

our land, our people
and our place
in the future

DÙTHCHAS UK EXCHANGE VISITS



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**Fair Isle, Shetland, UK,
21st to 23rd June, 2000
Fair Isle Bird Observatory**

SAFEINHERIT – Safeguarding Our Heritage

**Forum on long-term sustainability
and Community Development in relation
to natural & cultural resources**

Report contributed by Meg Telfer

Wednesday 21st June

The SafeinHerit Network was established in 1999 in response to a European Union / Norwegian Government initiative to stimulate community development and environmental protection in northern parts of Europe through the Northern Periphery Programme funded by EU, ERDF Article 10 and the Norway Bequest. This particular network and series of projects is a partnership between four communities and organisations:

- The community of Fair Isle, Scotland, under the auspices of the Fair Isle Marine Environment and Tourism Initiative.
- The Nord - Trondelag County Council, Norway
- Steigen Municipality, Nordland County, Norway
- The community development organisations of Inlandslaget, Vindelalvkommunera and SOS, Sorsele, Sweden

Each partner is responsible for taking a lead role in a series of one or more joint and individual projects, aimed at benefiting the communities and their environment and demonstrating how community development can be achieved through sustainable use of environmental and cultural resources.

We were welcomed to Fair Isle by Ian Best a traditional boat builder from Fair Isle. Anne Sinclair another native islander opened The Forum

"Long-term sustainability and community development in relation to natural & cultural resources in the northern periphery"

Nick Riddiford from Fair Isle, Eva Bakkeslett from Steigen in North Norway, Sigurd Kristiansen, Nord-Trondelag, Norway and Leopold Sjostrom, Sorsele, Sweden introduced themselves, their teams, and their communities to the forum.

Anne Sinclair introduced me and I gave a short review / preview of Dùthchas.

" Dùthchas is an old Gaelic word describing the link between people and place, the sense of place and belonging and of a shared inheritance. It has been used to name a project partnership between communities and agencies working together to develop strategies for the sustainable future of remote fragile areas. Dùthchas has gone out into the communities of North Sutherland, North Uist and Trotternish (Slieve), to find out what people want, what their dreams and realistic hopes for the future are. It has been working with the information to put a number of sustainable projects in place in the areas.

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"The importance of all projects is working and getting together, realising that we do not work alone and providing a revitalising experience."

Aims & objectives for the next few days resolved themselves as -

What are the challenges facing our communities ?
What actions are we currently taking and what actions can we take in the future to meet these challenges ?

(originally the word was "difficulties" this sounded negative, "challenges" had a more positive ring to it.)

"If you walk the road the road makes itself ahead of you "
Old Scandinavian Proverb

"Excursion to sample the Natural & Cultural Resources of Fair Isle"

These resources on Fair Isle are utilised both directly & indirectly, through interpretation. Here the issue is not how to use them sustainably, historically that has always been the case, but how to isolate what the advantages are of using these resources in this region, and how to promote this further, as well as how to overcome any difficulties in this utilisation

Fair Isle Bird Observatory - Very much an integral part of the community.

The George Waterston Memorial Centre - This old church/school houses an exhibition of Fair Isle, it is beautifully set out and very comprehensive

The Fair Isle Marine Environment and Tourism Initiative - Nick Riddiford gave a presentation about this OUTSIDE in an Atlantic Sea Haar !! The gist if it was to protect the local marine environment by the sustainable management of resources and traditional activities and to provide facilities to encourage environmentally positive tourism to the area. In the long term Fair Isle hopes to act as a national model for integrated management of the marine environment.

Boatbuilder and Felt Maker - Ian Best makes Fair Isle goals using traditional methods learned in Norway. He has a full order book and was off to The Scottish Museum in Edinburgh to be a living exhibit for a month making a yawl. His wife Lise makes felt waistcoats using wool from the local sheep.

Violin Maker - Ewen Thomson makes violins (part of the cultural heritage of Fair Isle).

Fair Isle Silver Company - this enterprise is in the process of setting up, and seemed to have been very well researched, (design, marketing, funding etc.). The workshop will be in the old south lighthouse.

