SRP involvement so far**

Even though the SRP project is still in its early stages, we have been impressed by the level of interest it has so far managed to draw from people keen to take part. There is a spread of volunteers all across the country from the Borders to the Western Isles. We currently have 116 interested individuals and a number of local groups who have registered with the project – with four projects already underway and at least four more in the pipeline, the results are beginning to come in.

### **Group training**

So far 39 volunteers have been trained in field survey and recording techniques at SRP training courses at Newtonmore (Highland), Killin (Stirling) and Blackcastle Farm (South Lanarkshire). Many of the trainees had little or no previous experience. During the courses we have shown them how to identify and interpret abandoned rural settlements and landscapes, how to survey sites with a range of techniques including plane table, alidade and measuring tapes, how to photograph a site, how to write a site description, and how to use historic sources, aerial photographs and early maps.

Despite the rain, freezing conditions and howling gales that have attended each of the training courses so far, the feedback from trainees has been extremely positive, with everyone feeling that they have learned new skills and a new way of looking at sites.



Volunteers in Glen Dochart brave the elements.

The training has been valuable for us as well, allowing us to see how best to structure the training and what to include. This will help us plan our future training courses to make sure they give the practical help our volunteers need – if only we could plan the weather!

### Reports from the projects

One of the first groups to start working with us was the North of Scotland Archaeological Society (NOSAS). Their project is to record all the abandoned rural settlements in Strathconon, Ross and Cromarty. They have made a fantastic start, completing the first of their six areas of survey in Strathconon, and planning the second phase. Meryl Marshall, NOSAS Secretary, has summarised their work so far:

'We are making good progress on the first phase of the project which involves the lower glen, around Scatwell. It is well forested, much of it having been planted since WW2. The 1950 aerial photographs have therefore proved very useful in giving an idea of landuse before the planting. We decided to leave Glen Marksie until March when the bracken will hopefully be down - on the initial visit it was obvious that some remains were obscured by the bracken which was still pretty rampant. We spent the last field day exploring Little Scatwell itself and the adjacent mica mines. So far the going has been quite tough but the rewards worthwhile - to my mind anyway! Besides the cup marked rock, we have recorded a substantial mill lade and dam, an early hydro scheme (predating the present Luichart one of 1957), the mica mines, an extensive field system and 4 deserted settlements or farmsteads.'



NOSAS recording in Strathconon

In Lochtayside, the Killin Heritage Group are planning to record a number of sites in Glen Dochart, starting with Ardnagaul township, one of the sites used during their training course. We have made several visits to the site with them to get them started and to provide the equipment they need. In agreement with the Killin Group, individual volunteers who attended the training course are being encouraged to join them in the initial stages of their project to build on their skills and confidence in recording.

Further south, the Lanark and District Archaeological Society (LADAS) have received two field training sessions from SRP and RCAHMS staff in building recognition, survey and photography. The courses were based at Blackcastle farm in South Lanarkshire, at the south-western edge of the Pentland Hills. We have also provided a training session on historical document research, enabling them to start their project investigating farms and settlements around South Lanarkshire.



LADAS uncover the history of Blackcastle Farm

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### Projects in the pipeline

Plans are in preparation for new projects in the Angus Glens, in and around the Grampians, the Lothians, Dumfriesshire and in Assynt. Anyone who wants to find out more and join in these projects should contact Flora Davidson (Angus Glens) [flora@flodge.f9.co.uk](mailto:flora@flodge.f9.co.uk), Bill Marshall (Grampians) [bill\\_marshall@beeb.net](mailto:bill_marshall@beeb.net) and [srp@rcahms.gov.uk](mailto:srp@rcahms.gov.uk) (Lothians, Dumfriesshire and Assynt).

### New training course

In addition to our fieldwork training a number of volunteers have asked for training in historical document research, so we are designing a two-day course, which will be based in Edinburgh and run on an annual basis over the winter months. The course will introduce volunteers to the types of historical documents available in archives that can be used to research the history of rural settlements. We will base the course at RCAHMS, but shall also visit key national archives to view material unavailable on-line. The course will be piloted in July 2007 with a range of local volunteers, and will be offered this coming winter. Places on the course will be advertised nearer to the date and we aim to run one of these each winter for the duration of the SRP project.

