

Pentland Post

October 2018



Bob Douglas took this picture looking up to West Kip on a fine spring day

Friends of the Pentlands is Scottish Charitable
Incorporated Organisation, registered as:

SCO 35514

AGM 10th May at Merchiston Castle School

New Chairman Hamish Clark conducted his first official duty as Chair for this, the 6th AGM for us as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO). Following the meeting we were treated to an excellent talk by Tommy McManmon of Natural Heritage Services. Tommy talked with humour and insight of his time as a Ranger in Knoydart, and accompanied his talk with beautiful slides.

Tea and Cakes 23rd June

The March Tea and Cakes event was cancelled because of frozen pipes, so it was good to see a sunny, if breezy day this June. Brian Robertson took 14 members and friends on a birding walk. On his recce the previous day Brian had identified 60 species between Harlaw and the bird hide!

As usual the ladies had laid on a mouth-watering display of sweet and savoury items, and the cool breeze made the home-made soup a welcome energy-restorer.



Our Honorary President, Thomas Huxley, was glad of his mug of soup, served with a smile by Maggie Paterson.

Diary Note!

October's Tea and cakes will be from 10 to 4 on Sat 27th

Where am I?

Two pictures this edition, one easy, one less so. Answers on Page 12



Bus to the Pentlands Saved!

Visitors to the Pentlands often use the 101/102 Stagecoach bus service, which takes the A702 between Edinburgh and Dumfries, passing access points such as Flotterstone, Silverburn, West Linton and Dolphinton. It is especially cherished as there is no service at all on the northern access road, the A70, after Balerno. Imagine the consternation when Stagecoach threatened to suspend the service! Local bus users and hillwalkers responded to an appeal led by Scottish Borders Councillor Heather Anderson (Tweeddale West), using the highly effective internet service change.org to reach a large catchment of interested parties, and the good news is that the service will continue. The fight goes on, however, as the reprieved service ends in the early evening— bad news for folk living on the route who want to visit the capital until late.

More Friends.....

Members might be interested in the activities of Friends of Corstorphine Hill, as shown at www.corstorphinehill.org.uk They are strong on bird-watching, have an interesting walled garden and a guide to a fine 3.5 mile walk around the hill, which gives good views over to our hills.

Harperrig and Crosswood Reservoirs

These reservoirs are both close to the A70 on the south-west slopes of the Pentlands. Although they are only four miles apart, they belong to different river systems and have different functions.

Harperrig is the only reservoir on the Water of Leith. Taking water from Colzium, East and West Cairn Hills, it was built to regulate the flow down to the paper and snuff mills of Currie and Juniper Green. Now it is one of the more tranquil reservoirs in our hills, with a bird hide offering sightings of waders and migrants. It has a fishery, which boasts of being the only brown trout fishery in the Pentlands. Anglers fish for stocked and wild “brownies,” in competition with otters which were introduced in the 90s. The 15th Century ruined keep of Cairns Castle at the southern end offers a stunning focal point to photographers. Nearby in Woodpecker Wood is one of our arboreta. *(NB West Lothian Council has produced Harperrig Local Nature Reserve Management Plan which is full of interesting information.)*

Crosswood Reservoir was built to regulate water supply to the Union Canal. Its water flows down to Camilty Water and on to join the Almond at Mid Calder. In Almondell Park a lade takes what it needs to join the canal at the aquaduct near Clifton Hall. This reservoir is also a delight for bird-watchers, but there is no longer a managed fishery. In fact the vast Colzium estate has been for sale for some time and this area is in need of some attention. The route from the A70 to Garvald via the Covenanter’s Grave, recently given new signage by our work teams, starts from the reservoir’s approach track.



