

PRESS RELEASE. Embargo till Thursday 25th May 2006

HI-TECH TALES, MAGIC CIRCLES AND A SENSE OF PLACE

HEBRIDEAN BEACHWALK IS A WORLD FIRST

STORIES from the past told in a wild and beautiful landscape through brand-new media will be available at Uig Beach on Lewis from later this summer. Visitors to Uig's Traighe Mor, one of the most beautiful beaches in the Outer Hebrides, can pick up a hand-held ipaq at the community shop and take themselves on an adventure that spans the centuries.

Visitors are free to choose their own walking routes and global-satellite-positioning tracks their progress around the bay. The area has been mapped as a series of "magic-circles" and when the visitor enters these circles the ipaq delivers tales and songs that are relevant to that specific location.

This wealth of tales spans the area's history back to the Iron Age and features the Bornais Broch, local Fenian legends, the origin of the Brahan Seer's stone, the 19th century evangelical revival, Uig's strong connection with the Napoleonic Wars and the discovery of the Lewis Chessmen. To walk the beach and explore all six story circles will take about two hours.

The narration is by renowned storyteller Dr Finlay MacLeod and the singers include Ishbel MacAskill and Mary Smith. The stories are available in both English and Gaelic and other language versions are planned for the future.

The project was created by the Gaelic arts agency, Proiseact Nan Ealan (PNE), and is the first of its kind. It was developed in collaboration with American researchers Alison Wood and Brendan Donovan from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Media Lab Europe and is already attracting international interest.

PNE Director, Malcolm Maclean, said: "The Hebridean landscape is not only spectacularly scenic but immensely rich in stories and songs that are rapidly disappearing from local memory. This new media enables us to experience these stories at the actual spot where the events took place and in even the most remote locations. It opens up new ways of understanding and enjoying landscape, legends and history and we are confident people will be overwhelmed by what a marvellous tour this provides."

Project Evaluator, Dr Neil Finlayson, said: "The project demonstrates that PNE is a highly innovative organisation willing to take considered risks, extend the reach of the Gaelic arts into new and exciting areas, and provide a great Hebridean exemplar for the potential of cross-disciplinary research. Funders are to be congratulated for giving them the means to do so." These enlightened funders were Leader +; Highlands & Islands Enterprise; Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Seirbheis na Meadhanan Gaidhlig.

The ipaqs will be gifted to the Uig community at a presentation/ demonstration ceremony on Thursday, May 25. Uig lies on the west coast of Lewis 30 miles from Stornoway and transport will be available through PNE. ENDS

For further information and/or transport assistance contact:

Moira Maclean, PNE	01851 704493
Malcolm Maclean, Director, PNE	01851 704493
Chrisella Ross, Gaelic Storytelling Project, PNE	01851 704493

Notes to editors

PNE aims to research, develop and promote the Scottish Gaelic arts. PNE views the Gaelic arts as central to Gaelic language maintenance and regeneration and the promotion of the Gaelic language and culture is our primary aim. PNE fulfill a dual function as both an arts production company and as leady-body for the gaelic arts sector. URL : www.gaelic-arts.com

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Proiseact nan Ealan, 10 Shell Street, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis, HS1 2BS

Tel : 01851 704493 Fax : 01851 704734 E-mail : pne@gaelic-arts.com