

Pentland Post

May 2021

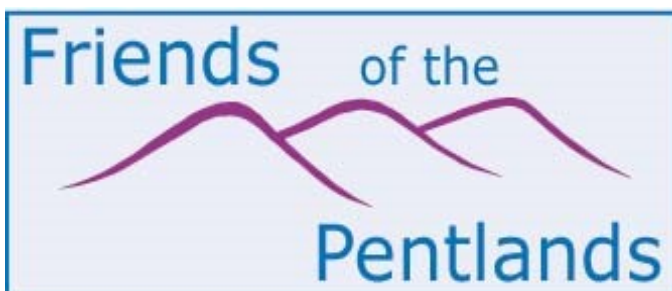


Has the world gone potty?

Coronavirus lockdowns may have restricted volunteering on the Pentlands but our litter picking team still managed to find some interesting articles, this one flushed out at Hillend. What is its message?

“Put the lid on litter”?

Send in your photo captions to the editor.



Friends of the Pentlands

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A year ago, I commented on the impact of the Coronavirus when we were in the middle of the first lockdown. I did not foresee that 12 months later, we would be coming out of our 3rd lockdown and reeling from the continuing toll on our ways of life, our wellbeing and in particular the tragic loss of life.

With the vaccination programme bringing the very welcome promise of some eventual relief, and greater control of the virus allowing for easing of restrictions, it is hoped that the activities of the Friends of the Pentlands can gradually return in a safe, but satisfying manner.

In this edition of the Pentland's Post, the View From Scald Law has been hijacked by the editor to explore the benefits of volunteering in the Pentlands.

There have been small scale volunteering works and a selection of these are featured. We also take a look at some of the dramas that have taken place in the hills and reported in various media over the past few months. The Pentlands offer a sense of continuity and timelessness as well as respite: will we value them more as a result of our Covid experiences?

I am confident the Friends of the Pentlands will show a determination to protect, preserve and enhance as we reconnect with the hills and with each other in the coming months.

Where am I?

Answer at the
foot of page 5



Hard Labour on Soft Ground



The path from Crosswood to Sargeant Law contains many soggy areas, but the worst is probably at Westwood. Our small socially distanced but hardy Work Day team took on the mud.

Andrew Marsden is on his knees, possibly in prayer, but definitely getting to grips with the task.



After completing the bog bridge, Hamish, Dennis and Andrew step back, looking remarkably clean.

As we emerge from restrictions associated with the Covid-19 epidemic, we are gradually re-engaging with what used to be considered normal activities and routines, including volunteering with the Friends of the Pentlands.

Much attention in various media during the pandemic was focussed on the benefits of connecting with nature, of taking exercise, of volunteering and of social contacts. As someone who has experienced mental health issues, I can testify that membership of The Friends of the Pentlands offers opportunities to access all of these benefits.

After retirement, I moved from the west of Scotland back to Edinburgh where I was born (the Elsie Inglis Hospital, now a care home for older people, so maybe I can book a room there and leave this world where I entered it!). In common with many retired people I was looking for a sense of purpose when I heard the late John Stirling talking about the work of the Friends of The Pentlands. That drew me in, and soon I was participating in workdays, litter picking and organised walks.

Volunteering itself provides a structure to one's time, a sense of purpose and feelings of satisfaction from having made a positive contribution. It also enhances connectedness with others and a sense of belonging through common purpose, whether that be catering at tea and cakes days, building bog bridges, picking up litter, or tending plants and arboreta.

Volunteering with the Friends provides additional benefits including physical exercise – barrowing hard core or carrying sleepers up the Thieves Road, climbing the slopes of Bonaly hunting litter, removing debris from streams — all get the cardiovascular system working. Exercise helps reduce stress hormones, and increase endorphins which make us feel good. It can distract from negative thoughts and emotions and promote confidence. Being tired at the end of the day also facilitates better sleep patterns.



Helping Rangers clear tyres from Bavelaw Burn

Photo: Donald Sandeman

Humans evolved in natural environments but while our brains have remained the same, modern life has disconnected many from that environment. Contrast all the demands on our attention experienced during a normal day, with connecting with green spaces and nature in the Pentlands. Being immersed in such a setting provides a more relaxed and soothing atmosphere (unless it is a particularly boisterous work party!) which is understood to help reduce brain activity associated with negative emotions and thoughts.



Deep in contemplation : The joys of clearing drains

Photograph: Donald Sandeman

For me, being a volunteer with the Friends of the Pentlands has opened up new opportunities and I feel I am doing something worthwhile and of community benefit. Much as I love Edinburgh, it gets me out of the city, to a more restful and calming place. The smells, the sounds, the views and the physical sensations combine to lift the spirits and calm the nerves - and it gives me something else to talk about with my wife, who is pleased to get me out of the way for a few hours.

We hear about GPs who may prescribe activity and volunteering instead of pills, where appropriate. Maybe there is a case to be made for prescribing membership of the Friends of The Pentlands - at a mere £9.00 a year it would be cheaper than the drugs from the chemist and perhaps more cost effective. Maybe there is a research project there?

