



Scottish Pilgrim Routes Forum

Meeting held on 11th April 2013 at Paisley Abbey Church

Summary Report

A total of 19 representatives of the Forum membership met at the Peoples Palace rooms in Paisley Abbey Church and were warmly welcomed by Rev Prof David Atkinson as Chairman of the Forum. A further 11 apologies were received. After personal introductions, the morning session began with the following short presentations:

From Luss to Paisley – Nick Cooke, SPRF Secretary

Nick summarized key SPRF developments over the previous 6 months including the establishment of the agreed Forum membership structure, Management Committee business, work on the web site, the continuing focus on strategic pilgrim walking / cycling route projects, and building partnerships with Visit Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland and Historic Scotland. Nick said the need for capacity building presented the Forum with important challenges, but its public profile was increasing rapidly and Scottish Government Ministers were taking a personal interest in its work. In the coming months the Committee would focus its efforts on securing funding to develop practical ideas and resources for pilgrim route designation, interpretation and promotion in the interests of all Forum members.

Pilgrim route development across Scotland – work in progress:

- **Argyll Pilgrim Routes – Rev Dane Sherrard, Luss Parish Church.**

Dane reported on significant progress being made under the terms of a new partnership agreement between Luss Pilgrimage Centre and Argyll & Bute Council. This would support a new educational programme for schools focusing on conservation and pilgrimage heritage and provision of a educational resource room for schools visiting Luss. Journeys across Argyll under the theme 'In the Footsteps of the Celtic Saints' were now being identified, with input from local churches having an interest in the social and economic regeneration which these could bring to their communities. A special pilgrimage to Oban was planned for September to mark the 1450th anniversary of St Columba's arrival on Iona. The high profile of Luss as Scotland's first 'Green Pilgrimage City' continued, with the use of electric cars in the village now being planned. The second international Green Pilgrimage conference in July at Trondheim, organised by the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, would be followed by a UK sub-group meeting of ARC at Luss.

- **Arran Pilgrim Routes – David Pott, Sannox Christian Centre.**

David gave a very interesting account of his personal experience creating the newly established Two Saints Way as a waymarked long distance walking route linking Chester (St Werburgh) and Lichfield (St Chad) in England, in which he acted as project manager and team leader. Much of the route incorporated existing footpaths and bridleways, but issues of route branding and

signage were highly important and had taken up much of his time. The Two Saints Way was now constituted as a separate company limited by guarantee - see www.twosaintsaway.org.uk This project was David's last piece of work before he and his wife decided to move to the Isle of Arran in March and devote their energies to the creation of the Sannox Christian Centre on the site of a former Congregational church with an important evangelical history. The Centre had only recently joined the Forum but the group had identified two pilgrim walking routes on the island having strong historical links with the early Celtic church.

- **Iona to St Andrews Pilgrim Way – John Henderson, Walking Support.**

John began by commenting on his recent experience working with groups of Norwegian pilgrims walking the St Cuthbert's Way. He then gave an overview of current work in the past 5 months by members of the Forum working group in identifying a Pilgrim Way walking route covering 150 miles between Oban and St Andrews divided into 10 stages. The group had now identified numerous options based on existing core paths and LDRs linking historic pilgrimage locations. John had joined Calum Macfarlane-Barrow for 2 days to look at viable and non-viable hill walking options through more remote areas of Argyll. Wider path development and infrastructure issues had materialized elsewhere through the work of Geoff Hardman Carter and Andrew Donaldson. The use of the Fife Coastal Path from Abernethy via Newburgh to St Andrews was now a clear preference. John reported that Mull & Iona Community Trust were actively planning to carry out a feasibility study for an off-road footpath linking Fionnphort and Craignure on Mull, but this might not physically materialize until after 2014. Meanwhile, SNH had set up a working group and funding to carry out a similar study for an Oban – Tyndrum LDR via the Pass of Brander, and John was in a regular dialogue with SNH on this.

John confirmed that more ground research was needed in several parts of the Pilgrim Way route to enable each section to be categorized as core path/LDR/undefined, thus allowing key requirements like landowner consultation, waymarking and path maintenance to be identified in line with specific criteria for the final route designation. The WG would also review the historic pilgrimage literature on which to base a final decision on a recommended Iona – St Andrews Pilgrim Way route that also met the practical needs of a wide range of walkers and cyclists. Further liaison would take place with SNH, FCS, Scottish Land & Estates and relevant local Councils.

- **Fife Pilgrim Way – Roger Pickering, Forth Pilgrim / George MacQuarrie, Scotways**

Roger summarized significant progress in developing a consensual approach among key local partners to establish a designated Fife Pilgrim Way linking Culross and Dunfermline with St Andrews. A broad spectrum of groups and agencies, especially those with tourism interests, now wanted to see a defined route agreed with landowners and a full feasibility study completed for upgrading existing core paths etc. The good news was that the Central Scotland Green Network had just approved a £25K grant contribution to take this work forward. George then explained that Scotways would have a co-ordinating role for the feasibility study, in close partnership with FCCT and Fife Council who were also contributing matching support. With Neil Ramsay having just left the Scotways team, a new project officer would be recruited to complete this work by March 2014. An update would be given at the 'Scottish Pilgrimage' Gathering in September.



