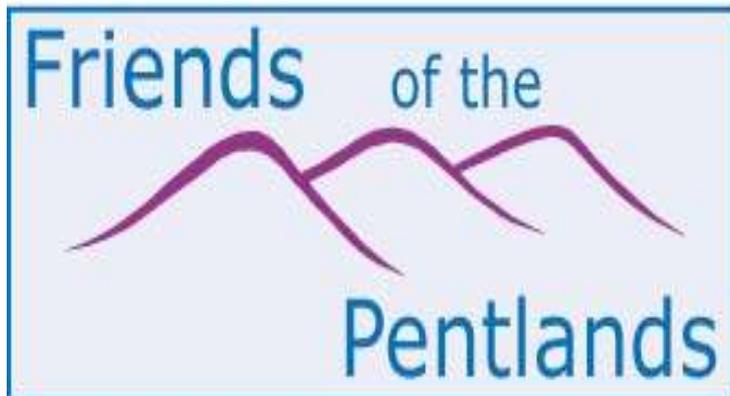


Pentland Post

May 2017



Friends of the Pentlands is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation.
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The Magnificent Eight volunteers stand proudly at their 'spilling'; work of weaving willow branches and anchoring them to combat erosion of the path at the Baddinsgill Burn in March. Good job, team!

View from Scald Law

by Thomas Huxley FRSB, FRZSS (Hon) , Our President

"I had to look up where Scald Law is as it is so many years since I walked in the Pentlands, but I suppose I must at least once have obtained the view from its summit. I am writing the history of the Countryside Commission for Scotland so am a bit pushed to think of something freshly written for Pentland Post, and hope that this extract from the draft book will suffice. The preceding paragraphs describes a study, in which the Director was involved, and was about the Torridon area, with a very different origin and structure to the Pentlands study."



Extract from draft book about history of the Countryside Commission for Scotland (CCS)

The CCS became involved in the Pentland Hills for very different reasons. When I lived in Edinburgh working for the Nature Conservancy I used to take one of my twin boys to spend his Saturdays looking after Icelandic ponies stabled in the Pentlands, while walking with the other twin up Caerketton Hill. From its summit the capital of Scotland was spread out below and it seemed right that something should be done to secure this uniquely important view, as well as the quiet glens and rounded hills stretching to the south. So, after I had joined the Commission and was looking for a project that might match the Torridon study, I approached a helpful civil servant in the Scottish Development Department, known through Study Group No 9, who quickly grasped the idea and set up what came to be called the Pentland Hills Technical Group and we had our first meeting on 7 April 1970. Of course the reasons for setting up the group were silent about views from Caerketton: more about the army planning to modernise its Castlelaw rifle range and the threatened encroachment of new building on the northern slopes. Nevertheless not everyone thought the study worthwhile; Jamie Stormonth Darling looked unconvinced when I approached NTS about a Conservation Agreement between the Trust and the owner of Caerketton and its neighbour Allermuir.

In due course the Group's report was published with a Foreword by the then Secretary of State Gordon Campbell, the CCS gave it its blessing but the Councils in the Borders refused to cooperate and so the designated Park covers only 45% of the Hills. However, the original idea for a designation covering the whole of the Pentland Hills was still being considered in 2015 when MSP Christine Graham promoted the Pentland Hills Regional Park Boundary Bill. The parliamentary committee said that there was little demand for expansion, and changing the boundaries *"would lead to an increased financial burden on councils, spreading available funding even more thinly."*

That there is a park at all I give credit to the CCS Chairman David Nickson who, in one afternoon, charged round the boundaries and secured agreement from the landowners for a park in the northern half of the hills. The Regional Park designation waited until this was approved by

Government following publication of the CCS report *A Park System for Scotland* and later legislation. Today, as local authorities are squeezed till they bleed, it is hugely to the credit of a group of enthusiasts that Friends of the Pentlands have such an active voluntary membership doing really good work on footpath maintenance, making gates and stiles, litter collection, tree planting and much more. The Friends are the best return on the work of the Pentland Hills Technical Group that one could hope for.

Poles in the Pentlands

What are trekking poles? Are they a fashion accessory? Are they necessary only on high mountains? The Pentlands are not big hills, so perhaps poles in our hills are out of place?

