

Pentland Post

May 2018



Kirsty of Harmeny Pentland Runners comes up to the crest of Harbour Hill on a fine summer's day, showing an impressive smile after that climb!

Friends of the Pentlands is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation, registered in Scotland under: SCO 35514

Where am I?

Answer on Page 12



Woodlands School—John Muir Awards

Linda Stirling reports

We are now in our fifth year of working with senior pupils from Woodlands Special School, as they undertake their quest for a John Muir Award

They must:

- Discover a wild place
- Explore it
- Conserve it
- Share their experiences

Over the years the different groups of pupils have built bird nesting boxes, bug boxes, dug drainage ditches, cleared cross drains, weeded areas, lopped back vegetation, beat trees, planted trees, picked litter, sown wild flower seeds, riddled compost, and composted. They have also done willow weaving and designed a dry stone planter suitable to allow persons in wheelchairs to maintain.

They are always an industrious group and, to acknowledge this, we have tried to have a BBQ near the end of their session. The weather has always been against us, so this year we took the group to the Edinburgh International Climbing Arena at Ratho where they enjoyed a climbing session.



Not getting wet at Ratho

Talk in Merchiston Castle School 2nd November 2017

There was a good turnout of members to listen to Kellan Macinnes talk about his book "Caleb's List". Caleb George Cash, Geography teacher at The Edinburgh Academy from 1886 to 1917, listed 20 hills visible from the summit of Arthur's Seat, and produced excellent sketches to help identify each one. Sadly for us, Caleb looked only northwards, so our Pentland Hills do not feature on his list.

Kellan, who spoke with confidence and humour, was coming towards the end of 8 years of serious ill-health when he gazed at Arthur's Seat from a supermarket carpark. With a flash of inspiration he saw that hills would help him back to full vigour. He discovered Caleb's list in the library, and set about climbing and researching all the hills on the list. The result is this handsome book, illustrated with fine photography and the original sketches, most of which still point the viewer on the summit to the hill in question. Caleb's List is on my birthday wish list.

Kellan has also written a novel "The Making of Mickey Bell"

David Syme

It's Nice to be Appreciated.....

Not an enquiry but a thanks for your work putting poles up on the Crosswood to Dunsyre route. We walked it on Wednesday 7 February and, with light snow cover, could find little evidence of a path, though a fox's tracks were very helpful!

We're reasonably competent navigators but it was very reassuring to have confirmation and guidance in the form of your posts in an area of the hills we had not walked before. If anyone finds a pole near the crossing of the Garval Syke could you let us know please!

Liz Beevers and two friends (aged over 200)

Keep Safe!

I hurt my knee when I fell through soft snow in late February on the upper slope of East Cairn Hill. Fortunately I was not alone, and could hobble back to the car with help. Had I been alone, had it been a more serious injury, had the violent storm which hit us just as we reached the cars come earlier..... I was reminded that the Pentlands can be as dangerous as any Scottish hills in certain conditions.

Aware that I might have needed help, I asked Tweed Valley Mountain Rescue Team what callouts they had had for walkers in the Pentlands over the last 4 years. None in 2015, they told me, two in 2016 (missing person at West Water and DofE participant with a leg injury near Cock Hill). In 2017 they helped two walkers with lower limb injuries, one on Scald Law, one on Carnethy. This year they were called out in January for a walker lost in deep snow on Harbour Hill. When you consider how many people walk, run and cycle in our hills this number of callouts is low. Nevertheless we must prepare for all weathers before venturing off the tarmac, and, should the need for help arise, have the means to phone 999 or 112 and ask for Police.

David Syme

New Bridge at Harlaw Thanks to Local Enterprise

The safety of a stone bridge on the popular path round Harlaw Reservoir has been greatly improved by the collective effort of several local organisations. The bridge over the burn, which runs into the SE corner of the reservoir, restricted access to some users, due to its narrowness and the absence of a safety rail on one side with a significant drop into the burn. As one member of the Currie and Balerno District Round Table recalled "I know that bridge very well, having watched my kids fly over it on bikes, with my teeth gritted, many years ago! An upgrade would be a good thing".