Stackhoull Stores - a *very* well stocked shop & Post Office.

Evening - slide show from Steigen, Sorsele & Nord - Trondelag about their Natural & Cultural Resources as well as giving a general impression of the areas.

What is most important - sustainability or promotion? Are the problems the same for all the areas?

Everyone was quite tired by now but not too tired to appreciate the beauty and the challenges common to all the areas, and the unique yet similar solutions being found & explored to deal with these challenges. It was about now that I realised the advantage of Central Government being far away from your centre of activity, and the advantages of having strong local government dealing directly with local communities.

Thursday 22nd June

A summary of the Natural & Cultural resources we have in the Northern Peripheries, and of the issues we need to address.

Presentations from each area - actual challenges and how they are being addressed.

Fair Isle Crafts - a co-operative set up 20yrs ago to continue the historical production and sale of Fair Isle's unique hosiery.

National Parks - Ivar Guntvedt from Nord- Trondelag spoke about how Central Government in Norway establishes national parks and takes other conservation measures versus a new model involving local communities in the process.

"People can come and steal it and leave. We don't want to leave"

Milk Production in Steigen - They have been overtaken by events in Steigen since this programme was drawn up. A huge consortium has taken over all the small dairies in Norway and the dairy in Steigen which apparently makes superb butter will be closed under rationalisation. The community, quite naturally, do not want this to happen and are hoping to effect a community buy out of the dairy. They would hope to continue with the production of their butter and supply a niche market. They are optimistic about their plans.

Sorsele Food Production - This is a co-operative association for production and marketing of local food products. All the producers worked on a small scale and had other sources of income.

Discussion

Four groups discussed the following topics which arose from the presentations :

Price Policy Strategies to Equate Supply with Demand

Main points -

- It is important that prices are what producers feel to be viable.
- It is important to have trademarks for exclusive local products

Locally Prepared Local Structural Strategies

Main points -

- Everyone should have the choice to be involved in the decision making process, from local level upwards
- Long term partnerships should be formed between locals and support agencies

Marketing Strategies for Local and Global Markets

Main points -

- Co-operation between those involved to produce a mutual marketing strategy
- Produce an image with local distinctions and identity
- Ensure the ability to meet demand created through careful marketing
- Raise local awareness and encourage local consumer pressure

How to get Local Communities Involved in the Process (in this case setting up National Parks)

Main points -

- Non-recognition in higher levels of bureaucracy that local communities must play a vital role in the management of their area
- A lack of community networking to build a strong voice and consensus: private landowners do one to one negotiations
- Traditional top-down ways of delivering regulations are hard to break

PM - Demonstration of some of the craft goods made on Fair Isle & in Swedish Lapland. Knitwear, stained glass, locker hooking, spinning wheels, straw backed chairs.

The Swedish folk had beautiful bracelets, purses, belts made from reindeer hide and interwoven with filigree threads and very functional but extraordinarily beautiful knitwear.

The Use of Resources - interpretation

Eva spoke about diversification in Steigen. How communities are dealing with the transition from farming and fishing to other ways of making a living.

Vindel River Handicraft - how they market their products to the wider community.

The Lierne National Park Information Centre - how the local community can benefit from the development of an interpretation centre encompassing the natural and cultural aspects of the area.

Scottish Islands Explorer - an informative magazine covering all aspects of the Scottish Isles, set up and run from Fair Isle since January 2000.

Evening buffet at the Observatory - I think every inhabitant of Fair Isle bar one or two were there and it was fabulous!!

Friday 23rd June

Summary of thoughts from the previous day. Have we reached any conclusions?

How communities can best help themselves highlight their strengths and overcome any difficulties in achieving sustainable development of their natural and cultural resources.

