

Headlines

- Some of the changes resulting from the Crofting Reform Act 2007 came into effect on 27th June. Details from Crofters Commission website www.crofterscommission.org.uk/p_downloads.htm
- The Crofters Commission is seeking Area Assessors to add to their network. (See page 2)
- Lairg NC Cheviot lamb went ahead on 5th September, following postponements in August due to foot and mouth movement restrictions.
- The Great 2 day sale of NC Cheviot lambs at Dingwall Mart on 13/14 September was postponed due to the Foot & Mouth Outbreak. A lorry was turned back at Lochinver with the lambs of a number of North Assynt crofters. *The sale is to go ahead on 5th October.*

Clachtoll Broch Project

The Project was launched in November last year with a well attended meeting at Rhu Stoer Hall. Dr Euan Mackie gave a talk on brochs, followed by a guided walk around the Broch. Dr Mackie, who is the Patron of the project, probably knows more about brochs than anyone else in the world, having excavated several, thoroughly studied many more and written about them extensively.



Dr Euan Mackie at the Broch in November 2006

The long term aim would be for a thorough archaeological excavation and evaluation of the Clachtoll Broch and the consolidation of the remains,

which are getting steadily eroded by visitors. The site would benefit from the removal of some of the fallen stone so that the full height of the tower and the layout of the surrounding enclosures could be more fully appreciated, the provision of good access to the site and around it in such a way that no more damage was done either to the monument or to neighbouring property, and the provision of interpretive material. Such a project would take several years and a lot of money to achieve. The Feasibility Study has therefore been set up to look into:

- how other communities have set about such a huge project
- what sort of local organisation would be needed to oversee such a scheme
- whether there is an archaeological organisation or university department which would be interested, on what terms, over what time scale etc.
- how the local community and

visitors could be involved at all stages

- how to consolidate and protect the remains
- what sort of access would be desirable and how it might be achieved
- how best to provide interpretation
- how much it would cost and possible sources of funding.

The Steering Group consists of members of Historic Assynt, Comunn Eachraidh Asainte and the Highland Council Ranger Service. For the time being Historic Assynt is acting as the umbrella organisation for such things as funding applications. When the feasibility study has been completed in about a year, there will be full public consultation on the study's recommendations for the way forward. If those recommendations are sufficiently encouraging and if the community response is positive, then work can start on the main project.

For further details, contact Gordon Sleight, Elderbank, Stoer (Tel. 01571 855207 gordon@gsleight.freeserve.co.uk)

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Assynt Hydro – AGM Report

At the AGM in March 2007, John MacKenzie reported there had been full output since October 2006 and the turbine had been working well. There had not been any mechanical nor electrical problems for the last two years. However, there has been a reduction in output due to the presence of an ever-deepening shingle bank

at the end of the tailrace where it joined the original watercourse (as discussed at the EGM Dec 2006). The current annual loss in production amounts to approximately £3,000. It is hoped that the cost involved in clearing the shingle could be recovered in about one year's improved generation. Six weeks previously, an organised visit to the site had taken place on the part of SNH

and Young Associates (representing the Trust's interests). SEPA were unable to attend. This involved a day's survey where five mature fresh water mussels had been found in the shingle. Based on this discovery, the Trust is obligated to pay for a full survey to conclude findings. The capital loan account with Triodes Bank is due to be paid off in full by the end of 2010. (contd. on page 2)

Crofters Commission Seeks New Panel of Assessors

The Crofters Commission is seeking people from throughout the Crofting Counties to serve on a new Panel of Assessors.

Assessors will act as the link between their communities and the Commission, assist the organisation to administer crofting more effectively and contribute to future policies.

Crofters Commission chairman, Drew Ratter said: "This is an opportunity for people across the Crofting Counties to get involved and to ensure the views of their communities are represented in the regulation, development and promotion of crofting."

"Assessors are also invaluable in helping to circulate information from the Commission among crofters in their areas."

"As we look to the future, we hope that there will be interest from younger people and women involved in crofting in taking on this important role."

Existing assessors are entitled to apply for the new positions.

Assessors are not paid, but the Commission will reimburse travel and subsistence expenses and compensate for any loss of earnings. New assessors will be supported within the Commission's new area team structure and full training will be provided to help them carry out their role.

The appointments will be effective from November 2007 and are for a five-year period.

