

Friends of the Pentlands



Pentland Post October 2024

In this issue

John Stirling Memorial Event

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Patieshill Wild Life Reserve

And much more!

Friends of the Pentlands is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation

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Editorial - John Surtees

Despite a rather disappointing summer weather wise the Friends continued with an active programme across a number of fronts as you'll read about in this addition of the Pentland Post. I have to admit we are now coming to my favourite time of year when the changing of the seasons brings an additional splash of colour to the trees although it's tempered occasionally by what seems to me to be an increasingly windy climate - or perhaps it's just an age thing!

The Pentlands can be pretty spectacular on many occasions during the year but it hadn't crossed my mind that this could include night time given all the light pollution that inevitably accompanies being close to a large city. However we were recently treated to a display of the Aurora which was visible across parts of the Pentlands and as shown on the front cover of this edition. Many thanks to Andrew Craigie for sending in the spectacular photo and to everyone who has contributed articles and photos!

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Views expressed in the Pentland Post are not necessarily those of the Friends of the Pentlands



The front cover picture is taken from this photo by Andrew Craigie showing the Aurora across Threipmuir Reservoir and Black Hill in May 2024

VIEW FROM SCALD LAW

Iain MacLeod, Treasurer

I arrived in Balerno in 1982 along with my wife and two young daughters. The choice of location was no accident, previously having lived in semi-rural locations in Yorkshire and Northumberland. Our early years here included many family walks around the "tanks", or reservoirs, at Harlaw and Threipmuir. The woodland on the slope from Harlaw over to Black Springs did not exist at that time, nor did the pine wood plantation at the eastern end of Threipmuir.

One particular foray that sticks in my mind was a walk to the top of Black Hill, which made me extremely unpopular with my daughters. Many years later when my elder daughter was in training for a sponsored walk in the Borders we had a memorable day out from home in Newmills through Maiden's Cleugh to Flotterstone then up on to the ridge and back westwards towards West Kip, from there making our way back home.

I'm happy enough with my own company and have enjoyed many a day tramping alone in the Pentlands. Another walk that springs to mind was when I was dropped off at Little Vantage, walking over to West Linton, then along the Roman Road (now part of the Pentland Way) to Carlops. Following some refreshment at the Alan Ramsay, three buses took me home, thus demonstrating to me how compact the Regional Park is and how easy it is, with the help of public transport, to enjoy a great day out.

Throughout my local excursions over the years I was completely oblivious to the formation of Friends of the Pentlands until in 2011 meeting, while on a ridge walk with Rob Melville, the late and fondly remembered Donald Graham, who performed the role of

recruiting sergeant, leading to both Rob and myself joining. I had retired by then and was looking for ways to join the "big society" and, having had a largely office based career, the prospect of some manual work out of doors was very appealing.

In the ensuing years I really enjoyed taking part in many work days and meeting interesting people from a variety of backgrounds. I always admired the efforts of the late John Stirling without which, I would suggest, the organisation would not be in the robust state we find it now. John had some super wood working equipment in his garage at home and one highlight was helping to build a door for the piggery at Harlaw. I can only claim credit for the paintwork!

It was never my intention to take up a position on the Board, but when Malcolm Patrick was obliged under the Constitution to resign after his eight year stint, there didn't seem to be a rush of applicants to replace him. I've found from involvement with another charity that this is a recurring theme. For whatever reason they find it difficult to find people who are willing or able to take on "the books". Anyway, following an approach by Hamish Clark, the then Chairman, I duly became Treasurer in May 2019.

The Treasurer role isn't particularly onerous, although there are peak periods of activity at subscription renewal time and when producing periodic accounts for our Board meetings and annual accounts for inspection by our independent examiner. The most challenging aspect has been in the relationship with our bank which, in order to comply with their regulations, tend to treat everyone as potential money launderers!

News from the Board

When taking up any Board position it's advisable to develop an escape route, which I will have to do in advance of my retirement date in 2027. The establishment by the Board of a risk register has identified a weakness in that we have only one person in control of the accounts. Ideally I would like to identify another member with the appropriate background who could shadow my activities, with a view to taking over from me at the end of my stint, or in the event of unforeseen circumstances.

