NEWSLETTER 32

www.acfabaseline.info November 2011

A week after the AGM and into winter now. The temperature has dropped and it's less tempting to be outside in the garden, and easier to sit at the computer. Just as well, since there's lots to do. In particular this newsletter which I hope you will agree has the ACFA character stamped on it. We have our fingers in many pies, not all mud ones.

The AGM was well attended, the photo competition came to life and we had a lively discussion about our future. You'll find details of all these below, as well as articles on runes, kelp kilns and the Paisley Abbey Drain. What more do you want? Let me know. Deadline for the next edition is end of January 2012.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year

WR

2011 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - IN BRIEF

Sue Hothersall and Ian Marshall step down from the Committee and were thanked for all their work on behalf of ACFA. The new Committee will be: Carol Primrose (Chair), Janie Munro (Secretary), Ewan Smith (Treasurer). Committee Members : Alan Thomson, Dugie McInnes, Sue Hunter.

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The Treasurer reported that the late Bruce Henry generously bequeathed to ACFA 4% of his estate, once it is wound up.

Two second year students on the CFA course have joined as Associate Members.

Lionel Masters updated the meeting about the CFA course. While DACE has survived, it is no longer an academic department in its own right and the future of CFA beyond this year remains uncertain, despite being described as “a jewel in DACE's crown”. However, if the CFA course continues, there may be scope for ACFA to be more involved in organising the field-work training. ACFA members (Ian Marshall, Wendy Raine and Bob Robertson) once again helped out over summer with the practical field-work and gave the students the benefit of their wisdom.
News from CFA suggests that the course is going smoothly and the morale of the 13 students is high.

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The redoubtable Macdonald / Wood quartet is planning a survey at Braes on the Isle of Skye 19-23 March 2012. Great things are promised – no, not the souterrain, possible stone circle or possible hitherto unrecorded chambered cairn - the sites are basically *by the roadside*. Accommodation is in Sligachan Hotel. Get in touch with Logistics Officer A Macdonald if interested.
Also advance notice from Anne of a pre-windfarm survey on the Rosneath Peninsula.

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Dugie McInnes is planning another 2 day survey at Glen Lochay in April 2012 to re-visit Tirai (remember Tirai?) to do EDM and generally bring the earlier survey up to the high standard of subsequent Glen Lochay surveys. Contact Dugie if interested. Further details at the Feb meeting.

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Wendy Raine reported on the Rona survey over the last two seasons, accompanied by photographs showing suspiciously blue skies. Good progress has been made with the accessible sites but the typical terrain is very rough with brambles and other troublesome vegetation which is going to limit the final extent of the survey. The Dry Harbour survey is now complete but any further surveys will need a vigorous volunteer to direct it. Any offers? NB Next time you are in Portree, if you are offered a landrover, from Rona, only one careful owner, strangely low mileage, at a very reasonable price – just walk away!

* * *

and finally, the 2011 ACFA Photographic Competition. Despite premature rumours of its demise, a late flurry of entries brought a range of interesting and entertaining photographs with more of an international flavour than usual. The overall winner was Fred Hay (again). Congratulations to Fred, pictured below receiving the quaich from Sue Hothersall, retiring Chair of ACFA. If he wins it a third time does he get to keep it? The web-site will show all the winning entries in due course.

EB

THE DISCUSSION CONTINUES

Notes from the AGM discussion on the way forward for ACFA

Prompted in part by the recent debate and uncertainties about the future of the CFA course, the Committee has been discussing the implications for ACFA. Membership numbers and our overall age profile are central issues, but other changes such as in the funding of surveys will also affect us in the future. There is also the key matter of what our members actually want from ACFA.
Although there is no immediate crisis, the Committee decided that it was time to begin to address these matters. An hour at the recent AGM was set aside for this. Alan Thompson was asked to prepare and present a brief summary of the issues as understood by the Committee, and to lead a discussion.

Three linked questions were posed:

- Do we want to do more/same/fewer surveys?
- How important is the 'social' dimension?
- Should we be doing more to promote field archaeology and education?

The first question is the most challenging and prompted the most debate. A clear and perhaps unsurprising message emerged - doing field surveys is the main reason for the existence of ACFA. The central importance of Survey Directors, and of a flow of new members wishing to be involved in field work was clear. The means by which suitable new members and potential Survey Directors would be attracted or trained was debated but not resolved. The 'social' dimension was felt to be about right, and only very briefly discussed. As regards promoting field archaeology, it was felt that the focus should be on actions which may bring new members into ACFA.