Where am I ? (from page 2)

The photograph is from the top of West Cairn Hill looking towards East Cairn Hill.

POET'S CORNER

Angus Ogilvy

Angus explores lockdown and social distancing.....

Distancing

On Harbour Hill the skylark's singing, not for joy
but warning. Something's about, a wind-blown kiss,
a single purpose to persist
within the silence it destroys.

Grouse erupt from clutching roots
with guttural calls Go Back! Go Back! Go Back!
as though they sense the silent truth
of presence as a signal of attack.

I hold my distance, mean no threat,
prepare that my existence here is soon
washed off the surface of its peaty skin,
and in the dark silts nothing left
but an altered life-force primed to reach
and pass between us each to each.



A socially distant workday: Photo Donald Sandeman

...and his experiences of
the February snowfall.

White-Out

How can this be? I've walked here too often.
I know the hollows and undulations,
the stub of each culled tree, the abrasions
on scuffed stones, slopes where desire-lines soften,
every wind-scent on its open spaces.

Now it enfolds me, without horizon,
spidered in a bowl I strain my eyes on,
stung by wind-smacked snow, searching for traces
of anything I know; blinded by white,
trapped by panic, memory holds no key;
my footfalls - vanished; my only birthright
where I stand, sinking, and finally free
of knowing anything but I am here,
so very, very far, yet still so near.



©Angus D.H. Ogilvy

Crane Loch

The adventurous must seek challenges locally in lockdown. I decided to explore a small loch in the southern Pentland Hills. These hills are criss-crossed by paths in the north, but wild and desolate in the south. Crane Loch is surrounded by reedy marshland, miles from A70 tarmac and rarely visited. My approach required care: it comprised a conifer plantation, recently harvested, now a bleak forest of stumps and puddles, then tussocky, soggy moorland – my trekking poles were invaluable. As I reached the loch the storm arrived as forecast. I crouched under a peat bank and watched the waves scoot over the water, reeds bending low, no bird or animal life to see, certainly no human nearby. Wonderful! The combination of remoteness, awkward terrain and wet, windy weather provided the challenge I needed. If lockdown continues, I will try this walk again, but at night.

Friends of The Pentlands Calendar 2022

Submissions of photographs for the 2022 calendar should be submitted to the editor by the end of July. The theme is **“Hidden Treasures of The Pentlands”**.

Photographs should be in “landscape” format, with a brief description of the location. Now we can travel further, take your camera on your explorations of less well known scenes.

Historical Associations/Name Derivations

Iain Combe

THREIPMUIR

Here follows an excerpt from the 1947 book by Robert Cochrane: "Pentland Walks- their literary and historical associations ". (Two and six-pence net!) (*Twelve and a half pence for those too young to remember old money. Ed*)

" The name of Threipmuir, according to the old story, arose when Sir William St Clair, of Roslin, staked his head* against his hounds, when hunting with King Robert the Bruce, and *threeped* the dogs in pursuit of a white deer. The notes of encouragement were successful; St Clair's head remained on his shoulders; he received a grant of the forest of Pentland from the King, and in gratitude, founded the chapel of St. Katherine of the Hopes at Glencorse. Threipmuir and Harlaw are compensation ponds, and the former has been raised to meet the needs of the Water of Leith purification scheme.

Beside the bridge over Threipmuir are the ruins of Redford, which, according to tradition, were the hunting stables of King James VI. James VI also hunted around Bavelaw, and Queen Mary came up from Lennox Tower on the Water of Leith to hawk there. "

Scots : To threep – haggle, wrangle, contend, assert ones opinion, to contradict

*Gambling is not just a modern affliction!

Have you any or stories to tell or information on derivations of names of places within the Pentlands. Contact the editor at pdmoore55@gmail.com

Perches and Bird Boxes from Saughton Prison: Ian Combe

A number of years ago John Stirling, our former chairman and founder member, began a joint venture with Saughton Prison to build for us 3 different styles of small bird boxes, bat boxes, bird of prey boxes, and bug boxes. Friends of the Pentlands only require to pay for the materials (the hard labour is free!). Wooden perches are also being built for us, the likes of can be seen by Swanston Arboretum or as pictured, overlooking Glencorse.



John and Linda Stirling were both closely involved with schools installing bird, bug and bat boxes, for example the Balerno Primary School playground, near the west end of Water of Leith walkway, Dreg-horn and Erraid Wood. The buzz of fixing up these boxes to trees has to be experienced, armed with ladders, screws, drill, emergency hammer and nails, a safety hat all with audience of teachers and excited pupils. The siting required the correct orientation - south-west facing for bats so they can register the setting of the sun and so get ready to exit. The two bat roosts that we are aware of are at Dreghorn and Erraid Wood and we believe are both regularly monitored by the Bat Conservation Trust.