Whatever the future holds I intend to continue to enjoy the Pentlands as much as possible. There are challenges ahead for the Regional Park as a result of increased participation in outdoor activity following the pandemic, and Friends of the Pentlands has an important role to play in conjunction with landowners, and other stakeholders to protect and enhance this valuable asset on our doorsteps.

It's been a busy summer for the Board - here's a quick round up of what's been going on.

The Board oversaw the planning of significant events at Patieshill Wildlife Reserve in August and the John Stirling memorial event in September. Reports on both are set out elsewhere in this edition.

The Board continues to oversee engagement with a wide variety of organisations, notably representatives of the Pentland Hills Regional Park (PHRP) with whom relations remain strong. An unusual example of engagement was an approach by the Long Distance Ways Association to include a section of the Pentland Way in the E2 pan-European route which stretches from the South of France to Cape Wrath. The Board agreed that appropriate signage could be added along the Pentland Way, and negotiations are currently taking place with relevant landowners.

The early summer saw the successful culmination of the project to digitise our membership system. Membermojo has rolled out successfully, the processes of applying for and renewing membership are now much easier, and the Board receives better information about the membership. A big thank you to Bill Aitken who oversaw the project for the Board and also to Nigel Rose who did a tremendous job in helping to deliver the changes.

Our treasurer, Iain MacLeod, continues to keep a close eye on the Friends' finances. These are in a particularly healthy position at the moment partly as a result of legacies and donations. The Board are continuing to talk to the PHRP and landowners about possible projects into which our funds can be invested.

The Board receives regular reports on workdays, the walks and talks programmes, and educational initiatives - thanks to Hamish Clark, John Hutton, and Bob Cook respectively for their work in leading and coordinating these activities.

The Board has decided to review the Friends' constitution to ensure it remains fit for purpose and compliant with wider good practice for charities. Ian Walford is leading the work with a view to putting a revised draft of the constitution to the AGM in 2025 for approval. If you have any questions or views about the review please feel free to contact Ian.

There've been some changes in personnel and roles on the Board over the last few months. Three new trustees were formally appointed at the AGM in May: Sam Lockhart, Neil Mackay, and Ian Walford (they are all profiled elsewhere in this edition).

Ian took over as Secretary to the Board immediately after the AGM when Dennis Smith stood down from the role. At their meeting on 4th June the other Board members paid tribute to Dennis for his excellent service over several years. Dennis remains on the Board and is overseeing our relationship with Patieshill.

Members will be sad to hear that the previous honorary president of the Friends, Tom Huxley, died earlier this year soon after retiring from the role. We are very grateful for all that Tom did for the Friends.

The Board agreed unanimously that Susan Falconer should be invited to fill the vacancy left by Tom and were delighted when she accepted. Susan is also profiled elsewhere in this edition.

Ian Walford

Meet our new Honorary President - Susan Falconer



It was a complete surprise to receive the invitation to become Honorary President of the Friends of the Pentlands and one that I was delighted and honoured to accept. My association with the Friends began more than 20 years ago, having discussions with the late Dr Robin Aitken and the late John Stirling about the formation of an independent group who could assist in practical conservation work and encourage more people to become involved in caring for the Hills.

I was very keen on the emphasis on independence as this meant a freedom to act and to forge working relationships with land owners, farmers and land managers which are key, as well as operate outwith the Regional Park area.

Throughout my working life as a Countryside Ranger I have always valued connecting people and place. This may have been through nature, landscape, cultural heritage and simply a sense of joy at being in a special place. The Pentlands have been that place for me throughout my life from walking the Hills as a teenager to having them as my 'office'. I am heartened to know that the Hills are being valued and cared for by the Friends and I'm delighted to offer my support as Honorary President.

Susan Falconer

Meet the three new Board members whose appointment and election was confirmed at the 2024 AGM

Sam Lockhart

I have worked at Swanston Farm in Edinburgh for over 10 years, as Marketing Manager, Livery Yard Manager and on the farm, with outdoor work including maintenance, conservation and animal care and office work focusing on community connections, business promotion, tourism and social media.

