

## **Rob Donn Trail Mackay Country Community Trust wins Heritage Lottery Fund support**

Mackay Country Community Trust Ltd are delighted to have received £36,200 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for an exciting project, to establish a themed trail to link strategically related places in the stories poems and songs of Rob Donn around Mackay Country, from Melvich to Scourie, Dùthaich Mhic Aoidh. "We gratefully acknowledge National Lottery players' contribution to our project through HLF funding. We are furthermore thankful to Caithness and North Sutherland Fund and SSE Strathy North who have granted funds as partnership funding for elements of the project within their area of operation bringing the project total to £51,816." Our partnership funding led by HLF has provided an opportunity to raise the profile of the 18 century bard.

Led by volunteers from the local community, the project focuses on his impact on the identity of North West Sutherland. The project will involve researching the works of Rob Donn and mapping the localities identified in his works, run a series of workshops for performing and recording the music, narrative, gathering of images and designing and creating a web of the trail and produce a bilingual printed publication. The project will enable local people to discover and explore heritage through training opportunities, historical research and analysis. A professional researcher, project director, creative writer and Gaelic translator will be commissioned for the project.

Mackay Country Community Trust is working in close concert with Strathnaver Museum and has been supported in their funding applications by the seven Community Councils across Mackay Country. Mackay Country Community Trust is an umbrella group covering 4 parishes and 11 communities in which local level groups are also active. This group focuses on activities which complement and augment local work and seeks to increase the profile and identity of their area for tourism using sensitive historical research and cultural development to create new skills in the area. We value and respect our past as much as we strive to make our present and future secure and vibrant.

Ronnie Lansley secretary said: "We are thrilled to have received the support of the Heritage Lottery and our other Funders. We are confident the project will create pride in this aspect of the areas Heritage. This is one of 3 major undertakings over the next 18 months to raise the profile and provide a better understanding of Rob Donn, probably the greatest classic Gaelic poet of the past, he is possibly one of the most accessible to a modern audience. His verse had a quality which conveys meaning and shades of emotion even to those who do not understand Gaelic. Born around 1715 at Strathmore, near Tongue. He died 1778 at Durness aged 63yrs. A plain stone slab with his name and the date marks his grave in Balnakeil Churchyard. In 1829 a monument to him was erected with inscriptions in Greek, Latin, Gaelic and English. Rob Donn made his living as a cattle drover travelling widely around Mackay Country. He never learned to read or write but his songs and poems were written down by educated well wishers in his lifetime. A precocious child, nonetheless, he began composing verses when he was only 3 or 4yrs. Like Mozart, he had the ability to produce intricately composed work seemingly out of nowhere and his incisive wit gave his poems a cliff-hanging fascination between satire and praise. So spontaneous was his work, yet so well constructed, if he was stopped in the middle of composing, the poem ends but is still perfect."

Further information can be obtained from Ronnie Lansley on 01971511346 or [info@mackaycountry.com](mailto:info@mackaycountry.com)

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