

# Lairg Magazine

LAIRG & DISTRICT COMMUNITY INITIATIVES



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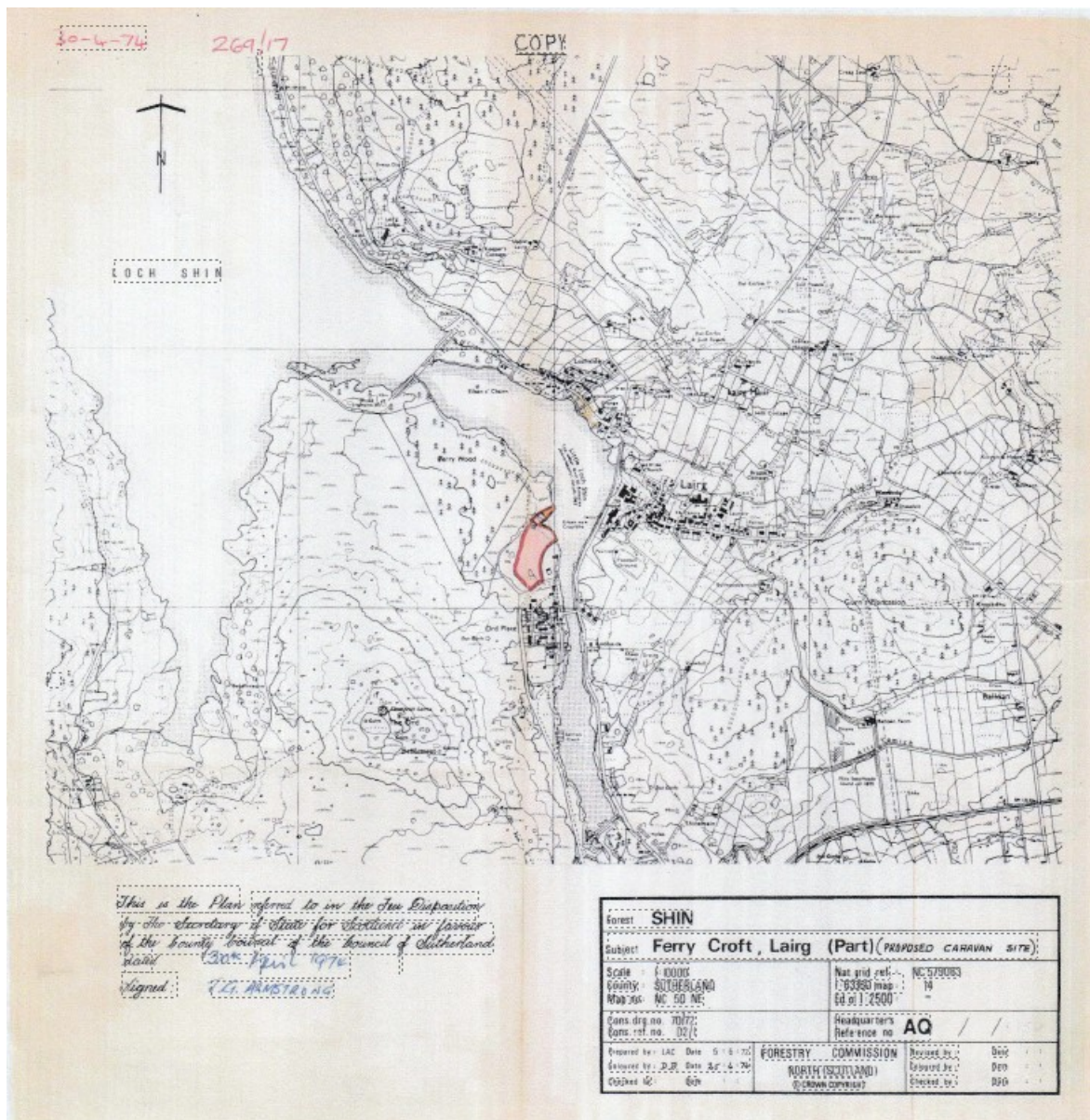
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## Ferrycroft - The Last 50 Years

Lairg & District Community Initiatives is delighted to announce that the installation of the new playpark at Ferrycroft is now complete. There will be an informal opening on the 10th October. The main purpose of this is to enable the school children (who helped to choose the equipment) to come and enjoy the park at the start of the October break.

To mark this moment, LDCI thought it might be of interest to reflect on some of the developments and events that have taken place in the Ferrycroft area over last 50 years or so. Photos and articles supplied by Alison Magee.