Committee members now take back these and other inputs from members to a committee meeting on 23 November with a view to developing some specific proposals and actions.

Alan Thomson

THE KELP INDUSTRY AND ITS ARCHAEOLOGY

In the 18th century a new industry appeared in western and northern Scotland: the burning of seaweed to make an alkaline product (kelp) which was used to bleach linen and to assist in the manufacture of glass and soap. First introduced in the Scilly Isles in the 1680s, it was taken up in Ireland on a large scale and from there brought to Scotland; by the 1760s it was practised from Kintyre to Orkney. Its importance was due to two factors: a growing demand for chemicals to be produced on an industrial scale, and the loss of the main alternative source – Spanish barilla, the ash residue from the glasswort plant – during the Napoleonic Wars. With a sharp price rise from £3-4 to over £20 per ton, landlords quickly realised that they had a valuable resource, and plenty of cheap labour to turn it into cash.

A good supply of weed – either Laminaria (kelp) which grows in deeper water, or Fucus (wrack) and Ascophyllum from the intertidal zone - and flat grassy ground to dry it on, are the basic

requirements for kelp production. Thus Skye was never a major producer, while South Uist and Tiree were ideal.

Gathering, drying and burning kelp was arduous, dirty and time-consuming. The weed was burnt in shallow stone-lined pits (kelp kilns), in a long process which required many hours of careful attention, and resulted in a kind of molten slag. When cooled, this was broken into lumps and stored until it could be collected by ship and transported to industrial centres in Edinburgh, Bristol or Liverpool.

Kelp-burning photographed by Erskine Beveridge in Tiree

For landlords, the boom years of the kelp industry, from the 1780s into the early 19th century, were massively profitable. Lord Macdonald made £20,000 a year from kelp, mainly from his North Uist estate, and for almost every estate in the north-west Highlands kelp was an important source of revenue, often outstripping the income from rentals. Many landlords encouraged or compelled tenants to move to the coast, subdividing larger runrig farms into small crofts which could not support a tenant unless he also worked at kelp production. Huge surges in population resulted. In South Uist the population rose by 211% between 1755 and 1831.

Unsurprisingly the tenantry did not get rich on kelp. Even when kelp was fetching £20 per ton, Hebridean kelpers' wages averaged only £2 per ton. More damagingly, the kelp work was done at the expense of agriculture, taking place precisely at the time of year when labour was needed for tilling, planting and harvesting. Contemporary accounts tell of kelp workers living largely on shellfish, partly because they were often collecting weed far from their homes, and partly because the work was done at the worst time of year for food, between the end of the previous year's supply and the current year's harvest. A further ill-effect was that kelp was no longer being used, as formerly, to manure the fields.

By now dependent on the inflated price of a single commodity, and neglecting its traditional sources of income from cattle and fishing, the Hebridean economy in the early 19th century was heading for a crash, and with the end of the Napoleonic Wars it duly came. High duties on foreign alkali were abolished, and new processes for making alkali from salt were being developed. By December 1827 the best grades of kelp were fetching a mere £3 per ton. A string of Hebridean landlords went to the wall in the second quarter of the 19th century. Kelp production, particularly of the better quality, continued for some time, in places into the 20th century, but the boom was over.

What are the archaeological traces of this industry, which in its heyday employed 10,000 families in the west of Scotland? The most obvious evidence is in the form of kelp-kilns, stone-lined trenches on level ground near the shore where weed is abundant.

Generally these are 3 to 6 metres long and around 0.6m wide. Some places, particularly Orkney, have round kilns. Normally they are in groups, and sometimes there are also kelp walls, lengths of low stone wall on which weed was spread to dry. Small rectangular bothies, built of stone and turf, provided shelter for kelp workers.

Kelp kiln and kelp walls, Traigh Bhi, Tiree.

This South Uist group is remarkable for having been photographed while still in use, and later planned and excavated by a team from Sheffield University.

Fig 33. Kelp-makers huts at Rubha Ardvule, Borenish. © St Andrews University Library (Valentine Collection, JV – 65245).