Our partnerships with local schools provide opportunities for pupils of all ages to learn about animals, wildlife and the landscape. I work alongside the Wellbeing Team at Firrhill High School who bring pupils to Swanston Farm as part of their support for learning, which has produced some profound and positive results.

I have liaised with Friends of the Pentlands over the years via the work they carry out in the Swanston area. In Spring 2024 Swanston Farm hosted 'Earth Day' for a local school, to which I invited FOTP's Andrew Marsden and Bob Cook to talk to the pupils about the Swanston arboretum and pollinators at our new wildflower area. This started conversations about what Friends of the Pentlands could facilitate from an educational aspect and I was invited to become a Trustee, to help develop this further. I am delighted to be part of the team, sitting on the educational committee led by Bob Cook.



Sam Lockhart

Neil Mackay

I have been tramping Scotland's mountains and hills for 40 years. During my working life as a police officer, I was posted at various stations in and around the Pentlands. My particular interest is history and heritage, and I enjoy researching its forgotten places and people.



I am a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, and a member of the West Linton based Pentland Writers Group for which I write occasional articles. I also help manage a vibrant social media group of some 19,000 Pentlands enthusiasts. Whilst this is enjoyable, and I learn a lot from the group, I recently decided that I wanted to do something more tangible to benefit the hills. Friends of the Pentlands offers an excellent opportunity to do that. My chief interest at the moment is its conservation and restoration project at Old Pentland Cemetery, Damhead.

I have adult stepchildren and live with my wife Corinne in the Braids area of south Edinburgh. Our 2 Border Terriers are regular companions in the hills.

Neil Mackay

Ian Walford

I was born and brought up in the West Midlands of England, studied history at Leeds University, and started work in the Civil Service in London in the late 1980s. I moved to Edinburgh in 1994 to work for the Scottish Office (which eventually became the Scottish Government) and have stayed ever since. My Civil Service posts up to my retirement in April 2022 included Deputy Chief Executive of the Crown Office and Chief Executive of Historic Scotland.

I very quickly found that a huge benefit of living in Edinburgh was easy access to the Pentlands and as a result I have cycled and walked countless miles in the hills over the last 30 years. I joined the Friends when I retired so that I could give something back to the Pentlands.

I have thoroughly enjoyed contributing to work days and litter patrols and my new role as secretary to the Board: I love the variety of our activities and the enthusiasm of everyone I've met. Among other interests I have published three historical fiction novels: if you're interested they're available via the link or direct from me. [Amazon.co.uk: ian walford: books, biography, latest update](https://www.amazon.co.uk/ian-walford-books-biography-latest-update)



Ian Walford

Corporate Work Days

Hamish Clark has managed the Friends working with Corporates for a number years and here he gives an update on current activities



Friends of the Pentlands have been hosting groups of volunteers from companies for the past 10 years or so to undertake path maintenance and improvement and tree planting and maintenance. Why do this you may ask when we have our own team of member volunteers? The main reason is that it increases the amount of constantly needed work done in the Pentlands.

Groups of younger, often fitter and enthusiastic people help make progress with larger projects and where tools and materials have to be carried longer distances such as further up the Thieves Road from Little Vantage to Cauldstane Slap.

It introduces many volunteers to parts of the Pentlands they didn't know of and to the work that goes into the path network. Awareness of Friends of the Pentlands and their activities is raised with the volunteers. For the companies who encourage staff to undertake a day volunteering it feeds into the broad social and community support objectives. For the volunteers it can be a chance to do something completely novel, to mix with colleagues informally, contribute to team building and to enjoy a day in the fresh air.

"Thank you so much for yesterday -

the whole team had a great day. Please also pass on our thanks to the 2 Andrews and Donald for their guidance too. It was great fun and I was so pleased the weather held out for us. I am sure some of us will be back in the Pentlands to admire our handy workI hope we all helped to make a little difference".

Corporate Work Day volunteer

However, as an actuary noted once, drainage ditch clearance wasn't going to feature in his CV.

Since starting to organise company workdays there have been changes in the way this has been done. At the start an approach from Bank of Scotland/Lloyds group resulted in nearly 80 staff coming out over a series of days to assist with extensive improvements on the Phantom's Cleugh path. The organisation of tools, materials and supervision of the inexperienced volunteers for up to 20 people on a single day was a "baptism of fire" for the FoP leaders. It was realised that such large numbers of company volunteers and workdays were stretching the capacity of our leaders and it would be sensible to operate on a reduced scale.



