

Former SAMS manager Christine receives MBE

INSIDE THIS WEEK: The second part of our Review of the Year



Chief Inspector Baillie.

Senior police officer honoured by the Queen

Chief Inspector Marlene Baillie has been awarded the Queen's Police Medal.

In a New Year Honours list in which Argyll folk were conspicuous by their absence, Chief Inspector Baillie has been recognised after more than 26 years' service.

She joined Strathclyde Police as a constable, working in various urban locations before being posted to Oban in 2000, marking the start of her long service to the communities of Argyll and Bute.

Promoted to sergeant in 2002, she worked in various locations, gaining promotion to Dunoon section inspector in 2006, then to her current post as area commander for Oban, Lorn and the Isles, Mid Argyll, Kintyre and the Islands in 2009.

Hardy dookers bring in the New Year with a splash



Steven Groom and Donald John Barr, members of North Argyll Cycle Club, were among those who took to the sea to welcome in the New Year. Steven and Donald enjoyed a fun dip at Tralee Beach, Benderloch.

Photograph: Kevin McGlynn.

COVID RISE RINGS IN CHANGES

by Kathie Griffiths
kgriffiths@obantimes.co.uk

Essential visiting only rules have been introduced at Lorn and Isles Hospital to stop Covid spreading and impacting on staffing numbers.

NHS Highland bosses, who have also restricted visiting at Fort William's Belford Hospital, say increasing cases of Covid directly impacting staffing levels are risking its rural hospitals not being able to deliver services.

Earlier this week there had been no specific ward closures in Oban because of the virus.

Katherine Sutton, NHS Highland's Chief Officer (Acute), said: 'We have worked closely with our colleagues in infection control and believe restricting visiting will help reduce the risk of introducing infection from the local community into our hospitals and give us the best chance to protect our patients and staff.'

'We understand that this decision will cause anxiety for our patients, families and staff, however, we believe the move to essential visiting across the hospitals will help us reduce the spread of the virus into our hospitals.'

National guidance asks essential visitors to take

a lateral flow test first to check for a negative result. To help CalMac cope with its Covid-related staff absences, the ferry provider announced temporary changes to several timetables that started on Monday this week and will last until at least Sunday January 23 and be kept under weekly review from then on.

Changes include removing the Oban-Coll-Tiree service on a Sunday, as well as the Wednesday Oban-Colonsay sailing.

Latest figures from CalMac showed 93 crew and 18 port staff were off work because of the virus.

CalMac managing director Robbie Drummond says

Continued on page 5.

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OT

Rescue effort fails to save Oban heart charity shop

by Kathie Griffiths
kgriffiths@obantimes.co.uk

A community campaign has failed to save Oban's British Heart Foundation (BHF) shop.

Despite letters, emails, phone calls and pleas on social media from the shop's supporters to the charity's head office, the shop in George Street will be closing its doors for the last time in the New Year after 14 years of trading in the town.

Jane Flannery, Senior Regional Director at the British Heart Foundation, said: 'It's a decision not taken lightly by us but in recent times there has been a significant fall in trade.'

And she added: 'We'd like to thank our wonderful staff, volunteers, customers and donors for all their amazing support over the years.'

The British Heart Foundation

also said it was currently not in a position to answer all the questions it had been asked.

Campaigners who have been lobbying the BHF to keep its shop in Oban wanted to know why the store was closing and to see if there was anything the community could do to stop it from happening.

News the shop will definitely close is 'disappointing' says Joy Cameron, one of the customers and charity supporters.

'The decision will be disappointing for a lot of people, not just those in and around Oban but also island residents who support the shop. To say there has been a significant fall in trade must be referring to Covid because the shop seems to be as busy as ever when it is open, saving so many beautiful things from going to landfill and helping fund vital

research into saving so many lives. So many people on our West Coast seem to die from heart-related causes and lots of lives are also saved here through research. It is such a shame to see the shop have to go. It is not closing without a heartfelt effort from the community to keep it open.'

Offers to help find cheaper premises to rent, if that was the problem, were also made but not taken up. Once the Oban shop shuts, the nearest store will be in Fort William but the charity reminds people they can continue to donate pre-loved items to help fund its vital research using its freepost service [bhf.org.uk/shop/donating-goods/post-your-donations](https://www.bhf.org.uk/shop/donating-goods/post-your-donations) and that customers can also shop online at its ebay store <https://www.ebay.co.uk/str/britishheartfoundationshop>.



The 37th Argyll (Ardchattan) Scouts Group cooked a Christmas dinner on open fires in the woods near Benderloch.

Scouts' festive woodland feast



No Christmas dinner would be complete without sprouts and carrots - even over a campfire.



Scouts turned woodland cooks for their last session of 2021.



Mulled apple juice to wash down the campfire feast.

Ardchattan Scouts headed to woods near Benderloch to cook a campfire Christmas dinner.

Even the moon came out and stayed out to light up the The 37th Argyll (Ardchattan) Scout Group's last session of 2021.

Each of the group's patrols cooked different parts of the seasonal feast on several fires. Pigs in blankets, chicken drumsticks, baked potatoes, carrots, spouts and even gravy were on the menu.

It was all washed down with mulled apple juice and then came pudding - chocolate cake mix spooned into hollowed out oranges which were then wrapped in foil and baked in the embers.

'The moon kept shining all evening and the clouds held off long enough to hear everyone's favourite cracker jokes, before we all yawned our way back home with very satisfied stomachs!' said helper Susannah Hughes.

Scout leader Andy Newiss said: 'We have met outside all year and will continue to do so throughout the winter and are grateful for the permission we have to use of a lovely local woodland.'

'I'd also like to add my thanks to all the leaders Moira, John, Susannah, Adam, Sam and to the parent helpers who have helped with our activities and camps this year.'

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Mull couple fly to Philippines to assist island hit by typhoon at Christmas

by Sandy Neil
sneil@obantimes.co.uk

A couple from Mull have flown to the Philippines to help a fragile island community devastated by Typhoon Odette days before Christmas.

Andrew and Gerlie Fuller contacted us near the end of quarantine in the Philippines' capital city Manila, where they were awaiting news of Gerlie's family on her small home island.

'Vast swathes of the southern Philippines have just been ravaged by the 600km wide typhoon,' said Andrew, senior associate at Oban estate agent Bell Ingram. 'Gerlie's home village was directly in the path of Typhoon Odette and we are fearing the worst. We head into the affected region in a few hours to assist where possible. 'We fly from Manila to



Butuan City, and then by car to Surigao city, a large coastal town, heavily damaged by the super typhoon. The village that we are trying to reach is called Riizal and it is positioned on a tiny island called Sibanac within the Dinagat Islands region.

'It seems that most of Gerlie's village has been devastated by the storm. We still cannot

contact her family at all. Early reports indicate that most of the houses in the village have been destroyed.

'Odette bombarded Dinagat with heavy rain and sustained winds, with an intensity of 195 kilometres per hour. Brief bursts of wind reached up to 240 km/h, tearing down communication lines, uprooting

Gerlie talking to Merla and her baby Ada – the family were in their coastal house when the typhoon hit. It was literally blown down around them.

trees, lifting roofs, and wrecking houses. Landslides, fallen trees, and debris have left most roads impassable.

'Hospitals in the region have been damaged to the point that some were rendered inoperable. Shops, banks and municipal buildings were also destroyed; the supply of potable water was disrupted, and people are already getting hungry. Also, the boats of the local fishermen, so valuable to provide daily food to local communities, have been decimated.

'There is a dwindling supply of food and water, and not much shelter left across the region. The people are literally

left with nothing and they need your help.

'Dinagat needs staple food, potable water, temporary shelters, fuel, hygiene kits, and medical supplies. Please take a moment to imagine yourself in this situation. Anything you can offer, no matter how small, will be used by us to help those left with nothing.'

They hoped the good people of Oban and Mull, 'a close island community that welcomed us both with open arms, can find a way to join and support our efforts to provide direct help to another small island community in desperate need'.

The couple set up a crowdfunding page, www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/help-dinagat, which has at the time of writing raised more than £3,000 of its £25,000 target.

In an update posted on Boxing Day, Andrew showed

a photograph of Gerlie listening to the story of Merla and her baby Ada, who were in their coastal house when the typhoon hit and blew the building down around them.

Merla told Gerlie: 'Our house is so damaged and we need to rebuild. Our income was from harvesting coconuts, but with almost all island coconut trees left flattened, there will be no work. We don't know how we will rebuild our house.'

A second photograph, posted a day later, showed the roofless house of fisherman Shernan Orillo, his wife and their six children.

Andrew said: 'We dropped off a supplies parcel on Christmas Day, only to be invited in to share what little food they had left. Some gestures leave me speechless! We hope to support him with the urgent repairs to his house.'

Connel church hall put on the market with 'a heavy heart'

Connel church hall has been put on the market. The granite building that stands alone in the heart of the village is open to offers from £110,000, writes Kathie Griffiths.

St Oran's church elder Moira Dunlop said the hall was being sold with 'a heavy heart' because 'we just can't afford to run it'. Funds from the sale will go towards the upkeep of St Oran's, which has link to Dunbeg church.

'The hall holds many very happy memories for us all from birthday parties, musicals, Brownies, and community celebrations, as well as other occasions, but the time has come to let it go.

'When lockdown came we couldn't use it as before. It's purely a financial reason for selling it. We just can't afford to run it anymore. It was a nice, wee hall and we are selling it with a heavy heart,' said Mrs Dunlop.

The church hall was previously a church in its own right but when it shut and was deconsecrated, it was passed to St Oran's to use for activities.

'The hall is in such a good spot, still in the village and made of granite, you wouldn't



Connel Church Hall sits in the centre of the popular village.

find granite like it elsewhere. We hope the new buyer will appreciate it as much as we have and that it continues to be a fond part of village life, possibly as a new home for someone.

'We are incredibly lucky to still have a village hall in Connel, near the shop, where activities can happen and keep our community thriving,' added Mrs Dunlop.

Inside the church hall, there is a fitted kitchen in the turret room, a cloakroom with toilet and sink and an entrance porch with cupboard, says Galbraith who are marketing it. A number of original features still remain including the vaulted wooden ceiling and panelled walls as well as stained glass

windows, although some are in need of repair.

Depending on planning permission, the sale details say the hall could be developed into a place to live, within walking distance of a licensed shop, post office, church and medical centre.

A lawned garden surrounds the building on all sides with hedgerows and mature trees. There is also a small wooden shed. Boundaries are marked by a low level stone wall to the rear and side and a metal fence with wrought iron gates to the front.

To see the full details go to <https://www.galbraithgroup.com/property/str210120-former-church-hall-connel-argyll-pa37-1pa>.

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Oban apprentice wins two top power station awards

A technical apprentice from Oban has won two top prizes at renewable energy company Drax's annual awards event in recognition of his achievements over the past year.

Iain MacPherson, 19, from Oban, won Craft Apprentice of the Year and the Paul Chambers Overall Apprentice of the Year Award after being commended for his enthusiasm and work ethic in his role at Cruachan Power Station.

Iain received outstanding feedback from his colleagues who speak highly of his commitment, potential and ability and say he has become a valuable member of the team at Cruachan.

Iain, who is now entering the third year of his apprenticeship, said: 'I'm extremely grateful to have received these awards and be recognised for the work I've put in over the past year. I'd like to thank



Iain MacPherson.

everyone who has helped and supported me. I'm looking forward to the next year of my apprenticeship.'

Covid restrictions meant this year's awards were held virtually, but none of the glamour and excitement was missing

as apprentices from across the Drax Group were recognised for their efforts overcoming the unprecedented challenges Covid brought.

Karen McKeever, Drax chief human resources officer, who hosted the event, said: 'Drax is committed to championing and supporting people in their early careers. Hiring and developing a talented workforce of the future is essential for an innovative business like Drax.'

'Apprentices all have unique talents and bring a new perspective that we can learn from. The last couple of years have been challenging for us all due to Covid, but our apprentices have shown great flexibility, resilience and patience in continuing to approach their learning with enthusiasm and dedication.'

Drax's long-running apprenticeship scheme is part of its commitment to developing

new talent as well as upskilling the workforce across the communities where it operates. Drax has 52 apprentices and 50 existing employees working towards apprenticeship qualifications at other career levels within the business.

Drax recently launched the next stage in its public consultation on its plans to more than double the generating capacity of its 'Hollow Mountain' Cruachan Power Station in Argyll. Under the plans, a second underground power station will be built adjacent to the existing one to enable Cruachan to play an even bigger role in supporting the expansion of renewable energy sources such as wind power and provide lifeline stability services to the national grid.

Around 900 jobs will be created and indirectly supported during the new power station's construction.

Covid rise rings in New Year changes in Oban

Continued from page 1.

the timetable changes will let it focus available crew resources on maintaining lifeline services.

'We fully appreciate the difficulties these changes will cause for some of our customers and we apologise for any disruption that may result. However, because this situation is changing rapidly, we must protect core services, which is why we are now having to introduce this temporary timetable,' said Mr Drummond.

Meanwhile anyone in the Oban area who missed out on getting their booster jags before the New Year bells are being urged to book online for vaccination clinics at the Corran Halls today, January 6, then on January 7, 14, 17, 24, 25 and 29.

Dr Boyd Peters, Medical Director for NHS Highland, says the threat and impact of Covid remains a significant concern as any big increase in community infections now will cause serious issues in late

January, both for individual patients and for the staffing of services.

'Our health and care system is fragile. The loss of staff to this variant through testing positive or the need to isolate has a huge impact on our ability to deliver the services needed across our patch and this is already a challenge,' he said.

If you cannot book a booster appointment online you can telephone the helpline on 0800 030 8013, which is open from 8am to 8pm, seven days a week. Details of Argyll and Bute Covid-19 booster vaccination clinics are regularly updated and published at bit.ly/ABVacClinics.

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Stability training call by Nancy Glen inquiry sheriff

by Colin Cameron
editor@argyllshireadvertiser.co.uk

The loss of two fishermen with the Nancy Glen four years ago shocked the community – but there is hope similar tragedies might be avoided in the future as an inquiry concluded into the sinking.

Sheriff Patrick Hughes concluded a Fatal Accident Inquiry at Oban Sheriff Court by recommending mandatory training on vessel stability for skippers on boats of this kind.

Skipper Duncan MacDougall, 46, and Przemek Krawczyk, aged 38, were on board Tarbert prawn trawler Nancy Glen – built in 1991 and owned by the MacDougall family since 1995 – when it capsized and sank one and a half miles north-east of Barmore Island on Loch Fyne on the evening of January 18, 2018.



The boat heeled over when one of her nets became embedded in seafloor mud as Mr MacDougall, an experienced skipper, turned to starboard ready for hauling the nets at around 6pm. By 8.30pm the boat had sunk despite heroic efforts to save her and the two men inside. A third crewman, John Miller, survived and was rescued by a passing vessel.

In his determination, Sheriff Patrick Hughes said the Nancy



Glen 'lacked the stability to withstand' the 'muddying' of the nets after a number of modifications made in the years previously.

Sheriff Hughes added that had professional advice been taken before some of the vessel's concrete ballast was removed in 2002 and 2016, and further modifications were made in December 2017 – including the fitting of a larger crane – the accident 'might' have been

avoided.

Another factor in reducing the boat's stability was, said the Sheriff, the practice of storing catch in tanks on the main deck and shelter deck, raising the centre of gravity.

A critical point, however, was the fact that until recently no mandatory stability criteria were applicable to fishing vessels of the Nancy Glen's size – registered length 11.98 metres – and masters are not required to un-

Skipper Duncan MacDougall, left, and Przemek Krawczyk both lost their lives when the Nancy Glen sank on Loch Fyne.

dergo stability awareness training. The sheriff recommended stability awareness training be made mandatory for masters of fishing vessels of between seven and 16 metres in length.

Sheriff Hughes added: 'I consider the loss of the Nancy Glen should not be seen as an isolated incident, but rather part of a wider pattern of small fishing vessels being lost in circumstances where inadequate stability plays a prominent role. The evidence before this inquiry showed the MacDougall family to be good employers who took pride in their vessel and kept it well maintained. When making the various modifications described to the Nancy Glen, they did not understand themselves to be placing the vessel in danger. They considered it to be a safe boat, an assessment which was based on how it felt to them.'

He went on to pay tribute to the 'courage and resourcefulness' of those who attended the stricken vessel; to John Miller for reliving the experience in his evidence and to the community for the compassion shown to the grieving families. Sheriff Hughes expressed condolences to both families.

He concluded: 'To work as a fisherman in the arduous conditions of these waters requires a very great deal of both courage and fortitude, qualities possessed by both Przemek Krawczyk and Duncan MacDougall, devoted family men whose loved ones feel an enormous sense of loss.'

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OT

Gap year charity Project Trust re-opens volunteering abroad

Project Trust brings international volunteering opportunities as a Gap Year alternative.



by Kathie Griffiths
kgriffiths@obantimes.co.uk

Repatriating 230 volunteers out of 18 countries was no mean feat for Coll's Gap Year charity Project Trust.

Some of the trickiest missions to safely bring volunteers back to the UK included chartering a helicopter in the Solomon Islands and hiring a local security firm in Honduras.

Most were home in just two weeks.

Project Trust's HR manager Jil McMeekin told The Oban Times: 'We repatriated our first volunteers back from China in 2020 and had planned to re-deploy them to other countries but then it became a pandemic, not just a local virus.'

'In mid-March 2020, we began repatriation of all 230 volunteers from 18 different

countries. We were able to get the majority of volunteers home within a fortnight, but it was a tense time with travel disruptions and cancelled flights.'

To get four of its volunteers away from the Solomon Islands, the charity had to charter a helicopter to lift two of them off a small island to a bigger one so they could catch a flight back to the UK via Australia. 'They just made it because the borders were closing. We couldn't have waited any longer to get them out,' said Jil.

Honduras was another country where repatriation was nerve-jangling. 'Honduras closed its borders to international travel almost immediately. It took us another couple of weeks to get 20 of our volunteers out. They were all in pairs but were spread



A Project Trust volunteer in the classroom.

all over the country. A couple of lads were on an island and that was a complicated exit to get them to one place then out to Mexico. The charity also helped get students from St Andrew's University out.

'It was a real task. We had to throw everything at it and use all the connections we had. We



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schools to give talks and presentations to rally future volunteers and fundraise but staff adapted and responded to the challenge by developing online alternatives and real-time sessions they could still deliver across the country.

Lockdown seems to have stirred up even more of a sense of adventure among young people, keen to find out more about the opportunities of volunteering abroad, says Jil.

'We have been able to re-open our international programme. We have volunteers back in Ghana and Senegal.'

had to explore all our options and they had to sit tight. We used a local security firm to get them out safely in the end.'

Only two volunteers had to wait longer to get home - one man who had lost his passport in India and another who was in hospital in Japan getting treatment after a snowboarding accident.

The pandemic meant charity staff could no longer go into

She added: 'We have been able to re-open our international programme. We have volunteers back in Ghana and Senegal and earlier this month we had young people visiting us here on Coll for a training course.'

'A lot will go and teach English but there are other subjects and other areas of interest for volunteers to help with. Honduras, Thailand and Malawi will be seeing volun-

teers arrive in the New Year. It has been very, very hard during the pandemic. Our main source of income is volunteer fundraising and losing that was a huge blow to us.

'We made some swift cost-saving measures including, sadly, redundancies but we are now re-building our staff team. We've recently taken on one new person to work on our international support team.'

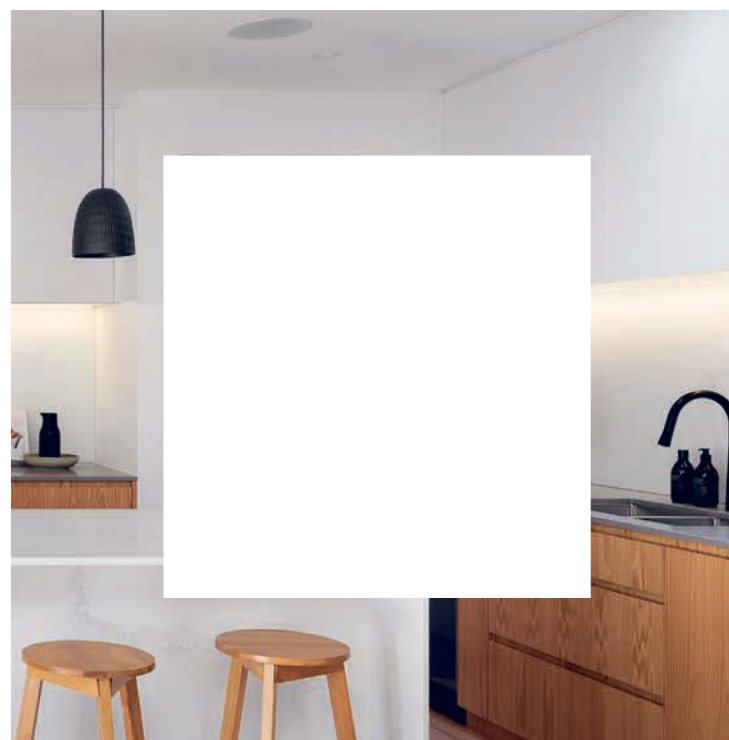
'We've done a lot of fundraising ourselves and re-engaged with our 8,000 past volunteers, many of whom have helped us in our time of need so that we can continue to offer other young people the opportunities they had themselves. We have been going for more than 50 years now.'

Among volunteers heading abroad later in the New Year will be Oban High School (OHS) student Evie MacGillivray from Mull. The 16-year-old is fundraising £7,000 for her trip to India at <https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/evie-macgillivray> Her fundraising plans for 2022 include climbing Ben Mor, the only Munro on Mull, with a group of family and friends in March.

Evie's friend Maisie from Coll, also a OHS student, will be going out to Honduras.



Many Project Trust volunteers go abroad to teach English.



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OT

Scots urged to seek financial benefits they are entitled to

A new campaign has been launched to help people in West Scotland struggling financially to get support and access the benefits they are entitled to.

The campaign comes as a survey reveals that nearly one in four - 24 per cent - Scots living in West Scotland wouldn't feel comfortable receiving any type of financial benefits or grants, even if they were eligible, and seeks to address the stigma people may have around claiming benefits.

The YouGov survey, commissioned by the Scottish Government, also found many people in West Scotland were concerned about being judged by others for receiving benefits, with 16 per cent saying they were concerned about being judged for receiving Universal Credit and seven per cent for receiving Child Tax Credits.

These results indicate there may be people in West Scotland

who are eligible for financial support, but aren't taking the help that's available because of how others may perceive them for doing so.

The survey comes as the Scottish Government launches a dedicated website - www.moneysupport.scot - to help those experiencing financial difficulties find the support they need. The Money Support Scotland website contains information and contact details for a range of organisations able to provide information on benefits people could be eligible for, where to go for free and impartial debt advice and how to apply for affordable credit.

The Money Support Scotland campaign is working in partnership with Citizens Advice Scotland and Advice Direct Scotland, which both help people understand what benefits they might be entitled to and how to apply for them.

The Citizens Advice network

in Scotland offers free, impartial and confidential advice, with trained advisers able to help explain how people can maximise their income through benefits and grants, cut costs and help manage debt. Its Money Map tool helps people check which benefits and grants they might be entitled to, as well as eligibility for council tax reductions and support with housing and energy costs. Advice Direct Scotland provides financial advice and offers a free benefit calculator on its website.

Citizens Advice Scotland chief executive Derek Mitchell said: 'People shouldn't feel uncomfortable about accessing the support they are entitled to. That's how the welfare state works - we all pay in and get support when we need it. That's what the money is there for and after the past few years people should be confident about getting the payments they are

due. People are facing a perfect storm this winter of rising bills and falling incomes, so maximising your income and getting all the money you are entitled to is really important to help with bills and spending.'

'Citizens Advice Scotland is proud to partner with the Scottish Government on this important campaign to ensure people get the help they need this winter. The Citizens Advice network can give people help in a variety of ways and during the pandemic we unlocked around £147 million for people through things like social security payments, employment entitlements and debt reductions.'

There's a range of support available to Scots of all ages from one-off payments to help with the cost of school uniforms to support with living costs. For advice on accessing financial support, visit www.moneysupport.scot.

Oban makes long list of city status contenders

Oban is on the long list of 39 UK places competing for city status during the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations in 2022, the Cabinet Office has announced.

The bid by the 'unofficial capital of the West Highlands', submitted by a December 8 deadline, has joined seven others from Scotland, from the towns of St Andrews, Livingston, Greenock, Elgin, Dunfermline and Dumfries and from the region of South Ayrshire, which includes Ayr, Prestwick, Troon and Turnberry.

A champion of Oban's city bid, Argyll and Bute councillor Elaine Robertson, welcomed the news: 'I am absolutely delighted Oban has been included in the 'long list' for city status, one of the celebrations to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. 'Oban has so much to offer - the caring people and communities, the history, the location and the educational

opportunities, to mention but a few. We now have to await the next decision and 'keep our fingers crossed' we continue to be a contender.'

British Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies are also included for the first time.

Stanley in the Falkland Islands, almost 8,000 miles away, is one of the places to apply and there have been entries from Gibraltar and the Cayman Islands.

Applicants were asked to talk about the distinct identity and community which they felt meant their area deserved to become a city.

An expert panel will work closely with ministers to make their recommendations, before being approved by Her Majesty The Queen.

Announcing the competition in October, the UK Government said: 'The number of awards made will depend on the strength of the applications received.'

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Jeff delivers a good deed



Retired Oban group scout leader Jeff Anderson with his 30 years' service to scouting certificate. T01_JeffAnderson01

by Kathie Griffiths
kgriffiths@obantimes.co.uk

When a good deed was needed, former Oban scout group leader Jeff Anderson was prepared to do his best.

Although Jeff retired from scouting two years ago, he was happy to come back and help organise the delivery of 2,000 Christmas cards across Oban, raising more than £1,000 to repair the ageing scout hall behind St Columba's Cathedral.

Money made from the 2021 Scout Post will be used to urgently fix leaks in the wooden hall that was built in 2000 on the same site as the original scout hall that dated back to the 1930s when the scouting organisation bought it for 'pennies' from the McDougall Estate, said Mr Anderson who joined the movement as a cub in 1957, the same year as scouting's 50th anniversary.

The former technical technician who worked at Oban High School and lives in Pulpit Hill, has been awarded his 30 years

length of service certificate to scouting in Argyll.

From being a cub with the 1st Argyll (Lorn) Scout Group, Mr Anderson worked his way up through the ranks to being an assistant scout leader, before taking a 20-year break from it all.

It was a colleague at Oban High School who hooked him back in to helping out with the scouts.

'It's good to see young people having fun, just as I did all those years ago.'

'He asked me to help out as a favour and that was it, I ended up staying and evolved into eventually becoming the group scout leader,' said Mr Anderson, whose wife Maggie has also been awarded a certificate for 25 years of service to scouting.

One of the biggest changes

seen in his scouting career was in 1970 when girls were allowed to join up.

Badge challenges have also changed with the times, he said: 'There wasn't one for computing or social media in my day as a scout because it didn't exist. The first badge I got was for cycling.'

Mr Anderson still keeps in touch with some of the friends he made through the world-wide family of scouts.

Over the years he has linked up with scouts from all over Europe and further afield, coming to stay in Oban - many using the scout hall for summer camps.

Two of the Belgian scout leaders he first met more than 20 years ago are now a Mr and Mrs and bring their own children over to visit.