Twenty years ago the negative aspect of using poles was being mistaken for skiers who had lost their skis, or perhaps that you were a timid walker, or posing as one more at home on distant peaks.

Since those far-off days we have come to acknowledge that poles are useful on muddy or uneven terrain, at burn crossings and steep sections of a walk. They aid balance on windy days and in wintry conditions, and they give the user an upper body workout. They are also invaluable to a walker recovering from a lower limb or back injury, so they can be appropriate for the Pentlands.

Modern poles are light and sturdy. Most come in three telescopic sections and are easily shortened and attached to a day-sack, and speedily deployed. It is prudent to have a pair on the day-sack, as you would have a compass, First Aid kit and emergency blanket inside. You may walk for whole days without using them in the Pentlands, but if conditions are bad you might be very pleased to have them available. So yes, poles are recommended for walking in the Pentlands.

Where
are we?
Answer
on Page 12



Snippets

Help!

Few of us carry a First Aid manual on a hill walk, and fewer have all the First Aid skills that might come in handy. Red Cross have developed an app which should be on every walker's smartphone. Find it at redcross.org.uk/app, you just never know....

Friends in Strange Places

Our Chairman and Secretary are becoming "weel kent" figures in HM Prison at Saughton. Their ID cards are waiting for them when they visit.... The two Johns have a fruitful relationship with some of the inmates. The Friends acquire kestrel boxes, bat boxes, perches, juniper frames, all inexpensive and sturdily built from this captive workforce, and, it is interesting to note, most of the jobs are done by women prisoners.

Thanks for Good Work Well Done

Our volunteers turn up for duty all year, so the Board decided to recognise this. Work Force volunteers gathered in Juniper Green in December for mince pies and mulled wine, while the teams of the Tea and Cakes, Litter-picking and Gardening enjoyed tea and cakes at The Steading. Thanks to all for the hard work!

Fascinating Visit 9th March 2017

Some 20 members enjoyed a presentation by three leading figures of the Fourteen Incorporated Trades of Edinburgh. David Le Sueur, Deacon-Convenor (aka Third Citizen of Edinburgh), Ian Robertson, Boxmaster, and Henry Steuart Fotheringham, Historian, all talked enthusiastically to us about their organisation and showed us artefacts such as The Blue Blanket, a copy of the National Covenant and chairs, boxes and insignia of individual trades. Of interest also were details of Mary Erskine, who founded The Merchants Maidens' School, now Mary Erskine's and The Maidens' School in Chambers Street, "for the Daughters of Decayed Tradesmen". For those of us who thought we "knew" Edinburgh it was an uplifting experience. Our visit to the museum at Ashfield, 61 Melville Street was a rewarding experience, and our thanks go to the three gentlemen and to May Le Sueur for refreshments.

"Pentland Post" is issued twice-yearly to members and interested parties. The editor would be grateful to receive contributions from members on topics relevant to the readership, and would respect the writers' opinions, even if they are at variance with the views of the Board.



Wildwood Legacy Tree Planting at Swanston

8th March 2017

Martyn Baguley holds aloft a young oak tree as he talks to pupils of Pentland Primary School. The six pupils then planted 17 trees, 1 for each species in Martyn's book except for the threatened ash. Despite a cold wind the children worked with enthusiasm and promised to bring their families to admire "their" trees.

After the tree-planting a book launch was held in Swanston Golf Club. Martyn, who is a founder member of Friends, told us that in retirement he has been enjoying a second career as a writer. He took part in an excellent Creative Writing evening class for several years, and has been writing articles for magazines, mostly drawing on his wealthy experience in forestry. In the wake of Bob Paterson's book "The Pentland Way" Martyn offered to collate articles he had written into a book, profit from which would go to the Friends. Wildwood Legacy is an informative and enjoyable read. It addresses the relationship between man and each species; how man has used it, and what legends are attributed to it. In his speech Martyn acknowledged the enormous help he enjoyed from our Chairman and Secretary, who are now well-versed in book publishing. Twenty-six members attended, 56 books were sold and a sumptuous buffet lunch rounded off an excellent morning.

