



FESTIVAL OF DEEP TIME

Orkney: Beside the Ocean of Time

The Project

The action of the sea is constantly reshaping and reducing the islands of Orkney, eroding the glacial till and the underlying sandstone. A continuous gnawing, but with moments of drama that thrust deep time into the full glare of consciousness.

At what temporal resolution should we view human activity? In order to understand the processes of change that shape the landforms under our feet and the resources upon which we depend, we need to think beyond the short-term time-horizons of rapid economic transactions and electoral cycles - the days, months or even years of human time. Yet, if we attempt to place human activity against the backdrop of Deep Time - the vast and gradual time-scale of Earth's geological history - the temporal span of a human life almost disappears. This presents us with a conceptual challenge. In attempting to understand how communities respond and adapt to landscape change, we need to understand the factors that shape attitudes and behaviour, and the present-day immediate context in which we narrate our lives. Yet understanding change also requires

a deeper time perspective, one that recognises long-term histories of human settlement, in the context of deep time geomorphological and ecological transformations. With short-term time horizons, the understanding of the places where we live can only be in relation to a single point in environmental history. If we expand our time horizons, and recognise environmental fluctuation, we will increase our collective resilience to landscape change. How, then, might thinking with a Deep Time perspective destabilise present-day certainties, and how might science, arts and humanities researchers work together to expand the time-depth of their work while remaining sensitive to the temporality of human experience?

The Project Team

This project brings together researchers from Palaeoecology, Social Anthropology, Archaeology, Literature, and Geology, working in collaboration with artist Anne Bevan and The Pier Arts Centre, to find innovative ways to investigate and represent time-depth in landscape, using Orkney as a model. The project team will develop and pilot interdisciplinary approaches that

seek to enable new insights into Orkney's rich literary, geological, palaeoenvironmental and archaeological heritage, which is coupled with contemporary concerns over coastal erosion and the political and economic importance of energy generation.

Anne Bevan is a visual artist and Curriculum Leader for Art & Design at Orkney College UHI. Her work involves landscape and the environment, in particular water, the sea, and the littoral zone.

Carina Fearnley is Lecturer in Science and Technology Studies at UCL. Her research is in hazard science, disaster management, and Science & Technology Studies.

Lourdes López-Merino is a Research Fellow at Brunel University. Her research focuses on the reconstruction of past relationships between humans and the environment.

Niamh Downing is Head of English & Writing at Falmouth University. Her research is in contemporary literature and its relationship to the environment.

Richard Irvine is a social anthropologist based in Liverpool and Cambridge. His current research focuses on the moral and temporal

dimensions of landscape change.

Tony Krus is a Research Associate in Chronological Modelling at the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre. He is an archaeologist and his work focuses on computational analysis.

The Pier Arts Centre in Stromness, Orkney is home to an important collection of British fine art donated by author and philanthropist Margaret Gardiner. The Pier has been instrumental in connecting the project with Orcadian artistic networks, and the local community.

The Festival Of Deep Time

The Festival is an invitation to join the project team for an exchange of ideas, stimulated by thinking with a Deep Time perspective. Events include talks, workshops, a field trip, storytelling evening, and an exhibition by Anne Bevan, including a new film work made in collaboration with Mark Jenkins. The exhibition and field trip are informed by the iterative process of walking the Stromness West Shore. All the events have been developed in dialogue between the research team, Anne Bevan, Carol Dunbar and colleagues at the Pier, and many other collaborators from Orkney, to whom we would like to extend our thanks.

Cover image: photograph
from *Walking the Sound*.
Courtesy of Anne Bevan.
www.annebevan.co.uk



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