



Scottish Pilgrim Routes Forum

Forum Meeting held on 29th September 2016 at Craig Lodge House of Prayer, Dalmally, Argyll

Summary Report

A total of 14 delegates representing Full and Associate members of the Forum and guests based in Argyll met at Craig Lodge, some having enjoyed excellent hospitality at the Lodge the previous night. [See list of participants below.](#)

The SPRF Secretary, **Nick Cooke** warmly welcomed everyone to the meeting, explaining why SPRF felt it important to hold this first 'local' Forum meeting to focus on an area of Scotland with a historic and distinctive spiritual landscape and pilgrimage heritage. He said the meeting would focus both on strategic and local pilgrim walking route issues across Argyll, relating these to local churches and local communities. Nick referred to recent press coverage of the future Iona – St Andrews Pilgrim Way as the 'Caledonian Camino'.

The morning session began with two presentations:

'Introduction to Craig Lodge and St Conon's Pilgrim Way: Ruth Black & Calum Macfarlane-Barrow.

Ruth set the scene by saying that everything Craig Lodge has achieved has been rooted in pilgrimage. This began with her family's first visit to the shrine of Our Lady at Medjugorge and has continued over the years through the conversion of the Lodge from a hunting lodge and guest house into a House of Prayer, with an increasingly ecumenical role. It offers resident volunteers a 'spiritual gap year' integrated with the local village, which for many becomes a personal pilgrimage.

Calum then related the role of the Lodge to contemporary pilgrimage walking routes and described the purpose of the St Conon's Pilgrim Way route from Dalmally to Iona as complementary to, but separate from, the planned Coast-to-Coast Pilgrim Way linking Iona with St Andrews. He highlighted special features of the St Conon's Way, especially the logistical and physical challenges it poses, e.g. lack of accommodation, when crossing Mull between Caignure and Fionnphort and his recent experience with Ruth using the A849. To download a copy of the booklet, go to <http://www.craiglodge.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/St-Conans-Pilgrim-Way-Leaflet-Download.pdf>

Iona – St Andrews (Coast to Coast) Pilgrim Way: John Henderson

John reminded us that a Coast to Coast Pilgrim Way has been discussed for many years and is now a priority project for SNH within the current National Walking & Cycling Network action plan. In 2013 he and Calum had investigated a possible high level section via Glen Noe. In 2015, SNH had contracted Vyv Wood-Gee to produce a socio-economic study into a new off-road LDR across Mull; the current consensus was that it was hard to quantify the possible benefits this might bring to the local economy. Public bodies are under political pressure to connect rural communities via multi-purpose walking / cycling routes; in John's view the current feasibility studies commissioned by SNH, e.g. on the Oban –

Tyndrum section were useful but it was just as important to get more people trying out a number of alternative routes, e.g. between Bridge of Orchy and Dalmally or along the Three Saints Way between Killin and St Andrews, by taking advantage of Scotland's 'responsible countryside access' regime. In this context, the general walking public, not just 'pilgrims', were what mattered. John concluded with the observation that the work of local volunteer Steering Groups, as encouraged and supported by SPRF, could help bridge the gap between walkers and cyclists and demonstrate the effectiveness of a 'bottom-up' approach to LDR development.

During the plenary discussion, attention focused on the merits of 'braiding' routes to cater for cyclists and walkers as distinct user groups with different behavioural characteristics; this could be seen in practice along sections of the new John Muir Way.

After the interval, we heard several short presentations which all focused on local pilgrimage connections.

The Kintyre Way: Jonathan Sheldrick & Jim Duncan, Heart of Argyll Tourism Alliance

Jonathan described the recent development of the Kintyre Way LDR as a pilgrimage walking route, and also part of the 'St Columba's Way' pilgrim journey promoted by Scotland's Churches Trust, in the context of his own lifelong interest in the special spiritual landscape of Christianity in Argyll. The historic international connection of Columba with other parts of Europe attracted many visitors today. Connecting the 'missing link' of the Kintyre Way between Tarbert and Oban was part of HoATA's faith tourism agenda, which should cater for walkers just as much as cyclists and motorists. He proposed setting up a Steering Group to take this idea forward, with locations like the islands of Seil and Luing included in its scope.