### Events & Exhibitions

Since the beginning of March we have run several outreach sessions for interested groups around the country. In partnership with Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park we gave a talk and exhibition at Kilmarnock Millennium Hall, Gartocharn and followed this up with a walk around the National Trust for Scotland's Ardess Hidden History Trail at Loch Lomond. We were invited to promote the project at the Breadalbane Tourism Group leaflet day in Killin, and have spoken to local groups in Laggan and Kilmartin House Museum. We have taken our exhibition to each of these outreach events and we plan to send it around the country with the team when talks and training sessions are taking place. As Scotland's Rural Past progresses the exhibition will be updated with details of completed volunteer projects. If you have any suggestions about where we can show the exhibition, or if you would like us to come and talk to a local group or school about the project, please get in touch.

The SRP team will make an appearance at the Scottish Archaeology Fair in Strathpeffer Pavilion on Saturday, 5<sup>th</sup> May from 10.00–4.00. This is a hands-on day for families and young people, organised by the Council for Scottish Archaeology, and the team will invite participants to have a go surveying an abandoned farmstead just outside of town. The exhibition will be on display in the Pavilion and staff will be on hand to answer your questions and show the equipment we use. We hope to see you there!

### Website

Our temporary website is now up and running ([www.scotlandsruralpast.org.uk](http://www.scotlandsruralpast.org.uk)), where you can find and download essential guidance information about how to start a project. This is only stage one of our website, and the designers are at present working on a new improved version, which should be ready to be launched in July 2007. The website will grow along with the project, with regular updates and reports on the latest findings. We hope to build an online SRP community with the website as a hub for all our projects throughout Scotland. Volunteers will be able to contribute their own material and share their findings and practical suggestions with other groups.

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### Leaflets

The leaflets promoting the project have just been printed. If you would like some to distribute please get in touch and let us know the quantity you need and a delivery address.

### Looking forward

Over the next few months we are going to be busy visiting groups and spreading the word around the Inner Hebrides. From 12<sup>th</sup>–25<sup>th</sup> May the SRP team will be in Bute, Islay and Mull, giving talks, displaying the exhibition, visiting sites with local people and training local groups.

### Dates for your diary for SRP exhibition, talks, and discussion:

16<sup>th</sup> May 7.00pm–9.00 pm - Ionad Chalum Chille Ìle/ The Columba Centre Islay. We are delighted that Bowmore Islay Single Malt will be supporting this talk, and providing the refreshments for the evening.

18<sup>th</sup> May 6.00pm-9.00 pm – Creich Hall, Fionnphort Mull

21<sup>st</sup> May 6.00pm-9.00 pm – An Tobar, Tobermory, Mull

22<sup>nd</sup> May 6.00pm-9.00 pm – Craignure Hall, Craignure, Mull

22<sup>nd</sup> June 7.30pm–9.00 pm – Isle of Lismore Community Hall, Lismore

In addition there will be visits to local schools to tell island students about the project and the work that SRP will be doing. Arrangements have been made to visit Islay High School, Port Ellen Primary, Keils Primary, Ulva Ferry Primary and Dervaig Primary. The SRP team will talk about the project and demonstrate the techniques being used to record buildings. Some of the schools will also visit local sites to see the methods in action and have a go themselves.

The SRP outreach programme is hoping to introduce the project to as many young people as possible, and get them interested and involved. If you would like us to talk to your local school, Young Archaeologists' Club or other youth group please get in touch with Brian Wilkinson, SRP Interpretation Officer, email: [brian.wilkinson@rcahms.gov.uk](mailto:brian.wilkinson@rcahms.gov.uk).

An education pack will be developed over the summer, ready to be launched when term begins in August 2007. In association with Careers Scotland, four teacher placements have been made available to assist the SRP team develop the pack. The successful teachers will spend a week with the team, taking part in training and seeing just how the project is applicable to the school curriculum. Anyone interested in applying should email [brian.wilkinson@rcahms.gov.uk](mailto:brian.wilkinson@rcahms.gov.uk).

SRP will be at the Highland Archaeology Seminar in Inverness, 13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> October. This will be an opportunity for SRP volunteers from different areas to meet up and exchange ideas and experiences. If you would like to talk about your plans or project, or have any other ideas for something you would like to do, please let us know.

Plans are afoot for SRP events during Scottish Archaeology Month 2007. A series of talks, walks and taster sessions will be held to promote the project and get people interested and involved. Details will be available in the Scottish Archaeology Month national events guide, which will be published by the Council for Scottish Archaeology in July.

### Scotland's Rural Past

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