Cults Loch Community Heritage Project: Final Report
Cults Loch Community Heritage Project: Summary Report

Andy Heald, AOC Archaeology Group

BACKGROUND
The Cults Loch Community Heritage Project, which began in September 2009, is a collaborative study between local community groups, schools, museums, councils, archaeologists and local and central government. The overall aim of the project is to use the rich heritage around Cults Loch – particularly the 2500 year old crannog - to facilitate and encourage the diverse local communities of Dumfries and Galloway to be involved in, and inspired by, the discovery, management, enhancement, interrogation and display of one of the most important cultural heritage landscapes in Scotland.

The project aims to involve as many people and groups as possible. Particularly important is the involvement of young people and any activities will have school children at its core. The constant emphasis on teaching, training and education, and the diverse media through which this is implemented, will encourage a learning and skilful region. It is hoped that the project may empower the community to drive forward future local developments and improve the quality of life and heritage of Dumfries and Galloway in an ethical and sustainable fashion.

The project to date has had many activities. Central to the project has been the archaeological fieldwork centred round Cults Loch, Castle Kennedy which took place between 2007 and 2011. As well as involving the local community in the actual excavations and survey this component also included on-site training workshops, open days, organised school visits and tours. But the project’s geographical scope has stretched far beyond Castle Kennedy, culminating in an ambitious regional community programme, which took place both during and after the fieldwork. Community exhibitions have been, and will continue to be, hosted across the region in appropriate venues, such as Stranraer Museum. Exhibitions have been complimented by object handling sessions, workshops and public lectures. The project heralded a touring school’s workshop, culminating in a county-wide education pack. Dissemination of information through various media, particularly the world-wide-web, has also been integral to many aspects of the work.

The central focus of the fieldwork at Cults Loch has been the excavation of the crannog, which we now know is 2500 years old. The timber that the crannog had been built with was well-preserved and collapsed wooden structures and wooden artefacts were found. A defended settlement site on the grassland around the loch was also excavated and several roundhouses, as well as a souterrain, an underground storage area, were found. One of the houses was occupied at about the same time as the crannog, while the other was occupied some 500 years later. The promontory fort overlooking the crannog was also investigated and was found to be in use over the same period. The excavations have thus given us evidence of a later prehistoric landscape around Cults Loch.

Numerous organisations have either taken part or lent support to the project including: Historic Scotland, Stranraer Museum, Dumfries Council (Local Archaeologists and Education Authority), Wigtownshire Antiquarian Society, University of the Third Age, local landowners (Stair Estate), Drumore, Belmont, Park Primary, Portpatrick, Drochdruil and Castle Kennedy primary schools.

ACTIVITIES
The programme of works was outlined in the original funding application. What follows is a brief overview of the activities that have taken place.

**Community excavation training programme**

Since 2009 four seasons of excavation have taken place at Cults Loch, Castle Kennedy. Every season has involved members of the local community, either taking part in the excavations and/or visiting the site.

The first community excavation training programme ran for 3 weeks from Sep 23rd to Oct 11th 2009. A full research design and a summary of the work to date can be found at [http://www.aocarchaeology.com/projects/heritage-and-community-outreach/cults_loch.htm](http://www.aocarchaeology.com/projects/heritage-and-community-outreach/cults_loch.htm). As well as taking part in the excavation of 2500 year old wooden structures on the crannog and cropmarks on the promontory fort the community also took part in various training activities including training in soil identification, artefact analysis, geophysical survey, excavation and other general skills.

![Fig 1: Cults Loch, Castle Kennedy](image)

Throughout the three-weeks visitors were encouraged to visit the site at any time to see the archaeology and there was a designated open day.

A week of school visits was also organised, which culminated in 12 individual workshops, each with c 20 pupils in each. Through one and a half hour sessions children were introduced to the concepts of archaeology and the rich heritage of the area both through visual prompts, a short lecture and a visit to the site to see the archaeology and the archaeologists. In the first year, therefore, around 250
children were introduced to the heritage of their area. The workshops were undertaken by members of Stranraer Museum and AOC Archaeology.

Due to the success of the project Historic Scotland assigned additional grants for further excavation work between March 2010 and September 2011. Although this further funding is separate from the original Leader application this additional grant-aid allowed the Cults Loch Community Project to be extended for another 2 years.