As for coming out of retirement again, Mr Anderson said: 'They know where I am if they need me!' And he added: 'It's good to see young people having fun, just as I did all those years ago.'

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OT

Concern as corncrake numbers seen to plummet in the Inner Hebrides

Corncrake numbers in Scotland are continuing to decline, the latest RSPB Scotland survey has revealed, adding to concerns about their precarious future here, writes Sandy Neil.

In 2021, only 850 calling males were recorded across the 16 areas in the country where these elusive birds are found, down from 870 in 2019. Corncrakes are usually surveyed annually but the Covid travel restrictions in 2020 meant that it was not possible to complete the count across all areas.

Whilst the decline from the 2019 survey is relatively modest, especially compared to other years where numbers have seen sharp reductions, it continues the overall worrying downward trend since the record high of 1289 calling males in 2014 and highlights how vulnerable these birds are.



Within the survey there are regional differences in how corncrakes are faring. In the Inner Hebrides the population has plummeted by 12.2 percent from 2019 but in the Outer Hebrides numbers are up by 9.9 percent. The reasons for these regional differences are unclear. In order to safeguard the species and try to provide a more certain future for them

in Scotland targeted measures are needed. The Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) has been crucial in supporting corncrake friendly farming methods for many years but its future has looked uncertain in recent times. The Scottish Government's announcement at the end of October that AECS will continue for the next three years

Corncrakes are the land-dwelling relatives of coots and moorhens and one of Scotland's rarest breeding birds. Photograph: RSPB.

was therefore welcome news. RSPB Scotland will work with farmers, crofters and Scottish Government to ensure as much corncrake and high nature value friendly management is delivered through AECS whilst it continues. From 2025, the Scottish Government has signalled that it intends to introduce a new farming policy and changes to farm payments. RSPB Scotland is calling for payments for nature and climate friendly farming and crofting to be at the heart of this new policy.

Commenting on the results, Jane Shadforth, project manager for Corncrake Calling, an RSPB Scotland project to improve these birds' fortunes

over the next few years, says: 'RSPB Scotland would like to thank everyone who supported this year's survey. The results highlight how vulnerable this species remains with numbers declining by more than 30% since 2014.'

'RSPB Scotland will use these results to help target management for corncrakes in the right places, working with farmers and crofters through Corncrake Calling and to make best use of the Agri-Environment Climate scheme. The importance of island communities in protecting this magical species cannot be underestimated.'

'The continuation of AECS over the next few years is welcome news to many. As we look ahead though, developing new farming policy and payments that better support farming and crofting communities everywhere to farm in

nature-positive ways is vital.' Corncrakes are the land-dwelling relatives of coots and moorhens and one of Scotland's rarest breeding birds. Due to their shy character they are surveyed by counting the number of males making the distinctive 'crex crex' call during breeding season. The birds migrate here every summer from Africa and used to be found across the UK before the changes in agricultural practices in the 19th and 20th century saw their range and number contract to just a few isolated pockets in Scotland.

Corncrake Calling is led by RSPB Scotland and supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The project builds on the work RSPB Scotland has been doing with farmers and crofters on corncrake friendly mowing for many years.

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Campaign to stop fishing gear entangling marine animals

A ground-breaking project is helping reduce mammal, shark and turtle entanglement in creel fishing gear in Scottish waters.

NatureScot has published a report on the first phase of the Scottish Entanglement Alliance (SEA) project, the first of its kind in the UK, which brings together commercial creel fishers, NatureScot, research scientists and marine mammal conservation and rescue charities to better understand the scale and impacts of marine animal entanglement in Scottish waters.

Entanglements in fishing gear and marine debris can have welfare and conservation impacts on marine animals, causing injury, impairment and death. Entanglement is the largest identified cause of death due to human activity in minke and humpback whales



A stranded humpback whale entangled in creel fishing gear. Photograph: the Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme (SMASS).

in Scottish waters and the only known cause of human-driven mortality in basking sharks and marine turtles. During at-sea surveys, more than 22 per cent of live minke whales observed on the west coast of Scotland showed evidence of previous entanglements.

The project involved interviewing 159 creel fishers about their fishing practices and their experience of entanglements. A total of 146 entanglements over a 10-year period were reported. Only a small number of these entanglements were previously known, demonstrating that entanglements are hugely under-reported. The interviews also revealed that a wider range of species

were involved than previously known. Fishers also participated in training events and workshops to promote best practice, reduce entanglement risk and safely disentangle large marine animals from fishing gear. This training gave fishermen the ability to call on each other and provide a rapid response to any entangled animal. Dr Kirstie Dearing, NatureScot's Fisheries Advisor, said: 'We all find it upsetting to see our majestic marine species in distress, so we're really heartened by the strong commitment and willingness of the fishing industry to work towards practical, safe and sustainable solutions on

the issue of entanglement. We will only solve this problem by working in collaboration on potential legislative changes. The new reporting obligation will also help us to understand the extent of the issue more clearly.'

Based on feedback from the fishers, the report recommends a number of ways to combat marine entanglement, including trials of weighted ropes – ropes which sink rather than float – and tighter regulation to limit the amount of gear in the water and caps on creel numbers, all of which were supported by fishers involved in the study.

Other recommendations include developing seasonal distribution maps of vulnerable species to identify potential high risk areas and trials of 'on-call' – or ropeless – fishing systems.

UK and EU reach deal on fish stock

UK-EU negotiations have agreed on key shared stocks in the North Sea and West of Scotland sea basins, as well as other coastal waters around the UK.

Among the stocks covered by this agreement are North Sea and West of Scotland nephrops, hake, monkfish and ling, as well as Rockall haddock and cod and West of Scotland whiting and cod.

Negotiations took place in November and December 2021 and were 'positive and constructive', the Scottish Government said.

'Both parties acknowledged the importance of responsible and sustainable management of the stocks under discussion and the need to achieve agreement before the end of the calendar year to give certainty to fishermen for 2022.'

A full list of stocks will be available on the Written Record. The estimated value of these stocks to Scotland is £148 million.



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OT

Review of the year



JULY: Pipe Major John McLellan DCM, a composer from Dunoon and Jura whose First World War song may replace Flower of Scotland as the national anthem, is the subject of a tribute website and Spotify playlists created by Duggy McGregor, above, while locked down in Oban. Pipe Major John McLellan 'is probably Dunoon's, if not Argyll and Bute's best known composer of bagpipe music,' wrote Dunoon-born Duncan 'Duggy' MacGregor on his tribute website, created while working in Oban during lockdown. Altogether, John McLellan wrote more than 160 melodies and songs. His most famous, The Road to the Isles, was written when McLellan was just 16 years old and living on the Isle of Jura. 'The aim of this website is to remember the man and his music and gather all the relevant information about Jock into one place online,' said Duggy. 'It was my late mother's wish that I create the website to Jock as she was his great niece.' You can read more about Pipe Major John McLellan DCM on Duggy's tribute website johnmclllandcm.weebly.com and listen to McLellan's many tunes via Duggy's playlists on Spotify.



JULY: For some people, the Ross of Mull's abandoned Pennyghael House will be haunting and creepy. For others, it's part of rock and movie history. But for the right buyer, this eight bedroom wreck, alongside its 8,700 acre estate, presents an opportunity. Five million pounds is all it would cost, far more than its name implies. Pennyghael means the Pennyland of the Gael: a land valued by the penny or section of the penny. In 2021, it would cost you half a billion pennies. The new buyer joins a long list of owners over the last 500 years, including the English rock group Genesis, though their presence left a somewhat invisible touch.

Part two: July to December

AUGUST: Calgary, Alberta, Canada, could not be further from the bare, isolated north western tip of Mull that gave it its name: Calgary Bay. In August a piece of that history - 382 acres of sheep grazing land plus a village of 20 houses abandoned during the Highland Clearances - went up for sale for £550,000. Many families affected by the clearances left for Canada from the pier at Calgary Bay. On the east side of the bay is Calgary Castle, which was built in 1817 by Captain Alan MacAskill, who retired there. Around 1870, the house was acquired by John Munro Mackenzie, Chamberlain of the Lews from 1848 until 1854. As the chamberlain, or factor, to Sir James Matheson, the then owner of the Isle of Lewis, Mackenzie was the man in virtual control of the everyday lives of its people. He presided over one of the key periods of emigration from Lewis when, between 1851 and 1855, 1,772 of the poorest sub-tenants, from a population of nearly 20,000, were assisted with their passage - not always willingly - to Canada. In 1872 Mackenzie, retired in Calgary Castle, was visited by a relation of his by marriage, Colonel James Macleod of Drynoch, Commissioner of the Canadian North-West Mounted Police. Colonel Macleod was so taken by Calgary Castle that he suggested it as a name for a fort along the Bow River. Fort Calgary, in turn, gave its name to the city of Calgary, Alberta.



Calgary on Mull.



AUGUST: The Steamship Sir Walter Scott Trust received the green light from Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park to reinstate the historic Roderick Dhu Path and construct a stunning lookout tower and platforms above Trossachs Pier at Loch Katrine. This is the spot where Sir Walter Scott was inspired to write his Lady of the Lake poem, published in 1810. Scott was born 250 years ago on August 15 and it was his poem that is credited with triggering the birth of Scottish tourism. Funding of £375,000 was secured earlier this year.



SEPTEMBER: More than a million Manx shearwaters, 95 per cent of the world's population, nest along Europe's Atlantic coast. Half of these, around 250,000 breeding pairs, can be spotted on just three UK islands: Skomer and Skokholm off Pembrokeshire and the Isle of Rum. In spring and summer every year, Rum's national nature reserve becomes home to 100,000 breeding pairs, who mate for life and fly hundreds of miles out to sea each day to feed a single fat, fluffy chick nesting underground. If the chick survives attacks from rats, cats, hedgehogs and even killer sheep and red deer, it takes to the air on its maiden flight, battling storms and tempests on an epic 10,000km migration across the Atlantic Ocean to the fish-rich waters of South America. But not all of them make it. On the way, lured by the bright lights, many are crash landing into Tobermory, Mallaig and cruise ships. Unable to take to the sea and air again, the seabirds blunder about until they are eaten by cats or gulls, or starve. In September, Conor Ryan, a guide for Nature Scotland who lives in Tobermory, appealed to Mull residents to help the lost and bumbling seabirds resume their marathon journey.



SEPTEMBER: The second worst civilian maritime disaster in the Atlantic after the Titanic, the sinking of the SS Norge, off Rockall, with the loss of 635 souls, was commemorated by an exhibition touring the Outer Hebrides. The display about the Norge maritime disaster more than a century ago, and the role played by the people of Stornoway in looking after survivors, opened at Comunn Eachdraidh in Ness, Isle of Lewis, in September. It told the tragic story of the foundering of SS Norge on a reef close to Rockall on its journey to New York, in 1904. It was carrying nearly 800 souls - Russian Jews, Norwegians, Finns, Swedes and Danes - and more than half were mothers and children. With only enough lifeboats for 215, only 160 survived and 635 perished. Most of the



OCTOBER: A major milestone in the Royal Navy's use of autonomous vessels in future operations has been reached during recent trials aboard HMS Argyll, Britain's longest serving frigate which celebrated its 30th birthday this year.

In a first for the navy, the warship successfully controlled an uncrewed

OCTOBER: The knit crowd are hooked on warm Hebridean clothing inspired by the historic herring girls, crafted by a growing team of knitters on Barra and Vatersay. The close-knit team, which has expanded from one to 14 knitters in just two years, found purls of wisdom in Barra's traditional knitwear, putting the island's unique pattern called a True Lover's Knot into scarves, shawls, hats, gloves, cushion covers, bed throws and fishermen's jumpers called guernseys.



A sea-faring labourer's woollen 'gansay', or 'geansaidh' in Gaelic, had to be durable, easy to mend, stain resistant, easy to move about in and warm. Traditionally they were knitted by fishermen's wives, sisters or mothers, using a pattern passed down through the generations. This meant islands, coastal communities and families had their own designs, which could be used to identify the wearer, like a US army ID badge. It's said a drowned sailor could be identified by his jumper, but as fishermen followed the shoals of herring round the coast from Aberdeen to Great Yarmouth, closely followed by the herring girls salting the catch, the British Isles' distinctive patterns got guddled. It is from this

deep well of tradition that the Barra knitters lifted up patterns for their Herring Girl Collection, which is securing orders from all over the world. The herring girls were a band of formidable island women who, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, spent many years following the shoals of herring around the British coast undertaking gruelling work to gut, cure and pack the fish for sale.



lifeboats drifted in the Atlantic for days before being found by chance – one close to the Faroes, around 500 miles from the sinking – and the survivors from two of the closer lifeboats were landed at Number One Pier in Stornoway. Some went on to be cared for in Lewis Hospital and others in private homes. Sadly, a number of them did not survive and they are buried in the cemetery at Lower Sandwick. The last place to pick up a signal from the ill-fated ship had been Lloyd's Station at the Butt of Lewis on June 27, the day before she sank. The disaster remains the second worst civilian maritime disaster in the Atlantic, after the sinking of HMS Titanic in 1912 with the loss of 1,500 lives, and it made headline news around the world when the story broke a week after it happened.

This meant islands, coastal



NOVEMBER: The life and work of Màiri Mhòr nan Òran was celebrated this November in a two-day community gathering - Blas Thròndairnis (a taste of Trotternish) - organised by Ionad Thròndairnis.

Màiri Mhòr nan Òran (Big Mary of the Songs/Mary Macpherson) was a nurse and prolific songwriter from Skye, known for her powerful songs of protest, praise, exile and hope. She championed crofters in the

struggle for tenure of their land and her poetry celebrates many aspects of Gaelic culture at the time, as well as shinty – the sport of the Gaels.

Margaret Nicolson, chairperson of Ionad Thròndairnis, said: '2021 marks 200 years since the birth of Màiri Mhòr nan Òran and we think it fitting that this milestone be celebrated in our inaugural gathering which, we hope, will become a regular event.'

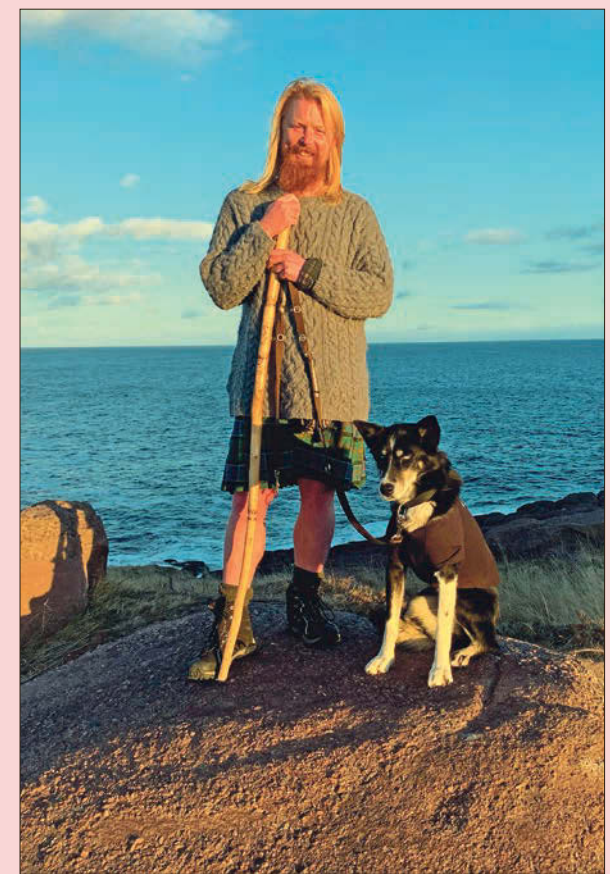
NOVEMBER: Argyll was rocked by an earthquake early on the morning of Tuesday November 16, waking people up from Ardrishaig to Barcaldine with a 'faraway boom' that shook whole houses and rattled bedroom furniture.

The tremor, which measured 3.3 on the Richter scale according to the British Geological Survey, struck while most lay asleep in their beds at 1.44am. The epicentre was recorded 12km deep in the earth's crust below Achnamara near Lochgilphead.

The ripples spread out, shaking homes in Ardrishaig, Ford, Dalmally, Seil, Oban, Taynuilt and Barcaldine, according to witnesses who took to social media to report their shock. A Lochgilphead resident near the epicentre described the quake as a 'very loud, low frequency rumble/growl, then an



impact type noise followed by the house and foundations shaking. Glass bottles in dressing table rattled. It was of very short duration, felt like no more than a couple of seconds.'



DECEMBER: After a gruelling nine months on the road which began on the shores of the Pacific Ocean, 32-year Michael Yellowlees from Perthshire and his faithful Alaskan husky dog Luna, above, have finally reached Canada's Atlantic coast, having trekked right across the vast country for Highlands-based rewilding charity Trees for Life.

On Sunday December 5, throngs of well-wishers gathered at the remote Cape Spear Lighthouse in Newfoundland, while political leaders in Canada and Scotland expressed their admiration for Michael's heroic venture.

'My best wishes on the successful completion of your incredible walk across Canada, Michael!' declared Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Noting that Michael has raised \$50,000 for the Scottish rewilding charity Trees for Life, Prime Minister Trudeau added: 'Michael chose Canada for this mission due to the many Scots who left their homeland generations ago, settled here and contributed significantly to the fabric of our country.'



DECEMBER: Five Argyll and Bute locations were bathed in art and light on Tuesday December 7 to celebrate the 1,500th anniversary of St Columba's birthday.

'Illuminations' projected artwork in the gardens of Hermitage Park, Helensburgh; onto McCaig's Tower, Oban; above, The Queen's Hall, Dunoon; The Egg Shed - Scottish Canals, Ardrishaig, and at a site on the Isle of Bute.

Each site was lit up with projections featuring the artwork of artists who have received funding from Duais Dileab Chalaim Chille/The Colmcille Legacy Award. In June this year, McCaig's Tower in Oban was lit up by projections featuring Colmcille Legacy Award artists. Photograph: Och Aye Events.



Pacific 24 rigid inflatable boat (RIB) while sailing at sea.

To mark the frigate's 30th birthday this year, its 18th commanding officer Commander Charlie Wheen gathered the bulk of his 200-strong ship's company on the flight-deck for cake and athletics in the Atlantic Ocean.

OT

Argyll's own winter wonder

Often hidden from view among the forests of Argyll, a winter phenomenon is occurring thanks to the area's damp and relatively mild climate.

Hair ice is a type of ice that forms on dead wood and takes the shape of fine, silky hair. It is believed to be caused by a fungus and occurs in hard and dead wood, although the reason behind its formation remains unclear. The conditions for hair ice to occur are fairly specific, requiring just the right temperature, moisture and wood type - and it seems that the 'temperate rainforest' of Argyll provides just that.

Dr Phil Anderson from the Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) first noticed hair ice when he moved to Taynuilt from Cambridge 10 years ago and has begun looking into the phenomenon.

He said: 'Hair ice is not that common but if you want



You are most likely to find hair ice on a crisp, sunny morning after a clear night.

to find it, Argyll is about as good a place as anywhere in the world. I first noticed it in my garden; there was this fragile bit of ice sitting in the sunshine where it shouldn't have been. I've since seen it up locally.

'I've worked in Antarctica

and studied how snow hardens but I found hair ice formation absolutely fascinating. It's just weird!'

Dr Dorothee Gotz works at Lallemand Aquapharm, which has a lab at SAMS, and shares an interest in hair ice formation. Lallemand Aquapharm holds a culture

collection that includes fungus and, as a microbiologist, Dorothee recognised that the fungus responsible for hair ice formation would be worth including in the collection.

She said: 'I saw hair ice for the first time three years ago in Sutherland's Grove, so I took a sample to add to our

collection. It's a fascinating bit of microbiology. A fungus that forms ice and degrades wood is certainly of interest and could potentially have industrial applications.'

Both scientists are keen to find out why this phenomenon occurs but say there is very little published literature

on it, perhaps because it is so rare.

'We don't know what's in it for the fungus,' explains Dr Gotz. 'It needs to expend a lot of energy to create the hair ice and there is no apparent benefit to doing this. Water is a problem for micro-organisms when it freezes, as ice can puncture the membrane. Perhaps the fungus is trying to expel the water before it becomes a problem.'

Hair ice is most likely to form on dead wood with no bark. It also forms on certain trees more than others and prefers hard woods such as birch.

'As a rough guide, if the gritters are out, then hair ice might be out too,' says Dr Anderson. 'You're most likely to find it on a crisp, sunny morning after a clear night. The temperature has to be just below freezing. If you have those conditions, keep your eyes peeled for frost or ice that shouldn't be there.'

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St Columba's legacy in

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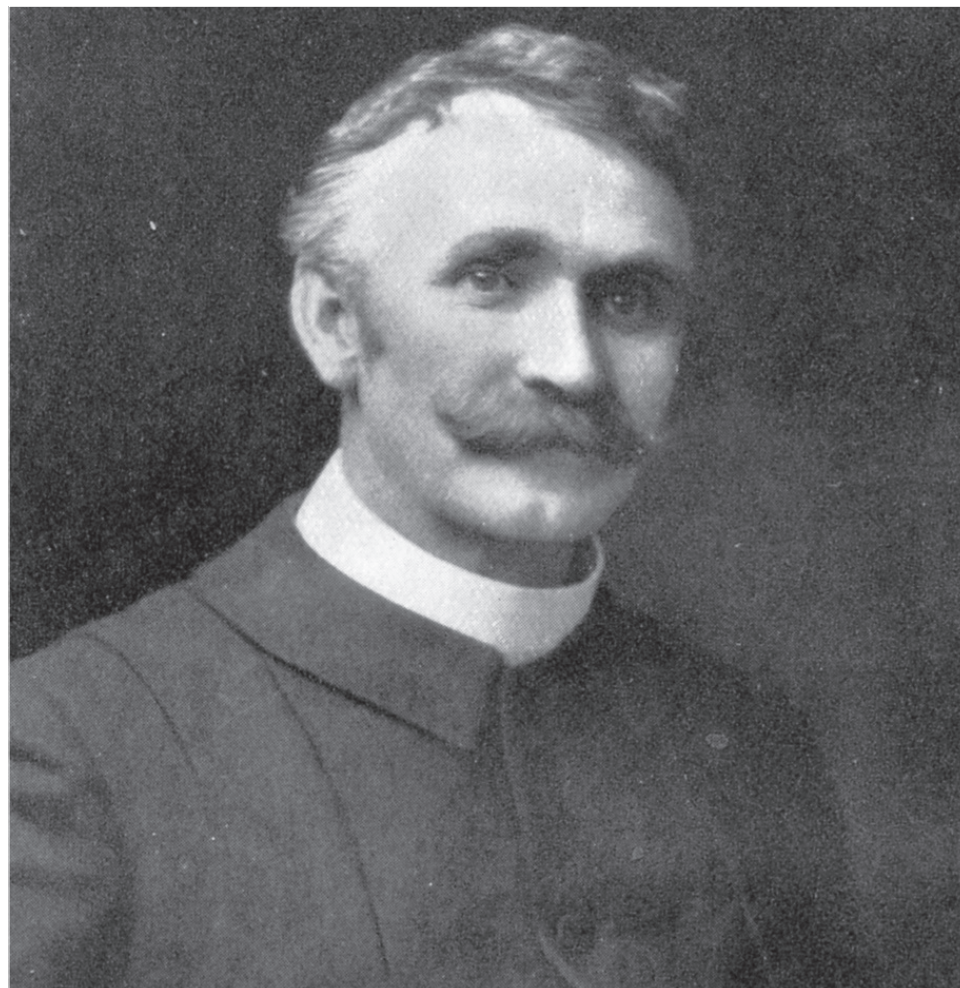
Well done drawing attention to St Columba and his Christian legacy in the article of how his 1,500th birthday was remembered and celebrated in Ireland and Scotland (The Oban Times, December 9, 2021).

There was a time when his name was a household word in Morvern and legends of his ministry were taught in every one of the parishes' nine primary and innumerable little side schools. Today the emphasis seems to be less on Gaelic and local history and more on computers and European politics.

Of course, teachers are seldom local and curriculums have altered out of all recognition, so how can it be otherwise? Gone are the posse of stalwarts who could teach any subject to all ages (and frequently did) and could hold their own in the finest educational institutions from Inverness to Oxford and every Highland and Islands village school in between - no matter how isolated.

Teachers such as Jessie Robertson (Claggan and Kinlochteacuis) Donald B Fletcher and his wife (Lochaline and Fiunary) Samuel Cameron (Kiel) Sarah Macmillan (Bunavalluin) Toie Mackenzie (Dorlin) Jay MacDonald (Claggan) Annabel MacGregor (Lochaline) Katie MacVicar (Liddesdale) Kate Cruickshanks (Lochaline) and Mary MacDiarmid (Glencripesdale) - to name just a few. Many of them have crossed the Great Divide but their names and dedication are still recalled with affection and gratitude.

St Columba is commemorated in the church and its adjacent graveyard, lying a little way above Lochaline village known as Kiel - an abbreviation of Cille Cholaimchille (The cell of St Columba of the Church), given to one of two of Morvern's medieval parishes and still in use to this day. Local tradition says that Columba crossed Loch Linnhe with St Moluag from the island of Lismore, and that, landing together, they climbed the Garbh Shlios. From the summit of Glas Bheinn, with its commanding views of Morvern, St Columba planted his foot on a flat rock, and, pointing to a green knoll, where Kiel now stands, said to his companion: 'There is the



place where we will build our next church'. It is recorded the indelible footprint is still to be seen on Glas Bheinn, similar to that found on a rock at Southend on the Kintyre peninsula. Further reference to the famous saint is also to be found in the name of an incised cross lying beside the ancient hill track leading from Mungosdale to Barr. Here, according to legend, St Columba looked down on Ardnamurchan and selected a sheltered bay, hard-by the lovely little peninsula of Ardslnish and Torr na Moine, in which to build his next church, which is why it got the name Camus nan Gall - The Bay of the Stranger - the stranger of course being St Columba - although some experts say it should be Camus na

Ceall meaning Bay of the Churches. Returning to Morvern, there is St Columba's Chapel half a mile below Drimnin House built in 1838 by local landowner Sir Charles Gordon on the site of old Drimnin Castle which he demolished to make way for it.

After Sir Charles died in 1845 the chapel gradually fell into disuse and was supplanted by one in Drimnin House. It was here that Saint Mary McKillop, whose parents came from Roy Bridge and who is Australia's first saint, worshipped on her visit to the UK in the late 19th century. When the Gordon family sold the estate to Miss Alice Horsman in 1943, the chapel became a total ruin but was given a Grade B listing to protect



its historical and scenic importance. Following acquisition of Drimnin Estate by its current owners, Mr and Mrs Derek Lewis, in 2002, plans were drawn up to restore the chapel as a place of non-denominational Christian worship and to make it a centre for music and the arts. For this purpose a charity, St Columba's Drimnin Trust, was formed and so this historic local landmark with its association with St Columba was given a new life.

To coincide with the anniversary of St Columba's death in 597 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland ordained that a Thanksgiving service for the introduction of Christianity to the region should be held on Iona in June 1897 in or near the site of Columba's original monastery.

A number of pilgrims travelled from Morvern led by their minister, the charismatic Rev Donald Macfarlane (1882 to 1907). On their return journey they took advantage of the fine weather and landed on Staffa to visit Fingal's Cave. As they stood inside marvelling at its vertical basalt columns and melodious acoustics, Mr Macfarlane suddenly suggested they sing Psalm 103 to the traditional tune of Coleshill (Bless the Lord, O

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in Morvern



Rev Donald Macfarlane (1834-1926); and right, Staffa on a winter's day.

