

# *'Fo fòid na tìme'*

STAFFIN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

SEPTEMBER 2015

Staffin Community Trust report

[www.staffin-trust.co.uk](http://www.staffin-trust.co.uk)



SCT's Dugald Ross and UHI's Dan Lee with Staffin school pupils at the excavation.

## Introduction

Staffin Community Trust (SCT) and UHI Archaeology Institute hosted a five-day archaeological excavation near Staffin Bay during September 9 - 14, 2015. It was the first dig in Staffin for more than 20 years, involved local people volunteering to work at the site on a daily basis and school pupils' participation. During the course of the project it was visited by more than 200 people, a healthy mix of local residents and visitors. Having discovered examples of flint and suspected animal bone, UHI archaeologists will now carry out further work on the finds and a full report from the Archaeology Institute will be issued in due course. The pilot project set out to gauge local interest in Staffin's archaeology and is hopefully the start of a long-term relationship between SCT and UHI, with a view to exploring and uncovering the district's archaeological potential over several years.

## Background and project aims

Attracting an archaeological event/excavation to Staffin was a key objective of the SCT for several years. A rescue excavation of an overhanging rock shelter at An Corran in the winter of 1993/94 was the last project of this type in Staffin. SCT has a track record of delivering successful social, economic



and cultural projects and a test excavation met all those objectives. Staffin's archaeology and natural environment is of key importance to the SCT and plays an integral role in the Skye Ecomuseum called Ceumannan

<http://www.skyecomuseum.co.uk/> It interprets history and landscape, with access and interpretation at 13 sites of interest. SCT was aware of several archaeological sites that had potential and were keen to attract an educational institution which could help it tell the stories behind the locations.

Left: The turf comes off on Day 1.

SCT is developing phase two of Ceumannan, which has included a major archaeological report by Ross and Cromarty Archaeological Services (RoCAS) and that, combined with a pilot excavation would be used to enhance and add more depth to the ecomuseum's story of Staffin.

This project came about after SCT chairman Donald MacDonald encouraged Julie Gibson, a County Archaeologist in Orkney, who also works for UHI, to visit Staffin. Donald wanted to establish if both organisations could find a way of working together. SCT director Dugald Ross, who is also the curator of the Staffin Museum, has a life-long interest and deep knowledge of archaeology in the Trotternish peninsula and welcomed Julie on a visit to Staffin in June 2014. Dugald wanted to show Julie an area near An Corran which he believed could be an excellent site for a community-led archaeological excavation. Dugald suspected it held the remains of a Mesolithic structure and was concerned that cattle had been eroding the site for the last 10 years. A high concentration of lithic debitage was recovered by Dugald in that period. Julie was enthused about the site and Staffin's archaeological potential and encouraged SCT to lobby for a project, after the ROCAS report was submitted.

In late 2014 the Scottish Government's Interface fund regional co-ordinator Dr Kathryn Fraser contacted SCT asking if any of its potential projects may qualify for a grant funding of up to £5,000. It was decided by SCT's board to lodge an expression of interest to Interface, which detailed the potential Mesolithic excavation project to academic institutions in Scotland. UHI and two other Scottish universities declared their interest and SCT decided to commence formal discussions with the region's university.

UHI archaeologist Dan Lee subsequently travelled to Staffin in May 2015 to meet Dugald and SCT development officer Hugh Ross and investigate the proposed site. Dan was also impressed with the site's potential and it was agreed that, subject to securing the necessary funding, an evaluation excavation, geophysical survey (below ground survey) and test pits would be carried out in September.

### Permissions/funding

The Garafad township's livestock graze the site and croft tenants, plus neighbouring residents, helpfully gave their approval for the project, as did the landowner, the Kilmuir Estate, while Scottish Natural Heritage and Highland Council were also notified and had no objections. A summary of the proposed dig was hand delivered to nearby residents and households in Garafad. SCT and UHI then secured funding from the Scottish Funding Council via Interface Scotland, Highland Council's Ward Discretionary Fund and the Carnegie Foundation of New York to ensure the project could proceed. A press release, written in English and Gaelic, was also issued to media outlets and published on the SCT website.