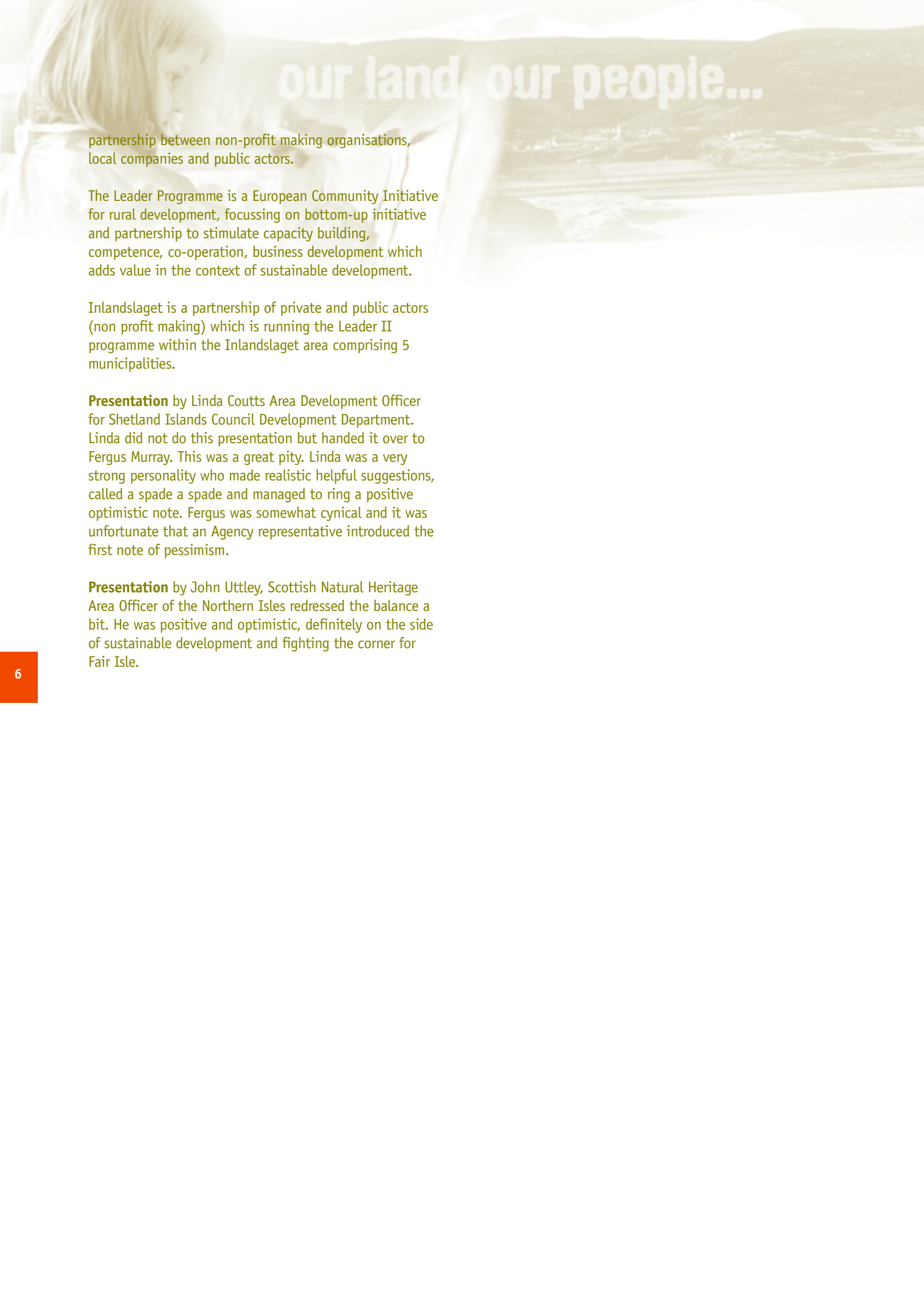
Fiona Mitchell who runs the shop with her husband and is chair of the Fair Isle Marine Partnership gave a presentation about their community attempting to regain local control of local waters.

This was followed by a discussion

"Fair Isle is not some quaint little place stuck out in the ocean...", although, this would seem to be how it is viewed by some of the very people who should be in there supporting their wishes.

How Agencies and partnerships can help communities.