In Northern Ireland the kelp industry has been well researched and is the subject of several academic papers. Here there are examples of large stone store houses for kelp, but I do not know of any in Scotland. Kelp irons, long-handled hooks for turning and breaking up the weed, were still in use in the 20th century (see Isobel Grant, 'Highland Folk Ways'), and one such was found during excavation on the Shiant Isles, off Lewis. And shell heaps on isolated islands in kelping areas may well be the remains of the wretched diet of kelp workers.

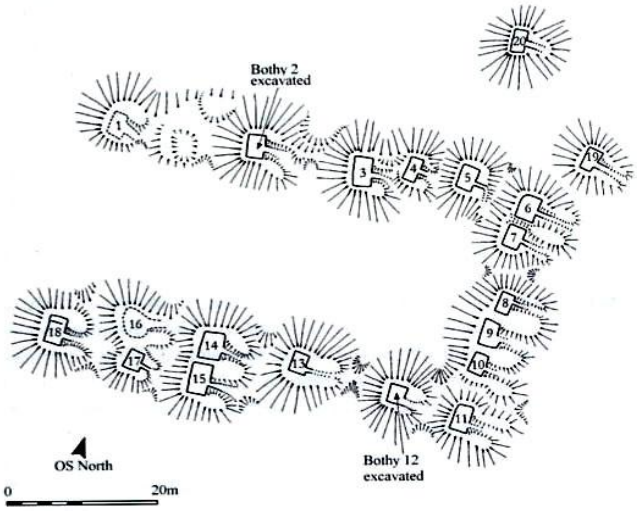
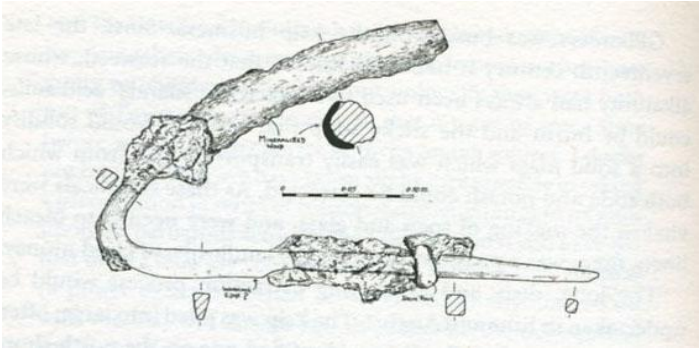


Fig 34. Rubha Ardvule: survey.

Ardvule Survey : Sheffield University

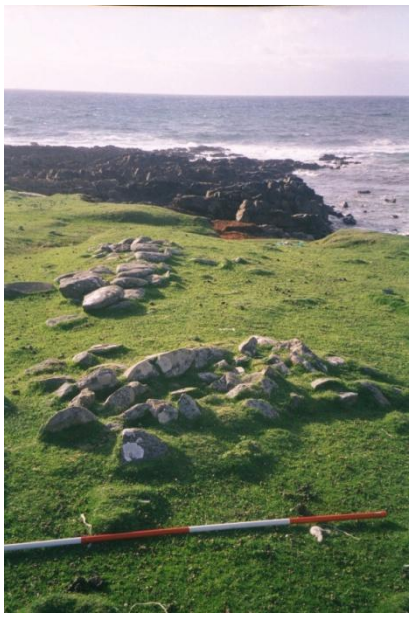


Kelp iron excavated on the Shiant Isles

*(From **Sea Room** by Adam Nicholson)*

Until recently only a few enthusiasts were able to recognise the traces of kelp manufacture, but more examples are being recognised and recorded. The number of kelp kiln sites listed in Canmore rose from 39 to 84 between 2009 and 2010. The Coastal Zone Assessment Survey carried out by the SCAPE Trust has led to the identification of many additional sites, and an internet search now produces quite a lot of information about the industry. Orkney in particular seems to take pride in its kelp history and shows pictures of kelp kilns in its tourist literature.

Once you are alert to the possibility of seeing kelping sites, you will often find them quite readily. These examples of kilns and bothies at Galson, N W Lewis were easily spotted by a visiting group even though there was no local knowledge of them. I still haven't found any on Bute though……



Sue Hothersall

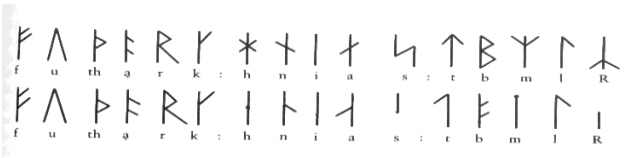
WHAT'S IN A NAME?

