



NEWS RELEASE

Use: Immediate

Date: 19/12/11

Ardnamurchan celebrates a new crofting dawn with training course success

An area of north-west Scotland which became well-known a quarter of a century ago for depopulation and the erosion of one of its crofting communities is this month celebrating the completion of the Scottish Crofting Federation's introductory course, attended by more than 20 crofters of all levels of expertise.

'Night Falls on Ardnamurchan', a minor classic book by the Highland writer Alasdair Maclean which was published in 1984, famously described the decline of the crofting township of Sanna in the west-coast peninsula of Ardnamurchan in Lochaber.

Yet earlier this month that image, of Ardnamurchan's twilight, was replaced with a very different picture as 24 students completed the SCF course in the township of Kilchoan, not far from Sanna.

The course at the University of the Highland and Island's Kilchoan Learning Centre was one of eight being held all over the Highlands and Islands this winter, from Uist to Shetland, with a total of 135 participants.

Su Cooper, who manages the SCF's training programme, said she was delighted with how this year's courses had gone. "This is the thirteenth year of this course and the feedback, again, has been excellent," she said. "Participants have said that the speakers have such a wide range of knowledge and experiences that it is of interest to crofters of all levels of expertise. For new and aspiring crofters there is a great deal of information that will help them on the crofting path, such as learning where to get help, and some of the services offered by the Scottish Agricultural College and the Scottish Government. But there are more experienced crofters who also find aspects of this information a useful refresher, and who will also be able to hear complementary experiences to their own.

"This course allows for the participants to set up their own support networks between each other, and it also feeds into the new skills training courses that we have introduced this year, such as in lambing, small-scale horticulture and tractor maintenance. The livestock, land management and horticulture courses seem to have been really appealing to people."

But there is no rest in prospect for Su as she is now in the process of setting up another six of the introductory courses for early in the new year.

SCF chief executive Patrick Krause, who attended the last night of the Kilchoan course, said: "The numbers on this year's courses, the positive responses from participants and also the feedback we've been getting from tutors has been phenomenal. Given the historical background, the popularity of the training here in Kilchoan is particularly heartening. It is great to think of lights returning to some of the townships of Ardnamurchan and it is entirely fitting that the Scottish Crofting Federation, the crofters' own representative organisation, should be leading the way by providing local properly accredited and well appreciated training and support for the next generation of crofters."