Anyone interested in serving on the Panel, should forward their details and a short statement to support their suitability to:

The Crofters Commission, Castle Wynd, Inverness IV2 3EQ.

Note: A copy of the recent advertisement is available from the ACT Secretary. The response has been disappointing, and they are still very keen to receive applications.

Assynt Hydro (contd.)

We can report a subsequent update in the situation with reference to the obstruction in the tailrace in that on 13th September a further site meeting took place, involving members of the Board of Assynt Hydro as well as representatives of SNH and SEPA. Those present on behalf of the two environmental bodies expressed the view that, on the basis of current European environmental protection legislation, they are unable to agree to any action being taken that was at risk of prejudicing the interest of the mussels. They stated that Assynt Hydro must make a

case to Scottish Government ministers to allow the proposed action to clear the tailrace to proceed. The Board of Assynt Hydro intends to pursue this matter as vigorously as possible.

- John MacKenzie

Crofting Series for BBC's Grassroots

BBC Radio Scotland's Grassroots programme's series on crofting begins on Saturday 6th October at 6.30am (repeated on Sunday at 5.30pm!) Nancy Nicolson took Grassroots to the north, west and islands, to meet

crofters, activists and politicians and report on the state of crofting in the 21st century.

The programmes in this new, three part series are broadcast on consecutive weeks. Each programme follows a specific theme:

Prog 1. Survival: Threats to the Crofting Way of Life

Prog 2. Identity: Who is the crofter?

Prog 3. Enterprise: Crofters Thrive and Diversify.

Allan MacRae, Torbreck, and Iain Matheson, Clachtoll, were interviewed for the programme, while background information on ACT was supplied by the Secretary.

Sport & Game Report – Deer Stalking

2006/07 Season

Commercial Stalking

The stalking season is well underway, with bookings in place for up to 25 stags, and 20 rifle/days at hinds. Further bookings could have been taken but care is being taken over numbers due to activities on neighbouring estates.

Carcase sales figures should be improved this year due to the new larder and chill facility, which will be up and running shortly.

Non-commercial Stalking

Many thanks to those townships which returned

non-commercial cull figures for last season.

Please remember to report any non-commercial culling to the appropriate township clerk or directly to Kirsty MacLeod (see page 4 for contact details).

It is in all our interests to have as clear a picture as possible of what is happening on the ground.

Neighbouring Estates

The John Muir Trust is proposing to cull 45 stags and 45 hinds this year, which is nearly double the level of last year (25+25)

which it reportedly struggled to achieve. ACT wrote to the John Muir Trust expressing its concerns about the high numbers proposed and the potential effect on neighbouring estates, with copies to Jim Payne of Ardvar and the West Sutherland Deer Management Group.

ACT had been invited to participate in another helicopter deer count this year, covering Ardvar, Quinag, and Inchnadamph estates. The Trust would have been responsible for

100% of costs, estimated at £5,000, while the other parties received part-funding from DCS. It was decided that the Trust would decline to participate.

See page 3 for updates on the new deer larder, fishing etc.

Estimated Total Cull Figures

	2006/07	2005/06	2004/05
STAGS (RED)			
Commercial	18	13	11
Non Commercial*	14	18	30
TOTAL	32	31	41
HINDS (RED)			
Commercial	18	21	22
Non Commercial*	8	18	32
TOTAL	26	39	54

*Non-commercial cull figures are estimated, based on township returns and verbal reports

CROFTING ADMINISTRATION

Queries relating to crofting admin matters should be addressed to Kirsty MacLeod (contact details on page 4). Crofters Commission leaflets and guidance available.

CROFT RENT

There are still some outstanding rents for 2006. We would like to remind those who have not yet paid their rent to please do so at the earliest opportunity. Please contact Joanne or Kirsty if you have any queries.

TOWNSHIP DIRECTORS - ELECTIONS

Ian C MacKenzie, Ian A MacKenzie, Bob Cook and Durrant Macleod were all duly re-elected for Achnacarnin, Balchladich, Clachtoll and Stoer, respectively.

2008: Culkein Drumbeg, Culkein Stoer
Clashnessie, Clashmore/Raffin and Torbreck

2009: Achmelvich, Drumbeg and Nedd

2010: Achnacarnin, Balchladich, Clachtoll and Stoer.

