



festivals is the joy in not just sharing our culture, but in building it. Féisean are for passing along our traditions of language, story, music and dance.

The longest running féis is Nova Scotia is **Féis an Eilein**, in **Eilean Na Nollaig** (Christmas Island). The society here describes a féis as being “a community-based festival designed to promote the Gaelic language and culture of an area.” The first féis was held on the Isle of Barra, Scotland, in 1981, ten years before the movement crossed the water and took root in Cape Breton.

The Christmas Island community represents an incredible story of a little community chasing their dreams and not looking back. It has grown from a hall full of locals to a community embracing visitors, many of them regularly returning, from across Canada, the USA and Scotland. A children’s concert/bonfire, Pipers’ Ceilidh, a symposium on work collecting songs in the Christmas Island area, language classes and milling frolic, supper/open mic, and a family square dance. Children’s summer activities include Gaelic day camp where children learn about the history of the Gaels, and learn basic Gaelic words and phrases through activities and games, playing different kinds of sports and creating different forms of Gaelic art.

The féis movement in Scotland has grown incredibly in its 23-year history. There is now

an independent umbrella association, **Féisean nan Gàidheal**, which employs 12 staff, offers financial assistance and publishes resources, in addition to programming, for the almost 40 annual féisean. For this group, the definition of a féis is a “Gaelic arts tuition festival, mainly for young people ... each one community-led and tailored to local needs.” In 2002-2003, almost 4,000 young students attended féisean throughout Scotland, with another 7,000 children being exposed to a traveling theatre group supported by the organization.

The growth in féisean has been slower in Nova Scotia, but it is increasing. More than half a dozen féisean are planned for this summer, with new communities becoming involved. In the past year, the Nova Scotia

Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage hired Frances MacEachen, Queensville, as Cultural Officer responsible for Gaelic initiatives. She is working with groups throughout the province to encourage and support the féisean movement in Nova Scotia, as well as developing other Gaelic programming. This source of support is already having an influence, sparking new féisean and bringing féis organizers from various communities together on a regular basis to find common strengths and learn from each other’s experiences.

What is a Féis? Everything a community needs!

Jenna MacNeil is a freelance broadcaster and writer, residing in Sydney. A graduate of the University of King’s College School of Journalism, Jenna has worked with CBC Radio and Am Braighe.

BY JENNA MACNEIL

Féis. This might come as a surprise, but it rhymes with beige. Try it out. **Faysh. Glé mhath!** (That means, Very good! You pronounced it well.)

Now that you know how to say the word, what does it mean? According to my handy Gaelic-English dictionary (which you don’t really need to have nearby for a visit to Nova Scotia, but it can be an interesting source of information), a féis is a banquet or a feast. Around here, we generally translate it as a festival. Beyond that, the word can represent a enticing diversity of activities. It can be one afternoon or a whole week, it can involve Gaelic language and song, or other elements of our culture, such as dance, fiddle and piping. It can be geared for beginners or fluent speakers, focus on youth or all ages.

But what distinguishes féisean from other

Involving youth in their culture

BY MEAGHAN O’HANDLEY

Ciamar a tha thu? Có ás a tha thu? Dé’n Ct-ainm a th’oirbh? Agus Dé’n aois a tha thu? These are just some of the questions that many youth around Cape Breton can today answer. With Gaelic on the come-back from its period of silence, everyone knows that the perfect way to preserve the culture is to pass it down to the youth. Is mise Meaghan O’Handley agus tha mi á Boisdale, Ceap Breatann. I am heading into my third summer as a music and dance instructor with the community-based organization **Comunn Féis an Eilein**, in Christmas Island. I have the pleasure of teaching youth their culture through Gaelic youth day camps. It is enlightening seeing youth from 4 to 14 being active in the preservation of their heritage.

Through workshops, classes, and day camps, the youth have a better chance than ever to learn their culture. Where once Gaelic was discouraged in schools, today it is being taught from grades primary to twelve in schools all over the island. Community Gaelic Art, Gaelic Cultural Studies and Gaelic Language are some of the many courses offered to youth.