Photograph Iain Thornber

my soul: and all that is within me, bless His Holy name). He had a beautiful voice and had led the singing at the Gaelic services on Iona earlier in the day; the rest of the party joined heartily. Later an eye witness wrote: 'The effect of the voices, men's voices predominating, ringing through the arches of that natural cathedral, was wonderfully striking. It touched a sympathetic chord in every heart'.

Donald Macfarlane was a son, grandson and great-great-grandson of the Manse; he preached and followed the teachings of St Columba and was adored by the parishioners of Morvern, Gigha and Cara when he moved there from Fiunary in 1907. His piety, humility and genius for friendship came through endearing him to all walks of life and every denomination of all ages; young and old flocked to Kiel and Ferinish churches every Sunday where it was standing room only.

Donald Macfarlane put great store in visiting throughout the parish, which he did regularly, no matter how remote or inclement the weather. I remember in 1977 Mrs Jessie Cameron (nee Mackinnon, Rhemore in Morvern, then living

in Carradale, Kintyre) telling me she had been baptised by Macfarlane. She described him as a very fine man who would never leave a house without going on both knees to pray for the occupants and that when he came back from Gigha to unveil the war memorial at Fernish to those who fell in the Great War, he was in tears reading the names of the young men whom he had christened.

Macfarlane's successor did things differently and although a very fine minister he did not possess MacFarlane's gifts. Mrs Cameron recalled that on the death of her sister at Salachan, above Fiunary, from scarlet fever, the new minister came to console her mother. He did his best but after he left she remarked that Donald Macfarlane had more in his little finger than all he could ever give. Someone said something to Macfarlane which caused him to leave Morvern.

St Columba is commemorated in a stained glass window in Kiel church close to a granite memorial to the Rev Donald Macfarlane which bears the inscription, 'A man shall be as an hiding place from the wind; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land' (Isaiah 32; 2).

Oban's history in safe hands at The Rockfield Centre

The Heritage Hunters at The Rockfield Centre have had a busy and productive few months – and turned up a few surprises into the bargain!

As well as their regular monthly Blether sessions, they held their first 'in-house' exhibition, which ran during the Winter Festival. It proved so popular that they decided to extend it - and are very glad they did.

A spokesperson continued: 'Many local folk, with treasures lurking in their lofts, brought some fresh insights to Oban's story and added to the growing collection of artefacts, maps and papers that we are archiving.

'The main focus of the exhibition was shops and businesses and a timeline of George Street, showing the changing face of commerce over the last century, provided an opportunity for debate and frequently argument.

'From valuation rolls, census returns, adverts in school magazines and travel guides, and first-hand experience, a picture gradually emerged of the changing face of our main street and the range of businesses that have flourished there over the years.

'Who can remember Boots the Chemist at Stafford Street corner and the library upstairs?

'Or the thrill of browsing through LPs or the latest singles in Douglas' Music Shop?

'Or playing 'Harry Worth' at Laird Parker's at the foot of Craighard Road?

'We were so fortunate to be given access to artefacts from Black the Tobacconist's and Hutton's shoe shop (by courtesy of the MacDougall of Dunollie Collection) and

examples of horse brasses and leather goods from the grandson of Alfred Collier of Hope and Collier, saddlers. These complemented perfectly our series of photographs showing Oban from early times to the middle of last century, expertly prepared for us by John MacLean and his team.

'And John also hosts the monthly Blether sessions which have proved so popular. At our Christmas Blether, we were treated to a just-for-fun quiz before relaxing with a cuppa, mince pie and slide show of views of our town which unfailingly leads to discussion and more questions. A great way to pass an afternoon with good company and craic.

'The Blether sessions are held from 2-4pm on the first Friday of the month from September to April. The next one is on Friday January 14 to allow for extended New Year celebrations.

'2022 will also bring to the fore exciting plans to further promote Oban's heritage. Other exhibitions are being planned, further research projects are in the pipeline and work is moving apace on our children's space. We are recording local people with interesting memories to share, liaising with schools to promote local history and developing our family history resources.'

If you are interested in finding out more or joining this exciting project, please get in touch with Mhairi, Elisabeth or Eleanor at The Rockfield Centre by emailing: heritage@therockfieldcentre.org.uk or call: 01631 701921, or visit www.therockfieldcentre.org.uk.



The Blether sessions are held from 2-4pm on the first Friday of the month. The next one is on Friday January 14.



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OT

LETTERS

Congratulations

Although Argyll folk were conspicuous by their absence in this year's New Year Honours list, it was good to see two women from our area being mentioned.

Chief Inspector Marlene Baillie has been awarded the Queen's Police Medal, while Christine Campbell from Bonawe, the former manager of SAMS Culture Collection of Algae and Protozoa, was awarded the MBE. Christine retired at the end of March after clocking up 35 years service.

And congratulations also goes to 19-year-old Iain MacPherson from Oban who won two top prizes at renewable energy company Drax's annual awards event in recognition of his achievements over the past year.

Iain, who is now entering the third year of his apprenticeship, received outstanding feedback from his colleagues who speak highly of his commitment, potential and ability and say he has become a valuable member of the team at Cruachan.

Celebrating people's achievements is a great way to start this new year, and we send our best wishes to all three recipients of their respective accolades.

The editor welcomes letters of approximately 300 words in length for publication on this page.

However we reserve the right to shorten, to amend or to refuse to print them. Names and postal addresses must be supplied, including on emails, to indicate good faith. A daytime phone number is also required for verification. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Please email: editor@obantimes.co.uk or write to: Letters page, The Oban Times, PO Box 1, Oban, Argyll, PA34 4HB.

The views expressed on our letters page are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of The Oban Times.

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Letter does bears a disservice

Joanne Matheson, in her letter of December 23, does a great disservice to bears who by and large are highly intelligent creatures that would not be seen dead wearing a yellow rosette and are respected members of the community, indeed there is a statue of one on Paddington station.

Whilst she is right about the low turnout, and this has a great deal to do with people having a poor opinion of the Highland Council – hardly surprising when it persists with its vanity projects and Inverness-centric attitudes – it is hardly commendable, in this day and age, with all the talk about global warming, that the Green Party candidate could only command support from 3.7 per cent of the electorate. We will see what happens in May.

Andrew Green, Ardtoe.

Reflection before publication?

Highland Council candidate, Joanne Matheson's letter of December 23 poses interesting questions.

For example, it's a pity she wasn't more forthcoming about the demographic profiles of those who informed her that, regarding SNP supporters, 'you could put a yellow rosette on a stuffed teddy and they'd vote for it.'

And perhaps her thoughts on who 'they' are would have been revealing as well.

Why does she criticise fellow candidates for not making use of Facebook when it's obvious that not all people conduct their political communications on social media?

There's nothing like insulting a large percentage of the electorate to ensure that you'll garner votes next time around!

Ms Matheson attracted 88 first choice votes – not surprising having publicly announced that folk shouldn't vote for her because she may not have 'time and commitment to fulfil the role'.

At best, her letter displays an appalling case of sour grapes, at worst, a highly insulting diatribe against those she doesn't seem to want to represent anyway.

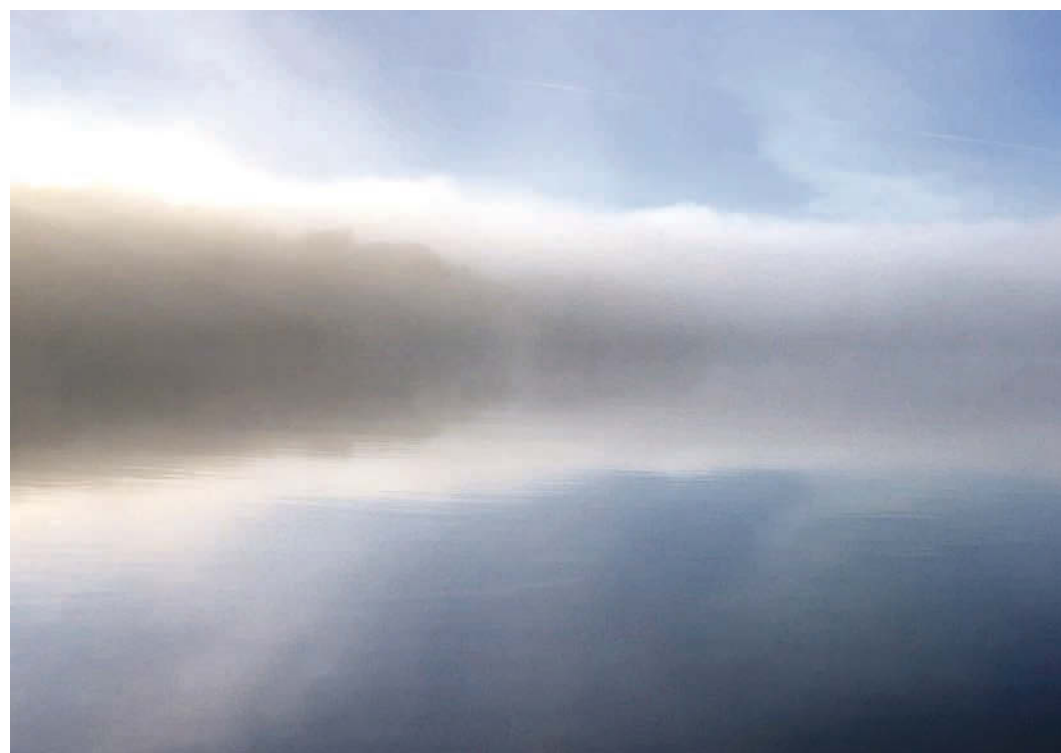
Perhaps reflection before publication would have been good advice.

Andy Thornton, Ballachulish.

Better route for timber lorries

As a community, we need to ask how sensible it is for Oban's unavoidable centre to be subjected to a seemingly unending procession of lorries carrying timber southward from felling operations north of the town and a similar procession

YOUR PICTURES



taking timber from south of the town northwards, presumably to Corpach?

Not only is there an unnecessary increase in HGV traffic through the town, often already congested, inevitable carriageway wear and tear brings a number costs, not least of which is the repair of damage to vehicles caused by sunken iron ware, etc. All these costs are borne by the community one way or another, not the companies handling the timber. Why can't timber harvested north of the town go northwards and timber harvested to the south go southwards?

Ian Reid, Oban.

Docs need to help all patients

It was manifestly obvious that we were not going to attain the target of everyone receiving a Covid booster jab by the end of December.

With the proportion of Covid sufferers requiring the most specialist care still above 90 per cent we are increasingly dealing with those who are highly resistant to medical advice.

So why is the cancellation of GPs' normal work prioritised, delaying the diagnosis and the treatment of other serious conditions, when the clear evidence from France is that requiring proof of vaccination to enter bars and other public places will persuade all but the most unregenerate to get jabs?

A new vaccination service staffed by easily-trained laypeople working under the supervision of one clinician per clinic is needed. This would free GPs, hospital medics, pharmacists and nurses for other, more complicated, health issues and reduce the cost of what is likely to be an annual exercise.

Dr John Cameron, St Andrews.

Using drones to spot algae

I'm interested to read that drones based at Oban Airport will be looking for 'harmful algal blooms which affect local aquaculture'.

Currently they are tracked by satellite by SEPA. This could be cheaper and with industry



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This beautifully atmospheric photograph was captured by reader Veronica Speirs on Saturday December 18, which she managed to capture through a gap in the fog at Loch Awe. If you have a photograph you've taken and would like to share it with our readers, email it to us as a jpeg of around 2MB to the address below.

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mortalities running as high as 20 per cent, blooms are a common cause and a serious problem.

I worry though that the fish farmers are oblivious to the fact that these blooms are quite probably caused by the waste products of the farms themselves. They, SEPA and the Scottish Government are in a state of total denial about this for obvious reasons, but the science behind it is not complicated. Blooms can be caused by excess nutrients in the water and the farmers know this. Mowi talk about it at length in their current application for an expansion of their farm in Loch Hourn.

If there is a major bloom in Ganavan Bay, it could easily come from the increase in biomass that has just been consented to Scottish Sea Farms in Dunstaffnage and at other local sites.

SEPA may claim that it just drifted in unpredictably from the open ocean, but this is really quite unconvincing. By the time a drone has spotted it, the damage will likely have become

inevitable. As the saying goes, 'there's none so blind as them who won't see'.

Dennis Archer, Oban.

At random

MARTIN LAING

editor@obantimes.co.uk



Future is bright

Much has been written in recent years about the prospects for British newspapers given the extraordinarily rapid changes to our traditional means of communication.

Many pundits have for years been predicting the demise of the printed press as electronic media explodes all around us. Indeed, there is some merit to that view as today's news moves online.

I was, therefore, intrigued by the historical focus in last week's issue chronicling the now 160-year

Beachd Ailein

ALLAN CAMPBELL

ailean@obantimes.co.uk



Fàilte air a' Bhliadh 'Ùr agus gach misneachd is dòchas a thàinig leatha, a dh'aindeoin an dubhair dhùbhlananach a bha cho goirid às a dèidh ann an 2021! Saoilidh mi gum bheil e nàdarra gu leòr a bhith a' coimhead romhainn le dòchas air star-saich bliadh 'ùire, agus a' feuchainn ri eallach uallaichean na bliadhna a dh'fhalbh a chur air ar cùlaibh. Chan eil sin daonnan furasta idir ge-tà, oir ged as urrainn dhuinn mòran atharrachadh nar dòigh-beatha fhèin gus cùisean a leasachadh bidh rudan ann air nach eil smachd againn! Aig toiseach 2022 tha mòran thachartasan an t-saoghail mhòir a dh'iarramaid atharrachadh, leithid mar a tha arm na Ruis a' bagairt blàir aig crìch na Ugràine; mar a tha tèarmann agus beatha 'ùr ga dhiùltadh dha mìltean fhògarrach is iad a' siubhal fad mhìosan tarsainn caochladh dhùthchannan; agus mar a tha beatha mhilleanan chloinne ann an cunnart de dith bidh agus uisge! Tha sin gun iomradh air rudan a tha nas fhaige oirnn uile gu làitheil mar a tha àrdachadh chosgaisean bith-beò le prìsean bidh agus connaidh a' toirt fàs bras air atmhorachd eaconamach, agus bhioras mallaichte Covid 19 a' sior sgapadh aig astar a tha na chùis eagail!

Bhiodh e furasta fàs iseal agus car brònach a' beachdachadh cus air na gnothaichean sin gun cuideachd aire a thoirt dha cùisean a tha togarrach. Tha an àireamh den t-sluagh air an deach banachdachaidhean air fàs gu mòr agus a dh'aindeoin cho gabhaltach 's a tha an strèan

'ùr den Chovid tha barrachd dhaoine a-nise air tomhas mhòr dìon fhaotainn bhon bhuidheas as miosa den bhioras. Ri linn sin tha e coltach gun till an saoghal againn uile nas fhaige air an seòrsa àbhaisteachd a b' aithne dhuinn fàisg air dà bhliadhna air ais, agus mar phàirt den ghluasad sin gun tog an eaconamaidh às 'ùr agus gun socraich an atmhorachd. Bidh cuid ag èigheach "bruadar, amadain", ach 's e mo bheachd gum feum sinn leantainn beò an dòchas agus gluasad air adhart le dìongmhaltas gus an seòrsa adhartais air am bheil feum againn a bhuingn! Leis a' gheamhradh letheach seachad agus an latha a' fàs fada a-rithist tha mi 'n dòchas gum bheil sibh ann an sunnd misneachail. Seo mar a sgrìobh m' fhear-dùthcha am bàrd ainmeil Niall MacLeòid a bheannachdan bliadh 'ùire fhèin fàisg air ceud gu leth bliadhna air ais, agus ged a tha am briathrachas 's dòcha beagan seann-fhasanta an-diugh tha rùn nam faclan pailt cho iomchaidh 's a bha iad nuair a sgrìobh am bàrd iad.

Saoghal fada, maoin, is cliù, D' ar luchd-dùthcha bhos is thall; Dòrtadh bheannachdan mar dhriùchd, Gach bliadh 'ùr thig air an ceann.

Ged a sgaradh sinn ri luaths, Bidh ar càirdeas buan 's gach àm; 'S òlaidh sinn le caitheam chruaidh, Làn na cuaich air Tìr nam Beann.

Tha mi a' guidhe sith, sonas, slàinte, agus soirbheachas dhuibh uile ann an 2022, agus tha fhios nach dèanadh beagan saidhbheis cron sam bith a bharrachd!

Many of you dear readers and advertisers will be perusing my ramblings on your devices rather than in print. And that is clearly not about to change. However, The Oban Times as a printed newspaper remains a success story and is a vital part of life for many thousands of people in the town, its surrounding area and much further afield. Indeed, I bought a copy in Stirling last week and was right behind an elderly lady doing the same thing. We even ended up in conversation about Oban and its newspaper as a result.

The Oban Times remains in safe hands and has a brilliant team of journalists and other staff members – perhaps especially its IT team in light of what I have written – to take it onwards into the future. Reaching its landmark 160th anniversary is a wonderful achievement and I believe it has a bright future.

span of The Oban Times. I should add that as a journalist with more than 40 years in newspapers, I am something of a traditionalist and have an enduring affection for the printed press. I am also, of course, a former staff member on The Oban Times and a continuing contributor, so I have a vested interest in this august publication and its success.

The Oban Times has, like other media organisations, fully embraced the new world of online working, with a great website and publication of everything it does online and across social media.

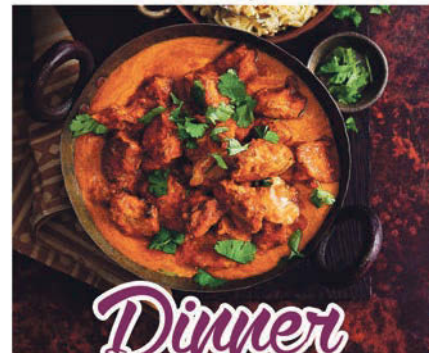
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LEISURE & ENTERTAINMENT

YOUR GUIDE TO WHAT'S ON IN ARGYLL AND LOCHABER

Oban DI is back on a trail of murder

by Sandy Neil
sneil@obantimes.co.uk

Just outside Oban, within sight of the Connel Bridge, there's a burned-out car containing the charred remains of a human body.

A woman is missing – but is the body hers?

In a high stakes game of business and politics, what secret does the bustling port of Oban hide that is worth killing for?

That's the teaser for a West Coast crime thriller, *The Dead* in Appin, the third in the Oban-based Inspector Angus Blue series, following *The Peat Dead* and *The Dead of Jura*.

The author, Allan Martin, although born in Glasgow, has long connections to Jura and Colonsay, where his father's family hail from.

He has worked as a teacher, teacher-trainer and university lecturer, and turned to writing fiction only after taking early retirement: 'The best decision



I ever made,' he said.

'It was natural to set the books in places I know and love, and feel a real affinity for,' he said. 'These are special places with unique land and seascapes. And, of course, Angus Blue's favourite whiskies! As a product of this area, Angus Blue is a man of integrity who believes in justice as a moral as well as a legal concept.'

Martin's first novel, *The Peat Dead*, featuring DI Angus Blue, was shortlisted for the inaugural McIlvanney Debut Prize in 2019. On the Isle of Islay, 'five corpses are dug up by a peat-cutter. All of them have been shot in the back of the head, execution style.'

'Sent across from the mainland to investigate, Inspector Angus Blue and his team

are sent to hunt down the assassin. By the time Inspector Blue and his team arrive the estate staff have been scared into silence, and the crime scene has been disturbed. His investigation hampered at every turn, Inspector Blue must discover what Special Branch are hiding - and who they are protecting.

slowly piece together the little evidence they have, and discover the men were killed on a wartime base, more than 70 years ago. But there are still secrets worth protecting - and even killing for. Who can Inspector Blue trust?'

It was followed by *The Dead of Jura*, an island 'where the rich and the powerful come to play away from the prying eyes of the press. But when there is an assassination attempt on a Cabinet Minister while he's on his island estate, questions must be asked, and Inspector Angus Blue and his team return to the Hebrides to investigate.'

Deemed a matter of 'National Security' by London, local protocols are overruled, and Special Branch officers

are sent to hunt down the assassin. By the time Inspector Blue and his team arrive the estate staff have been scared into silence, and the crime scene has been disturbed. His investigation hampered at every turn, Inspector Blue must discover what Special Branch are hiding - and who they are protecting.

Martin lives just north of Glasgow with his wife Vivien (also a writer). They regularly visit the Highlands and Islands, as well as Germany and Estonia. In addition to the Angus Blue series, he writes crime novels set in 1930s Estonia, and he has also translated from Estonian a closed-room mystery, *The Oracle*, originally published in 1937.

The Dead of Appin

The car was well alight by then; probably doused with petrol before being torched. Renault Clio, by the way.

We put a pipe into the loch and gave it a good drenching.

We gave the back end of the cottage a splash too, just in case. The car was pretty burnt out in the end.

It wasn't till then we could get close enough to see inside with the spotlight from the engine, and realised there was something there.

I must admit, it wasn't easy to spot; it had slumped down from the passenger seat into the footwell, and suffered a lot of fire damage. Looked more like a charred lump than a corpse. So you're going to have a bit of trouble identifying it, I guess.

We're just hanging on now to make sure it doesn't reignite. That could happen if there were something flammable in the boot, for instance. Anything obvious would have gone up by now. Probably easier to wait till it gets a wee bit lighter and the car's a bit cooler before you get too close.

The corpse is not going to run away, and the car won't be going anywhere either.

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ROBERT ROBERTSON

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The Glenfinnan Ceilidh Band were the house band for the Hogmanay show on BBC Alba.

In my final column of 2021, I hoped for a slightly more exciting Hogmanay than last year's.

Unfortunately, my mum and dad both testing positive for Covid kicked this hope right into touch and condemned me to my second isolation period within a month!

I am still testing negative but clearly there was no first footing on the cards for a second year running!

Thankfully, there was some great viewing on television and congratulations must go to everyone involved in this year's Cèilidh na Bliadhna Ùire – BBC Alba's live Hogmanay ceilidh which was broadcast, conveniently for this column, from Glasgow.

The lack of a live audience often makes a gig like that very difficult for performers, but I thought the whole show generated a really lively, natural atmosphere.

The set design, made from fishing nets and creels, was very appropriate for a true West Highland ceilidh led, as ever, by the fantastic house band, the Glenfinnan Ceilidh Band, who were joined by New

Tradition, led by Iain Costello MacIver. These two bands complemented each other perfectly – the Glenfinnan crew leading the cèilidh dances and playing some great traditional Gaelic songs, whilst New Tradition played a variety of Gaelic songs with Costello's trademark country twist.

There was a fine line-up of singers for both these bands to accompany: Emma MacLeod from Scalpay, Chloe Steele from Uist, and Iain 'Spanish' Mackay from Lewis making sure most Hebridean bases were covered! And a special mention should go to Glenuig's Iain MacMaster who put down the box for a song half way through the evening.

The show was augmented by pre-recorded performances from the Stornoway Youth Pipe Band, Còisir Ghàidhlig Leòdhais (a selection of choral singers from Lewis), and Peat and Diesel, and was presented with great humour by Niall Iain MacDonald and Cathy Bhàn.

It was one of these programmes that just felt really positive and happy – despite

everything that is going on around us at the moment – and it certainly cheered up my Hogmanay in isolation no end.

Covid or not, my mum and dad managed to stay up past the bells and dad even managed a hot toddy! The following day, his symptoms were all but gone, so perhaps the cure for Covid is a hot toddy with the BBC Alba Hogmanay show!

On the 1st, to keep my mind off the fact I would normally be first footing, I put on Take the Floor where Gary Innes was introducing a fantastic New Year's Day Party with music from Iain Cathcart and his Scottish Dance Band.

Gary had interviewed me for the programme before Christmas and asked me to choose a song to be played. I chose Clare Island by the Saw Doctors – two of whom (Leo Moran and Anto Thistlethwaite) I had the pleasure of singing with on a BBC Alba Hogmanay show a few years ago.

It was nice to think back on Hogmanays gone by; and look ahead to more lively ones in years to come!



Peat and Diesel were guests on BBC Alba's live Hogmanay ceilidh, helping Gaels bring in the new year.

What's on at Oban Cinema



THE STORY OF LOOKING As he prepares for surgery to restore his vision, Mark Cousins explores the role that visual experience plays in our individual and collective lives. In a deeply personal meditation on the power of looking in his own life, he guides us through the riches of the visible world, a kaleidoscope of extraordinary imagery across cultures and eras.

Friday 7 January

The Story Of Looking 15	12:30/19:45
Spider-Man: No Way Home 12A	16:15
West Side Story 12A	16:30
The Matrix Resurrections 15	19:45

Saturday 8 January

Spider-Man: No Way Home 12A	12:15/14:45
Clifford The Big Red Dog PG	12:30
West Side Story 15	15:45
The Story Of Looking 15	17:45
The Matrix Resurrections 15	19:30
Spencer 12A	19:45

Sunday 9 January

Spider-Man: No Way Home 12A	12:15/14:45
Clifford The Big Red Dog PG	12:30
West Side Story 12A	15:45
The Story Of Looking 15	17:45
The Matrix Resurrections 15	19:30
Spencer 12A	19:45

Wednesday 12 January (screenings marked with★are captioned)

The Story Of Looking 15	12:30/19:45
Spencer 12A	12:45★
Spider-Man: No Way Home 12A	16:15★
West Side Story 12A	16:30★
The Matrix Resurrections 15	19:45★

Thursday 13 January

The Story Of Looking 15	12:30/19:45
Spencer 12A	12:45
Spider-Man: No Way Home 12A	16:15
West Side Story 12A	16:30
The Matrix Resurrections 15	19:45

Key: HOH - Captions for the hard of hearing.

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MONDAY:	8am-12pm 12-3pm 5pm-7pm 7pm-8pm 8pm-9pm 9pm	Breakfast show with Stephen Lunch with Bob G Drive Times with Marcus Highland Fling with Rosemary Calum McLuckies Show David Cullen Show
TUESDAY:	8am-10am 10am-12.30pm 1pm-3pm 5pm-7pm 7pm-8pm 8pm-9pm 9pm	Breakfast Show with Stephen Ken Hunter Macky on FM Drive Times with Archie Darling Highest Praise with Stuart Chalmers Scottish Sounds with Archie Cameron Oban Pride on the Waves with Jay & Crystal
WEDNESDAY:	8am-11am 11am-1pm 1pm-3pm 4pm-7pm 7pm-9pm 9pm	Breakfast Show with Stephen Comfort Zone with Lesley Doug in the afternoon Drive Times with Campbell Country meets Rock N Roll with Len Gordon's Grooves
THURSDAY:	8am-11am 11am-2pm 3pm-7pm 7pm-9pm 9pm-10pm 10pm	Breakfast Show with Andy & Sarah Lunch Show with Steve Drive Time with Stephen Christine's Collections Ann's Ceilidh Margo Till Midnight
FRIDAY:	8am-10am 10am-1pm 1pm-4pm 4pm-6:45pm 6:45pm-7pm 7pm-8pm 8pm-10pm	Breakfast Show with Anna & Phil The Brunch Show With The One Bob G Country, Rhythm & Blues show Teeney & Tiny Show with Harry & Janet Sports View with the Dream Team Country Meets Country with Jackie Craig
SATURDAY:	8am-10am 10am-1pm 2pm-4pm 6pm-7pm 7pm-8pm 8pm-10pm	Evening Show with Peter Rainnie Breakfast Show with Andy Saturday Morning Live with Linda Jukebox Jamboree with Ken Mc Sports View with the Dream Team Sounds Scottish with Archie Darling Evening Show with Dave Hobbs
SUNDAY:	9am-11am 11am-2pm 3pm-5pm 7pm-9pm 9pm	Sunday Morning with Breege Sunday Brunch with Stephen Mental Musings with Mer New Country Show with Dave & Murdoch Drum & Bass with Graham.

