



Friends of the Pentlands Volunteer Handbook

revised November 2023

Volunteering with Friends of the Pentlands

Introduction

The Pentland Hills stretch from the Edinburgh City Bypass in the North to Carnwath/Biggar in the South, being bounded by the A70 (“Lang Whang”) to the west and the A702 to the east. The Pentland Hills Regional Park occupies about a third of the area of the range at the north end.

The Friends of the Pentlands is a conservation charity established in 2003 – it has an interest in the whole area of the hills and not merely in the Regional Park. The strap line of the charity is Conserving, Protecting and Enhancing. Volunteering to work with the Friends is truly rewarding and there is, as our brochure states, “Something for Everyone” in addressing these three aims. As well as enjoying physical exercise in the countryside area there is, frequently, the opportunity to learn new skills and crafts.

This handbook describes the work we do against these three broad headings; The Work we do, How we do it (i.e. how the work is organised) and notes for volunteers on Safe and Healthy Working Practices.

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. Declaring that “the Pentlands” shall mean the Pentland Hills and surrounding countryside.
- To protect and enhance the natural and cultural heritage and features of public amenity within this area.
- To encourage respect for the quality of life of those who live and work within this area.
- To carry out environmental projects that enhance public access and biodiversity.
- To encourage high standards of design in all work undertaken within this area.
- To provide an annual programme of activities to foster the enjoyment of healthy exercise, an appreciation of the environment and social and cultural history.
- To promote the forming of appropriate planning policies, compatible with these purposes, through the considered long term development plan process and their effective and consistent implementation.
- To stimulate public interest in these purposes by means of publications, meetings, exhibitions, appeals and other forms of publicity.

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The Work We Do

Visitors to the Pentlands frequently come across Friends of the Pentlands volunteers (often retired persons) carrying out footpath repairs using mattocks and spades. But there is a lot more to volunteering than that as this handbook hopes to illustrate.

Of the 400 or so Friends of the Pentlands members, over 100 volunteer across different areas and 40 or so are regularly active.

Our activities can be described in terms of our aims, viz Conservation, Protection and Enhancement

CONSERVATION

Wildlife Conservation

The Pentland Hills are abundant in wildlife and from time to time our volunteers assist with ecological projects working with the Regional Park and other organisations. These can include bird observation, wildlife transect monitoring, pond dipping and moth monitoring.

Trees

There is a huge drive to plant native trees across the Pentland hills and to support those already in existence. Planting usually requires staking and placement of tree guards; maintenance of existing trees ("tree beating") includes removal of tree guards which have achieved their purpose, clearance of dead or decaying trees (including those affected by dieback disease) and removal of weeds and plants which are choking the root systems. In the winter invasive gorse which strangles young trees and obstructs their light must be removed or cut back – and safely burned.

Patieshill Wildlife Area

Some time ago George and Janet Burke, owners of Patieshill Farm near Carlops, fenced off 12 acres (5 hectares) of hillside to create a wildlife area which contains a variety of ecological habitats including woodland, marshland, scrub and a pond. Since 2021 Friends of the Pentlands have been helping to maintain and enhance this area in line with an agreed action plan.

Wild Flowers and Butterfly Conservation

Friends of the Pentlands have started a programme of creating wildflower meadows to support pollinators, with particular emphasis on those plants utilised by the caterpillars. This involves strimming or scything meadows regularly until they are fully established, then sowing seeds and planting plug plants, such as yellow rattle and devil's bit scabious, to encourage wildflower growth and provide a species-specific habitat for pollinators.

Pentlands Arboreta

The Friends of the Pentlands have planted five arboreta around the Pentland Hills to commemorate John Muir, the Dunbar-born environmentalist. There is one in each of the five local authority areas around the perimeter of the hills, viz Swanston, Silverburn, West Linton, Carnwath and Harperrig. Each contains an example of every tree native to Scotland. These tree collections require regular maintenance.



Hedges

From time-to-time native hedgerows require to be planted or "laid".

Litter Picking

We have a regular programme removing litter and harmful materials from "hot spots" within the hills.

PROTECTION

Much of our work is involved with protecting paths in order to promote access for all within the Pentland Hills.

Path protection

This is important to reduce damage to fragile ecosystems which occurs when walkers or riders stray off the path, causing “braiding” and bruising of the heather or damage to the habitats of, for example, ground nesting birds. It goes without saying that the visitor experience is improved when one doesn’t have to walk through deep bog or cross inhospitable grazing areas. Ridge and rocky paths often require specialist building using contractors. However, there are many paths in the lower areas which can be maintained by volunteer teams using simple hand tools.