Growing up in the community of Boisdale, located on the St. Andrew’s Channel of the Bras d’Or Lakes, myself and many other dozens of other youth have been absorbing the Gaelic culture without even knowing it. Everyone loves a good square

dance but most don’t realize that it’s all part of their heritage. Being a student of Gaelic at St. F. X. University, I am excited for the day when I can teach Gaelic to youth in schools – the feeling you get when a five-year-old pulls on your sleeve and asks **Dé tha sin a’ciallachadh?** (What does that mean?) makes you feel that there’s hope for the future.

Without the language, all other elements such as music, art, dance and song would dissolve as well. For this reason, **Féis an Eilein** has created a new Gaelic day camp curriculum that will teach the history of the Scottish Gaels, including why and how they came over to Cape Breton. This way children can better understand the difficulties faced by their ancestors and see where their people originated. Through such activities, the youth learn Gaelic place names, simple words and everyday phrases. It’s the best way to reach the youth, especially the younger children. They are learning Gaelic while having fun, playing games, and interacting with other youth. Everyone knows the way to make learning fun for children is to keep them interested. This is the one reason for **Féis an Eilein** incorporating guests into the daily curriculum such as local pipers, storytellers, and weavers. The Gaelic spark has been lit in the youth and it won’t be blown out anytime soon if we have anything to do with it!

Tapadh leibh

Comunn Féis an Eilein presents Summer Events 2004

6th Annual Gaelic Concert Series - July 9-Aug 19

Bu Deònach Leam Tilleadh - I Would Willingly Return

JULY 9TH MOD NAM FIDHLEAREAN – THE FIDDLER’S COURT • Wilfred Prosper, Kimberly Fraser, Theresa & Marie MacLellan, Aggie MacLennan, Marianne Jewel, Beth MacNeil

JULY 16 TOGAIDH MI FONN – I’LL RAISE A TUNE • Featuring Songs composed by Christmas Island Bard Hugh F. MacKenzie, Iona Gaelic Singers, Traditional Milling Frolic Set, Jim Watson, The Boisdale Trio

JULY 23 BEOLACH • Wendy MacIsaac, Mairi Rankin, Ryan MacNeil, Patrick Gillis, Mac Morin, Matt Foulds & MC Jeff MacDonald

JULY 30 GA SMÙIDEADH – DRIVIN’ER • Youthful Dancers, Singers, Fiddlers & Pianists, Helen MacDonald, Dawn MacDonald Gillis, Kyle Gillis

AUGUST 13 Suas e! Up With It! • Mary Jane Lamond, Brenda Stubbert, Stephanie Wills, Tracey Bailey, Robert Deveau

AUGUST 17 CÉILIDH NAM PIOBAIREAN – THE PIPER’S CÉILIDH • Barry Shears, George Shears, Wally Ellison, Ian MacKinnon & MC Hector MacNeil

All concerts start at 8 pm, Followed by Tea and Lunch, and an Adult Square Dance.
Admissions: Concert \$8 / Concert and Dance \$10 / Dance only \$5.00

14th Annual Féis An Eilein Festival of the Island August 16th-21st

- Mon August 16 • Children’s Concert and Bonfire Beach Party
- Tues August 17 • Piper’s Céilidh, followed by a Céilidh (see above)
- Wed August 18 • Gaelic Activities Camp for Youth, Gaelic Language Session for Intermediate and Advanced Learners, John Lorne Campbell Symposium
- Thurs August 19 • Gaelic Language Session (cont’d), Milling Song Workshop, Traditional Milling Frolic, Céilidh to follow
- Fri August 20 • Workshops in Fiddle Gaelic Song, Mouth Music Salt Cod Supper, Céilidh Hour-Open Mike Show, Family Square Set Céilidh
- Sat August 21st • Workshops in Gaelic Language, Step-Dance, Square-Dance, and Gaelic Song – A Gaelic Story-Telling Session, Family Square Dance and Céilidh.

Events are open to all ages but minors must be accompanied by an adult.
Daily rates & Family rates are available.

Summer Music Program July 5th to August 13th – Individual Lessons in Beginner and Intermediate Fiddle and Piano, Group Lessons in Step/Square Dance. Tuesdays and Thursdays Gaelic Activities Camp for children

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