

Pentland Post

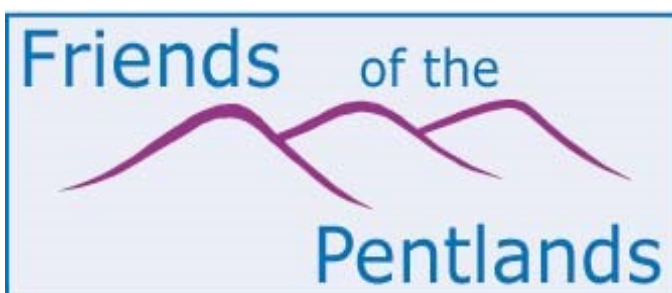
October 2021



“Job done!”

Two of our recently recruited volunteers, Charlie Withers and Robert Cook, proudly surveying their work (“I didn’t expect it to look that good!”) after repairing a stile on the Pentland Way at the foot of West Kip.

Photo and Caption : Andrew Marsden



Friends of the Pentlands
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Registered in Scotland

The Pentlands have been a means of escape and respite during the prolonged restrictions associated with Covid-19. This edition of the Pentland Post illustrates how walking in the hills has been a recreational pursuit stretching back to the 19th century, as Douglas Lowe introduces us to the first published guide to paths in the Pentlands from that time.

On the theme of guides, Andrew Marsden brings news of a rewriting of Bob Paterson's original guide to the Pentland Way, along with developments to the infrastructure along the Way itself. Many of us can look forward to getting to know the Pentlands even better as a result.

In the "View From Scald Law", Angus Ogilvie, who has entertained us with his poems in a number of recent editions, tells how he was motivated by, and finds inspiration in the hills. The process of getting to the finished product sounds as exhausting and as exhilarating as climbing to the steepest summits.

Elsewhere in this edition the continuing impact of the work of Litter Pickers and Work Day volunteers is illustrated, and attention is drawn to media appearances of the Pentlands.

The activities of the Friends of the Pentlands appear to be gradually edging towards normality and I am sure a resumption of Tea and Cakes would be greatly welcomed when it is deemed safe to do so. In the meantime I trust this edition of the Post helps keep you in touch.

Where am I?

Answer at the
foot of Page 6



THE VIEW FROM SCALD LAW Angus Ogilvie

I joined Friends of The Pentlands about four years ago and wished I had done so long before. I have been walking the Pentlands regularly since 2009 when I returned to Scotland from many years working in Asia and Africa, and after recovery from a blood cancer. For three long weeks during a stem cell transplant in the Western General in January 2009, I looked out on those hills covered in sparkling layers of ice and made a resolution that if and when I was able to do more than shuffle round the block I was going to be up there as often as I could. I came across someone in Bonaly Wood picking litter one morning, found out all about FoP and signed up right away. I currently do a 5 days a week, 3 hour early morning routine over the hills between Bonaly/Torphin and Swanston in most weathers and love it. Being in Friends of the Pentlands work teams is a natural fit. After one year I became a life member, which, with what went before, was making a statement of some kind!



Empty beauty captured by Bob Douglas

For me the Pentlands are many things. Apart from their physical beauty, incredible accessibility and relative emptiness, it is where I meet myself in quiet and solitude (I usually walk alone) in an open expanse where we become immersed together in creativity.

Walking is a rhythm that perfectly lends itself to thought and reflection. Thought involves elements of language and the walking rhythm

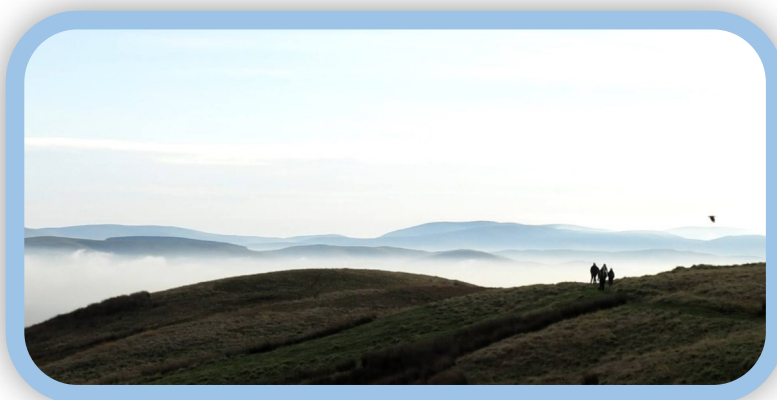
fits well with the 'language' of poetry. If you are a visual artist you will probably need to stop on the hill to capture what you want to express with various substances and/or implements. With poetry you just keep on walking. Your only tools are your vocabulary, your mind-play of ideas, a note book and a pencil, with which, admittedly, you might need to make the occasional very brief stop along the way to jot a word or phrase before it escapes into the ether.

