



Annual Review 2020

The Friends of the Pentlands is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SC035514) which exists:

- To protect and enhance the natural beauty and upland character of the Pentland Hills, its waters and surrounding countryside
- To protect and enhance the cultural heritage and public amenities of the area
- To promote the quality of life of those who live and work here
- To carry out environmental projects that enhance public access and biodiversity
- To encourage high standards of design in new works undertaken in the area
- To provide an annual programme of activities including walks, talks, etc.
- To promote appropriate planning policies
- To stimulate public involvement by means of publications, exhibitions, appeals, etc.
- To co-operate with other bodies active in the area

The Friends of the Pentlands welcome new members who share our aims.
For more information see our website at www.pentlandfriends.org.uk/membership/

Or contact us through Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/Friendsofthepentlands1/>



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Chair's Foreword *Hamish Clark*

Thinking back to the start of 2020, little did we know the momentous effects the COVID pandemic would have on our lives and the world. For Friends of the Pentlands the COVID restrictions have had a big impact on the Pentland Hills and on our activities. The Pentland Hills, particularly near built-up areas and the main access points, became even more popular with regular and new visitors attracted to their special surroundings to enjoy the benefits of exercise and recreation. This inevitably meant more wear and tear on paths and tracks and downsides such as the anti-social behaviour of a small minority and problems from inappropriate parking.

COVID forced the cancellation of several FoP activities throughout the year and others had to be curtailed and adjusted. Our work with special and primary schools, the escorted Wheelchair Walks, Tea and Cakes days and the programme of walks and talks all fell victim of the restrictions and necessary precautions. By working in small groups and complying with COVID guidance, litter-picking, gardening, arboretum maintenance and workdays became possible following the easing of lockdown. Path inspections, usually carried out by teams of two, were also able to go ahead and all inspections were completed on schedule by the end of the year, with relevant information added to the asset register.

Our volunteer teams produced two editions of the Pentland Post, our annual calendar and developed our Facebook profile. Board meetings and the AGM were conducted virtually, with many of us adding familiarity with Zoom to our CVs. Thanks to all the leaders and volunteers who in difficult circumstances contributed to FoP's continuing role in the Pentlands.

At the start of 2020 FoP discussed ways of celebrating the memory of our late Chair John Stirling and three possibilities were highlighted for further investigation. Due to COVID restrictions progress has been slow but we plan to move forward as soon as the rules permit.

We were very fortunate to receive two large donations in 2020 as detailed in the Treasurer's Report. This gives us a substantial surplus to fund new projects and initiatives of long-term benefit to the Pentlands. The first project supported from one of the donations - a turning head for mobility scooters and wheelchairs at the Bavelaw Marsh bird hide - has had all the negotiations and agreements completed and will be constructed early in 2021. Over the year we received many appreciative comments, through all kinds of media, in praise of the Pentlands and of our work in particular. This has been reflected in an encouraging growth in membership numbers, from 382 at the end of 2019 to 404 a year later.

Six Trustees who were appointed to the Board at its inception and served continuously for eight years were required under the constitution to stand down by the end of 2020. On behalf of all members my thanks go to Allan Ainslie, David Syme, Malcolm Patrick, Margaret Granger, Neil Macaulay and Rod Greenwell for their contributions and service to FoP. Dennis Smith was appointed to the Board at the AGM and took over as Secretary, and Iain MacLeod is our new Treasurer. The appeal continues for members to consider filling remaining vacancies on the Board.

A final thanks to Dennis Smith for compiling and editing another interesting and attractive Annual Review.

Despite continuing uncertainty during 2021, the ongoing interest and support of members should see FoP resume as many activities as possible in the course of the year.

Acknowledgements

- Alastair and Susan Cowan, Eastside Farm
- Allan Ramsay Hotel, Carlops
- Andrew and Catherine Barr, Harlaw Farm
- Appin Sports
- Balerno Ramblers
- Bavelaw Castle Farm
- Bob Barr, Easter Kinleith Farm
- City of Edinburgh Council Natural Heritage Service
- Craigdon Mountain Sports
- Earth Calling
- Garvald Home Farm
- Gavin and Geraldine Hamilton, Crosswoodhill Farm
- Gavin Marshall
- George Watson's College
- Harmeny Athletic Club
- Lee and Carnwath Estate
- Mallyen Angling Association
- Midlothian Ranger Service
- Ministry of Defence/Defence Training Estate
- Pentland Lodge Ltd, North Slipperfield Estate
- Scotland's Rural College
- ScotWays
- Stewart and Lesley Barr, Leyden Farm
- Swanston Farm Ltd
- Water of Leith Conservation Trust



Treasurer's report *Iain MacLeod*

This being my first Treasurer's report I would like to thank Malcom Patrick, the outgoing Treasurer, for making the handover relatively painless, despite initial issues over alterations to our bank mandate.

