

LEADER

Community-Led Local Development



National Rural Network

LEADER 2014-2020 NRN CASE STUDY

Project name: Lands of Éogain Heritage Festival

Date: September 8th to 10th 2017

Local Action Group: Donegal LCDC

Implementing Partner: Inishowen Development Partnership

Type of Beneficiary: Formalised Community Group

Priority & Focus Area: Theme 1: Rural Economic Development, Enterprise Development and Job Creation / Sub theme: Rural Tourism

Project Beneficiary: Lands of Éogain Heritage Group

Address: Ballybrack, Moville, Co. Donegal

Further information: www.landsofeogain.com

LANDS OF ÉOGAIN HERITAGE FESTIVAL

Summary

Based on the Inishowen Peninsula in Donegal, the Lands of Éogain heritage group was supported through LEADER funding to run the 2017 Lands of Éogain Heritage Festival. The 2017 festival had diverse aims and a wide range of local benefits. It helped to promote Inishowen as a destination for world class heritage tourism, gathering leading academics and situating Inishowen's heritage story in an international context. It raised local awareness of Inishowen's unique cultural heritage. The festival was attended by national and international participants bringing off-peak cultural tourism to the area. This also generated wider spin-off local economy benefits such as to hospitality, food service and transport providers.

Context

Lands of Éogain is a heritage group based on the Inishowen Peninsula in the north of county Donegal. Broadly speaking, Lands of Éogain works to develop, preserve and raise awareness of Inishowen's heritage and its significance in the European historical context. The Lands of Éogain heritage group has a diverse range of aims and activities such as collating and disseminating information on Inishowen heritage, providing training opportunities, as well as running projects and seminars. The group has been involved in digs and research, such as at the Cooley Graveyard monastic settlement in the Moville area. The group recognises that local heritage has its own important innate value, but also if carefully managed and harnessed is a significant resource that can support economic



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development through supporting local cultural heritage tourism.

Lands of Éogain first held a heritage festival in 2015 aiming to share the results of excavations carried out in collaboration with the Bernician Studies Group. LEADER funding supported the 2017 Lands of Éogain Heritage Festival which acted as a focal point to celebrate Inishowen heritage, attract tourism to the area and build future momentum. A festival concept for 2017 was developed aiming to provide academic and historical information in an accessible and informative way.

In the wider context, the festival supported the goals of the Donegal Local Development Strategy. One of its objectives is to harness the potential of Donegal's world class authentic tourism offerings for the benefit of rural communities by facilitating diversification and the creation of indigenous tourism enterprises, community based tourism initiatives and ancillary facilities. The Lands of Éogain Heritage Festival directly supports this goal as a community based festival supporting cultural heritage tourism and education. The festival was planned for September to stimulate tourism at an off-peak time of year.

Objectives

The 2017 Lands of Éogain Heritage Festival aimed to:

- Promote Inishowen as a destination for world class heritage tourism
- Gather leading academics in the field
- Disseminate knowledge to local groups
- Raise awareness and appreciation of the unique cultural heritage of the area

Activities

The Lands of Éogain Heritage Festival 2017 was developed to have wide appeal to different groups such as tourists, students, academics and the general public, particularly those with an interest in history, archaeology and culture. Focus was placed on developing a programme including high quality speakers to build a reputation for Inishowen as a destination for world class heritage events.

The Lands of Éogain heritage group has connections with international experts such as at Newcastle University and the Bernician Studies Group. This provided links to potential speakers. The academic content was tailored to explore Inishowen's heritage story and situate it in an international context. This aimed to help elevate and enhance Inishowen's position in a cultural heritage context. The festival concept was developed to help support further establishment of expert links locally, nationally and internationally. The event also included updates on current geophysical surveying by the Bernician Studies Group of Straid Church, Clonmany, helping raise the public profile of ongoing work. The opportunity to complement other local cultural initiatives was also identified, such as the Inishowen Traditional Music Project.



Traditional music performance at the 2017 Lands of Éogain Festival. Image Credit: Lands of Éogain Heritage Group

The Lands of Éogain Heritage Festival programme in 2017 included talks, a tour, music and an exhibition, alongside book stalls and a craft market. The three-day event was held on September 8th to 10th 2017 in Clonmany, a village located along the Wild Atlantic Way. The event gathered international and national experts.

The festival opened on Friday September 8th with a keynote presentation from Dr Brian Lacey and Colm O'Brien. The opening talk was followed by a special musical performance by the Inishowen Traditional Music Project. The Saturday programme featured a full day of presentations and discussions. Speakers included those





with local, national and international expertise. For example, Professor Michelle Brown from the University of London spoke about the Irish contribution to early medieval manuscript culture and Dr Hermann Moisl from Newcastle University explored ecclesiastical empire building in the context of the Armagh confederation and Merovingian Gaul. Local experts included Donegal based artist and musician Seoirse Ó'Dochartaigh who discussed the clachans of Clonmany and Dr Brian Lacey who traced the 7th century connections between Inishowen and Northumbria. An art exhibition, alongside a heritage book and craft market added to the diversity of the programme on Saturday. Sunday's programme included a heritage tour and visit to Inishowen heritage sites including Cooley Graveyard, Straid Church and Fort Dunree.