In the following five years until Covid lockdowns and restrictions we typically organised 5 or 6 workdays, usually from

late spring to autumn, with 5 to 12 people. The majority of days were with one group of around 35 from the first BoS/Lloyds year with other companies joining us occasionally.

When work in the Pentlands resumed after Covid the number of enquiries received from companies has shot up. This is probably due to a combination of reasons. Some of the increased numbers visiting the Pentlands during Covid restrictions will have noticed our badges on the likes of way marking posts, gates and sleeper bridges we've installed. Our much improved Facebook which records each day's work by FoP and companies together with our website has raised awareness of our activities. Perhaps word of mouth may also have fed into the rise in enquiries. We have accommodated as many of

these enquiries as our capacity allows but have to turn down the rest.

"Many thanks for hosting and coordinating we have all loved the experience".

Corporate Work Day volunteer

Thanks to the commitment of our leaders we expect to do 13 workdays with company volunteers this year.

As well as the work done, FoP leaders enjoy the enthusiasm, cooperation and humour of the company volunteers and draw satisfaction from the positive feedback we get from them. I hope that we will continue to be able to organise days with company volunteers and look forward to welcoming them in future.

Hamish Clark



Patieshill Wildlife Reserve

2024 has seen a significant amount of Friends activity at the wildlife reserve as described here in Dennis Smith's update



Patieshill Wildlife Reserve in foreground

More than thirty years ago George and Janet Burke of Patieshill farm near Carlops decided to 'give something back' to nature. While running Patieshill as an upland sheep farm they wanted to act as stewards of the land, preserving its beauty and diversity for future generations. They therefore fenced off twelve acres of mixed habitat where they planted nearly 4,000 native trees. They also created a pond, fed by natural springs on the hillside, which now supports a thriving community of plants and aquatic animals, including many dragonflies and damselflies.

By 2021 George and Janet had retired from farming and leased out much of their land for grazing. To ensure the wood's long-term future, they invited the Friends of the Pentlands to assist in managing what is now known as Patieshill wildlife reserve.

Continuing George and Janet's ideals, the Friends aim to allow nature to flourish largely on its own terms, with limited human intervention. Many trees are now well-established and creating their own micro-habitats, but there have been a few problems. Ash die-back has hit that species hard, and roe deer have damaged some trees by nibbling and antler-rubbing. Over time, wind exposure, moisture levels and varying soil types demonstrate what will thrive where. We hope to learn from experience, aiming to maximise biodiversity and resilience.

Earlier this year we began planting hedges which will hopefully - over many years - enhance the ecosystem. Another new development is the creation of wildflower meadows, one link in a corridor of sites running from Garvald round to Harlaw. This involves cutting the sward regularly to create open ground where residual seeds can flourish, supplemented by selective planting of butterfly-friendly species.

This small area contains a variety of woodland, scrub and wetland habitats, with wildlife to match.



The pond within the reserve

As well as roe deer - recent (maybe regrettable) arrivals in the Carlops area - there is a badger set. Voles can be common, with populations rising and falling in cycles. Nine butterfly species have been recorded to date, with more in the North Esk valley nearby, and more than twenty-five species of birds, including snipe and woodcock.

On the hillside above there is a sheep stell, apparently dating from the early 19th century, which was restored in 2005 by the Dry Stone Walling Association. Here the Friends recently installed a picnic table, from which visitors can enjoy spectacular views across to the Moorfoot hills and beyond. In addition, we have been busy over the summer restoring the path network and installing new signs.



The sheep stell above the reserve

All this was celebrated at an open day on 25 August. The weather was less than perfect, giving an insight into the rigours of life 1,000 feet up the Pentlands. But a healthy number of visitors got a glimpse of what Patieshill has to offer, and were sustained by our Chair's barbecued sausages.

