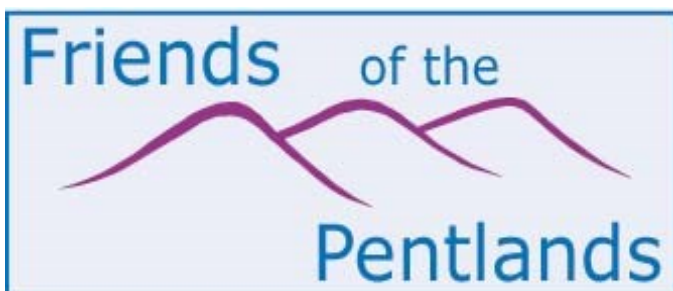


Pentland Post

May 2023



Toasted marshmallows—reward for volunteer gorse cutters on a cold January day



Friends of the Pentlands

is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation

Registered in Scotland

Number SCO 35514

We are through another winter (according to the calendar, if not the weather), and already it is time for your next Pentland Post. It includes information on the activities of the Friends in the past few months, developments that are underway or planned, and writing inspired by the Pentlands.

The motto of the Friends is “Conserving Protecting and Enhancing”, and the range of work illustrated in this edition serves to demonstrate that all three aims are being pursued with vigour and enthusiasm. There are the more visible Work Days involved with activities such as managing gorse, tree planting, path repair and wild flower meadow creation, alongside the less obvious but no less important working in partnership with other agencies and making representations to other bodies such as planning authorities.

It is hoped you enjoy reading this edition and that it helps keep you feeling in touch and informed. Do send in comments and suggestions for future content. *“Thank You”* to all contributors to the Pentland Post.

Where am I?

Answer at the foot of Page 12



Photo supplied by David Syme

While there have been no major developments to report over the winter, there are one or two promising projects on the horizon - provided all the pieces of the jigsaw fall into place - plus slow but steady progress on several internal issues.

Two important documents have been scrutinised and revised by the Board and should be ready for publication in the near future - a Child Protection Policy (led by Board member Bob Cook) and a Privacy Notice (led by Board member Douglas Tullis and myself). The new Child Protection Policy reflects our commitment to expanding our activities in education and public outreach.

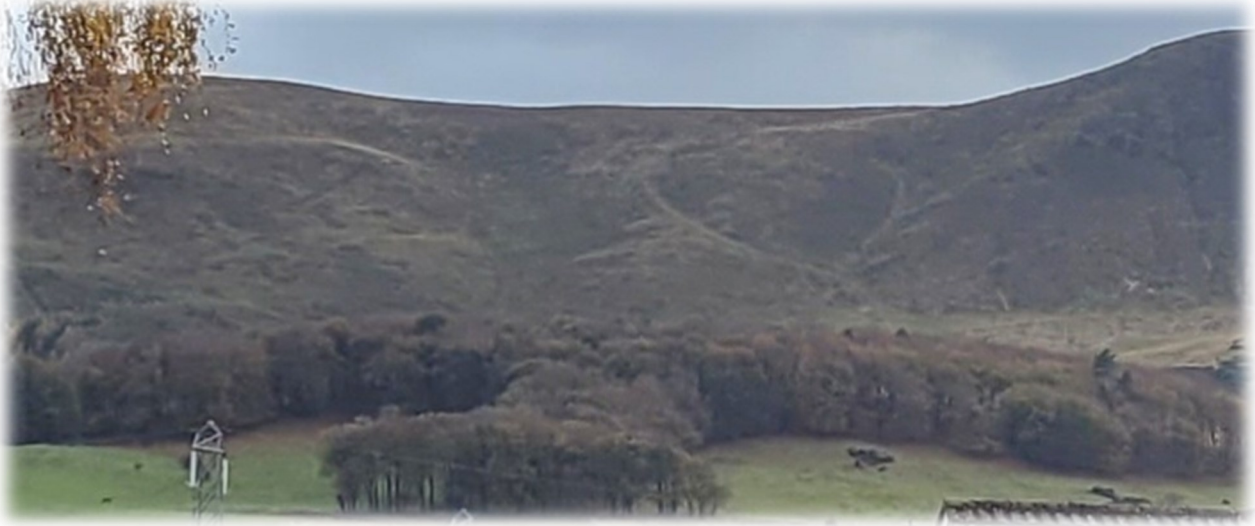
Board member Bill Aitken has been investigating options for switching FoP's membership processing operations to a proprietary software package. Current signs are promising and we hope to finalise this over the summer.