Any queries relating to township elections should be addressed to the Secretary or Administrator (contact details on page 5)

SERVICE CONNECTIONS

If you or anyone you know has had any problems regarding new water and/or electricity connections in this area, please

get in touch with ACT. This issue has potentially serious social and economic implications, and ACT will be doing its utmost to help prevent future development being hampered as a result.

Gaelic in Assynt – MESSAGE FROM SHONA CAMPBELL, COMUNN NA Gàidhlig

Assynt was, at one time, a stronghold of the Gaelic language and culture. There is continuing support for Gaelic in the area, but to ensure that this precious heritage is passed through the generations we can all play a small part.

If you are involved in a community group or business in the area, there are ways in which you can help to support the Gaelic language. For example, adding Gaelic to your website or shop signs – if you should have any questions about translation or place names, feel free to contact me.

In my post as Gaelic development officer for Comunn na Gàidhlig, I cover Ross-shire, Sutherland and Caithness. I would be delighted to hear from individuals who are interested in learning Gaelic, and equally from community groups or businesses who would like to know more about the language.

Please contact Shona Campbell, Comunn na Gàidhlig, 5 Mitchell's Lane, Inverness, IV2 3HQ. Telephone: 01463 234138, or e-mail: shona@cna.org.uk.

Sport & Game—General

Deer Larder

The outer building was completed in April. After delays due to problems with the supplier, the larder/chill was finally installed at the start of September, and the rail system is about to go in. There have been various difficulties with the service connections, but these have been resolved and the larder should be connected shortly. It has all taken longer than anticipated, but the main thing is that it will be up and running soon.

Fishing

Permit sales are reported to be up this season. There have been lots of enquiries from targeted advertising in Trout & Salmon and Trout Fisherman, and the website has been improved to include permit vendor information and map of the estate showing the main lochs.

Quad Bike

The Trust has purchased a new quad bike and trailer for carcass extraction.

A rear mounted sprayer was also purchased, and it will be possible for members to hire the equipment for bracken spraying. Hire fees are shortly to be decided by the Executive Committee. It is proposed that the Trust will provide the spray itself as a contribution towards bracken control. More details in the next Newsletter.

Griff Rhys Jones talking to Allan MacRae at his croft in Torbreck (on BBC1's "Mountain", series episode shown on 29th July 2007)



North Assynt Features on Television

Assynt has benefited from television exposure over the summer.

Filming took place at the Old Man of Stoer in May for "Ultimate Rock Climb", featuring Watchdog's Julia Bradbury. It was aired on Wednesday 15th August on BBC2 (Friday 17th in England) as part of the BBC's Ultimate Outdoors season.

Assynt featured in the North West Highlands episode of the BBC's "Mountain" series, presented by Griff Rhys Jones, on Sunday 29th July. The programme included an interview with ACT Chairman and co-founder Allan MacRae. Having had his doubts about community land ownership as "something of a land grab", Rhys Jones came away "utterly won over by Allan", who had talked about the pioneering buy-out in North Assynt and crofters being the best people to look after the land on which they live.

Scenery from the B869 coast road featured on an episode of "The Woman Who Ate Scotland" on STV in early July. The programme showcased The Albannach Hotel and MacKay Brothers fish merchants in Lochinver, as well as Loch Duart Ltd of Scourie, owners of Drumbeg Salmon since the take over of Ardvar Salmon in 2004.

The "Summer Walkers" featured on several *North Tonight* news reports during June. There was also coverage in the press. A special Gaelic language programme was aired in September on BBC2, and featured in the Geopark Conference also in September.

Also in June, Blue Planet Productions were in the Drumbeg area filming for a drama series starring John Hannah and Colin Campbell. Many locals were involved as extras, including children from Stoer Primary, as well as runners, and providers of props from boats to Land Rovers! It is not yet known when it is likely to air.

ACT Meetings 2007

Board Meetings

Monday 19th November (changed from 5th November)

[Executive Committee meetings are held in the intervening months]

General Meeting

- Monday 22nd October 2007

Brought forward from December

Reach 80% of households in North Assynt - and further afield - through the ACT Newsletter Notice Board

Please contact the Secretary if you have any comments on the Newsletter and/or if there is anything in particular you would like to be included in the next issue.



