



## Scottish Pilgrim Routes Forum

Meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2018 at Luss Parish Church, Argyll

### Summary Report

A total of 28 delegates representing Full and Associate members of the Forum and visitors met at Luss Parish Church. A total of 24 apologies were received. See attendance list below

The SPRF Chairman, **Very Rev Sheilagh Kesting** warmly welcomed everyone to the meeting, in particular Bridget Jones from Scottish Natural Heritage and all members attending a Forum meeting for the first time. Unfortunately, Guy Hayward of the British Pilgrimage Trust was prevented from attending by disruptions to flights from London.

#### Pilgrimage Developments in Argyll

**Donald Hardie** and **Mike Palmer** welcomed everyone to Luss and provided a brief introduction to the long history of the church dating back to the martyrdom of St Kessog in 520 AD at the hands of local druids. **David Pollard** provided additional information about the linked church at Arrochar. A number of local walking routes are under development or discussion, and both churches are supporting these as pilgrim routes, even if they are not yet designated as such. A link between Arrochar, Tarbet and Portavadie is one suggestion; another is Arrochar to Luss, Tarbet and Inversnaid, then north and west to Oban. Developments at Luss have been supported by volunteer work, with young people from around the world using the pilgrimage centre next to the church created by the former minister, Rev Dane Sherrard. Luss was recognised globally as one of the inter-faith Green Pilgrimage Network 'cities' represented at the inaugural GPN conference at Assisi, Italy.

**Jonathan Sheldrick**, Heart of Argyll Tourism Alliance, and convenor of the SPRF Argyll Steering Group, looked at the wider opportunities to create an Argyll network of pilgrim routes, e.g. from Kintyre to Oban, Lismore and Iona, all of which have a rich medieval Christian heritage. The 'Faith in Cowal' project showed the huge potential for local historic churches to play a new community-focused role; 50% of Argyll parishes have vacancies for Ministers and the entire population of Argyll only numbers 90,000. Pilgrimage by boat is a theme that deserved to be explored more – it is an excellent and traditional way to explore the ancient sacred sites of Argyll and offers the opportunity to link to Ireland. There is a great need for SPRF to co-ordinate local effort to develop and promote pilgrim routes. Kenny Wilson, youth leader for CoS in Argyll is taking a small group of young people from Tarbert, Loch Fyne to Glencruiten (Oban) in June.

#### Current SPRF developments

**Nick Cooke** updated the meeting on developments across Scotland. He reminded us that the Forum is still a young initiative, only started in 2012, but now has over 75 organisations and individuals in membership; SPRF is a SCIO with 6 trustees. Members of the Forum are developing individual priority Pilgrim Way routes around Scotland, in all cases working through local volunteer Steering Groups. SPRF is looking to build its capacity to achieve the goals set out in its Strategic Plan to 2021. This year, the Forum is piloting a programme of one day walks to involve members and local communities and

raise public awareness. A key priority is to establish a 'Scottish Pilgrim Ways' accreditation scheme to recognise real, not virtual, routes that are graded to encourage high standards of route design and interpretation; SPRF hopes that routes of the highest standard will achieve 'Scotland's Great Trails' branding and status. Once established, usage by walkers and cyclists on accredited routes will be of interest to local authorities and Visit Scotland. A parallel can be drawn with the development of the Eco-Congregation scheme for church congregations.

Nick summarised SPRF's growing ecumenical partnership with Scottish churches, marked in particular by the Deliverance on Pilgrimage approved by the 2017 General Assembly which seeks to rehabilitate pilgrimage in the Church of Scotland – a far cry from the Act of the Scottish Parliament in 1581 which banned the practice. International links are also increasing, and SPRF is currently a partner in a research funding bid to the EU's HERA programme looking at pilgrimage as a growing aspect of cultural heritage in Norway, Estonia, Ireland and Scotland; the historic Irish connection with Scotland through Celtic Christianity is becoming increasingly significant through the Columba Trail initiative.

***This presentation will be on the SPRF website.***

### **Lunch**

A soup and cottage pie lunch was kindly provided by May and the volunteer team of Luss Church and enjoyed by all. Banners and other information brought by member organisations were also on display.