We have also been consulting on expanding our volunteering opportunities. Bob Douglas has various plans in hand for creating wildflower meadows for butterflies and other pollinators, which may benefit from new, more flexible ways of working. We are also looking at the option of occasional weekend conservation work parties for people in full-time employment.

Recent visitors to Hillend will be aware of tree-felling operations linked to improved road access to the Snowsports Centre, where Midlothian Council's planned redevelopment is moving up a gear. As a consequence, FoP will shortly have to evacuate the steading where we store our tools and materials. Discussions are under way on alternative accommodation.

On the planning front, the Board was disappointed to hear that Scottish Borders Council's decision to refuse permission for a quarry development at Slipperfield had been reversed on appeal by the Scottish Government.

The T wood is easily spotted from Edinburgh as it is indeed shaped like a T. This T shape is thanks to it having been cleverly built over a steep knoll in a cross shape so from every compass point it looks more or less like a T.



T Wood from Swanston Raod

Being pedantic, it's not an exact T and possibly more of a crucifix with the southern arm being longer than the northern. If anyone has tried walking in it – there is a handy gate at the North east point - it's surprisingly steep and extends from c240m to c300m above sea level.

This steepness has not discouraged youthful campers who have endeavoured to keep themselves warm utilising a well-used fire pit area. Fortunately they have predominantly used old branches to burn and certainly there are numerous old trees with broken branches.



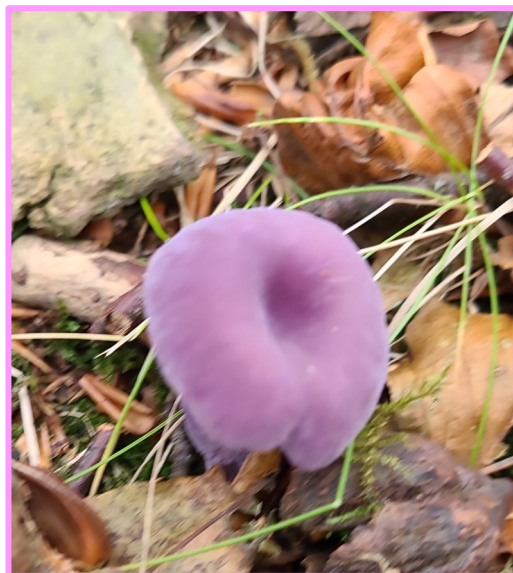
1946 photograph of T Woods

This is not surprising since the wood was originally planted in 1766 by Henry Trotter of Mortonhall. There are a variety of stories regarding the genesis of the wood – it was either planted to celebrate a contemporary relative surviving some battle, or to commemorate an ancestor for doing the same. Another rationale was to provide a permanent reminder that although Henry had been beaten a couple of times in his legal quest to prevent Swanston water being used to slake Edinburgh's thirst in 1760, it was still his land. One could say, it suited him to a T! His namesake is still in charge of Mortonhall estate.

If interested, one could walk from the T wood, via Swanston cottage to the water house at the bottom of the Howden Glen as the latter were built as part of the water works work in 1761.

Whilst the trees are predominantly Beech, I spotted Sycamore, Wych Elm, Scots Pine, Sitka Spruce and Ash.

My fungi skills are next to non-existent, though I spotted what I think is an Amethyst Deceiver. Apparently edible, I certainly would not wish to experiment. My fungi aware mother's favourite joke is 'All mushrooms are edible – some of them only once'.