Leopold gave a presentation about the Leader Inlandslaget and SOS (Strategies for Optimum Strength) partnership. The interaction between them. The



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partnership between non-profit making organisations, local companies and public actors.

The Leader Programme is a European Community Initiative for rural development, focussing on bottom-up initiative and partnership to stimulate capacity building, competence, co-operation, business development which adds value in the context of sustainable development.

Inlandslaget is a partnership of private and public actors (non profit making) which is running the Leader II programme within the Inlandslaget area comprising 5 municipalities.

Presentation by Linda Coutts Area Development Officer for Shetland Islands Council Development Department. Linda did not do this presentation but handed it over to Fergus Murray. This was a great pity. Linda was a very strong personality who made realistic helpful suggestions, called a spade a spade and managed to ring a positive optimistic note. Fergus was somewhat cynical and it was unfortunate that an Agency representative introduced the first note of pessimism.

Presentation by John Uttley, Scottish Natural Heritage Area Officer of the Northern Isles redressed the balance a bit. He was positive and optimistic, definitely on the side of sustainable development and fighting the corner for Fair Isle.



Our Challenges

Education

- To educate decision makers of the passion we have for our local areas and overcome perceptions held by those in government.
- To appreciate that young people should have the opportunity to move away for a time for further education, to see other areas of the world, to accumulate information and skills, and to provide opportunities for young people to return.

Local Community Control v. Higher level Bureaucracy

- To change the vertical (top-down) tradition of decision making to one which is horizontal
- To ensure that all levels are able to participate in decision making
- To find tools for constructive dialogue and remove feelings of “them” and “us”

Gain Confidence

- To be aware of our identity and origin, to explore our territorial image, retaining the sustainable and diverse way of life
- To share our ideas and visions, enabling us to be prepared for situations as a united front.

Use of media

Conclusion

We were provided with interesting presentations and the relaxed and friendly atmosphere was productive, providing opportunities for discussion, time to chat, forge friendships, and make links, and learn from each other. None of us is in a vacuum after all!

Dùthchas Cumbria Fact Finding Trip 13–14 November 2000

This visit was a result of the North Sutherland Local Produce Seminar – “Good Enough To Eat”, held in September 2000. The host in Cumbria, Geoff Brown was a speaker at the Seminar. The aim of the trip was to learn about the ways in which Cumbrian hill farmers had diversified in order to boost farm incomes.


Summary of Visit

Contributed by W. Cattanach, North Sutherland

Despite all the adverse commentary from the media concerning massive disruption to the rail services, Michael Stuart and myself arrived at Penrith station only a few minutes late. We then proceeded to our accommodation at Limes hotel where we met up with Hector Macleod, the project representative from Skye. During the first evening we quickly established a common bond with the problems of Sutherland very similar to those experienced on Skye.

First thing Monday morning we were met by Geoff Brown who was to be our host for the next 2 days. The offices of the Cumbria rural resource centre where Geoff is based were adjacent to our accommodation and we started off with a tour of the centre and an explanation of his role as Leader 2 project officer. From his description of Cumbria, it quickly became apparent his rural community were facing similar problems to those on the Northern fringes of Scotland. There is the same economic decline amongst farming communities, producing low incomes with families scarcely able to support themselves on traditional practices thus an urgent need to add value to their produce if they were to halt the trend and retain young people within these remote communities.

Our first visit was to High Cairlingill Farm at Tebay where the Wilson family operates a hill unit and run a flock of Rough Fell Ewes. Hilary Wilson has given up her off farm job and embarked on a farm gate sales venture in an attempt to increase the profitability of their traditional family farming business. Lambs from the farm were previously sold at market fetching around £16 each, which the Wilsons concluded was an unacceptable and unprofitable level. They have joined up with several other local producers and formed the Kendall Rough Fell Lamb Group. Through assistance from the Leader 2 project a small and simple farm shop meeting all environmental standards has been created utilising an old existing building. From this site, Hilary now sells their produce. The lambs are slaughtered and butchered offsite with the meat taken back to the farm. Here Hilary makes up 1/4 lamb packs containing half a leg, six chops, some rolled shoulder and a small tray of mince, the total pack weighing around 4 kilograms sells for £17.50 thus raising the lamb value to £70. While there are costs of £12 per lamb this still represents a significant percentage of added value and has certainly proved to be a worthwhile exercise.