Again, local volunteers took part (many returning from previous years) and another series of school visits and tours took place. Daily updates on the web-diary continued allowing individuals to follow the excavations and findings (see aocarchaeology.com; and twitter). The project directors, Dr Anne Crone and Dr Graeme Cavers, noted an increase in public interest as the project progressed indicating that the project aims of furthering interest in the local heritage is being fulfilled.

Despite the often bad weather, on average each year we had around 5 volunteers taking part in the excavations and around 30 casual visitors.

The two further seasons of excavations allowed another round of school work. In 2009 152 school children (6 different schools) visited the excavations between 8th and 11th September. The pupils ranged in age from 4 to 12 and group sizes varied from 10 to 32. Feedback was extremely positive.

These on-site visits were complimented by another series of school visits by the archaeologists in Spring 2010. Again, a full week of school work was undertaken by members of Stranraer Museum and AOC with 7 schools visited. Again, around 200 children were taught and introduced to the rich heritage of their area.

**Reporting on the archaeological results**

A report on the archaeological works and discoveries for each year was completed. These *Data Structure Reports* record all the information recovered during the excavation and initial thoughts, prior to full post-excavation. All reports are hosted digitally on OASIS.

A full report documenting all the findings is currently being prepared and will be published as a Society of Antiquaries of Scotland Monograph. As well as documenting the excavations the publication will also present the community element of the project. The Monograph is due to be completed by March 2013 and distributed thereafter.

The directors have also been active in lecturing on the work at Cults Loch, to local societies and academic audiences.

The excavations and school work is the basis for many of the other outputs of the Cults Loch project including the teacher’s pack, the temporary exhibition in Stranraer Museum (see below) and the forthcoming touring regional exhibition.
Fig 2: The site and location of the trenches
Temporary exhibition in Stranraer Museum

A month-long exhibition was hosted in Stranraer Museum in January 2010 in partnership with the hosts. The exhibition displayed some of the finds recovered during the Cults Loch excavations and display boards, text and images outlined some of the key findings. The exhibition coincided with an Antiquarian Exhibition undertaken by Stranraer Museum. This timing was ideal as some of the finds and discussions in this exhibition involved local antiquarians, including Lord Stair, the landowner of Cults Loch. The display boards will be held by Stranraer Museum for future community work.
Fig 4: A temporary panel for the exhibition
The display was well-received with visitor numbers for the Museum in January totalling 427.

A final exhibition is being hosted again in Stranraer Museum in January and February 2013 as part of the *Fabulous Finds* exhibition. This will be the beginning of the County-wide Touring Exhibition and culminate in the launch of the Teacher’s Pack. Similar number of visitors as those attending the first exhibition is a realistic figure.

**Touring school workshop programme**

As noted above, young children have been central to the project. Three, one week-long touring school’s programmes were undertaken the format of which was designed in discussion with local head-teachers. The children were encouraged to learn about their past through a series of activities: powerpoint presentation on the archaeology of Cult Loch and crannogs; a time-line game; mock-up excavations; object handling sessions; and a ‘what objects tell us’ teaching session. By visiting a wide number and range of schools the project has reached a wide range of ages, genders and cultures and offers equal access to training opportunities.

Over the course of the project 31 separate sessions were undertaken at the following primary schools: Drochdruil; Castle Kennedy; Park Primary; Belmont; Rephad; Portpatrick and Sandhead. In total approximately 650 school children took part in the hands-on activities.

![Fig 4: A member of the local community who has just discovered an Iron Age whetstone](image)

**Object training session in Stranraer Museum**

An object handling session undertaken in April 2010 complimented the school’s touring programme. Again, this was undertaken in partnership with Stranraer Museum. During the week 7 sessions were run by Jamie Enstone, John Pickin (both Stranraer Museum) and Julia Dawson (AOC Archaeology) in Stranraer Museum. Each session ran for an hour and a half and involved object handling, object recognition and worksheets. During the week 165 school children took part in the activity.
Production of county-wide teacher’s pack and associated resources
A key outcome of the project was the production of a teacher’s pack. Relevant bodies and school teacher’s were consulted concerning the structure and content of the teacher’s pack. All of the content is complimentary and integral to the Curriculum for Excellence. The pack will be launched to coincide with the Spring exhibition.

