



Newsletter of An Iodhlann's members

Dear Member - welcome once again to another edition of our newsletter.

Darko and the Graves of Hough

We were privileged this spring to be sent a copy of the PhD thesis on the archaeology of Tìree and Coll by Darko Mariäeviç, a student of Professor Steve Mithen at Reading University. His thesis, called *Later Prehistory of Tìree and Coll: the Application of geophysics in archaeological investigation of cultural landscapes*, is a huge work and a good bed time read at 523 pages. Darko has concentrated on the period 4,000 BC to 500 AD, what you could call loosely the Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Age.

He starts off by giving us the first detailed and referenced history of archaeological exploration on Coll and Tìree. He rightly praises the colossal work of the Royal Commission's Inventory of the Monuments of Argyll (RCAHMS 1980). But Darko points out there is a huge gap in our knowledge of Tìree around the Neolithic period. A fertile land like Tìree should have attracted a thriving community and yet we have little evidence of how they lived here.

Darko set out to change that, armed with boundless enthusiasm and what looked like a large television aerial and a field telephone. He wanted to see if you could 'see' underground using magnetic waves and electrical currents. This equipment has been in use for some years, but rarely in such a sandy place.

He became increasingly interested in the stone circles at Hough. He found that there are in fact three circles and a huge cemetery of graves. Some of these graves seem to stretch in a line from a previously unrecognised Neolithic cairn in the middle of the Balevullin sliabh to the Kilkenneth cairn where the memorial for the Reverend MacCallum had been built. If you stand in the middle of one of the stone circles, this cairn, the Dutchman's Cap and *Beinn Mòr* in Mull are in line and the sun would have risen behind them at the spring and autumn equinoxes. You have to be careful not to over-interpret patterns you see underground, as lumps of natural rock can be deceptive. But the Hough site looks very exciting as a collection of graves, standing stones and marked paths. Only 'ground truth' excavations will tell.

Another feature he has drawn our attention to is a possible Neolithic tomb at *Uamh Chaluim Chèaird* at the base of *Ceann a' Bharra*. A huge boulder left by the last Ice Age seems to have been lifted and put over a couple of natural rocks to form a grave, although, from the name, Calum the tinker used to sleep there more recently!

An Iodhlann, as a community historical society, sponsored Darko allowing his funding to be secured. In his introduction he writes: *The study was designed as collaboration with An Iodhlann Archive and Museum in Scarinish, Tìree's historical centre run by the Tìree and Coll Gaelic Partnership. The benefits of the collaborative approach were immense and in retrospect it is impossible to see how this research would have been possible without it... Catriona Hunter, Duncan Grant and the late Alasdair Sinclair made An Iodhlann a wonderful place to come to and provided me with great deal of unreserved help. I shall carry dear memories of Alasdair whose stories about all things concerning Tìriodh were a joy to listen to.*

Darko has become a good friend to the archive and this publication is, I am sure, the first of many. We hope at least part of his career will be spent unravelling some of the mysteries he has discovered on Coll and Tìree.



