

IRELAND

Local development

Location

Caherconnell

Programming period

2014 – 2020

Priority

P6 – Social inclusion & local
development

Measure

M19 – LEADER/CLLD

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 20 000
EAFRD 6 280
National/Regional 3 720
Private 10 000

Project duration

2017 – 2018

Project promoter

Burren Forts Ltd

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Website

<http://caherconnell.com/archaeology/>

LEADER funding enabled the purchase of specialist equipment for training students in the use of modern and sophisticated archaeological surveying techniques.

Summary

Caherconnell Archaeology Field School, located in the Burren in the west of Ireland, was originally established to uncover the history surrounding the Caherconnell Stone Fort. The Field School delivers National University of Ireland, Galway approved residential courses; providing students with archaeological education as well as a cultural introduction to the area and its communities.



The Field School wanted to introduce a new course on Archaeological Surveying to its offer and the LEADER funding enabled the purchase of specialist equipment for training students to use the most modern and sophisticated archaeological surveying techniques: providing them with world class transferrable skills.

Results

Field school employment levels were sustained. The field school supports 3 lecturers for the field school season, who produce annual dig reports and work on the preservation of the artefacts that are found

In the first year, 15 students took the new course in Archaeological Surveying and developed highly transferable archaeological surveying skills

Students on the new two week course in Archaeological Surveying generated approximately 210 bed nights for a local accommodation provider

A local transport provider was commissioned to provide transport for the students for the duration of the 2 week course

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ Diversifying from a farm business to a tourism and education business has been a big step and it has been necessary to acquire new and different skills.
- ❑ It is important for prospective applicants to carefully consider the complexity of the application forms and the length of the application process in relation to the size of grant, timescales and needs of a private venture. The process is time-consuming, even for small grants.

Context

The Caherconnell Stone Fort is located in the Burren, a region of environmental interest in the west of Ireland. The area has massive archaeological potential because of the well-preserved archaeological sites which are dotted across the landscape. The Caherconnell Archaeological Field School sits at the heart of the wider visitor attraction which hosts an Information & Visitors Centre, Café and Sheepdog Demonstrations. The unusual Medieval ring shaped Caherconnell Fort is situated on the founder of the field school and visitor centre's family farm.

Tourism is important to the area and the family saw potential to tap into this. After several years of development work, they opened the Caherconnell Fort Visitor Centre in 2003. However, the feasibility study for the Visitors Centre identified that there was a lack of historical knowledge surrounding the Caherconnell Fort itself, which established the need for the Field School.

Following various exploratory excavations, the Archaeological Field school was formally established in 2010 and has been vitally important in building up knowledge about the Fort; which in turn has greatly enhanced the tourism offer. The Field School has been key to providing income to support the costs of the archaeological excavations, helping to continue the research and uncover the history of the Fort.

The field school has a purpose-built teaching space and all courses are accredited by National University of Ireland, Galway, with students mostly coming from the USA and Canada. To maintain its international reputation and to attract future students, the Caherconnell Field School wanted to expand the package of courses offered to include Archaeological Surveying, which required state of the art technology. The project provides tuition in archaeological surveying, field survey, data processing, map production, artefact reporting, cataloguing, photography and digital processing. The equipment required included work tables, laptop computers, a data logger, a total station, a tripod, a prism, etc.

Objectives

- The project set out to ensure the continued success of the archaeological project at Caherconnell by enabling the expansion of the package of courses offered to include a new Archaeological Surveying Course.

- Through the purchase of a range of specialist archaeological equipment this course aims to tutor students in the use of some of the most modern and sophisticated archaeological surveying equipment available to archaeologists today.
- They aim to increase the use of digital surveying equipment in Caherconnell Archaeology Field School courses to support the development of highly transferable skills which can be used worldwide.

Activities

Feedback from past students and NUI Galway reinforced that there was a need for the use of new technologies to be included in the future course development.

Initial research was carried out by academic staff into which particular models of equipment would be the most suitable. As part of the course development and planning process, similar equipment was borrowed and used as part of a 'test course'. The test course ran the year prior to the final decisions being taken on which equipment to purchase. This helped not only to ensure that the equipment was appropriate, but also to trial the course and assess the level of interest in and demand for it.

Of the equipment purchased, the greatest expense was the acquisition of a data logger and 'total station'. The 'total station' measures angles and distances around the Fort in detail and processes the data. Used in conjunction with a data logger, the details can be saved and transferred for further processing.

The equipment has improved the academic provision overall as there is now a module on the basic elements and uses of the new equipment and technology in all courses. The new two-week course in Archaeological Surveying is specifically centred around the new equipment. As course leaders are in the field they are able to teach students, in a hands-on way, how to apply the technology for measuring, site layout and other technical needs.

The Field School markets their courses as high quality, fully-residential packages which include: accommodation, full catering, local transport, academic studies and cultural activities. All these services are provided by local businesses, providing important income and helping them to be more sustainable.

Main Results

- Increased the quality of the package of courses to better compete in a global market
- Field school employment levels have been sustained. The field school supports 3 lecturers for the field school season who produce annual dig reports and work on the preservation of artefacts that are found
- In the first year, 15 students took the new course in Archaeological Surveying and developed highly transferable archaeological surveying skills
- Students on the new two-week course in Archaeological Surveying generated approximately 210 bed nights for a local accommodation provider
- A local transport operator provided transport for the students for the duration of the 2 week course
- The course and its excavation fieldwork has contributed to the ongoing work of uncovering the unique history of the Caherconnell Fort

“The LEADER funding assisted the purchase of digital surveying equipment which is a valuable asset in teaching the skills of artefact reporting, cataloguing, illustration, photography, and digital processing. These skills will enable our students to work in archaeological sites throughout the world.”

John Davoren, Founder, Caherconnell Archaeology Field School

Key lessons

Diversifying from a farm business to a tourism and education business has been a big step and it has been necessary to acquire new and different skills. This contributor suggests that in order to help bridge this gap, accelerate business growth and increase the impact of the LEADER funding, some parallel business and marketing support and training would be useful.

Private businesses in the heritage field need to take into consideration National legislation. For example, in Ireland all archaeological finds must go to the National Museum for storage. If they were able to stay on site this would add great local value to the visitor centre and experience.

The visitor centre and the Field School complement each other and the archaeological work has led to the production of an information booklet with further audio visual displays planned on the new discoveries uncovered.

It is important for prospective applicants to carefully consider the complexity of the application forms and the length of the application process in relation to the size of grant, timescales and needs of a private venture. This project contributor would welcome changes to the application process to make it less onerous for smaller grants, taking into consideration an applicant's track record in terms of previous, successfully delivered projects

Additional sources of information

n/a