![Fig 5: A drawing of the crannog by Zoe, a primary school pupil who took part in the school visits. Images such as these will be used in the touring exhibition and the schools pack.](image)

The pack will be distributed to as wide a group as possible ensuring that the results reach as wide a range of ages, genders and cultures and offer equal access to training opportunities, as possible. It is hoped that the teacher’s pack will be distributed to every primary school in Dumfries and Galloway (c pupil role c12,000).

Virtual learning: web-site
Although it was hoped that a range of individuals and groups would physically take part in the project (e.g. participation in the fieldwork; school visits; visiting community displays etc) it was always likely that many people would not be able to. In an attempt to encourage ongoing engagement in the project and disseminate information virtual learning and access through the World Wide Web was integral to the work. This has included a daily web-diary during the four seasons of excavations (see above) and regular updates throughout the duration of the project. It is envisaged that the teacher’s pack may be hosted on the internet.

The web-diary has been a good success. It is advertised through the AOC web-site and on Twitter, with links to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland and Archaeology Scotland. It is also advertised in other media (press releases, posters etc).

Other achievements
In October 2009 a public lecture was undertaken in association with Wigtownshire Antiquarian Society (28 people in attendance). The project directors also presented the community project at the International Wetland Conference in Dublin in February 2010 and to other academic audiences in Edinburgh. Graeme Cavers and Andy Heald discussed the project in a major article on ‘Community Archaeology’ in the May edition of History Scotland. The work will also be discussed in the forthcoming Dumfries and Galloway Archaeology conference in October.

One of the key outcomes of the project has been the additional work undertaken by the local schools. Stimulated by their visit to Cults Loch Belmont Primary School undertook a major display in...
their school foyer which documented their visit to the excavations and their attitudes to archaeology. Numerous schools have also undertaken illustrations, the writing of poetry and/or short stories which will be integral to the school’s pack and the touring regional exhibition. Further, spurred on by their object handling class Park Primary visited Whithorn to find out more about their archaeology and have been undertaking a project on the Vikings. A retired teacher from Rephad is also now one of our regular excavation volunteers!

The community project has also acted as a stimulus for other groups to undertake heritage projects, for example the successful Machars Archaeological Project (funded by Leader and HLF) and the Glasgow University survey project.

**Summary: benefits from the project**

A range of different groups benefited from the project.

*Males and Females under 25*  
School children were central to the project. Three week-long individual school sessions were hosted. In all 31 individual sessions were hosted either on-site or in the schools, reaching around 602 children. These school sessions were complimented by an object handling session in Stranraer Museum, 7 sessions were held, 165 school children took part in the activity. In summary, over 38 teaching sessions were held. Importantly, these involved activities in the class room, on the excavations and in the Museum.

This work has been central to the creation of the county-wide teacher’s pack which will be distributed to every school in the county.

*Males and Females over 25*  
Over the duration of the fieldwork, each season saw between 5 to 7 individuals (aged between 25 and 65) taking part in the actual dig. This number was complimented by around 30 casual visitors to the site each season, either as drop in visitors or as part of the open day. Thus, around 130 individuals (aged between 25 and 65) either took part or visited the excavations.

Four-hundred and 27 individuals visited the temporary display in Stranraer Museum, and a similar number is expected for the final exhibition in January/February 2013.

Many more individuals will be aware of the project and the outcomes through the following touring exhibition, the press releases and lectures that have taken place during the duration of the project.

*Local Businesses*  
Over the duration of the whole project many local businesses benefited from the project including: rented accommodation, hotels, bars, supermarkets, petrol suppliers, (for archaeologists and visitors), plant hire, and bus hire. This has an estimated direct spend value of c£14,000 to the local economy over the 4 year project duration.

*Local Heritage Groups and Cultural Tourism*  
As noted above, the Cults Loch Project has been a part stimulus to other heritage projects being advanced in the area in the last few years. It has also led to increased partnership working between various stakeholders and groups. Combined, these will undoubtedly encourage increased marketing, tourism and community capacity that will have added benefit to the area in and around Castle Kennedy for years to come.