A friend of mine, interested in archaeology, looked up ACFA on the internet. She found the right site but found a few others as well:

American Cat Fanciers Association
Association Canadienne-Française de l'Alberta
American Cash Flow Association
Asian Committee for Future Accelerators
Association of Consulting Foresters of Australia
Army Cadet Force Association
Arab Children Friends Association
Association of Cystic Fibrosis Adults
A Call for Accountability
Allegheny County Fire Academy (Pennsylvania, USA
Atlanta Camaro and Firebird Association
Arts and Cultural Foundation of Antioch
American Center for Artists
American College Funding Association
Accelerated Co-Financing Scheme for Africa (Japanese assistance project)
Anti-Chaff Frequency Agile
Advanced Complementary Metal Oxide Semiconductor (CMOS) Frame Aligner (electrical engineering)
Australian Cane Farmers Federation
Associación Colombiana de Falcultades de Arquitectura
Alabama Coastal Fisherman's Association

Sue Bryson

OBAN RUNES



Common or Danish runes above: Swedo-Norwegian runes below

Having sailed on the west coast of Scotland over the years, I chose to use this experience for a Scottish Cultural Studies project for UHI, ambitiously titled "Sailing, Sites and Sagas: a look at evidence of Scandinavian activity along the sea routes of Argyll". It was inspired by some previously unrecorded runic type markings on a cliff face at Dunollie in Oban Bay. They are shown below. They measure about 2cm x 12cm. but are partly covered with lichen. I made out some letters, framing lines and a chevron type pattern. What do readers think? I am told framing lines are not associated with graffiti on rock faces but more likely on formal writing on memorials. The rock is conglomerate but the writer has chosen a smooth bit.

Few runes have been found in Argyll and the Southern Hebrides. Three are on Christian grave stones. The Kilbar Cross slab on Barra reads '*After Thorgerd, Steinar's daughter, this cross was raised*'. Inscribed on an Iona grave slab with Irish type interlace is *'Kali son of olvir laid this stone over Fugl his brother* and a fragment of a cross shaft with a smith, a boat and weapons (Fisher 2001). A third stone on Inchmarnock, Bute says '*Krus:þine:til:kuþ*e*** this cross and ends with a personal name '*Guthleif 'r*.

Looking south down the Sound of Kerrera from the site

There is a Celtic name inscribed in runes on the Hunterston brooch '*Melbrigda owns brooch',* showing that the owner, who has a Celtic sounding name, had knowledge of runes.

On St Molaise's cave wall on Holy Island, Arran, there are incised crosses and runes of personal names, some possibly associated with King Haakon's expedition to the Clyde in 1263. One reads '*Vigleikr stallari reist, Vigleikr: the marshal carved*'. Vigleikr is thought to have been one of the leaders of Haakon's expedition

The runes I was shown on Dunollie cliffs appeared to me superficially similar to Fisher's illustration of those in St Molaise's cave, mentioned above. It would have been a neat solution since King Haakon visited Kerrera in 1263 before and after the Battle of Largs. He was to meet Ewen MacDougall of Lorn, King of the Isles, known as King John in the sagas[1] who was in a difficult position, holding his island lands under Norwegian suzerainty and his mainland possessions under the King of Scotland. Unfortunately a letter **S** appears to belong to the Common or Danish futhark used in an earlier period, and not the Norse lettering I would have expected. However Page (1998) notes that Manx runes are strongly influenced by the common or normal Danish types naming the **S** form. I made out an **S M** and **N** (with a bit of imagination). A friar by the name of Simon was ill and died at some point on Haakon's expedition whilst sailing south to the Battle of Largs –a coincidence perhaps! He was buried at Saddle, Kintyre.

The view from the site overlooking the north entrance of Oban Bay, and out west to the Sound of Mull

Magnus of Man was on this expedition supporting Haakon. A possible Manx link is interesting with some MacDougall ancestors being Sea kings of the Western Isles that included the Isle of Man. Scandinavian influence can also be seen in Manx, Irish and Hebridean sculpture. A certain Gautr who claims to have made the Manx crosses might have come from Coll, a fairly short sea journey from Oban; *Gautr made this and all in Man* was incised in runes on a cross at Kirk Michael. *Gautr made me, son of Bjorn of Kollr* is inscribed on another cross (Page1998). Perhaps a Manx man carved runes at Dunollie in memory of the good friar in archaic writing, or was it someone much earlier? Who knows!