The air at the southern bay of Crosswood Reservoir is thick with noisy gulls

Editor

View From Scald Law : Alistair Cowan

Who better to ask for the View from Scald Law than the man who farms that hill and its surroundings? The Cowan family has farmed Eastside since the year 1850, and the present farmer, Alistair, joined Friends of the Pentlands at its inception. "I wanted to be on the inside in case you were all plotting against me" He says with a roguish smile. Eastside extends from the col between Carnethy and Scald Law in the north east to the Borestone in the southwest. "Kirkton and Eastside are the only sheep farms left in the Pentlands to use traditional hefting." Alistair explains, "We have only Blackface on the hill, they are hardy enough to withstand the winters, well, most winters," he says, not needing to go on about the extreme weather this spring. When I visited, Alistair was preparing the farmyard for a new system of sheep pens which can be operated by one man; a sign of the tight budgeting needed in the present climate. Like most farmers he is very worried about Brexit and is reluctant to make extra financial commitments until a clear picture emerges. Apart from sheep husbandry, Eastside has a pheasant shoot, grouse moors and some forestry. Trees on the west of the Kips are being felled at present, with new tracks created to give access to the heavy vehicles involved. "Don't worry, they will restore the ground to its former state", he assures me, "they are an environmentally friendly company."



Another example of diversification is the conversion of cottages and out-houses to holiday letting property. "There are plenty of folk who want to take a look at Edinburgh, but want a peaceful bed for the night. They expect high quality, so we supply it." (A glance at the well-presented website www.eastsidecottages.co.uk confirms this.)

Alistair has only two issues with other users of the Pentland Hills, firstly irresponsible dog owners, and secondly people in the hills who don't return his smile.

"The worst offenders are joggers, who don't look as though they are enjoying themselves, and people with earphones. Why can't they listen to the sounds of the countryside?" So, if you are out and about on Eastside land and see a cheery fellow on a quad bike with sheep dogs, give him a broad grin, please!

In Case of Emergency (ICE)

A good maxim for a hill-walker is that if you prepare for the worst there's a good chance it will not happen.

If you are an unconscious casualty in the hills and someone kindly wishes to rescue you, you want them to know ICE details promptly. Most mobile phone address lists have ICE contacts listed, but the phone could have been damaged in a fall, you might have low battery strength, some phones are locked There are good reasons for having a back-up method of telling rescuers essential information. Here are two suggestions.

MediPAL produces a hard plastic card with personal and medical contact details, allergies, blood group etc for £7.99. It's up to you where you put it – wallet, inside or attached to rucksack or pocket. Good, but could be difficult to find.

Winomo offer another system. For £6.99 I acquired 6 small aluminium watertight (I tested!) canisters, each with a key-ring. Using spring-clip Karabiners (Decathlon £0.49 each) they can be attached to the strap of a rucksack – highly visible. I found it difficult to remove a roll of paper from the canister at home, so it would be doubly tricky on a windy, wintry day, but with some experimentation I can solve this. With 6 canisters you can dangle one from a golf bag, handbag, saddlebag, canoe seat, wherever you feel knowledge of your medical state could save your life or accelerate recovery.



Winomo canister



MediPAL card

If Hills Could Talk.....

A walk in the hills can be enriched by a little knowledge of what happened there in the past.

In and around Edinburgh and the Pentland Hills we have visible links to an important episode from our past – the 17th Century struggle between Royalists and Covenanters. In the city we can see underneath the pulpit in Greyfriars Kirk a plaque marking the spot where the National Covenant was signed in 1638, and on Redford Road stands the Covenanters' Memorial (below) at the spot where the rag-tag army of Covenanters parleyed with the city fathers, but were turned away in 1666.



Redford Road

The plinth at the top of the column has inscribed on its 4 sides:

Romans

Cromwell 1650

Covenanters 1666

Charles 1745

The smaller memorial is difficult to read due to weathering



Rullion Green

The red railings enclose a memorial stone to the Covenanters who fell in the battle; the two named are Rev John Crookshanks and Rev Andrew McCormack

In our hills the Martyrs' Monument, a memorial to the Battle of Rullion Green, can be reached on foot from Flotterstone, and the churchyard at Old Pentland is said to contain unmarked graves of Covenanters who fell at the battle.



Old Pentland Kirkyard lies below the site of the battle, on the minor road between Hillend and Loanhead. It has a watch house to guard against grave-robbing — another interesting stage in our history!

The well-known Covenanter's Grave on Black Law marks the spot where one victim was buried "Within sight of his beloved Ayrshire hills". Roger's Kirk above Medwyn Water, Cauldstane Slap and Dunsyre Common are just three secret locations for discreet worship in the forbidden traditional style - conventicles. These sites all had the advantage of more than one approach. If Royalist soldiers were to be seen coming from one direction, worshippers and priest would fade away in another.

