

Fair Isle Marine Environment and Tourism Initiative

NEWSLETTER: February, 1999

Editor: Elizabeth Riddiford.

Safeguarding our Heritage - the Fair Isle marine resource: a community proposal for its sustainable management.

Two years of intensive work, gathering together strands of information on a range of Fair Isle maritime issues, culminated in the September 1998 publication of the document *Safeguarding our Heritage - the Fair Isle marine resource: a community proposal for its sustainable management*. Its subtitle "An illustrative proposal for integrated sustainable management of Fair Isle's inshore and adjacent offshore waters to safeguard Fair Isle's maritime, cultural and natural heritage" sums up the whole thrust of the isle's quest for a return to a balanced, fully functioning marine environment for the community as well as for conservation reasons. We were also able to raise the profile of our arguments in two presentations, to Scottish Natural Heritage Northern Region staff in May and to SNH main board in October 1998; and to set in motion plans for turning our aspirations into actions through the Fair Isle Marine Partnership, a network of users and agencies with interest in the Fair Isle marine zone.

This is, of course, only the beginning and we continue to forge forward on all fronts. One of the most important aspects of raising the profile, and demonstrating the value and need to maintain our high quality maritime heritage, is through dissemination and education. This requires interpretation based on knowledge. The Scottish Office Rural Challenge Award has given us the opportunity to do this. Whilst information and data-gathering continues, FIMETI is now strongly into the interpretation phase. In this newsletter, members of the working group report what these are.

Nick Riddiford, Project Co-ordinator, FIMETI.

THE FAIR ISLE MARINE PARTNERSHIP

The partnership met in Lerwick in early December. This time FIMP were joined by Alvin Bashforth (S.I.C.) and John Goodlad of the Shetland Fisherman's Association.

After discussing FIMETI progress, the successful S.N.H. visits to Fair Isle and the proposed Northern Peripheries programme we moved on to discuss future action by the partnership. In brief the meeting agreed the following –

A letter would be sent to Lord Sewell asking him to confirm his support and encouragement for the concept of a community-led sustainable management of the seas around the Isle and for the minister to make a date to launch the partnership and the documents.

FIMP would develop an audit of existing legislation to be used in the framework on which to base agreed management prescriptions, to make comment on details within the documents and to prepare a statement which could be used at a launch but would also be sent to Scottish Political Parties.

It proved a useful meeting, in particular contributions from John Goodlad making comment that whilst he supported the concept of the documents, the S.F.A. members would have a problem signing up to proposals for a nil catch of sand eels or only Fair Isle boats fishing within 5 km of Fair Isle.

Fiona Mitchell, Chairperson, The Fair Isle Marine Partnership

FIMETI and the Northern Periphery Programme

Nick Riddiford, Project Co-ordinator, reports on a potential new source of funding

The three-year Rural Challenge programme ends in March 1999. My main focus for some time has been to ensure that the progress we have made does not come to a halt and that we continue to keep the pressure up.

From the very start we have identified our approach to be important not just for our small community but in setting national and international standards for the new millennium in integrated protection, interpretation and appreciation of the marine environment.

We may now have the opportunity to demonstrate our approach to a much wider audience and to develop an internationally relevant model. This opportunity arises because of something called the Northern Periphery Programme.

The NPP is a joint European Union/Norwegian government funded programme which aims to "contribute to the improvement of services and value creation in northern areas of Finland, Scotland, Sweden and Norway".

The programme has a number of elements, but is very strong on "sustainable land, marine and fresh water management, sustainable energy provision and wild-life surveillance and management".

On behalf of FIMETI I attended an NPP conference in Åre, Sweden, in December which resulted in the establishment of a network of 12 communities and organisations from Scotland, Finland, Sweden and Norway. The network links regions with similar characteristics of remoteness, fragile economic base and high natural and cultural heritage value. Not surprisingly, we identified the sustainable resource management theme as relevant to us all and, because we already had some experience in the field through our Rural Challenge work, FIMETI has been asked to lead the entire project.

I am currently preparing a proposal, to be submitted before the deadline of 19th March 1999, which focuses on sharing and developing programmes of sustainable development adapted

to small and/or remote rural communities, linking environmental protection with socio-economic development.

The main theme will be participation by local communities in a series of demonstration projects and activities. These will allow us to emphasize further the urgent need for sustainable management of our marine area, but will also include terrestrial issues. This is because some members of the network are inland away from the coast. Fair Isle's terrestrial values constitute a good example of what can be achieved through sensitive management (recognised in the Council of Europe European Diploma, amongst others) and contrasts with the current marine situation.

