

Wester Ross Radio Ltd



REVIEW OF 2008

NOW WE ARE FIVE

We have just passed our fifth year on the air, and celebrated this milestone with what proved to be a superb community cèilidh in Gairloch Community Hall last month. We have had hugely positive feedback from that event, and look forward to celebrating our tenth in similar style.

More importantly, we have maintained our commitment to providing over 30 hours per week of local programming and service to the communities of Gairloch and Loch Ewe. As always, we've said goodbye to some voices on air and welcomed others. And of course we've continued to make behind the scenes adjustments and improvements to help make things easier for our volunteer presenters and add to the facilities they have available.

As well as the formal company board, we have a management committee which has met several times through the year to discuss and decide specific matters arising in running the radio station, and we have held several presenters' meetings at which the committee and presenters discuss programme schedules and programme ideas.

PEOPLE AND PROGRAMMES

We organize our programmes in quarterly (13-week) blocks and are currently into our 21st 'season' since starting. We review our programming and presenter resources each quarter, and our general scheme of programmes has continued broadly according to plan this year. We have once again added yet more hours of local broadcasts.

As always we are heavily dependent on our team of volunteer presenters, without whose commitment there would be no programmes. We said goodbye to Angie & Mark Naylor as regular Craic at Dawn presenters, but they have continued to support us as very willing stand-ins when needed. Our news production team shrank back to one person with the departure from the area of Donald MacRae, who had become the main reporter of news, and was proving a great help. We also said goodbye to one of our long-standing younger presenters, Calum Gibson who presented the Monday evening 'Zone'.

However, the new presenters who joined us towards the end of 2007 have come through training and Ron Cole and Carol Bulmer are now regular *Westering Home* presenters, and Mary Rogers has joined Graham Nash and Tracy McLachlan in providing cover for holidays and other unforeseen absences. Ron Cole has also stepped in as a producer of news bulletins to allow my own occasional absences, which has been a great relief, however, we badly need to recruit another news writer.

At the time of our last annual report, we had scaled back the Sunday Brunch programme to just one Sunday per month, but we have been joined by new presenters Neil & Julie Brady and Sabita Lawson, and with the welcome return of Jackie Hodges, we have been able to return to weekly Sunday Brunch shows, which have proved very enjoyable and popular. Neil and Sabita also proposed a new programme to add to our schedule, *The Portal*, which is now on the air.

We continue to supplement our locally produced programmes with programmes directly to us by folks in Barra, Cape Breton, Skye and elsewhere, and we continue to foster links with other radio stations.

Jackie Wilson has maintained our regular feed of What's On listings every week, with Tracy, Liz and Carol Bulmer providing occasional cover when Jackie is away. Jackie has also undertaken a range of other tasks in support of the station and we're very grateful for her commitment and support.

Young people

Our Radio Waves activities with youngsters have continued through the year after Dave Griggs and Campbell Elder took on the challenge of picking up what the previous team had built. This year has seen the introduction of Gaelic segments into the Radio Waves programmes. A highlight of the year for the young presenters was a 'raid' on our neighbouring station, Cuillin FM, when the team chartered the local high-speed Orca boat to travel as a group to Portree and present their shows from there for an afternoon. Many thanks to Orca skipper Nick Davies, and to Fiona Downie as well for helping to find funding support for that venture.

Religious programme items

Our thanks go to Catriona MacLean and her team of willing readers for preparing our *First Light* daily Bible readings, and to Liz Forrest for compiling the programmes each week – they've presented over 1,300 daily readings so far! Thanks also to the team for producing special readings for Christmas.

Gaelic programming

We continue to produce a weekly Gaelic music and conversation programme *Ceòl is Criomagan*, which is our longest running weekly programme, never missing a beat since Two Lochs Radio first went on the air. Thanks to all those people who have taken part over the years, and special thanks to Alice Mackenzie for her dedication in coming up with new topics each week and presenting the show which has now passed 250 editions. Possibly the only reason we didn't win the Wallace Sword award for the best Gaelic magazine programme produced in the Highlands again is because the contest hasn't been run since we won it for the third time!