Most of my poems have been 'walked'. That means that I take them with me onto the hill and fine tune them. (The last poem I wrote had about 15 hours of this tuning over 5 mornings and it is just 14 lines long and remains 'unfinished', but it took me on an intricate journey). Sometimes I go onto the hill with an idea and begin a poem. Sometimes an idea presents itself as I am walking. Poems generally are core ideas with many other ideas built around them. For me the Pentlands are about the elements, the pulses of nature, the human place in the intricacy and enormity of things. Hills help to put you in your place, remind you of your relative insignificance in the world. I live in Polwarth and I need to gain height, get to a place where I can look out and down on the world on a

regular basis. The Pentlands provides that grand vista field of poetry. It also reminds you of the infinities of the miniscule. You look down a lot when you are walking, you notice the smallest of wonders, a universe in a clump of sphagnum. For this reason I love what many find to be Edinburgh's curse, the North Sea haar. Walking in the haar forces you to concentrate on the immediate surroundings, for example I never cease to wonder at the fact that the entire hill is continuously coated in millions of spider webs which we do not see until the dew is heavy or the haar is down. The hill reflects back ideas, helps to crystallise things that bubble up from the undercurrent of the subconscious as you walk and breathe.

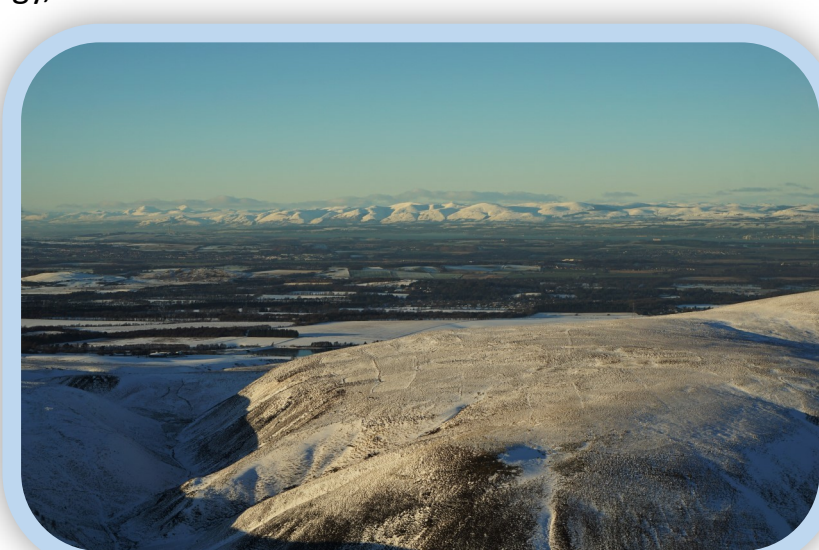
Once you have an idea, sometimes even a neat line, you think about how to frame that as a poem. I often use an established poetic form initially, such as a sonnet or a cinquain. These are structure into which you can mould words to express the idea. Then the hard work begins. Poetry is an art, but the art is mainly the result of craft (or hard graft!). Poetry is the old cliché, 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration, and this is even more true of writing while walking over hills! Walking the hills aids the whittling, chiselling, smoothing and layering that goes on along with the singing, sounding and scrabbling to find the right words that express the ideas, create the right mood and sit well with each other.

Most of my walking is in the Bell's Hill, Harbour, Capelaw, Castle Law, Allermuir, Caerketton area, though I have also often wandered the southern skyline and the area around East Cairn and Monk's Rigg. Weather, light, wind (after many years of absence, I soon found out how much I had missed the Scottish wind), water, woodland, the movements and activities of animals and birds, the geology, the occasional human encounter. All of these can spark creative ideas. If there is one



Looking East from Monk's Rigg

Philip Shinton



Scottish Himalayas? Actually, The Ochils

Bob Douglas

thing above others, I would choose the solitude in elevated open places with great vistas.