Despite COVID closing down some of our income streams it is heartening to report that our funds in hand at 31st December 2020 stood at £42,169, amounting to an annual surplus of £24,782. This surplus was largely founded on a bequest of £18,000 from the late David Proctor, formerly an active member of our group, demonstrating his love of nature and wild outdoor spaces, and the high regard in which he held our volunteers across a wide range of activities. A substantial donation was also received from Appin Sports whose CEO, a keen hill runner, is appreciative of the work we do on path improvement and maintenance.

Our membership income at £4,621, including Gift Aid, remained in line with the prior year's figure of £4,657.

No grants were received during the year as there were sufficient funds in hand to perform what project work we could. Project costs for the year of £4,000 as against £8,212 in 2019 show the reduction in our activities.

Sales of 'The Pentland Way – A Walk with History' rose to £520 during the year, perhaps a result of more people taking an interest in their immediate surroundings during lockdown. This book has proved to be highly successful, having generated a surplus so far of £3,770.

Once again the calendar provided a valuable source of income with sales over the year of £2,180 against a cost of £1,294. With income from the sales straddling the year end I expect the final profit from the 2021 calendar to approach £1,000.

Our limited activity over the year was also demonstrated by a 21% drop in administration costs to £3,651.

In conclusion I can happily state that our finances have never been in better shape and, when life returns to what we once accepted as the norm, Friends of the Pentlands will be in a wonderful position to expand and extend the range of our activities.

Membership report *Dennis Smith*

In December 2020 Rod Greenwell retired from the Board after an unparalleled run of twelve years as Membership Secretary and eight years' continuous service on the Board of the incorporated charity. His contribution did not end then: he kindly offered to continue handling upcoming membership renewals for 2021. A heartfelt vote of thanks to Rod for his outstanding service.

Pending a review of future membership arrangements I acting as Secretary took on some parts of the Membership Secretary's role including enrolling new members and handling data protection (GDPR) issues. Some preliminary work has been done looking at options for moving procedures online: this needs to strike a fine balance between ease of use for a diverse membership and high levels of data security. The application form on the website has been updated and it is now easier to make payments by bank transfer.

It will not surprise anyone that the year of COVID was exceptional. We received many messages of thanks for our work in the hills and there was also a noticeable rise in the number of membership applications. On 31st December 2020 the membership stood at: individual life members 74; joint life members 54; individual members 112; and joint members 164, making a total of 404 personal members. This represents a rise of 22 from the comparable total in 2019. There were also four corporate members and four group members.



Work parties *Hamish Clark*

1,268 volunteer hours

COVID obliged us to revise our workday practices, which meant that routine 'bread and butter' tasks were the norm for most of the year and larger flagship projects were ruled out. However, at the start of the year, prior to COVID, volunteers spent three days constructing a protective barrier of live willow along the bank of the burn near Garvald. This was to prevent further erosion of the bank near one of the supports of a footbridge on the Pentland Way. With the easing of restrictions after the spring lockdown, we resumed workdays in small groups with social distancing and other precautions.



The heavy footfall on the path network and extended wet weather in the latter part of the year meant there was plenty of repair and maintenance work needed. Across the Regional Park and the rest of the Pentlands Hills work was undertaken on 20 paths. Surface damage was remedied or at least contained, drainage ditches and culverts were cleared, and gates, steps, sleeper bridges, signage and boardwalks repaired.



Donald Sandeman became a welcome addition to our team of leaders. My thanks go to John Surtees who decided to stand down as a leader after many years in which he planned and executed many important projects and shared his knowledge and skills with his squads.

Senior school students from George Watson's College volunteered during the autumn term. Fortnightly groups of 12 to 16 carried out tasks identified by the Pentland Hills Regional Park staff and supervised by FoP leaders. They planted saplings and cleared gorse in new woodlands, raked a cut wildflower meadow and added more young flowers, and cut back encroaching vegetation on paths.

Over the year 54 work parties put in a total of 1,268 hours of work. This contribution is a real credit to our leaders and volunteers in this difficult and exceptional year.