Marketing her produce simply started off by selling the odd lamb to friends and has spread by word of mouth. In addition her ventures has attracted an element of free TV and press advertisement as result of her innovative approach to assist the family business increase its margins. Over the past year, almost 300 lambs have been sold this being a good base upon which to build.

This type of enterprise is low cost to get off the ground and I am sure would be appropriate within any of the 3 Duthchas areas. Grant assistance for such a venture would almost certainly be available under the new Highlands and Islands Transitional Scheme, which has just been launched and covers the entire Duthchas area with grant levels up to 50%.

Our next visit was to Buckles Farm where the Buckle family has been involved in agriculture for many generations dating back to the 16th century. This was more an upland than hill unit with a wider range of enterprises including sheep, beef, pigs and a small dairy. The Buckle family had become despondent with the poor prices being obtained from conventional markets for their produce.

In an attempt to reverse this trend they decided to shorten the market chain and sell a quality product direct to the public. With assistance under Leader 2 they have created a high standard on farm processing unit at a total net cost (after grant) of around £15,000. This building incorporates a commercial chill and cutting facility. Each week they slaughter approximately, 10 lambs, 5 pigs and 1 heifer, this is done off farm with the carcasses delivered back to the farm where they are hung for 2 weeks to maximise the eating quality. The sides are then butchered with the poorer cuts made into high quality sausage and burgers, the bulk of this work is carried out by Rachael Buckle with some assistance from other family members.

Most of the meat is then sold via farmers markets with Rachael covering 3 towns each week. In addition to this they have established an Internet mail order venture, which although still in its infancy is steadily building up. Sales from this currently accounts for approximately 20% of total output.

Rachael realised her market stall was one of about 3 or 4 selling meat on any day and in order to attract more customers she has introduced a range of freshly baked home-made pies. This has proved a great success and drawn extra customers onto her stall resulting in an overall increase in sales, it also utilises all the poor and fatty cuts of meat. If there was anything from the Cumbrian trip I would have wanted to bring home it must be "Rachael" as she was one of the most dynamic individuals I have met. She gets up at 4am on market days to make 50 pies in her kitchen oven prior to setting off with her trailer fully loaded with meats. Single handed she operates the market stall and still has the energy to come home, make sausages and burgers and look after her young family.

While this was a most impressive set up, the potential for selling large volumes of meat through farmers markets within the Duthchas project area is much less as we do not have the same easy access to large centres of population. There would however be some scope to develop an Internet mail order outlet and attend smaller farmers markets on a less frequent basis.

On the Monday night we were joined by John Macmillan from South Uist which completed our group.

Tuesday morning dawned fine and clear and we set off on a long but scenic trail over the hills to Ayside Farm near Newlybridge where Eric Airey farms and also operates a small abattoir and butchery business from the farm. His enterprise concentrates on rare and traditional breeds and his aim is to sell meats with the best eating qualities direct to the public and catering establishments. All products are sold by breed, with Herdwick lamb, Berkshire pork and Galloway beef on sale the week of our visit.

A small slaughtering facility which is attached to the back of the shop is operated on a Monday at which time he will kill up to 6 or 7 cattle and 50-80 lambs depending on availability and demand. The meat is well hung and butchered on the premises. Eric admitted the main challenge is to get all the poorer cuts sold along with the roasts and other high value joints.

In addition to killing his own stock he also offers a small capacity facility to others charging £120 for cattle and £12 for lambs to slaughter and butcher, this overall approach has significantly lifted the prices Eric gets for his stock and at the same time has created additional employment.

