

THE SUTHERLAND LONGHOUSE PROJECT

ALLOWING THE MAPS TO TELL THEIR STORY

On 4th March, our Project workshop was led by Dr Elizabeth Ritchie. Participants were treated to two hours of studying maps and their stories. Once again, the workshop was full to capacity with scarcely time to pause for refreshments.

Dr Ritchie began by drawing attention to various ways in which maps are utilised, why people are so



interested in them and what they can tell us. She then observed that maps can be read like books and much information on the past gleaned from them.

Attendees then worked in four groups at four different work stations. Each station had its own selection of map types and books, from digital to paper, from local Dornoch Maps and General Roy's Survey maps and the Homes Survey of Assynt to Ordnance Survey and orienteering maps.

Guided by a series of questions to consider when studying the maps, the participants were soon immersed in the task, sharing ideas and thinking about, for example, how older maps compare with modern ones, how and what main features are portrayed, and what can be learnt from them about how people used the natural resources available.



Participants noted with interest the emphasis put on boundaries and resources on the older, pre-clearance maps. They deduced that the maps were probably made, or paid for, by wealthy land owners in order to deduce ways of making more



money. General Roy's detailed military maps, made after the second Culloden uprising, focussed

on the topography and open ground. Dr Ritchie pointed out that often what hadn't been recorded told the viewer as much as what had.

The group was impressed by the accuracy of the older maps when compared with the modern-day ones, marvelling at the skill it must have required to record them with very limited equipment.

After a short break it was time for participants to get creative. Using symbols and colour, they each sketched their own map of a place of importance



to them. This exercise illustrated clearly how the creation of maps is not always simple or straightforward; how focus changes

dependent on both intended use and on author.

The verdict was unanimous: Dr Ritchie had given an informative and enjoyable workshop, and many stayed afterwards to finish their maps!