The afternoon session began with four updates on specific Pilgrim Way projects:

#### **Fife Pilgrim Way: Ed Heather – Hayes**

The Way is being developed by a partnership led by the Fife Coast & Countryside Trust. The route creates a new walking route through the middle of Fife using old trails to link settlements together. The route is nearly complete on the ground. The route crosses one coalmine restoration project that has not been finalised causing some delay to route completion. Waymarker posts are being installed and when completed the route will be walkable hopefully by the end of May 2018, with a formal opening in spring 2019. There are seven 'gateways' to the route where there will be interpretation boards and travel information; other information resources are being developed, including a website and possibly an app. See [http://fifecoastandcountrysidetrust.co.uk/Fife-Pilgrim-Way\\_68.html](http://fifecoastandcountrysidetrust.co.uk/Fife-Pilgrim-Way_68.html)

Development funding to cover project costs of over £650,000 has been raised by the FCCT project team from Heritage Lottery Fund (over £300,000) and a variety of other sources. Future route management will involve ongoing costs of route maintenance, publicity, community liaison, volunteer development. The South West Coast Path in England runs a business membership scheme which is a potential model the FPW would like to follow, if the critical mass can be achieved.

***The current Fife Pilgrim Way presentation will be on the SPRF website.***

#### **Forth to Farne Way: Jimmy McGuinness**

Jimmy explained the evolution of the route from discussions in 2014 initiated by Rev Joanne Evans Boiten, recently retired Minister of Whitekirk & Athelstaneford in East Lothian, to its launch last October as a long- distance 72- mile route between North Berwick and Lindisfarne. This constitutes a

major section of the historic coastal pilgrimage route from Durham to St. Andrews. The route largely follows existing core paths including parts of the John Muir Way and Berwickshire Coastal Path. Volunteer members of the Steering Group have produced and published a leaflet and pilgrimage companion booklet, partly funded by local sponsorship. A logo for the route has been designed, but agreements and funding for waymarker posts have still to be confirmed. See <http://www.forthtofarne.org/>

### **Whithorn Way: John Henderson (Walking Support)**

The WW is 143 miles long in 12 sections. The celebration of the 850<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Paisley Abbey in 2013 led to the route being identified and walked in sections by members of the congregation. This led to a Steering Group being set up to make the route permanent, sharing it more widely and helping to regenerate local communities along the route. The Steering Group is driving the development process, holding meetings in towns and villages along the entire route to raise public awareness and involvement.

The route incorporates the Ayrshire Coastal Path and other core paths; route sharing such as this makes a lot of sense in establishing and maintaining the route. The Whithorn Way website provides information on each section at a nominal charge payable via Paypal to raise funds which are ring-fenced to cover development costs. The main objective this year is to grow partnerships with local authority access officers, businesses and local churches, as well as to enhance the route design and add more off-road sections where possible. See <http://whithornway.org/>

### **Iona - St. Andrews and the Three Saints Way: John Henderson (Walking Support)**

There has been a long-standing ambition to develop this coast to coast Pilgrim Way of 190 miles across Scotland, now recognised as a priority project under the National Walking & Cycling Network Action Plan led by SNH. To help deliver this, a major section of the route through Perthshire, named the Three Saints Way (after Saints Kessog, Serf and Fillan) has been actively developed over the past 3 years going from Killian via Strathearn and Abernethy to the Tay estuary to meet the existing Fife Coastal Path leading to St Andrews – a total length of 100 miles in itself. The Steering Group has commissioned scoping studies which have identified an optimum route subject to confirmation with landowners and waymarking. See <http://threesaintsaway.org/index.html>

The 90 miles west of Killin, in particular the cross-Mull section, remain more challenging to develop because of the terrain, lack of existing footpaths and sparse settlements. The St Conan's Pilgrim Way from Dalmally to Iona, a local initiative recently started by Craig Lodge, has not yet been incorporated into the current SNH / local authority route planning process.

