

Report to the Nineveh Trust: June 2021

In August 2020 the Nineveh Trust awarded Gairloch & District Heritage Company Ltd a grant of £5000 towards the costs of the Archaeological Trail element of our 'Outdoors Story' project. This was the final piece of the regeneration jigsaw of the originally semi-derelict brownfield site where Highland Council's Roads Depot, once a Cold War era bunker, was transformed into the 'new' Gairloch Museum, recently awarded the prestigious accolade of Art Fund Museum of the Year 2020.

Our Land, Our People, Our Outdoors Story was planned to ensure that the external environment became another really good reason to visit Gairloch Museum, an aim enhanced as social distancing and activity in the fresh air is encouraged in the ongoing pandemic circumstances. Having provided an interim update in March, I am now writing to confirm that the project is complete. There were no significant changes to the original estimates for project expenditure as no additional or unforeseen costs were incurred as the work progressed. We are delighted that the generosity of funders enabled us to undertake all the work in a coherent whole (and so more economically).

The substantial landscaping required began in February, after inevitable and unavoidable delays owing to the pandemic circumstances. It was completed by the end of April, though the ground will look rather 'raw' for a few months until the vegetation regrows. The improvements on the ground included considerable drainage work, and created a better surfaced and less steep path for the lower part of the Archaeology Trail, making it far easier to access the nine roundhouse sites and various shielings on the hillside behind the Museum. The drystone dyke has been reconstructed and seats (some being cores cut-out from the original Cold War building) have been installed, to give visitors a breather.

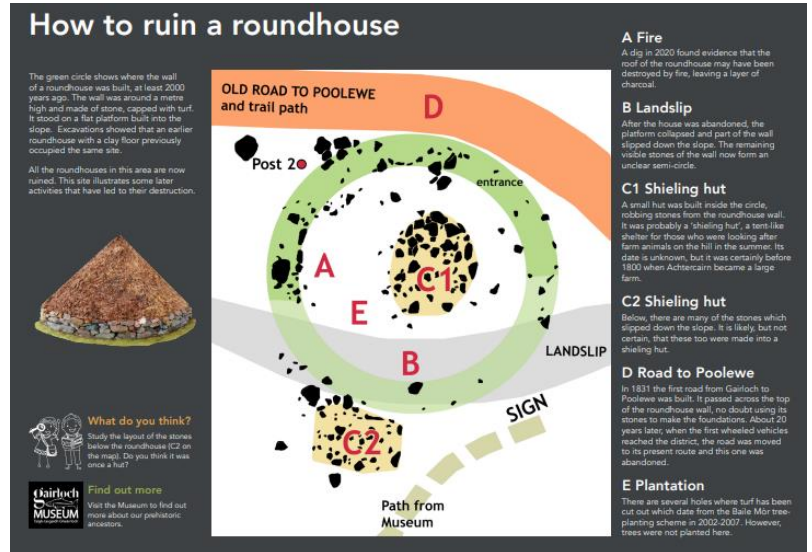
Two interpretation panels specifically for the Trail were commissioned from our well-reputed Museum designers, Campbell & Co., Edinburgh, consistent with the 'branding' of the internal galleries and with text and images provided by our (by-now) well-practised Interpretation Team. These were installed in early June, bringing to completion this phase of the project. (We now have plans for a community project to build a replica roundhouse and other ideas for 'Phase II' once we have taken stock of how the broader heritage scene might look post-pandemic.)

The 'signposting' panel informs visitors about the archaeological heritage and the trail walk.



The second panel is located at the site of the first roundhouse on the trail. It illustrates the significance of the findings of the community excavation undertaken here in October 2020. Further excavation work is planned, under the guidance of Dr Tom Gardner of Edinburgh University.

Maps, a guide book and QR download (for mobile phones) are available to allow a broad spectrum of visitors to enjoy the walk to the 'hill of the eagle', with its extensive views over Gairloch Bay to Skye and the local mountains.



The Trail is already proving an attraction, both with visitors and local walkers. All being well, and the tourist economy remaining open in Scotland through the summer months, the learning gained 'outside' can be followed up inside the Museum, where there is a formal display, a diorama of a roundhouse settlement and other artefacts and features.



We hope that *Our Outdoors Story* will encourage people to 'dig deeper' and explore the supplementary resources available, both in the Archives/Library and book shop. We are also very much looking forward to taking advantage of this opportunity to extend our heritage reach with guided and self-guided walks, and to offer sessions with young people and community groups as soon as this becomes feasible. We are confident that these initiatives will help secure our financial sustainability in these challenging times and will encourage those who journey on the North Coast 500 to embrace 'slow travel', intrigued to discover what Gairloch parish has to offer.

The Board, staff and volunteers of Gairloch Museum have been delighted to be able to welcome visitors once again, having reopened to the public on 27 April after the months of enforced closure. At last we are able to re-engage in 'real time' with our community groups of all ages. In this Covid-19 era, opportunities for outdoors heritage and activities seem particularly important. We are therefore immensely grateful for this support from the Nineveh Foundation to ensuring we enjoy a stimulating future. The official opening of the 'Outdoors Museum' is scheduled for early August 2021. Your grant will be acknowledged on a panel recognising the funding support for all aspects of the project which will be located at the viewing platform in front of the Museum. Thank you!

Pauline Butler
(Board Secretary)