

International Celtic Conference – Oban 2005

Christine MacKay

The International Celtic Congress is an educational and cultural organisation whose aims are to perpetuate the ideals, cultures and languages of the Celtic people. There are branches of the International Celtic Congress in the Celtic regions of Brittany, Cornwall, Ireland, Isle of Man and Wales.

Celtic Congress (Scotland) is recognised as a charity. It is non-political and non-sectarian.

An international conference is held annually in a different Celtic region and, in July 2005, Scotland had the privilege of hosting this event. On previous occasions this conference had been held in the Highland Region and in the Central Belt. This was the first time that Argyll had been selected with the chosen base, The Royal Hotel, Oban.

This annual conference follows an established pattern. There is a chosen theme and, in 2005, this was 'Language Revival Through the Arts'. Every region nominates a speaker for the subject and also invites artistes to participate in the Showcase Evenings and, informally, at ceilidhs throughout the week.

Each morning commenced with Gaelic language lessons.

The Scottish Branch of Celtic Congress recognises the importance of involvement of young people and a 'Young People's' programme was in organised which involved language, culture, activities and excursions. Feisean nan Gaidheal gave generous support and local children of Feis Latharna were invited to take part.

At any conference one of the most popular events is an excursion. With this county's richness in historical sites and places of cultural interest choice of excursion was one of our pleasant problems! With the support of The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) Outreach Team a day tour, which included many of the spectacular sites and landscapes of Lorn and Mid Argyll, was organised. Two coaches were used, one taking a clockwise circuit and the other anti-clockwise with four main stops at Inveraray, Auchendrain, Dunadd and Kilmartin. Delegates were given published guides of the route.

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While there were many highlights of the day - ascending Dun Add, Inveraray Castle, and Steve's excellent guided tour of Auchendrain - the archaeological richness of Kilmartin Glen impressed all delegates with many expressing wishes to return and to have more time to explore the area.

We are grateful to our RCAHMS guides, Steve Boyle and Jack Anderson and to Brigadier John MacFarlane for covering the Gaelic and cultural components of the excursion.

Owing to generous publicity in the Oban Times we were delighted to welcome members of the community to lectures, to the Ecumenical Church Service which was conducted by Rev Donald Canon MacKay and Rev Dr Roddy MacLeod, and to the Showcase Evenings in the Corran Halls. One of these evenings featured adult artistes and the other most memorable evening had as participants not only young people who participated in the week's programme, but also young delegates from other Feisean in the Highland Region. These young people represent the future of the language and the culture,

We acknowledge the generous support of Argyll & Bute Council who hosted a Civic Reception at the Official Opening, the support of local organisations and businesses and national support and sponsorship.

In excess of two hundred delegates were involved in this conference week and delegates were enormously impressed with the town of Oban as a conference location, with the warm welcome which they received from residents and local businesses and also with the opportunities which Oban afforded to explore other areas in the west of Scotland.

Anyone interested in Celtic languages and culture, in becoming a member of Celtic Congress (Scotland), or in the published Proceedings of Congress 2005 please contact Christine Mac Kay, Isle of Luing.

Editorial Note: Christine modestly fails to mention that she is currently International President of the Celtic Congress.