

Pentland Post

May 2016

Registered Scottish
Charity Number
SCO35514



A Pentland Trig Point—see Ian Combe’s account of his 2 day walk round all eight of them on Page 4

The View from Scald Law

by David Pritchard

When the society was formed, the way in which it would develop was unknown. Four developments that perhaps are surprising are: tea and cakes days, litter picking, gardening and Woodlands School.

All charities require money to do good works, and we are no exception. Tea and cakes days at Harlaw Visitor Centre now provide us with over £1000 a year to spend on our various activities.



In the last two years we have hidden pumpkins, fairies and dinosaurs among the Harlaw trees to appeal to our younger Friends on these occasions.

Litter is a problem that can plague the appearance of the Pentlands. Experience has shown that not removing the litter seems to have the effect of encouraging people to leave even more! Most of us were surprised how much time the Natural Heritage Service (NHS) Rangers spent collecting litter. To enable the Rangers to do more useful tasks, we now do regular litter picks at Dreghorn Spur and Bonaly Country Park. Litter picking is not very glamorous work but recently Keep Scotland Beautiful identified Janet Clarke as Hero of the Month for her efforts over a long period of time. Fame came to Janet swiftly after this award: An article with a photo in the Evening News was followed by a piece on STV evening news.

In the recent past the garden at Harlaw Visitor Centre was done by the NHS rangers but with fewer rangers gardening was given a low priority. Through the guidance of Bob Paterson and a regular team of FoP volunteers a lovely garden has been created. It is gratifying to see folk enjoying their lunch in the garden in summer. Last year we had our first wedding in the garden!

Woodlands School is a secondary school in Currie for pupils with special educational needs. Several pupils are working towards the John Muir Award, which requires them, amongst other things, to help with the conservation of a suitable area. We help the pupils with this aspect of the award in the Pentlands on a weekly basis. All of us involved in this work find it very rewarding.

All of these developments rely on well-motivated, hard-working and cheerful volunteers, and we are fortunate in Friends of the Pentlands to have plenty of these. Take a bow, volunteers! You can be very proud of your achievements.

This page is dedicated to our tireless litter-pickers.



On the left, Janet Clark (R) receives the “Hero of the Month” award for February from Nicola Turner, Community Projects Officer of Keep Scotland Beautiful, Clean Up Scotland.

Editor’s note: Janet’s award has made me more aware of the litter problem, and I have been inspired to pick litter in my local area. It is satisfying to return home with the thought that I have made the world — ever so slightly — a better place!

This mattress was dumped immediately below a sign requesting “No Fly-tipping”

“We’ll try, Norman, but I don’t think it will fit into your black bag....”



For those who know **Ian Combe**, it will be no surprise that he would rise to the challenge of walking round the Pentlands' eight trig points. Here is his account.

A ROUND OF THE PENTLAND TRIG POINTS

5 & 6 April 2016, starting at Boston Cottage

Day 1: Seat Hill, Darlees Rig, Mendick Hill, Mount Maw.

Camp: 1.5 mls SE of West Cairn Hill, along the Ravendean Burn.

Day 2: West Cairn Hill, Scald Law, Marchbank, Allermuir, finishing at my house at Swanston.

This walk had been in my bucket list for some time and it was fun trying to work out the best route. I decided that this would be a leisurely journey, no race against the clock, and I wanted to travel as light as possible and solo. So a few days before I went out to pitch an old tent, in which I left the minimum of old gear including sleeping bag, food (haggis and tatties), gas and a little malt. My campsite was chosen for its peaceful location, therefore hidden from the Thieves Road path, availability of water, and my estimate that it was close to the halfway mark of my chosen route.

I enjoyed real Pentland weather, with hailstones and mist to keep me on my toes on the early wild sections on both days, but generally grand walking weather, with any wind mostly at my back, heavy rain showers intermittent at times then some warmish sun. It was to be a few days before fine examples of Pentland bog would dry out from my trusty boots.

The main wildlife encountered: meadow pipits, skylarks, buzzard, red grouse, curlews, lapwings, and three hares (near Marchbank).

I had views of Crane Loch, Harperrig, Westwater, Baddingsgill, Loganlea, Threipmuir, Bavelaw, Harlaw, Bonaly and Glencorse, with only Crosswood, Clubbiedean, and Torduff avoiding my gaze.