Early Christmas present as polar bear cub born

by Sandy Neil
sneil@obantimes.co.uk

The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland has announced the birth of a tiny polar bear cub at Highland Wildlife Park.

Staff at the wildlife conservation charity were delighted when they first heard the distinct high-pitched cub sounds coming from the den last month but say the coming months are crucial.

CCTV footage captured in the den shows mum Victoria and cub enjoying a snooze.

Vickie Larkin, carnivore team leader at Highland Wildlife Park, said: 'This is a tremendous occasion which is a testament to our team's hard work.

'While we are excited about the new arrival, we are not celebrating quite yet as the first few weeks of a polar bear's life is critical, with potential immune system complications and mum's need for privacy during this time our top priority.

'Like all the animals in our care, our polar bears play an important role in attracting and engaging thousands of visitors each year so they



hopeful Victoria and Arktos would produce another cub when they were reintroduced for the breeding season in February.

'She is a very attentive mother and we're pleased to say they are both doing well so far. We will not know if the little one is a boy or girl until we are able to perform health checks in the spring and they will be named shortly after.

'Polar bears are born blind and do not open their eyes until they are a month old. At the moment, the youngster is about a foot long and weighs

roughly the same as a guinea pig.'

Public viewing is closed to give mum Victoria and her youngster peace and quiet. Dad Arktos and Walker, the park's other male polar bear, can still be spotted in their enclosure.

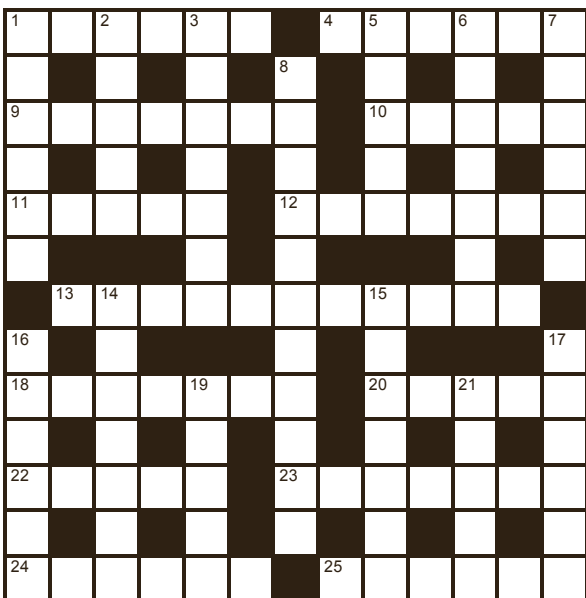
Vickie continued: 'We were

The cub's high-pitched cub noises were first being heard on Tuesday December 14. Mother and cub will remain in the off-show den until early spring.

Public viewing is closed to give mum Victoria and her youngster peace and quiet.

Dad Arktos and Walker, the park's other male polar bear, can still be spotted in their enclosure.

CROSSWORD



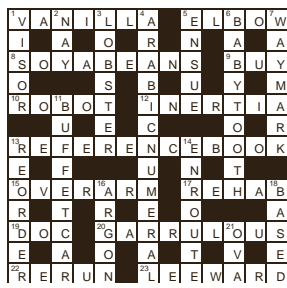
Across

- 1 Forming into a globe (6)
- 4 Blinds (6)
- 9 Defence technique (7)
- 10 Actionable words (5)
- 11 Leftover (5)
- 12 Dictionary (7)
- 13 Churns up heavy filler (6,5)
- 18 Increase (7)
- 20 Cold lunch (5)
- 22 White heron (5)
- 23 Huge explosive force (7)
- 24 Could be composition or in motion (6)
- 25 Cultural (6)

Down

- 1 Item (6)
- 2 Compact and this describes a small place in the house sellers guide! (5)
- 3 Important (7)
- 5 Spiral (5)
- 6 Fiasco (7)

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION



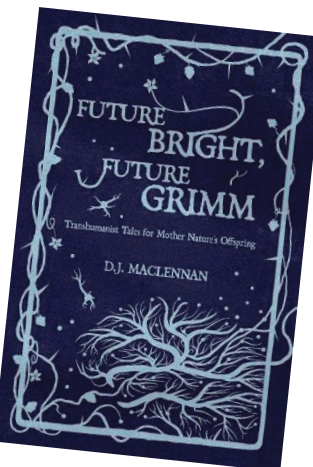
Skye futurist writer gives Grimm fairy tales 'magipunk' reboot

by Sandy Neil
sneil@obantimes.co.uk

Future Bright, Future Grimm: Transhumanist Tales for Mother Nature's Offspring is a new collection of 'wild, futuristic reimaginings of the Grimms' classics' by Skye author D.J. MacLennan.

Benbecula-born D.J. MacLennan 'never shies away from the tales' weird, haunting qualities', the publicity says, and 'dives into their dark hearts to draw out twisted, dazzling threads that thrum with astonishing possibilities for all our tomorrows'.

Branded variously, 'magipunk', 'Cinderella science' and 'alternative fireside', it is a book of 'daring, grown-up re-



his decision to sign up for head-only 'cryopreservation' upon his death – provoked controversy throughout his native Highlands of Scotland and far beyond.

Dubbed 'The Cryonic Man', the futurist author has been paying £50 a month to the Alcor Institute in Arizona, USA, to have his head cut off and cryogenically frozen in liquid nitrogen after his death, in the hope that he can one day be brought back to life. The full-body procedure costs £75,000 but D.J. opted for the £40,000 brain freeze.

Currently focusing his speculative thinking on fiction writing, he draws inspiration from 'the astounding scientific and technological

breakthroughs transforming our lives at an unprecedented rate', he says.

'Though my writing's scope is global, universal, I think the brooding land - and seascapes - of Skye and the West Coast work their queer magic on my imagination,' he said. 'Through that majestic blue-grey lens, I conjure the future as wild, soaring and limitless – more fevered fairy tale than science fiction.'

Excerpt from *The Tree of Love*, adapted from the Grimms' *The Juniper Tree*

With glistening eyes, she smiled up at the tree and thanked it for its blessings. It began to rustle. Fresh new leaves sprouted, and it tinkled

Celtic Connections to celebrate oral tradition in Year of Stories

Celtic Connections is to put Scotland's rich oral traditions in the spotlight this January as part of a specially commissioned strand of events for the Year of Stories 2022.



Mitchell Theatre to explore Scotland's contribution to the world through its greatest export, its people.

Whisper the Song will see a week of five captivating shows featuring storytellers, poets, writers and 20 high-profile musicians, exploring the oral tradition of passing stories down through generations, alongside the creation of exciting new tales.

Inspired by Scotland's people, places, tales, legends and outstanding natural beauty, the activity is supported by EventScotland as part of the Year of Stories 2022.

Scotland's Year of Stories spotlights, celebrates and promotes the stories inspired by, written, or created in Scotland. The following shows will be part of Whisper the Song in Glasgow:

The Scottish World will look at how tales of Scotland travelled with and were reimagined by the diaspora and the influence they had around the world. On Saturday February 5 writer, performer and broadcaster Billy Kay, singers Siobhan Miller and Robyn Stapleton, and guests will take to the stage at the

Breathe will highlight global climate change concerns through a collection of stories from Scotland's natural world. Strathspey composer and multi-instrumentalist Hamish Napier and Scottish storyteller David Francis, accompanied by a trio of musicians, team up to explore attitudes to land management over the centuries on Saturday January 29 at the Mitchell Theatre.

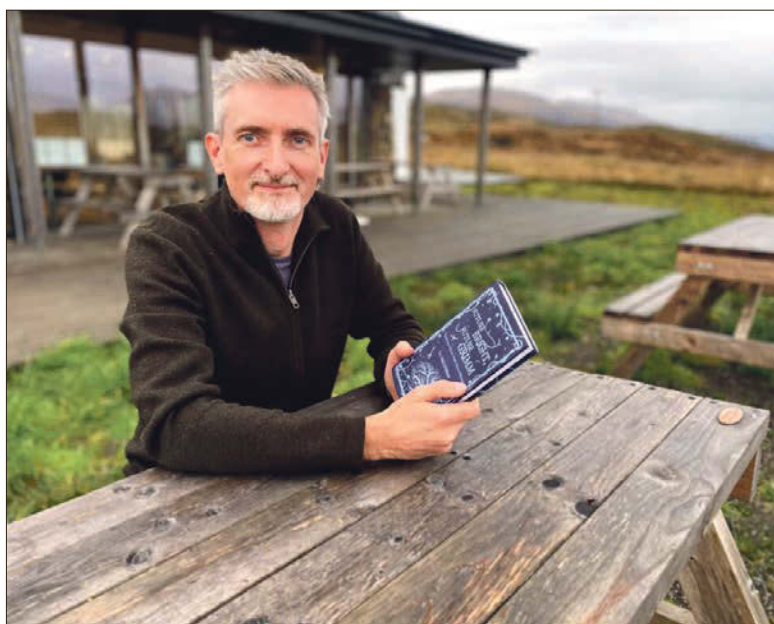
Homage to Home will explore how traditional folk tales, stories and songs are the last link to the homeland of some new Scots. Scotland-based Jamaican singer-songwriter iBrina will be joined by a world-class ensemble of musical friends, including Gambian kora player Jally Kebba Susso, Ghanaian-born British hybrid guitarist Nathan Somevi and contemporary Scottish Nigerian singer-songwriter Bumi Thomas, pictured, for a night of dynamism and transcultural expression as she explores her tale of making Scotland her home. Taking

place at Tramway on Saturday January 22, this event is staged in partnership with BEMIS.

Sing Me a Story – Cuir Seinn ri Seachas will see the storytelling tradition of the Gàidhealtachd championed on Friday February 4 at the Mitchell Theatre. Allan Henderson, Margaret Stewart, Ewen Henderson, Sileas Sinclair, Ewan Robertson and Duncan Chisholm will revisit both humorous and tragic tales of hidden treasure, fairies, bòcain and more.

Shetland 550: A Peerie Foy was the first show to be announced as part of the Year of Stories 2022 and will see storytellers and musicians from the Shetland islands gather at The Old Fruitmarket on Sunday January 23 for a contemporary concert version of a traditional house ceilidh – or “peerie foy” – incorporating music, stories and poetry.

Donald Shaw, creative producer of Celtic Connections, said: 'Stories have long been at the heart of traditional music – the word Celt comes from the Germanic word Keltoi meaning 'secret', referencing how the Celts never wrote their stories down. It seems only fitting that we kick off Scotland's Year of Stories with a special series of Celtic Connections events celebrating these rich oral traditions.'



D.J. MacLennan and his fairy tale reboot: Future Bright, Future Grimm: Transhumanist Tales for Mother Nature's Offspring.

Photograph: Sara Bain.

with a gentle, joyful sound. Mazaleen giggled with delight as misty fronds arose from the tree's canopy and coalesced into the most beautiful golden shrike.

To and fro darted the shrike, like a streak of fire in the sunlight now pouring into the atrium. It soared up high and

began to sing a sweet, desolate song. Then it darted away, leaving Mazaleen standing alone under the Tree of Love, dewy-eyed in puzzled rapture.

After a time, she dried her eyes and went to look for her distressed parents.

Meanwhile, the shrike alighted on the roof of the alchemist's

lab, and there began to sing its bittersweet song:

My mother destroyed me
My household consumed me
My weary head nourished a loving tree

Silken Mazaleen set me free
Trill! Trill! By smattering skill

A golden shrike I came to be!

M'ALBA

MY ALBA

DIARDAOIN 6 Am Faoilleach THURSDAY 6 Am Faoilleach

17.00 Prògraman Chloinne – Children's programming
19.00 Dealbhan Fraoich
19.30 Sgeulachd Syd agus Millie/Two go to Tolsta
20.00 An Là
20.30 An Lot
21.00 Sulaisgeir: an t-Sealg/The Hunt
22.00 Bannan 58 Ep5
22.30 Afganastan: An Tir Fo Leon/
Afghanistan: Kingdom
23.20 Dhan Uisge; River Douchary
23.30 Under Canvas/Music from Eden Court

DIHAOINE 7 Am Faoilleach FRIDAY 7 Am Faoilleach

17.00 Prògraman Chloinne – Children's programming
19.00 An Là
19.25 Dàn
19.30 Machair
19.55 Fraochy Bay
20.00 Vets: Gach Creutair Beo
20.30 Fuine
21.00 DIY le Donnie
21.45 ALT
22.00 Man in Room 301: Letter/ Finnish Drama
22.45 Dealbh is Slighe
23.00 Ceòl Roc Ceilteach/Folk that Rock

DISATHAIRNE 8 Am Faoilleach SATURDAY 8 Am Faoilleach

16.00 Prògraman Chloinne – Children's programming
17.45 An Là

18.00 A'Fagail Mhiughlaidh
19.00 An Là/Tide
20.00 Vets: Gach Creutair Beo
20.30 Golf: Mun Cuairt Alba
21.00 Fèis Rois
21.55 Afganastan- An Tir Fo Leon/
Afghanistan: Kingdom
22.50 Tatu Rioghail Dhùn Èideann aig 70
00.00 Belladrum 2019 (Highlights)

DIDÒMHNAICH 9 Am Faoilleach SUNDAY 9 Am Faoilleach

16.00 Prògraman Chloinne – Children's programming
18.15 An Là
18.30 Seachd Là/News Review
19.30 Alleluia!
20.00 An Lot/The Croft
20.30 Garraidhean Mora na h-Alba
21.00 An Là/Tide
22.00 Fèis Rois
22.55 Man in Room 301: Letter/Finnish drama
23.45 ALT

DILUAIN 10 Am Faoilleach MONDAY 10 Am Faoilleach

17.00 Prògraman Chloinne – Children's programming
19.00 Turas a' Bhradain/The Salmon's Journey
19.30 SpeakGaelic S1 Ep11: Latha gu Latha/ Say to Day
20.00 An Là
20.30 Fuine
21.00 Trusach – Tioram air Tìr/Port Tales
22.00 Ceolmhor@Piping Live
22.30 Opry le Daniel

23.25 Dàn
23.30 Under Canvas/Music from Eden Court

DIMÀIRT 11 Am Faoilleach TUESDAY 11 Am Faoilleach

17.00 Prògraman Chloinne – Children's programming
19.00 Dealbhan Fraoich
19.30 SpeakGaelic S1 Ep10 Ceannachd/ Shopping
20.00 An Là – NEWS
20.30 Garraidhean Mòra na h-Alba
21.00 An Là/Tide
22.00 Trusach; Tioram air Tìr/Port Tales
23.00 Machair
23.25 Dàn
23.30 Alleluia!

DICIADAIN 12 Am Faoilleach WEDNESDAY 12 Am Faoilleach

17.00 Prògraman Chloinne – Children's programming
19.00 Turas a Bhradain/The Salmon's Journey
19.39 SpeakGaelic S1 Ep11 Latha gu Latha/ Day to Day
20.00 An Là - NEWS
20.30 Golf: Mun Cuairt Alba
21.00 Opry le Daniel
21.50 Dhan Uisge/River Garry
22.00 Na Milenni- Gaels
22.30 Under Canvas/Music from Eden Court
23.00 Sulaisgeir: an t-Sealg/The Hunt



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Around the markets

United Auctions, Stirling, Thursday December 30: sold 4707 prime sheep comprising of 3520 prime lambs selling to an average of 270.39ppk & 1187 ewes and rams.

Lambs (3520) – Easter Ochtermuthill (Tex) £146.00; Newton of Crathie (Tex) £145.00; Little Raith & Head of Balglass (Tex) £144.00; Auchenrivoch & Isle Cottage (Tex) £142.00; Isle Cottage, Groan & Doune Farms (Btex) £145.00; Harviesmailing (Btex) £144.00; Doune Farms & Newton of Crathie (Btex) £140.00; East Brachmont (Suf) £143.00; Little Raith (Suf) £142.00 & £141.00; Isle Cottage (Suf) £139.50; Drumdowie (Suf) £139.00 & £138.00; Newmill Rathven (BDM) £140.00; Dalcapon & Easter Ochtermuthill (Che) £139.00; Forest (Che) £127.00; Wardhead (Che) £125.00; Newmill Rathven (Che) £124.00; Bangour (Con) £137.50; Bangour (Cha) £137.00; Old Faskally (Cross) £133.50; Newton of Crathie (Cross) £125.00; Glendamp (BF) £122.00; Burnhead (BF) £118.50; Hill of Errol (BF) £118.00; Sauchrie Mains (Mule) £121.50; Glendamp (Mule) £118.50; Old Faskally (Mule) £117.50.

Lambs (3520) – Newton of Crathie (Btex) 346.00ppk; Groan (Btex) 330.00ppk x2; Dall (Btex) 329.00ppk; Wardhead (Btex) 326.00ppk; Newton of Crathie (Tex) 334.00ppk; Easter Ochtermuthill (Tex) 321.00ppk; Kinclaven (Tex) 318.00ppk; Hallhill (Tex) 314.00ppk; Chalmerstone (Tex) 313.00ppk; Wardhead (Cha) 311.00ppk; Newmill Rathven (BDM) 292.00ppk; Snawdon (Che) 283.00ppk; Forest &

Newmill Rathven (Che) 282.00ppk; Snawdon (Che) 280.00ppk; Fridayhill (Che) 278.00ppk; Spittal (Suf) 276.00ppk; Wester Moffat (Suf) 273.00ppk; Fintalich (Suf) 270.00ppk; Wardhead, Kinclaven & Little Raith (Suf) 269.00ppk; Newton of Crathie (Cross) 273.00ppk; Carse of Trowan (Cross) 268.00ppk; Over Buttergask & Old Faskally (Cross) 265.00ppk; Binn (Cross) 264.00ppk; Over Shannochhill (Cross) £263.00ppk; Tay & Torridon (BF) 268.00ppk; West Bracklinn (BF) 267.00ppk; Glendamp (BF) 266.00ppk; Dunruchan (BF) 265.00ppk; North Deanhead (Mule) 260.00ppk. Ewes (1187) – Townhead (Tex) £220.00; Quixwood (Tex) £208.00 & £190.00; Townhead & Over Finlary (Tex) £180.00; Hill of Errol & 2 Keltie Bridge (TexX) £148.00; Quixwood (Suf) £149.00; Hill of Errol (Suf) £142.00; Bangour (Suf) £138.00; Quixwood (Suf) £131.00; Bangour (Suf) £128.00; Lilyburn (BFL) £136.00; Dalcapon (Che/Mule) £133.00 & £131.00; Hallhill (HB) £126.00; Three Views (Zwa) £128.00; Meadowbank (Mule) £125.00; Quixwood (Mule) £122.50; Townhead (Mule) £122.00; Wardhead (Mule) £120.00; Braendam (Che) £125.00; Hallhill (Con) £120.00; Braendam (Lle) £120.00; Quixwood (BF) £107.00; Sauchrie Mains (BF) £106.00; Dalcapon (BF) £91.00. Tups – Over Finlary (Tex) £180.00; Lephinkill (Tex) £120.00; Fintalich (Hamp) £158.00; Sauchrie Mains (BFL) £132.00; Yorkston (BFL) £118.00; Braendam (Lle) £114.00; Connachan (BF) £96.00; Lephinkill (BF) £84.00

Creating opportunities for women in agriculture

More women and girls living and working in Scottish agriculture will be able to apply for funding for courses to help develop their skills. Eligible courses include support to get tractor and trailer driving certificates or help to train sheepdogs.

The Practical Training Fund, which was launched earlier this year and is administered by Lantra Scotland, has already supported more than 400 women and girls to undertake courses to develop their skillset or change careers.

From today, women and girls over the age of 13 can apply for up to £500, or more on a case by case basis, for the cost of a practical or technical training course through the fund, with the first batch of successful applicants being notified by the end of January 2022.

It has been supported by



Mairi Gougeon is encouraging more women to visit the Lantra Scotland website and apply for course funding.

in rural areas and the development of Skillseeder – a skills sharing app which provides an easy to use one-stop shop to find training and skills development opportunities across the country, particularly for those in rural and island areas.

‘We want to see more women joining those who are already developing a career in Scottish agriculture – which is why it’s important that women are given these opportunities in what has been a very male-dominated industry.

‘Throughout this year, we’ve heard from women and girls who have undertaken courses through the Practical Training Fund and said that they have more confidence and are more knowledgeable, which is great to hear. I would encourage more women to visit the Lantra Scotland website and apply.’

another £75,000 of Scottish Government funding, with £20,000 of the funding ring-fenced for applicants living in island communities.

Rural Affairs Secretary Mairi Gougeon said: ‘This year, we

have committed £300,000 to support women in agriculture, including: the wider roll-out of the personal development training programme, Be Your Best Self; a project to test innovative solutions for childcare

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NFUS disappointment over seasonal worker visas

The visa scheme to allow seasonal workers to come to the UK will continue, but the UK Government has demanded a plan from the sector to cut the reliance on foreign labour.



from 2023 and the sector will have to improve pay and conditions.

Following the 2019 review of the pilot, the Home Office has reviewed the requirements placed on

the scheme operators and updated the seasonal worker sponsor guidance to tighten the compliance requirements.

While acknowledging the sector's reliance on foreign workers, the UK is committed to becoming a high-skilled, high-wage economy and the government has been clear that more must be done to attract UK workers through offering training, career options, wage increases and to invest in increased automation tech-

nology. Commenting on the announcement, NFU Scotland President Martin Kennedy, pictured, said: 'On Christmas Eve, the government has given Scotland's fruit and veg industry deeply disappointing news about the continuation of the seasonal workers scheme.'

'Keeping the number of visas for 2022 at 30,000, with the potential to increase to 40,000 is the direction the scheme should be going and should have gone further. However, government plans to then start tapering the scheme down from 2023 shows a complete disconnect from the industry.'

'The seasonal workers visa scheme is an essential route to get the workers needed for fruit, veg and ornamental sectors. Plans to start dismantling the scheme are a blow

and mean some very difficult decisions will have to be made about future production.'

'The labour shortages encountered across the whole chain in 2021 – on farm, haulage, processing and packing – coupled with the government's late delivery of the seasonal worker pilot scheme led to significant crop losses and millions of pounds of wastage. Worker shortages on Scottish farms alone were around 20 per cent. Indications are that Scotland will produce a lot less fruit and veg next year and an announcement that will initially keep the number of seasonal visas for the UK static at 30,000 will not improve that picture.'

'On the shift to UK staff, the Home Office continues to show huge levels of naivety on the

matter despite repeated briefings from NFU Scotland and others. Let's be perfectly clear, failure to secure UK workers is not for want of trying.'

'Our survey of fruit and vegetable members in September 2021 found one Scottish fruit and veg business that had offered 100 contracts of employment to UK applicants; six were accepted and only three turned up to work. Across all businesses who completed the survey in September, the retention rate for EU and other migrant workers was more than 80 per cent. The retention rate for UK workers was 32 per cent.'

'Our horticultural sector punches way above its weight in Scottish agriculture, accounting for only one per cent of our land area but 16 per cent

of our agricultural output. Its ongoing success is wholly dependent on securing the necessary labour.'

'Alongside NFU of England and Wales, we had asked for the number of seasonal visas available to the UK in 2022 to be extended to 55,700. For only 30,000 to be offered at the outset in 2022 is a big disappointment.'

'While that is tempered by the potential that visa numbers may rise to 40,000, the Government's stated intention is to shut down the scheme in the years ahead.'

'We will survey our members again next year to identify what impact the Government's decision will have on our hugely important soft fruit, vegetable and ornamental sector in Scotland.'

SCOTTISH FIELD

February



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S&S SERVICES



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One of the longest serving Subaru and Isuzu dealers in the UK, S & S Services is glad to be able to showcase its New Year offers. It has been a tough time for showrooms as consumers are facing price rises and shortages of vehicles due to a global shortage in semiconductors. Father and son team, John and Matthew Spicer are both excited to be returning and seeing some familiar faces.

John said: "We are so excited to be back and we are bringing some fantastic models to showcase. We have been supporting the people of Argyll for over 30 years, through three generations, and during that time we have formed many

friends and founded a trusted, reliable business. Come meet us at Tesco Oban this January."

When asked, son Matthew said: "We look forward to seeing customers and we have so many offers available. Tesco car park is a hub for the town and people are used to seeing us there. Come and have a chat with us to start your New Year experience the right way." S & S Services was first started by Brian and Dulcie Spicer in November 1979 from a small building at Sandyford Toll, Ayr. Brian and Dulcie's son John joined the family business and for almost two decades cars were sold, serviced and many friendships formed. The family

business was further enhanced when John's wife Lesley joined the business in 1997. It was in the latter nineties that the business had outgrown the location and it now resides in an impressive state of the art

showroom and workshop at Ayr. Now on to the third generation with Matthew Spicer, business has flourished to unbelievable standards meaning that S & S are now the top UK Subaru dealer, achieving Subaru

UK's dealer of the year status continuously from 2007. S & S Services are your number one for Subaru, Isuzu and Great Wall franchise, with a large stock of new and used cars at competitive prices



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**GREEN POWER (CARRAIG GHEAL) LIMITED
ELECTRICITY ACT 1989 (SECTION 36C)
THE ELECTRICITY GENERATING STATIONS
(APPLICATIONS FOR VARIATION OF CONSENT)
(SCOTLAND) REGULATIONS 2013**

Notice is hereby given that GreenPower (Carraig Gheal) Limited, company number SC245115, with its registered office at The E-Centre, Cooperage Way, Alloa, Clackmannanshire, Scotland, FK10 3LP has applied to the Scottish Ministers to vary the Section 36 consent to construct and operate the Carraig Gheal Wind Farm at Fernoch Farm, near Kilchrenan in Argyll and Bute (central grid reference 197022E 720568N) previously consented on 13 June 2008 by Scottish Ministers ("the Variation Application").

The Variation Application seeks to extend the duration of the operational life of the wind farm from 25 years (current) to 35 years (proposed). No other changes are proposed.

A summary of the Variation Application, a copy of the Variation Application, a link to the original Section 36 consent decision letter and the environmental reports prepared in relation to the proposed varied development can be found at the following websites: <http://www.carraighealwindfarm.co.uk/> or at www.energyconsents.scot.

In line with The Electricity Works (Miscellaneous Temporary Modifications) (Coronavirus) (Scotland) Regulations 2020, the Variation Application is not currently available at any physical locations for inspection. However, copies of the Variation Application may be obtained from GreenPower (Carraig Gheal) Limited (telephone 01259 272158 or by email enquiries@greenpowerinternational.com) at a charge of £50 for a full hard copy. DVD copies are available at a cost of £25.

Any representations to the application may be submitted via the Energy Consents Unit website at www.energyconsents.scot/Register.aspx or by email to the Scottish Government, Energy Consents Unit mailbox at representations@gov.scot or alternatively by post to the Scottish Government, Energy Consents Unit, 4th Floor, 5 Atlantic Quay, 150 Broomielaw, Glasgow G2 8LU, identifying the proposal and specifying the grounds for representation.

