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HERITAGE: Dozens of scholars will head to Gaeltacht to study ancient dialect

Gaelic is talk of town

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For The Whig-Standard

Lovers of all things Irish will return to Tamworth and Erinsville next week from places the world over to study their true mother tongue and celebrate their heritage.

All are headed to Gaeltacht, on 15 hectares of land in the centre of the early Irish-Canadian settlements in Stone Mills Township.

Dozens of Irish-Gaelic scholars, from beginners to those fluent in the ancient dialect, will attend classes all week. They start setting up their campsites Sunday and begin their studies the next day.

"We're also here to have a bit of fun, too," said organizer Aralt Mac Giolla Chainnigh. "We've grown from just organizing weekends eight years ago to full weeks in recent years.

"Now we have several wonderful events in our program that are open to the public at large.

Irish-Gaelic

■ The European Union recognized Irish-Gaelic as Ireland's official language in 2007.

■ The earliest written Irish records — Ogham Stones — have continuity with Irish-Gaelic and indicate the language goes back 9,000 years.

■ The language has only 18 letters

We want to give back because the neighbouring communities have been so helpful to us in the past."

On Thursday, Aug. 12, there will be a public performance by harpist and singer Una Flanagan at the Royal Canadian Legion's Tamworth branch, open to Gaeltacht participants and to the public for \$10.

An open house will be held on the site on Saturday, Aug. 14, from noon to 1:30 p.m., with lunch for \$2. Earlier that day, organizers will hold a crash course in Irish-Gaelic for beginners,

in its alphabet and assigns gender to nouns and other words. For example, the word for girl, Caitlin, is masculine.

■ Many of its letters sound nothing like they do in English, and the sounds frequently depend on a series of specific, complex written accents attached to the letters.

from 10 a.m. to noon.

Also that day, at St Patrick's School in Erinsville, there will be Irish folk dancing open to the public with music by Wild Canadian Geese in the Bog. The event starts at 8 p.m. and continues until midnight at a cost of \$10 for adults and \$5 for children.

The Gaeltacht, at 298 Gilmore Rd. in Tamworth, is the first officially designated and sanctioned Irish-Gaelic speaking area outside of Ireland.

Each day, participants will take classes and workshops beginning at 9 a.m. Evening activi-

ties will include singing Irish songs, telling age-old tales, playing musical instruments and folk dancing, including Ceili dancing and step dancing.

There will be afternoon workshops in creating stain glass, pottery, needlework and different artworks, all with an Irish flair.

"We are happy to be able to celebrate our history and culture and to be able to reach out and share it with others," said organizer Julie Bowes.

"People will be coming from Texas, Ireland, Ottawa, all parts of Canada and the north, and southern United States, all joining to learn and share a history and culture."

Historically, Erinsville was settled by Irish Catholics and Tamworth by Irish Protestants, but Gaeltacht organizers have said early settlers in both communities have always been close and cooperative with no religious friction.

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