His slaughtering facility has been built up and improved over the years but in doing so he has not incurred great amounts of capital expenditure. It is now up to full EEC standards with modest improvements carried out to the slaughter line last year at a total cost of under £5000. The message I took away from Airleys was that slaughtering facilities could be created at reasonable capital cost and that we should not get carried away with expensive mobile jobs which are quoted at over half a million pounds. The type and scale of facility operated at Ayside would be very appropriate for all our areas and would enable some form of farm or croft gate marketing

Our final visit was to Millbeck Farm at the top of Langdale Valley where Eric Taylforth runs a flock of 1500 Herdwick ewes maintained on high fell land. His flock produces approximately 700 wedder lambs each year, most of which he attempts to sell direct to the public. The farm location with over half a million visitors in the locality each year leads itself to marketing opportunities. Eric has exploited the abundance of people and strategically placed adverts

for his produce on gates all over the farm. In addition, they also operate B&B from the farmhouse, where evening meals are served giving visitors an opportunity to taste their produce. Some are then persuaded to take a lamb away home with them. The next step in their venture is to create a web- site, which will include the lamb for sale, the B&B facility and also 2 holiday cottages, which they operate.

The conclusions I have drawn from this fact finding visit is that there is much to be learned from the entrepreneurial visions of these Cumbrian farmers but we must not get too ambitious and carried away with their success. We are not blessed with the numbers of population either in terms of visitors or urban settlements to provide the substantial customer base available to our Cumbrian cousins.

The first issue for us to take forward is a suitable slaughtering facility as all 3 areas are devoid of this and therefore cannot embark on such ventures. In doing so we must take heart from the modest operation of the Airey family and attempt to provide something on a similar scale.

Finally I would like to thank The Duthchas Project for providing me with the opportunity to visit and witness first hand these splendid examples of adding value to basic agricultural products. I think it is important to recognise our rural communities are still built on firm crofting foundations and if we can find ways to improve the outputs from this resource we will almost certainly succeed in sustaining these fragile communities.

I will be writing independently to thank Geoff Brown for being such a splendid host.

W Cattanach

Cumbria Visit Diary

Contributed by Hector Macleod, Skye


Visit One - High Cairlinghill Farm at Tebay (Host Hilary Wilson)

A hill farm running Rough Fell ewes, prices for stock being much the same as ours (approx £15 per lamb), they decided to try adding value to their product with the result that they started farm gate sales. Seven farmers got together and started Kendall Rough Fell Lamb Group. Assistance has been given to them by LEADER 2. Start up costs have not been astronomical as they used a redundant building, brought it up to standard, in agreement with the environmental bodies. The lady of the house, Hilary, is responsible for this part of the operation (killing and selling). Lambs are killed in a nearby slaughterhouse, and butchered before being taken back to the shop where Hilary makes up a very attractive pack of quarter lamb (half a gigot; six chops; rolled shoulder and a tray of mince; maybe some belly strips or liver). This item amounts to approx 4 kilos and sells at £17.50. When you multiply this by four, this gives added value to the product. Even taking away the killing and cutting charges etc, (£12 - £15), they are selling 10 lambs per week. This way, there is power to the pocket I believe, and I wish them well in their venture. A very simple project with little outlay which would suit our own areas well, but maybe not everyone.

At the time of our visit the Rough Fell group were looking to build an abattoir and production plant at the cost of £400,000, even though there were two others in the immediate area. They felt that their idea was not falling on deaf ears.

Visit Two - Buckles Farm, Kirkby Stephen (Host Rachel Buckle)

A mixed farm unit, with sheep, beef cattle, dairy cattle and pigs. They needed to improve the income on the farm to sustain the 3 families, and decided to go down the road of selling direct to the consumer. This was to maximise their return to their benefit and cut out the middle man. This has proved a success. The set up here was more state-of-the-art, as they had taken the job a step further. They were still doing the killing off the farm, but bringing the meat back in carcass form and doing their own cutting and packing. Part of the steading building was sectioned off - approx 12 m sq - and lined with washed down surfaces, a small chill installed, a sausage maker, a vacuum packed machine, a tray and foil wrapped machine, a mincer, wrapping table and cutting block. This work was grant aided 50% by LEADER 2 at a total cost of £30,000. The throughput was 10 lambs, 1 cattle beast and 5 pigs per week - and demand was rising. All the meat is used - the poorer cuts being



used for sausages and pies. Rachel Buckle makes 50 pies per market day in the farmhouse kitchen. She also attends three farmers' markets per week on her own with a very early start in the morning – 4 am. She has found that with the pies added to the stall, she has managed to up the sales of their meat products. She is now quietly overtaking the other meat stalls. An internet site has been set up and mail order is being done as well. This is building up sales as well. The family are very hard working and demonstrate that value can be added to home produced products by selling direct. www.bucklefarm.com

