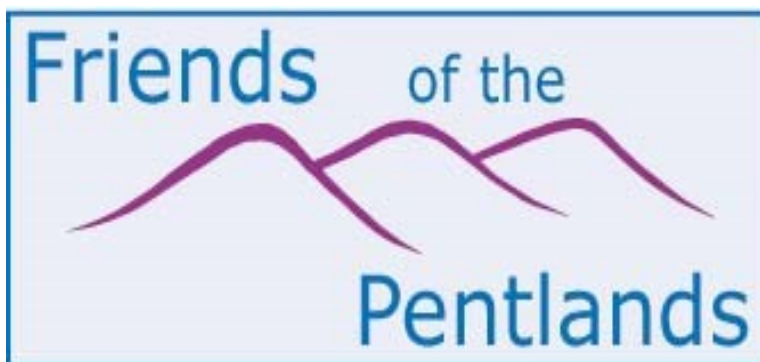


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Ten Years of Tea and Cakes at Harlaw



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Conserving, Protecting and Enhancing

Editorial

For this issue, instead of “The View from Scald Law” by one of our members, I have invited Jenny Hargreaves of the Natural Heritage Service to assess our ten years of achievement. Her article stresses the partnership between Natural Heritage and the Friends, a partnership that is based on harmonious co-operation towards a common aim. Long may it continue.

This May we also salute the willing workforce which provides tea and cakes at Harlaw four times each year. This is a fruitful source of income, and excellent exposure for the Friends. The Publicity Group has started to add activities for children on Tea and Cakes days to enhance the appeal to all ages. Look up the dates for these events on the website and support the team on the day!

I am delighted to include articles by Ian Combe (Source of the Water of Leith) and David Pritchard (Hedge-laying in the Pentlands) as well as stalwart (ex PP Editor) Bob Paterson (Gardening Notes). I welcome contributions on any aspect of Friends’ activities or Pentland themes for future issues.

Working with the Friend of the Pentlands, Partnership Working at its Best!

By Jenny Hargreaves, Acting Natural Heritage Service Manager

When I was asked to write this article I talked to my colleagues who have worked in the Pentland Hills Regional Park over the ten years that the Friends of the Pentlands have been running. The Friends were developed when we recognised that volunteer rangers, who patrolled the Regional Park, wanted to do more. We also realised a friends group would be a good way to carry out project work; they would be able to access funding and make a positive contribution to the Park.

During the ten years the Friends have existed they have been involved in a wide range of tasks, both big and small and the members themselves have grown both in number, confidence and knowledge. Today the group has diversified into sub-groups which take responsibility for some Pentland paths, litter hotspots and Harlaw wildlife garden.

The growth in knowledge and skill was highlighted by Victor Partridge who has worked with the group from the beginning. He commented: “The Service works with a number of different types of groups doing practical work, for example community, corporate, conservation, student, special needs, but you know that when you are giving the Friends a task to do, you know the result is going to be good quality workmanship. This is down to the skill of the volunteers and their love of the area they are working.”

A great advantage of getting a local group involved is also their ability to secure funds. Martin Duncan stated “They are very good at securing external funding from various sources – most obvious examples would be the success of the Bavelaw Bird Hide and the replacement bridge at Gala Ford though I am sure there are many more examples elsewhere.”

Replacement bridge at Gala Ford



One member of staff who works very closely with the Friends group at Harlaw Wildlife Garden is Paula Newton who mentioned the gardening squad who carry out routine maintenance but also help to develop new habitats – sensory bed and herb area. She said “The Friends donated the nest box bird camera which allows visitors to have their very own ‘springwatch’. The Friends were a key partner in the installation of the Harlaw Biodiversity Trail.



Torduff Road—not a scrap of litter to be seen!

They provided the physical labour for installing the posts which was essential to the funding parameters.” She also mentioned the litter squad which is”... such a big help to the Service. They litter-pick Bonaly and Dreghorn once a month. This has helped deal with the fly-tipping issues at Dreghorn as well as the antisocial camping we have at Bonaly Country Park.”

As the Service we fully appreciate the work carried out by the Friends group which complements our work in caring for the Pentland Hills Regional Park.

Who knows what the future holds? Hopefully it will involve further successful partnership , working with more projects and innovative ways to care jointly for the Pentland Hills.

Members' Talk at Boroughmuir Rugby Club: 26 Feb 15

Stan Cartmell of Balerno Ramblers gave a fascinating talk, illustrated with superb photographs, entitled "Walking in Japan". Stan has family in southern Japan and visits regularly. A former Geography teacher, he explained why Japan suffers frequent earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions. He also provided an insight into cultural aspects of Japanese life; Stewart Watton and other litter-pickers who attended were open-mouthed at the description of a litter-free, vandalism-free society where households take turns to run the street's recycling scheme. Stan's enthusiasm for Japan was infectious, and only the slides of erupting volcanoes and talk of raw fish meals prevented some of us from looking into flights to Japan in time for the cherry blossom.