‘Paisley 850’ Pilgrimage Walks – Sylvia Jenks, Paisley Abbey

Sylvia explained how she and fellow members of the Abbey Church congregation had organised the current programme of monthly 1 day walks from Paisley to Whithorn to commemorate the 850th anniversary of the founding of the original Benedictine monastery in 1163. This idea was inspired by the celebrations in 2010 to mark the 1100th anniversary of Cluny Abbey in France, the original mother house of Paisley Abbey as the most northerly foundation in the Cluniac Order, built on the site of an earlier church of St Mirren. ‘Paisley 850’ is a pilgrimage experience open to everyone, encompassing all forms of transport, with each walk starting and finishing at a church hall and using existing footpaths and byways to connect famous abbeys, old churches and historic towns and villages. Sylvia commented on the poor condition of the signage and path conditions under foot on some stretches of the route that she had chosen. Many people had found the average 15 mile distance of each walk challenging, but the numbers taking part had grown to around 60 including members of other local churches. Each registered walker received a briefing pack and was given a completion ‘passport’ at the end of each day’s walk; qualified first aiders accompanied every group.

Sylvia’s talk was followed by a very interesting tour of the Abbey Church led by local volunteer guides and an excellent soup and sandwich lunch; both were much enjoyed by all and allowed everyone to network and share information.

‘The Perfect Match’ project fundraising workshop – Sheila Fraser, SCVO Rural Direct

Sheila introduced the workshop session by commenting that the Forum had a major advantage in working equally with public, private and voluntary sector organizations and bringing rural communities together – this was an ideal context for ‘making things happen’ on the ground. She added that the Forum’s work should score highly with funders in terms of promoting social ‘well being’ and informal lifelong learning, and the SPRF membership structure should encourage a broad basis of support at the local and personal level.

Everyone participated in a ‘dating profile’ exercise to demonstrate how finding people who enjoy doing specific tasks is key to organising volunteers with the right skills to run organizations. This was followed by a very useful group activity requiring a decision to be made by a board of Trustees on two different grant applications to a hypothetical grant making trust, leading to a discussion on the associated issues and information on relevant sources of third sector grant funding. The whole workshop session was much appreciated for its interest and relevance, with very positive feedback from several ‘seasoned’ fundraisers taking part.

Open Session

Forum members raised a variety of comments and points of information. Strong interest was shown in plans led by the Northumbria Community to mark the 500th anniversary of the battle of Flodden and the death of King James IV by leading a pilgrimage / 'prayer walk' of reconciliation between Edinburgh and Durham in September.

John H expressed his appreciation of the results achieved by individual fellow Forum members working away independently on sections of the Iona – St Andrews Pilgrim Way project, which he hoped was made clear from his report in the morning session.

Roger and Nick gave a briefing on current preparations for the 'Scottish Pilgrimage' Gathering to be held at The Vine Venue in Dunfermline on 27th September, led by Forth Pilgrim in association with SPRF and the Fife Tourism Partnership. This event would offer all Forum members an excellent platform to promote the work of their own organizations and individual pilgrim route projects, as well as raise SPRF's public profile, and if the 'shop window' format combined with the AGM proved successful it would be repeated in future years.

Summing up the day, the Chairman expressed collective thanks to Sylvia and all the Paisley Abbey team for their warm welcome and hospitality; to Nick for planning the day and making it happen; and to all other Committee colleagues for their sustained input to the Forum's overall progress. He said that SPRF has taken off, but it was important we all help to grow the network as it will be the numbers of Forum members that will be of particular interest to external funders and partners.

Attendance List:

- Rev Prof David Atkinson (Associate)
- Rev Dr Ian Bradley (Associate)
- Sally Cook (Paisley Abbey)
- Nick Cooke (CLEAR Services / ACTS – SCRG)
- Rev Lisa Eunson (Associate)
- Dr Brian Fraser (Scotland's Churches Trust)
- Sheila Fraser (SCVO – Rural Direct)
- John Graham (Scotland's Churches Trust)
- John Henderson (Walking Support)
- Sylvia Jenks (Paisley Abbey)
- Robbie Lennox (Luss Parish Church)
- George MacQuarrie (Scotways)
- Mike Palmer (Luss Parish Church)
- Shona Paterson (ACTS)
- Margaret Pedersen (SEC Home Mission Committee – St Aidan's, Morebattle)
- David Pott (Sannox Christian Centre, Isle of Arran)
- Roger Pickering (Forth Pilgrim)
- Rev Dane Sherrard (Luss Parish Church / Green Pilgrimage)
- Harry Sprange (ACTS – SCRG)