Iain Morrice last year presented 6 kestrel boxes to Graham Anderson and Keith Burgoyne of the Lothian and Borders Raptor Study Group. Graham and Keith monitor the birds of prey in the Edinburgh area and on occasions have delighted a few volunteers with a fine very close encounter when ringing very young kestrel chicks.

The initiative has enjoyed the enthusiastic support of the prison staff over the years. Angus Ogilvy has taken on the role of liaising with the Prison. In due course it is hoped that we will be able to recommence work with the various schools at which time it is anticipated there will be a request for volunteers to take up “natural world” and “school liaison” roles.

PS: it is only a rumour that the key builders would have been only too pleased to come out and site the boxes for us, but apparently there is no get out clause!!

THE TURNING HEAD: ROBIN AITKEN BIRDHIDE AT BAVELAW MARSH – A LONG TIME COMING!

Neil McCaulay, Project Leader

The Hide and its walkway were installed in 2007 in memory of our founder Chairman, Robin Aitken. My first involvement with what became Wheelchair Walks was less distant – October 2016, when John Stirling asked me to become involved in planning the best use of the battery-powered invalid scooter then generously donated to The Friends. Little did either of us realise then how long it would take!

As a surveyor (long retired!) the first thing I wanted to do was recce the possible routes both on foot and using the scooter which my invalid mate Alun drove. That survey gave rise to many improvements to routes round Harlaw and Threipmuir reservoirs, mostly carried out by Friends' volunteers. Balerno Ramblers part-funded by an anonymous donation from one of our fellow members handled the first job of reducing the frightening slopes at the bridge at the SE corner of Harlaw. The survey also eliminated the walkway over Red Moss on safety grounds and highlighted the extreme difficulty in manoeuvring the scooter in and out of the Bird Hide at Bavelaw without causing chaos for other users.



Walkway meets birdhide: before Turning Head build

Photo: Bob Douglas

When I suggested a Turning Head at the inner end of the walkway, John gave his immediate backing. Wheelchair Walks were then launched on the less ambitious routes around the two reservoirs, but John and I still dreamed of getting out to the Hide too.

In 2019, with the benefit of a very generous legacy from David Proctor, just before John sadly passed away he encouraged a formal application to our Board for the installation of a Turning Head as a separate Project from Wheelchair Walks. The Board happily agreed and provided 100% of the funding. The Project was helped by Gavin Marshall and his company, Treeline, which had installed the original walkway. (Continued on Page 11)

Thanks are due to Victor Partridge, Natural Heritage Officer for City of Edinburgh Council who was instrumental in obtaining all necessary permissions for the SSSI location and the Project itself. He and his colleagues were per-



New Turning Head:

Photo Bob Douglas

sueded by the upgrading of what is essentially a public facility. Consideration of various technical matters slowed progress, BUT apart from completing the installation of new anti-slip treads to match existing ones, IT'S FINISHED – on time and on budget, looking quite pretty as the photo shows.

PENTLANDS IN THE MEDIA

Despite lockdowns, or perhaps because of them, there has been plenty of activity in the Pentlands reported in print , television and online media. Cow confrontations, helicopter rescues, and avalanches.

The Pentland Way

The Pentland Way featured on BBC Scotland news in September last year with the story of a stroke victim who ran a 26.2 mile course along the Way in October 2020. The route included the Pentland's highest hills.

Cows and Avalanches

In the later part of 2020, there were reports of hill users being attacked by cows on a path on Turnhouse Hill. Also on Turnhouse Hill, *The Scotsman* reported an avalanche at the end of January, spotted by a Tweed Mountain Rescue Team leader. It was noted that the angle and direction of slope of the hill, of which there are many similar locally, made it vulnerable to avalanches.

Helicopter Rescue

The BBC reported the helicopter rescue from Caerketton Hill of a walker with a broken leg. The helicopter was deemed necessary as the slope of the hill would have made walking off with a stretcher hazardous and time consuming. With the wind chill at the time a significant factor, the casualty was in danger of suffering hypothermia.

Pentland Hills Regional Park Developments

Covid lockdowns and a stampede to greenspaces appears to have exacerbated problems associated with wild camping and car parking. *The Scotsman* reported in January that the Park authorities are looking at the provision of managed eco-camping facilities in the Harlaw area, modelling it on a successful initiative at Loch Lomond also beset by negative consequences of wild camping. The same report indicated that parking charges are likely to be introduced at Flotterstone, Harlaw, Bonaly and Threipmuir, with yellow lines on roadsides to protect verges and farmers' access.

From the Archives

Found on BBC Sounds, from 16th October 2010, Clare Balding in series 16 of "Ramblings", goes on a walk with "Neil, Pete, Mike and Sandy members of Friends of The Pentlands." Does anyone have memories of this walk to share?



Ian Combe marvelled at the ability of geese to read.

Spotters: Neil McAulay, Rob Melville, Ian Combe, Peter Moore

AND FINALLY.....

Please continue to bear in mind the coronavirus rules of good behaviour as well as the Country Code, and keep yourself and those who live and work in the Pentland Hills safe.

