

Scottish Stone Liaison Group

NEWSLETTER

Indigenous Materials Project Team

Issue No. 4 Winter 2002

First Scottish slate quarried for almost 50 years



During the week beginning the 19th September the first blocks of Scottish slate for some 50 years were extracted from the Khartoum Quarry, Ballachulish.

The work was undertaken by a slate producing company using pneumatic drills, diamond saw cutting and finally freeing the blocks by the use of black powder charges. The blocks (see above) were then transported to the company's production sheds to be riven into slate.

Scottish Stone Liaison Group, having within seven months of its formation in 2000, secured the permission of all parties that had an interest in this proposal - not least the Ballachulish and Glencoe Community Council - also liaised with other interested bodies included the mineral rights

The planned extraction exercise was scheduled for the Spring of 2001 but the outbreak of the Foot & Mouth Disease resulted in the entire project being placed "on hold" and only resurrected in 2002 when the commercial programme of the extractor meant that September was the first possible date.

Media interest

The extraction programme generated considerable media interest with BBC TV Scotland covering the issue "LIVE" on both its Scottish lunchtime and evening broadcasts with radio coverage in its evening programme. Newspapers, both local and national, reported on this development.

Community Council

holder, the landowner, SEPA and SNH to enable the test be undertaken. Financial support from Lochaber Enterprise and the Highland Council underpinned finance made available from Historic Scotland which enabled the test to proceed.

However "The best-laid schemes..."

The local Ballachulish & Glencoe Community Council, whilst having agreed to the test extraction, is naturally concerned at the possible outcome of these tests. A delegation, lead by its Convener Mr I Brown, paid two visits to the site towards the end of the week to view the work undertaken.

Weather? - just for the record the sun shone for the entire week beginning 19th September 2002!



October '02

On the 23rd October, at the premises of the company that undertook the test extraction, the slate block was riven into slate (see above) and samples of the slate secured were then provided to the University of Paisley for weather testing and analysis by Dr Joan Walsh, author of the "Scottish Slate Quarries" (Historic Scotland's "Technical Advice Note 23").

It is anticipated that the results of these tests will not be available until March 2003 and at that time a detailed report on the entire exercise will be presented to the three funding bodies and to the Community Council.

The SSLG Chief Executive will seek to meet with the Community Council to present the findings of the research and discuss the issues.

Whilst this exercise has been undertaken it has to be recognised that this test slate material was extracted from a number of blocks secured from one area of a disused quarry, of which it was not possible to secure any detailed factual information. It follows that the actual analysis will be based on that limited sample.

However it may be able to determine if the material secured has any value and that is the object of the exercise.

Hills of Foudland

At the same time as the above exercise has progressed the Indigenous Materials Project Team has sought to develop the other options available.

Working from the aforementioned TAN 23 two sorties have been carried out in the Foudland Slate hills and an area identified upon which further exploration is being planned.

Scotlands "Crowning Glory"

The SSLG Chief Executive addressed the Historic Scotland Seminar held in the lecture theatre at the SCOTBUILD exhibition in Glasgow (6th Nov).

Mr McKinney drew attention to the magnificent built heritage that Scotland enjoys and stressed the importance of ensuring that it is maintained by this generation, the current custodians, in the appropriate manner. The developments of both

Slate is certainly available but the manner of working these old quarries has led to a collapse of the working faces and this then presents difficulties when seeking to determine the most suitable area for core sampling. However a mapping exercise has been commissioned but the onset of the winter may well delay this exercise until Spring 2003.

the slate exercises were outlined at the meeting.

Sandstones

The SSLG has supported the development of new sandstone resources and has introduced those interested in quarrying such material to landowners upon whose land stone reserves are known to exist.

The Group has also supported the companies making application to open new quarries and, whilst recognising the concerns of communities, stresses that the impact on the local environment is invariably minimal. Unfortunately, the perception of the public is often "coloured" by the activities of open cast coal mining. Dimensional stone quarries continually have to address these negative factors.

The SSLG is active in examination of both Cullaloe (ideal replacement for Craigleith) and Carmyllie resources and is looking to assist with the developments of both or either.

In closing...

An angling sign, adjacent the Historic Scotland site at Lochmaben Castle, states that "*Permits must be purchased prior to fishing at local Post Office*".

This surely suggests a new interpretation of the phrase "catching the post".

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