"LEADER funding gave the Lands of Éogain group the capacity to offer a high quality festival that could attract world-class speakers and integrate this with local community heritage interests. Feedback from the speakers and the general community has been excellent and has generated an appetite for further events of this kind."

Dr. Trish Murphy, Lands of Éogain Heritage Group

Results

Scheduled in September, the festival increased tourism activity to the Inishowen Peninsula in the off-peak season. Attendees were diverse such as academics, students, heritage enthusiasts and wider tourist visitors. The festival was attended by national and international participants from the UK, Northern Ireland, US, Europe and North West region of Ireland. Friday September 8th was attended by 67 people, Saturday September 9th by 69 people and Sunday September 10th by 59 people. A total of 51 people took part in the guided bus tour on Sunday September 10th.

The festival also generated wider spin-off benefits to the local economy engaging services of local tourism, hospitality, food service and transport providers. The festival generated 94 bed nights for local accommodation providers. A local bus company was contracted to provide

a bus for the tour. Food service providers were contracted to provide food and beverage catering for attendees. Festival attendees also visited the military museum at Fort Dunree.

"The Lands of Éogain Festival 2017 has helped to consolidate the excellent reputation of the coordinating group in Inishowen and beyond. It has opened up Inishowen heritage to a wider audience locally, nationally and internationally. We look forward to further promoting Inishowen as a go-to destination for cultural and archaeological heritage."

Neil McGrory, Lands of Éogain Heritage Group

The Lands of Éogain Heritage Festival enhanced the profile of Inishowen as a hub for cultural tourism. Advertising, local media and social media coverage supported this. Promotional materials were generated, distributed and displayed (e.g. 30 A3 posters, 50 A4 programmes, pop up and outdoor banners). The festival gained local newspaper coverage such as in Donegal Now and The Derry Journal. It also gained coverage through social media such as by local (e.g. @VisitInishowen and @Inishowenmusic), national and international groups (e.g. @Berniciantweets and @FourCourtsPress).



Interactive discussion at the 2017 Lands of Éogain Festival. Image Credit: Lands of Éogain Heritage Group



More broadly the festival provided a forum for networking and ideas exchange between groups that without the festival would not have come together. Talks generated good discussion and strong audience engagement.

“The Lands of Éogain Festival Heritage project is about local people taking ownership of their shared heritage, celebrating it and developing it for the benefit of all in the Inishowen Peninsula.”
Andrew Ward, Joint CEO, Inishowen Development Partnership

The festival also had local community benefits, increasing appreciation and understanding of local cultural heritage. The local community had the opportunity to engage in field trips to archaeological excavation sites showcasing the wider work of the Lands of Éogain Heritage group. For example, Lands of Éogain collaborates with the UK based Bernician Studies Group to study local ancient monuments using innovative geo-physical surveying methods.



Visit to Straid Church, Clonmany as part of the 2017 Lands of Éogain Festival. Image Credit: Lands of Éogain Heritage Group

Lessons

Strong potential for cultural heritage to stimulate niche tourism: This project shows the potential for cultural heritage to stimulate niche tourism. This is particularly important as it can be harnessed at off-peak times of the year helping to extend the tourist season.

Local supports and groups important to realise the potential of cultural heritage tourism: The existence of local community groups working to highlight and preserve local cultural heritage resources emerge as a vital part of realising the potential for cultural heritage to stimulate niche tourism in the Inishowen context. The importance of support for community heritage groups in their work, such as through LEADER, is vital to preserving and unlocking the value of local heritage.

Elevate local heritage sites through knowledge sharing demonstrating their wider significance: The festival worked to place Inishowen at the centre of the early Christian world and explore its unique position in the ecclesiastical context of Ireland in Europe at this time. It did this by working with a range of experts, both local and international. This points to the importance of knowledge and networks to highlight the wider, deeper significance of heritage sites, helping to harness their value for cultural tourism.

Local collaboration helps to build a diverse festival programme: Wider local cultural assets, resources and services are important to build a festival programme that incorporates different types of activities. For example, music from the Inishowen Traditional Music Project was part of the festival programme.

Funding

Total project budget (i)+(ii)+(iii) =	€6,101.64
+ (i) Rural Development Programme support (a)+(b)	€4,576.23
+ (a) EAFRD (EU) contribution	€2,873.87
+ (b) National / Regional contribution	€1,702.36
+ (ii) Private / Own funds	€1,525.41
+ (iii) Other funding sources	n/a

Contact details

Project beneficiary name	Lands of Éogain Heritage Group
Email	landsofeogain@gmail.com
Address of beneficiary or implementing body	Ballybrack, Moville, Co. Donegal