Books are available at £10 + post and packaging from Margaret Granger on sales@pentlandfriends.org.uk or 0131441 5355

The Hunt for the Stone

By Mary Hayward

After the Battle of Rullion Green in 1666 the Covenanter John Carphin was buried under a simple stone on the shoulder of Black Law, within sight of his home hills of Galloway. Two hundred years later the present stone was erected by the farmer at Easton, after his son had dug up the grave. New member of the Friends Mary Hayward managed to trace the original stone when researching her book: "Walks on the Wildside" Here is her story:

The shepherd who buried Carphin was Adam Saunderson of Blackhill, Medwynhead. He erected the first stone and inscribed it "A Covenanter Dunsyre 1666". I wanted to find out what happened to that stone. Initially I looked in Dunsyre Church. I learned that their artefacts had been sent to Carnwath, but the good folk of that parish knew nothing, and suggested Dolphinton. That stone? It is in the Village Hall, I was told. The hall was as open and unmanned as the Marie Celeste, but no stone could be found. Perhaps they had meant the Church Hall? I drove out and was in luck. A lady just leaving after organ practice told me that she had no idea of any stone but would make enquiries. Later that week she phoned to say that the stone had been found in a corner of the church toilet. No-one knew of its significance, and yes, we could look at it and photograph it.



Mary's grandson Larry poses with the stone in Dolphinton churchyard.

The church also has a plaque in memory of Major Joseph Learmont of Newholm, who led the Covenanters at Rullion Green

So the hunt was successful, but there are loose ends. What should be done with this historical artefact? Should it stay in the church, in a more suitable location? Should it be taken back to the grave site, or should it go to the National Museum?

Anyone wishing to follow up this story could try to find out who named the dead man as John Carphin, the man from Galloway.

Donation from Harmeny Pentland Running Club



The presentation at Craigdon Sports on 6th February.

For the last six years Harmeny Running Club has organised a race on the first Sunday in December. With a limit of 120 runners this popular event is full within 20 minutes of it being made available! Competitors start at Threipmuir, cross to Loganlea and Glencorse, then return to Harlaw by way of Bonaly, Torduff and Clubbidean. The route touches these seven reservoirs, hence the 7Rs title. The winner completed this course in 1 hour, 25 minutes and 30 seconds!

This year's organiser, Moira Nicol, presented our Chairman with a cheque for £300 from entry fees "as a thank you for all the good work you do in the Pentlands"

Talk by Hamish Martin at Merchiston Castle School on 03 November 2016

Report by Esmee Yuille

Hamish owns and runs "The Secret Herb Garden" the name of which was inspired by the children's book, "The Secret Garden" by Frances Hodgson Burnett. He opened his talk with a resume' of the finding and setting up of this delightful specialist nursery garden, then went on to tell of his own love of the Pentland Hills encouraged by a teacher from his school who took the pupils there on hikes and camping trips.

Members of the audience were then asked to name wild flowers and plants common to the Pentlands and surrounding area and in his responses Hamish gave us not only his in-depth knowledge of such plants but also his passion for the interaction of nature. Using the list of plants given he spoke of their origins and medicinal and culinary properties, some fairly well known, some less so, from the fragrant thyme to the dreaded ground elder, the first green shoots of which are good in salads, we were surprised to learn. Many in the audience will now be looking on dandelions in a completely new light and leaving them where they have grown, following his lyrical story of why this is his favourite wildflower. All present thoroughly enjoyed the evening hosted as always so generously by Merchiston Castle School, Hamish's "Alma Mater". As one member said "I could have listened to him all night".

The Petrifying Spring

By David Syme

In 1979 Gloria Gaynor sang: “First I was afraid – I was petrified....” then claimed: “I will survive”. Most of us are afraid, perhaps not petrified, when we hear the song’s opening chords on a karaoke machine - the key-changes defeat all but the best singers.

Gloria was “petrified” ie shocked, horrified, turned to stone at losing her lover, so, should there be a warning notice at the site of the **Petrifying Spring** on Carlops Hill (GR 146565)? Your intrepid editor went to see.