Dennis Smith

John Stirling Memorial Event

A fitting memorial



Unveiling of the memorial at Harlaw House visitor centre - from left to right: Friends Chair Andrew Marsden, Linda Stirling, daughter Lara and son Euan, Friends Hon. President Susan Falconer. Photo Bob Douglas

On 14th September about eighty Friends of the Pentlands – and others – gathered together at Harlaw House for the dedication of the John Stirling memorial. After an introduction from the Chairman, our Honorary President, Susan Falconer, paid a tribute to John as “environmentalist, educator and much-loved Friend of the Pentland Hills” before members of John’s family unveiled the memorial.

John had an ability to get on with people, an essential skill and he used this to engage with everyone from farmers and landowners, local politicians, businesses to school children and colleagues.

These are John's Hills and our Hills, and this sculpture will serve as a fitting and lasting tribute to both his

memory and to the future of the Pentlands and to inspire visitors to enjoy and to care for them.

Susan Falconer, Honorary President at the event

The event has been a long time coming – since John’s passing in 2019. Plans for an early tribute were thrown awry with the coronavirus pandemic and its consequences. It had been one of the Board’s original intentions to dedicate the exhibition room at Harlaw House as the John Stirling Education Centre. This was not to be as the centre was closed – and remains so – since the pandemic.

However, at the suggestion of the Regional Park Natural Heritage Service, it was agreed that a fitting tribute would be the creation of an outdoor relief map of the Pentland Hills to replace the deteriorating paper mache one indoors.

It took some time to investigate the possibilities including the creation of a cast bronze structure like the map of Edinburgh at the back of the National Gallery on The Mound.

We consulted artists and sculptors including experts from the Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop but, in the end, settled for a structure created by 3D printing on ASA – a hard wearing plastic which could be painted and illustrated to show the principal features of the hills and which would have more relevance for children – and Pentland explorers – an attribute with which, I am sure, John would have concurred. The map was mounted on a dry stone pedestal facing Black Hill, one of John’s favourite viewpoints - on which his ashes were scattered.

3D maps from moulds are not uncommon but a structure such as this breaks new ground and presented many challenges for the project team.

The printing specification was based on OS co-ordinates and height profiles and, because of its size, had to be printed in three sections before assembly and mounting. Each section took about a week to print with the 3D printer building up many hundreds of layers of extremely thin (0.15mm) material in order to ensure accuracy of detail.

The work was carried out by Psyber-Tech of Livingston. Then came the painting and varnishing to make the structure comprehensible but weatherproof – and we admired the fine detail of Rich from Whitewash Studios who has earned his reputation painting tabletop war game miniatures. Finally the map had to be married up with a frame and base plate and mounted on a plinth created by Richard Love and colleagues from the Dry Stone Walling Association. Even the dedication plaque is state of the art – using a specialised printing technique from Specialised Signs which produced a

faux-brass waterproof (and metal-thief proof) colour plate.

The production of this memorial has been an exciting journey, shared with Linda and John’s family at each stage. We hope that the Friends of the Pentlands - and all the thousands of visitors to Harlaw – will gain as much pleasure admiring the monument as we have in creating it.

Andrew Marsden, Chair



“The printing specification was based on OS co-ordinates and height profiles and, because of its size, had to be printed in three sections before assembly and mounting. Each section took about a week to print with the 3D printer building up many hundreds of layers of extremely thin (0.15mm) material in order to ensure accuracy of detail”

Photo Bob Douglas



The relief map being printed - photo Psyber-Tech

Walks and Talks

As part of a varied programme organised by John Hutton members have enjoyed the following events since Spring.

Hermitage of Braid walk 24 April 2024

Six of us set out in good weather from The Clock in Morningside. We reached the small café at The Hermitage and noted that it was open. Not coffee time yet, though, but we'd be coming back that way! Our seventh walker joined us on cue.



We proceeded alongside the burn, but our first obstacle became apparent as we neared the Ice Hut: a sign saying "path closed". Tree lopping was in progress. Undaunted, we retraced our steps a little and headed up the valley side, along and then down to the bridge. A few items of flora generated some discussion as we went, ably guided by our walk authority on the subject! Ground ivy, few flowered leeks, greater stitchwort, green alkanet, and others. I hope we all remember them next time we see them!

Stopping briefly to contemplate Agassiz Rock, we headed a little further on, then upwards, to start our return along the north side of the valley. Bees were plentiful and generated some discussion, but in truth I think we lacked real expertise here! White tailed? Buff tailed? Aye, harder than you'd think!