Amethyst Deceiver

ENJOYING THE HILLS RESPONSIBLY



The Friends are now represented on the Pentland Hills Partnership Against Rural Crime. One aspect of this body's work is placing signage to raise awareness of the need to avoid disturbance during the lambing and nesting season by ensuring dogs are under control. Signs are much in evidence especially in the north of the Pentlands, but care is required across all the hills.

The Scottish Outdoor Access Code provides guidance:

"3.54 In exercising access rights, you must keep your dog(s) under proper control. You must also ensure that your dog does not worry livestock What 'proper control' means varies according to the type of place you are visiting. Essentially, there are four important things to remember:

- do not take your dog into a field where there are young animals;
- do not take your dog into a field of vegetables and fruit (unless you are on a clear path);
- keep your dog on a short lead or under close control in a number of other places A short lead is taken to be two metres and "under close control" means that the dog is able to respond to your commands and is kept close at heel
- remove any faeces left by your dog in a public open place"

[Scottish Outdoor Access Code | Scottish Outdoor Access Code \(outdooraccess-scotland.scot\)](https://www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot/)

THE CRAWLEY TUNNEL and the guid Pentland Waters Ian Combe

One of Edinburgh's lesser-known hidden passageways is the Crawley Tunnel, although for most of its distance it was actually a cast iron pipeline. Built around 1821 by the Edinburgh Water Works / Edinburgh and District Water Trust, at the same time as Glencorse Reservoir, the tunnel is actually an aqueduct built to house the pipes bringing water into Edinburgh and runs for about a mile from the Meadows, under the old Royal Infirmary and the Grassmarket, all the way to the foot of The Mound where it crosses Princes Street to at least Hanover Street. The structure consists of stone walls with an arched stone roof and sections still survive.

The tunnel had been mostly forgotten about when workers rediscovered it in the late 1950s while removing Edinburgh's old tram lines. This 'rediscovered' section was subsequently filled in, though it's understood that the majority of the tunnel lies intact. At the same time, a network of similar tunnels was discovered at the west end of Princes Street at Lothian Road. It is also rumoured that another section of the Crawley Tunnel extends towards Scotland Street and possibly Leith. Further work to shore up the tunnel took place in 2013 when Edinburgh's tram system was in the process of being brought back.

CALENDAR INFORMATION

GREAT news from the Treasurer. The 2023 Friends calendar has broken all records and made a profit of over £1500. That is an excellent achievement and huge thanks are due particularly to Averil Sutherland, Olga Macfadyen, David Syme and Linda Stirling for organising production and sales, as well as all the members who have supported the efforts with submissions of photographs and with purchases.

For 2024, the theme is "*Life in the Pentlands*", which intentionally offers a very wide range of possibilities. Photo submissions should be sent to:

peter.moore@pentlandfriends.org.uk.

Please remember to use "landscape" format and to label each photo with your name, and location of the picture.

POET'S CORNER with Angus Ogilvie

Bog Bridge Building on Thieves Road

(rising to the challenge with an unlikely sonnet)

With the calipers we grapple the dead weights
of the wooden sleepers, one each end,
and teeter along with quickening gaits
till the feelings gone, then stop to bend
our arms to get the blood back and swap hands
then lift again.

The bog sucks at the spades
unclogging the syke that the old bridge spans;
turf's hacked back, rot cut out. New sleepers laid
on top, three wide, are braced and nailed to joists
with four inch clearance either side to fix the posts
that dead-eye Arthur drives home with a mell,
and dab-hand Andrew anchors with the drill.

With non-slip staples battered in the job is finished.
"Well, yes, is there a poem here, Angus?" asks Hamish.

©Angus D.H. Ogilvy



“BOG BRIDGE BUILDING ON THIEVES ROAD” was selected from Angus’ recently published “Lines Left in Sphagnum”, his fourth book of poems, the others being “Lights in the Constellation of the Crab”, “House Clearing by Moonlight”, and “The Road to Mellon Udrigle”.