In February it was widened, safety railings put up and the surface re-laid. This will benefit all users of the path and in particular those in mobility scooters and wheelchairs. The path was created as an all-access route round the reservoir but in recent years some scooter-users had stopped crossing the bridge due to its deterioration. For example Friends of the Pentlands who have run two-day Access for All events each year for the past ten years decided in 2017 that the bridge could not be used by participants for reservoir trips on scooters. Using only part of the route round the reservoir meant they could not enjoy the full attraction of the round trip. John Stirling, Secretary of Friends of the Pentlands, commented "The Friends of the Pentlands are about to launch the use of a mobility scooter for those persons who are unable to walk round Harlaw Reservoir or visit the bird hide at Bavelaw Marsh. This they can now do thanks to the enterprise of Balerno Ramblers and the joint funders in ensuring that the bridge is safe."

John Stirling

The new bridge



View from Scald Law

Peter Harnden

It would be difficult to name a more enthusiastic Friend of the Pentlands than Peter Harnden. His love affair with our hills stretches back over eighty – yes eighty years. The hills featured in his long association with the Scout movement. Firstly as a cub scout and scout he played wide games, trekked and camped at Bonaly Scout Park. “I gained my Scout Stalkers badge by taking a photo of curlew on their nest, using my Box Brownie camera” he told me. Later as a Scout leader with 30th Inverleith Swift Troop he organised The Pentland Club for his scouts. They had to walk over thirteen Pentland tops in eight hours to be awarded a handsome certificate. Peter had walked the circuit (Hillend along to West Kip, then back west to Harbour Hill) in seven hours but allowed the scouts eight.

What changes had Peter noticed over the decades? He shakes his head: the decline in bird populations. Where there used to be many grouse and curlew on the moors there are now few, and back-headed gulls have forsaken some of the remote reservoirs. Could this be due to mink?



Peter in his garden

Not surprisingly Peter welcomed the formation of the Friends and became an active member. He has raised funds by sponsored walks, and made nest boxes and a work bench for us. Nowadays he does not climb as often as he used to, but he enjoys writing about the hills. In an earlier edition we printed his poem “Poppies” about the WW2 Hare Hill plane crash, and he has offered contributions to future editions.

The first two verses of his poem “Pentland Moments” sum up this man’s affection for our hills:

“I’ve roamed these hills since just a lad
And faced their every mood
From foot-deep snow to blazing sun
I’m sure it does me good.
To have the Pentlands close at hand
Where everyone may roam
For eighty years I’ve done just that
They’re like my home from home.”



KIRK BRIDGE

Peter Harnden and his friend take a fresh look at this bridge while walking round Glencorse Reservoir

It is a strange fact that we often look at something without actually seeing it for what it is. The particular incident which brought this to mind came during a walk from Flotterstone to Glencorse Reservoir, where we stopped at the Kirk Bridge to admire the wintry landscape before moving on. Tom and I have crossed this bridge countless times without giving it a second thought, but this time was different; we saw it as a masterpiece of the stonemason's art, and wondered why such a fine bridge should be built in such a remote location.

The bridge crosses Kirk Burn where it enters the reservoir, close to the submerged ruins of St Catherine's in the Hopes Chapel, which disappeared from sight when the reservoir was constructed in 1822. Does the bridge date from that time, or was it required when Loganlee Reservoir was built in 1851?

Returning to the bridge itself; it is made of precision-cut stone blocks, now partly beneath the cloudy water which laps just below the slightly projecting keystone of the arch. The parapets are not only of straight cut-in-line blocks, but the corner stones are set back with a curved side. Presumably these stones are the full depth of all four corners, so add up to a considerable number.