The weekly Gaelic-presented pop music programme, *Gàgail is Gàire*, from the Isle of Barra was joined early this year by a second weekly show, *Ùpraid*, featuring more traditional Highland music. As with our other 'out of area' productions, these shows are extras to our local production commitments, and don't displace anything produced locally. As mentioned earlier, we also now have a regular Gaelic element to the youngsters' *Radio Waves*.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

We have continued our links with various local groups, schools, service providers and other agencies, and have regular reports or interviews with many of these. We continue to urge everyone to make the most use of the radio to support and publicize their own activities.

In January several of us attended the Highlands & Islands Community Broadcasting Conference, at which we made representations to the First Minister about support for community radio. At his suggestion, we followed this up with a submission to the Scottish Broadcasting Commission, and our input was reflected in the Commission's final report. The Gairloch & District Times assisted us with the distribution of a listener survey to gather updated listener feedback as part of this exercise. We have now seen significant steps towards increased Government support, particularly in advertising.

Our Friday breakfast link with Cuillin FM has proved a bit problematic this year owing to technical difficulties at the Portree end, but we are now back to regular Friday link ups, albeit with reduced sound quality at the moment. We have also implemented an alternative way of getting a regular feed of the very popular Saturday Scottish dance music show *Balaich nam Port* from Portree in sufficient quality.

Unfortunately, we were unable to bring programming direct from the Royal National Mod in Falkirk this year, owing to the organizers leaving it too late to provide us with the necessary technical and scheduling information.

Our family Hogmanay party at the end of 2007 (the first since 2004) proved even bigger and better than the previous events, and plans are well advanced for 2008. We took part in the Gairloch Highland Gathering again this year, providing the public address and running our own fundraising bottle stall. Thanks to Anne for organizing the tombola and to Christine MacIver and Abbey for their help.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

The major development of this year was the introduction of public Internet streaming of our programmes, so anyone anywhere in the world with an Internet connection can 'tune in' and listen to us live. The public Internet service was only possible after intense negotiation with the copyright body PPL to reduce the proposed costs, and with some generous funding support brought in by Ron Cole. The service has proved successful and reliable, with around 6,000 connections and 1,000 hours of Internet listening each month. It provides a steady stream of contacts from folks around the world, and we now have some notably loyal listeners in Iceland, South Africa, Austria and the Arab Emirates.

We introduced e-mail direct to the on-air presenters using the studio email address, and this has added to the interaction available, particularly with people listening on the Internet.

Our automated handling of the legally-required off-air recordings and changing between different 'sustaining services' out of hours, and playouts of pre-recorded programmes, have all proved reliable throughout the year, and have contributed to smooth presentation of unattended hours output.

Our previous 'sustaining services' providing programme material during hours when we have no local programming became a bit erratic at the start of the year, with some services ceasing operation, another becoming Welsh, and a third focusing increasingly on London. As a result, we reached new agreements with alternative providers, the Guardian Media Group, and implemented a new way of getting an acceptable feed of sound from their Glasgow-based Smooth Radio service. This has improved our non-local hours service considerably, particularly with the provision of "Glasgow and the West" news services. We are still working on improving the sound quality of the feed from Glasgow.

We successfully completed the several grants that we secured for a completely refurbished studio and digital desk system, and the bulk of the equipment and software required has been bought (thankfully at a very favourable rate of exchange with the dollar), and we cleared and relined the former thrift shop area ready for conversion to office use. However, things have progressed little further during the year owing primarily to a lack of working time apart from doing the day-to-day routine work of the station.

One other bottleneck has been the lack of anywhere suitable to store construction materials and equipment and relieve other temporary storage. We have identified a solution to this, with a plan to site a storage container at the former fire station site a few doors away, and this is being worked on.

