

CASE STUDY

CLADACH AGUS MACHAIR (MACHAIR AND SHORE): COMANN EACHDRAIDH UIBHIST A TUATH (CEUT)

The aim of this project by Comann Eachdraidh Uibhist A Tuath (North Uist Historical Society) was an exploration of the unique and threatened shoreline of North Uist and the machair land lying behind the marram grass dunes.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

AWARDS:

- The work done by the young people qualified them for the John Muir Trust Environmental Awards.

PROJECT PARTNERS:

- Sgoil Uibhist a Tuath, Sgoil Lionacleit, Junior CEUT members, Johanne Ferguson (Scottish Natural Heritage), Tom Dawson (Coastal Archaeologist from St Andrews University), Fiona MacIsaac Neil Davidson (Outreach and Education at Taigh Chearsabhaigh), John Macdonald (Comann na Mara).

PROJECT DELIVERY:

- Duration of project: March 2019- March 2020

THE PROJECT:

'Cladach agus Machair' focused on an exploration of the shoreline of North Uist and the importance of the dunes in the protection of this fertile, sandy environment from the encroaching ocean. The project integrated aspects of natural life with local culture and change. In this way it could highlight important aspects of conservation for the future.

During the project we worked with a group of 10 children (aged between 6-16) to conduct research alongside scientific and coastal archaeological experts and make films. We also worked with crofters to record their experiences of the landscape and the young people recorded bilingual interviews with them about the use of Gaelic names, folklore and stories, as well as any changes they have noticed affecting local biodiversity and subsistence.

With the whole school, Sgoil Uibhist a Tuath, we held three field trips to a local RSPB bird reserve, beaches and machair. Although we had to place a limit of 10 children for the filmmaking group in our summer activities week, we advertised that any families could join us for two of the field trips. The first was a beach archaeology walk with local archaeologist Rebecca Rennell and the second a rock pooling session with Johanne Ferguson (Scottish Natural Heritage). Over the two days we were joined by over thirty more interested children and family members on the beach.

At the end of the project, we held a packed evening presentation of the children's films. Tom Dawson from St Andrews University and two visiting American archaeologists gave talks and the Uist Gaelic choir sung traditional songs of the sea. As part of the project there was also due to be a travelling exhibition of all the children's work. This had to be cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions.



“This project, supported by the Royal Society Places of Science scheme, combines the science, local history and education in a way which does huge credit to the energy and vision of the North Uist Historical Society. The panel was greatly impressed how the project built on and developed interwoven themes, which touched on contemporary issues of environment and outreach.”

Professor Jonathan Ashmore FRS, UCL and Chair of the Places of science allocation panel

CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES:

- The archive materials, oral recordings, and films that the children gathered and made so enthusiastically are measures of their engagement and learning.
- These have been recorded in their bilingual John Muir Record Books. A particular emphasis here was in learning the Gaelic names for machair flowers and coastal birds.
- The evening presentation of the project brought people together and for an island of 1,600 very scattered souls, the audience of over 120 represents a good turn-out!
- Sadly, the week before we were preparing to go public with the project exhibition it was closed due to COVID-19 measures. We were lucky to get funding for this to become a ‘virtual exhibition’. St Andrews University Open Virtual Worlds offered matched funding towards mounting this.

THE IMPACT IT HAS MADE:

- The impact of the learning that the young people (and volunteers) gained from working alongside

eminent scientific and coastal archaeological experts was immeasurable. It was also a real boost to our status and way of operating as a museum, for which we are very grateful.

- In the museum there was a widening of our understanding of, and commitment to, STEM and the history of changes in local biodiversity.
- The young people gained confidence in STEM research methods, the different ways of presenting these and interviewing/oral recording skills.

LESSONS LEARNED:

An unexpected part of the project was when the school asked the museum to include their yearly beach clean within the project. Although not our original aim, we embraced this, with positive outcomes arising:

- CEUT managed to adopt a nearby section of beach for the school through the Marine Conservation Trust.
- The children came up with the idea to use the gathered plastics from the beach clean as part of a proposed giant dolphin sculpture for the quadrangle, to become a receptacle for plastic waste. (We are currently seeking funding for the design and materials for this).

GUIDANCE:

- Work collaboratively with a wide range of groups and experts. We partnered alongside the NHS, St Andrews University, Uist Gaelic Choir, Comann na Mara amongst others to widen our audience reach, skills, and capacity.
- Careful, detailed planning with the relevant staff to mediate the project and to work alongside volunteers is the key to integrating it within the curriculum. A Protection for Vulnerable Groups (PVG) check for outreach volunteers is recommended.

USEFUL RESOURCES:

If you would like more information about this project please contact: marri.morrison@gmail.com

T: 0131 550 4100 | W: museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk | Twitter: @MuseumsGalScot

Museums Galleries Scotland is a company limited by guarantee registered in Scotland (No. 74264) and a charity registered in Scotland (No. SC015593).