I did not meet any walkers on Day 1, and then on Day 2 I had reached the Bore Stane before another person appeared.

Ian Combe

Mendick Hill



Gardening at Harlaw and Hillend by Esmee Yuille

The gardening sessions at Harlaw have just begun. The team has high hopes that we can build on the excellent groundwork - forgive the pun - that that has gone before under the guidance of Bob Paterson who has regrettably had to discontinue as team leader due to severe knee problems.

We are, as all gardeners, hoping for good gardening weather so that we can expand on the planting already in place. The established borders are doing well, so mostly we will be concentrating on the fairly new herb and sensory beds. We are hoping for advice from Hamish Martin of “The Secret Herb Garden” and will use herbs from his vast stock to replace some of the herbs lost in the winter. In particular we will add sage, lavender, rosemary and thyme and perhaps some more unusual ones.

The sensory bed has some rogue plants which will be removed possibly to another part of the garden and once again we hope to supplement the established plants with others, such as stachys, lemon thyme and (perhaps a lovely thing for smell) pineapple sage.

The Steading garden is at the happy stage of looking good with just a regular clear up of the invasive species such as ground elder and thistles.

To all gardeners - best wishes for a good gardening year.

Harlaw Garden on a Spring Day



Meeting a Member:
Ronnie Dickson
walker, ornithologist, historian



Ronnie Dickson of Balerno is one of our founding members and proud of his low membership number (21). He is very enthusiastic about the Pentlands and our organisation. He and his friend, Robert Erskine (Member 24), are both in their 80s and have been tramping through the Pentlands together for 60 years. Their navigational aids have not moved with the times; they use map and compass, the map being an old “inch to the mile” one with height given in feet. “We have climbed all the Pentland hills over 1400 ft. high” says Ronnie with a chuckle, “except for Horse Law. We can’t find it. It could be one of several hummocks in the area.”

Ronnie and his friends are also keen birdwatchers, and regularly conduct surveys of visiting and resident birds on Threipmuir, Harlaw and Bavelaw Marshes on behalf of the British Trust of Ornithology.

As a prominent member of Currie and District Historical Society, Ronnie takes an interest in past events in our hills, and when we met in February, he was preparing an article on the 1943 Junkers 88 crash on Hare Hill.

The common bond in members of the Friends is a love of the hills, but it is fascinating to discover the variety of interests the hills can offer us.

Who can tell me of other hobbies they enjoy in the hills?

Spring Talk: Bumblebees of Edinburgh and the Pentland Hills

David Adamson of Edinburgh Natural History Society gave a talk to 40 members in Mortonhall Golf Club on 10th March. He told us how he first became interested in bumblebees after finding one up by the Borestone. We learned a great deal about these insects and where they may be seen in our hills. For example, David suggested that in June the Harlaw Wildlife Garden would be a good place to spot several species; the Early Bumblebee, perhaps, the Heath or the White-tailed. The Cuckoo Bumblebees, which use the nests of Carders, can also be seen in our hills. For any of us who want to learn more, we should look out for organised “bee-walks”, and for further information he recommends the book: “Field Guide to the Bumblebees of Great Britain and Ireland” by Edwards and Jenner, or membership of The Bumblebee Conservation Trust (BCT) or the Bees, Wasps, Ants Recording Society (BWARS).

We are very grateful to David for giving us such a fascinating talk, and made a donation to BCT to show our gratitude.

Photo Page

Another marker for the path from Kirknewton to Little Vantage is hammered into the ground by Ian and Dennis.



The plinth and sign which mark the end of The Pentland Way at Swanston, erected by Dennis Smith, Ian Combe and John Stirling.



Harperrig Reservoir by David Syme

I visited Harperrig on the 21st April, a day of bright sunshine and cool wind. First I took a look at our Centenary Hedge, now 2 years old and doing well. Local resident John Strachan fenced in most of the hedge and this has kept it safe from nibbling sheep. The commemorative plaque, too, is in good shape. I chatted with Lucy Strachan, who told me that her holiday let cottage was doing well, especially at Edinburgh Festival time. I could see that anyone who wanted peace and quiet after the bustle of the Festival would be delighted with such a remote location!