The App-ian Way Forward

If you have a smartphone you will load it with apps for all eventualities. There are even some which are useful for walking in the Pentlands. As you approach the endpoint of a long walk – the No 10 bus terminus at Torphin, for example – you don't know whether to scurry along to catch a bus just before it departs or stroll gently for a departure in 15 minutes. The Lothian Buses app will tell you! What about waiting for the 101/102 Service along the A702? Open <http://mobile.mybustracker.co.uk> on your phone, enter bus stop search and punch in the 8-digit code for your stop. Technology rules!

There are other apps for hill walkers; ViewRanger gives a free map, which is adequate for walking in the Pentlands, and pinpoints your location. OS Locate claims to convert GPS readings to OS grid references, even where there is no mobile signal. Outdoors is another OS app, available at OS Online. It enables you to download maps (at a cost) and works as a GPS.

There are other walkers' apps of less relevance to Pentlands walkers. Uepaa! Is an app for alerting rescue services, and Peak Scanner is one which can identify mountains when you point your phone at them. This might be useful when walkers on a summit have different interpretations of the panorama.

Peak Hunter, My Trails, Alert5.... Apps are a growth industry. If you are an app-user, and come across apps useful to hill-walkers, please contact me with your critique, and I will pass it on in the autumn issue.

Editor

Tea and Cakes

10 Years of money-raising service to the Friends

It is Monday afternoon, and Alyson Patrick is busy on her computer. She is contacting volunteers to prepare the food and serve it at Saturday's Tea and Cakes Day at Harlaw Visitor Centre.

Maggie Paterson and Helen Aitken started the Tea and Cakes days at Harlaw in 2005. The event - held four times per year - has grown since then, and, although Maggie and Helen are still active participants, the planning has passed to Alyson and Linda Stirling. They have a list of members willing to contribute, either by baking or by serving on the day at Harlaw, and Alyson is working from a rota.

The Tea and Cakes Days now open at 10am and close at 4pm, offering tea, coffee, cold drinks, soup and savoury snacks, also scones and cakes. The lure of homemade soup, sausage pie and home baking is strong, and many locals make sure the dates are written in the diary as soon as they see them.

"We have all types of customers" says Linda, "families, walking groups, cyclists, Duke of Edinburgh Award youngsters..... One walking group dropped in for a coffee just as we opened, and returned just before we closed. They cleared the table of food! That was one of our best days."



The team on 18 April 15 who raised a record £486—a truly magnificent outcome!

With fair weather this summer their takings to date will exceed £10,000; money which has gone to buy materials for path repair, route-marking and the like. We are all grateful to everyone involved for this immense contribution to Friends of the Pentlands.

Gardening Notes

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The plants at Harlaw and Hillend have benefitted from another mild winter, but of course so have the weeds. The gardeners got back to work at the beginning of April with a flurry of activity. There has been lots of cutting back, cutting out and weeding of grasses, docks, nettles and, in some areas, buttercups. Buttercups can look great in a wildlife garden but, unfortunately, they are immensely invasive and have to be managed.

Almost all the plants survived the winter and while there is lots of healthy new growth the only colour at the end of April was yellow. The spring bulbs were still in bloom at Harlaw and Hillend and cowslips were beginning to bloom at both locations. Primroses were looking good at Harlaw and the primroses we plant-

ed at



Bonaly several years ago were providing a great display. Best of all, however, were the marsh marigolds at the edge of the Harlaw pond (above).

The bed which we cleared at Harlaw last year is being planted up during May. One section will become an herb garden. The plants, which include fennel, lavender, rosemary, thyme, sage and chives, have been brought-on in a sheltered garden during the winter. Almost all herbs survive happily in poor soil although some need a fair amount of sunshine so we are keeping our fingers crossed.

The other half of the bed, which is more shaded, will be planted up with a mixture of foxgloves, agrimony, bugle and birds-foot-trefoil – the latter being commonly, albeit not very flatteringly, known as ‘granny’s toenails’! All four species should be happy in partial shade with the foxgloves and agrimony giving height and colour and the bugle and birds-foot-trefoil providing ground cover. Agrimony has a long history of medicinal use for a huge range of ailments but we will keep that a secret to stop it being dug up by hypochondriacs!

It is five years since we took over the routine management of the Harlaw garden and we are marking that anniversary on 5 June with a garden party. Come along and enjoy the ‘goodies’ and admire the garden, but remember to book in.

The Source of the Water of Leith (WoL)

My life has been influenced by many of the great adventurers of the past, Scott of the Antarctic, Sir Ranulph Fiennes and especially Dr David Livingstone.

Inspired by their example John Stirling and I and friends from the Water of Leith Conservation Trust and Natural Heritage Service walked down the course of the river in December 13, starting at Gala Ford, as the river leaves Harperrig, and ending at Balerno. Crossing from side to side as the paths and river allowed us this was a relatively easy day, with only one brief section in a wood where a machete would have been useful. Unsurprisingly we never saw a soul.

Seeking a greater challenge an intrepid band of adventurers set off in December 14 to explore the upper WoL: Dennis Smith, Ian Macrae, Ian Combe, Charlotte Neary, and Susan Falconer decided to dispense with a base camp, and hitched a lift (Stirling Taxi Services) which dropped us off close to Crosswood Reservoir. In the true spirit of adventure we agreed to dispense with sherpas on this occasion.