Any representations should be submitted not later than [insert date at least 30 days after date of publication of last public notice] 2021 although Ministers may consider representations received after this date.

Written or emailed representations should be dated, clearly stating the name (in block capitals), full return email and postal address of those making representations. Only representations sent by email to the address stipulated will receive acknowledgement. Should additional information be made available in relation to this application, then further public notices will give advice on how this information may be viewed by members of the public, and how representations may be made to Scottish Ministers.

Where Scottish Ministers decide to exercise their discretion to do so, Scottish Ministers may cause a Public Local Inquiry (PLI) to be held. Following receipt of all views and representations, Scottish Ministers will determine the variation application in one of two ways:

1. Make such variations to the consent as appear to the Scottish Ministers to be appropriate; or
2. Refuse the variation application, in whole or in part.

General Data Protection Regulations

The Scottish Government Energy Consents Unit processes applications under the Electricity Act 1989. To support transparency in decision making, the Scottish Government publishes representations online at www.energyconsents.scot. A privacy notice is published on the help page at www.energyconsents.scot. This explains how the Energy Consents Unit processes your personal information and includes contact details for any enquiries or complaints regarding how your personal data is handled.

**PROPOSAL TO DISCONTINUE THE
PROVISION OF EDUCATION AT ROY
BRIDGE PRIMARY SCHOOL
NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETING**



The Highland Council has published a consultative paper on a proposal to discontinue the provision of education at Roy Bridge Primary School, and to reallocate the school's catchment area to that of Spean Bridge Primary School.

The paper has been issued under the terms of the Council's procedure under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended. The consultation period began on Wednesday 24 November 2021 and will finish on Friday 21 January 2022. During this period members of the public are invited to comment on the consultative proposal.

Arrangements have been made for representatives of the Highland Council to meet with parents, children and other members of the public to discuss the proposal at a public meeting to be held on:

12 January 2022, online at 6.30pm

An invite will be sent to parents. Anyone wishing to join the meeting and who does not already have the necessary link, can request the link by emailing Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk

All comments made in writing or at the public meeting will be presented in due course to the Highland Council's Education Committee for consideration. As this is a public consultation, written submissions, and a note of the meeting, will be made available to the public and any comments submitted may be published on the Council's website – www.highland.gov.uk. Hard copies of the report have been made available at Spean Bridge Primary School and the Fort William Public Library. Alternatively the proposals can be viewed online at: <http://www.highland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations>

**FIRST REGISTRATION
OF CROFT**

Mrs Christina Catherine Anne Cameron has registered the croft at 6 Blaich in the parish of Ardgour on the Crofting Register held by the Registers of Scotland. Any person that wishes to challenge the registration may apply to the Scottish Land Court by 15 February 2022. Details of the registration can be found at www.crofts.ros.gov.uk/register/home. The croft registration number C7714.

**FIRST REGISTRATION
OF CROFT**

Mrs Christina Catherine Anne Cameron has registered the croft at 6 Blaich (share) in the parish of Ardgour on the Crofting Register held by the Registers of Scotland. Any person that wishes to challenge the registration may apply to the Scottish Land Court by 15 February 2022. Details of the registration can be found at www.crofts.ros.gov.uk/register/home. The croft registration number C7715.

Argyll and Bute Council

PLANNING

The applications listed below together with the plans and other documents submitted with them may be viewed electronically through Argyll and Bute Council website at www.argyll-bute.gov.uk. Having regard to Schedule 6, Part 3, s10 of the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020, documents are only available to inspect electronically at this time. Customers requiring assistance can contact us by e-mail: planning.hq@argyll-bute.gov.uk or tel. 01546 605518.

**TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PROCEDURE (SCOTLAND) REGULATIONS 2013 REGULATION 20(1) ADVERT STATEMENT
TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (SCOTLAND) ACT 1997 (AS AMENDED), RELATED PLANNING (LISTED BUILDINGS AND CONSERVATION AREAS) (SCOTLAND) ACT 1997**

Ref. No.	Proposal	Site Address
21/02298/PP	Use of land for the siting of 2 self catering pods	Garden Ground Of Kirkapoll House, Kirkapoll, Isle Of Tiree, Argyll And Bute
21/02181/PP	Change of use of residential garage to a dwellinghouse and removal of storage container. Installation of sewage treatment plant and air source heat pump and formation of access	Keepers Cottage, Cladich, Dalmally, Argyll And Bute, PA33 1BQ

Written comments can be submitted online <http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/planning-and-environment/find-and-comment-planning-applications> or to Argyll and Bute Council, Development Management, Kilmory Castle, Lochgilphead, Argyll, PA31 8RT within 21 days of this advert. Please quote the reference number in any correspondence. Any letter of representation the Council receives is considered a public document and will be published on our website. Anonymous or marked confidential correspondence will not be considered. A weekly list of all applications can be viewed on the Council's website. Customers are requested to use electronic communication where possible during the coronavirus pandemic as our ability to process postal mail is restricted.

To find out more about living and working in Argyll & Bute visit us at: www.argyll-bute.gov.uk
Comhairle Earra – Ghàidheal agus Bhòid



Argyll and Bute Council

**EDUCATION SERVICE
EDUCATION (SCOTLAND) ACT 1980
CHOICE OF SCHOOL AND REGISTRATION
OF INFANT BEGINNERS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS
SESSION 2022/2023**

All children who reach the age of five years between 1 March 2021 and 28 February 2022 should register for education during the week commencing 17 January 2022.

Usually children attend their local school however parents can make a request to place their child in any school under the management of the education authority. This is known as a placing request.

P1 registration, including placing requests for starting in August 2022, will take place online using the council's website. Details of the link will be published using social media and on the website. If you are unable to access the online registration form please call your local school week beginning 17 January 2022.

A list of all schools and documents relating to registration can be found on the council's website www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/education-and-learning/placing-your-child-school, this includes:-

- Gaelic Medium Education
- Denominational Schools
- Non-denominational Schools



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**FIRST REGISTRATION
OF CROFT**

Mr William Beaton Macdonald has registered the croft at 1 Blaich (apportionment & share) in the parish of Ardgour on the Crofting Register held by the Registers of Scotland. Any person that wishes to challenge the registration may apply to the Scottish Land Court by 29 March 2022. Details of the registration can be found at www.crofts.ros.gov.uk/register/home. The croft registration number C7815.

**FIRST REGISTRATION
OF CROFT**

Mr Robert Gregor Cameron has registered the croft at Uisken (3,4 & 5) (shares) in the parish of Kilfinichen on the Crofting Register held by the Registers of Scotland. Any person that wishes to challenge the registration may apply to the Scottish Land Court by 20 February 2022. Details of the registration can be found at www.crofts.ros.gov.uk/register/home. The croft registration number C7722.

**FIRST REGISTRATION
OF CROFT**

Mrs Christina Catherine Anne Cameron has registered the croft at 5 Blaich in the parish of Ardgour on the Crofting Register held by the Registers of Scotland. Any person that wishes to challenge the registration may apply to the Scottish Land Court by 14 February 2022. Details of the registration can be found at www.crofts.ros.gov.uk/register/home. The croft registration number C7713.

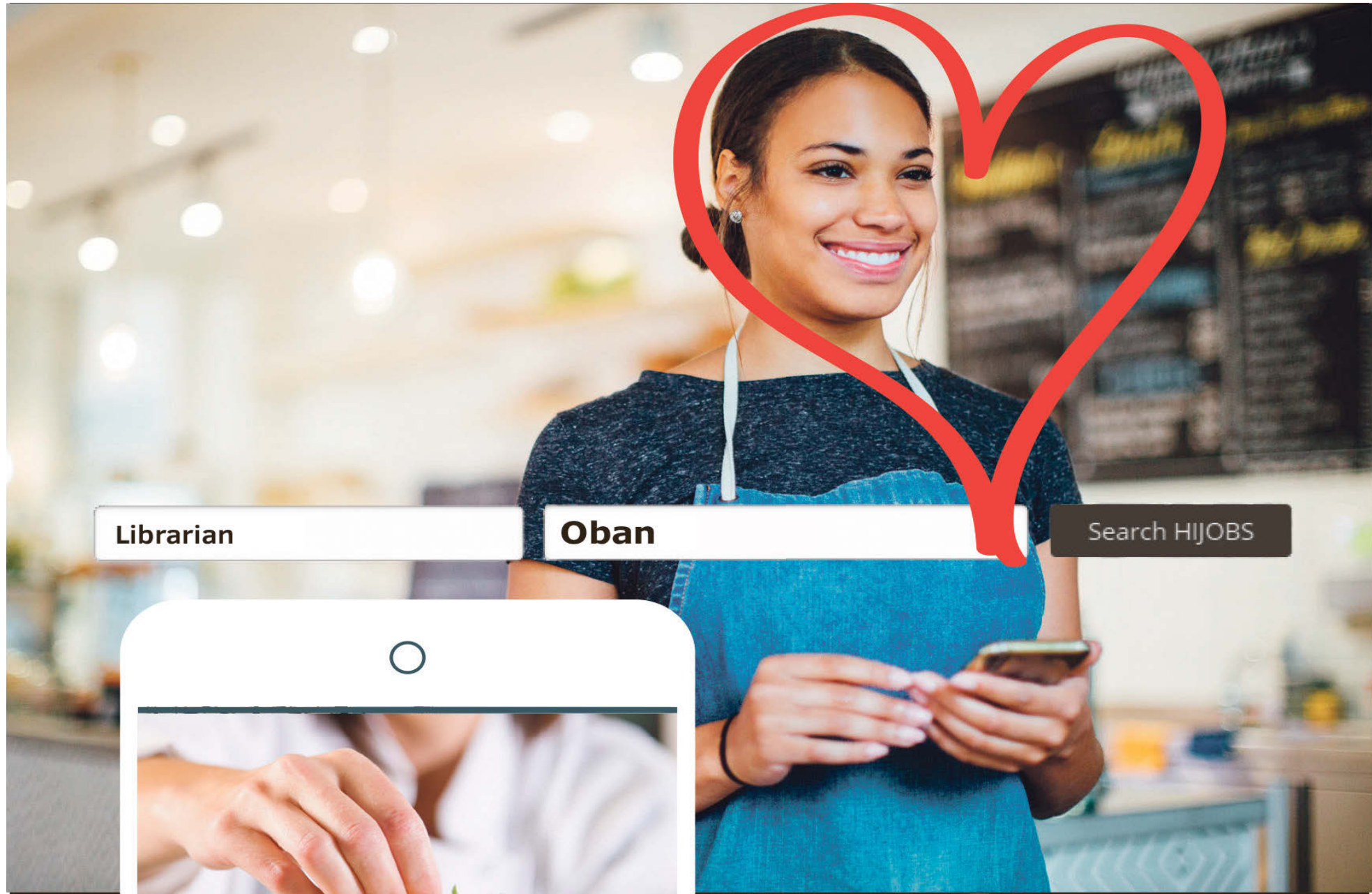
**FIRST REGISTRATION
OF CROFT**

Mrs Christina Catherine Anne Cameron has registered the croft at 5 Blaich (share) in the parish of Ardgour on the Crofting Register held by the Registers of Scotland. Any person that wishes to challenge the registration may apply to the Scottish Land Court by 14 February 2022. Details of the registration can be found at www.crofts.ros.gov.uk/register/home. The croft registration number C7712.



Source: Business Choice II, The Newspaper Society

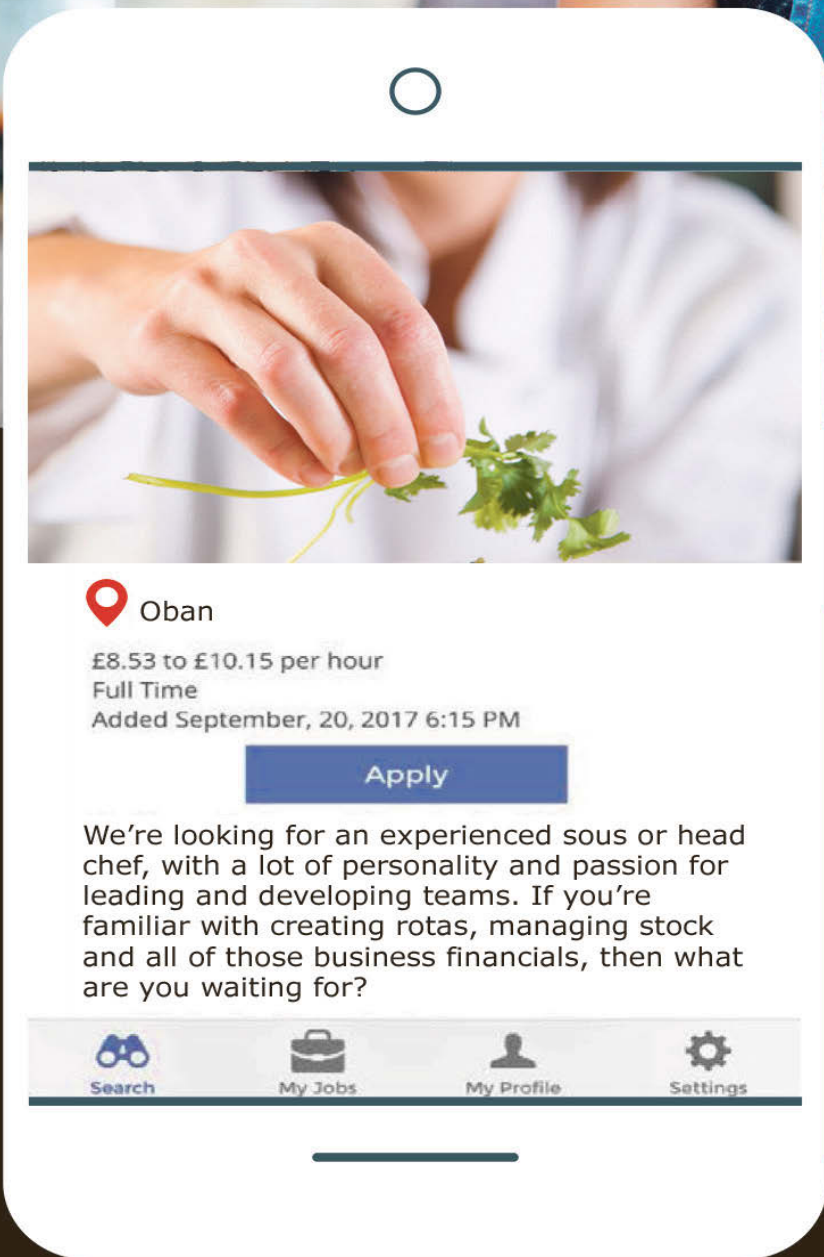
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DEATHS

ERSKINE - Ivor (formerly Fort William). Suddenly, at Forth Valley Royal Hospital, Larbert, on Monday, December 27, 2021, Ivor, beloved husband of Carole, dearly loved father of Sheila, Jane and Paul and a much loved grandfather of three.

STILLWELL - Rita. Peacefully in the care of Mossspark Nursing Home, aged 93 years. Dearly loved wife of Harold and very much loved mother of Jenni, nana of Jamie and great nana of Ross and Cerys. Cremation in Inverness, Thursday January 13, 2022 at 1pm. There will be a celebration of Rita's life later in the year when family and friends can gather. Family flowers only please, donations if wished, to Alzheimer's Scotland.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

BROGAN - Cathie, Denise and Tracy would like to thank all relatives, friends and neighbours for their overwhelming kindness, generosity and support following the recent passing of Davie. Special thanks to Mgr. James MacNeil for his visits and lovely service as well as staff at Ward B Lorn and Islands Hospital and doctors and staff of the Lorn Medical Centre for their care. A big thank you to all who attended at the Cathedral and graveside. Heartfelt thanks also to Catriona Hoey and staff of Hamish Hoey and Sons for their professionalism and guidance, Flowerhouse for the beautiful arrangements and staff at the Soroba House for their excellent catering.

MEMORIALS

EVANS - Precious memories of my son, our brother and uncle, Lloyd who died suddenly on January 8, 2021. Forever in our hearts. Those we love don't go away, they walk beside us every day.
- Mum, Jane, Claire and families.

EVANS - In loving memory of a dear mother and gran who passed away January 11, 2008. Forever in our thoughts.
- Nigel, Hazel, David, Gareth and Kaitlyn.

HEAP - In loving memory of a beloved husband, dad, father-in-law and grandad Robert (Bob) who died January 12, 2018. Our lives go on without you Though nothing is the same We have to hide the heartache When someone speaks your name You did so many things for us Your heart was kind and true As long as we were happy You were happy too. Always loved and sadly missed.

-Your loving wife Isabel, Robert, Joe, Lorraine, Louis, Sophie and Morgan xxxxxxxx Also remembering our lovely dog Buster who left a paw print on our hearts.

MACDONALD - In loving memory of my dearest niece Eileen Susan, died January 6, 2008 aged 41 years. A daily thought A silent tear A constant wish that you were here Cherished memories.
- Auntie Eileen and cousin Rhea

MACLELLAN - With love we remember Christopher Allan, taken from us on January 1, 1991. Forever in our hearts and thoughts.
- The MacLellan family.

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Source: YouGov 2018

ROBERTSON - In loving memory of my dear husband George and our dearest dad, who passed January 6, 2011. No longer in our lives to share But in our hearts you're always there Loved forever.
- Margaret, sons George and Lorne and daughter-in-law Helen x

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Christine Campbell from Bonawe, a former manager at SAMS, was awarded the MBE.

MBE delight for former SAMS scientist

In a year once again dominated by the devastating Covid-19 pandemic, the Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) did have reasons to celebrate.

At the turn of the year, Christine Campbell from Bonawe, the manager of our Culture Collection of Algae and Protozoa, was awarded the MBE. Christine retired at the end of March as the longest-serving current member of staff, clocking up 35 years.

Seaweed served up many successes at SAMS in 2021. In May, a £150,000 project to expand and commercialise the award-winning seaweed nursery at SAMS secured £75,000 from Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE).

Then, in November, SAMS secured a £400,000 grant from the UK Government to set up the Seaweed Academy, offering advice to start-ups, training workers and sharing the latest research to help develop a seaweed cultivation industry for the UK and beyond.

Meanwhile, Prof Elizabeth Cottier-Cook, was selected to join the Safe Seaweed Coalition, a global group of experts established to support farmers of seaweed, a crop that some academics regard as the greatest untapped resource on the planet.

Prof Cottier-Cook also leads the £5m GlobalSeaweedSTAR programme, which in

November published an international policy brief, alongside the United Nations University, on safeguarding the industry.

During 2021 our biologists learned that microscopic marine zooplankton have an aversion to light that helps them avoid predators, while our ocean modellers calculated 120 years of data showing the strength of a massive Atlantic Ocean current that dictates much of our climate, potentially improving climate change predictions.

In June, we published a paper showing how the cumulative sound from Acoustic Deterrent Devices – used to deter seals from fish farms – may have had unintended consequences for harbour porpoises and SAMS researchers developed a way of creating ‘designer’ algae that could signal a breakthrough in how shellfish larvae can be produced for the aquaculture industry.

In August we used marine robotics as our scientists took measurements at the face of an Arctic glacier in Ny Ålesund, Svalbard, a task deemed too dangerous for humans because of falling ice.

Our researchers also won individual honours: marine geologist John Howe was awarded a professorship from the University of the Highlands and Islands and Prof Michael Burrows was ranked 180th on the ‘Hot List’ of 1,000 most influential climate scientists

compiled by the Reuters news agency.

After more than a year of virtual learning, our students returned to campus in 2021, a year in which the University of the Highlands and Islands marked its 10th anniversary and marine science teaching at SAMS UHI was rated among the best in the UK following the publication of two student surveys and The Guardian University Guide for 2022.

The university’s Wind and Wave Club, which is based at SAMS UHI, won Sports Club of the Year in this year’s Highlands and Islands Students’ Association (HISA) Awards for the third year running.

For the first time in its 21-year history, the annual SAMS Newth Lecture was a virtual event, as people from around the world tuned in to a live broadcast.

Towards the end of the year, nine SAMS scientists were involved with the COP26 summit in Glasgow.

There was sad news this year with the deaths of two former members of staff. Dr John Gordon OBE, from Seil, was one of the world’s foremost researchers in deep sea ecology and remained a SAMS Fellow until his death on June 3. We also mourned the passing of former SAMS project manager Adrian Beard MBE. Both men are remembered at SAMS with great fondness.

OT

July

Oban Lorne's Jonathan leads the way

Oban Lorne Rugby Football Club's Jonathan Sayer was named as one of 10 winners of the inaugural Royal Bank RugbyForce Young Ambassador programme.

In a drive to get more young people into club boardrooms and to improve diversity and representation in rugby, the Young Ambassador programme sees grassroots heroes aged 18-35 from amateur clubs across Scotland put forward ideas for projects that will help their club create stronger connections with their communities, build a legacy and make



positive societal change. Coming out on top against competition from across the country, Jonathan's Young Ambassador programme will see him run a recruitment campaign to increase membership at the club which traditionally faces challenges with player retention and consistency due to its rural location.

Dalmally Gents Club Championship

Ten golfers battled it out to decide the Dalmally Gents Club Championship on Sunday August 8. The championship, which combined handicap and scratch competitions, had been closely contested throughout the preliminary rounds with Jim Livingstone leading in the handicap and club captain Graeme MacKechnie leading in the scratch. With Graeme holding onto his lead, Angus MacGillivray, who had been sitting in second place before the final, put on a masterclass in chipping and putting to seize the lead in the handicap and eventually take the trophy by four strokes.

August



October



Billy Thomson, left, from the Sports Shop MacMillan and Lorraine King.

Oban Sports Shop golf tournament raises charity cash

A golf tournament organised by Oban Sports Shop raised almost £900 for The Argyll Wellbeing Hub.

The business decided to stage the event following a good year of Adidas golf clothing and footwear sales to golfers, many of whom are members of Glencruitten Golf Club.



Wind and Wave Club a winner again

A student water sports club based in Oban was named the University of the Highlands and Islands' best sports club for the third year running. The Wind and Wave Club won Sports Club of the Year in this year's Highlands and Islands Students' Association Awards, despite spending limited time on the water because of the Covid lockdown. Club commodore Iain Walsingham and yachting co-ordinator Jamie Rodgers, who both study at the Scottish Association for Marine Science UHI, were also highly commended in the Above and Beyond – Student Award category.

August



Martin Tait won the Glencruitten Open in August, scoring a scratch 66 on the Oban course, two shots ahead of second placed Gavin MacMillan, Stephen Fox and David Devine.

September



Donna's Day turns Oban bowling green purple

Known as 'the life and soul' of Oban Bowling Club, Donna MacLean spread cheer and laughter at her home club throughout her lifetime. Donna kept members and guests well watered among her many duties at the club. Clubmates celebrated her life by renaming their traditional Ladies Day 'Donna's Day' and adorning themselves, and their surroundings, in her favourite colour - purple. There were purple flowers, purple balloons, purple raffle prizes, purple bowls, purple shirts and hats - even purple hair as members paid tribute to the colourful girl who lost her life suddenly earlier this year.

Cycle club success

The wheels of fortune were turning again for North Argyll Cycle Club (NACC) members with multiple successes at the Rothesay Cycling Weekend on the Isle of Bute on September 17 and 18. Ewan Dowd kicked things off, taking the win in the Juvenile Serpentine Hill Climb in 59 seconds. Despite being short, the well-known climb was steep and technical, making the riders navigate up nine hairpin bends for the Juveniles and 13 for the seniors. Ewan told The Oban Times: 'I am really happy with my performance in the hill climb, taking the lead by four seconds. A lot of it was down to line choice and knowing when to put the power down due to the greasy conditions. There was a very good atmosphere with crowds clapping, ringing bells and cheering me on.'



November

Oban Otters had a busy weekend with swimmers competing at the West District time trials at Tollcross in Glasgow and attending the Scottish Swimming Young Leaders training weekend in Largs. Andrew Boyle, 16, and Rachel Carre, 15, right, travelled with new head coach Shannon McCuish to Tollcross in Glasgow for the West District time trials. This was the swimmers' first competitive meeting for more than two years and a tough event to qualify for due to the high standards and number of competitors. Andrew and Rachel both excelled, achieving six personal bests out of seven races between them, in challenging events including 200m butterfly and 200m individual medley.



Sport

highlights July to December



with Argyll Wellbeing Hub duo Des

Billy Thomson told The Oban Times: 'This was our first time hosting a golf event and we decided to support The Argyll Wellbeing Hub, with all proceeds from the entry fees, kindly donated by Glencruitten Golf Club, and our raffle going to the charity.'

Gavin Hill, Neil Allan and Kenny Campbell were the winning team, with the runners up only one shot behind and the third placed team only a single shot behind them.



From sporting hobby to an exciting new way of life

What started off as a new sporting hobby five years ago has become an exciting new way of life for 30-year-old Miguel Alvarez.

Miguel was declared winner of his bout at the SGI tournament on October 9. In July 2016, Miguel and a few of his friends responded to a request from Brazilian Jiu Jitsu (BJJ) enthusiast and blue belt Gareth Butterfield

who was looking for training partners in Fort William.

However, before the end of the year, Miguel had not only had a go, but was good enough to compete against grapplers from across the country, representing 'Fort BJJ' Club. Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu is a martial art and combat sport based on grappling and submission holds. A year after helping to set up the club, Gareth left the area for a new job in Canada, but his interest in the sport continued, its running being taken over by Miguel with fellow members Eddie Lopez and Paul McGillivray.



Magnus makes 100th Edinburgh Rugby appearance

Magnus Bradbury made his 100th Edinburgh Rugby appearance when the capital club hosted Benetton at the DAM Health Stadium in Round 7 of the United Rugby Championship. As Edinburgh Rugby celebrated 'club appreciation night', which saw the squad pull on the socks of their boyhood

December

clubs to recognise the importance of the wider grassroots game, Magnus represented his hometown team, Oban Lorne, while reaching the landmark

appearance seven years on from making his professional debut at the age of 19. After producing a typically physical performance, carrying dominantly for the 80 minutes, the 26-year-old back row also secured the Player of the Match award following his team's 24-10 victory.

December

Mountain Bike World Cup heads back to the Fort

Early bird tickets went on sale for the Fort William leg of the 2022 Mercedes-Benz UCI Mountain Bike World Cup, as the event gears up for its much-anticipated return to the famous Nevis Range track on Aonach Mor. The exhilarating event is 'Back in the Fort' and will attract thousands of spectators to witness more than 250 of the world's top riders battle it out for the Downhill World Cup and 4X Pro Tour titles on Saturday May 21 and Sunday May 22 next year. The event has a new main partner for 2022. Online bike retailer Freewheel.co.uk is sponsoring the event as well as being part



of the Elite Madison Saracen Team. After two years of cancellation due to Covid, the Fort William World Cup will be back with a bang and

will feature homegrown champion Reece Wilson, who won the 2020 Downhill World Championships - the first Scot to take the title.



Oriental exercise classes on offer

Three health and wellbeing volunteers are working together to offer oriental exercise classes which will benefit the wider community. Held in Taynuilt Sports Pavilion, Veronica Kennedy's Tai Chi classes have started up again with the additional offering of a Qigong class, led by volunteers Marlyn Turbitt and Emma Grant. During the pandemic, Marlyn and Emma trained as Level 1 Qigong Shibashi instructors on an intensive online course with Des Lawton of Pro Holistic in Glasgow.