Part of the Centenary Hedge at Harperrig. By next winter it should provide a screen for drifting snow, and by next spring a habitat for small birds.

You can walk round the loch, but I drove to the West Cairns end of the reservoir. There is a car-park here, which offers an alternative to Little Vantage as a start point for a walk to Cauldstane Slap and East and West Cairn Hills. There is a fine view over the water, which is flanked by low moorland on both banks. Rowing boats lined the shore beyond the ruined shell of 15th Century Cairns Castle; two fishermen were setting out in one as I approached. I chatted to local farmer Graeme Hamilton. "There have been some good catches this year already, and last night the fish were feeding on surface flies; there was a great rise" he told me. "It's not too early to give it a try, but today there is a cold wind, and - you know what they say: 'When the wind is from the east, it brings no good to man nor beast'. These chaps will be lucky if they do well today."

The reservoir is stocked with brown trout, but anglers compete with cormorants and otters to catch them. Graeme does not fish; he is too busy running the farm. He told me that lambing was well underway, but the long weeks of damp had affected the health of his ewes, and he had lost several.

I walked up to the arboretum, noticing that the leaflet container was well-stocked, and that the trees were in good shape. Storm damage in the form of fallen trees in the area of Woodpecker Walk had missed our planted saplings. Sadly there was no sound or sight of woodpeckers.

I left Harperrig well-pleased with my visit. Granted, the weather had been wonderful, the water sparkling in the sunlight, but I made a note to come again. I will probably avoid a windy day, as there is not much shelter, but on a calm day it offers stunning views and pleasant walking.

Note: Tickets for a day's fishing are bought at Festival Stores, Kirknewton: £10 (£9 for OAP) to fish and £5 (£4.50 for OAP) to hire a rowing boat. Children under 16 can fish free if accompanying an adult.