Fair Isle will be joined by a number of communities in developing demonstration projects. Some will be specific to each community, others will be shared between all.

The form of these projects has not been finalised, but are likely to include participation and activities holidays, a series of publications focusing on cultural and environmental assets shared by communities (e.g. traditional music, arts and crafts, environmentally sensitive agriculture) and a number of educational initiatives - which could involve the schools. Dissemination and exchange of ideas, through modern technology such as the internet as well as in more traditional ways, such as exchange visits or seminars, will also feature.

The funding period would be for three years, with the demonstration projects being planned in 1999 for implementation in 2000 and 2001.

It is hoped that the programme will identify further benefits which may accrue (to us and other communities) at social and economic as well as environmental levels. Entry into the Northern Periphery Programme will not only permit us to continue our efforts but, by working in partnership with other peripheral communities, provide us with an international platform for the future.

Fingers crossed!

Reports from FIMETI Working Group

Marine database

The marine database continues to develop. Initially set up on Excel, the marine database is now being transferred onto Access. This means that the time consuming method of manually extracting and entering all data can be replaced in future by manipulating data supplied on disk directly onto a relational database. Current database attention continues to focus on collating and adding records from other sources, including Fair Isle Bird Observatory's extensive card index system, cetacean records, and seabird food-sample data obtained from FIBOT's *Seabird Monitoring Reports*, and updating all records from 1998.

The marine database was used to identify and contribute details of notable species published in the *Safeguarding Our Heritage Report*.

Photographic Survey of beaches and coastline

Photographic survey work for several of Fair Isle's main beaches and areas of coastline continued during 1998, working anti-clockwise from Linni Geo in the south-west, around to North Haven in the north-east. Photographs were taken from re-locatable set points around the coastline at low tide and on suitable days during August 1997 and June 1998. Poor weather during both summers limited the number of suitable days available.

The photographic database set up last winter to include beach surveys, other marine environmental and weather-related photographs is being updated with photographs from summer 1998, along with more detailed work on mapping and description of habitats. Negatives and prints continue to be passed on to Dave Wheeler for scanning.

Display materials

Preparation was carried out this autumn on display and interpretive materials which were used at the Northern Peripheries Conference in Sweden, attended by Nick in December.

Elizabeth Riddiford.

Fish Records for 1998

Inclement weather throughout most of the year - and the fact that there was usually much too much land work to catch up on during the few favourable days we did have, meant that there were fewer fishing days recorded this year than last.

The times we went out, however, were interesting in different ways. Although the seasonal trends were similar to other years, fish - especially coalfish - appeared in some unusual places, and we had a run of ling on the west side when we drifted too far inshore. The reason for this is quite likely food, i.e. sand-eels, as we had quite extensive markings on the meter. Mackerel were also prevalent in that location on all the days it was fished. There were a few small whitefish, but mostly the only fish caught on the whitefish grounds were small to medium flounders.

There were more cod on the ling grounds than last year, but the increase is not enough to be significant. The main noticeable difference at Sheep Rock (Da Ruff) being the quantity of coalfish lying up from the bottom, but not feeding. Perhaps an indication of sand-eel recovery, although oddly enough, most of the mackerel this year were feeding on small jellyfish. A more thorough census of stomach content should be an interesting project in the future.

Stewart Thomson, Jr.

Historical research on fishing issues

I now have data on catches made from the Isle for 12 species of fish, from 1913 to 1997 (when Stewart Thomson takes over), missing only 13 years – an amazing achievement and tribute to all diary writers on the Isle. Although I am unable to directly relate this data to fish stocks in the seas around Fair Isle, I believe the trends are the same: a dramatic decline in all species, some to extinction. This is nothing new to us, but important to have as evidence for organisations, government bodies etc., whom we wish to convince. These trends have required explanation – hence hawking in archives; trying to grasp an understanding of marine biology (for physical explanations); and extraction of relevant data from Scottish Office Fisheries Statistical Tables to establish fishing effort this century.

The questionnaire filled in by folk on Fair Isle will help me establish how human activities have changed this century on the Isle because of changes in the marine resource.

Except for collecting all the different methods in which resources from the sea were/are used on the Isle – salted, boiled, raw, etc., (any suggestions would be welcome), my data collection is about complete. Over the next few months - as well as writing a report - I will be producing a leaflet on the trawling prosecutions. I hope that Dave (Wheeler), Stewart (Thomson), George (Stout) and Brian (Wilson) will help me get the map of the fishing hands on to computer, enabling an accurate poster to be produced – watch this space!

