

Farming Focus

Volunteers' sheep dyke repairs get the seal of approval from North Ronaldsay veterans

KATE TRAILL PRICE

North Ronaldsay was alive with the sound of celebration on Friday night, as dry-stone-walling volunteers and islanders gathered to toast the end of the first week of the Sheep Festival.

The fortnight of conservation efforts and activities is the first of its kind for North Ronaldsay, but has proven such a success that visitors have already ear-marked their places for next year's event.

The idea for a festival was conceived following the overwhelming public interest that the island and its storm-damaged sheep dyke received after being featured on *CountryFile* in January.

A committee was set up to organise activities and showcase the island's many attractions, while offers of help flooded in from far and wide.

The first week of the Festival saw people from Sydney, Amsterdam, Denver and all across the UK knuckling down and re-building the sheep dyke, under the guidance of islanders and visiting professionals.

"The effort and enthusiasm of the volunteers has been phenomenal," said J. D. Price of the festival committee.

"We've had the most eclectic range of people, including a retired Metropolitan policeman, a dustman, nurses, musicians and several teachers, and everyone has really dug in and worked with a smile on their face."

Seasoned sheep dyke builders were in agreement, with Ian Scott of North Ronaldsay declaring (following an inspection of the volunteers' work) that the rebuilt sections were "very fine indeed."

Despite clocking up over 30 hours of building in the first five days, folk were still lively in the evenings with the sound of fiddles, guitars and even a

ukulele keeping the bar at the Bird Observatory buzzing until the wee hours.

Highlights of daytime activities included tours of the island's lighthouse and wool mill, a pop-up art exhibition, felting workshops, a kids' club and "Bag the Bruck" beach clean-up, with a film night and a treasure hunt still to come.

"There's a real buzz on the island," said Helga Tulloch, who organised the art exhibition.

"It's wonderful to see so many people around, and it's got folk talking about North Ronaldsay again."

News of the fun spread fast, with the islander plane at full capacity each day and many catching the Friday boat to make it in time for the evening's celebrations.

A Pub Quiz of general knowledge and island-specific questions kicked things off, followed by music led by Fionn McArthur and Kitty Halcrow. Toes were soon tapping as the reels got under way, including a fast and furious Strip the Willow and Dashing White Sergeant, with impromptu lessons for visitors unfamiliar with the steps.

Despite the festivities lasting until the early hours of Saturday morning, the group was back up and building under the watchful eye of the island's famous sheep just hours later.

"I didn't really know what to expect when I applied to come here," said Claire Maguire, a teacher from County Wicklow in Ireland, "but it's everything I'd hoped it would be and more."

"This place is magical. Aren't we lucky?" We couldn't agree more.

For more details, see www.nrsheepfestival.com



Hard at work repairing a section of the sheep dyke.

(All pictures: Kate Trill Price)



David Roddie, from Essex, tries his hand at shearing.



Relaxing with a pub quiz after a hard day's work.



Work under way by the North Ronaldsay pier.

AuctionMarts

Orkney Auction Mart

Fifteen prime cattle and 21 OTM cattle were sold on Monday, when prime cattle sold to 216p/kg for a 590kg Charolais heifer, from Glen Orkney Farms, St Ola, which realised £1,274.40 to Craigie Butcher Ltd, The Brig, Kirkwall.

Other leading prime heifer prices: Limousin (595kg) Learmonth, Grandon, Finstown (215p) £1,279.25; Charolais (535kg) Stanger, South Seatter, Sandwick (204p) £1,091.40

Prime steers sold to 205p/kg for a 750kg Simmental, from Garson, Gairsty, Sandwick, which realised £1537.50, also to Craigie Butcher Ltd

Other leading prime steer prices: Charolais (615kg) Stanger, South Seatter, Sandwick (202p) £1,242.30

OTMs

OTM cattle sold to 128.5p/kg for a 615kg Limousin cow, from Rendall, Whitehow, Papa Westray, which realised £790

Other leading OTM prices: Angus (705kg) Garson, Gairsty, Sandwick (124.8p) £880.

Blonde D'Aquitaine (810kg) Seatter, Elsness, Sanday (124.7p) £1,010.

Simmental (795kg) Paterson, Nessbreck, Harry (124.5p) £990.

Charolais (755kg) Rendall, Whitehow, Papa Westray (119.2p) £900.

Shorthorn (725kg) Scarth, Twatt, Birsay (117.2p) £850.

Aberdeen & Northern Marts

Store Cattle

Bullocks to a top of 216p per kg for a pair of 514kg Charolais and £1,150 gross for a pen of 564kg from N. & D. Chalmers, Upper Lea,

Stromness.

Heifers to a top of 227p per kg and £1,025 gross for a pair of 452kg Charolais from A. Laird, Mossbank, Burray.

Leading prices per head and kg

Bullocks

501-550kg – Upper Lea £1110 Char.
551-600kg – Upper Lea 204p.

Beef

Beef Cows sold to 183.3p per kilo for a 510kg Simmental from Greentoft Farms, Eday and to £1,205 gross for a 825kg Limousin from A. J. Laird, Mossbank, Burray.

Leading Prices: Mossbank £1,075, 176.2p, £1,075, 147.3p; Greentoft £855, 139p; Hayon, Birsay £915, 143p; Upper Lea £816.75, 135p.

Dairy Cows

Dairy Cows sold to 119.8p per kilo for a 680kg Friesian from Berriedale Farms, South Ronaldsay and to £935 gross for a 795kg Friesian from Scott & Reid, Howe, Stromness.

Leading Prices: Berriedale £815, 108.5p; Howe £655, 100p.

Mature Bulls

Leading Prices: Halcro, South Ronaldsay £1,050, 117p; Berriedale £910, 103.4p.

Prime Sheep

Leading Prices: Tex – Millhouse, Harry £81.50. Suff – Knockhall, South Ronaldsay £80.

Rams

Sold to £113 for a Suffolk from Knockhall. Leading Prices: Knockhall £90.50.




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