

## THE GAELIC RING

---

### 1. SUMMARY

- 1.1. An informal meeting took place in Oban during the week of last year's Royal National Mod festival, involving some of the members of the Oban, Lorn and the Isles Area Committee and the Western Isles Council, at which matters of joint interest were discussed.
- 1.2. Among the items of mutual interest raised was the concept of creating a tourism marketing initiative which could be called 'The Gaelic Ring' which would be aimed at linking the Gaelic-speaking areas of the Western Seaboard of the mainland with the Argyll and Highland islands and the Hebridean chain of the Western Isles.  
The links would be physical (transportation links) and cultural (themes – music/dance/heritage etc), and could be promoted in the first instance by local partnerships assembling programmes of events which could be accessed using journeys within the existing Caledonian MacBrayne Network, not dissimilar to CalMac's 'Island Hopscotch' travel packages.
- 1.3 The **Gaelic Ring** should be a carefully constructed tourism marketing effort developed through partnership working between Argyll & Bute Council, The Highland Council, Western Isles Council, the respective Area Tourist Boards, the HIE Network and Caledonian MacBrayne.

### 2. Recommendation

- 2.1. That the Oban, Lorn and the Isles Area Committee supports the development of the 'Hebridean Gaelic Ring' (Cearcall na Gaidhlig) initiative, and
- 2.2. That the Director of Development Services be authorised to co-ordinate and develop the concept in conjunction with other appropriate agencies and in close co-operation with the corresponding agencies in the Highland Council area and the Western Isles.

### 3. Background

3.1. There are excellent existing trunk road links between the Central Belt and the main Argyll towns, giving journey times from Glasgow to Mid Argyll in under two hours, and to Oban in two hours 30 minutes. These routes take the visitor through breathtaking coastal landscapes, with a backdrop of mountain and glen and pass through sites of unparalleled historical and archaeological significance.

3.2. Oban, well named as the 'Gateway to the Isles', is a primary transport interchange with bus and train termini and ferry services to the inner islands of Mull, Iona, Lismore, Colonsay, Tiree and Coll and the outer islands of Barra and South Uist.

Oban itself is a popular tourist centre, being second only to Edinburgh for the number of tourist enquiries in Scotland.

The sites to see in the area include the Garvellach Islands, (the Isles of the Sea) haunt of sea eagles and other fascinating wildlife, Ardnamurchan point, the most westerly mainland point in the UK, "Balamory", or Tobermory as it is known in real life, the Corryvreckan whirlpool, many famous lighthouses such as Skerryvore and Dubh Artach, ancient castles including Dunstaffnage, where the 'Stone of Destiny' resided for some time, and much more.

3.3. The introduction of the CalMac ferries on the Sound of Harris and the Sound of Barra has provided the opportunity for increased travel choices to link the Gaelic speaking areas of Argyll and Bute and Highland Council areas, with the Hebridean chain of the Western Isles.

Other routes in the Caledonian MacBrayne network to the Inner Hebrides continue to improve in service levels and frequencies, such that increasing opportunities for island travel are available.

3.4. In addition, last year saw the completion of the fixed links programme of major infrastructure to provide a spinal route through the Western Isles, with South Uist linked to Benbecula, North Uist and Bernera. Other ferries link to Skye, Harris and Lewis. It is possible, therefore to access the islands from Oban or Ullapool on the mainland, or by the Skye bridge and ferry from Uig. It is evident that there are many permutations for visitors to visit the various islands, all providing much diverse interest with many having magnificent sandy beaches. The weather, however cannot be guaranteed, a fact which possibly gives the area some of its charm!

This has provided a significant improvement in the journey options for visitors and locals alike when travelling to the mainland ports.

3.5. Recent years have also seen a significant increase in the number and type of special, cultural events taking place at different locations and at different times throughout the area and this taken together with the improving travel links, presents the opportunity to provide a multi-layered framework of activities,

interests and travel options, bound together by the Gaelic tradition, which could all be captured as a tourism promotion under the umbrella of a "Hebridean Gaelic Ring" initiative.

#### **4. Concept of Gaelic Rings**

4.1. The advent of the Spinal Route has also provided the opportunity to create rings of 'participation' for visitors who may wish to visit cultural events or other activities in a number of locations by connecting areas in Argyll, Highland Region and the Western Isles that have a strong Gaelic language and cultural heritage.

As can be seen from the indicative map attached to this report, a number of existing 'rings' can be drawn, joining centres which have connecting transport arrangements.

It would be possible also to identify rings connecting locations with similar events or activities, and promote the concept under the banner of 'Cearcall na Gaidhlig'/ Hebridean Gaelic Ring

4.2. The potential visitor seeking information on the 'Hebridean Gaelic Ring' could then choose from a menu of layers of interest or layers of route options

4.3. An initial list of 'layers of interest' is attached in Appendix 1 and an indicative list of route options is enclosed in Appendix 2

4.4. The route options could be developed by the individual to suit available time and budget and would include a multi-modal combination of air, sea, road and rail options.