Emma Perring.

Historical research – 16th to 19th Centuries

I have collected a great deal of information over the last year. Mainly covering 16th to 19th century, the richness and diversity of our history is a constant inspiration. Over the next months I intend to produce a general history/museum leaflet and one on the “Lessing” as well as expanding on the “disaster” information.

The collection of archival material is growing at an alarming rate (much thanks for this is due to the keepers of both Shetland and Orkney Archives). I am in the process of cataloguing Xeroxed material from Orkney and Shetland along with original records, letters and reports already in the Fair Isle collection. This will take some time but, I hope, will form the basis of an archive particular to Fair Isle obviating the need for researchers to read much fascinating but completely irrelevant material (am I doing the right thing?) and enabling them to study on the island.

For centuries the culture and movements of Fair Isle’s people and their relationship to the environment has been under the control of outside forces – raiders, tacksmen, landlords, government edict and county authority. Ramparts were built in the Iron Age, probably as defensive measures. Viking raiders and settlers used it as a stepping stone and a signal post. There was once a small leper colony on the Isle. The payment of “ship money” in the 18th century made already onerous rents impossible. (This was a tax paid by all coastal areas to help pay the cost of keeping the British Navy – particularly ironic for us as the men of the Isle were more in danger from British press gangs than from any foreign power. The more I delve into the past, the more I am convinced that Fair Isle must have a say in its future. A measure of autonomy could help protect Fair Isle into the next millennium.

Anne Sinclair.

SCRAN Millennium project and the Fair Isle Cultural and Maritime Database

Dave Lowe from Shirva began work on museum records for the Fair Isle Maritime Database during the winter of 1997/98. This particular database has since been expanded to that of Fair Isle Cultural and Maritime Database and is now contributing a selection of records to a Millennium Project known as SCRAN. When Dave Lowe moved to Ireland with his family this New Year, responsibility for the SCRAN database records passed to myself.

The Fair Isle Cultural and Maritime Database is a huge, but very interesting project, involving much more than the simple entry of existing data onto a database as first envisaged. Many Fair Isle records are not easily accessible, having been recorded under different headings elsewhere, or are new records which have not been available before. Consequently, all these will therefore require carefully collating, cataloguing and researching. This will involve thousands of photographs, slides and artefacts of particular cultural/maritime interest.

Several people have already kindly loaned photographs and slides for the database in response to an appeal in the Fair Isle Times - many thanks to everyone. Special thanks go to Jimmy Stout of Midway who has given permission to use his large collection of photographs - many of them dating from the turn of the century, including a wonderful collection of wedding invitations dating from the same period. Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust has also given permission for us to use both the Richard Richardson Slide Collection and the George Waterston Photograph Collection. These three collections alone total over a thousand images between them. In addition, Dave Wheeler has several thousand photographs of his own, taken over the years since 1972. Even with all these images, there will still be gaps with particular activities, events, etc. not covered. Once these gaps are known, a further appeal will be made to see if we can collate as full a collection for the Fair Isle Cultural and Maritime Database as possible.

Database records currently being produced for SCRAN will eventually total approximately 1,250 records, of which 1,000 will be Basic Records (providing a list and basic description of each photograph or artefact). The remaining 250 will be Full Records (including 'thumbnail' images and a captions giving more background information). Dave Wheeler at Field is busy scanning the images onto computer to link in with the database.

In order that the information on the SCRAN database is as accurate as possible, I have to rely upon the knowledge and expertise of other people on the isle, and very much appreciate the assistance which has been offered. I will be calling on folk throughout the course of the year for both initial information and also at the editing stage to make sure I have interpreted information correctly.