### The excavation – community involvement and participation

From the outset SCT was determined that any archaeological excavation in Staffin would have the community at its heart with the project open to all to experience, either through direct participation or observing and enjoying tours of the site. Dugald fenced the location off from livestock, posters advertising the event were handed out to local shops and put up around Staffin and the project started on Wednesday, September 9 after the arrival of Dan and Tom Desaille from their UHI base in

Orkney. An undoubted highlight of the project was the three visits from the Staffin and Kilmuir primary school pupils and staff with their enthusiasm and interest in the site and archaeology gratifying for all involved. They enjoyed hands-on experience of geophysical surveying, sieving soil and investigating test pits where they took great delight in finding flint tools. The Community Open Day on the Saturday saw several Staffin children arrive again, but this time with their families, having enjoyed their school visit so much they had badgered their parents to take them back. More than 40 people, of all ages, attended on the day and Dugald, Dan and Tom were on hand to talk to everybody, explain the dig's objectives and provide information on the area's archaeological context.

- *A timetable of the week is published below.*

**9am to 5pm, 12.30 lunch. Present each day: Dan Lee and Tom Desaille, UHI; Dugald Ross, SCT.**

<b>Wednesday, September 9</b>	<b>Excavation/geophysics starts at the site.</b>  <b>Volunteers: Ella Liley (Portree); Anthony and Moira Forsyth (Dunvegan)</b>
<b>Thursday, September 10</b>	<b>Excavation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Staffin Primary School visit 1.30pm to 3pm (P1-P7 both English and Gaelic medium classes)</b></li> </ul> <b>Volunteers: Heather Keith (Uig); Gordon and Wendy Higgins, Lillian MacInnes (Staffin), Anthony and Moira Forsyth.</b>
<b>Friday, September 11</b>	<b>Excavation and visits from two Kilmuir Primary School groups</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>9.45am – 12.15pm Kilmuir Gaelic medium class P4-7</b></li> <li>• <b>1pm to 2.45pm Kilmuir English Medium P3-P7</b></li> <li>• <b>Volunteers: Simon Gilkes, Gordon and Wendy Higgins (Staffin), Anthony and Moira Forsyth.</b></li> </ul>
<b>Saturday, September 12</b>	<b>Excavation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>10am to 4pm Community Open Day.</b></li> </ul> <b>Volunteers: Calum and Angus MacDonald (Staffin), Moira and Anthony Forsyth.</b>
<b>Sunday, September 13</b>	<b>No work carried out.</b>
<b>Monday, September 14</b>	<b>Volunteers: Wendy Higgins, Moira and Anthony Forsyth.</b>



## Promotion of Ceumannan and Staffin

Fo fòid na time received very welcome and heavy exposure in the traditional mainstream media after the press release was issued but also from various social media platforms and specialist archaeology/heritage outlets. Newspapers such as the *West Highland Free Press* (left) and *Press & Journal*, which sell around 8,000 and 50,000 copies respectively, carried prominent articles and images of the event. The *WHFP* published two articles, with the second story a front-page picture of the excavation. BBC Highland's online website carried the story while BBC Alba's Skye-based broadcaster Calum MacLean visited the site and interviewed the participants for *Radio nan Gaidheal* and the station's flagship news programme *An Là*. All of these

outlets have considerable reach, not just across the Highlands and islands, but throughout Scotland, with their social media presence also high profile.

Daily updates of the dig were written by Dan Lee and published on the SCT website. The updates were helpfully shared by the unaffiliated "Staffin Community" Facebook page, which has more than 2,400 likes from people all over the world. That in turn saw the stories shared by hugely popular Facebook pages run by the Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre and others. From the Staffin FB page there was positive feedback from Kilmuir and Staffin teachers Josie MacLeod and Marlene MacDonald, and parent Karen Campbell, who all enthused about the project, see below.



[Josie MacLeod](#)

[September 11 at 9:04pm](#) · **"Absolutely superb day taking part in archaeological dig in Staffin with Kilmuir PS. Mòran Taing Staffin Trust 🙌. It was really great - the kids were buzzing with excitement as they found lots of flint. It was great! I'm considering a career change"**

[Karen Campbell](#) **"Beth LOVED it - Thanks for letting kids be involved."**



The SCT development officer Hugh Ross used his Twitter and LinkedIn accounts to publicise the project heavily over the five days. Hugh's most popular tweet, below, earned 1,406 "impressions" across Twitter.