We have suffered some ongoing signal interference problems since various changes were made to the powers and aerials of Cuillin FM and BBC services on Skye, especially affecting the Cliff Hill transmitter. Plans are in hand to try to resolve this, but we really need some spells of clear dry weather to permit easier access and working at the hilltop sites.

Residents of Shieldaig and Achnasheen continue to urge us to consider expansion of our area of coverage in those directions, and we would like to improve coverage in the Melvaig area as well, but these are not things that can be undertaken lightly, or even at all without support from various authorities and funders. Coverage in Achansheen would also have a great benefit in car coverage for local residents driving through to the East. We are continuing to look at the options, and the indications are that next year would be a better than average one in which to apply for funding support, but we really need to get our present developments more fully progressed before taking on anything new.

FINANCE

At the last AGM we reported positive signs in commercial broadcasting income – sponsorship and advertising, and I am pleased to report that the general trend continued through the year, with an increase in general revenue that roughly kept pace with our inevitable increases in general costs, however our revenue grant income declined, particularly with regard to Highland Council funding. Our revenue for the accounting year 2007 was about £26,700 (previous year £25,800), and the upward trend has strengthened in 2008, particularly with national advertising. We also have developments in the pipeline with the Government that may bolster this further. There still seems on the face of it to be scope for additional advertising sales regionally (ie on the east coast with larger businesses that also serve the west), but we have not yet found a way to exploit this.

Other fundraising income continued slightly depressed in 2007 from previous years owing to there being no Hogmanay event at the end of 2006 and with the planned closure of our thrift shop in the autumn of 2007. However, things have improved on this front considerably since the end of the 2007 accounting year, with the 2007 Hogmanay ceilidh getting us off to a good start.

A recent development has been the formation of a separate fundraising group (WRR Fundraisers) consisting of Ron (as chairman), Anne, Alex and Liz, though we are looking to recruit further members from outside the committee as soon as possible. This properly-constituted group will organize fundraising events and ventures, and donate the proceeds to Two Lochs Radio. It was responsible for our fundraising CD *Coig!* which, after several years "in the pipeline" came together within just a couple of months thanks to a lot of hard work from all concerned. The group decided on criteria for selecting the music (all Celtic, and with a link to the Two Lochs area), produced a list of possible tracks/artistes, and approached the artistes for agreement in principle, before formally seeking permission from their record companies. Twenty tracks were chosen, and then began the mammoth task of applying for a MCPS licence. Local artist Lynn Bennett-Mackenzie kindly donated a painting for the cover image and Anne and Alex prepared the sleeve notes and cover design. Copies of the CD were ready in time for the 5th Birthday, and are on sale in local shops, in record shops in Inverness and Portree and online via our website or through CD Baby. 2000 copies were produced, and should generate some much-needed income. The next venture for the Fundraisers will be the 2008 Hogmanay party. The group has also obtained a lottery licence and in 2009 plans to use this to generate further income.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership has increased somewhat over the year, with 17 new memberships (mostly corporate or family memberships, each representing two or more people) and only two non-renewals. Last year we anticipated an increase in membership charges this year, but on considering this afresh in the light of current circumstances, the committee recommended keeping to the same levels for another year, and the Board has endorsed this. Instead we hope to increase membership numbers significantly, aiming to reach 200, or even 300 memberships by the next AGM.

AND FINALLY...

As always, I would urge anyone with ideas for new programmes to get in touch – we have seen new ideas come on air this year, and have a few more ideas in the pipeline. And of course it always helps if the ideas come complete with volunteers to make them happen! So please don't hesitate to step forward if you think you could join us or take on a new role in these areas.

Thank you for reading my report on 2007/8. Of course, I haven't had room to mention everyone who has supported our activities through the year, but as always our sincere thanks go out to everyone who has given us help, financial support and encouragement to continue to make Two Lochs Radio a local service of real value in which we can all take real pride.

Alex Gray
Chairman