### **Plenary Discussion Points:**

- All four afternoon presentations showed that creating an effective Steering Group is essential to any Pilgrim Way route development project, but energy and enthusiasm can be difficult to maintain, and the skills required for the task change at different stages of the development process.
- There is real need for SPRF to organise an annual training workshop open to volunteers from all Steering Groups. A closed Facebook group would also be a very useful aid to communication between Steering Groups.

- Close dialogue with local Councils, especially access officers, as well as local communities and landowners is essential. The Whithorn Way Steering Group has recently set up a sub-committee to engage with others with an agreed 'message' and will be happy to share its experience with other Steering Groups; other sub-groups could be set up for similar specific purposes. Part of the role of Steering Groups should be to enable pilgrim walkers and cyclists to meet and feel part of local communities and help these provide new facilities.
- Early discussion with land owners is essential to avoid friction or hostility, and concerns such as gates left open, damage to fences, accidents and public liability have to be addressed.
- The Whithorn Way website provides a very good template; the facility to invite donations in return for downloadable information on the route helps to put real value on a good walking experience.
- Scotways have a small grants scheme open to member organisations for community based multi-use path works including Pilgrim Ways – see <https://www.scotways.com/news/511-scotways-small-grant-scheme>. Scotways also have some 100 volunteer members who could help in such projects.
- A possible new long-distance walking route themed around the life and journeys of St Mungo, linking Glasgow Cathedral with Hoddam near Annan, is under discussion.

Concluding the formal sessions of the meeting, Sheilagh Kesting warmly thanked everyone in the Luss Parish Church team for their hard work and all the speakers for their contribution to the proceedings. After a cup of tea, members enjoyed a guided walk on the Glebe Field pilgrimage trail led by Mike Palmer, which was much appreciated.

### **Attendance: Full Members**

Arrochar Parish Church (David Pollard)  
 Church of Scotland – Church & Society Council (Adrian Shaw)  
 CLEAR Services (Nick Cooke) **(Secretary)**  
 Fife Coast & Countryside Trust (Ed Heather-Hayes)  
 Finn's Place (Ruth Forsythe)  
 Heart of Argyll Tourism Alliance (Jonathan Sheldrick, Jim Duncan)  
 Holy Socks (Margaret Wyllie)  
 Luss Parish Church (Donald Hardie, Mike Palmer)  
 Paisley Abbey (Sylvia Jenks, Sally Cook)  
 Scotways (Karen Inkster)  
 St Mirin's Pilgrims (Martin Bonnar, Gerry & Pat Murdoch)  
 Walking Support (John Henderson) **(Treasurer)**  
 Whitekirk & Tynningham Parish Church (Jimmy McGuinness)  
 Whithorn Trust (Rev Alex Currie)  
 YWAM Unite (Arno Bremer)

### **Associate Members:**

Very Rev Dr Sheilagh Kesting **(Chair)**  
 Ken Spittal  
 David Macdonald  
 Kenneth McTaggart  
 Rena Simpson

### **Visitors:**

Neil Gaunt  
 Bill Jack  
 Bridget Jones – Scottish Natural Heritage  
 Duncan MacIntyre

**Apologies:**

ACTS (Ian Boa); ACTS – Scottish Churches Rural Group (Rev David Atkinson, Harry Sprange); Auchterderran Kinglassie Parish Church (Rosemary Wallace); Church of Scotland – Church & Society Council (Marjorie Paton); Comrie Croft (Andrew Donaldson); Confraternity of St James (Arthur Chapman); Discover Dunfermline Tours (Jack Pryde); Dunfermline Heritage Community Projects (Clive and Yvonne Willcocks; Fife Pilgrim (Roger Pickering); St Cuthbert's Coffee Stop ( Rev Margaret Pedersen); Scotland's Churches Trust (John Graham); Strathearn Churches (Rev Paddy Allen); Way of St Andrews (Hugh Lockhart); Dr Marion Bowman; Very Rev Dr Ian Bradley; Gilbert Markus; Sr Margaret Anne Minards; Calum MacKellar; Sarah Pickles; Rev Dane Sherrard; Helen Terwey; Lord David Wilson of Tillyorn.

24.4.18