Angus has a few copies of “Lines Left in Sphagnum” remaining. Angus does not sell his poetry, but when giving away his books he suggests donations to The Friends of the Pentlands and to Maggie’s Edinburgh.

“Lines Left in Sphagnum” is inspired by the Pentland Hills and captures the differing moods of the hills, paints verbal pictures of their wildlife and weathers, and depicts experiences of walking in the hills. Angus should know - he is up there daily, probably mulling over the next collection of poems.

Bog Bridge Building was selected for the Pentland Post as it aptly illustrates the challenges of that particular task to the volunteers, shows how these challenges are overcome through teamwork, and encapsulates the humour that generally accompanies, and lightens, the activities.

Angus can be contacted at hermitcrabspoems@gmail.com

Pentlands in the Media

Pentlands on the BBC: [Rescuers bunny-hop up hill on ski tow to reach injured walker - BBC News](#) This is the story of an unusual rescue carried out by the Tweed Mountain Rescue Team when conventional methods were not possible.

The Borestone featured in Paul Murton’s exploration of the North River Esk from its source in the Pentlands to the sea at Musselburgh, on the BBC’s “Grand Tours of Scotland’s Rivers”.

THE ART OF GORSE MANAGEMENT

Over recent winter months, a number of work-days have been devoted to management of gorse, mainly around Bonaly. This has been done in association with the PHRP team as part of their habitat management plan to improve the biodiversity of the Bonaly Country Park.

For those who play golf, gorse may be that thorny hazard which attracts your ball and is reluctant to give it back no matter how much hacking sustained from the meanest club in the bag. More on gorse and golf later, but to the Friends' volunteers, it may also be a prickly hazard and an undesirable plant in the wrong place. However there are also good reasons for seeing it as a positive contributor to the landscape and a benefit to nature.

Gorse (scientific name: *Ulex europaeus*) is a “pioneer” species, one of the first plants to colonise bare ground. Gorse thrives on free-draining soils with low fertility and indeed it can be out-competed in nutrient rich conditions. As it seeds freely, it can be highly invasive in heavily disturbed areas.

Traditionally, common gorse was regularly collected from common land for a number of purposes including fuel for firing bread ovens, fodder for livestock, bound to make floor and chimney brushes, and a colourant for painting Easter eggs. (Ref 1)

While useful for our ancestors, gorse may now be seen as more vital for wildlife. It is ideal for a range of nesting heathland, downland and farmland birds, including the stonechat, linnet and yellowhammer. The dense structure also provides important refuge for these birds in harsh weather.



Gorse is important for invertebrates as it is in flower for long periods, so is an important nectar source in early spring and early winter, when little else is in flower. Some scarce invertebrates are dependent on it.

Gorse is valuable as scattered bushes or as discrete clumps. Large continuous patches colonising open habitats could shade out herbaceous

interest and might not be appropriate. Gorse hedges provide nest sites and stock proofing. Ref (2)



In view of the importance of gorse to nesting birds, any management of gorse is restricted to the period between the end of September and the end of February. Much of the work carried out by the Friends is with the purpose of preventing incursion onto paths, and to allow recently planted trees to become established to the point where they can outcompete the

gorse.

Returning to the golf theme, it is interesting to note that the Old Course, St Andrew's now plan their gorse management. Prior to that, particular areas were cut at random during inclement weather. Since then, work is planned to create healthier and more ecologically beneficial stands of gorse through coppicing the plant when it has become leggy and degenerate.

The ecological benefits of correctly managed gorse are recognised, by creating a denser stand with a diversity of structure throughout the course. This provides a variety of ecological niches, maximising the environmental value which the course provides.

Gorse management on the golf course is not simply cutting the gorse down and allowing it to regrow. Managing this aggressive plant means topping it, (retaining a height of 1-1.5 metres), coppicing it (cutting it back to stumps 150-300mm above ground), and sometimes even completely removing it. This is all dependent on the condition of the stand and its strategic position on the course. It only takes about 10-15 years for stands of gorse to lose their compactness, so the management of this vigorous plant is an ongoing job. (Ref 3)

So whether historically, on the golf course, farmland or on the open areas of the Pentlands, gorse management is important from an ecological perspective, and the Friends of the Pentlands are firmly in the minds of the Pentlands Hills Regional Park for future work days.