Surface protection includes creating a firm foundation (in this respect the Friends have gained some experience in the use of sheep fleece as a stabilising membrane) and applying a top dressing of aggregate and whin dust. Vegetation which allows water accumulation requires to be trimmed. Paths may require levelling (“benching”) and/or edging when they are on a slope.

Drainage It is important to keep water off paths, especially on a slope. For this, cross drains and side ditches are needed which require regular maintenance and unblocking. In some places, especially across boggy ground, surface paths are unsuitable and **boardwalks** and/or “**sleeper bridges**” are created.



Where paths follow the edge of a river there are risks that the riverbanks can become eroded and damaged. A variety of methods are in use to provide **stabilisation of the river bank**. One such method – “**spiling**” - makes use of planted willow staves and woven osiers, which provide a living wall along the river bank.

Where paths cross water or walls, the Friends may be involved in the construction and/or maintenance of **countryside furniture** such as bridges, stiles, gates and fences.



ENHANCEMENT

Enhancement is all about improving the visitor experience.

Waymarking

Popular walks benefit from a programme of **waymarking** using badged waymarking posts or, on more remote routes, tall “line of sight” posts. On occasion we maintain waymarking posts on behalf of other organisations e.g., the Scottish Rights of Way Society – Scotways - or the Pentland Paths within the Regional Park. Features of interest may be described on **information panels** for example on the Cross Borders Drove Road or on the Pentland Way, a 20-mile trail created by the Friends of the Pentlands.

Path Inspections

The Friends of the Pentlands run a programme of annual path inspections where path damage or deterioration in countryside furniture can be noted and recorded in an **asset register** which informs future work planning.



Educational Activities

The Pentlands are a “countryside classroom” and groups of volunteers are on hand to support learning for schools and youth groups.

Access for all

The Friends have available two motorised wheelchairs which are available for the provision of guided walks for those with access difficulties.



The Harlaw Wildlife Garden

Adjacent to Harlaw House, the Friends have created and maintain a wildlife garden which includes a pond, a bird feeding area, a composting area and flower beds of different varieties and habitat types.

Walks and Talks Programme

The Friends provide a programme of talks of interest approximately four times a year and walks – usually monthly, several of which are theme related.

How we do it

Arrangements for the Types of Work

Our volunteering work is organised into groups, each under the management of a group co-ordinator. The following groups are currently active –

Community engagement

We are always looking for skilled and experienced teachers or experts to work with schools or youth groups (see “Working with Children” below). From time-to-time volunteers represent the Friends of the Pentlands at talks, fairs, markets, etc.

As stated above, Friends of Pentland owns two mobility scooters which may be used to offer guided outings at Harlaw. A team of guides/escorts has been trained to assist with this activity.

Conservation Groups

We have developed “dedicated” groups with expert leaders to work on tree management, in the arboreta and in the wildlife meadows, and at Patieshill. The work of these groups is episodic and seasonal, but it is hoped to be regularised as time progresses. Details are on the FoP website.

Gardening

We have been maintaining the wildlife garden at Harlaw, on behalf of the Pentland Hills Regional Park, since 2010. The gardening team meet at 10am every second Thursday for about two hours, from April until October. Gardeners come when they are able to and there is no expectation for anyone to attend on every occasion.

On an ad hoc basis the gardening team will provide their attention to other sites around the Pentlands including around the Friends of the Pentlands store/operational base.

Litter-picking

Litter-picking volunteers are essential to keep the Pentlands looking beautiful. Meeting at 9.30am we litter-pick twice a month at the car parks and main paths at the “hot spots” of Bonaly Country Park, Flotterstone, Hillend and Harlaw. From time-to-time clean-ups are carried out at Castlelaw, Dreghorn, Boghall and Swanston car parks. We also stage one-off clean-ups in response to requests for help. Litter-picking usually takes less than 2 hours, but this can depend on the number of volunteers and amount of litter.

We now have a couple of dozen sets of litter picking kits (pickers, hoops, tabards) for children and young people which are available on loan for groups or individuals by arrangement.



Path inspections

Path inspections are carried out in the last quarter of each year after the active walking and riding season. Path inspectors work in pairs and are allocated their own designated paths to oversee and on which to report. The volunteer co-ordinator sends out details of the proposed inspections at the start of the inspection period.

Workdays

Our formal workdays take place throughout the year in nearly all weathers (with a break over Christmas!) and take place on the second Tuesday, third Wednesday and fourth Thursday of each month. Work squads, under the supervision of appointed workday team leaders, tackle the more challenging – and sometimes heavier – tasks including maintenance of paths and countryside furniture. Workdays run approximately from 10am to 3pm, but this is variable, depending upon the job, the weather and the number of volunteers. Some projects may last several months whilst others can be completed in a day. Our volunteers can become involved with a variety of activities and learn new skills. Volunteers of all abilities are welcome but must book a place beforehand with our volunteer organizer. The programme for the following month is usually posted in the last week of the previous month. The team leaders will have carried out a reconnaissance of the work required, sourced the materials, and prepared a tools and equipment list.