Having stopped at the bridge we took time to appreciate what a remarkably fine structure it is, and to ponder why the stonemason should make the effort to construct such a handsome bridge.

What have our work teams been up to?



On a fine February morning (R to L) Dennis, Stewart and Bill installed this bench at the Howe, a memorial for Alistair and Jan Mowat, who loved the view up to Scald Law.

In all weathers.....

Ian took 8 volunteers to tidy up Swanston trees on a dreich April day. Annette said they would just have to “man up” to the miserable conditions.



Iain and Hamish led a team in February improving the Kirk Burn path.

They had a fine view over the hills when they looked up from the work!

This poem by Arnold Crompton, read out at Esme Yuille's funeral, captures her love of volunteering, reading, hillwalking and laughter.

Instructions

When I have moved beyond you in the adventure of life,
Gather in some pleasant place and there remember me

With spoken words, old and new.

Let a tear if you will, but let a smile come quickly

For I have loved the laughter of life.

Do not linger too long with your solemnities.

Go eat and talk, and when you can;

Follow a woodland trail, climb a high mountain,

Walk along the wild seashore,

Chew the thoughts of some book

Which challenges your soul.

Use your hands some bright day

To make a thing of beauty

Or to lift someone's heavy load.

Though you mention not my name,

Though no thought of me crosses your mind,

I shall be with you,

For these have been the realities of my life for me.

And when you face some crisis with anguish.

When you walk alone with courage,

When you choose your path of right,

I shall be very close to you.

I have followed the valleys,

I have climbed the heights of life.

Spring Walk 2018 – Flotterstone and Castlelaw

By Andrew Marsden, Walk Leader

“What a difference a day made,” as the song goes, describes the weather change from when I recc’ed the walk on the last day of winter to the start of our walk on the 21st March, the first day of Spring. A beautiful winter’s day on the 20th with bright sunshine and clear views across the southern Pentland range and fairly easy going on frozen earth changed overnight to a cruel wind (the Beast from the East) and a rapid thaw making some of the paths extremely boggy and wet. Fortunately the weather did not deter 19 of our members and friends and a dog - Coire! (I am advised a record number beaten only by the first walk 14 years ago) completing an enjoyable and fascinating eight kilometre hike.

Our path took us from Flotterstone car park (past the memorial stone to CTR Wilson, the Scottish Physicist) along the old filter beds to the edge of Glencorse Reservoir. This magnificent reservoir covering 20 acres was designed by Thomas Telford and built (at a cost of £145,000) by James Jardine between 1820 and 1824 to supply water for the mills of Auchendinny and Milton Bridge and as an overflow reservoir for drinking water for the citizens of Edinburgh. The Glencorse dam is 77ft in height and 86,335 cubic yards in volume. In their heyday the three twelve-foot-deep filter beds (with a sand- gravel- fine sand – shells – coarse sand and very fine sand composition) could handle 3.8 million gallons of water per day.

The filter beds area is a haven for birds and other wildlife and it was a joy to hear the robins, blackbirds and thrush (though not, on this occasion, the reportedly resident green woodpecker) as we passed the abandoned cottages and made a slight detour to view the splendid cascading waterfall being the overflow from the reservoir. For the past few years there has been consideration to creating a formal wildlife sanctuary within the filter beds area – a concept which would have the strong support of the Friends of the Pentlands.

Just past the keeper’s cottage we noted that the water level was low enough to allow a view of some of the caseway across to the island but certainly not low enough to expose the ruined 13th century chapel – or even its bell tower - of St Catherine’s in the Hopes (last observed in 1915). There is an interesting legend behind the creation of this chapel. It seems that one Sir Henry St. Clair (the father of Sir William who later founded Rosslyn Chapel) was awarded a charter of Pentland Muir by King Robert the Bruce for his good and faithful services and, in particular, for winning a wager with the king over who had the best hunting hounds when pursuing a rare white deer in the area. St Clair prayed to St Catherine of Alexandria (the same Catherine who was condemned to death by “breaking on the wheel” and who, in her martyrdom, gave her name to the Catherine Wheel) and his prayers were answered through the superiority of his trusty dogs Help and Hold – the chapel was built as an expression of his thanks on the site where the hind was slain.