Whoever incised the marks on cliffs at Dunollie had some knowledge of runes and chose a site that overlooked the seaways. It is a good lookout for the two approaches into Oban bay. However the carvings may well be modern. A nearby tree with initials carved on the trunk is a timely reminder of jumping to conclusions. Knowledgeable folk were not impressed with my photographs although I think no expert has been up to take a closer look. Books on runes can readily be found. The wisdom of the staves have been associated with fortune telling, magic and symbolism so a sceptical view is probably the right one but it got me started looking for Scandinavian evidence for my project.

Note

1. Eirspennill's Hakon Hakonson's Saga, in Early Sources of Scottish History.

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Graham-Campbell, J. and Batey, C. (1998) **Vikings in Scotland: An Archaeological Survey.** Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press.

Johnstone, J. **(**1782) **Norwegian Account of Haco's Expedition against Scotland AD MCCLX111 now first published in the original Icelandic from the Flateyan and Frisian MSS with a literal English version and notes.** Edinburgh, privately printed

Page, R. (1998) **Runes and Runic Inscriptions**. Woodbridge, Boydell Press.

I am grateful to Prof Michael Barnes for his comments on the hazy photo I emailed him. He saw no similarity between the Holy Island runes and the Dunollie inscription

Alison Blackwood

BLOG SPOT

An interesting blog link from Sue Bryson :

http://structuralarchaeology.blogspot.com/2011/07/is-post-processual-archaeology-new-age.html?utm_source=BP_recent

EXCAVATION AT PAISLEY 2011

In both 2009 and 2010 Renfrewshire Local History Forum was instrumental in promoting the excavations of Paisley Abbey Drain. Members of the Forum volunteered to assist Glasgow University Archaeology Research Department in the 'digs'. The Abbey Drain lies under the grassed area beside the Town Hall where the festive lights are displayed at Christmas. The excavations in 2009 and 2010 concentrated on examining the outside of the drain and both were popular venues on Doors Open Days.

The Abbey Drain was first discovered in 1879 and then forgotten about until it was rediscovered in 1991. The Drain is a large structure, two metres high in places, with an arched roof. Among the finds buried in the silt inside this medieval sewer were

unique 15th century examples of polyphonic music incised on slate, tuning pegs for musical instruments, pottery and pottery shards, dice and gaming tokens, and lead seals from cloth imported from the Netherlands and Italy. This all had to be washed and sorted. Forum members and members of ACFA assisted in a project to sort and match the pottery shards in 2009. The Abbey Drain was scheduled as a national monument by Historic Scotland in August 2010. Further information on the Abbey Drain can be found at canmore.rcahms.gov.uk/en/site/71769/details/paisley+abbey+drain/

Interior of Paisley Abbey Drain

In September of this year our Forum volunteers assisted GUARD Archaeology Ltd. in a further excavation. A number of ACFA members also volunteered in the excavation. Life was made easier for us this year by the use of an excavator to remove nearly 1m of early 20th century in-fill on the site. Two trenches were dug, one extending a previous trench and the other at a spot which was a possible site of old monastic buildings. We expected to find structural remains in the first trench, but the second trench was a bit of a gamble. The line of the drain was known to have a large curve and then return to its original straight alignment. But what was the purpose of the curve in the drain? Were there remains of abbey buildings within the curve?

The results of this excavation surpassed all expectations. Both trenches were dug to a depth of more than a metre. The first trench revealed a medieval wall beside some beautifully cobbled paving. This is likely to be the remains of a hitherto unknown ancillary abbey building, perhaps the abbey kitchen or a workplace.

The second trench revealed a circular structure about two metres in diameter with a narrow break or opening at one side. The top edge of the structure was covered by layers of carefully laid slates to a depth of about two inches. As the excavation was terminated at this level it was not possible to determine the depth of the structure or the materials used below the excavated level

Medieval wall and cobbled paving

Circular feature

Initially this feature appeared to be a well. However, on reflection it seems more likely that it is the remains of a kitchen oven or perhaps a kiln used by the monks. Further investigation in the future may ascertain its purpose.
Information on the excavation with a picture gallery can be found on the RLHF website at www.rlhf.info/

Helen.Calcluth

CALUM'S ROAD

Adapted by David Harrower from the book by Roger Hutchison.

Communicado Theatre Company and National Theatre of Scotland.