We came back down to the burn at the garden area. It was basking in the sun, and it was a nice spot to take a wee break at. [The excitement was too much for some who took a little time out to nip along to the toilets (there being none at the café)!]

A couple of jackets were put on at the café. It was airy enough, but a lovely day for it. And so back to the SP.

John Hutton

Glenlude Estate Talk 28 May 2024

Karen Purvis the manager of the John Muir Trust's Glenlude Estate gave a most interesting and informative talk to members following the formal business at the AGM. Glenlude, in the Scottish Borders near Innerleithen and Traquair, covers some 149 hectares and was gifted to the Trust some 20 years ago by the late Sheila Bell. The Trust's aim at Glenlude, which despite its modest size has a wide range of habitats, is to demonstrate exemplary land management and to engage with people who have limited access to wild places. They have a 20 year restoration plan.

Karen described the progress that has been made and the work carried out by groups of enthusiastic volunteers across various parts of the estate. This includes introducing greater numbers of native broadleaf trees on open grassland. As the years have gone by and biodiversity increased then so has the estate's wildlife.

The talk was well supported by photographs and much appreciated by the Friends membership.

John Surtees

Balerno to Water of Leith walk 23 June 2024

We enjoyed a fine sunny day for the 12 mile walk from the centre of Balerno following the Water of Leith to Leith. A long walk but the gradual descent is full of interest as the river makes its way through the city.

Some 11 walkers started off but that number waxed and waned as this was a walk with a difference. John Hutton our walk leader had arranged for it to be split into two parts. Firstly from Balerno to the Water of Leith Visitor Centre and from there to Leith. At the Centre he had arranged a special event, coinciding with our lunch break when the party enjoyed a short but very atmospheric film and discussion about the Phantoms Cleuch by Josh Nixon and was greatly appreciated by the walkers plus a number of other members who came to the Centre just for the film. Well refreshed and rested the walk party, which was joined by Josh Nixon and friends continued on their way to Leith in afternoon sunshine where we arrived around 4.30 pm.



John Surtees

Black Hill walk 14 September 2024

Following the ceremony at Harlaw Visitor Centre and the unveiling of the memorial to John Stirling 10 members set off to walk the 3 miles to the summit of Black Hill. The hill was one of John's Pentlands favourites and its because of this that the memorial relief map at the visitor centre faces this hill.

The conditions were cool and blustery particularly as the summit of the hill was approached and it's not for nothing that the hills are known as 'The Breezy Pentlands'!

Retracing our steps from the summit meant that there was some respite with the wind at our backs and the views started to reveal themselves as the sun made a somewhat belated appearance. A bracing walk!

John Surtees



Glenlude Estate walk 24 September 2024

Twelve of us car-shared from Swanston and arrived at the John Muir Trust's Glenlude estate in beautiful sunshine.

Karen and Isaac were there to welcome us with tea, coffee and biscuits.



After an introductory orientation, we set off on our morning stroll. Karen and Isaac were constant sources of information about how the environment had changed since 2012, and how it would continue to change. Their enthusiasm was so obvious; what a credit they are to the JMT. We heard about larches having to be culled. Brash hedge creation and management. So many different species of native trees planted. How relationships with volunteers have been nurtured. That the number of recorded bird species has doubled, from 22 to 44. Everyone came away a bit wiser (some, like me, more than others!).

We returned to the cabin for our tea and sandwiches and a bit of chat. The sun was in good form and we could have sat there a bit longer.

But we had another stroll to do, partly through woodland with the open hill rising quite steeply to the other side. We were shown the spot where the remains of a tawny owl were found recently, and looked in hope (but in vain!) for the goshawk believed to be the culprit. Butterfly-friendly flora were duly noted. Fungi were inspected and pondered over. And we learned about Karen's commitment to traditional methods: the heavy horses she has brought in, a week at a time, to haul logs after felling; the dry stone walling; the scything. And probably more when I wasn't in earshot!

We weren't quite finished and had a quick tour of the tree nursery, polytunnel and outdoor education centre (in the making).