**"Jury still out on date of structure" - Latest on #Staffin #archaeology dig @UHIArchaeology <http://staffin-trust.co.uk/news> [pic.twitter.com/RqQKak8FX8](https://pic.twitter.com/RqQKak8FX8)**

An impression means that a tweet has been delivered to the Twitter stream of a particular account. Not everyone who receives a tweet will read it so it is considered a measure of potential impressions but in terms of reach it gives an idea of the overall exposure the Staffin project received.

Dan also used the UHI Archaeology Institute Twitter account (see below) to post updates and links to the SCT website which were retweeted (shared) by the popular Orkney College, Love Archaeology and Dig it 2015 accounts, which have more than 12,000 people receiving the updates combined. Archaeology and history website Culture 24 has more than 42,000 followers and also featured the Staffin project while Interface and The Scottish Funding Council also highlighted the dig on their social media accounts, which are also followed by several thousand people.



### [UHI Arch Inst @UHIArchaeology Sep 10](#)

Daily updates from [#staffin #skye](#) dig: Day 1 [http://staffin-trust.co.uk/staffin-archaeological-excavation-day-1-diary ...](http://staffin-trust.co.uk/staffin-archaeological-excavation-day-1-diary...) [@DigIt2015](#) [@orkneyjar](#) [@ThinkUHI](#) [@LoveArchaeology](#)

The top tweeted picture from the dig; above 12 retweets

14 favourites  
2,364 Impressions  
79 engagements

Positive Interaction with Twitter follower, below.

[Fiona England @FiBelinda20 Sep 16 @UHIArchaeology](#) *"Staffin is definitely one of my fav places in Skye! Also, love that it was place of An Corran, a Mesolithic Rockshelter! :)"*

## Impact

From the simple poster on a local bus shelter, on the gate to the Old Man of Stor path, to the WHFP front page and a tweet posted by UHI or SCT - there were a wide range of ways in which the message was conveyed. In terms of profile and reach the Staffin archaeological excavation made a huge impact across a range of different spectrums and certainly raised the community and SCT's profile. It helped drive traffic to the SCT website with a record 5,100 page views from more than 1,000 people who logged on. Economically, that could also help because of the Staffin businesses which are now advertised on the website.

In economic terms one of the reasons behind the site was to encourage people to visit the Staffin and Staffin, and ensure the area benefitted financially. A significant percentage of people who came to the excavation were tourists who relished the chance to experience an "event" as part of their trip to Staffin. That may have helped visitor spend in the local and wider Skye economy and would have also conveyed the message that Staffin was a destination where events and activities were held. The easy and relaxed manner in which the dig leaders Dan and Tom and Dugald welcomed people to the site, explained the motivation behind the dig and then placed it in the context of Staffin's heritage and landscape, was invaluable. It certainly added "value" to visitors' holiday experience in Staffin, and that is a factor in the repeat tourism market.

## Conclusion & Next Steps

Fo fòid na time was a success on several levels for the SCT - culturally, socially, economically and educationally. It was a fully inclusive heritage project which brought the community together over a five-day period. For SCT to help joint host an excavation in Staffin with a respected academic institution after a gap of more than 20 years was a major achievement.

The enthusiasm of the school children, *right*, was a highlight and considering the close quarters of the site, everybody worked well with each other and the regular volunteers certainly deserve acknowledgement for their hard work. It was very much a volunteer-run project and was a lively, relaxed site, with an open door policy.



Everything was getting fed back to the community via the daily SCT website updates or by telling local people face-to-face about the progress, finds etc. Once the full UHI report is published the SCT is looking forward to further discussions about future collaborative projects in Staffin.

The excavation raised the profile of Staffin as an exciting archaeological destination in the west of Scotland attracting national media attention and it promoted the district to the archaeological tourism market. With the impending UHI report on the finds and site, more detail and information about the site's past and Staffin will emerge which will enhance the understanding of the area and provide further content for Ceumannan, as SCT moves through its second phase. Significant academic research output will also be achieved.

SCT has taken a great interest in Orkney, where the UHI Archaeology Institute is headquartered, because of the islands' huge success in attracting the archaeological tourism market. More than 50 per cent of visitors to Orkney make it their destination based on their interest in the islands' archaeological sites. Independent analysis of the economic impact of archaeology work has concluded that the market is a significant point of growth.

Like Skye, tourism is the most valuable industry in the islands with £31 million spent in Orkney in 2013 - the huge potential for Staffin and the island's economy is evident.