

“Creation of a single, accessible Generic Information Source for Wester Ross”

Background:

As per discussions and subsequent minutes of T@ meeting, dated 27th February.

“Project: Developing a single information source for the entire region. What options are there for this, and how can we create an effective source that local people can tap into?”

Why is this work required?

There are a huge variety of information sources currently available on the subject of Wester Ross. These range from books and other printed matter through to videotapes, CD – Roms, DVD’s, Cassettes, Photographs, and the spoken word. However, should an individual or a group become involved in developing a tourism related product, there are several difficulties in accessing the required information which may be required as content.

Almost all of the information appears to be in book form up until a few years ago, which means that this has to be broken down and laboriously copied onto a PC. And while there are many websites and subsidiary sources (CD’s etc) containing relevant information on the area, these are often reflecting the personal opinion of the site/CD owner, and can frequently be out of date by several years. So, the issue here is how to best develop an adaptable and simple *quality* information source which can be used by any organisation or business in the area.

Methodology:

It was obvious from the start that this seedcorn project had close tie-ins with both Seedcorn projects No: 2 (Information delivery) & No: 6 (Regional Website). The first of these was to do with getting information to people within this area, and the second was connected with pushing this information outwith the area onto the world stage.

Therefore *this* project is about gathering that information in the first place.

Therefore, a review was first undertaken of the results from these projects, couple with an informal visit to various retail outlets in the area to see what exists at present. This showed that there are a significant number of books and guides for the walker (perhaps too many), several “coffee table“ format colour publications, a small number of CD’s (mainly home produced OR on a very small scale), and a variety of books on history / culture. Most of the latter are focused either on Ross and Cromarty as a whole or on Easter Ross – there are very few specifically on Wester Ross.

Interestingly, a survey of Internet keywords through up the fact that entering Easter / Wester Ross in order, followed by the words History (or) Culture (or) Heritage threw up similar results, *namely* that there are far more sites connected with Easter Ross. In the case of “Heritage”, Easter Ross has **12.5x more pages** available (493,000 against only 40,500), **Puzzlingly though, asking for pages for “Visitor Information” produced a reversed set of results, with Wester Ross having nearly ten times more results than its eastern counterpart!**

This indicates that while relatively speaking, there is more general tourist information available on Wester Ross, this is of a non specific nature – Accomodation, local facilities etc. While Wester Ross is obviously regarded as a major Visitor draw, there is a clear area of non-information concerning specialist items ie. **Generic information on the area covering subjects such as Culture / Heritage / Wildlife etc.**

With photography, there are not quite the same issues: In fact, there are a huge range of photographers and photographs of Wester Ross available on the Internet and through publications that are widely available. The challenge here is not finding information for a central source, but to sift through what is available and cherry pick the images with the most visitor appeal on a variety of subject matter.

We therefore contacted a number of locally working photographers, and asked about the possibility of obtaining samples for this information source and for the proposed website. The result was that nobody has objected to this request – in fact, everybody was only too happy to assist, albeit with a perfectly reasonable suggestion that their help is acknowledged on such a site / CD or similar.

We have also consulted with other sources such as SCRAN (Scottish Cultural Resource Access Network), Scottish Natural Heritage, National Trust for Scotland, again with the same general proviso as the private sector – *acknowledgment of assistance*.

Finally, we have a range of websites already in existence, albeit ones which cover specific areas of Wester Ross rather than the entire area. All of the T@ partners are prepared to work together on collating this information into one unit for the purposes of this central source, while accepting there may be specific items which are effectively “owned” by a third party, and potentially not available for general use.

Therefore, we have access to all the information required.

- Text Content
- Photography
- Music
- Specialist Knowledge
- Technical ability
- Culture
- History
- Heritage

Coupled with the results of Seedcorn project No: 2, which showed that information in leaflet and booklet form was erratically spread throughout the region, it is clear that as a group, we must therefore be looking to develop an information source with the following attributes:

- **This must cover specific interest subjects**
- **It must be detailed**
- **Adaptable and upgradeable as time goes on**
- **Portable, easy to access and user friendly**

In today’s language, this means a digital format - most likely CD Rom - using commonly available equipment / software, which can be put together through combining and collating already available information from a range of sources.

Proviso:

The information should be made available to people within the tourist industry at present, and the ability to access and use this should relate to emerging quality assurance criteria, specifically the Wester Ross Brand Logo which T@ Wester Ross has developed through the NEST Project.

The resulting item would be clearly sustainable, as this would be a saleable item on CD format, and can easily be altered as time passes.

We are now proceeding with this project and expect that the initial boost enabled through the NEST project will result in a “one stop” CD during the course of the coming season.

D. Gibson, Celtic Fringe Tourism Association, September 2007