Rev Cliff Acklam, Minister of Kilmartin Parish, supported Jonathan's proposal. He saw pilgrim routes in Argyll as bridges for people 'to cross open spaces' and a wonderful opportunity to provide much needed local accommodation, following the ancient tradition of Christian hospitality and outreach in the service of the wider community in keeping with Argyll's reputation as a 'place of healing'. In Cliff's view, our aim should be 'to make pilgrims out of tourists'.

Inveraray Parish Church: Rev Roderick Campbell

Roderick related his long standing personal interest in walking and his recent arrival in Argyll to the role of pilgrimage in the context of enabling the Church of Scotland to respond to the acute shortage of clergy, with 10 vacancies in the Presbytery currently amounting to one third of the parishes. In his brief time as Minister, he had identified four very different communities within the current Inveraray congregation. Although the 'invisible church' accounted for many people who did not attend services, nevertheless the church was still regarded as a place of spiritual significance to the wider community. In this context, plans to convert the half of the building used as a church hall into pilgrim hostel accommodation – especially if this was on the route of an extended Kintyre Way walking route - would breathe new life into the town. Roderick felt certain that similar opportunities existed in other locations.

The 'Faith in Cowal' project: Dr Gilbert Markus

Gilbert began by describing the role of the Augusta Lamont Bequest in enabling his project to be set up by the Church of Scotland, covering the mapping of demographic change in the Cowal area and its impact on falling church congregations across Argyll. Based on surveys of UK religious affiliation between 1983 and 2009, current Church of Scotland data indicated a 50% fall in local Church membership in the past 10 years. The local population was ageing and declining at the same time. Church buildings were being sold off and Gilbert felt it was vital that the buildings that still remain, such as at Sandbank, Kilbride and Inverchaolain, should speak to ordinary people in the community if they are to survive. This represents an opportunity to cater for pilgrims. It was time for the Church of Scotland to overturn its historic Calvinist hostility to pilgrimage and rediscover its powerful message by enabling churches to create spaces for faith to flourish in new ways. Using some excellent slides, Gilbert demonstrated there are important historic buildings and sites, e.g. Kilfinnan, Ardfaraig and Lochgoilhead, where this could happen. Cowal is a landscape filled with saints' place name associations ('Kil') that link today's world with ancient stories about Christian vocation that are still relevant in the C21st. Why not create a 'St Munnu's Way' walking route with a starting point / pilgrim hostel at Kilmun and linking up with Kilmodan and Kilfinnan?

More details of these places and their pilgrimage connections can be found on <http://www.faithincowal.org/> which also gives information about specific places and provides blog space. Gilbert hoped that a series of printed leaflets could be produced for individual locations, as well as a generic leaflet (partly written) on the theme of 'Tempting Tangents' for faith tourists in Cowal.

This led to a wider discussion about the future reorganization of churches in Argyll. The CofS may be at the point where it has no choice but to move away from traditional hierarchies such as Presbyteries to a more diffuse and organic network of individual churches, leading to a redefinition of the parish based on older structures and ecumenical linkages. The church at Kilmun has a current congregation of 9 people, but would be admirably suitable as a Christian heritage centre cum pilgrim hostel run by a local warden.

Further discussion prompted by Gilbert's presentation focused on creating a potential 'Cowal Pilgrim Way' to connect (on a north – south axis) Lochgoilhead, Kilmun, Kilmodan (Glendaruel) and Colintraive and including sections of the 'West Island Way' via Kilbride and Kilgarth on the Isle of Bute. In time, this route could be extended northwards from Lochgoilhead to connect with Strachur, Inveraray and Dalmally.