Quite a bit later than scheduled, we eventually trooped back to the cars for the return journey. A grand day all round!

John Hutton

The Reclamation of a Historic Cemetery

Old Pentland Cemetery, Damhead

In recent months, the Friends have become involved in conservation and restoration work at Old Pentland Cemetery. This is being run in conjunction with the landowner and members of the local community. The site's a wonderfully atmospheric spot, hidden away behind mature yews on the south side of Pentland Road. It has a historical importance out of all proportion to its modest size. Unused for burials for many years, the graves here overlie the ruins of a 13th century church, and carved stones linked to the Knights Templar have been unearthed nearby. Two of these are on display in the gated watch house, originally built to deter grave-robbers at the time of Burke and Hare.



Several Covenanting dead from the Battle of Rullion Green are thought to be buried here, along with a cross section of Pentlands society. The kirkyard comes complete with creaking metal gates, and its own ghost story of 'The Grassless Grave'. There are 2 versions of this tale, both relating to the broken gravestone nearest the gates.

Just 40 years ago, the graveyard was in

a poor state of repair. This was addressed in the 1990s, with an award-winning restoration project undertaken by local residents, public sector agencies, and private business. This saw a partial rebuild of the boundary wall, a full rebuild of the watch house and the re-erection of fallen headstones. Unfortunately several of the key players involved either died or moved on, and by 2022 the graveyard was badly overgrown again.



It was around this time that I became involved in some light gardening work at the site. However it soon became apparent the scale of work required was beyond any single person. And this is where the Friends enthusiastically stepped in. Ongoing work parties have made a big difference, and with the assistance of a few local residents it's now a lovely and peaceful space to visit. Please come and see for yourself.

N.D Mackay

Litter Picking

In 2024, our litter picking group maintained its commitment to keeping our local areas clean and beautiful, meeting twice a month as usual. Our season began in March, with our first visit to Flotterstone, as Hillend remains inaccessible due to ongoing construction. We also enjoyed our annual coffee morning at Cobb's, which continues to be a highlight for our group.



Litter picking at Dreghorn Summer 2024

A special note of gratitude goes to the ranger service, whose quick response ensures that much of the litter is swiftly removed before it becomes a significant issue. Their support has been invaluable, and we extend our heartfelt thanks to them.

Despite the Ministry of Defence's decision to close the car park at Dreghorn due to anti-social behaviour, our group has found a way to continue contributing. We have taken on the responsibility of regularly clearing an access route to the hills through Dreghorn, a task that has proven to be both necessary and rewarding. On our first visit in June, we spent over two hours in the area, collecting 10 very full bags of litter. We returned in August, where we again filled another 10 bags. This effort has clearly shown itself to be a valuable venture, and we plan to continue it into the future.

The success of this year is a testament to the unwavering commitment of our volunteers, whose hard work, resilience, and dedication are what make the group so effective. Every litter pick, whether small or large, contributes to the health of our environment and enhances the beauty of our surroundings. Special thanks to everyone who gave their time and energy this year – your efforts have made a tangible difference and reflect the spirit of community that defines our group. Each contribution has helped preserve and care for the places we all cherish

Andrew Gallacher

Café options in and around the Pentlands

Fellow member David Syme reports on an enjoyable time visiting cafés in and around the Pentlands



There are some excellent cafes in the Pentlands, and several around our hills. First of the “in” cafés is the Pentland Hills Café Express at Flotterstone, in the former visitor centre at the carpark. Parking can be difficult at peak times, but delicious home baking makes this a worthwhile visit. The café is open daily 10am - 4pm except Tuesdays and Wednesdays. The toilets are open 24/7.

The Loganlea Trout Fishery lies in the heart of our hills. The building there has undergone a thorough make-over, and is now a bright, cheerful café open to all, serving hot and cold snacks and drinks. The toilet is available to customers, and there is a wi-fi signal. It opens 8.30am to 4pm Monday to Friday and 8am to 4.30pm Saturday and Sunday until the end of October – or longer if the weather is mild. Check on facebook.

Next is Café 360 at Hillend ski slope, which was the longest but now the 13th longest dry ski slope in the world. The café is popular with parents having a latte while kids take skiing lessons; there is parking (limited at busy times) and there are toilets in the labyrinthian building. All the beverages and a selection of simple snacks are available as you watch tiny tots whizzing down the artificial snow.