Before visiting any of the places above, it is worth reading up some of the literature about that period. For me the most fascinating is "The Pentland Rising" by Robert Louis Stevenson. He writes about the events leading up to Rullion Green in great detail and in the colourful style of the novelist. Building up tension to his tale, he describes the night before the battle thus..... "The sun, going down behind the Pentlands, cast golden lights and blue shadows on their snow-clad summits, slanted obliquely into the rich plain before them, bathing with rosy splendour the leafless, snow-sprinkled trees and fading gradually into shadow in the distance." Perhaps RLS was trying to give an account of a serious event in too romantic a style, but we can forgive him; he was a mere lad of 16 when he wrote it.

In researching this article I am sad to report that there is no signage in Redford Road, the small monument is so weathered that it is illegible. There is no signage to the memorial at Rullion Green, and the area surrounding the enclosure, untended on three sides, is so overgrown as to appear disrespectful to the fallen. Should we not be taking better care of these visual reminders of our history?

Editor

A bit of a Moan

Peter Harnden, our senior member and resident poet, wrote these lines during the “Beast from the East” cold snap this March. Further poems by Peter are displayed at Café 360 Hillend, Harlaw Visitor Centre, Café Express Flotterstone and the poet’s pub “Sir Allan Ramsay” at Carlops.

I dinnae like this growin’ auld, on days like this I feel the cauld.

Altho’ my joints all ache a bit, I like tae think I’m fairly fit.

Another thing that gars me greet – I’m no that steady on ma feet.

Ma walking stick wi’ palm-shaped grip stops me fae fallin’ if I trip.

An’ noo I cannae walk sae fast, a tortoise could go whizzin’ past.

But still I get there just the same, as lang’s still licht when I get hame.

It’s no’ a’ bad, if truth be told, there is some good in growin’ auld.

Nae need tae fear the dentist’s drill – I’ve nae teeth left for him tae fill.

And on the bus we travel free, wi’ seats reserved for folk like me.

Another thing I thought I’d mention – nae need tae work, jist draw wir
pension.

Wi’ pick-up sticks in every room I’ve nae mair trouble bendin’ doon

Tae pick up things in awkward places, but they’re nae guid fir tyin’ laces.

My shoes are a’ the slip-on kind; they’re made wi’ folk like me in mind.

So growin’ auld is no sae bad – nae need tae sit there feelin’ sad.

We hae maist o’ a’ the things we need – jist thank the Lord that we’re
nae deid.

In May I showed a work team in wet and windy conditions (but still smiling) at Swanston. In this edition I am happy to show work teams in more benign conditions.



The team tackles the path between Boghall and Tytler Memorial, and enjoys a break for their piece.



This summer work parties have again been augmented by members of Balerno Ramblers and Scottish Widows corporate volunteers. They have worked at Silverburn, Swanston, Harlaw, Garvald, Hillend, Bavelaw and Clubbiedean. Anyone interested in joining the work team should contact our Chairman, Hamish Clark at

Hamish.Clark@hotmail.co.uk or by phone at 01313343717

Gordon Macdonald, MSP for Edinburgh Pentlands (3rd from R) joined a Friends' litter-picking team at Dreghorn on Wednesday 8th August



Moth Trap

We have bought this moth trap, which will emit light overnight and attract moths. The problem, as explained by Peter Moore, is identifying the types of moth the next morning. Once we have a fool-proof means to do this we hope to take it to schools to show the “catch” to pupils.

Where am I? (Page 3) The picture on the left is taken on the summit of Capelaw, with Castlelaw in the background, the one on the right is looking west from the Tytler Memorial at Woodhouselee.



Left: The new plaque on the wall of Harlaw Visitor Centre is a tribute to the huge contribution to the garden and The Friends in general by Bob.

Below: New fingerposts mark the track and path intersection between Medwynbank and Covenanter's Grave

Pentland Post is a twice-yearly magazine for 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



For details of our activities go to pentlandfriends.org.uk

