Islands Book Trust looks ahead to 2015

After a successful, recently concluded, inter-island programme, the Islands Book Trust is now looking forward to the new year.

Look out for details of the 2015 schedule, which will be published in the February edition of Am Pàipear...

Another successful year of events and publications is drawing to a conclusion for the Islands Book Trust (IBT), but plans are already coming together for the 2015 programme of events.

IBT is now chaired by Alasdair MacEachen, who is pleased to report that the 2014 programme went very well, with some major events extending beyond the Outer Hebrides to places like Colonsay and County Donegal in Ireland.

Alasdair said: "I am also happy to announce that several new Uist and Barra-based trustees were appointed to the board at this year's AGM, giving us scope to run a few more events and spread the workload among our volunteers."

Alasdair MacEachen.

Joining the three longstanding local trustees - Alasdair MacEachen, John Love and Calum MacNeil - are Jonathan Grant from Barra, along with Mike Townsend and Iain MacDonald from North Uist.

Jonathan is employed as the National Trust for Scotland Ranger for the Barra Head Islands and he has already assisted IBT with summer excursions to Mingulay and Berneray (Barra Head).

Retired teacher Mike Townsend is well acquainted with the Uist and Barra landscape, having compiled the current Cicerone guide to Uist and Barra Walks. Iain 'Blashaval' MacDonald has a long association with his local historical society and his involvement also strengthens the *Gàidhlig* dimension of the trust's work.

Looking ahead, the 2015 programme of events will include the usual variety of walks, talks and excursions to remote islands including Barra Head, the Monach Islands and St Kilda.

The main conference event next year will be hosted in Barra, with a three-day event examining 'The History of Galley Castles' being organised along with Historic Scotland and Rory MacNeil of Barra.

Readers can keep up to date with all Islands Book Trust events, publications, and other news through the website (details opposite).

Islands Book Trust recently held its last event of 2014 at Kildonan Museum, an evening in the company of Professor Hugh Cheape (pictured), exploring the photograph collection of Margaret Fay Shaw.

THE ISLANDS BOOK TRUST
Urras Leabhraichean nan Eilean
LIVING HISTORY
www.theislandsbooktrust.com

International audience for Island Voices

***Gordon Wells* writes on the latest news from the 'Island Voices - *Guthan nan Eilean*' project, including a recent visit from some Irish enthusiasts...**

The 'Island Voices - *Guthan nan Eilean*' project has been running locally now for a number of years. During that time it has grown and developed in various ways, but the fundamental aim remains the same – to capture and curate local language usage, in both English and *Gàidhlig*, primarily for the benefit of language learners, but also for anyone else interested in getting a taste of 21st century Hebridean life and work.

The work is low-key, and aimed at representing the 'ordinary' speech of community members. The interest is in real life rather than razzamatazz. Over the years, a substantial archive of recordings - mostly video, but also sound recordings and texts - has gradually accumulated.

The project also has its own YouTube channel and Facebook page, both easy to find from the central website.

This ease of access should make the material readily available for local residents – provided they have a decent internet connection – but it also means that people all over the world can peek in and get some appreciation of what life is like here. And, surprise, surprise, the project has been attracting growing international interest - YouTube views in over 200 different countries for example - not least in Ireland, particularly amongst Irish language speakers and enthusiasts.

Last year a small group of *Uibhistich* went over to Ranafast in the Donegal Gaeltacht to talk about Island Voices, at the invitation of Ulster University, in a trip funded by the Colmcille partnership.

This year, at the very end of October, we were pleased to play host to a return visit by a group of Ulster University teachers, along with community members from Gweedore and other parts of Donegal.

It was a short visit, but the group were very comfortably installed at the Nunton House Hostel for a couple of nights. The weather on the first day was calm, bright, and still – a perfect autumn day for showing off the delights of Benbecula.

With Archie Campbell as the volunteer guide, the morning was devoted to walking up Rueval, from which the visitors were able to view neighbouring Hebridean islands on all sides. With Bonnie Prince Charlie's escape road east to Roshinish spread out below them and the spooky profile of *Airidh na h-Aon Oidhche* sticking up jaggedly to the south, they also gained a physical appreciation of some of the stories, whether historical or mythical, that they had already come across being related on the Island Voices website.

Irish visitors on tour around Benbecula, led by Archie Campbell and Gordon Wells.

In the afternoon, one exploratory party reconnoitred around *Teampull Chaluim Chille* in Balivanich, while others explored the shoreline at Cula Bay, again taking in some of the cultural and natural heritage of the island. Much of this activity was recorded on video or in still photographs. This material was further added to in the evening when some serious interview work was done, back in the warmth and comfort of the hostel.

Despite the significant distance between Irish and Scottish *Gàidhlig*, we found we could manage pretty well without English most of the time. We even recorded some 'bilingual' conversations, alongside the Irish and our *Gàidhlig* , most of which have now been placed online so interested viewers can judge for themselves how close they find the two languages to be.

Speaking for myself, as someone who came rather late to *Gàidhlig*, I have to confess to experiencing one or two 'Manuel moments' - Que? - but Archie seemed to manage it well!

In any event, the visitors evidently enjoyed their trip, and hopefully they'll be back for a longer visit next time.

The enjoyment and appreciation was mutual, and both Archie and I were reminded of many of the usually unsung attractions that Benbecula has to offer visitors. It may be a relatively small and low-lying island, but these factors can be turned to its advantage – particularly for short-stay visitors. The view from the top of Rueval is magnificent – and it doesn't take long to get there. Meanwhile historic sites and a stunning beach are all within easy reach.

The Irish went home raving about their trip, with Facebook and YouTube fairly humming in the days after with posts and videos. We may have started something bigger than we first thought…

Meanwhile, back at home, the Island Voices project continues, and is always open to new ideas and new participants.

Visit the website at guthan.wordpress.com and if you think you might like to try out some recording yourself get in touch through the site or on this number: 07879 644984.