Other Activities *Hamish Clark*

During the summer months, following lockdown, the gardening volunteers worked in socially distanced pairs in the wildlife garden at the Harlaw Visitor Centre. The attractive and well maintained appearance of the garden was appreciated by many of the people coming up to Harlaw. Well done and thanks to all involved. Frances Carnie has had to give up her role as leader on moving house elsewhere in Scotland. The search is on for a replacement should anyone be interested. We wish her well in her new home and thank her for heading up the band of happy gardeners.

Continuing our established link-up, the woodwork shop at HM Prison Saughton constructed four sitting perches using materials we supplied. Two of these were installed in 2020 - an additional perch at the West Linton arboretum and one to replace a damaged perch at the Swanston arboretum. Both these sites have very attractive views of the Pentlands and surrounding areas. Thanks to Angus Ogilvy who is now liaising with the workshop staff.

Due to COVID restrictions and precautions it was not possible to work with primary and special schools, run escorted Wheelchair Walks, hold Tea and Cakes days or organise walks and talks. We intend to resume these as soon as guidance and our risk assessments permit.



Conservation, Training & Quartermaster's report

Ian Combe

Conservation

Several work parties were involved in tree planting. On the south bank of Threipmuir reservoir we helped to plant willows as part of long-term Park plans to establish a wildlife corridor. At Sanctuary Wood we planted a total of 200 willows, larches and junipers.

Over the year we were involved in two willow spiling projects. Shortly before lockdown we planted a new section of willow to protect the southern abutment of the bridge at Garvald which was in danger of being eroded. By late autumn the willow was well established and promising to serve its purpose. On the Lyne Water south of Baddinsgill we added a short extension to the section of spiling carried out a few years ago. It remains to be seen how well this copes with the winter floods.

On the path from Lowries Den to Silverburn we added a new section of steps in addition to general strimming and tidying up.

Being out and about in the Pentlands, whether actively volunteering, walking, biking or just chilling out, offers great opportunities for observing wildlife. Sticking just to less common birds and mammals, we have had reported sightings over the past year of whooper swan, pink-footed geese, goosander, kestrel, buzzard, tawny owl, cuckoo, red grouse, woodcock, snipe, dipper, grey wagtail, wheatear, meadow pipit, starling, skylark, stonechat, whinchat, linnet and tree sparrow, as well as hare and roe deer.

Training

Many types of routine training were inevitably disrupted by COVID. Meetings moved online, including a 'virtual' AGM, and many members learned the magic of Zoom, acquiring new skills which will be of benefit in their personal lives. COVID intelligence was absorbed and carefully adapted to the running of FoP, with particular regard to the number of volunteers in work parties and our individual responsibilities to ourselves, the general public and each other. The smaller work parties have proved very popular, with Hamish Clark demonstrating new skills in recruiting, organising and deploying teams of workers. Some of these changes may provide a model for the future.

Quartermaster

A supply of special gloves was purchased for use in particularly cold and wet conditions.

During lockdown the opportunity was taken to tidy up our tool store in the Steading. The installation of new metal shelving has made it much easier to store and identify publications and maps, allowing us to develop a better stock-taking system to see when items need to be reordered.

Angus Ogilvy arranged the collection of a further supply of bat, bug, and bird boxes, including large kestrel boxes, from HM Prison Saughton where they are constructed - what might be called an inside job!