The route followed the dam wall and then climbed steadily up the obvious ridge in an easterly direction, marshy and heavy going at times, with few paths. We reached the highest point of the day, the summit of Mealowther, (which would not be easily found in mist). From a quarry high on the north side of this hill we fanned out down the slope in the traditional manner as if searching for a body, until we picked up a pool formed by a spring. Although we had been walking over the first trickles of the WoL before then, we declared that we had now reached the source of the river. At this spring Charlotte and I decided to drink some of the pure, clear water, and took the opportunity to cleanse our faces at the same time. We are pleased to report no ill effects, but sadly I have not noticed any reduction in my facial wrinkles!

Wikipedia states “WOL rises in the Colzium Springs at Millstone Rig of the Pentland Hills”. We noted that there are also three other main feeders on the Explorer Map: Coldwell Strand, Mid Burn, and East Burn. However on reviewing the website, Richard Webb states in his log “The WOL, a hill-burn upstream of Harperrig, is named West Burn on the Colzium Estate, and starts in a bog on the slopes of Mealowther.” A few wet socks certainly confirmed that we had found the bog! We walked all the way to Little Vantage car park, around 9 miles in total, on what was a fairly strenuous day out, attempting to stay as true to the run of the river as possible. As well as being blessed with good weather, we had good sightings of roe deer, a fox, heron, mergansers, and 27 whooper swans flying overhead. Finishing this remote, wild, strangely atmospheric little walk gave us all a great source of satisfaction, indeed you might say we went on our way with a spring in our step.



Hedge-laying in the Pentlands

The Natural Heritage Service organised a two day hedge laying course at Harlaw House Visitor Centre from 19 to 20 February 2015. Peter Holmes, all the way from Kilchoan in Ardnamurchan,

was the instructor and very good he was. Gavin Johnstone, from the Balerno Ramblers, and I (above) were two of the 8 participants.

In theory the technique is simple: each tree is disentangled from its neighbour by judicious branch cutting and then, close to the ground, the trunk is cut, from the right hand side, about three quarters of the way through and bent to the left and woven between



The hedge at Harlaw

ash/hazel vertical stakes in the ground, at about 700 mm distance apart, producing a woven effect. In practice it is hard work and can be painful if a thorn penetrates your gloves. However, a well-laid hedge offers a fine natural barrier and a safe home for wildlife.

There is plenty of hedge-laying work still to be done at Harlaw and other sites in the Pentlands; volunteers should apply through the channels as shown on the website.

Litter-picking is Fun!

Whatever the weather our teams seem to be happy picking up other people's litter. Plastic bottles? Into this bag... Old newspaper? Over here! Fly tipping? Let's see what we can do...



Listen to the Litter-Pickers At Work

JC on the art of litterpicking: "You can't do it wrong!"

EY (on arrival) "This won't take long." (40 mins later) "Perhaps I was wrong."

SW "There will be just as much underneath as you see on the surface."

A McK "You'll never get it all..."

DP "There's always next time....."



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Our Walks Programme

We carry out many tasks and projects in pursuit of our aims to conserve, protect and enhance the environment of our hills. It is not all work and no play, however, and we are fortunate to have Fiona Black as our Walks Coordinator. Fiona and husband Cameron created the Edinburgh to St Andrews walking route: "The St Andrew's Way"; their book of the same name helps ambitious walkers plan this 115km walk.

Last year Fiona led six walks; four in the Pentlands, one in the Lomonds in Fife, and one down at Peebles. Fiona leads with a light touch, stopping now and then to share her knowledge of the route with the group. She has a canny knack of route selection, so that there is usually a coffee or a hot chocolate option at the destination.

The remaining walks for this year are: 23 May Castlelaw, 17 Oct Falkland and 05 Dec Vogrie. Walkers should ensure they have sturdy footwear and appropriate clothing for the time of year.

Details of each walk are under Events on our website.



Dawn at Hillend April 15



The Font Stone, Monks Rig



Conserving, protecting and enhancing.....

Right: A work party carries out maintenance on the path to the Robin Aitken Bird Hide at Threipmuir, ensuring that the path is wheelchair-friendly.



Left:



Right: a stell is born!



Left: A Friends work party tackles the muddy path at Black Springs

Access for All Event

The Friends are holding their 7th “Access for All” event on Thursday 28th and Friday 29th May. Their aim is to guide and support people in half-day sessions around the Threip-muir area. “We want to share our love of the Pentlands with people who need assistance, people who couldn’t manage a walk on their own” says organiser Esmee Yuille. “We provide guides, mobility scooters and lay on free refreshments, and we will have a portaloos (wheelchair accessible) in the car-park.” The event has proved popular with locals in the past, so anyone who is interested, or who knows of a person who would enjoy a rare visit to the hills, should contact Esmee at the.yuilles@talktalk.net for more details and to book a place.



“Your chariot awaits.....”

For information on what we have done, what we are doing, and what we plan to do in the future—visit our website:

www.pentlandfriends.org.uk