Occasionally, tasks – such as emergency repairs - present at short notice whereupon the workday volunteer co-ordinator will assemble a small “hit squad” from the pool of workday volunteers.

The FoP are planning to introduce occasional, weekend, work parties which are both more family friendly and can also meet the needs of those members who have not reached the age of retirement and are looking for some activities to occupy their weekend.



And, in addition, we are always on the lookout for members and friends with other attributes, such as secretarial or IT skills, to support all the work which takes place in the background.

Volunteers who are not Friends of the Pentlands

Individuals

We are aware that, increasingly, individuals wish to take up pro-bono volunteering opportunities offered by their employers or community organisations. We only exceptionally offer volunteer places to non-members; for reasons of privacy and sheer logistical complexity. But we do invite such people to consider joining the Friends as individual members and explain that we organise regular work parties, which they are welcome to join. Members are covered by the Friends of the Pentlands insurance policy which provides indemnity when they are working with us. We do spell out that we cannot guarantee them a place working on a task and date of their own choice; they must take their chance along with other member volunteers.

Corporate Groups

We are able to provide a limited number of supervised work days for corporate groups, particularly those who have worked with us in the past. Ideally the business should provide a named contact who can liaise with us and organise the arrangements for the workday – between eight and



twelve corporate volunteers is ideal. As much notice as possible should be given to facilitate forward planning. We do not charge corporate groups (unlike some bodies who employ paid “volunteer co-ordinators”), however the organisation is expected to join the Friends of the Pentlands as a “corporate member” and voluntary donations to support the work we do are always welcomed.

Communications

How do I know what is going on?

We issue a 12-month calendar of activities covering conservation, gardening and litter work days towards the end of the preceding year.

The name and contact details of the activity work co-ordinator are provided to new volunteers for an activity.

As a small charity, and to reduce costs, we try to communicate as much as possible using email. If you do not have an email address we will post out the monthly workdays email to you. As stated above, in the month preceding the next month's formal workdays, information is sent to volunteers giving specific details of the exact tasks to be undertaken including the level of task and the distance from meeting place to the start of the task. Following receipt of a communication please contact the sender by return so that numbers can be finalised for each task. If you later find that you cannot make a particular workday, please let the leader know. (Team leaders check the weather forecast for the day on the BBC website).
See Further Information 1

What to Bring

Clothing and Personal Protective Equipment

Working in exposed places can be very cold so please bring warm clothing and waterproofs. Frequently your clothes will get muddy from contact with stones, logs, etc.

For the heavier tasks robust footwear, especially with protective toe caps, is required. On occasions, especially working in boggy ground, wellington boots are very useful – again, if you are able, select those with protective toecaps and which can give a good degree of thermal protection. We will provide waders where necessary.

Gloves will be provided if you do not have your own, as will eye and hearing protection and hard hats where appropriate.

Food and refreshments

Please bring your own food and drink, commensurate with the conditions. An average workday includes a break both for tea/coffee and lunch.

Transport

We usually assemble in a car parking area close to wherever the day's work will take place and normally readily accessible by public transport. If you do not have access to a car and want a lift to the starting place, then please get in touch with the relevant contact and they will try to arrange it. If using your own car, please ensure with your insurance company that cover extends to such journeys and/or giving lifts.

Training

Some volunteers have been provided with certified training in the use of power strimmers and brushcutters. Workday volunteers have received training on safe working on MOD land e.g. the areas around Castlelaw and Dreghorn.

Health, Safety and Risk

The responsibilities for health and safety are shared between the individual volunteer and the Friends of the Pentlands. These notes give guidance and summarise the legal framework.

Friends of the Pentlands Health and Safety Statement

(Revised and updated January 2016)

The Organisation is not a business undertaking, being of charitable status. The legal requirements of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and the relevant statutory provisions made there-under, therefore, do not apply to the activities of the Organisation.

None the less the Organisation recognises a general duty of care towards its members and volunteers when, and wherever, it is reasonably practicable to do so. However each member and volunteer does have a responsibility for his or her own health and safety in connection with the Organisation's activities and events especially in respect of potentially hazardous project work.

Members and volunteers are therefore asked to make a personal self-assessment as to their own physical capability and competence prior to embarking upon any of the Organisation's activities. In order to assist members in ensuring their personal safety information and advice will be given to members and volunteers from time to time. Furthermore, where possible, advance information will be provided as to conditions likely to be encountered.

Members and volunteers should feel free to withdraw from any activity, at any time, should they consider themselves to be at risk.