This section of the walk, meeting and joining the path down from Turnhouse and Carnethy hills, forms part of the Pentland Way and leaves the Glencorse Reservoir road to the right to climb up the path to join the military road to the south of the Castlelaw ranges, where panoramas of the southern Pentland range including Scald Law and the Kips can be obtained. We passed remains of some ordnance targets probably from the Great War. The path continues parallel to the Kirk Burn round the side of Castlelaw up to Fala Knowe. Though much work has been done in recent months by the Friends to repair this path including shoring up, the placing of boardwalks and the creation of sleeper bridges, the track remains particularly muddy in parts, especially after the thawing of the snow fields in the upper section. Mountain bikers, it seems, are especially attracted to the boardwalks but, sadly, cause more churning up of the ground at either edge as they take a direct hit on the path.

This part of the walk was fairly blowy (anyone continuing across to the summit of Allemuir would have had a blustery challenge) and we were pleased to get round the corner out of the wind where we were able to regroup and have a break for hot drinks. Hereafter it was downhill to Castlelaw. Those who had not been before were able to inspect the ruins of the iron-age Castlelaw Hill Fort. Of particular interest was the earth house or souterrain, excavated by V Gordon Childe in 1932-3, most probably used for the storage of agricultural produce. When occupied the fort would have been formed of three earthwork ramparts, ditches and timber palisades. The fort is in the ownership of Historic Environment Scotland who have placed a number of useful interpretation boards at the entrances to the site.

From Castlelaw Farm we took the path down Buckie Brae (this forming part of the Glencorse panoramic walk) back to the metalled road in Flotterstone Glen and along to the car park and, for some, the cheery warmth of refreshments at the Flotterstone Inn.

I realise that group walks are not everyone's cup of tea (reminiscences of the dour words of A Wainwright) and a group approaching twenty is a fairly unwieldy one. But the composition and mix of the group were spot on – there was hearty companionship and a broad range of conversation and we were able to experience, as a group, some of the things we might have missed if on our own. Roll on the next walk – when the climate may be a little more convivial.

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At 579m above sea level, the summit of Scald Law is the highest point in the Pentland Hills. It lies 17 km from Joppa, the nearest point on the coast, perhaps 5 hours of walking from sea to summit.

Contrast this with Tena, a small town on the Napo River in Ecuador. The river comes down from the Andes at speed – some say the Napo is one of the best white-water rafting rivers in the world – then slows down as it becomes part of the Amazon, which flows into the Atlantic Ocean.

What I find difficult to understand is that Tena is more than 2000 miles from the Atlantic Ocean, yet only 599m above sea level! How can the Napo, which at Tena seems so eager to reach the sea, only drop 600 metres in such a vast distance?

Editor



Do sheep like water? Bob Douglas snapped two Blackface using stepping stones to cross Logan Burn, but another enjoying a paddle at Loganlea.



Dulverton Bird Hide on North Esk Reservoir



Glencorse, Loganlea and North Esk Reservoirs

Everyone's favourite, **Glencorse** is a pleasant tarmac stroll up from Flotterstone on a Sunday afternoon, with the prospect of a drink in the Flotterstone Inn or snack in the Pentland Hills Café Express in the old Information Centre. Completed in 1824 it takes the water of the Logan Burn, its purpose being to supply water for the paper mills of Milton Bridge and Auchendinny. In the 1840s the level was raised by 4 ft and water was also piped to Castlehill Reservoir in the heart of Edinburgh as part of the city's water system. Now it is stocked

with trout, and its boats are popular with angling clubs. The facility is not open daily; advance booking essential. Perhaps the best fishers on this water are the resident cormorants. Each bird weighs around 5 kilos and requires 1 kilo of fish per day, so they are not popular with anglers and disappear when the boats are being used.