There are times from Capelaw when I have looked north and thought I was looking at the Himalayas as they appeared from the roof of my house in Kathmandu, but, of course, it was just the way that the clouds were stacked behind the Ochils and the hills of Fife.

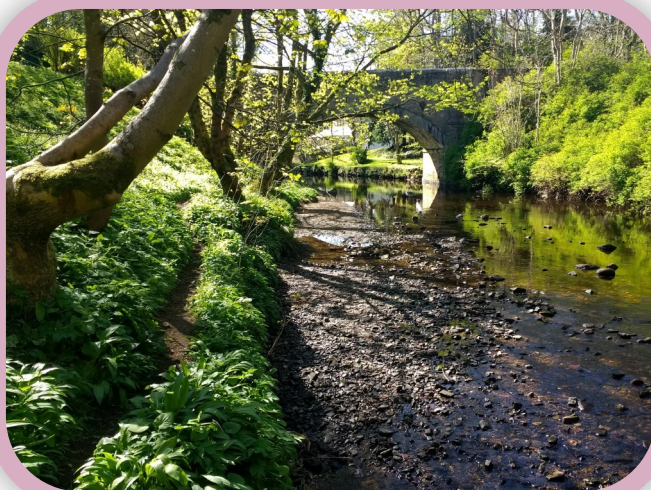
All it takes is a little imagination!

AGM SPEAKER

David Syme reports

The speaker who followed the zoom AGM on 18th May was Helen Brown, of the Water of Leith Conservation Trust. Helen gave a lively talk about the history and ecology of the Water of Leith's catchment area with excellent slides to support. When she went on to list the aims and activities of the Trust it was clear that it and Friends of the Pentlands have much in common. Indeed some of our members are also Trust members.

Helen has a deep knowledge of the wildlife of the area. We were astounded to hear the numbers: 76 species of aquatic plants..... 278 species of flowering wild plants.... 82 species of birds have been spotted, and, to Helen's delight, the mammals now include several otters. She pointed out that we should not malign the humble bat. An adult bat will consume 3000 midges a night!



The river has a busy industrial heritage, and the reason behind the creation of the Trust (in 1988) was to clean up the environment in the post-industrial era. The problems the Trust now faces sound familiar to our members: rubbish, flooding, sewerage and planning and development issues.

The Water of Leith in Currie

Philip Shinton

The 150 volunteers share the same values as our members, and Helen's talk on their work to conserve, enhance and protect the Water of Leith had us all nodding in approval and appreciation. A visit to the Trust's Visitor Centre at 24 Lanark Road is highly recommended.



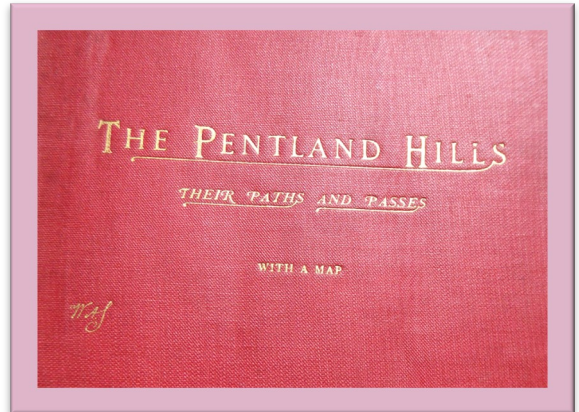
WORK DAY ACHIEVEMENTS I

A riverbank reinforced by willow spiling carried out by a Work Day team.