Litter-picking *Judy Cantley*

176 volunteer hours - 95 bags of litter collected



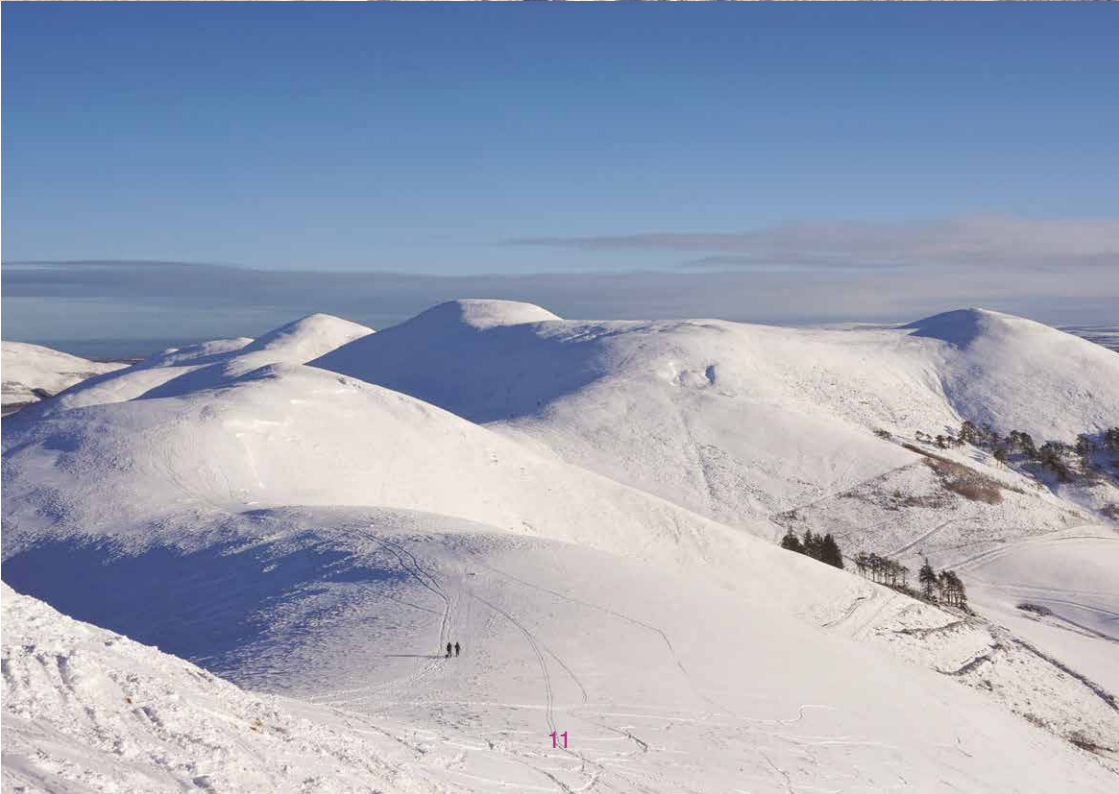
Litter picking started as planned until mid-March when COVID restricted our activities. It was a frustrating time with the FoP group suspended but throughout the summer individual members volunteered to keep an eye on their local areas. These unofficial litter pickers did a great job in the face of unprecedented numbers of 'locked-down' visitors to the Pentlands. They tackled some (very) wild camping, numerous barbecue sites and toilet mess in the woods, on top of the usual dog-poo bags, sandwich

wrappers, bottles, cans etc. Litter became a talking point in the media, with some positive results. The Lang Whang Wombles were set up to clean up along the A70 and the Pentland Hills Litter Watch page was set up on Facebook by one of our members acting in an unofficial capacity.

It was 14 July before regulations allowed us to venture out again. With helpful guidance from the Board, we put safety measures in place. Litter-pickers etc. were issued for members to keep at home, so avoiding bunching round the car as people picked up equipment. Sadly, the sharing of cakes became impractical! With numbers limited, people were asked to book a place – strange times indeed! With advice against car-sharing and bus use, we mainly kept close to the city. On one occasion four out of eight participants arrived at Harlaw by bike – a good effort considering the ascent! The new format has involved two groups meeting at different times with individuals allocated to areas in advance to reduce congestion. (We normally agree routes on arrival but everyone has accepted this restriction with very good grace.) On occasion we have been oversubscribed and I had to award regular attenders a week off!

The summer yielded quite a collection of camping equipment of varying quality, mainly very wet! Barbecue sites produced the usual rubbish but on one occasion Malcolm found a still hot barbecue – so hot that it melted the ends of his litter-pickers! We retrieved a rather fine plastic potty – perhaps a reflection of the difficulty of finding any toilets open during lockdown. The woods around Dreghorn barracks yielded 20+ bags of rubbish, including a wheelbarrow, so we felt we had really improved that approach to the hills. We did some limited recycling – my thanks to members who have taken away cans and bottles and found suitable bins.

With four would-be litter pickers on a 'waiting list' we need to find ways to accommodate more workers once restrictions are lifted, maybe by expanding our range. My thanks go to all the team members for their commitment and their cheerful acceptance of new ways of working, and also to the Regional Park staff. Their advice and support, including arranging pick-ups for our litter and setting up contacts with landowners, is much appreciated.



Publications *Peter Moore (pdmoore55@gmail.com)*

Thanks to the digital nature of so much current communications, the Publications team continued to operate safely and successfully in 2020 despite COVID. The twice-yearly Pentland Post and the annual Calendar were published as normal. Prior to lockdown restrictions, an FoP recruitment flyer was also completed. The editorial team is also responsible for FoP material submitted to external publications such as the Currie and Balerno News and the Pentland Beacon.