Thank you for reading this special issue of the Lairg Magazine! If you would like to submit anything to the magazine, please send it to: [projectofficer@lairginitiative.co.uk](mailto:projectofficer@lairginitiative.co.uk).  
Phone: 07961 372 427 or write to: Schoolhouse, Main Street, Lairg, IV27 4DD



The area shown in red on the map was acquired in April 1974 by the then Sutherland County Council from the Forestry Commission, with the intention of creating a caravan park. The copperplate writing – perhaps more reminiscent of the Victorians than the seventies – in the bottom left hand corner confirms the land transfer. The coloured section of the map shows that the land transferred included access to the loch.

In fact, the caravan site plan seems to have been delayed for many years after that, and it was the loch access that next proved important. The Army was looking for suitable community projects it could deliver, and in around 1990 the Community Council, when Leslie Goskirk was the chairman, suggested building a jetty. It is not clear if this was to replace an older one, but the Army agreed to the project, and over several days constructed the jetty that's still there today. Meanwhile, Sutherland District Council had finally drawn up plans for a caravan park for touring caravans only, and submitted a planning application. At virtually the same time, the Dunroamin site in Main Street was being developed, and the Council decided it didn't want to compete with a private business in the same community, and so did not go ahead at Ferrycroft.



The Army at the jetty

By spring 1992, a completely different proposal was put to a public meeting in Lairg. The plan was for an interpretive and visitor centre at Ferrycroft, displaying the area's potential attractions – the archaeology, the hydro scheme, as well as crofting and forestry. Designed in-house by the Council's architecture department, it brought together a strong partnership to emphasise what Lairg and district had to offer.

The richness of the archaeological history was a major theme, the Forestry Authority offered up to £25000 of investment, and a smaller contribution was promised by the Hydro Board. All of this materialised, not only in displays and audio-visual material, but outside the building as well, with the establishment of the forestry and archaeological trails.



Objective 1 monitoring committee letterhead



Tree planting at the site, with some of the original play equipment in the background.

Like several infrastructure projects in and around Lairg at the time, part of the costs were met by EU funding. Of course, the design also included accessible toilets, a space for tourist information, and a small café. The total build cost was £140000.

The 1990s also saw other development at the site. The playpark, with what was state-of-the-art equipment for its time, filled the area on either side of the Visitor Centre entrance path.

Lairg Rovers football club were carrying out a major community fundraising drive to provide changing rooms at the football pitch. This was the time when Sutherland District Council was being abolished, to be replaced by the Highland Council, and both Councils supported the project and contributed to the costs, as did the Sports Lottery Fund. However, it would probably never have seen the light of day without Lairg Rovers, and the changing rooms were successfully opened in September 1996 with a match against Highland League side Deveronvale.





As can be seen in the plaque above, the Visitor Centre itself was opened by Robert Maclennan MP in September 1994.



In the same year, Prince Charles (as he then was of course) visited, and in addition to touring the Centre, met representatives of Lairg's community groups.

The contribution made by EU funding was recognised a year later, when the EU Objective 1 monitoring committee were visiting and assessing projects the EU had supported. Not only did the whole Committee visit Ferrycroft, they actually held their formal Committee meeting there on 8<sup>th</sup> November 1995. The EU Social and Economic Committee followed this up with a visit five years later.

A very different group of visitors over Christmas and New Year 1996-97 were a party of children from Chernobyl, who spent a morning there as part of time spent in the Highlands designed to give them a holiday and time in an unpolluted environment.

If anyone has any photographs of the royal visit, or of the children from Chernobyl - we would love to publish them in the Lairg Magazine. Please send them to the contact details on the front page.



Alison Magee inside the EU parliament chamber, Brussels. The Visitor Centre was partly funded by the EU.

Over the years the displays inside the Centre have been expanded, the local history panels especially being a comprehensive and fascinating addition, which gave a truly local focus to the building. The other displays have been renewed as well, and outside, the trails continue to be popular, and water-based activities have increased. However, outside there has also been decline – the play equipment has gradually been removed piece by piece as it became unsafe, and not replaced. Some of the wooden sculptures are rotting.

A community consultation held by LDCI showed widespread support for the creation of a new playpark on the site, and although it's taken a bit longer than we would have liked, this has been achieved, with a lot of the new all-abilities equipment chosen by local children themselves. Everyone will have their own thoughts of course, but perhaps the new playpark could be a further step in Ferrycroft realising its fuller potential as a recreational hub in our area for local people and visitors alike.

