

Scotland's Coastal Archaeology and the Problem of Erosion (SCAPE)

The organisation

SCAPE is a charity that was established in 2000. The initial funding for establishing the organisation was provided by Historic Scotland and staff employed by the University of St Andrews work with SCAPE. SCAPE has managed Scotland's programme of archaeological coastal zone assessment surveys and provides information, data, evidence and advice to local managers and national organisations about the coastal archaeological resource.

The charitable aims of SCAPE are to raise awareness and provide opportunities for participation and education regarding the history, archaeology and past environments of the coastal zone of Scotland.

Currently there are four members of staff, and the manager has been in place since the organisation was established, while one project office has seven years' experience and the other three years. It's a flat organisation and everyone has the opportunity to do a variety of tasks and lead on different aspects of projects.

Types of Volunteering



Board of Directors – selected from leading experts in their field, the 12 directors volunteer their time and meet 3 times a year. They provide advice, support and help through networks.

SCAPE's major current project is Scotland's Coastal Heritage at Risk Project (SCHARP). It has been running since 2012, and will finish in 2017. From September 2012 until the end of December 2015, there have been 1058

volunteers involved. The project consists of two main activities:

- Coastal Surveys – Volunteers are provided with access to a database of coastal archaeological sites and carry out condition surveys. They then complete a form which they submit along with photographs.
- Community Projects – Communities or individuals identify a site being damaged due to coastal erosion and nominate it for action. According to Project Manager, Joanna Hambly, "In the 14 projects we've supported, volunteers do a very wide range of activities". This includes co-ordinating activities, fundraising, holding open days, helping design interpretation, and undertaking excavations and surveys. The projects are defined by the local community and in all cases involve a local voluntary co-ordinator. As Joanna says, the co-ordinator "will organise venues and get the word out about the project. SCAPE takes responsibility for project management, including obtaining necessary permissions, insurance, risk assessment and health and safety, and manages the post-excavation works for excavations."

Before SCHARP, SCAPE's main delivery project was Shorewatch - and this evolved into SCHARP. Some of SCAPE's community projects keep their volunteers on a pretty long term basis. For example, a community research and excavation project at Brora carried on for 5 years. "We recently visited the site at Brora and 15 people joined us for a walk on site. They would like to volunteer to do more here. It's these people who inspire us. The group had contacted us as there has been more of the site eroding and they are our eyes on the ground."

Innovative opportunities

Another project example involves a series of caves near East Wemyss, Fife that contain Pictish carvings. These are very vulnerable to erosion and vandalism.

Save the Wemyss Ancient Caves Society (SWACS) have existed since 1987. They look after the caves and raise awareness of them through



organised cave tours and the local visitor centre that they manage. However they wanted to do something more to address and highlight the erosion at this vulnerable site. Joanna says, "We've been working with them for the last 3 years to make a digital record of the caves so they can present a virtual Wemyss cave online allowing people to find out more. SWACS draw in local support for the project and volunteers have worked alongside specialists. Volunteers have been trained in and carried out specialist photographic recording (RTI). They have also been making videos to embed into the virtual caves. This includes a film that dramatises the history of research at the caves, showing the Victorian antiquarians who first recorded the carvings. Local stories about the caves have also been recorded."

See more: www.4dwemysscaves.org

Change in demand

SCHARP has been running for the last 3 years. "It should have ended this year but there is still great demand and we have been able to extend the project. We are thinking now about how we maintain this level of activity beyond the end of the project to fulfil the interest and need for these kinds of volunteering opportunities in archaeology."

Critical Success Factors

To develop and sustain a network of volunteer surveyors, there needs to be a framework which enables that to happen. SCAPE's experience is that:

- Personal contact leads to a high level of volunteer involvement. This includes training events, regular field trips and being available for questions, help and support.

- Volunteers appreciate feedback and the fact that their submitted surveys are moderated, published on-line and the information they collect is **used** to improve base line data and ultimately management.
- Projects really depend upon local people on the ground, and successful projects have great local coordination.
- When projects are suggested, we try to determine how much local support there will be, and use local networks. We have found that word of mouth is really important.
- Community councils and local heritage and archaeology societies are vital.

Benefits of involving volunteers



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Joanna says, “Involving volunteers is our raison d’etre as an organisation – that’s what we do!” There are only 4 people in St Andrews, but the organisation deals with sites around Scotland. Although staff have a good knowledge of the larger picture, they are reliant on getting detailed information about specific areas at the local level. Local people provide good information about changes to sites and the local value of heritage.

Project volunteers – Joanna says, “For volunteers, the fact that specialists are interested in something in their local area helps shows that there’s value in it - people feel that it must be important. People find the projects enjoyable and fun. ” She adds, “People like the fact that they’re contributing to a research project; that what they’re doing is useful. They get lots of training and support and the information provided is used to prioritise future work.”

Challenges of involving volunteers

The main challenge identified was one of capacity. “There are a small number of us and we work long hours. Often in the summer we’re working every weekend. It’s not simply a funding issue, as we designed the project; but working with volunteers takes time to do it well. Our audiences are incredibly diverse in terms of their experience in archaeology and volunteering and we have to be able to communicate with everyone.”

Future of volunteering

SCAPE provides the support and structure to respond to project requests. Through working with volunteers, SCHARP has achieved a scale of data collection over a short time scale that would not have been possible within the staff resources of SCAPE. The team now want to take the lessons learned from the project further by embedding volunteers in the heart of doing research.

“We have lots of involvement with Historic Environment Scotland and work closely with them. Their current strategy is focused on participation and involvement. The intention is there and now we need to put it into practice. Projects will have to be funded in order to see that happen.”

Support needs

The main support need identified was the need for more security of funding longer term. “The SCHARP funding initially was for 3 years, which was good - but the challenge is how to sustain capacity between funded projects. Currently it is difficult to obtain funding for involving volunteers without it being tied to a specific project.”

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