Pentland Post

Two issues were produced in 2020, with a range of features and photographs based around the activities of the Friends and their thoughts and feelings associated with the hills. Many thanks are due to everyone who has contributed, providing a range of interesting themes. The Post is distributed electronically to most Friends, with paper copies also provided to key partners. We also lodge copies with the Agency for the Legal Deposit Libraries, meaning a record of our activities is preserved for posterity.

Issues of the Post are planned for May and October 2020. Contributions, from brief comments to more lengthy features, are always welcome, as are suggestions of topics readers would like to see covered. Please contact me with ideas at pdmoore55@gmail.com.

Calendar

The 2020 calendar sold very well, contributing positively to support of the Friends. The 2021 calendar on the theme of 'Favourite places in the Pentlands' attracted many wonderful photographs of the Pentlands. Special thanks are due to all who submitted pictures and to the panel who had the hard task of picking out the views to feature. As a physical meeting was impossible, photos, discussion and decisions were all shared online, making the process more drawn out than usual. The calendar has attracted positive comments, though sales are likely to have been affected by reduced footfall in our usual outlets. Thanks also to the volunteers who helped distribute calendars.

Looking ahead, the theme for 2022 is 'Hidden treasures of the Pentlands'. Photographic entries should be submitted to the Editor by 31st July 2021, with a brief note of the location. We hope some secret gems will emerge.

Recruitment flyer

The production of a flyer was suggested and led by Judy Cantley, who liaised closely with the printer, and edited and re-edited until all the editorial group were satisfied that we had an attractive and informative document. COVID has had an impact on distribution but the leaflets are ready to go as soon as conditions permit.



Arboreta *Mike Andrew*

Despite lockdown we managed to get all six arboreta into good shape, much helped by having the use of two strimmers. The separate woodland legacy planting at Swanston which had been left for a couple of years is generally in good shape though it has lost a few trees to deer nibbling. John Surtees helpfully supplied a map showing the exact location of all the trees, enabling us to identify what needs replanting, notably the elm, rowan and oak. We spent two full work days cutting back gorse and grass and replacing tubes, which has made a huge difference.

Swanston arboretum is in good shape and we spent a full work day cutting back grass and gorse and making everything tidy. A new box for leaflets is now in place. West Linton also received a grass cut and a good tidy up: we replaced one rotten perch and added a new one, making a total of three in this scenic location, perhaps the jewel in the crown. At Silverburn everything is in good shape, grass cut and generally tidied up. Carnwath had a similar tidy-up though we may need to replace the beech and downy birch at some point. At Harperrig the trees are looking very well established.

Overall the arboreta are now looking the best they ever have so we just need to keep on top of everything. A new supply of leaflets has been printed and the holders will be replenished on a regular basis.

