



The Iona Community at Camas

History of the Iona Community and Camas

Camas is run by the Iona Community, an ecumenical Christian community committed to seeking peace and justice. The Camas Centre contributes to this vision by enhancing the lives of young people experiencing challenging and often disadvantaged lives, with a particular focus on the personal development of young people and on work with vulnerable groups.

The Iona Community's administrative headquarters are in Glasgow, and the mainland work and interests of the Community include work with young people, the Wild Goose Resource Group, a magazine (*Coracle*) and a publishing house (*Wild Goose Publications*)

Introduction to Camas

The Camas centre is situated on Mull about 3 miles from Iona and about 30 minutes walk across beautiful (and boggy!) moorland from the road end. This lends itself to a sense of isolation, adventure and an appreciation of the simpler things in life.

Originally, the row of granite cottages were used as accommodation for quarry workers supplying pink granite for local lighthouses, then, used by salmon fishermen, then becoming an adventure centre for the Iona community in the 1960s, to help young men from borstals (Young Offender Institutions) take a different perspective on their lives. In the 21st century Camas retains a focus on working with groups of young people and providing a safe place for youth groups (particularly from urban and inner city areas), schools, social work organisations, people with learning disabilities. The main season at Camas now runs from mid April to October, with guests generally arriving on a Saturday afternoon and leaving the following Friday morning. Camas can accommodate up to 28 guests at any one time. During a typical week the programmed activities on offer could include: kayaking, hill walking, coasteering, abseiling, swimming, art and crafts, raft building, gardening, games, a 'beach clean' in the local area and an overnight camping trip. Camas is registered with the Adventure Activities Licensing Service (AALS) as an outdoor centre; staff lead and assist with these activities according to their experience, qualifications and training. All Camas staff also take part in the domestic and maintenance tasks necessary to keep the centre running.

Work at Camas is all-embracing. Daily chores, outdoor activities, art, music, games and meals are all shared with our guests. It can be very demanding and deeply satisfying. A routine day might include cooking scones and porridge for breakfast, weeding in the garden, delivering a kayak session, listening to a young person's story with empathy and compassion and singing songs with the group until late evening. In addition the resident staff day might be organising work loads for volunteers, liaising with guest leaders or updating health and safety documents.

The Camas staff team (of up to 12 people) is made up of Resident Staff, employed for between one season and 3 years, and Volunteers, usually here for between 4 and 6 months.

All staff must embrace the nature of shared living in community. Inevitably, personal issues and difficulties will arise and being able to approach these difficulties in oneself and with others in a way that supports the community is essential.

It is a basic and healthy lifestyle, fun, joyful, tearful and enormously supportive through close team relationships. Accommodation is in single rooms within the cottages. All electricity is generated by a wind turbine and so, if there is no wind there is no hot water. Food is mostly vegetarian and, where possible, harvested from our garden.

Camas has an environmental ethos which is integral to all that we do. The John Muir Award is offered as part of many programmes. One particular focus for this is the organic garden and tree nursery and both staff and guests are encouraged to participate in environmental projects and gardening tasks.

Although very much a resource of the Iona Community, formal Christian worship is not regularly pursued at the centre. Instead, staff facilitate morning and evening “reflections” designed to engage staff and guests in contemplation about events of the day, themselves, the environment, past and futures. Camas takes heart from the beauty of creation, revealed in the wildlife, cliffs, crags and white sand beaches near to the centre.

Perhaps the most important aspect of our task here at Camas, and in some ways the most difficult to define, is that of providing welcome, hospitality and an experience of community living to the many different people who wander down the track to Camas. It is perhaps this, more than anything that makes working at Camas more than just a job; this task is not confined to programmed activities, it starts as soon as someone arrives at the top of the track and continues throughout their time at Camas. In practice, this can mean very long working days – starting with breakfast and finishing up by singing songs or telling stories around the fire in the evening. It is also what makes working at Camas so hugely rewarding and, often, great fun.