I chose the wettest day last November to walk from the 44 bus terminus at Balerno. I justified this lengthy approach as an opportunity to test the waterproofing of my winter outfit. Anorak, gloves and trousers failed the test before I reached the base of West Kip. My route from there took me down the feeder burn to North Esk Reservoir, where I admired the make-over done by the volunteer team at the Dulverton Bird Hide the previous day. I reached the bridge over the Fairlie Burn and looked south. Somewhere on the slope in front lay the object of my quest. Steeling myself not to be petrified I splashed uphill through soggy reed clumps and muddy cattle tracks. I had studied the 1:50000 and the 1:25000 maps. The former has a symbol halfway between two burns high up the slope, but the latter has only the words in blue “Petrifying Spring”. I was cold, wet and hungry, but determined to carry out my task. Using my usual non-scientific technique (it might be here.... or there.... or over there....) I found a harmless spring which a 1:50000 map-user could accept, and declared the search over. There was no evidence of petrified anything, not even lime-covered stones! What a disappointment. I splashed my way down to Carlops just in time to see the bus heading to Edinburgh, and enjoyed a reviving soup and a pint in the Allan Ramsay.

My friend John Hart of Elsrickle took up the challenge of finding a more menacing spring. A Yorkshireman, he knows the famous Mother Shipton’s Cave, near Knaresborough and became interested in finding a Pentlands equivalent. He tackled the project with some research, tracking it down in the Works of Alexander Pennecuik of New Hall: “.... a stratum of limestone ascends the Mount Maw – or highest – division of Carlops Hill 50 or 60 feet – from the lower limb, the Turnip Hill next it on the east, about two-thirds up its north side issues a strongly-petrifying lime spring – from the Wester Hill of ‘Spital, on the east side of this with the North Esk between them, halfway up, bursts a rill of encrusting lime water.....” also the Edinburgh section of Lawson’s Scotland Delineated (1854). “In the neighbourhood of Pennycuick there is a petrifying spring, and others that are chalybeate.”

Armed with this intelligence, John scoured the area with his GPS and dog to help, but sadly had the same result; a wee spring, lime-free and quite harmless. Not even Gloria Gaynor would have been petrified. He suggested that a more interesting plouter in the Carlops area would be up to the former lead mine known as Jenny Barry’s Cave, taking in Hell’s Hole and Seven Cauldrons.

That’s for another day, hopefully not such a wet one.

Capital Hills by Charlie Brown

(While Charlie is not a member he is definitely a friend of our hills!)

The sun rose on Pentland's Caerketton hill,
above dear Swanston's rhyming rhyll'.
It kissed the crags, which smiled on the town
whilst lesser crags still wore a frown.
Away to the west, slept dark Mount Maw,
but in our east yawned bright Capelaw.
Soon all the Pentlands were bright and breezy,
on such a day all rambles seem easy.
The walkers, as they enjoy the right to roam,
see all these hills as their hills of home.
From fortified Kip to beyond Craigengar,
hills flatten out to the muirland afar.
Bound by stout Mendick and perky Dunsyre,
these distant views set spirits afire.

In this wilderness quiet, where wildlife abound,
see many a creature named from the ground.
The 'Wolf' is too close to the 'Lamb' and the 'Ewe'.
But imaginative views are all up to you.
Where 'Ravens' stalk 'Pike,' and 'Adders' hunt 'Crane',
after this rough terrain, you may suffer some pain.
But suffer the pain and eschew the pills
Rather focus on your joy in our glorious hills!

Pentland Rocks!

The late Dr Robin Aitken was interested in and knowledgeable about the geology of our hills. It was easy to become infected by his enthusiasm. Robin would be delighted with the brochure "Pentland Rocks!" produced by Lothian and Borders GeoConservation with help from our friend Victor Partridge and others. If you want an educational walk, pick up a brochure at Harlaw or Flotterstone, and walk the route of the Geological Trail from Threipmuir to Flotterstone. If you have the time and energy, visit also the sites of geological interest on Caerketton and Torduff Hills. Robin will be with you in spirit.

Also in the Pentlands..... By David Syme

With Power round the Fringes

I met a mature, solidly-built cyclist near Threipmuir. His bicycle was a new, battery-powered machine, which took much of the hard work out of cycling. He said that he was delighted to be able to potter round the fringes of the Pentlands without risking a heart attack. He had just sailed up Kirk Brae at 8 mph, and was about to ascend the Bavelaw Beech Avenue, he explained. In fact he could travel from Balerno over Threipmuir and Harlaw to Bonaly without difficulty. He acknowledged that the heavy machine with road tyres was unsuitable for Pentland paths, but he was more than content to be able to savour the hills from the tracks round the fringes. Drawback? The cost of the machine: £2000.



