

Archaeology on... ...St Kilda



St Kilda, a small group of islands 41 miles west of the Outer Hebrides, is a World Heritage Site on account of its amazing natural heritage: 'the islands of a million birds'. But the UK Government has now proposed similar recognition for the remarkable archaeological remains which survive there. Caring for such an important cultural landscape demands the highest standards: since 1996, thanks to a grant from Historic Scotland, the Trust has been able to employ a St Kilda Archaeologist each summer.

Since 1958 the Trust has organised Work Parties to go to St Kilda for two weeks at a time to help conserve the standing remains, and to assist a team of professional archaeologists in their survey and excavation work. Because of the remoteness of the islands – less than 1800 people visit each year – the Trust has established the St Kilda website www.kilda.org.uk, and a Gaelic version www.hiort.org.uk, where people from all over the world can share our fascination for the islands.



A rare scene of snow lying in Village Bay

Iron Age building



The 1995 'St Kilda Explored' exhibition

The popularity of St Kilda was shown in 1995 when a major exhibition in the Kelvingrove Museum, Glasgow, attracted over 700,000 visitors in just 10 months. Visitors were able to see many of the best artefacts to survive from the islands' 5,000 years of human activity.



Volunteers have helped excavate the remarkably intact remains of an Iron Age structure built into the scree overlooking the village. Pottery and midden material has been found, as well as evidence that crude stone tools were made in the prehistoric building – parts of which survived to around 1.5m (5ft) high.



Blackhouse before and after restoration

When the walls of an 1830s blackhouse had fallen into The Street in Village Bay, archaeologists carefully excavated the soil between the outer and inner wall, and recovered many everyday artefacts once used by the St Kildans.

Work Party volunteers then reconstructed the fallen wall to its appearance before the collapse. Much of St Kilda would be in ruins were it not for this type of repair.



The cliff-hanger excavations at The Gap

In one of the most spectacular examples of 'extreme archaeology', volunteers helped excavate an enigmatic 'boat-shaped setting' at the edge of a 220m (650ft) vertical sea cliff at The Gap. The site was in danger of falling into the sea, and therefore had to be completely excavated. The excavators were harnessed to ropes in order to work safely at this (literally) breathtaking site.

Visit our St Kilda websites at: www.kilda.org.uk (English)
and www.hiort.org.uk (Gaelic).



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