Assynt Crofters' Trust
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E-mail: secretary@assyntcrofters.co.uk

www.assyntcrofters.co.uk

ACT Mission Statement:

"To manage the Estate in such a way as to conserve and advance the social and economic livelihood of the communities, and to foster, preserve and improve the natural environment".

PEOPLE & PLACES

North West Highlands Geopark

The 7th European Geopark Conference, held in the Macphail Centre in Ullapool, was a big success, with delegates attending from all over the world. Events were also held at Inchnadamph Field Centre, and there were various field trips. The conference was organised by Geopark Officer Iessie MacPhail, who is a Director of ACT. The Geopark starts at The Summer Isles in Wester Ross and continues northwards through west Sutherland to the north coast. For further information visit the website at www.northwest-highlands-geopark.org.uk

Pine Marten Hide

The new pine marten hide was opened by Assynt Tourism Group in Euan MacDonald's croft at Torbreck in August. It was funded by SNH and Highland 2007, and constructed by Euan, Andy Summers and student ranger Andy. Highland Council Rangers will give people a presentation at the Assynt Visitor Centre then go to the hide where they



will hopefully catch a glimpse of these normally shy creatures.

It should prove to be a popular visitor attraction for next year's tourist season.

*Nina and Rita MacDonald
at the pine marten hide in
Torbreck*

Tragedy at Stoerhead

People in Assynt were shocked and saddened by the tragic accident earlier this month when Krzysztof Galikowska and his sister Iwana were swept off the rocks near Stoerhead Lighthouse. Kris, who was 26, had been working with Robbie MacKenzie (Ardroe) for the past year, and his wife and two young children joined him earlier this year. His 18 year old sister Iwana had also recently come over from Poland.

In years gone by a book would have been passed round the parish to help the family. The Trust has made a donation to the account set up for Kris's family at the Royal Bank of Scotland in Lochinver, and members are encouraged to make their own donations if they have not already done so.

ACT Directors, Office Bearers & Grazings Clerks – contact details

Executive Committee:

Allan MacRae (Chairman)
Donnie Macleod (Vice Chairman)
Ray MacKay

Supported by:

Kirsty MacLeod (Secretary/Crofting Administrator) (855212)
Joanne Murray (Cuidiche/Administrator) (855298)

Township Directors

Achmelvich - Ray MacKay, Redbraes, Achmelvich (844337)
Achnacarnin - Iain C MacKenzie, The Gate (855241)
Balchladich - Ian A MacKenzie, Bordan, Balchladich (855315)
Clachtoll - Bob Cook, 132 Clachtoll (855301)
Clashmore & Raffin - Iessie MacPhail, 204 Clashmore (855297)
Clashnessie - Roddie Kerr, Hill Cottage, Clashnessie (855359)
Culkein Drumbeg - Janice Macleod, Achloist (855228)
Culkein Stoer - John Morrison, Cnoc Uaine, Culkein (855331)
Drumbeg - Donnie Macleod, 340 Drumbeg (833256)
Nedd - Anne MacCrimmon, Crithinn, Drumbeg (833237)
Stoer - Durrant Macleod, Hillhead, Lochinver (844206)
Torbreck - Allan MacRae, 83 Torbreck (844335)

Co-opted Directors

John MacKenzie, 307 Culkein Drumbeg (833258)
Hugh MacRae, Cagarabh, Culkein Drumbeg (833212)

Township Grazings Clerks

Achmelvich - Margaret Macleod, The Shore (844393)
Achnacarnin - Iain C MacKenzie, The Gate (855241)
Balchladich - Ian A MacKenzie, Bordan, Balchladich (855315)
Clachtoll - Graham Gordon, Briar Cott., Lochinver (844607)
Clashmore & Raffin - Iessie MacPhail, 204 Clashmore (855297)
Clashnessie - Kenny MacKenzie, 1 Canisp Road (844487)
Culkein Drumbeg - Amanda MacRae, Cagarabh (833212)
Culkein Stoer - John Morrison, Cnoc Uaine (855331)
Drumbeg - Anne MacCrimmon, Crithinn, Drumbeg (833237)
Nedd - Emily Ross, Nedd (833225)
Stoer - Ishbel Macauley, Ard na Mara, Stoer (855214)

Telephone numbers in brackets (STD code 01571)

For email addresses, please contact:

Secretary: secretary@assyntcrofters.co.uk
Administrator: admin@assyntcrofters.co.uk