Anyone who has been to Raasay will be familiar with Calum Macleod and his road. Most of ACFA Raasayites will have driven the tortuous one and three quarter miles between Brochel and Arnish up and down and round about. They may have read the book that told the story. And they must have wondered, as I did, how it could be made into a play that would travel the theatres of Scotland.

The Eastgate Theatre in Peebles was packed out for this October midweek production and as we sat waiting for it to begin, the scene was set with the evocative backdrop of a video loop of a sparkling, singing burn. Having left Rona only two days before, I was immediately back there. And the small cast, doubling up at times, then told the tale with the help of the inevitable wheelbarrow, and a collection of heavy wooden boxes. These were repeatedly lugged around the stage cleverly giving the audience the feeling of toil that Calum must have experienced as he went about his task.

To hold the story together and give it lively interest, the device of the Raasay exile, returning to his roots from Glasgow with his adolescent son, was successfully woven together with personal details of Calum and his family to make a tale with some tension and a satisfying resolution- at least for some.

Well worth seeing – a verdict amply confirmed by the warm reception given by the Peebles audience. WR

DR ALEXANDER (ALEX) MORRISON

The sad death in September of Alex Morrison, Lecturer and Senior Lecturer in the Department of Archaeology at Glasgow University from 1965, brought to an end the life and work of one of Scotland's most outstanding archaeologists. I joined the staff of Glasgow University just a year after Alex and we soon became great friends as well as colleagues. Best known for his work on early prehistory - his *Early Man in Britain and Ireland* soon became a standard work on the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic - he was, nevertheless, the champion from the start of his academic career of the newly emerging study of Medieval and Post-Medieval rural settlement in Scotland. He was also an expert on the Neolithic and Bronze Ages, contributing particularly to the study of Bronze Age pottery in SW Scotland. Through our long association I always regarded Alex as a sort of human encyclopaedia of archaeology, always willing to talk, answer questions and produce from his prodigious memory all sorts of fascinating ideas. Alex was the *Google* of his day.

It is, however, for his long association, from the very beginning in 1976, with the Certificate in Field Archaeology that I have most cause to be grateful. Alex introduced many ACFA members to the joys of surveying and interpreting the remains of Medieval and Post-Medieval rural settlements. Through his work in rural Perthshire (Loch Tay and Ben Lawers spring to mind), Dunbeath (Caithness) and at Auchendrain (Argyll) he introduced us to the wonders of longhouses and, yes, shielings. Well, at least the latter made a change from cairnfields. It's not surprising, then, that ACFA has engaged in many surveys which have promoted the cause of studying Medieval and later rural settlements. I know that Alex regarded this as vital work because he once said to me that we think we know so much but, in reality, we know very little. I was also grateful to him for passing on his knowledge of early maps, such a vital source for rural settlement studies. Year III of the old CFA always concluded with Alex on maps and rural settlements and, for over 20 years I could always depend on him to finish the academic part of the course with a flourish.

I'll miss Alex. Meetings with him were always fun, entertaining and stimulating. In over 40 years I never heard Alex say anything derogatory about our colleagues - quite an achievement for an archaeologist. Always willing to praise a good piece of work and to comment rather than criticise, Alex was a perfect colleague and friend.

Lionel Masters

A REMINDER FOR ACFA MEMBERS!

If you have an idea for a survey, no matter how small, please feel encouraged to get started. Contact the Committee if you are thinking of proceeding since there are many people who will be happy to advise if required. So, if you have come across an old farmstead or a kiln or a WW2 air raid shelter or any unusual feature in your walks, consider drawing it up.

ACFA does of course promote the larger scale survey where a team of volunteers labour over many weeks / months / years. The costs of printing can be considerable depending on the size of the final report but the Committee will assist survey directors in applying for grants and also advise on a combination of in-house printing and electronic publishing.

ANNIVERSARY FIELD TRIP

ACFA is 25 years old in 2012. A fitting way to mark this milestone would be a celebratory residential field trip. Please help by

- **sending in suggestions for a destination**
- **volunteering to organise the trip.**

Suggestions for venues and offers of help should go to the association's email address or phone to Janie Munro, secretary.

The Coll Field Trip-what are we looking at?

Title page photo : Hard at work, An Teampuill, Rona. Photo by WR.

Disclaimer - The views and opinions of authors published in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of ACFA.

Submissions - It would be appreciated if submissions were sent in Word format. Please note that the Editor reserves the right to shorten and generally edit articles, as required.

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