

P28 Music and Tales



Project Overview:

A living landscape is more than just scenery; it is the interaction between people and place. Stories, music and song reflect these interactions, helping us better understand where we have come from and where we might go. Coigach and Assynt have a wonderfully rich cultural heritage – the area was Gaelic speaking until three or four generations ago and it has produced more than its fair share of musicians, many of whom have achieved national acclaim.

The aims of the project are to:

- Produce a song and music book enabling musicians and others to bring old tunes back to life and ensuring future generations can access and use them.
- Unearth new material as well as research and connect existing archived information.
- Commission and record a modern piece of music, inspired by the area's living landscape, to encourage our young musicians to promote the area through their music.

Project lead organisation and other organisations involved: Coigach Community Development Company and Scottish Wildlife Trust

Project Location: Coigach and Assynt

Project dates: September 2016 – September 2021

Project Outputs

Measure	Target	Achieved	Notes
People attending the ceilidh trail	250	115	Venue Drumbeg, Achiltibuie, Ullapool
5 unpublished tunes	5	18	Mentor composed tunes. 13 unpublished tunes in C&A Collection book (Miss Christine Lonie's Jig (tune), Hector Macleods's Farewell to Altandena (tune), The Bermuda (tune), Rolling Fleeces (tune), Ben Mor Coigach (tune), Eachan's Air (tune), Sally's Waltz (tune), Leaving Coigach (tune), Coigach Hornpipe (tune), Ali 'Beag's' Reel (tune), Al Fraser's Jig (tune), Maureen Pendred (tune), Euan MacRae of Drumbeg (tune)).
5 songs identified	5	17	12 unpublished songs for C&A Collection book (Currie Dubh nan Ropa (song), Am Fiadh Cabarach (song), Mullaichean Rubha Stoir (song), Cathair a' Chulchinn (song), Airigh a' Chulchinn (song), Lochinver (song), Hurry back to Coigach (song), Taladh na Talmhainn (song), Kitty Alice (song), Clashnessie (song), Reidhport (song), Star of Hope (song)).

Participants in oral history project	10	12	
Books purchased	200	160	400 books were printed and released in Sept 2021. As of 22/12/21 160 copies invoiced and 24 promotional copies
Connections made with previous cultural studies	5	58	Link with European Ethnological Research Centre, 25 Albums, 4 Field Recordings, 18 books, 8 websites, 2 films
People attending commissioned piece concerts	500	524	Due to COVID Guidelines on 24 Sept 2021 - video of performance viewed by 50, and subsequently viewed on YouTube by 474 (29/12/21).
CDs of commissioned piece purchased	250	300	Year one commissioned recording 500 CDs produced, and 300 copies distributed or sold.
Local young musicians trained	4	3	Only three musicians recruited year 1. Training at Final year Performance.
Volunteer Days	20	35	Book had major contribution from volunteer contributors

Scheme Outputs

How has the project contributed to the CALLP Scheme Outcomes:

Y	1. The key features of the Coigach and Assynt Landscape will better understood and restored with a fit for purpose system in place to ensure the benefits are sustained. <i>The Music and Tales project has used the land and its people as inspiration and will contribute to a new and continuing appreciation of the area by local people and by visitors.</i>
	2. Where appropriate the connectivity and diversity of selected habitats will be mapped.
Y	3. Increased awareness and understanding amongst all individuals and groups of what makes Coigach and Assynt special and the threats to the unique heritage. <i>The oral history part of the project was important in that some of the area's last native Gaelic speakers were interviewed. The material from these interviews has been used by the composers as inspiration for their music, which will be available to the public, and the book is another expanded collection of oral histories. Mary Ann Kennedy, in her introduction to the book, highlights the threats to the Gaelic language: "In a part of the world where Gaelic clings to the very rocks by her fingertips, her life in danger, this collection of music, songs and stories is a priceless thing."</i>
Y	4. Important elements of the built, cultural and natural heritage will be recorded, improved, made publically accessible and celebrated by the local community. <i>There will be 3 music recordings, 10 people interviewed and a beautiful book of songs, tunes, photographs and stories.</i>
Y	5. People will have gained new skills in researching, restoring and understanding their heritage. <i>Young people have been taught by professional musicians and have made a music recording; the musicians have taken inspiration from research that has been done as part of the oral history element of the project and will, in turn, pass this knowledge on to the public; people have undertaken walks with other local, knowledgeable people and learnt about the history of the land and its people.</i>

Y	6. Collected data, information and interpretation will be more accessible in the public domain including posting on appropriate websites. <i>As at 6 September 2021 the total number of 150 for the Ceilidh trail. The portfolio of collected songs and compositions will be available through print or for musical compositions through download.</i>
Y	7. Local groups and individuals understand, enjoy, value and take action in the Coigach and Assynt area in ways they did not at the outset. <i>The Covid-19 lockdowns of 2020 forced people to find different ways to communicate. The Music and Tales Year 4 composition commission would normally have entailed the composers coming up to Coigach and Assynt to work. Of course, they couldn't do this so a successful series of online meetings with people from the Coigach and Assynt communities took place and material from these meetings was woven into the final composition.</i>
	8. Increased access infrastructure at key strategic locations enabling people to enjoy the natural and cultural heritage of the area.
Y	9. Increased opportunities for informal recreation that promotes health and well-being benefits. <i>New music to listen to and films to watch; a new book of music for people to play from and to read.</i>

Reflecting on the last 5 years, what's the one thing that you're most proud of that has come from your project being part of CALLP?

