



**Foyle Rowing Club
Moville
Co. Donegal**

25/07/2011

***Final Report on the
Colmcille Challenge
9th/10th July 2011***



Comhshaol, Pobal agus Rialtas Áitiúil
Environment, Community and Local Government





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To Whom It May Concern:

The Colmcille Challenge event took place on the weekend of the 9th/10th July 2011. This was the culmination of months of training and preparation for the rowing challenge, and also of months of planning and preparation for the land events.

Following the application process, Foyle Rowing Club was offered funding 75% of the €20,000 applied for to stage the inaugural Colmcille Challenge. The club wanted to make contact with like minded rowers on the island of Islay and then to row across the North Channel from Islay to Inishowen.

Foyle Rowing Club had already investigated what rowing boats would be capable of crossing this stretch of water, and had procured a Celtic Longboat from its own resources. However, the club felt that in order to undertake the challenge, it needed another Longboat. This would allow two teams from the club take part, numbering twenty rowers in total, plus standbys, and while this would require greater input from the club membership, it was felt that this was the critical minimum needed to sustain interest in the long term training and preparation that would be needed, and also to assist in organising the land events. This would also have the effect of increasing the chances of success while also drawing more people in to participate in organising the land based events that would run on the weekend of the Challenge. Having more people involved would also improve the reach and spectacle of the event.

The funding application was prepared and a letter of offer issued. The main part of the funding was taken up with procuring and delivery of a second Longboat and spare equipment which was vital in a long distance row. The balance of the funding was for land based events, a festival to celebrate the hoped for successful completion of the Colmcille Challenge. In tandem with this, a Festival of the Sea was organised on Islay. As part of the preparation, a group from the Foyle Rowing Club went to Islay in April 2011 on a Pre-development visit, funded by Inishowen Development Partnership.

The balance of the funding allowed for the provision of a marquee, sanitary facilities, advertising, publicity, band, etc. for the homecoming festival. The committee worked together to ensure that all the preparatory work was done. Flyers, brochures, posters and hoardings were organised. A location was organised for the marquee, a band was booked, and various services were procured. Foyle Rowing Club was proactive in promoting the event, and featured on a televised item on TG4, as well as on numerous radio interviews. There were also many newspaper features. John Hume agreed to be the patron for the event, and Brian Friel wrote a piece about the club for inclusion on our brochure.

The marquee was set up on the grounds of St. Colmcille's Primary School in Greencastle, which is adjacent to all the facilities of the village. There was a full programme of events organised, beginning with Traditional music on the Saturday evening of the return of the rowers, and ending with a dance in the marquee on the Sunday night. The marquee was decorated looked attractive and inviting to anyone passing.

Colmcille Challenge Patrons
John Hume
Brian Friel

Foyle Rowing Club enlisted the help of many supporters for this event, and without them the event would not have been possible. Members of local sub-aqua clubs gave their time and their boats as support vessels and local boats and trawlers helped with transporting the rowing boats and teams, as well as acting as support vessels during the row. Members of the Inishowen Tradition Music Project travelled to Islay along with members of Merville Boat Club in five yachts on the 8th July and took part in the sister Festival of the Sea.

Foyle Rowing Club members travelled to Islay on the 8th July, and enjoyed the festivities there. The Colmcille Challenge took place on 9th July. Two Islay teams in traditional type Greencastle yawls, left at 3 am, Foyle Rowing Club women's team left at 5 am and the men's team left at 6 am. Conditions were initially good, then somewhat choppy. Foyle Rowing Club's men's team arrived back in Greencastle at 1.45 pm, in a tremendous time of 7 hours 45 minutes. The Islay boats came in shortly afterwards, taking just over 11 hours for the crossing. The Foyle Rowing Club women's team arrived at 3.45 pm having taken 10 hours and 45 minutes. All teams were met by a flotilla of boats, and supporters lined the entrance to Greencastle and met them on the slipway. Boats in the harbour and on sea hooted their horns as the rowers arrived. (A car with a loud hailer had kept onlookers informed of the boats' progress.)

Festivities followed as organised. (See programme) following the provision of food to the participating teams, there was traditional music in the marquee. All team members and support crews and musicians from Islay and Foyle Rowing Club were presented with specially commissioned pieces Merville Pottery as well as some specially labelled miniature bottles of Tyrconnell Whiskey. On Sunday 10th July, all the advertised activities took place, nature walks, history walks, and sea safety talk. A very successful Craft Fair took place in the marquee, and this turned into a well supported and sociable event with teas available and comfortable seating allowing people to sit and chat. A beautiful cake, made by Lynda O'Doherty and featuring recognisable models of the rowers was a centre piece and talking point at the Craft Fair. The Colmcille Challenge event finished with a celebration dance in the Marquee.

Foyle Rowing Club has received tremendous support for this venture and in the weeks since the event it has also received tremendous positive feedback. The successful completion of the challenge and the very positive reception accorded to the rowing teams contributed to giving the festival a very upbeat start, and this continued throughout the weekend. The event received huge support for many parts of the local community, who helped by offering time, boats, and financial help. Being a small club, Foyle Rowing Club had to raise the 25% of the funding needed and did this by appeals to businesses and to individuals locally and further afield. The event required and generated community spirit, and it was heartening to see this spirit and to have it on view to our friends from Islay.

Overall the Colmcille Challenge was a very successful event. Its focus, the rowing challenge across the North Channel, was completed by all participating teams. This involved support and input for local communities both in Scotland and Ireland, and the Colmcille Challenge Festival ran to plan and was enjoyed by all who attended. The co-operation and involvement of our sister community on Islay enriched the experience for all involved. The event crossed boundaries and joined two communities and we hope that we can build on this excellent start. Foyle Rowing Club members have learnt a lot about making contacts, and organising events, but they have also learnt about commitment and the importance of seeing a project through to its conclusion. While this project may be over, we hope that it will be the foundation for future collaboration, and it has increased our skills for dealing with future projects, while at the same time highlighting some of the pitfalls.

Foyle Rowing Club is very appreciative of the support and assistance of Inishowen Development Partnership, without whom none of this would have happened.

Colmcille Challenge Patrons

John Hume

Brian Friel