Cairns Castle Bridge

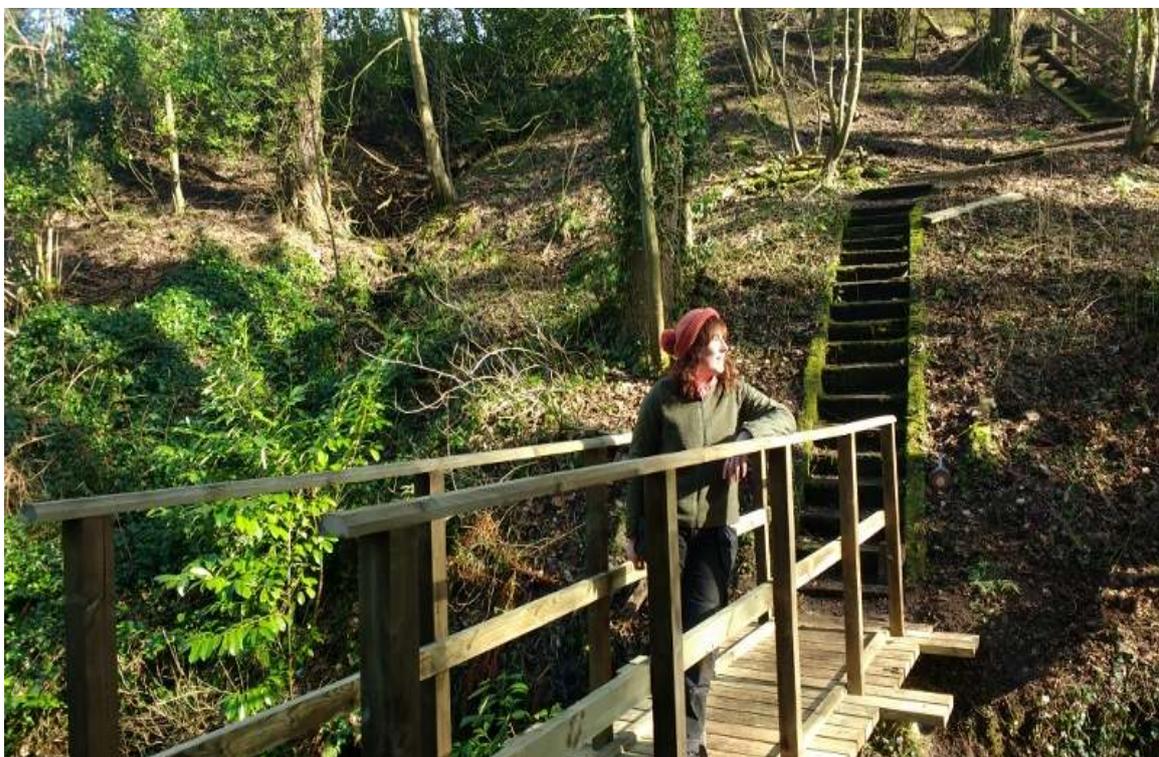


Poet's Glen Bridge by John Stirling

In late 2015 it was reported to the Water of Leith Trust that the upper bridge in Poet's Glen, above Currie in the foothills of the Pentlands, had collapsed.

Our Member Ian Combe, who volunteers with both the Friends of the Pentlands and the Water of Leith Trust, suggested that it might be a good idea for the two organisations to come together to seek the reconstruction of the bridge.

The new bridge would be built by Treeline of Baddingsgill, whilst our two organisations would seek funding for it. We were successful in raising the necessary funds, and we have to thank Balerno Ramblers, Currie Community Council, Currie and Balerno Round Table and a private donation.



Charlotte Neary of Water of Leith Trust poses on the new bridge

Snippets

Nest Boxes

With help from pupils of Edinburgh's Woodlands School, we have installed 32 boxes on trees in the Pentlands. These should provide homes for robins, sparrows, tree creepers, blue tits and great tits. We provided the wood and inmates of Saughton Prison made up the boxes. The response has been so positive that we are planning to make 30 more boxes; 10 for Woodlands School to use in their own grounds, and 20 to be given to children at Balerno Gala. We hope that the children will erect the boxes in their gardens and local area, and enjoy seeing them being used.

Badger Watching

We have been forced to stop the popular badger watching at Blinkbonny. Building development near the sett has forced the badgers to disperse – some over the A70 to the north of Currie – and we will have to wait until we find an alternative sett which can be observed without disturbing the badgers. Further information can be found at www.scottishbadgers.org.uk.

Programme of Walks

We have decided to cut back on our organised walks, as the take-up from members has been low. Over the last three years, Fiona Black has produced an excellent programme of varied and interesting walks. We will continue to offer some walks, for instance, the 3 Pentland Way walks this June (see page 12).

Deadlines

The deadline for submitting items for the October Pentland Post and for photographs for the 2017 calendar is 01 August 2016. The editor will be very grateful for all contributions.

Glencorse Water Project

STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) has produced a 3 minute video of this innovative project, which can be seen in the Education part of Scottish Water's website.

Diary Dates

Thurs 12th May

The Annual General Meeting in Merchiston Castle School (Main Building Old Library) at 1930 hrs

We are fortunate to have as our speaker after the AGM on 12th May Charlie Cumming of Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust. His topic will be: "The Pentland Path Project," and he will also talk on the work of the Trust.

Thurs 26th May and Fri 27th May Access for All Event

This event for people with mobility problems will be based at Threipmuir Car Park. Contact for volunteering for the above is the Events Organiser, Esmee Yuille. Email: the.yuilles@talktalk.net or telephone 0131 629 1736

Sat 28th May Balerno Gala Day, 1200 - 1600 hrs

We will have a stall showing the public what we do.

Wed 1st June, Thurs 9th June and Fri 10th June Pentland Way Inaugural Walks

Using either public transport or a mini-bus from appropriate car parks, the Pentland Way will be walked in three sections;

- Wednesday 1st June – Dunsyre to West Linton
- Thursday 9th June – West Linton to Flotterstone
- Friday 10th June – Flotterstone to Swanston.

Walks will be from 10.00 am to 3.00 pm approx. Booking and joining details will be published in April.

Sat 11th June "Whipman Play" at West Linton, 1800 - 2100 hrs

We will have a stall showing the public what we do.

Sat 25th June Tea and Cakes Day Harlaw Visitors Centre, 11.00 am to 4.00 pm

Open event, so no need to book. There will be children's activities in the garden. A not too demanding walk with an educational slant will be arranged.

As Editor, I wish to thank all who contributed to this edition of Pentland Post, and to John Stirling and Margaret Granger for proof-reading it. Contributions to the autumn edition are requested. The deadline is 01 August, and the address is davidsyme@hotmail.com.

David Syme