SCOTTISH FIELD



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Season's greetings from the sporting community – part 2

Dalmally Golf Club

Despite restrictions on most sports, Dalmally Golf Club has had one of our most successful seasons in a long time.

As one of the few sports where social distancing is relatively easy to achieve we, like many of our fellow clubs, have recorded a substantial growth in membership and visitors.

An early highlight of our year was the Ladies' Putting and Prosecco evening which saw more than 30 women gather for a fun evening.

As a result, we attracted a significant number of new lady members, most of whom took advantage of the regular Sunday coaching sessions run by club captain Graeme MacKechnie.

The club decided to err on the side of caution and postpone our regular programme of open competitions. We have, however, been fortunate in being able to hold a busy and suc-

cessful club gents, ladies and mixed fixture list throughout the year.

Thanks to our new greenkeeper Garry Bidmead and greens convener Jim Livingstone along with great voluntary help from members, the course this year has been in superb condition with plaudits from members and visitors.

We hope all our members, friends, visitors and all readers of The Oban Times, which has also given us great support over the year, had a very happy Christmas and wish them a healthy New Year. Tony Graham, match secretary.

Oban Saints FC

The Covid-related postponement of the West of Scotland Amateur Cup fourth round tie against Uddingston Anvil on Saturday December 18 was the final act in a year which, for the most part, Oban Saints will be keen to see the back of.

Saints' first post lockdown action of 2021 didn't come until July 10 when they were pitched into action against Castlemilk Dynamo in the Central Scottish Amateur Football League Division One play-off.

The Division 1A winners had the advantage of competitive action in the weeks leading up to the game which saw them pip Gartcosh United to top the Covid-disrupted 2019-20 Division 1A.

Saints, however, had been confirmed as Division 1B winners as far back as March 2020 and had only one warm-up game against Lochgilphead Red Star under their belts.

A close match ended level. Neither team could find a winner in extra time and it was Castlemilk who came out on top in the penalty shoot-out to be crowned overall Division One Champions.

Consolation for Saints came when captain Craig



Oban Saints eventually got their hands on the Division 1B 2019/20 trophy in July this year.

Photograph: Derek Black.

MacEwan was presented with the long-awaited Division 1B trophy, however, the main prize for both teams was to be confirmed as competing in the Central Scottish Amateur Football League Premier Division, widely considered to be the best amateur division in Scotland.

After more Covid-related fixture disruption, Saints finally got their 2021-22 league campaign under way with a heavy defeat away to early pacesetters Lesmahagow. The reverse against the on-fire league leaders unfortunately set the tone for a frustrating run of results where Saints harvested just four points from a possible 24 before bagging a first home league win of the season against Gartcosh United and finally putting smiles on the faces of their loyal home support.

Saints are due back in action

on Saturday (January 8) with a fourth round West of Scotland Cup tie away to Uddingston Anvil.

Oban Saints extend season's greetings and best wishes to sponsors D and K Lafferty Contractors, MKM Oban Building Supplies and Aulay's Bar and to all of the club's faithful supporters. David Buchanan, secretary.

Taynuilt Golf Club

Taynuilt Golf Club has had a successful year, despite the challenges of the pandemic, albeit with a much-reduced social calendar.

We hosted the gents and senior opens with fantastic attendance and our thanks go to our sponsors on the days of the events, S and S Services and Munros of Oban.

Despite the lack of social activities, £807 was raised with

donations made to prostate and breast cancer charities, Macmillan in Oban and the Dove Centre. Both ladies and gents prizegivings have been moved to the New Year.

We were delighted to welcome Craig Lee and the roving pro initiative which encourages juniors into the game of golf. The club was encouraged by the number of new juniors taking up membership. The club is open to applications for new members across all categories of membership for 2022.

Taynuilt Golf Club wishes you all a happy New Year. Marlyn Milne, secretary.



Some of the Dalmally Golf Club Putting and Prosecco evening winners with match starter Graeme MacKechnie and Prosecco waiter Tony Graham.



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Tide tables for Oban during the week from **Thursday 6 January, 2022** are listed below with differences for major ports listed alongside. All times are GMT (add one hour BST)

6	0202 0.8	8	0335 1.1	10	0516 1.5	12	0103 2.9
	0804 4.0		0936 3.6		1128 3.2		0727 1.8
TH	1437 1.0	SA	1612 1.4	M	1756 1.8	W	1411 3.1
	2018 3.6		2143 3.2		2335 2.9		2001 1.9
7	0248 0.9	9	0424 1.3	11	0615 1.7	13	0216 3.0
	0849 3.8		1027 3.4		1252 3.1		0853 1.8
F	1524 1.2	SU	1702 1.6	TU	1857 1.9	TH	1509 3.2
	2100 3.4		2231 3.0		2102 1.8		

OBAN WEATHER

Thursday
Light rain showers and a fresh breeze
Temperatures 3°C to 7°C.

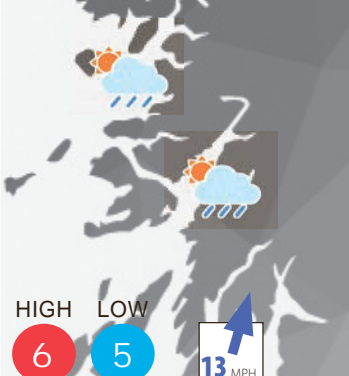
Friday
Sleet showers and a moderate breeze
Temperatures 5°C to 6°C.

Saturday
Light rain showers and a moderate breeze
Temperatures 4°C to 8°C.

Sunday
Light rain showers and a moderate breeze
Temperatures 6°C to 7°C.

FRIDAY FORECAST

Ardishaig	-5.35
Campbeltown	-5.30
Crinan	-0.47
Islay Port Ellen	2.00
Lochboisdale	+0.30
Mallaig	+0.25
Portree	+0.55
Tobermory	+0.16
Dover	+5.30



HIGH
6

LOW
5

WIND
13 MPH

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Countdown to Fort's Hi-Bike scheme launch

INSIDE THIS WEEK: The second part of our Review of the Year



Police confirm man's arrest following Mallaig fire

Police have confirmed that a man was arrested in connection with a blaze which badly damaged part of the West Highland Hotel in Mallaig on Monday night, writes Mark Entwistle.

No-one was injured in the fire, which was confined to one side of the property.

A Police Scotland spokesperson said officers were called to a report of the fire at the hotel at 9.55pm and that a 24-year-old man had been arrested in connection with the incident.

'Enquiries are continuing,' added the statement.

Commenting on the hotel Facebook page, proprietors Gavin and Sine Davis and family said: 'We wanted to say a huge thank you to everyone for the help, support and kind messages.'

'Although the hotel is badly damaged, it is mostly confined to one area of the hotel and thankfully there was nobody inside.'

'We fully intend to open as planned in February, albeit with reduced rooms. We look forward to thanking you in person then.'

'Last night we witnessed how wonderful a village we are lucky enough to live and work in. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.'

Loch Linnhe Loonies enjoy New Year's Day dip – with cake!



Photograph: Iain Ferguson, alba.photos

Fort William swimming group Loch Linnhe Loonies find taking to the cold Highland water a piece of cake – more so on New Year's Day with the promise of a home-baked sponge laced with rum.

The hardy swimmers often take to the waters around the area several times a week to enjoy the scenery and enjoy the benefits of cold water therapy to keep them healthy.

However, their first dip of the year was cut short due to the combination of high winds and the incoming tide which were pushing them back to their start point – leaving them even more time for cake!

Essential visiting only

by Mark Entwistle
mentwistle@lochabertimes.co.uk

NHS Highland announced on Sunday night it was imposing restricted visiting at the Belford Hospital in Fort William, along with Lorn and Isles Hospital in Oban and Caithness General Hospital, in an effort to reduce the risk of the spread of Covid infection across its rural general hospitals.

The seven-day period for which latest figures were available before the Lochaber Times went to press yesterday (Wednesday) morning - December 22-28 - recorded the number of new positive cases (in brackets)

for that period as follows: Lochaber East and North (10); Lochaber West (17); Fort William North (10); Fort William South (14); Lochalsh (22); Skye North West (12); Skye North East (19) and Skye South (35).

NHS Highland recorded a total of 883 new cases of Covid on Tuesday December 28, which was four times the daily average seen the week before last and is the highest number of new cases seen in one day, being more than double NHS Highland's previous highest daily figure.

Katherine Sutton, NHS Highland's chief officer (acute), said: 'We continue to see an increasing number of Covid-19 cases in our communities and

this is having a direct impact on staffing levels. This means we are at risk of being unable to deliver services across our acute hospital sites. We have worked closely with our colleagues in infection control and believe restricting visiting will help reduce the risk of introducing infection from the local community into our hospitals and give us the best chance to protect our patients and staff. We understand this decision will cause anxiety for our patients, families and staff, however, we believe the move to essential visiting across the hospitals will help us reduce the spread of the virus into our hospitals.'

Continued on page 5.

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Council ensures pupils get hot meals during holiday

Lochaber school pupils from P1-S6 have received a one-off wellbeing payment of £25 to ensure this provision continued during the festive break from school, writes Mark Entwistle.

This wellbeing payment per child or young person has been agreed in order to help Highland parents and carers to provide nutritious hot meals for their children during what is a very expensive and often challenging time of year.

A nutritionally-balanced diet is shown to support good memory and cognitive abilities among children and young people and therefore improves learning and educational attainment.

In addition, energy levels are increased enabling children and young people to keep active during the winter school holiday period.

Chairman of Highland Council Education Committee Councillor John Finlayson said he was delighted the free school meal payments for the festive period had been

paid automatically to families based on existing entitlement, without the need for them to complete application forms.

'Council members recognise the mounting pressures that are facing low income families, including removal of the £20 top-up payment from Universal Credit, withdrawal of the furlough scheme and exorbitant and crippling energy price increases,' he added.

'I hope that these wellbeing payments go some way to supporting the health of our children and young people while also providing financial breathing space to Highland families during this expensive and challenging time of year.'

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Review of property to reduce carbon footprint

by Mark Entwistle
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Members of Highland Council this month approved a list of offices for review and potential rationalisation as a key part of the 15-year capital strategy plan.

Consultation will be undertaken on the properties identified as part of the review process.

The aim is to improve the estate by reducing the number of properties, and therefore maintenance costs, reduce carbon emissions, release revenue savings of some £0.231 million and achieve market value for some buildings estimated around £1.7m.

It is also intended to improve community access to essential services and look for opportunities for shared services with partners, increasing collabo-



Margaret Davidson

ration and also efficiency, by maximising the use of existing buildings.

There are a number of reasons behind the changes, including the need for flexible work space, improving access to services, changing the way services are provided, an ageing estate and importantly, the need to reduce the council's carbon footprint.

The initial focus will be on office accommodation, to increase capacity in nine offices which will lead to new ways of working, taking into account home and office working for office-based staff.

A total of 16 offices have been proposed for review.

The review will take into account options for future use

or disposal, staff wellbeing, service delivery improvement, community benefit, carbon neutral strategy, and financial best value.

The council has 60 general fund offices and in addition to those 16 offices identified for review, 16 are to be retained; 15 have no data and 13 are misclassified - either already disposed of or not currently being used as office accommodation.

Approximately 21 properties have been classified as vacant or mothballed and investigations are taking place to confirm their status and speed up disposals wherever possible and appropriate.

Targeted condition surveys will provide an external view of the overall state of the current property portfolio.

Initially, surveys will prioritise depots and stores, key sites which will require targeted investment.

Once complete, all remaining sites which include a building will be surveyed within the next 18 months.

The condition surveys will be vital towards making long-term decisions over properties.

These include rationalising or repurposing and where appropriate further investment

can be targeted in a sustainable way.

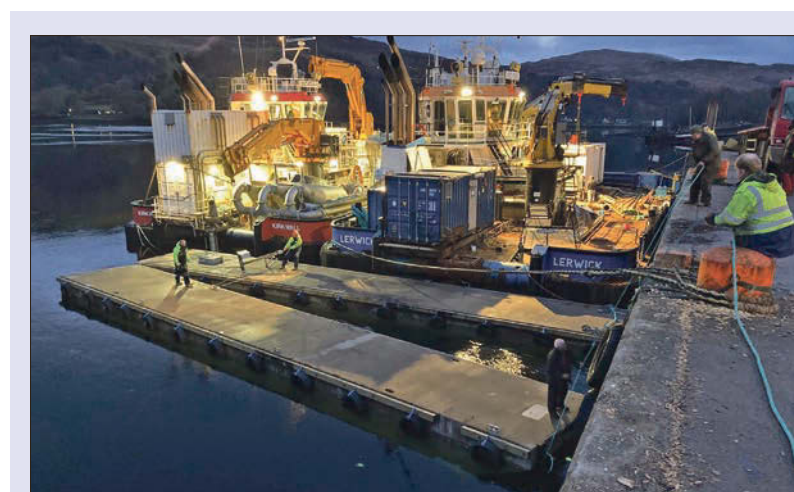
Given that a significant percentage of the council's built estate continues to be heated via oil and gas - which accounted for 28 per cent of its total corporate carbon footprint in 2019/20 at a cost of £2m - the whole project is fundamental to gaining net zero requirements.

Leader of the Council Margaret Davidson added: 'Rationalisation of our huge estate, getting rid of crumbling buildings and reducing the energy bills and repurposing some of the buildings we keep is essential to tackling climate change.'

'At the last full council meeting, we agreed that we must reduce, re-use, recycle and re-purpose before considering the creation of new assets.'

'Only where none of these options are deliverable or appropriate should the focus be on building new, and even then these new assets must be as carbon neutral as possible,' she added.

'It must be recognised that this comes at a cost that has to be met up front, whilst the benefits can take many years to accrue.'



Progress was made this week on the pontoons extension project.

Photograph: Fort William Marina and Shoreline Community Interest Company.

Progress on Fort pontoons extension project

There was more progress for the extension to the Fort William pontoons last week with the giant breakwaters getting put into the water ready for installation in the spring, writes Mark Entwistle.

Fort William Marina and Shoreline Community Interest Company secretary Sarah Kennedy told the

Lochaber Times: 'We're at long last nearly there with the extension to the pontoons - just waiting for the dredging licence to be received which should be by the end of January.'

'We then need to carry out the dredging and then we can transfer the breakwaters into position and hold them in position with anchors

and chains. The bridges and ladders are currently being made by a local company. The extension is anticipated to be completed for the beginning of the sailing season in 2022.'

'We will give more details nearer the time as we'll arrange a grand opening, but we're getting there - after a six-year slog and overcoming various obstacles.'

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New nursery building handed over to Arisaig Primary School

A new nursery building at Arisaig has been completed and handed over to the primary school.

The project allows the nursery to move out of the school's gym hall and into its own dedicated new building, which has a registered capacity of 20. The building fully meets the requirements of the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) expansion programme.

Chairman of the education committee, Councillor John Finlayson said: 'I was pleased to see the completion of this important and high-quality project. I am sure children, staff, parents and the wider community are all delighted with their new 21st-century nursery space, which is bright, spacious and ready for use. 'I would like to thank everyone involved, including the contractor and council staff for completing the project, which enables us to further support the expansion of nursery provision and hours across our many communities.'

The project was delivered by Highland Council's in-house property teams with Robertson as the principal contractor. A total of 82 construction projects have been taken forward to support the delivery of the ELC programme, many of which



Children enjoying their new nursery space.

also included other essential improvements to school buildings. Although progress was disrupted due to the impact of the pandemic, 59 have now been completed with a further 15 due to be completed.

Chairman of communities and place committee, Councillor Allan Henderson said: 'Arisaig Nursery building is a welcomed asset for the pupils, staff and wider community. The modular building is a good example of the council's commitment to developing sustainable and greener buildings for future generations to enjoy.'

Onich crofter admits assaulting pensioner

A Lochaber crofter attacked an 83-year-old woman because she was going to help his elderly mother take down curtains in her home.

Inverness Sheriff Court was told that 50-year-old Colin Campbell of Cuilcheanna, Onich, dragged the pensioner out onto the patio before punching her on the head and body.

Fiscal depute Martina Eastwood said Campbell shouted at his victim: 'Don't be interfering with anything in this house.'

The woman pleaded with Campbell's 93-year-old parent to phone the police and when officers arrived, Campbell confessed to officers what he had done, Ms Eastwood added.

The prosecutor said Campbell was a crofting tenant who supported his mother and provided maintenance, transport and did shopping for her.

Sheriff Sara Matheson heard that Mrs Campbell had wanted to remove the curtains and her neighbour offered to help.

Campbell told her not to do it but when the woman continued with her task, she was attacked, Ms Eastwood went on.

Campbell admitted assaulting the woman by seizing her by the neck, pushing her



against a wall, causing her to fall to the ground and punching her on the head and body to her severe injury and impairment. Ms Eastwood said the woman suffered a broken ulna and required a cast on her arm, a cut lip, a nose fracture and she lost two teeth.

'She still suffers from restricted mobility,'

Ms Eastwood added. Deferring sentence until Monday February 14 for a background report and a restriction of liberty order assessment, Sheriff Matheson allowed Campbell's bail to continue. But she warned him: 'You should take nothing from that,' implying that a jail sentence was still a possibility.

Body of man found in Glen Nevis identified

Police officers in the Highlands have identified the body of a man found in Glen Nevis.

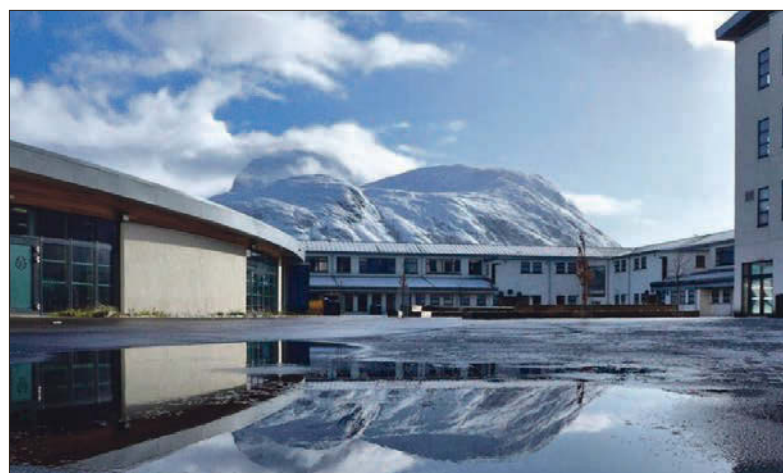
He was 55-year-old Stanley Stewart from the Falkirk area. Mr Stewart's body was found by the River Nevis around 11am on Christmas Day, by a member of the public. The death is not being treated as suspicious.

Detective Inspector Andrew Bilton, of South Highland CID, said: 'Our thoughts remain with Mr Stewart's family at this difficult time.'

'We are grateful to everyone who helped our inquiries following our earlier appeal for information.'

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The stunning image from Lochaber High geography teacher, Neil Adams, which secured the secondary the coveted title of most scenic school in Scotland.

Photograph: Neil Adams.

Lochaber High voted most scenic school

A stunning photograph taken by local geography teacher, Neil Adams, has seen Lochaber High School voted the most scenic school in Scotland, writes Mark Entwistle.

Run by TES Magazine (formerly the Times Educational Supplement) as a bit of fun in the build-up to Christmas,

the competition eventually saw photographs of 48 schools from across the country submitted, attracting more than 20,000 votes via Twitter polls.

The Fort William secondary eventually emerged as the overall winner on Christmas Eve after defeating fellow finalists Morgan Academy from

Dundee in a poll that drew around 3,500 votes.

A statement on Lochaber High's Facebook page celebrated the school's win: 'It's official - Lochaber High School voted as Scotland's most scenic school. Huge thanks to all our supporters for taking the time to vote us through the rounds.'

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Nevis Hill Walking Club,
Saturday, January 8 –
Fassfern. Meall a' Phubuill
(774m, Corbett); Meall
Onfhaidh (681m, Graham)

Two little-visited hills tucked away at the heads of Glen Suileag and Glen Loy with an opportunity to add an additional Graham Aodann Chleireig. 663m.

A number of options to lengthen or shorten the route are available. Total distance: 17km, 1,062m ascent – Meall a' Phubuill and Meall Onfhaidh; 16km, 782m ascent – Meall a' Phubuill only; 19km, 1,378m ascent – Meall a' Phubuill, Meall Onfhaidh and Aodann Chleireig

For more detail of the route please visit our website www.nevishillwalking.club or the Nevis Hillwalking Club Facebook page.

Please note that walks may change at short notice due to conditions on the day and Covid restrictions.

Hebridean marine charity inspires 10,000 pupils to protect oceans

Youngsters from Lochaber and Skye are among 10,000 school children who have now taken part in educational programmes run by conservation charity the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust.

The trust has been inspiring children to cherish their marine environment for more than 15 years, with more than 200 schools having taken part since 2005.

Pippa Garrard, the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust's education manager, said: 'Connecting young people to their marine environment is crucial if we want them to help protect it. It's so heartening to experience the children's energy, enthusiasm and awe when learning about whales and dolphins.'

'Our sessions are so important as they spark passion and interest in the local environ-



Scanning the seas at Kilchoan Primary School.

ment and encourage conversations about the actions that we can all take to help protect it, now and in the future.'

Players of People's Postcode Lottery have supported the charity, raising £80,000 since 2017 to support the development and delivery of new and immersive learning experiences that bring the marine envi-

ronment to life for children in coastal communities.

The trust's latest creative project – funded by People's Postcode Trust and Sea-Changers – has been to launch the best of their education sessions online, working with schools and home educators across Scotland and England.

Prior to the pandemic, every

year school groups would join the charity's crew onboard the research vessel, Silurian, as she was temporarily transformed into a floating classroom.

'My daughter, age 10, loved visiting your boat. Since her trip, she has been researching marine biology and has decided she wants to go to university in Glasgow to study this,' said a parent of a pupil at Mallaig Primary School.

Raising awareness and aspirations for green careers features at the centre of the charity's education strategy.

Each year the trust runs dedicated research expeditions for 16- and 17-year-olds on board Silurian.

These young adults gain hands-on experience monitoring marine life, including collecting data as part of the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust long-term citizen science

project which informs local and national conservation efforts.

Anyone can help the charity monitor marine life, by reporting their sightings of cetaceans – the collective name for whales, dolphins and porpoises – and basking sharks online.

The trust also offers guided field trips for schools, so younger children can take part on land.

'Local wildlife is not only amazing to see, but each species also has an important biological role to play,' said Pippa Garrard.

'By protecting whales and giving marine ecosystems the chance to recover, we can improve the health and resilience of our seas and in turn the climate and planet for us all.'

For more details about the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust, visit hwdt.org.

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Essential visiting only as Belford restrictions in place

Continued from page 1.

NHS Highland also advised those whose visit was essential to contact the hospital ward their relative or loved one is in and the staff will support them with making arrangements to visit safely.

Ms Sutton added: 'Please do not visit the hospital if you or anyone else in your household has tested positive for Covid-19 or has any symptoms. National guidance now requires that, prior to visiting a loved one in hospital, you should take a lateral flow test and only visit if you return a negative result.'

'We are grateful to the public for its ongoing co-operation and understanding. If you are visiting the hospital, please ensure you wear a face mask and wash your hands or use hand sanitizer before you go onto the ward/department and as you leave the hospital.'

NHS Highland also restricted all visiting at Raigmore Hospital in Inverness as from Friday to essential only after a number of wards had to close over the last few weeks due to

what it called the 'unprecedented increase' in Covid-19 cases in the health board area.

By Hogmanay, three wards were closed at Raigmore Hospital, while ward 7A reopened on Friday following a prolonged period of closure.

Dr Boyd Peters, NHS Highland's medical director, explained: 'These ward closures have had a knock-on effect on our bed capacity and increasing levels of Covid-19 transmission in our communities has significantly impacted on our staffing levels.'

'We have not reached this decision lightly and recognise this could cause a great deal of anxiety for patients and their loved ones during this time. These measures will be reviewed on a regular basis.'

'However, we believe the move to essential visiting across both hospitals will help us reduce the spread of Covid-19 and maximise our ability to safely staff our wards and improve bed capacity over the bank holiday weekend and beyond.'

Visit www.gov.scot for more.

Staffin developer rolls out welcome mat on new homes

Six families will open the doors to their new homes this month, after the handover date for an eagerly awaited north Skye community-led housing, health and business project was confirmed, writes Fiona Scott.

The three-bedroom homes at Taighean a' Chaisheil in Stenscholl, Staffin, will be completed on Monday January 17.

It comes 23 years after the last affordable housing development opened in Staffin.

James MacQueen Building Contractors Ltd will then complete the new community-owned health centre and two business premises in February.

The £1.6 million housing, health and economic development was progressed by Staffin Community Trust in partnership with the Communities Housing Trust and Lochalsh and Skye Housing Association amid concerns about the lack of available accommodation locally for families, a falling



Members of the MacQueen's team at the new Staffin development.

pupil roll at Bun Sgoil Stafainn and the declining population.

Around 12 adults and eight children will call Taighean a' Chaisheil their new home and SCT has paid tribute to the support received, including the Kilmuir Estate, the Stenscholl township and the Staffin Community Council, since the project's inception back in 2014.

SCT director Donald MacDonald said: 'The board of Urras an Taobh Sear is delighted to be nearing completion

on a project that has taken seven years and has, at times, been fraught with challenges. At a time when we need more community empowerment, this project has shown how far we, as a country, are from achieving that.'

'The directors and staff of the trust must be thanked for their determination and diligence in seeing this through when fatigue and burnout could have easily given rise to a different outcome. We wish the new

residents many years of happiness within these homes which are an important step towards community sustainability and growth.'

Ronnie MacRae, CHT chief executive, added: 'Congratulations to SCT which has delivered this mixed development of homes and amenities that will enable a stronger, more resilient Staffin and provide a template and confidence for many other similar communities to follow.'

'CHT is delighted to have been able to support SCT, and key to success was the support of Scottish Government and Highland Council, alongside working with HIE and NHS to provide essential amenities that will improve social and economic opportunities going forward.'

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Sometimes, post-Christmas can look a little like having to put up with a pesky flu, cold or cough after a busy and often, stressful festive season. If this is the case, we have a fast and an effective relief for those troublesome chesty coughs, look no further than the Covonia Chesty Cough Mixture! Take it home with you for only £2.99!

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VIEW FROM THE CHAMBER

A new year brings a new start and a whole lot of new opportunities and challenges for business.

The team at Lochaber Chamber of Commerce is looking forward to building on our support of our local business community – creating links between businesses, offering insights and information sessions, behind the scenes tours of local industry, and giving our businesses the opportunity to promote what they do through our social media, newsletters, updates, website and through the Scottish Chambers of Commerce network.

There's a lot more to being a member of the Chamber than our regular events (although the business contacts you meet and face-to-face promotion from those alone are worth joining for!).

We're also here to help businesses promote what they do to the wider community, share information and guidance on key business issues, highlight funding opportunities, share international trade missions, help keep you up to date with changing business conditions



and rules, and provide access to free HR, legal and tax advice and information through our Chamber Benefits package.

When you're busy with the vital day-to-day work of running your business, it's all too easy to overlook the benefits that joining your local dedicated business organisation can bring. But it is well worth it.

Put simply, it's an easy way to get involved in your local business community, make valuable connections, access business expertise and promote your business.

Think it's going to be expensive? It's not!

Membership subscriptions work on a sliding scale depending on the size of your company, but start at just £120 + VAT for a sole trader. Join today and discover all the ways that Lochaber Chamber of Commerce can help your business thrive in 2022.

