



Scottish Pilgrim Routes Forum

Scottish Pilgrimage Gathering 2019 - Summary Report

A total of 30 delegates representing Full and Associate members of the Forum, invited speakers and guests met at Girvan, Ayrshire on 4th October for a busy and informative Gathering blessed by a welcome interval of autumn sunshine. See below for a list of attendees and apologies.

Most of us took part in the 5 mile morning walk along the Ayrshire Coastal Path section of the Whithorn Way pilgrim route, starting at the layby on a quiet minor road above the Dowhill Farm visitor centre. We enjoyed superb coastal views from the beach looking across to Ailsa Craig and then passing through open farmland into Girvan town centre, stopping to see the 'pebbles' memorial garden overlooking the harbour. See photos below. Many thanks are due to **Sylvia Jenks**, **Martin Bonnar** and **David Langworth**, members of the Whithorn Way Steering Group, for acting as our walk leaders and sharing their story of the creation of the route. We also saw at first hand the excellent path maintenance work by the Ayrshire Coastal Path volunteers from the Ayr Rotary Club who were carrying out essential fence and gate repairs.

An excellent soup and sandwich lunch was provided by Michelle Oellermann and the volunteer team at the Milestone Church, where we then held our main meeting. Several Forum member organisations brought leaflets and other information.

The SPRF Chairman, **Very Rev Dr Sheilagh Kesting** warmly welcomed everyone to the afternoon session and introduced **Pastor Adam Oellermann** who gave us an overview of the many varied Christian outreach activities supported by the Milestone Church within the Girvan community, which made this such an appropriate venue for a Pilgrimage Gathering on the route of the Whithorn Way.

Kenny Wilson, Youth Worker with the **Church of Scotland Argyll Presbytery** set the scene admirably with his talk and video film of the 'Columba Experience' walk using the Dalriada Way pilgrim route starting from Tarbert, Kintyre and following the Argyll coast to the Isle of Lismore via Oban. This route was first researched by Jonathan Sheldrick and colleagues from the Heart of Argyll Tourism Alliance in 2017 and was completed over 5 days by a small group of young people in 2018, who then returned this year to help lead two similar groups along the Way. Kenny spoke about the journey of discovery, both physical and spiritual, which this project has become for all who have been involved, and the huge generosity of local people in offering hospitality and accommodation along the route. He had been initially surprised that the idea of an outdoor walking pilgrimage could be so appealing to young people, and he hoped it would have a long-term future based on its success so far. **To see the video of the Columba Experience 2018 walk, visit www.facebook.com/thecolumbaexperience**

John Jackson, a Trustee of the **Sannox Christian Centre SCIO** on the Isle of Arran, spoke about the charity's progress in developing a new ecumenical centre at Sannox which will reflect different aspects of the rich religious heritage of the island. John's talk covered the recent work carried out on the total renovation of the former Congregational church and adjoining residential hostel and also the charity's future plans to construct a Celtic 'beehive' church as a place of worship and learning. The overall aim of these projects is to create a multi-purpose centre, looking back to the arrival of Christianity on the island with the Irish monks who came some 1,500 years ago to found the Celtic Church, and much more recently

to the evangelical religious revival of the C19th, but also forwards to the relevance of contemporary pilgrimage – as expressed in “travel, wandering, rest, refectory and restoration” - to the spiritual needs of many people today. John’s wide-ranging talk also referred to the work of individuals such as John Campbell, James Haldane and members of the Coats family in Paisley who played an important role on the island. **To access this presentation, go to the News page on www.sprf.org.uk**

Mark Calder, regional manager for the **Embrace the Middle East** charity, then gave a fascinating personal perspective on his interest in pilgrim routes in his talk ‘Running Home – a new kind of Scottish pilgrimage’. This covered his experience in running a total of 14 ultra-marathons along different pilgrim routes across Scotland – a total of 1,725 miles - in the course of 2019 to raise funds for EME’s essential humanitarian work in Iraq resettling refugees returning to the region. Mark questioned whether he was in fact making a pilgrimage at all, given that running was the opposite of an exercise in slowness, but that ‘running with patience’ had made him very aware of the variety of landscapes and people he encountered and the hospitality he had received, especially from those who were fellow Christians, had been a transformative experience. In the end, Mark thought that ‘Running Home’ had made him better prepared for the challenge of working in Iraq, creating a better society and being a more ‘open’ person. **To access this presentation, go to the News page on www.sprf.org.uk**

The afternoon programme concluded with the **2019 SPRF Annual General Meeting**, which included the Chair’s report on what has been another very busy and exciting year for the Forum. The AGM Minutes are recorded separately.

In closing, the Chair expressed her warm thanks to all who had made the Gathering such a success. Tea and cakes were enjoyed in the Church prior to departure.

Nick Cooke
Secretary

October 2019

Attendance:

SPRF Patron: Lord David Wilson of Tillyorn KT GCMG

Full Members:

CLEAR Services (Nick Cooke)
Arthur Chapman (Community of St James)
Discover Dunfermline Tours (Jack Pryde)
Fife Coast & Countryside Trust (Ed Heather-Hayes)
Holy Socks (Margaret Wylie)
Kentigern Way (Bill Jack)
Luss Parish Church (Rev Louis Bezuidenhout)
Orkney Pilgrimage (John Stockan)
Paisley Abbey / Whithorn Way Steering Group (Sylvia Jenks)
Sannox Christian Centre (John Jackson)
St Cuthbert’s Coffee Stop (Rev Richard Pedersen)
St Mirin’s Pilgrims (Martin Bonnar)
St Ninians Priory Kirk, Whithorn (Rev Alex Currie)
Walk the Camino Ltd (Amanda MacFarlane; Anne Ridwan)

Associate Members:

Sarah Akehurst
Neil Gaunt
John Graham
Rev Dr Sheilagh Kesting
David Langworth
David Macdonald
Rev Dr David Pickering
Rena & Eric Simpson

Visitors:

Church of Scotland - Mission & Discipleship Council (Felicity Burrows)
" " " - Argyll Presbytery Youth Work (Kenny Wilson)
Embrace the Middle East (Mark Calder)
Milestone Church, Girvan (Pastor Adam Oellermann)
Tina Ng-a-Mann

Apologies:

Steve Aisthorpe; Rev Prof David Atkinson; Jill Baker; Dr Valentina Bold; Dr Marion Bowman; Prof Ian Bradley; Caithness Book Club / Northern Pilgrims Way; CofS Church in Society Council; Marilyn Gardner; Glencruiten Cathedral of Trees; Margaret Hadley; Heart of Argyll Tourism Alliance; Sarah Kettles; Sr Margaret Ann Minards; Walking Support; Way of St Andrews; YWAM Ignite.

Scenes from the Whithorn Way at this year's Gathering – spot the saltire in the sky!