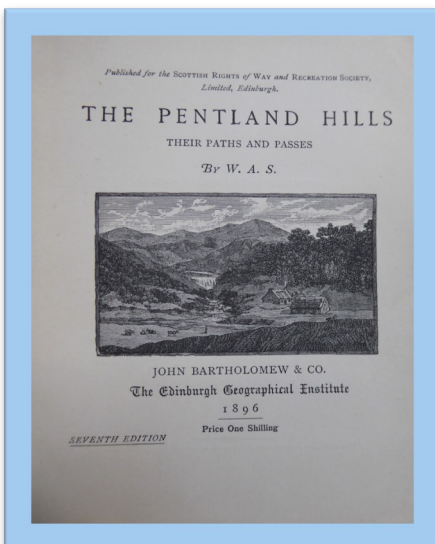
Photo: Donald Sandeman

The Wee Red Book of Pentland Paths Douglas Lowe reviews

One hundred and thirty six years ago the first guide book of Pentland paths was published. The small red cloth covered “The Pentland Hills their Paths and Passes, With a Map “ was written by WAS (Walter A. Smith), map by John Bartholomew , and was published for the newly reformed The Scottish Rights of Way and Recreation Society, now today known as SCOTWAYS.



The Society was reformed in March 1884, re-blooded with new Directors, and set to work immediately. A dispute in the Pentlands at Dreghorn was settled by agreement and the Society set to surveying and recording all of the Pentland paths. Following discussion with and the agreement of the landowners, signposts were erected in 1885 on all but the most westerly routes. The guide book was published that same year. The first two editions of the guide book end with the description of the Cauldstane Slap route, “This very ancient and still used Drove Road”. However I see from my sixth edition (1892) another chapter “West Linton, Dunsyre and the End of the Range “ had by then been added and signposts erected on the western paths as well. This guide book was published in various editions until 1923.



It is interesting to note that in 1886 some 300 copies of the book were presented to Edinburgh Trades Council for distribution amongst working men “in order that healthful enjoyment and recreation afforded by the rights of way across the hills should be better known”. The first edition of the Bartholomew’s Pentland Hills Walking map appeared in 1890.

Where am I? From Page 2

You are looking south to Eastside Farm from Crosss Sward between Scald Law and East Kip

LITTER PICKER FINDS



In the last edition, the front page featured our litter pickers with a trophy from the slopes of Hillend. (see Caption Competition below). Now they display their latest unusual find :

“Up the hills with a paddle.”

Keep your eyes open for an abandoned canoe.....

CAPTION COMPETITION RESULT

Readers were asked to submit captions for the last edition's featured litter find:

The winning (and only) entry from Penny Mckee:

“Hello! I’m a duck
So you’re in luck!
Rubbish is poo-y,
So put it in my loo-y!”



WORK DAY ACHIEVEMENTS I



Our work day volunteers successfully shore up a bank at Baddingsgill

Photo Hamish Clark

2022 Calendar is out!

The Editorial Team has produced next year's calendar a little earlier this year. Many thanks to all those who sent in photographs! The theme "Hidden Treasures of the Pentlands" sent you to the far reaches of the hills, and we received a wide array of hidden corners. We hope that the pictures chosen might encourage people to explore beyond the most accessible hills and routes. We are grateful to the Estate of Ian Hamilton Finlay for the image of Little Sparta (August photo), and for welcoming representatives of the Friends of the Pentlands to this special place. It certainly merits visiting to view art works set in the natural Pentlands landscape.

For **2023** our theme will be: **"At Work and Play in the Pentlands"** and we are hoping for some interesting photographs from you. Submissions should be in landscape format, and sent to the editor (pdmoore55@gmail.com) by the end of July 2022.

Carnethy Hill Runners were featured on the BBC News website. Congratulations to the 120-strong team from Carnethy Hill Runners who between them, managed to climb all 282 Munros in a single day, making the last peak with minutes to spare! They did this on the 14th of August, when conditions were far from ideal. Surely many days were spent in training over the hills of home.

WORK DAY ACHIEVEMENTS II

Spot the
difference!



“Before” and “After”
our Work Day team
wielded the scythe
(or was it the strim-
mer) at Lowrie’s Glen,
in late summer.

Photographs:

Donald Sandeman



UNDER THE HILL**VII**

As mist lifts the hill transfigures
to a mountain, liquid in its shifting lights.
It glooms and coruscates with colours
thrilled to life as dull spills bright
in lemons, limes, vermilion, then mutes
again to sallow, lovat, mauve. Its dark roots
tug the memory of how a child would find
a massif in a tussocked hump, and climb
past overhangs of buttercups and crevices of grass
onto a secret pass, to scale that last
unassailable pinnacle into those drifting clouds.
Age will slow the hill down to a mound,
while up there, with its sleights of mists,
the myth that is the mountain will persist.