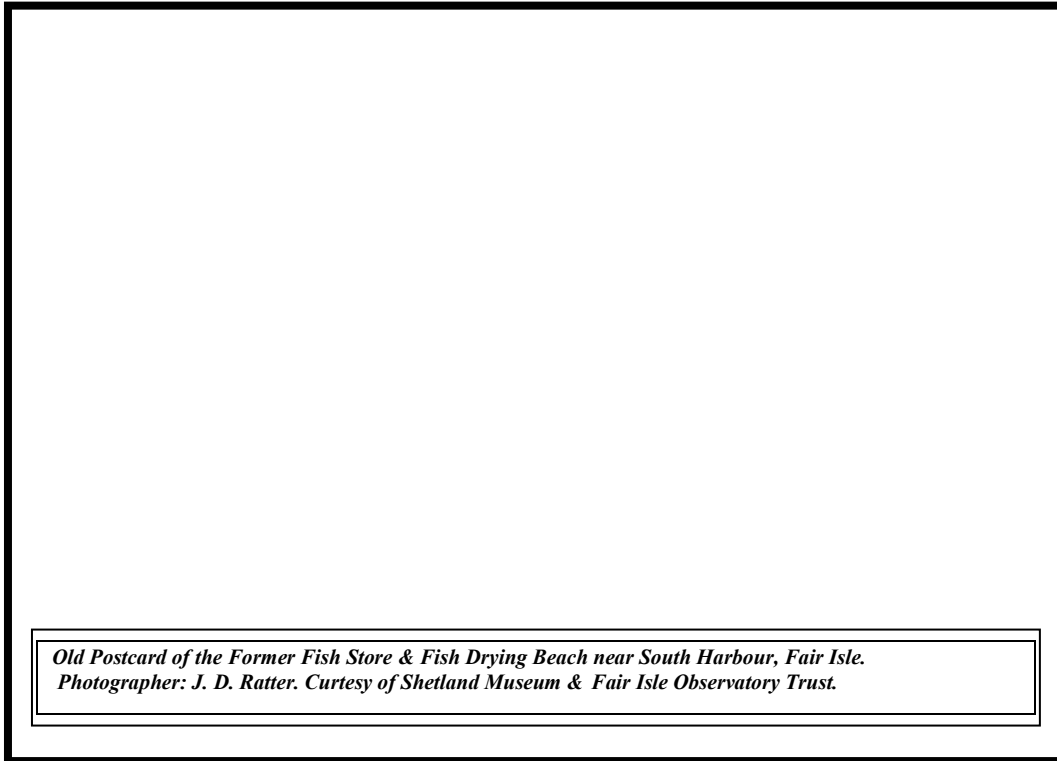
Hopefully, once the images have been scanned onto computer we will be able to have an exhibition for folk on the Isle. Eventually, the SCRAN database and scanned images will be put onto a CD Rom and will be available on the SCRAN educational web site: <http://www.scran.ac.uk>. In the end, all of the hard work will result in a tremendous cultural and educational resource.

Elizabeth Riddiford.

LATE NEWS

A date has now been set for the official launch of FIMETI documents -

Poor weather meant that Lord Sewell was unable to visit Fair Isle in September last year to unveil the windmills and launch the two FIMETI reports as originally planned. Trevor Croft and Anthony Bryant of the National Trust for Scotland did, however, manage to meet with him in Lerwick before returning south. It has now been confirmed that Lord Sewell will be officially launching the two FIMETI documents *Managing the Sea for Birds* and *Safeguarding our Heritage – the Fair Isle Marine Resource: a community proposal for its sustainable management* on Friday, 5th March 1999 in Edinburgh. Nick Riddiford & Fiona Mitchell will be attending the launch on behalf of the Isle.



More on the Photographic Database – an up-date from Dave Wheeler

Work on the photographic database continues apace - the appeal for island photographs having produced an almost overwhelming response!

FIBOT are allowing us to use slides from the Richard Richardson and photographs from the George Waterston collections. Once Elizabeth has painstakingly catalogued these and entered them on the database these will be scanned and linked with the appropriate record on the database. So far I have completed only the first of several boxes of the Richard Richardson slides but, while copyright clearance is obtained for these and other material, I have moved on to scanning in a representative selection of images from my own Fair Isle collection of some 15,000 b&w negatives. To date some 300 images have been digitised.

As the 300 digitised photographic images scanned to date require some 540 Megabytes of storage space these are presently being saved to 100 Mb Zip disks. With many more photographs yet to be scanned, and to speed up the process, a 2 Gb Jaz drive and a CD writer have been ordered. The latter will also allow CDs of scanned images to be used by other team members, hopefully simplifying the production of full SCRAN database records and enabling further research into the photographs.

As team members now use and explore their own computer facilities with ease the support required has changed accordingly - they are now asking much more demanding questions! Material is also being scanned in and printed to assist in the preparation of reports etc.

Computer and software upgrades are being addressed, as is the Year 2000 'bug'. This should not be a problem with the FIMETI computers and software. A memory resident program is/can be enabled on the computers and the software used (spread-sheet, database etc) checked to make sure that it is using the 4 figure year date, dd/mm/yyyy, by default.