Back to the past with series by Lochaber A

This week sees the launch of a regular series of articles written by the Lochaber Archive Centre in Fort William, explaining what it does, informing readers of upcoming events, and delving into its fascinating collections.

The Lochaber Archive Centre is based at Alexander Ross House, on Achintore Road, in what was formerly Fort William Primary School.

Alongside offices in Wick and Portree, we are a spoke of the Highland Archive Service, the central hub being the Highland Archive Centre in Inverness.

Like other archive facilities, we hold items deemed worthy of permanent preservation, regardless of age or format. We look after parchment, paper, photographs, and even DVDs.

Although we are part of the wider Highland Archive



The centre's strongroom. Photographs: Lochaber Archive Centre.

Service, our collections specifically relate to the Lochaber region.

Lochaber is a place of enduring historical importance, from the '45 Rebellion, to Commando training during the Second World War, and we receive inquiries from all over the globe.

Some of you may be interested in family history, or the history of the area you live in. Sometimes, folk will visit the Lochaber Archive Centre just to browse, and they are equally welcome.

Our archives are kept securely in an environmentally-controlled storage space called a

strongroom. We want these cherished items to be accessed by future generations, so must ensure they do not become spoiled or damaged.

Public access to our archives is possible through our search room, situated just inside the main entrance of Alexander Ross House.

Amongst our collections are records of the Highland Council and its predecessors.

These fascinating local government collections include school admission registers and logbooks, valuation rolls detailing property and tenants, and poor relief records for numerous Lochaber parishes.

As well as local government records, we are privileged to be the chosen archive for many deposited collections.

These include collections from families like Cameron-Head of Inverailort and Cameron of



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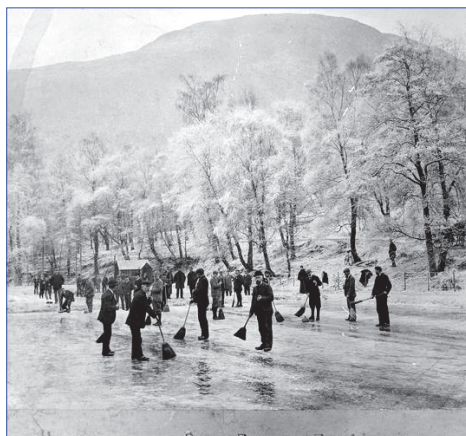
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Launch of new Archive Centre

Countdown begins to launch of Fort's Hi-Bike share scheme



One of the historical photographs held by the Lochaber Archive Centre showing a curling match between Lochaber and Spean Bridge.

Lochiel – names significant to numerous periods of Scottish and British history.

Family collections also include letters, diaries and photographs, with many items dating from centuries ago, as well as records from local organisations and businesses. These document the lives of

Highlanders across the years and across the social spectrum.

The Lochaber Archive Centre is open Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday.

Visitors are welcome to drop in and chat but we encourage you to make an appointment which is bookable in advance.

We are also contactable by

phone or email, so please get in touch with any inquiries you might have.

We post regularly on our Facebook, Twitter and Instagram pages with news and updates, and interesting finds from our collections.

You can join us each Thursday morning at 11am on Facebook for 'Learn with Lorna', which is a weekly look at the archives held across the Highland Archive Service.

Classes on family history and archives for beginners also run throughout the year, so look out for these in 2022. We hope you will enjoy these articles.

Email: lochaber.archives@highlifehighland.com

Web: www.highlifehighland.com/lochaber-archive-centre/

Facebook: www.facebook.com/LochaberArchiveCentre/

Twitter: twitter.com/hlharchives

The countdown is on for the launch of the Hi-Bike Fort William electric bike share scheme in spring.

Lochaber Environmental Group (LEG) was busy in 2021. Four of the Hi-Bike scheme's eight charging hubs – at Caol shopping centre, Kilmallie Community Centre, Inverlochy, and the travel centre – are now connected to the SSE network and are ready for Bewegen, the provider and operator, to install the equipment.

This month, contractors Concrete Groundworks Group will start work on the High Street hub outside the Royal Bank of Scotland, which will be the biggest hub, with 14 recharging docks and an information panel. The work at the High Street site will involve connecting the hub to the SSE network, laying a concrete pad for the information panel and recharging docks, and removing the existing bike hoops and the noticeboards, which will be moved to new locations on the High Street. There



Emma Walters, left, Kate Willis and Rachel McKerral, of Lochaber Environmental Group. Photograph: James Mackenzie.

will also be charging hubs in Upper Achintore, Claggan and the new Blar Mhor housing development.

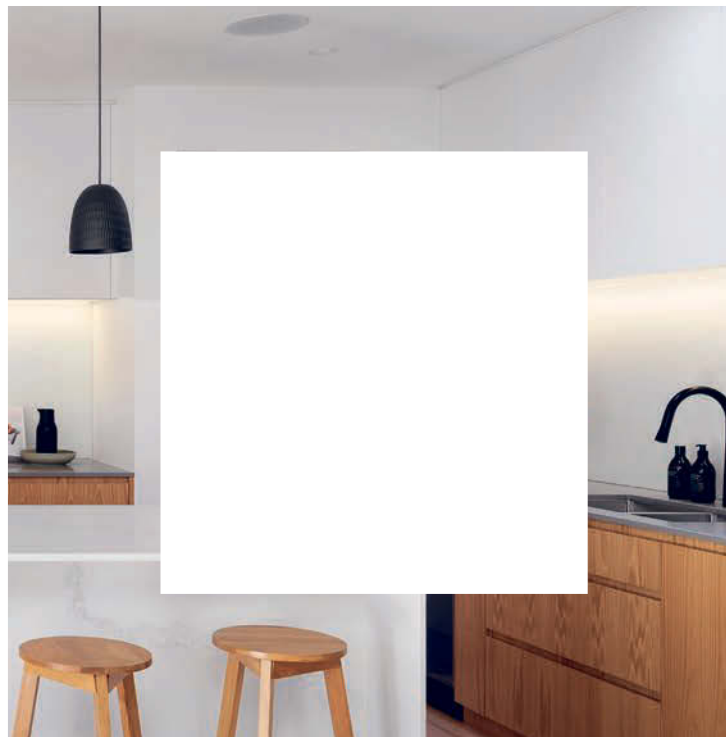
Hi-Bike Fort William will have 60 ebikes for use with annual, monthly and pay-per-ride membership options. Once Hi-Bike is launched, LEG will be running training sessions and guided rides to teach people how to use the scheme and unlock the bikes. LEG will also be running competitions and

hopes to be able to offer reduced and free rides and membership to anyone who needs it.

For more information on the bikes and the charges, check out Hi-Bike at www.hi-bike.co.uk.

Kate Willis from LEG said: 'We recently tried out the Hi-Bike Inverness ebikes and they were comfortable, easy and great fun to ride. The electric assistance makes the riding feel light and is great for getting up steeper hills. The large basket on the front makes it practical and easy to carry shopping or heavy bags.'

'Since Hi-Bike Inverness launched on October 1, the bikes have been ridden over 3,500 miles on more than 1,200 rides. We hope that Hi-Bike Fort William will be even more popular. We certainly think they will be a great way to travel around Fort William, and in the summer months when the roads are completely clogged with traffic it will be much easier and quicker to get around on a Hi-Bike than in a car.'



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Halcro Johnston to convene new islands forum at Holyrood

Highlands and Islands MSP Jamie Halcro Johnston has been elected convener of the Scottish Parliament's proposed new cross-party group on islands.

Mr Halcro Johnston, who is from Orkney, was elected uncontested at the recent inaugural meeting, with Argyll and Bute MSP Jenni Minto elected vice-convenor.

The new group includes MSPs from across the Scottish Parliament, and will now go before Holyrood's Procedures Committee for confirmation.

Mr Halcro Johnston hopes the next meeting will then be held early in the New Year, and has committed to ensure that all meetings will be hybrid, allowing for groups from Scotland's islands to attend remotely.

The Scottish Conservative MSP said he was delighted to chair the first meeting of this new group and to be elected convenor.

'I have felt, for some time, that addressing the many



Mr Halcro Johnston is the convener of the new cross-party group on islands.

distinctive issues that really matter to islanders requires the focused attention of MSPs in an all-party forum,' he said.

'I'm determined that the group provides a proper forum for engagement with islanders and island stakeholders, and also for those bodies and organisations responsible for delivering services to our island communities.

'We will be developing a work programme over the next few meetings, but I will be

pushing for a particular focus on the state of Scotland's ferry network, a subject of enormous concern to many island residents.

'Other colleagues are looking to cover the ongoing issue of depopulation, and other key issues such as the delivery of health and social care services to remote island communities.

'And we will not be limiting our attention to just the larger island groups such as Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles, and we will ensure that we engage fully with Scotland's smaller island communities as well.

'Islanders often feel that decisions that are impactful on their lives are made by people who seem remote and far removed from them. I want fellow islanders to feel a little more engaged with parliament.

'Working with local and regional MSPs, we want to ensure that the voice and concerns of our island communities is heard louder and clearer at Holyrood.'

Forestry and Land launch climate change plan

by Fiona Scott
fscott@lochabertimes.co.uk

Environment Minister Mairi McAllan has welcomed the launch of Forestry and Land Scotland's climate change plan.

Centred on the themes of 'adapt, reduce, capture', the plan outlines how FLS will boost its contribution to Scotland's response to the global climate emergency.

As well as highlighting actions that FLS has already implemented, it illustrates how FLS will enhance how it manages Scotland's forests sustainably.

The aim is for Scotland's forests to maximise their environmental, economic and social contribution.

Ms McAllan, said: 'As a fully-engaged partner in this shared national endeavour, Forestry and Land Scotland is



already contributing significantly towards mitigating the twin emergencies of climate change and nature loss.

'As well as woodland creation, peatland restoration, and facilitating the generation

of renewable energy, it sustainably manages Scotland's national forests to produce timber – always replanting more than is harvested.

'And this is all done in a way which balances Scotland's

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and Scotland change plan

Environment Minister Mairi McAllan, left, with FLS central region manager Carol McGinnes.

economic, social and environmental objectives.

‘However, being well placed to enhance its contribution to net zero, the commitments in this climate change plan highlight that FLS is rolling up its sleeves and getting on with the task at hand.’

FLS will continue to enhance its work in key areas of forestry so that Scotland’s forests and land contribute more towards climate action. Its conservation management will:

- reduce biodiversity loss and carbon loss

- increase productive and native woodland creation and capture – and store – more carbon emissions.

Planting more productive

forests and delivering more from its sustainable forest management programme will:

- help to reduce pressure on native woodland resources

- help limit emissions arising from importing timber and

- increasingly help to reduce the use of carbon-dense materials such as concrete, steel and plastic.

FLS will also build on its 30 years of landscape-scale adaptation experience.

By pursuing innovation and new ways of working, FLS is also reducing emissions from its business.

Measures outlined in the plan include replacing petrol and diesel vehicles with electric equivalents, making buildings more energy efficient, working with suppliers and contractors to reduce the emissions from the goods and services they supply and the works they undertake.

Mental Health Matters

NIC GODDARD

fort@obantimes.co.uk

‘It’s the most wonderful time of the year’.

Hopefully. But for some people it can be the most challenging time of the year. Short dark days, cold grey weather, financial woes or loneliness can mean the festive break falls right in the middle of the toughest season of the year for many of us.

With our usual routines and coping strategies disrupted due to seasonal or Covid-related shutdowns, too, it is important to include ‘look after our mental health and wellbeing’ along with the other items on the many lists we tend to write at this time of year.

Remembering the Five Ways to Wellbeing can be a useful way to help with this. Here is a quick reminder of them along with some suggestions of ways to add them into your life.

CONNECT – there is nothing more soul feeding than being in the company of people who make you laugh, really listen when you talk and make you feel valued and important. A telephone or video call to family or friends can provide

a great boost if meeting up for a coffee in person isn’t an option. If you are struggling to find someone to reach out to and connect with then don’t forget the army of volunteers who work on helplines and are trained to listen, empathise and provide a friendly ear. If you are a Twitter user then the fantastic #joinin campaign will be running again to provide company during the holiday.

BE ACTIVE – It can be hard to summon enthusiasm to get up and outside when the weather is bleak, but fresh air, exercise and some time outside connecting with nature is always beneficial for us. Wrap up warm, take a flask or travel mug of your favourite hot drink and remind yourself why we live in the outdoors capital of the UK, with stunning scenery, amazing wildlife and physical activity options from a gentle stroll to skiing down a mountainside.

TAKE NOTICE – At this time of year with overwhelming lists of things to do, buy or organise it can be really hard to slow down, catch your

breath and find a moment to notice the small things. The winter solstice on December 21 marked the shortest day of the year, though, and from now on every day will have a few more minutes of daylight, with the sun rising earlier and setting later. Take five minutes to watch the birds out of your window, indulge in a spot of people watching or sit and watch the sunrise or sunset if you can.

LEARN – no matter how old we are we can still learn something new every single day whether it is starting a new hobby or craft, learning a new language or turning an idle ‘I wonder how...?’ thought into a research project by looking online or borrowing a book from the library to find out more. Challenge yourself to add some new recipes to your repertoire in the kitchen, learn an instrument or a line or a poem every day until you can recite the whole thing by heart.

GIVE – The festive season may well be a time of giving but we can extend our generosity all year round. Doing

something nice for others has the double win of making us feel good as well as them. Whether you are able to offer your time, your skills or your money, every one of us has something to give to others, from a regular volunteering position to a small random act of kindness. Think about what you have to give and find a way to do it.

Hopefully some of these suggestions will have given you ideas for ways to improve your wellbeing. If you are finding things tough, then do remember you are not alone and there is always help and support available from your GP, charities or from reaching out to family and friends.

Some useful numbers:

- Mickey’s Line textline 07786 207755

- Ewen’s Room textline 07537 431637

- Samaritans 116 123

- Breathing Space 0800 83 85 87



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Great Glen felling key to safety, says FLS

Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) says its North Region team is more aware than ever of the importance of its steep ground felling programme along the Great Glen as parts of the country deal with the aftermath of Storm Arwen.

The storm which battered the east coast and south Scotland with winds of up to 100mph at the end of November has resulted in around eight million trees being blown over, families left without power for days and many popular forests closed for public safety reasons.

FLS said had the storm funnelled down the Great Glen, the impact on the forests – despite the safety measures that are in place – could have been significant.

The potential for serious interruption of traffic on the A82 could also have had a major impact on local communities, businesses, the emergency services and on the rural economy.

Writer withdraws from book prize declaring it 'too white'

Organisers of the Highland Book Prize have acknowledged the withdrawal of Deep Wheel Orcadia by Orcadian writer and performer Harry Josephine Giles from the 2021 competition longlist.

The Highland Book Prize celebrates the finest work that comes from, or is inspired by, the Scottish Highlands.

Presented by the Highland Society of London and facilitated by Moniac Mhor Writers' Centre, this year's competition initially saw 12 titles selected from more than 70 submissions.

Among the books nominated are *In a Veil of Mist* by Donald S Murray and *Hiort* by Iain F Macleod – who are both originally from Lewis – and *An Seachdamh Tonn* | *The Seventh Wave* by Sandy NicDhòmhnaill Jones, who is from Uist.

Dr Giles, who personally uses the pronouns 'she' and 'they' issued an online state-

ment saying the withdrawal decision was in response to the Scottish BAME Writers' Network call to action.

'I made a commitment not to be part of further literary events and projects that excluded writers of colour,' said Dr Giles. 'As part of meeting that commitment, I've now withdrawn from the Highland Book Prize 2021, for which Deep Wheel Orcadia was longlisted.'

'The call to action says ongoing racism and exclusion within Scottish literature requires work from many people working at many levels of the sector and white writers and organisers like me each have to work out our own ways of meeting that work.'

'The problem isn't in one longlist, it's in who publishers submit for prizes, who is being published, who is programmed for events, who is welcomed to spaces and much more, including how

the 'Scottish' in 'Scottish literature' is imagined.

'I don't think this particular action is all that's required of me. It's just one way I can be accountable to the commitment I made.'

'I'm making the decision at a time when all-white shortlists are common in Scottish literature. I'd like them to be impossible. There's a much richer world of writing already happening here and now.'

Responding, organisers of the Highland Book Prize said the processes surrounding the prize are transparent, open and democratic but like any have limitations and they acknowledged the Highlands' relationship with ethnicity is 'multi-layered and complex'.

Prize organisers continued: 'We are thrilled to see David Alston's book at this stage of the process, going some way to exploring the issue, but recognise this cannot be compared to representation



Orkney author Harry Josephine Giles has withdrawn her book from the Highland Book Prize 2021.

Photograph: Pan Macmillan.

on the list. The organisers, Moniac Mhor, have played a developmental role in equality, diversities and inclusion within the Scottish literature sector and more broadly and will continue to focus on these issues. We would welcome

conversations about expanding this work.'

Each title on the longlist will now be considered by the judges, with the shortlist announced in March and the eventual winner being declared in May.

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NIC GODDARD

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It's a quiet time in the garden and the temptation when there is nothing requiring urgent weeding or watering attention is to ignore the vegetable patch and do no more than idly browse a seed catalogue instead of spending time outside.

Not only is getting outside on a dry day good for me in terms of fresh air and exercise, there is always something I could be doing even in this relatively dormant period.

Pruning the fruit bushes is definitely a winter task and although I only have a small number of trees and bushes they will certainly benefit from some attention.

I've been gathering seaweed from the beach and spreading that on my raised beds.

This suppresses any weeds which may be considering



'Pruning the fruit bushes is definitely a winter task and although I only have a small number they will certainly benefit from some attention.'

taking over the soil now that it is bare from crops after I pulled out the final harvest of pumpkins.

As well as putting nutrients and adding organic matter to the soil, it will also provide a bit of blanket to help the soil warm up that bit quicker in the spring when it finally comes.

A general tidy up of anything which has blown around the plot, gathering up and washing out of any pots and containers and checking on the progress of the spring bulbs which we planted a few

months ago and are already peeking tiny green shoots through the soil helps to remind me that it won't be long before I am back juggling things about to make room for the inevitable over sowing of tomato seeds resulting in far too many tiny plants to either sacrifice or give away to friends.

While I'm outside the hopeful glances from the friendly robin remind me to top up the bird table and feeders which the pine marten has emptied once more.

I am rewarded for my efforts by a visit from the woodpecker to the table once I have come back inside.

The view of the plot which is often a bit scruffy this time of year is improved and I know I have earned my cup of tea and, having done an inventory of leftover and saved seeds from last year, I can get back to that catalogue and start planning the growing season for the year ahead.

Virtual visiting welcomed at Western Isles hospitals

Patients in Western Isles hospitals have benefited from 20 new iPads from Health Improvement Scotland (HIS) to allow virtual visits over the festive period.

Restricted indoor visiting arrangements continue in all hospitals in the Western Isles to help protect hospital services and to prevent the risk of transmission of Covid to patients and staff.

A virtual visiting appointment can be set up by contacting the hospital reception on 01851 704704.

In terms of indoor visiting, arrangements are reviewed regularly and, as a result of the current risks associated with the high rate of transmission of the Omicron variant of Covid across Scotland, NHS Western Isles reluctantly took the decision to continue indoor visiting restrictions in all hospitals in the Western Isles until further notice.

The restrictions apply to Western Isles Hospital in

New iPads from Health Improvement Scotland keep patients connected

Stornoway, Uist and Barra Hospital in Benbecula and St Brendan's Hospital in Barra.

Hospital dining rooms are also closed to members of the public until further notice.

NHS Western Isles staff will take every step to ensure alternative visiting options are available to all inpatients at this time, including virtual visiting, outdoor visits and window visits, where appropriate and possible.

Essential visits such as end-of-life; birth partners; children; patients with acute mental health issues and those with dementia, learning disabilities or autism, can be made more than once a day if required and there is no restriction on the

number of essential visitors for each inpatient, although they must be immediate family members. Essential visitors must also pre-book visiting slots.

Essential visitors are requested to self-test using lateral flow devices (LFDs) daily and in particular before visiting the hospital and are urged to carefully observe safety precautions before and between visits to protect themselves from the risks of contracting Covid prior to visits.

If symptomatic, people should not visit the hospital and should arrange a PCR laboratory test by calling 01851 601151 even if they tested negative using an LFD test.

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**Living safely
this winter**



LT

Review of the year

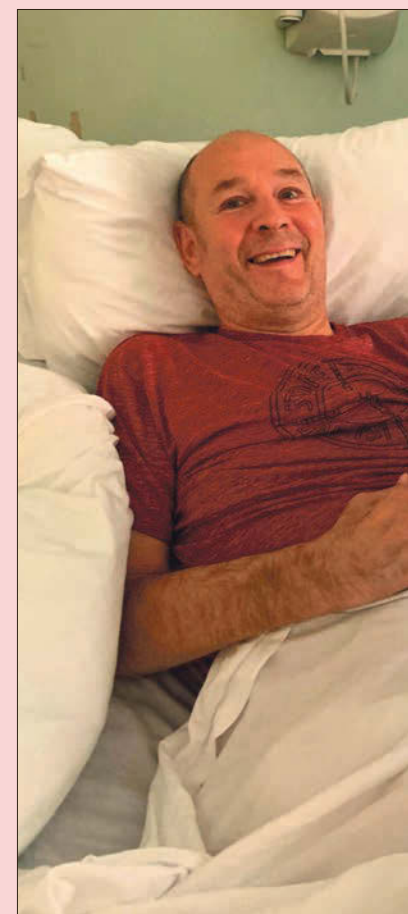
JULY: Major Janet McIntyre, right, former Corps Officer for the Salvation Army in Kinlochleven, added Fort William to her remit following the departure of Major Elaine Turner. The latter took up a new position for the organisation in Thurso after what she told the Lochaber Times was 'seven happy years' in Fort William. Major McIntyre was installed as the Corps Officer at Fort William Salvation Army by Captain Peter Renshaw. Photograph: Iain Ferguson, alba.photos.



Part two: July to December



AUGUST: A campaign to prevent the building of 18 affordable homes in Caol was stepped up after developers lodged an appeal with the Scottish Government. The planning application from Lochaber Housing Association for permission to develop grassland to the rear of Glenkingie Terrace was refused by Highland Council back in April. However, acting on behalf of the developer, Inverness-based Communities Housing Trust lodged an appeal with the higher authority on July 20. Highland Council were given until August 10 to respond. Campaigners against the development launched a petition. Photograph: Iain Ferguson -alba.photos.



SEPTEMBER: Mallaig endurance athlete Pawel Cymbalista announced plans to run up and down Britain's highest mountain as many times as possible in 24 hours to raise funds to help his friend Davy Duncan. Davy had spent five months in Raigmore Hospital in Inverness, with two months prior to that



JULY: Strictly Come Dancing judges Craig Revel Horwood and Bruno Tonioli took to the roads from Cornwall to the Highlands in a six-part series for ITV which saw them visiting various locations and immersing themselves in local culture. The final programme in Great British Road Trip took the dynamic duo to Inverlochy Castle where, amongst other things, they enjoyed sampling the hotel's own brand of whisky while boating on the exclusive lochan. Photograph: Iain Ferguson, alba.photos.



AUGUST: Lochaber Foodbank received a boost after 17-year-old Josh Higgison held a 30-minute socially distanced one-man show in his garden. The Fort William teenager entertained his audience by singing The Greatest Showman, Amazing Grace and Country Roads as well as performing a march to Scottish pipe music, a sword dance the Macarena dance which involved crowd participation. Josh, who has learning difficulties, raised £120 for the local charity.

SEPTEMBER: A group of P7 pupils from Lundavra Primary School in Fort William joined members of the Upper Achintore Regeneration Group to help plant seeds as part of a Greening the Burn project. The work was undertaken with the climate and ecological emergency in mind, with the group looking at ways to help, even in a small way, to save the planet. The group aim to enhance, rewild and maintain a green area that runs downhill at the side of a burn between housing from Sutherland Avenue to Lundavra Road. Photograph: Iain Ferguson, alba.photos.





in another hospital in Mexico, after contracting Covid while working offshore as a saturation diver in the Central American country.

The fundraiser was to help generate finances to assist with making Davy's home in Fort William more accessible to aid his recovery.



OCTOBER: After a Covid-enforced absence of two years, cruise ships finally started returning to Loch Linnhe and Fort William with the famous Hebridean Princess becoming the first to drop anchor since the easing of lockdown restrictions allowed the international cruise industry to set sail once again. She was followed by the MS Island Sky when Sarah Kennedy, secretary of the Fort William Marina and Shoreline Community Interest Company welcomed ship's captain Jorgen Cardestig, his crew and passengers on their maiden voyage to Fort William. Photograph: Iain Ferguson, alba.photos.



OCTOBER: There was joy on Knoydart with news that enough money had been secured to take forward a community bid for ownership of Britain's remotest pub. The Old Forge Community Benefit Society Ltd, established at the beginning of the year by a group of Knoydart residents, has been awarded £508,000 through the Scottish Land Fund (SLF) to support the purchase and redevelopment of the pub. Jacqui Wallace and Rhona Miller, co-chairpersons of the society's management committee, said they were delighted that the SLF had chosen to support the community-ownership bid for The Old Forge. Photograph: Mark Harris.



DECEMBER: Gemma Macleod, right, from Fort William described winning a Saltire Summit Award for her decade of volunteering like getting an early Christmas present. The 24-year-old has been volunteering for the Tuesday Social Club in Fort William every week for nine years, latterly while also working full time. Gemma's achievement was announced at an awards evening hosted by Voluntary Action Lochaber and the Highland Third Sector Interface.



NOVEMBER: Lochaber residents made sure local Remembrance Sunday commemorations were appropriately marked following the 2020 events being hampered by Covid lockdown restrictions. At war memorials across the region, a dry Sunday morning saw people pay their respects and honour those who gave their lives for their country in two world wars and other more recent conflicts. Photograph: Iain Ferguson, alba.photos



NOVEMBER: Climate and environmental activists from Lochaber made the journey to Glasgow to join thousands of others for the Global Day of Action for Climate Justice march to coincide with the city's hosting of the COP26 conference. Some also took part in a march organised by Fridays for Future Scotland, a group founded by youngsters inspired by Swedish teenage climate campaigner Greta Thunberg. Our photograph shows Lochaber climate activists Andrew Squire, Kate Willis, centre, and Scottish Greens MSP for the Highlands and Islands Arianne Burgess at the Friday march.



DECEMBER: More than 60 Rainbows, Brownies and Guides from across the area took over Highland Cinema for a special private showing of Disney's Encanto film. Brownies from Acharacle, Fort Augustus and Fort William, and Rainbows, Brownies and Guides from Kilmallie Church in Caol enjoyed the treat arranged by district commissioner Laura Macadam-Slater. To make the occasion even more special, three local Guiders, Laura Macadam-Slater and Debbie Macadam-Slater from Kilmallie Brownies and Marie-Luise MacDonald from Acharacle Brownies, were presented with their five-year service awards on the day. Photograph: Iain Ferguson, alba.photos.

LT



Proud parents Annice and Connor with baby Leo, born on Christmas Eve.

Christmas Eve baby and a marriage proposal in Stornoway maternity unit

The birth of a Christmas Eve baby in the maternity ward in Western Isles Hospital in Stornoway was followed by a marriage proposal for the new mum.