Loganlea is upstream in the same catchment. A long, narrow reservoir it was built in 1851 to augment the city's supply. It is also popular with anglers who can use boats or fish from the bank. Walkers often stop to watch a fine rainbow trout being brought to the net. The building at the dam wall was the scene of a tragedy in January 1985 when a soldier shot and killed 3 others in a bid to steal £19,000. The full story can be read on-line under Glencorse Barracks Murders. Between the two reservoirs you can often see dippers flitting along the Logan Burn, and in the spring, you will probably hear cuckoos calling from the woods to the north.

The North Esk River rises near the Bore Stane. Half way between its source and Carlops, where it passes under the A702, lies the **North Esk Reservoir**. It was also built in the mid-1800s to guarantee a constant supply to the papermills, the chief engineer being Thomas Stevenson, father of RL. Not much tarmac here, so this is a wilder scene, in fact a wildlife sanctuary. It is a Site of Special Scientific Interest owing to its flora and rare geological formations on Paties Hill to the south. In 2008 Friends received funding from the Dulverton Trust to build a bird hide on the northwest shore of the reservoir (named Dulverton Hide in gratitude). The main attraction was a large, noisy colony of black-headed gulls. Although these gulls appear to have forsaken this water the hide offers plenty of other bird species for keen watchers. In the hide logbook this year are recorded sightings of Greylag, White-fronted and Canada Geese, Goosander, Mallard, Little Grebe, Tufted Duck, Widgeon and Oyster-catchers, and, curiously, one entry of 70 black-headed gulls.

Material for this article supplied by Andrew Marsden and Margaret Granger

You are coming from the Bore Stane down towards Listenshiels. The low hill in the centre is King's Hill, and the black track is new; readers might remember a muddy route with sections of sleepers.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Wed 10 May 6th Annual AGM Merchiston Castle School 1930hrs, followed by a talk by Tommy McManmon: "A Ranger's Experiences in Knoydart"

Thu 24 May Access Event for pupils of three Special Schools

Sat 26 May We will have a promotional stall from 12.30 to 4 at Balerno Gala Day, Malleny Park (Currie Rugby Club)

Sat 09 June We will have a presence at the Whipman Play, West Linton

Sat 23 June 10 am—4 pm Tea and Cakes, Harlaw

September 10 am—4 pm Tea and cakes, Harlaw date to be confirmed

Wed 10 Oct Walk (details to follow)

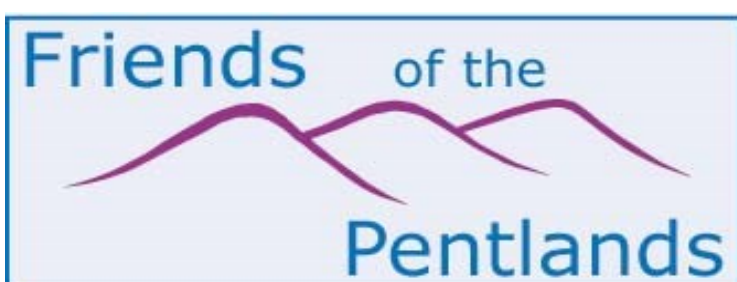
Thu 01 Nov 7 pm Talk in Merchiston Castle School "Dear Wee Hills" by Ben Dolphin, President of Ramblers Scotland and a Countryside Ranger

Pentland Post is a twice-yearly magazine for members of Friends of the Pentlands and connecting parties. As editor I welcome contributions relevant to our activities and interests from all readers. Please send written material and/or photographs to me at davidsyme@hotmail.com.

Footnote to the front cover photograph:

Editor to John Stirling: "How can Kirstie smile after running up that steep slope?"

John's reply: "Everybody smiles in our hills.....!"



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