New Music for Coigach and Assynt

For me, the greatest achievement of the project is that, by the time it is completed, we will have a rich bank of original new music, composed by a group of Scotland's high profile musicians and the first collection of traditional songs and tunes from Coigach and Assynt. Thanks partly to earlier work completed for the Music and Tales project, we managed to obtain significant additional funding from Creative Scotland and enhance the original project, so, in addition to Mary Ann Kennedy's album of new music inspired by Coigach and Assynt, we will now have several more original compositions, along with new film.

What difference has this project made to the built, cultural and natural heritage of Coigach and Assynt?

Over the five year course of the project, music and oral histories have been collected and recorded, and original new music has been composed by highly skilled practitioners, in collaboration with members of both communities. Even during pandemic lockdowns, we managed to find ways of introducing the composers to the communities by organising a series of online meetings where we discussed different themes. Young people have been mentored by high profile musicians and given the opportunity to take part in the recording of an EP, 'The Soil Beneath Our Feet'. By the end of the project, Coigach and Assynt will have a bank of new music inspired by here, something which will have a long-lasting appeal to local people and visitors alike. I think this is something as a community we should be very proud of.

What difference has this project made to People?

I hope the project has made people aware of how rich our cultural history is and realise how important it is. During the writing of the book, 'The Coigach and Assynt Collection', Ronan Martin says he has been in touch with roughly 60 people, to find music and photographs, check details and seek permission for material to be published. Many of these people now live away from Coigach and Assynt, so this re-connection with their own cultural history must have been an important one. I believe that, over the last year or so of the pandemic and the anxiety that has come with that, the Music and Tales project has helped people: there is solace in the continuity that a knowledge of cultural history brings and positivity in the forward-looking creation of new music.

"The Coigach and Assynt Collection makes a truly inspiring contribution to the Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape project." Val Bryan

"I was blethering with Bruce MacGregor about sessions generally on BBC Radio Scotland Travelling Folk last night, and a gave a punt for the Coigach book!" Kevin Macleod

"I love the ethos of the CALLP Scheme, how individual projects join to have a greater impact." Mary Ann Kennedy

Useful Links

<https://coigach-assynt.org/2017/07/soil-beneath-feet/>

[Coigach Community Development Company – Community sustainability in a world class environment . . .](#)

Future Plans and Legacy

The project has allowed us to realise and expose the richness of the cultural histories of Coigach and Assynt; shown us and our communities that the area is more than simply a beautiful place with an interesting geological history. The land and the people, and how they have used the land, are of equal importance. For artists – musicians... visual artists... makers... designers... writers - there is infinite scope here for inspiration. We are considering a biennial celebration of this, perhaps a small festival or another series of artists' residencies, perhaps even the establishment of an artists' retreat both similar to Eigg's 'Bothy Project'. We have gained confidence from the Music and Tales project: Coigach and Assynt deserve to be celebrated and what the area has to offer shared with local people and visitors from all around the world alike.

Lessons Learned

What are the three positive lessons gained from the scheme:

1. For me, the last 18 months have been a crash-course in project management
2. I am enjoying the collaboration with other work colleagues and with members of the communities
3. I believe the project has drawn together the people of Coigach and Assynt

What are the three negative lessons gained from the scheme:

1. It's better to over-estimate rather than under-estimate a budget
2. Managing busy, high profile practitioners, although rewarding, is challenging
3. Rejected applicants for positions can need delicate handling

Funding Partners



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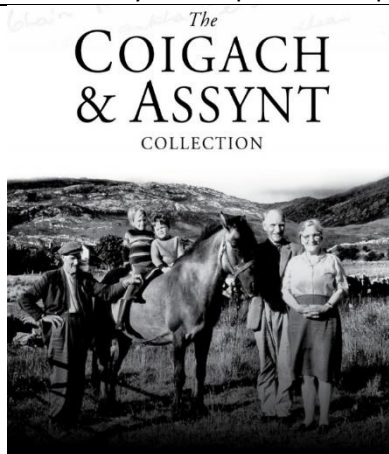
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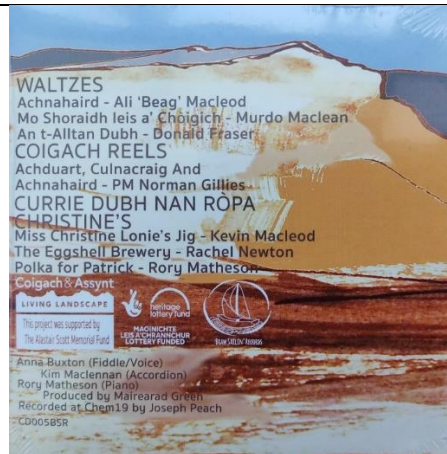
Anna Buxton, mentored young musician playing at ceilidh ©Coigach Community Development Company



Introduction of commissioned musicians to the landscape of Coigach © Ann Marie Firth-Bernard



Music & Tales Coigach & Assynt Collection book cover © Coigach Community Development Company



CD produced by the collaboration of the young musicians and their mentors © Coigach Community Development Company