

## CASE STUDY

# HIGHLAND THREADS: MUSEUMS AND HERITAGE HIGHLAND

By employing innovative digital technologies and working with sector professionals, 'Highland Threads' online exhibition reflects the quality of museums and diverse collections that can be found across the Highlands. Nicola Henderson, Innovation and Network Manager at Museums and Heritage Highland, talks about the partnership work between 14 museums and heritage centres to create 'Highland Threads'.

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

#### PARTNER MUSEUMS:

- Glencoe Museum
- Inverness Museum & Art Gallery
- Gairloch Museum
- Ullapool Museum
- Grantown Museum
- West Highland Museum
- Highland Museum of Childhood
- Castlehill Heritage Centre
- Tain Museum
- Wick Heritage Museum
- Highland Folk Museum
- Groam House Museum
- Strathnaver Museum
- Dornoch Historylinks.

#### PROJECT SUPPORTED BY:

- Circa £15,000 from National Lottery Heritage Fund. Support from XpoNorth for event delivery

### THE PROJECT:

'[Highland Threads](#)' was conceived at a Highland Heritage Café, a regular online meet-up during COVID-19 for museums across the Highlands to share ideas and discuss issues they were facing as a sector.

Discussions around the impact of COVID-19, led to plans by 14 museums and heritage centres for a joint online exhibition focusing on clothing through the ages, where each museum would focus on a costume from their collection. The collective vision for the project was to use collections to support museums in these difficult times: driving new and existing audiences to the museums whether they were open or closed; help museums find new ways of creating income streams; and, increase access and engagement with collections.

By employing innovative digital technologies and working with sector professionals, 'Highland Threads' reflects the quality of museums and diverse collections that can be found across the Highlands. The digital exhibition launched on 1 April 2021 and can be found at [www.highlandthreads.co.uk](http://www.highlandthreads.co.uk). The physical exhibition has also now launched with 12 of the 14 museums able to put their costume on display for visitors to create their own Highland Threads tour.

**"Being part of Highland Threads has been fantastic for Glencoe Folk Museum. As a small museum with only one full-time member of staff, having access to the**



Image credit: Jim Dunn

## resources, expertise and advise of staff across a range of Highland museums has been invaluable.”

Catriona Davidson, Curator Glencoe Folk Museum

### CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES:

- The greatest challenges were presented by Covid-19. We were fortunate that the Highland area was in Level 1 on the Scottish government’s level system before Christmas and therefore travelling across the area and getting the costumes prepared for photography and film to be taken was possible. This did not make it easy however, as obviously all distancing and hygiene protocols still had to be followed and therefore the conservator - who worked with museums to undertake any minor repairs and mount the costumes - had to be able to travel and visit just before the photographer travelled to capture the items.
- The global reach of the digital exhibition and online events has been truly astonishing. In its first 2 months it has reached over 10,000 individual users with almost 15,000 sessions recorded. 55% of the audience has been from outwith the UK (predominantly from the US - 28% - but then fairly equally spread across every corner of the globe). The exhibition launch had 492 participants from across the world with a further audience of 1.3k on Facebook.
- The exhibition has received critical acclaim, being rated the best online exhibition in the UK by digital museum platform museumcrush, plus has led to invites to present the project to University Museums and other heritage organisations across the country.
- The films have been picked up as pieces of art and will be presented on new cultural channel Ikono TV - which has over a million subscribers. It is also currently in discussion to be made into a

TV production. It has generated some income (around £1k) and while perhaps not as large as we would have hoped for, it has shown that people are willing to donate to a high quality product.

### THE IMPACT IT HAS MADE:

- It has absolutely succeeded in bringing Highland collections to a global audience and has shown what can be achieved by working together.
- Museums have learned conservation skills, worked with fashion historians to build their knowledge on their costumes, connected with global audiences and received digital assets that they can use on their own digital platforms going forward.

### LESSONS LEARNED:

- We had numerous discussions around the different tech we could use to present the objects and finding the right solution took time, but high quality film and detail photography was absolutely right for this.

### GUIDANCE:

- Digital is another tool in a museum’s belt and if used in the right way can be hugely impactful but finding the right vehicles to bring the story you want to tell to life and understanding the audience you want to engage with should be at the core of all decisions.
- Embrace collaboration! The power of this exhibition lies with all the museums involved - the different skills each individual brings helps to strengthen the sector through a strong peer to peer network. And the reach you can achieve when resources are pulled together is extensive - the impact the marketing campaign had (multiple press articles, TV pieces, influencer sharing) would not have been achievable by one museum on their own.

### USEFUL RESOURCES:

If you would like more information about this project please contact Nicola Henderson, Innovation and Network Manager Museums and Heritage Highland, email: [nicola.henderson@museumsandheritagehighland.org.uk](mailto:nicola.henderson@museumsandheritagehighland.org.uk)

Visit Highland Threads at: [www.highlandthreads.co.uk](http://www.highlandthreads.co.uk)

**T: 0131 550 4100 | W: [museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk](http://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).