References:

1 [Common gorse | The Wildlife Trusts](https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/) <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/>

2 <https://www.rspb.org.uk/.../techniques-to-help-wildlife/managing-gorse>

3 Fergal Cushen Greenkeeper The Old Course blog.standrews.com/2016/08/23/

WILD FLOWER MEADOW PROJECT

Led by Bob Douglas

Prior to the winter months, members were invited by Bob Douglas to help with the propagation of various wild flower seeds with the aim of having a big supply of plug plants to populate the various wildflower meadows that Friends of the Pentlands are aiming to establish in the coming year.

In February Bob began looking for indications of success with the germination of seeds, whilst advising that some might not yet have broken dormancy, requiring a (healthy) dose of winter frost to encourage germination. Bob himself had grown 800+ seedlings and young plants including Cuckoo-flower, Red Campion, Kidney Vetch, Yarrow, Birdsfoot Trefoil, Bugle, Self-Heal, Foxglove and a handful of other plants.

The next step for those which had germinated, was to be “pricked out” into individual cells for growing on. Seedlings required to be big enough to handle with at least one pair of well-developed “true” leaves.



Strimming in preparation for planting wild flowers

For "taming" the target sites, volunteers had been trained in using a strimmer for grass-cutting at sites FoP manage, while more tools for raking and planting were procured.

Sites for planting include:

Silverburn Arboretum and Garvald Home Farm: both small sites sown with wildflower seed last summer which might need “topped up” with plug plants

Patieshill Farm: we’re currently looking at 3 locations, with varying habitat conditions, on this extensive site. Wildflower planting commenced on two of the locations, but further grass cutting and planting will be required

West Linton Arboretum: we started grass cutting on the north and south sides of the banking. Some seed has been sown and plugs planted on a small section of banking where we removed a layer of turf.

Baddingsill Farm, beside Lyne Water: this area is about a third of an acre, with many of the target butterfly species already in the area. In April We started by cutting a trial strip on a small section with the aim of sowing plugs as they become ready. The farm has offered help in grass cutting.

Harlaw: we have agreement from PHRP to extend the existing wildflower meadow, and potentially to plant wildflowers along the ditch that runs beside the path on the north side of Harlaw .

GEOLOGY TALK AND WALK

The latest in the series of talks offered to Friends was a very interesting and informative presentation by Angus Miller on the geology of the Pentlands. This was followed up with a guided walk in the Bonaly/Torduff area the following day where the varying geology of the Pentlands was highlighted. While Angus focussed on the volcanic origins of the Pentlands around 410 million years ago, it was noted that a second period of volcanic activity 300-360 million years ago was responsible for the formation of Arthur's Seat. Edinburgh apparently is peculiar globally in experiencing these two distinct volcanic episodes. Subsequently sedimentary layers formed on top of the volcanic rock under the old Lapetus Ocean, much of that eroded away eventually by ice and weathering, leaving the hard igneous rocks poking out of the current landscape. For an insight into the long term geological processes of tectonic plate movements Angus recommended Christopher Scotese's videos on U-Tube.



The walk route demonstrated the contrast between basalt-based Warklaw Hill which contains more soil and supports bracken, grass and gorse, and Torduff Hill consisting of trachyte with more silica and is acidic which is better for heather.

Angus explains the geology of Black Hill Angus has a finger in several geological pies, including The Centre for Open Learning at Edinburgh University, Edinburgh Geological Society, Lothian and Borders GeoConservation and his own business "Geowalks" which offers a range of activities exploring the geology of landscape and human activity (www.geowalks.co.uk).

Where am I? From Page 2: The picture was taken at the old filterbeds at Flotterstone.