4.5. The concept might be developed along similar lines to the Ring of Kerry, in the Republic of Ireland.

#### **5. Internet Capability**

5.1. The concept lends itself well to promotion via the world-wide web where potential visitors from around the world could access the 'Hebridean Gaelic Ring' web site and determine the 'Hebridean Gaelic Ring' experience of their choice. Thereafter, with the creation of suitable links, accommodation, travel and function or venue tickets could be arranged, thus allowing the visitor to design and implement their own, unique, Hebridean Gaelic Ring experience.

## 6. Opportunities for Other Links

6.1. The opportunity exists following the development of the Hebridean Gaelic Ring to link into other initiatives such as the Columba Initiative. This would enable further Gaelic links to be fostered with Ireland

6.2. It would also be possible to link the Hebridean Gaelic Ring to such attractions as the West Highland Way and the proposed Kintyre Long Distance Footpath, thereby provide an overall experience similar in concept to that of the 'Western Trail' in Vancouver Island, Canada.

6.3. The proposal could, in the first instance, be developed through the Community Planning Partnership in Argyll and Bute and in conjunction with the appropriate corresponding agencies in the Western Isles and Highland areas.

## 7. Implications

Policy	The development of tourism opportunities will help to sustain fragile communities
Financial	Development work will be met from within existing budgets
Equal Opportunities	None
Personnel	None
Legal	None

For further details please contact Blair Fletcher, Transportation Manager at 01546 604190

Dave Duthie  
Head of Transportation and Infrastructure  
01546 604689 [dave.duthie@argyll-bute.gov.uk](mailto:dave.duthie@argyll-bute.gov.uk)  
11 June 2004

## Appendix 1

### Layers of Activities and Interests

Although not intended to be exhaustive, the following list provides some examples of the types of activities and interests which could be considered by the traveller wishing to create their own personalised Gaelic Ring experience.

- Gaelic speaking centres/ courses
- Arts and Cultural Events
- Heritage and genealogical interest
- Music Festivals and workshops
- Outdoor Trails and walks
- Cycling routes
- Historic Walks and Archaeology
- Wildlife and Natural History
- Architecture – housing types
- Maritime History, Boat building and traditional sailing.
- Food and Accommodation
- Crafts and Tweeds
- Religious establishments and Events
- Cruising in small craft
- Distillery visits

## Appendix 2

### Sample Route Choices

#### Road Links

All mainland Argyll and Highland ports are readily accessible from the trunk/strategic road network, eg Glasgow to Oban,(A82. A85) Kennacraig (A82/A83), Mallaig (A82/A830), Skye (A82/A87) and Ullapool (A 835)

#### Spinal Route Sea rings

Oban – Tiree – Castlebay - Eriskay – Spinal route – Stornoway – Ullapool

Oban – Castlebay – Eriskay– Lochboisdale – Oban

Oban – Castlebay – South Uist - Benbecula – Lochmaddy – Uig - Armadale – Mallaig

Uig - Lochmaddy – Bereray - Spinal Route – Tarbert – Uig

Mallaig – Small Isles– Uig – Lochmaddy – Spinal Route – Tarbert –Uig – Skyebridge

Kennacraig – Islay – Jura – Colonsay - Oban and on to Western Isles

Oban – Mull – Iona – Staffa - return to Oban

Oban – Coll – Tiree – Oban

Oban – Mull – Ardnamurchan –(Kilchoan) – Mallaig – Armadale (Skye)

Oban – Mull – Morvern (Lochaline) – Corran Ferry – Fort William

Mallaig – Skye – on to Outer Hebrides

Other Sea Routes could be developed taking in the other islands and the Kintyre and Ardnamurchan peninsulas, using links at Tarbert and Lochaline as mainland embarkation points.

## **Air Links**

London – Glasgow – Barra – Spinal Route Options– Stornoway – Inverness – London

Glasgow – Barra – Spinal route – Stornoway – Glasgow, or start Edinburgh.

Other links could be developed using airports at Islay, Tiree, Campbeltown and Benbecula, but the issue for the Argyll islands is that the current services operate radially from Glasgow.

The advent of a hub at Oban, which is presently being actively considered, would add greatly to the opportunities available.

### Appendix 3 - Events – Not Comprehensive Listing

March	Lorn Drama Festival Mid Argyll Music Festival
April	Oban and Lorn Strathspey and Reel Society annual concert Oban Argyll Drama Festival, Ardrishaig.
May	Highlands and Islands Music and Dance Festival - Oban Scottish Sailing Series, Tarbert, Loch Fyne Scottish 3 Peaks Race (Sailing/ Fell running) Islay Whisky Festival Glens of Antrim Festival Ionad Chaluum Chille events, Islay and Ireland (N and S)
June	Oban and District Provincial Mod Kilmore Highland Games Islay Provincial Mod Ardnamurchan Provincial Mod
July	Clyde Cruising Club Tobermory Race/ Whisky Cruise Oban Saints Football Tournament
August	Lorn Agricultural Show Taynuilt Highland Games Mull Highland Games Mid Argyll Agricultural show Appin Agricultural show West Highland Yachting week, Oban Shinty Leagues Argyllshire Gathering and Oban Games Cowal Games, Dunoon
September	Mull Provincial Mod Tarbert Music Festival Campbeltown Music Festival Mid Argyll Provincial Mod
October	Royal National Mod (2004 Perth, 2005 Western Isles, 2006 Dunoon)