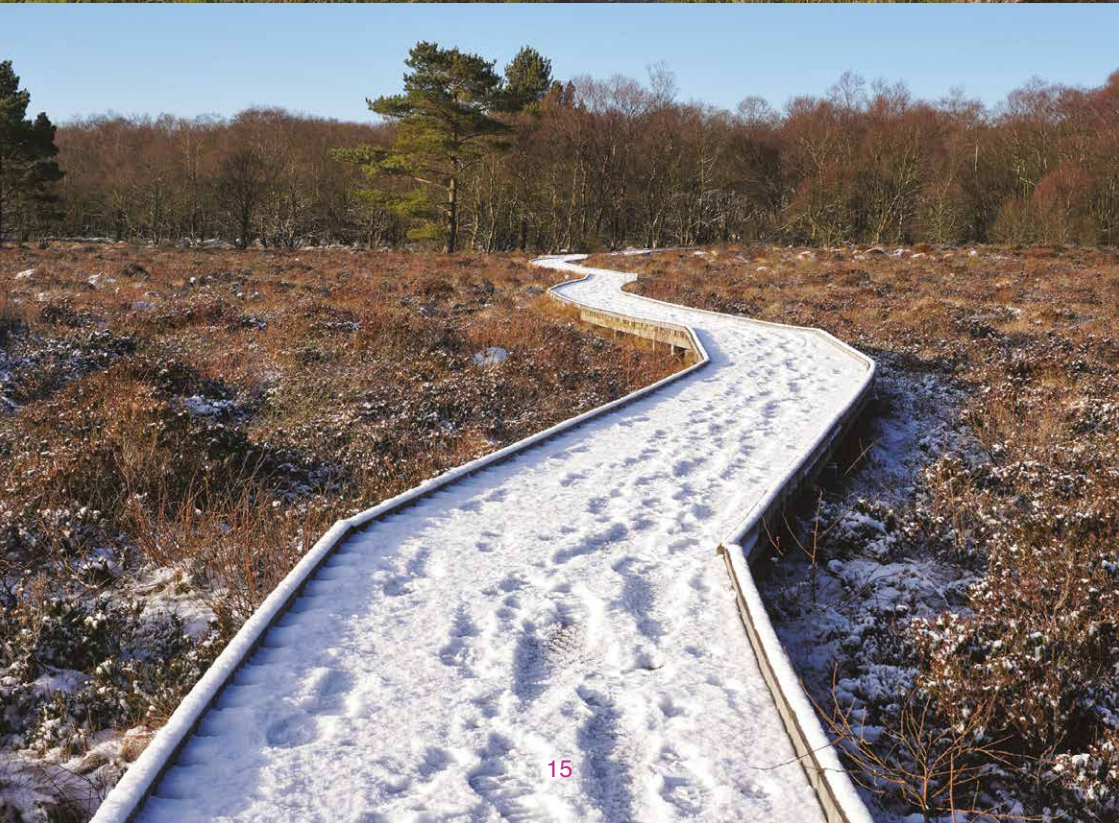
Facebook *Bob Douglas*

In a year a bit different from others, social media took on a new role for many folk impacted by the various forms of lockdown. Being fortunate to live within walking/cycling distance of the hills, I undertook to record pictures of natural life as spring progressed into summer, and posted these onto Facebook every few days during the first three months of lockdown. To reduce repetition this was supplemented as necessary by pictures from the archives.

When workdays resumed in July, I posted pictures from each workday (when received). It helps for team leaders to take 'before', 'during' and 'after' pictures – the muddier the better. A lot of folk seem to like workday pictures of our volunteers working in the mud! At the end of 2020 I published a review of the year, with three pictures from each month. During the year we received a couple of queries, including one from the Belgian National Parks asking about our experiences of using sheep fleeces for path maintenance.

The problems created by record numbers of visitors using, and abusing, the hills this year were well-publicised through social media. Whilst we are painfully aware of the concerns raised, we have used Facebook to maintain a positive view of the activities undertaken by our members rather than dwell on the bad news published elsewhere.

The FoP Facebook page now has well over 1000 followers, and some posts shared onto other pages have been seen by several thousand Facebook users. To find or follow us, search for 'Friends of the Pentlands' on Facebook or Google, or go to <https://www.facebook.com/Friendsofthepentlands1>.





Friends of the Pentlands people

Office Bearers

Chair	Hamish Clark
Vice-Chair	Andrew Marsden
Treasurer	Malcolm Patrick (to July 2020) Iain MacLeod (from July 2020)
Secretary	Margaret Granger (to July 2020) Dennis Smith (from August 2020)
Membership Secretary	Rod Greenwell (to December 2020)

Other Board members

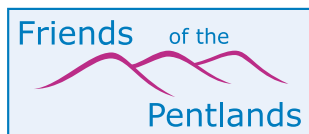
Allan Ainslie (to December 2020)
Judy Cantley
Neil Macaulay (to July 2020)
Olga Macfadyen
Iain Macleod (to July 2020)
Iain Morrice
Malcolm Patrick (to December 2020)
David Syme (to December 2020)

Team leaders

Alyson Patrick	Tea & cakes
Linda Stirling	Tea & cakes
Frances Carnie	Gardening (to December 2020)
Judy Cantley	Litter-picking + walks & talks
Neil Macaulay	Wheelchair Walks
Iain Morrice	Wheelchair Walks
Allan Ainslie	Planning officer
Dennis Smith	Annual Review editor
Ian Combe	Conservation, Training & Quartermaster
Hamish Clark	Workdays & corporate liaison
Donald Sandeman	Work parties
John Surtees	Path inspections
Mike Andrew	Arboretum coordinator
Angus Ogilvy	Liaison with prison workshop
Peter Moore	Publications editor
Bob Douglas	Facebook editor
Andrew Marsden	Pentland Way coordinator



Credits:
Annual Review editor: Dennis Smith
Photo credits: Bob Douglas, Andrew Gallacher,
Andrew Marsden, Donald Sandeman,
Victor Partridge



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