

Ballads & Blethers

Dates: September 26th – October 2nd 2009

Summary

[Ballad (n): A song or poem that tells a story.

[Blether (vb): To talk (often of frivolous matters)]

Singing and storytelling often feature highly at Camas. This week there will be the opportunity to enjoy, learn and share songs and stories of Mull, Iona and further afield. A light hearted programme with time spent out and about exploring the local area as well as cooryin' in around our wood burning stove.

[Coorie (vb): to come closer, snuggle]

Led by two residents of the Ross of Mull: Jan Sutch Pickard , a member of both the Iona Community and the Scottish Storytelling Network , and Gillian Cummins, a former Iona Community Musician.



Details

Storytelling and music are essential parts of our social lives, in whatever format they come. Whether in films, TV or gossip in the coffee shop – stories fill our leisure time. Music is often in the background everywhere we go, and often in the foreground during the evenings as we relax in bars, at concerts, or simply with the radio or a CD on.

But taking part in these activities individually is rarer. When did you last hear a spell-binding story told; or tell one yourself? When did you last sing out loud with other people? Our gut reaction is: “Oh, I don't sing!” or “I don't know any stories!”. Camas is a very safe place to listen, learn and teach our stories and songs in this light-hearted programme. There will also be time to explore the local area and plenty of time to just chat over food or find some time on your own.

Storytelling

Modern day stories are now often told visually in films and TV, but also through radio shows, audio books, and through songs (ballads). The written story is everywhere as well - but the live spoken story is a part of our heritage that is fading slowly, becoming 'just for kids' (ghost stories round the campfire, bedtime stories). However, we do it more than we know; in the pub, coffee shop and over dinner - storytelling happens when the story is told person to person, live, without print or technology. Storytelling is a unique human skill and is one of our oldest art-forms. Done well, it can be spell-binding.

Jan Sutch Pickard is a local storyteller, collecting stories from near and far and passing them on; keeping them alive. She says “I love to tell stories because I love to listen to them!”.

Music

Background music fills almost every aspect of our lives. Many people like to have music or radio on while they work or relax and the music industry is worth millions thanks to the fact that humans like to listen to and make pleasing harmonic vibrations in the air.

However, even though music is everywhere we go, most people don't take part in active music-making on any regular basis. Outside church, football matches, and karaoke nights, singing is regarded as something that only the 'professionals' can or should do. Here at Camas most weeks we see the same thing; people arrive with that notion that 'singing is not what we do'. But when the daylight fades and you're sitting round the fire, music comes naturally and is often an unexpected highlight of a stay at Camas. We don't plan it, but it happens! Besides unexpectedly building community, music has been used to tell stories for centuries, with or without words. It has been used to teach, challenge, inspire, cajole, lament, mourn, praise, create laughter, lift hearts, drive away the dark, bring the rain, welcome the sun, and express almost every aspect of human emotion.

Gillian Cummins, now living locally on Mull, has a background in music education, working in Cumbria, London and some places in between from time to time! She has a particular interest in nurturing musicianship through singing and movement. From January 2006 to October 2007, Gillian was resident musician for the Iona Community.



Things you should know before you come

Camas is based in old quarrymen's houses at a secluded bay on the Island of Mull. The Camas road end is reached approximately 2 miles before Fionnphort (location of the Iona ferry); however there is no vehicle access to Camas itself, which is reached by a walk of about 20 – 30 minutes (1½ miles) across a moorland track. This lends itself to a sense of isolation, adventure and an appreciation of the simpler things in life.

- All Camas staff members live at the centre; our working hours are from breakfast (usually 8.30am) to 10pm and someone is always reachable in an emergency.
- Staff take it in turns to cook and we also eat all meals with the guests who are staying at the centre.
- The food at Camas is vegetarian – please let us know of any special dietary needs in advance.
- Camas has 6 bunk rooms, each sleeping from 4-8 people, to a total of 28. Sleeping bags are essential (but we do have spares if necessary).
- Both staff and guests at Camas take part in daily chores, which are done in teams by rota. They include tasks such as washing up, cleaning toilets, cutting firewood and helping with the garden.
- The days at Camas are framed by morning and evening reflections. These are generally led by the Camas staff, and focus sometimes on people's experiences at Camas and sometimes on wider experiences or on issues of social justice (such as Fairtrade). Everyone is invited to attend reflections and to participate as fully as they wish.

Cost and Booking

£210 (inc. VAT at 15%) for 6 nights (Saturday – Friday morning) including all food, accommodation and activities. Activities with external providers (e.g. fishing trips, ferry crossings) may cost extra.

For bookings and more information contact:

tel: 01681 700404. e-mail: camas.bookings@iona.org.uk

Camas Centre, Ardfenaig, Bunessan, Isle of Mull, PA67 6DX, Scotland, UK.

The Iona Community is a charity registered in Scotland No SC003794

www.iona.org.uk