Pilgrimage and Spiritual Outreach: Arno Bremer, YWAM Ignite, Oban

Arno explained how the international Youth With A Mission organization had decided to establish a residential centre at Glencruitten House outside Oban to support its mission - centred vision of working with 'pilgrim seekers', building on the town's role as a travel hub connected with Iona. YWAM provides skills training for young people and the House, opened in 2015, is run as a community of 14 staff and volunteers. The team is currently evaluating long term options for developing its mission activities in the area. In Arno's opinion, plans to open up local pilgrimage walking routes and find new roles for church buildings across Argyll would help YWAM to take people outside their 'comfort zones' to experience something distinctive and different as outdoor pilgrims. Glencruitten House is located on the St Conon's

Pilgrim Way and offers scope for offering Christian fellowship based on historic traditions of welcoming and talking to people using the route. YWAM currently has working links with 8 local churches and recently hosted a local Eco-Congregation meeting at the House; it has a walled garden on the adjoining estate. For more information, see <http://www.ywamscotland.org/oban/>

Plenary Discussion

Donald Hardie, Luss Parish Church commented on the discussions from the perspective of the Luss Pilgrimage Centre set up very successfully by Rev Dr Dane Sherrard as former Minister. As an Elder at the Church, Donald and others were currently looking at pilgrimage issues, including the use of walking routes in Luss village, as a source of new ideas on connecting their church to new audiences. He reminded us that the Parish Church had a long and distinguished history and owned a copy of the first Gaelic translation of the Bible.

John Henderson, Walking Support, pointed out that although the Kintyre Way had not originally been established as a Pilgrim Way LDR it was now already being used linked to the Cowal Way as such by some of his clients. This underlined the clear opportunity to use other existing LDR footpaths in Argyll as pilgrim routes.

We were reminded of wider connections in this discussion. Under the Roman Empire the original meaning of the word 'peregrinus' denoted a foreigner or 'one from abroad' who lived outside civilized society or the comfort zone of most people. Relating this to the contemporary debate about the role of immigrants in UK society represents a challenge to us all and reminds us that pilgrimage today is open to everyone, irrespective of their country of birth or faith. At another level, the huge popularity of the *camino* to Santiago de Compostella in northern Spain highlights the opportunity here in Scotland to re-create the role of 'hospitallers' as providers and managers of overnight pilgrim hostel accommodation, and to make this a distinguishing feature that sets them apart from other walking routes.

Further Action

On a show of hands, it was agreed that SPRF should set up a Steering Group of those interested in considering further the options for developing Pilgrim Way walking routes in Argyll. NC and JH would take this forward in the first instance. It was possible that this might be done by initially establishing an Argyll Steering Group under the auspices of the Coast to Coast Pilgrim Way although its geographic remit would be in line with the day's discussions.

After an excellent soup and sandwich lunch provided by the Craig Lodge team, participants enjoyed a vigorous walk along the Way of the Cross up the hill behind the Lodge. From the summit viewpoint, we took inspiration from the spectacular vistas looking west over Loch Awe towards Cruachan and the surrounding hills.

Nick Cooke Secretary
November 2016

Attendance List:

Full Members:

- CLEAR Services (Nick Cooke) **(Secretary)**
- Craig Lodge House of Prayer (Calum Macfarlane-Barrow, Ruth Black)
- Heart of Argyll Tourism Alliance (Jonathan Sheldrick, Jim Duncan)
- Luss Parish Church (Donald Hardie)
- Walking Support (John Henderson) **(Treasurer)**
- Way of St Andrews (Hugh Lockhart)
- YWAM Ignite (Arno Bremer)

Associate Members:

- David Langworth
- Dr Gilbert Markus

Visitors:

- Rev Roderick Campbell (Inverary Parish Church)
- Rev Cliff Acklam (Kilmartin Parish Church)
- Andreas Woolf (BBC Alba)

Apologies: Very Rev Dr Ian Bradley

NC/ 30.11.16



Forum members and guest at Craig Lodge



At the summit of the Way of the Cross.