Tìree Show at Scarinish in 1922

The Oceana

Expect the unexpected in this business! In February Janet Bowler, our archivist, received an enquiry from Anthony Vaughan from Lynsted in Kent. He was looking for information about a yacht called the Oceana which had become stranded on Tiree in 1949. His own interest was sparked by some photographs he had inherited from his great uncle, Clinton George Vaughan, who had chartered the yacht several times in the 1930s. Anthony had done some research in archives in Southampton and the Isle of Wight and discovered some of the boat's story. She had been built in Cowes in 1879, originally named the Thais. She was a two-masted sailing schooner 105 feet in length and 109 tons gross. One of her seventeen owners was Sir Percy Florence Shelley, the son of the poet, who changed the yacht's name to Oceana in 1887. She was given a refit in 1923 and motorised with twin screws, although she retained her rigging. At her prow she had a striking figurehead of a woman blowing a pipe. In 1948 her registration was transferred to Dublin. On the 9th of March 1949 she was on passage past Tiree. Local tradition on the island is that the crew were Latvian, Finnish or Russian, and that the vessel was en route from Dublin to the Baltic. Early that morning the local coastguard crew, led by Murdoch Cameron, Balevullin and Alec MacLean, Hough, were called to a stranding half way along *Tràigh Bhàigh*, now more often known as Crossapol Beach. The boat was grounded over a hundred yards out and the beach party had to fire a rocket to the stricken vessel to allow the bosun's chair to be used. Donald MacKinnon, Hough, then driving for Johnny Kennedy, had the contract to transport the coastguards' equipment. He was told to park his lorry up on the dunes beside some wartime ruins to secure one end of the rope. The crew of around six were winched ashore, their "backsides dipping in the waves". The captain came ashore last, with his "cap glued to his head!" according to Archie Brown, Kilkenneth, the only surviving member of the coastguard team. The crew were taken to the Crossapol Hall and seemed to have left the island the next day. The ship broke up rapidly in the onshore winds and there was a sale of the yacht's fittings on the beach the next day. Johnny Brown from the Scarinish Hotel bought two aluminium water tanks, but before most of the items could be collected there was another storm and everything was buried in the sand. It is said at low tide parts of the vessel can still be seen and exquisite brass bolts can be found on the beach from time to time. How the yacht came to be grounded in reasonable weather is still a mystery. The crew were adamant no one could touch a large chest on the deck. Rumours that they were smugglers or they were going to Russia to pick up a dissident flew around the island. One suggestion was that they had been steering for the light on the airport control tower instead of the Scarinish lighthouse. We will probably never know, although it's nice to think that the answer is still lying beneath the sands of *Tràigh Bhàigh*!



'Oceana' anchored off the Isle of Wight in the 1930's. This is how she is likely to have appeared in 1949 at the time of her stranding at Crossapol on Tiree

There are more photographs of the Oceana in An Iodhlann if you are interested..

Historic surf board on Tiree?

In March, we had an enquiry from Andy Bennetts who is researching the history of surfing in Scotland. He asked whether An Iodhlann could shed any light on a story he had heard:

"American soldiers were posted in Tiree during World War II and were surfing on Tiree. The soldiers left a board behind but there have been no further stories of anyone else using the board after the war. The board was kept in a house with a tin roof at the top of the Maze Road. The house was rebuilt about 5 years ago."

As far as we know, there were no American servicemen based on Tiree during the war, and, so far, no-one remembers anything about a large wooden surf board, which would have been either solid or hollow made from plywood or similar and at least 12 foot long.

It is possible that there is no basis for this story, but if any of you can confirm it, we would be delighted to hear from you - JANET BOWLER, ARCHIVIST.

Place names – Stories from an Island Landscape

One of our projects over the winter has been to put the 3,200 place names of the island on a web site along with a number of stories. This huge labour is now almost finished and the results will be published on-line in the summer.



Tug o' war at a Tiree Association Sports Day held at Cornaig School in the late 1930's

Donald the Pilot

The fascinating story of the role of Donald MacLean from Ruaig in the escape of Bonnie Prince Charlie and Donald's family tree has been put together by a hard-working team led by Louise MacDougall in Canada. The results of their studies can be seen at the following websites:

<http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?db=pilotoftiree>

<http://www.tireegathering.com>

Old Maps

A good site for research in the old maps of the island is the National Library of Scotland's website at www.nls.uk/maps/

A Sri Lankan geologist on Tiree

We were contacted recently by a researcher at the Hunterian Museum in Glasgow who was working on the publications of a Sri Lankan geologist who visited Tiree around 1900. This fascinating man, Ananda Coomaraswamy, was born in Colombo in 1877. His father was the first Sri Lankan to be knighted by Queen Victoria and his mother came from Kent. His father died when he was just two and Ananda was sent to school in England. He graduated in 1900 with a first class degree in geology and botany and became Director of the Mineralogical Survey of Ceylon. Before going back to his father's country, however, he wrote a paper in 1903 on the marbles of Tiree and Iona, of which we have a copy in the archive. In 1906 Coomaraswamy gave up geology and moved to a country house in England, devoting himself to the study of Indian art and philosophy, meeting Gandhi and Tagore. We were asked if anyone on Tiree remembers meeting this remarkable man. So far we have not found any stories about him, but let us know if you have one!

Thanks again for supporting your archive. I think you'll agree that there is plenty going on in this little island!

Dr John Holliday, chair of An Iodhlann