Baby Leo was born at 10pm on Friday December 24, weighing 6lb 1oz, to delighted parents Annice Macleod and Connor

Maciver from Stornoway. And baby Leo had an important job on Christmas Day: to help his daddy propose to his mummy. Annice and Connor are pictured shortly after getting engaged, with their beautiful bundle of joy Leo. Zoom in to wee Leo's vest, which says 'Mummy will you marry Daddy?'

Students secure funding for Western Isles Women's Aid

Nicolson Institute students have secured £3,000 for Western Isles Women's Aid through the Youth and Philanthropy Initiative (YPI).

Bethany MacLeod, Caitlin Morrison, Millie Widdop and Simeon Fletcher from the Stornoway school profiled the work of Western Isles Women's Aid, highlighting the role of the service within the community.

The award will allow the group to raise awareness in schools and public places by designing and producing posters with QR codes linking to information on Women's Aid. They will also be displayed in toilets where the code can be scanned confidentially. They will also use the award to provide Wi-Fi in the Women's Aid refuge.

YPI empowers young people to make a difference in their community. Through a unique programme of teamwork,



Bethany MacLeod, Caitlin Morrison, Millie Widdop and Simeon Fletcher.

research and competition, an entire year group takes part and one team is chosen to secure the grant.

Richard Fraser of the Nicolson Institute said: 'Congratulations to the winning team. Their fantastic video presentation on behalf of Western Isles Women's Aid really impressed the YPI judges.'

'This year was the first time we've had a fully online YPI final and while we missed the festive atmosphere of a live

event in the assembly hall, we managed to have all the key elements that make a successful YPI final. All the teams did very well.'

YPI is supported by Caledonian MacBrayne. The delivery and engagement of The Wood Foundation programme is also supported by Volunteer Centre Western Isles (VCWI). Suzanne MacAulay of VCWI added: 'Through YPI, youth volunteers are able to make a positive impact on

the services of Western Isles Women's Aid and the lives of their service users. We are in our fourth year of running the YPI initiative on behalf of The Wood Foundation across the Western Isles and the standard of presentations and engagement with charities is inspiring.'

CalMac's regional support of YPI sees it partner with 10 schools including the Nicolson Institute, Sir E Scott School, Sgoil Lionacleit and Castlebay. CalMac colleagues act as judges at schools' finals, as well as offering mentoring support to young people involved in the programme. Christina MacKay, CalMac customer advisor in Stornoway, said: 'I thoroughly enjoyed supporting the programme as a judge at the YPI final. I was really encouraged by the young people and have huge admiration for the work they put into the project.'

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LETTERS/DISTRICTS

Wheels in motion for launch of Fort e-bikes

Hats off to the team at Lochaber Environmental Group who have been working very hard all last year to organise the Hi-Bike Fort William electric bike share scheme, which will launch in the spring.

Hi-Bike Fort William will have 60 ebikes for hire, with annual, monthly and pay-per-ride membership options. And there will be charging hubs in around eight areas throughout Fort William.

And once the scheme is launched, LEG will be running training sessions and guided rides to teach people how to use the scheme and unlock the bikes.

Let's hope that these ebikes are popular. They will certainly be a great way to travel around Fort William, particularly in the summer when the roads are clogged with traffic. And the big basket on the front of the bike will allow people to do some shopping while getting exercise.

The scheme sounds like it is a fantastic idea not only for the environment, but also for people's health and wellbeing.

Congratulations to the team from LEG who have worked hard to get it to this point.

The editor welcomes letters of approximately 300 words in length for publication on this page.

However we reserve the right to shorten, to amend or to refuse to print them. Names and postal addresses must be supplied, including on emails, to indicate good faith. A daytime phone number is also required for verification. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Please email: editor@obantimes.co.uk or write to: Letters page, The Oban Times, PO Box 1, Oban, Argyll, PA34 4HB.

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**Letter does bears a disservice**

Joanne Matheson, in her letter of December 23, does a great disservice to bears who by and large are highly intelligent creatures that would not be seen dead wearing a yellow rosette and are respected members of the community, indeed there is a statue of one on Paddington station.

Whilst she is right about the low turnout, and this has a great deal to do with people having a poor opinion of the Highland Council – hardly surprising when it persists with its vanity projects and Inverness-centric attitudes – it is hardly commendable, in this day and age, with all the talk about global warming, that the Green party candidate could only command support from 3.7 per cent of the electorate. We will see what happens in May.

Andrew Green, Ardtoe.

Reflection before publication?

Highland Council candidate, Joanne Matheson's letter of December 23 poses interesting questions.

For example, it's a pity she wasn't more forthcoming about the demographic profiles of those who informed her that, regarding SNP supporters, 'you could put a yellow rosette on a stuffed teddy and they'd vote for it.'

And perhaps her thoughts on who 'they' are would have been revealing as well.

Why does she criticise fellow candidates for not making use of Facebook when it's obvious that not all people conduct their political communications on social media?

There's nothing like insulting a large percentage of the electorate to ensure that you'll garner votes next time around!

Ms Matheson attracted 88 first choice votes – not surprising having publicly announced that folk shouldn't vote for her because she may not have 'time and commitment to fulfil the role'.

At best, her letter displays an appalling case of sour grapes, at worst, a highly insulting diatribe against those she doesn't seem to want to represent anyway.

Perhaps reflection before publication would have been good advice.

Andy Thornton, Ballachulish.

Beachd Ailein

ALLAN CAMPBELL

aillean@obantimes.co.uk



Fàilte air a' Bhliadhnn' Ùr agus gach misneachd is dòchas a thàinig leatha, a dh'aindeoin an dubhair dhùbhlananach a bha cho goirid às a dèidh ann an 2021! Saoilidh mi gum bheil e nàdarra gu leòr a bhith a' coimhead romhainn le dòchas air star-saich bliadhnn' ùire, agus a' feuchainn ri eallach uallaichean na bliadhna a dh'fhalbh a chur air ar cùlaibh. Chan eil sin daonnan furasta idir ge-tà, oir ged as urrainn dhuinn mòran atharrachadh nar dòigh-beatha fhèin gus cùisean a leasachadh bidh rudan ann air nach eil smachd againn! Aig toiseach 2022 tha mòran thachartasan an t-saoghail mhòir a dh'iarramaid atharrachadh, leithid mar a tha arm na Ruis a' bagairt blàir aig crìch na Ugràine; mar a tha tèarmann agus beatha ùr ga dhiùltadh dha mìltean fhògarrach is iad a' siubhal fad mhiosan tarsainn caochladh dhùthchannan; agus mar a tha beatha mhilleanan chloinne ann an cunnart de dith bidh agus uisge! Tha sin gun iomradh air rudan a tha nas fhaisge oirnn uile gu làitheil mar a tha àrdachadh chosgaisean bith-beò le prìsean bidh agus connaidh a' toirt fàs bras air atmhorachd eaconamach, agus bhioras mallaichte Covid 19 a' sior sgapadh aig astar a tha na chùis eagail!

Bhiodh e furasta fàs iséal agus car brònach a' beachdachadh cus air na gnothaichean sin gun cuideachd aire a thoirt dha cùisean a tha togarrach. Tha an àireamh den t-sluagh air an deach banachdachaidhean air fàs gu mòr agus a dh'aindeoin cho gabhaltach 's a tha an strèan

ùr den Chovid tha barrachd dhaoine a-nise air tomhas mhòr dìon fhaotainn bhon bhuidh as miosa den bhìoras. Ri linn sin tha e coltach gun till an saoghal againn uile nas fhaisge air an seòrsa abhaisteachd a b' aithne dhuinn faisg air dà bhliadhna air ais, agus mar phàirt den ghluasad sin gun tog an eaconamaidh às ùr agus gun socraich an atmhorachd. Bidh cuid ag èigheach "brudard, amadain", ach 's e mo bheachd gum feum sinn leantainn beò an dòchas agus gluasad air adhart le dìongmhaltas gus an seòrsa adhartais air am bheil feum againn a bhuingn! Leis a' gheamhradh letheach seachad agus an latha a' fàs fada a-rithist tha mi 'n dòchas gum bheil sibh ann an sunnd misneachail. Seo mar a sgrìobh m' fhear-dùthcha am bàrd ainmeil Niall MacLeòid a bheannachdan bliadhnn' ùire fhèin faisg air ceud gu leth bliadhna air ais, agus ged a tha am briathrachas 's dòcha beagan seann-fhasanta an-diugh tha rùn nam faclan pailt cho iomchaidh 's a bha iad nuair a sgrìobh am bàrd iad.

Saoghal fada, maoin, is cliù, D' ar luchd-dùthcha bhos is thall; Dòrtadh bheannachdan mar dhriùchd, Gach bliadhnn' ùr thig air an ceann.

Ged a sgaradh sinn ri luaths, Bidh ar càirdeas buan 's gach àm; 'S òlaidh sinn le caithream chruaidh, Làn na cuach air Tìr nam Beann.

Tha mi a' guidhe sith, sonas, slàinte, agus soirbheachas dhuibh uile ann an 2022, agus tha fhios nach dèanadh beagan saidhbheis cron sam bith a bharrachd!

Omicron hits optimism of West C

Optimism amongst Highlands and Islands businesses increased as the year went on, but it has now taken a big hit due to the Omicron variant of Covid.

So finds the last in a series of five business surveys conducted by the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) in 2021.

The survey has found that the impact of Omicron is growing rapidly and causing considerable pain and concern to numerous customer-facing businesses and their suppliers, but it also highlights staff shortages, and utility and other cost increases as two of the greatest

threats to business viability. Moreover, these threats are squeezing margins and stimulating enforced price increases, and whether or not demand remains strong among locals and visitors remains to be seen.

The FSB's Highlands & Islands development manager, David Richardson, said: 'Our latest survey closed on December 14 and, perhaps understandably, it found that businesses are the most positive they've been all year about how trading has gone in 2021, with around three quarters (76 per cent) saying that they have done OK or better. Conversely, eight per cent

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'Incredible' response to Gaelic school nursery welly walk

Children from Sgoil-àraich Ghàidhlig Loch Abar raised the spirits of Caol locals recently by taking their sponsored 'Christmas welly walk' out into the community, writes Kirsteen Bell.

The children and nursery staff dressed up for the walk, with a Santa, elves, tinsel, Christmas hats, and even fairy lights. All the children carried bells to jingle and sang Gaelic nursery songs from the school all the way to Caol shopping centre, where there was a fantastic turnout of people gathered to hear the children sing.

Angela MacIsaac, Senior Early Years Practitioner at Sgoil-àraich Ghàidhlig Loch Abar, told the Lochaber Times: 'Last year we wanted to raise the spirit of locals that had been affected by Covid and isolation. It was incredible.

'We had some older folk en-route to Caol shopping centre waving at us through their window, and some came to their door.'

It was so well received that the nursery decided to do the walk again this year.

Ms MacIsaac explained: 'I got in touch with Linda and Isobel Campbell to advertise it on Nevis Radio. I am so grateful to Isobel and Linda - what a response we had to it!

'This year we had children and babies at the windows too, as well as older folk. Santa gave them a wave at their windows! The smiles and



joy on their faces is what it's all about - having fun and spreading the Christmas cheer. Our parents are also so supportive of everything we organise, and we the staff are very appreciative of that. Tàing mhor a h- uile duine. 'Nollaig Chridheil agus bliadhna mhath ur!'

The nursery children spread Christmas cheer as they made their way through Caol to give a short carol service in the shopping square. Photograph: Iain Ferguson, alba.photos



A Caol Primary School pupil has raised £111.50 for homeless people by making and selling Christmas cards, with a little help from his nanna, Stephanie. Eight-year-old Ollie Lamont from Fort William made and sold over 100 cards and will donate the money to the Social Bite cafe in Glasgow. Photograph: Iain Ferguson, alba.photos.

The Baby and Toddlers Group held in the Salvation Army Hall, Fort William, on Tuesdays and Thursdays of each week are very popular with children and parents who travel from right across Lochaber to enjoy each other's company.

However everyone was extra excited recently when a special visitor arrived to bring joy, cheer and presents at their joint Christmas party.

With an eye to Covid regulations, Santa visited the group in two separate rooms in the hall to keep numbers down, but with no dampening of spirits and enjoyment.

Photograph: Iain Ferguson, alba.photos



Coast businesses

were really struggling/barely staying afloat. The Omicron variant started to flex its muscles during the survey period, and the rapidly deteriorating situation as the virus spreads, together with reimposed Covid measures and calls for the public to exercise extreme caution, are taking their toll on trading.'

The FSB's latest survey also looked at staffing, costs and prices charged.

Mr Richardson added: 'Aside from Covid, the two most potent problems facing businesses are arguably the shortage of staff and rising costs, and the two are clearly linked.'

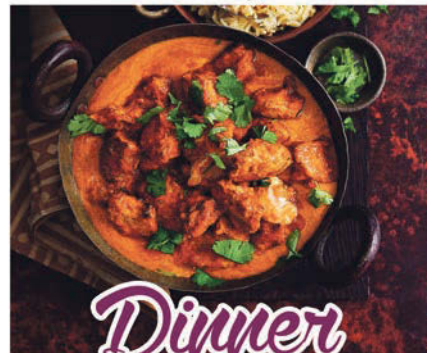
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Glasgow Letter

ROBERT ROBERTSON

robert.d.robertson@hotmail.co.uk



The Glenfinnan Ceilidh Band were the house band for the Hogmanay show on BBC Alba.

In my final column of 2021, I hoped for a slightly more exciting Hogmanay than last year's.

Unfortunately, my mum and dad both testing positive for Covid kicked this hope right into touch and condemned me to my second isolation period within a month!

I am still testing negative but clearly there was no first footing on the cards for a second year running!

Thankfully, there was some great viewing on television and congratulations must go to everyone involved in this year's Cèilidh na Bliadhna Ùire – BBC Alba's live Hogmanay ceilidh which was broadcast, conveniently for this column, from Glasgow.

The lack of a live audience often makes a gig like that very difficult for performers, but I thought the whole show generated a really lively, natural atmosphere.

The set design, made from fishing nets and creels, was very appropriate for a true West Highland ceilidh led, as ever, by the fantastic house band, the Glenfinnan Ceilidh Band, who were joined by New

Tradition, led by Iain Costello MacIver. These two bands complemented each other perfectly – the Glenfinnan crew leading the cèilidh dances and playing some great traditional Gaelic songs, whilst New Tradition played a variety of Gaelic songs with Costello's trademark country twist.

There was a fine line-up of singers for both these bands to accompany: Emma MacLeod from Scalpay, Chloe Steele from Uist, and Iain 'Spanish' Mackay from Lewis making sure most Hebridean bases were covered! And a special mention should go to Glenuig's Iain MacMaster who put down the box for a song half way through the evening.

The show was augmented by pre-recorded performances from the Stornoway Youth Pipe Band, Còisir Ghàidhlig Leòdhais (a selection of choral singers from Lewis), and Peat and Diesel, and was presented with great humour by Niall Iain MacDonald and Cathy Bhàn.

It was one of these programmes that just felt really positive and happy – despite

everything that is going on around us at the moment – and it certainly cheered up my Hogmanay in isolation no end.

Covid or not, my mum and dad managed to stay up past the bells and dad even managed a hot toddy! The following day, his symptoms were all but gone, so perhaps the cure for Covid is a hot toddy with the BBC Alba Hogmanay show!

On the 1st, to keep my mind off the fact I would normally be first footing, I put on Take the Floor where Gary Innes was introducing a fantastic New Year's Day Party with music from Iain Cathcart and his Scottish Dance Band.

Gary had interviewed me for the programme before Christmas and asked me to choose a song to be played. I chose Clare Island by the Saw Doctors – two of whom (Leo Moran and Anto Thistlethwaite) I had the pleasure of singing with on a BBC Alba Hogmanay show a few years ago.

It was nice to think back on Hogmanays gone by; and look ahead to more lively ones in years to come!



Peat and Diesel were guests on BBC Alba's live Hogmanay ceilidh, helping Gaels bring in the new year.

HIGHLAND CINEMA

FRI 7TH - THUR 13TH JAN



FRIDAY 7TH JANUARY
 Spider-Man: No Way Home (12a) 12:30pm, 4:30pm + 7:30pm.
 The Matrix Resurrections (15) 1pm. The King's Man (15) 4pm + 8pm.

SATURDAY 8TH JANUARY
 Spider-Man: No Way Home (12a) 10:30am, 4:15pm + 7:30pm.
 Clifford The Big Red Dog (PG) 11am + 1:45pm.
 The Matrix Resurrections (15) 1:30pm. The King's Man (15) 5pm + 8pm.

SUNDAY 9TH JANUARY
 Spider-Man: No Way Home (12a) 10am, 3:45pm + 7pm.
 Clifford The Big Red Dog (PG) 10:30am + 1:15pm. The Matrix Resurrections (15) 1pm. The King's Man (15) 4:30pm + 7:30pm.

MONDAY 10TH DECEMBER - ALL SHOWN WITH SUBTITLES
 House Of Gucci (15) 12pm. Clifford The Big Red Dog (PG) *Bairns At The Box Office: 12:30pm*. Highlands From The Air (U) 2:50pm. Spider-Man: No Way Home (12a) 3:40pm + 7pm. The King's Man (15) 4:15pm + 7:30pm.

TUESDAY 11TH DECEMBER
 Spider-Man: No Way Home (12a) 12pm, 4pm + 7pm.
 The Matrix Resurrections (15) 12:30pm.
 The King's Man (15) 3:30pm + 7:30pm.

WEDNESDAY 12TH DECEMBER
 Spider-Man: No Way Home (12a) 12pm, 4pm + 7pm.
 West Side Story (PG) 12:30pm. The King's Man (15) 3:30pm + 7:30pm.

THURSDAY 13TH DECEMBER
 Highlands From The Air (U) 12pm. Spider-Man: No Way Home (12a) 12:30pm+ 4:30pm. The Matrix Resurrections (15) 1:15pm.
 The King's Man (15) 4pm + 7:30pm. The Rescue (12a) 8pm.



FILM SYNOPSIS, TRAILERS, TICKETS AND TO SIGN UP FOR OUR WEEKLY E-NEWSLETTER:
WWW.HIGHLANDCINEMA.CO.UK



LT

JULY



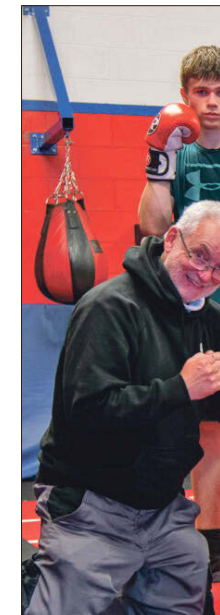
The goal of opening up Kinlochleven's Island Park for sports and community events moved a few steps closer thanks to the fundraising efforts of village footballers. The teams took part in a charity match in their favourite team colours. Photograph: Iain Ferguson, alba.photos.

Sport high

SEPTEMBER



Members of the Lochaber Phoenix Boxing Club had fun celebrating International Boxing Day. Photograph: Iain Ferguson, alba.photos



JULY

Inverlochly mountain biker Archie Ferguson, left, topped the podium at a Scottish Downhill Association (SDA) race at the first time of asking. Archie took the top spot in the juvenile section of the SDA event at Glencoe. Photograph: Mikie Palmer.

Young Lochaber Athletics Club member Maddison MacMillan put in a stellar performance in her appearance in a national Scottish track and field meeting.

OCTOBER



Mallaig endurance athlete Pawel Cymbalista reached the dizzying heights on Ben Nevis seven times last weekend, breaking a 15-year-old record. Previous record maker Charlie Anderson, left, who made the ascent/descent in 24 hours 15 years ago not only congratulated Pawel on his return, but spent much of the night on the hill helping him stay safe. Photograph: Iain Ferguson, alba.photos.

Right: David Langan, left, of Langan and Smith which sponsored the Lochaber Camanachd second team strips, and second team coach Donnie MacRae, presented Seonaidh MacDonald, right, with the Player of the Year trophy after a meal in Spice Tandoori, Fort William. Photograph: Iain Ferguson, alba.photos.

AUGUST



The Highland League ordered Fort William FC to play all its league and cup games away from home after the condition of the pitch came under scrutiny. It triggered a major response from members and supporters. Some of the team which worked to restore Claggan Park pictured here are, front from left, Mark Rydings and David MacDonald. Back row from left are Peter Murphy, Olly Stephen, Mark Gillespie and Iain MacKay. Photograph: Iain Ferguson, alba.photos

NOVEMBER



Kingussie won the 2021 Macaulay Shinty Cup after beating Kyles Athletic 4-1 in the final played at Mossfield, Oban. Photograph: Neil Paterson.

Lochaber's Katie Dougan, pictured, right, in action as the Scotland squad warms up before a Women's Six Nations tie last year between Scotland and France at Scotstoun Stadium, in Glasgow, told the Lochaber Times of her hopes to add to her 14 caps with a few more in next year's Women's Rugby World Cup in Auckland, New Zealand. Photograph: Bill Murray / SNS Group.



Highlights July to December



NOVEMBER

Former Scottish footballer John Collins made climbing Ben Nevis his goal to help raise funds to get an injured player from his home town club in the Scottish Borders back on the field. Ex-Hibernian and Celtic midfielder John, left, and his brother, Norrie, at the start of their climb. Photograph: Iain Ferguson, alba.photos.



DECEMBER

A nine-year-old shinty fan from Fort William has been swinging his way to stardom on the national golf circuit. Junior Champion golfer Harry Stewart with his collection of trophies. Photograph: Iain Ferguson, alba.photos.



Fort William Football Club announced the appointment of new manager Shadab Iftikhar, left, a former Mongolia assistant who holds a UEFA A Licence coaching qualification and who worked as an opposition scout for Roberto Martinez during Belgium's Euro 2020 campaign.

SCOTTISH FIELD



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February

Sea cliffs of Scotland...

Hebridean crofter takes on Airbnb...
The real Macbeth... Ghillie Basan recipes...
Graham McTavish's Credo... Beautiful Fife garden...
Artist Lily Macrae... Underwater photography...
A Scot's 5,000-mile trek across Canada...

Season's greetings from the sporting community – part 2

Fort William Football Club

As 2021 draws to a close, the directors, committee, management and players of Fort William Football Club thank our many fans locally and further afield for their support again this year.

The club has gone through some significant changes over the past 12 months with a new board being appointed following the club's annual general meeting in August. A new committee and a new manager have also been appointed recently.

Whilst everyone will be aware of the public effort to improve the pitch at Claggan Park and to get Highland League games back at home, there has also been considerable efforts made

into improving the long-term viability of developing football locally from grassroots through to first team level and on developing Claggan Park to make it a sporting hub.

In December, Claggan Park hosted the second in its series of charity friendlies between Fort William and South Lochaber Thistle which was well attended by several hundred people. It also played host to its first youth game in many years as the Under 14s youth development team took on Portree Football Club.

The short-term target of avoiding relegation has been set and new manager Shadab Iftikar has been given the full backing of the board to ensure this happens.

We hope everyone had a happy Christmas and wish you all a great New Year and can't wait to see Highland League games back at Claggan Park in the 2022-23 season. Oliver Stephen, director.



Fort William FC Under 14s.

district championships.

Next year we are joining the Grampian Athletics League which is a track and field league and are therefore looking for more youngsters to join us in running, throwing and jumping.

Lochaber Athletic Club was founded in 1951 so this is our 70th anniversary. We are hoping to piece together the history and milestones and also get information on some of the great Lochaber athletes from the past.

We remember with joy and with a sense of loss some of the heroes of the past. We think of some of the local Ben Nevis race winners such as the late Brian Kearney and the late Eddie Campbell. More recently, Davie Rodgers and, of course, ten times Ben winner Finlay Wild.

We are grateful for 70 years

of fun and camaraderie with the club and we are looking forward to the future and to representing Lochaber wherever we compete.

Thanks for all the support from parents, relatives, friends and the community. Please cheer on Lochaber Athletics Club Juniors.

Lochaber Phoenix Boxing Club

Like every other sports club, working within Covid regulations limited physical presence for much of 2021, although contact was never lost with our members through online training sessions and regular messages to check on how they were coping.

As restrictions eased, outdoor training started up on Caol foreshore and the gym



Members of Lochaber Phoenix Boxing Club.

Photographs: Iain Ferguson, alba.photos

car park, which saw numbers increasing gradually and a move back indoors as this was allowed.

We have now returned to an almost pre-Covid training timetable through well-attended junior and senior sessions with male and female participants.

Our first home show for two years took place in Caol Community Centre to a sell-out crowd and since then our boxers have fought in a novice championship in Inverurie, taking two silvers and a gold, as well as in the Highland Boxing Academy Home show in Inverness where Farquhar MacRae headed the bill and took the winner's trophy.

We will have several entrants in Boxing Scotland Championships in Motherwell over two weekends in February and our next Home Shows

are planned for April and November 2022.

Before this, there is plenty training for those taking part to build fitness and skills, as well as working with everyone at regular training sessions to encourage their interest not only in the sport, but in enjoying healthy and active lives.

Club expenses and travelling costs also have to be met, so fundraising is vital.

Our next event is a prize bingo night on Friday February 18, in Caol Community Centre, so please give us your support. Iain Ferguson, chairman.



Lochaber Athletics Club junior Maddison MacMillan in action at the graded meeting at Queen's Park.

Lochaber Athletics Club Juniors


Our eight to 15-year-old athletes wish all readers and all sports clubs in Lochaber a successful year in 2022.

We have had a disrupted year but have enjoyed training. Some of our athletes competed in open graded track and field meetings during the summer in Inverness and we have also competed in the north district cross country league and the



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The Lochaber Times: 95p



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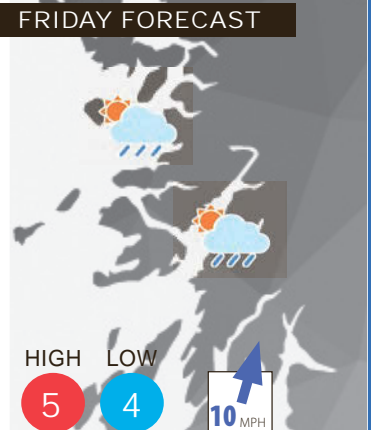
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Tide tables for Oban during the week from **Thursday 6 January, 2022** are listed below with differences for major ports listed alongside. All times are GMT (add one hour BST)

6	0202 0.8	8	0335 1.1	10	0516 1.5	12	0103 2.9
	0804 4.0		0936 3.6		1128 3.2		0727 1.8
TH	1437 1.0	SA	1612 1.4	M	1756 1.8	W	1411 3.1
	2018 3.6		2143 3.2		2335 2.9		2001 1.9
7	0248 0.9	9	0424 1.3	11	0615 1.7	13	0216 3.0
	0849 3.8		1027 3.4		1252 3.1		0853 1.8
F	1524 1.2	SU	1702 1.6	TU	1857 1.9	TH	1509 3.2
	2100 3.4		2231 3.0		2102 1.8		

FRIDAY FORECAST



Ardishaig -5.35
Campbeltown -5.30
Crinan -0.47
Islay Port Ellen 2.00
Lochboisdale +0.30
Mallaig +0.25
Portree +0.55
Tobermory +0.16
Dover +5.30

HIGH 5 LOW 4 10 MPH

FORT WILLIAM WEATHER

Thursday Heavy rain and a moderate breeze Temperatures 2°C to 6°C.	Friday Sleet showers and a gentle breeze Temperatures 4°C to 5°C.	Saturday Heavy rain and a moderate breeze Temperatures 4°C to 6°C.	Sunday Light rain and a moderate breeze Temperatures 6°C to 7°C.
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