Loganlea Fishery

Keen angler Alec Jack of Bonnyrigg managed Loganlea Fishery for 13 years, his daughter Karen has now been in charge for the last 5 years, manning the office from the first Saturday in March until the last Sunday in October, 7 days a week.

Loganlea is relatively small but can take up to 40 bank anglers, with 8 rowing boats carrying a further 16 or 24. Walkers on the road between The Howe and Glencorse Reservoir can often see a fisher playing a large fish, which could be a stocked Rainbow, Tiger or Brook Trout, or even a native Brown Trout. For a fisher who lies near the Pentlands, this is as good as it gets; fine sport in a quiet glen only 15 minutes from Edinburgh's by-pass.

With large fish in a smallish reservoir it is no surprise to learn that some poaching takes place. "The biggest poachers," says Karen, "are the cormorants which come up from Glencorse, but there's not much I can do." Karen is very happy at her job, with two wee Scotties as company, but would like to see more youngsters coming to fish. Having seen the facilities and read of the catches on the website (www.loganleafishery.co.uk), I'll be up with the grandchildren this summer!

It's all Happening at Harlaw!

On a reasonably mild January day Tommy McManmon (Ranger) and Stewart Watton donned waders and bravely tackled the overgrown pond at Harlaw. They cleared away stones, debris, weeds and excessive growth. The plants and weeds from the pond were left out overnight on the margins of the pond so that any denizens trapped in the debris could crawl back into the pond. The following day Linda Stirling supervised the pupils from Woodlands School who did a good job of clearing and disposing of the debris. Tommy, Stewart, May Le Seuer and Esmee Yuille cleared the margins of excessive reeds and raked back weeds. When this job was finished the water expanse appeared a great deal larger. We hope this will benefit the pond plants to grow and encourage the wild life particularly damsel flies, newts and water snails. Since January the water has started to clear and with the spring we have high hopes of the pond once again being an attractive feature and an asset to the garden.

Thanks to the generous grant from Tesco two webcams are being installed. A new nest-box camera, better than the old one, and an underwater one for the pond. Live pictures will be sent to a screen in the Visitor Centre, and the public can switch from one camera to the other. Beyond the building the grassy area near the reservoir has already acquired a horse-shoe line of apple and pear tree saplings, planted by pupils from Woodlands School. The ground in the middle has been prepared for planting of wildflower plants. This task will be carried out by three classes of Dean Park Primary School, each class being responsible for 100 plants.

Hamish Clark led a work party of Friends and Balerno Ramblers on a wild March day to prepare for the plantings and to lay a pipeline for the webcam cables.

Hamish Clark briefs the work party



Preparing the route for the "JCB" team to dig the cable trench to the pond



Events May to November

- ◆ Thursday 11th May 7 for 7.30 pm: AGM at Merchiston Castle School followed by Talk by Alan Forrester on the Scottish canal network and work on canals
- ◆ Thursday 25th and Friday 26th May: Access for All, based at Harlaw Visitor Centre for people with mobility problems. Contact the Events Organiser for details.
- ◆ June Walks: Three stages of The Pentland Way
 1. Thursday 1st Swanston to Flotterstone Contact the leader John Surtees on john.surtees@blueyonder.co.uk or 0131 445 4623 or Mob: 07948563691
 2. Wednesday 7th Flotterstone to Carlops Contact the leader Hamish Clark on Hamish.clark@hotmail.co.uk or 0131 334 3717
 3. Tuesday 13th Carlops to Dolphinton Contact the leader Jhn Stirling on j.stirling@btinternet.com or 0131 449 3456 or Mob 07702523367
- ◆ June Tea and Cakes)
- ◆ September Tea and Cakes) dates to be confirmed
- ◆ October Tea and Cakes)
- ◆ Thursday 2nd November 7 for 7.30pm Talk at Merchiston Castle School by Kellan MacInnes on Caleb George Cash and his list of all the mountains visible from Arthur's Seat. Please contact the Events Organiser if you wish to attend
- ◆ Wednesday 8th November Walk in the Pentlands led by Allan Ainslie and John Surtees, details later.



Events Organiser

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