VIII

The hill may seem aloof, a stolid mass, but it is ruthless;
around that mask there hangs the air of a benign malignity.
It tears out hearts to lavish feathers on a breeze;
swallows oaks in centuries of rot to grow a harebell;
goads the hare to streak from cover into the slicing shadow;
strings its blades with beads of pearl to juice the meat
of lumpen cattle. It cleaves a niche for a seedling tree
to stunt its limbs, then warp them into knotted stumps.
When proffered gods, it lets them squat till degradation
drains away their power. It lulls the mind to assuage the soul
with palliatives of silken sounds and visions, then whips,
and howls, and hacks at eyes with wind-shards sucked from heaven.
It calls me up to tranquillize, but shrieks wild threats and warnings,
and I must go, or lose the day to bleak remorse and longing.

Making Progress along the Way

Andrew Marsden

Friends of the Pentlands will be aware that work is under

way to update and rebrand the Pentland Way as a “long distance footpath”. Some of you might already have noticed some change in this respect.

First, the route waymarking has been completely updated and new yellow Pentland Way roundels have replaced the

Friends of the Pentlands arrows with

their caps – wherever possible these have been affixed on plates to metal fingerposts.

Alternative routes (especially at the start and finish) have been researched and these, too, are being identified on the ground with colour-coded (green) roundels. Details are being posted on the FoP Facebook Page.

The writing of a new edition of the late Bob Paterson’s guide is almost complete with the route description being separated

from narrative on the features. In addition to Bob’s fascinating historical insights there will be more generalised guidance to walking the Way and descriptions of geographical and geological features and the rich wildlife. Several new photographs, mostly from the camera of Bob Douglas, are included. Access to some of the features not directly on the route is being provided by descriptions of Side Trips – giving the Wayfarer the opportunity of taking a break from the main track and explore further afield.

To accompany the guide there will be a few map boards/interpretation panels erected along the route. Sites for interpretation panels already identified include Garvald Home Farm, the Allan Ramsay Square at Carlops and the old filter beds track at Flotterstone. The information on the panels will link, using QR codes to a Pentland Way web page where further details will be found. The benefit of a PW webpage is that information such as waymarking or feature changes, access, public transport, and accommodation information can be readily updated – whereas the printed word cannot.

It is hoped all these changes will be concluded by Spring 2022 when the re-branded Pentland Way will receive the benefit of a formal public re-launch.

Andrew is Vice Chair of Friends of the Pentlands and leads the Pentland Way Consolidation Group

Pentland Way route marking signs on finger post



Ramblings

Included in the May 2021 Edition of the Pentland Post was a brief reminiscence of a BBC Radio 4 “Ramblings” episode set in the Pentlands and involving members of the Friends. Readers were asked for information or memories and **Pete Drummond**, one of the participants, has replied:

Clare Balding’s Pentland walk:

In late 2010 Clare was doing a series for Radio 4, walking with locals in their home area, gathering their thoughts en route. Our group of four in 2010, together with Clare, producer Maggie and Pentland Ranger Susan, started at Loganlea. We went over Carnethy and Turnhouse Hills before going up Allermuir and descending to Hillend: every so often Clare would interview one of us about what we got out of Pentland-walking. One of our number, Neil, a micro-lighter, had set up a pal of his to fly low over us on the ridge as we traversed it. The picture shows us acknowledging it.



PENTLANDS in the MEDIA 2

Spotter : Lesley Arthur

Clare Balding made a return visit to the Pentlands on a new “Ramblings” programme broadcast on 4th September. This time she was accompanied by two Edinburgh-based adventurers, who took her up Capelaw Hill from Bonaly. One of the hosts, interestingly, described an experience similar to Angus (see View from Scald Law) of looking out to the Pentlands from the Western General Hospital and taking inspiration from the hills.

And Finally...

Do you have a comment, story, or photograph related to the Pentlands which you would like to share, or would you like to suggest a potential feature for the Pentlands Post?

Please send your thoughts to the editor
Peter Moore, at pdmoore55@gmail.com