Visit Three – Ayside Farm, near Newlybridge (Host Eric Airey)

We had a fair bit of travelling through nice scenery to Newlybridge and Airey's farm. Here they had an abattoir and a butcher's – a family run business specialising in rare and traditional breeds. Breeds include Hereford, Aberdeen Angus, Belted Galloways and British White Cattle, Saddlebacks, Gloucester Old Spots, Middle Whites, and Berkshire pigs. Kerryhill, Rylands, Shetlands, Hebridean and North Ronaldsay sheep. The primary production area that impressed me was the small abattoir and hanging facility at the rear of the building where the animals were slaughtered and hung, with the animals entering the leirage from the farm building via a farm track keeping stress to a minimum. A very basic practical set up that cost about £5,000 to date, to be modified to EEC standards, and would be well suited to this part of the world without going down the road of astronomical figures that are talked about for EEC standard slaughterhouses.

They kill 7 cattle and 100 lambs per week (*pigs had to be killed elsewhere at the moment*). With the low throughput hygiene traceability and return of producer product, this could be monitored far better. This is something that came up in conversation with the producers we spoke to on Monday, that sending this – ie lambs – to the big abattoirs, they ended up getting ewes back. The cost to the public for killing and butchering one cattle beast was £120 and £12 for a lamb. All costs included the veterinary and meat hygiene service at £46 per hour and a £100 per day respectively. The meat is marketed under breed names which gives the consumer the choice of type and breed of meat required. All types of caterers were supplied from the shop.

Visit Four - Millbeck Farm at the top of Langdale Valley (Host Eric Taylforth)

We then moved to Ambleside where we met Eric Taylforth. He runs 1,500 Herdwick ewes on the Fells and some cattle on the lower pasture. He markets his lambs direct to the public wherever possible. Airey's abattoir is used to kill

and butcher stock, some of which we had seen there. Selling is done by word of mouth, brochures and people staying in B and B where there is an option of an evening meal and self-catering units. The tourism side is run along with the farm enterprise. The farm is set in the busy Fells area, and customers are easily targeted. A chill van had been bought in partnership for the delivery of lamb and beef to customers in Cumbria and the surrounding area. A website is being built at the moment and will advertise their meat and accommodation to a host of people worldwide, to open new markets for the Taylforths.

Conclusions

The visits represented only a small cross section of producers in Cumbria that we were given the opportunity to visit, and it gave us all something to think about and take home to the Dùthchas areas. They are not projects that will work for everyone, but if there is a will there, individuals or small groups could do something similar. The Uists and Sutherland have certainly got a good start, since there are abattoirs in their proximity which could be brought into play. Skye does not have this resource however. If you have the primary side readily available, you are a big percentage of the way to adding value to our local product, giving producers more revenue in their pockets. Keeping production close to the source is going to give you far better local products to sell. Small is beautiful and practical, and we are not asking for miracles - just some solutions. I certainly enjoyed the visit to Cumbria and meeting fellow producers who have the same train of thought in their ideas of adding value. I feel that the abattoir which we attempted to put in place in Skye was not impractical, and should be looked at again seriously.

We need to move onwards and upwards, and think of people in rural and geographical areas. After all, we are important to the economy and the environment of these. My thanks to Dùthchas and to Geoff Brown for the organisation of the trip, and also to the people who gave of their time to speak with us. It is a pity that Virgin trains and Railtrack could not be so well organised!

Hector Macleod, Sconser, Isle of Skye, March 2001



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