Terms used:

Member: a formal subscription-paying member of the Organisation.

Volunteer – a non-member of the Organisation (i.e. a volunteer for the day)

Health

Health issues

Please advise the team leader, in confidence, if you have any health issues which may affect your ability to carry out volunteering activities. Always work within your own capabilities. Volunteering workdays are not boot camps – it is no disgrace if you do not feel able to carry on. Don't do a task if you are not comfortable – ask for help or leave it for someone else.

You should be responsible for bringing any medication of your own where relevant e.g. asthma inhalers.

Hygiene

Work is often carried out in dirty or unsanitary environments. Hand sanitizer is available, particularly before breaks and meals, for those who do not carry their own.

Environmental Protection

It is a good idea to carry your own supply of sunscreen and insect repellent.

Ticks

On open ground you may come in contact with ticks – picking up a tick can be reduced by wearing long sleeved shirts and trousers. Team leaders will have tick removers – please aim to have the tick removed as soon as possible to prevent any adverse consequences.

See Further Information 2



Accidents

Specialist training and refresher training is provided in occupational First Aid for team leaders. The team leader will be equipped with a First Aid kit appropriate for the circumstances. However, it is a good idea to carry a small first aid kit with plasters, etc of your own. Our insurers require us to keep records of all accidents or unforeseen events which occur whilst carrying out Friends of the Pentlands Activities. The team leader will notify the Secretary as part of the work day report.

Safety

Power tools

Petrol-operated power tools such as strimmers and brushcutters may only be used by individuals who have received appropriate training and certification. Our insurers do not permit the use of chainsaws by Friends of the Pentlands volunteers. Volunteers are not permitted to bring and use their own power tools.

Working with Hand Tools

Hand tools will be provided for each work day to complete the task at hand. Tools should be carried safely – upright or at an angle to the body to avoid accidents. When using a tool look around to ensure that no-one else is in the way – keep plenty of space if using a sledgehammer or pick. Be aware of the weight of objects to be carried – the team leader will advise on safe methods of transport of tools and materials.

Lifting and handling

Always consider the safety of others as well as yourself. Only take on work that is within your capabilities and pay particular attention when lifting objects and loads. Use lifting aids (e.g. foresters' calipers) where appropriate. Use suitable gloves when handling rough objects.

From time to time the work can be strenuous, so share it among all the work party.

Risk

Risk Assessments

All potential projects are assessed for suitability beforehand and a formal risk assessment completed. This includes, for instance, the need for materials to be carried to site by hand and the technical aspects of the project. The team leader will be responsible for telling the work party the tasks to be completed. A follow-up workday report is completed after the workday.

See Further information 3

Insurance Provision

While you are volunteering with us you are covered by an insurance policy which covers Public Liability and Personal Accident cover. However, please note that the cover is limited and does not cover all eventualities.

Some of the key points in the insurance policy are:

- A risk assessment must be completed for all jobs
- No one can work by themselves
- Only named people can use power tools.

Data Handling

We may ask you for information to help in planning our work – e.g. contact telephone numbers, details of next of kin, in the event of an accident etc. Photographs may be taken of the activity – if you prefer not to appear in a photograph, please let us know. All information (including email addresses etc.) will be used in accordance with our data protection policies

See Further information 4

Working with children and young people

Schools across Scotland recognize the importance of using outdoor learning to broaden children's educational experiences and encourage them to become more active. The Pentland Hills are the ultimate outdoor classroom and Friends of the Pentlands are ideally placed to support schools and clubs in introducing young people to the outdoors. We are increasingly involved with groups of children and young people in a variety of activities, from litter picking to a range of conservation activities.

Whilst the groups we work with will always be under the supervision of their teacher or group leader, we are likely to be involved in helping to guide them, directing their activities or sharing our knowledge and love of the environment. This level of contact with children and young people requires us to conform to some of the rules around child protection with which their teachers and other group leaders are familiar.

We shouldn't be shy of talking with groups of children, taking an interest in what they are doing, asking questions and sharing our knowledge with them. On the other hand, we need to be mindful that close contact is inappropriate. As a general rule we should have no physical, or close personal contact with the children and young people we are working with. Talking with a young person should normally be in the context of their group, rather than on a 1:1 basis. Rare exceptions to the 'no contact' rule might be, for example:

- administering first aid;
- extending a hand to help a young person cross a stream or a ditch;
- helping someone up who has fallen.

See Further information 5

Further Information and links to further reading

1. Contact details for Current Volunteer Team Leaders
2. Ticks:
www.lymediseaseaction.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/LDA002-10.pdf
3. Work Day Risk Assessment Matrix
4. Information Governance and Privacy Policy
5. Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy

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

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