Further round the northern slopes we find Swanston Brasserie, good friend of the Friends. Excellent coffee stop with superb views, but busy at peak times. Parking, toilets and a lift.

The only other café “in” the Pentlands café is the Clubbiedean Café, sadly only open at weekends (9.30am – 4pm). Al fresco and dog-friendly; no vehicle access or toilet facilities but scones to die for!

For the cafes “around” our hills we’ll start in West Linton, where the popular Old Toll Tea House is closed for renovation. The Pyet, however, on Main Street, is open Tuesday to Sunday 10am - 3pm for coffees and much more. Parking nearby is tight.

In Edinburgh Cobbs Café is on the 1st floor of the Craigdon building (daily 9am – 5pm), on Biggar Road just inside the ring road at Fairmilehead. Parking, toilets and a lift give easy access, and their snacks extend to light meals. The building also has a small Sainsbury shop and, of course, Craigdon for outdoor clothes and kit.

Heading west we come to the popular Molly’s of Juniper Green. Parking is limited, but the 44 bus stops just outside. Molly’s baking has many devotees; walking groups can fill the place, so a phone call ahead is advisable. There are toilets. Further along in Currie is the Corner Café, also served by the 44 bus and also with toilets and limited parking. Finally in Balerno don’t miss the Mill Café at Balerno Parish Church, open 9am to 2pm Tue to Fri and 9am to 1pm every second Saturday in the month when the popular Farmers’ Market is on. It is run partly by volunteers. There are toilets and it is on the 44 bus route.

PS Anyone returning to the city from the Pentlands might consider a couple of options a little further away. Also run with the help of volunteers are the Swing Café at Colinton Parish Church (Tue to Sat, 10am – 2pm), and, on Lanark Road *near* Longstone, the Water of Leith Visitor Centre (daily 10am – 4pm).

David Syme

Scottish Hill Tracks by Scotways (Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society) Book review

Scottish Hill Track books have been a valuable source of information for walkers and outdoor enthusiasts over many years. This the 6th edition continues in a similar format to the last published in 2011 but has been comprehensively updated.



There is much additional detail including the use of colour maps to introduce each of the 25 sections which cover some 350 tracks across Scotland. The book is well illustrated and tracks are presented in a precise and logical manner with grid references for start and finish, distance, ascent, descent and O/S map details. The tracks cover a total of 7,600 km and were surveyed by 130 individuals for this edition.

There is a section devoted to the Pentland Hills which covers 12 routes (2 routes are slightly outwith the Friends description of the Pentlands)

This delightful book is a valuable companion to any walker’s bookshelf and is highly recommended.

Published by: Scottish Mountaineering Press September 2024

No of pages: 396

Format: Softback

ISBN: 9 781907 233524

Price: £25

Available from: <https://scotways.com/product/scottish-hill-tracks/>

John Surtees

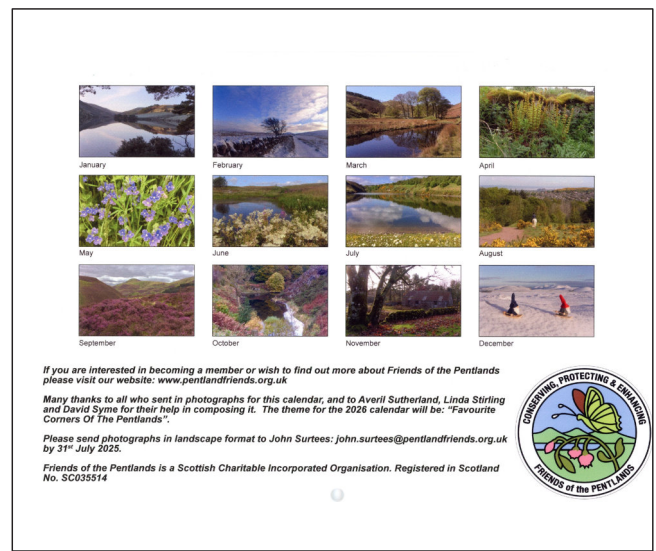
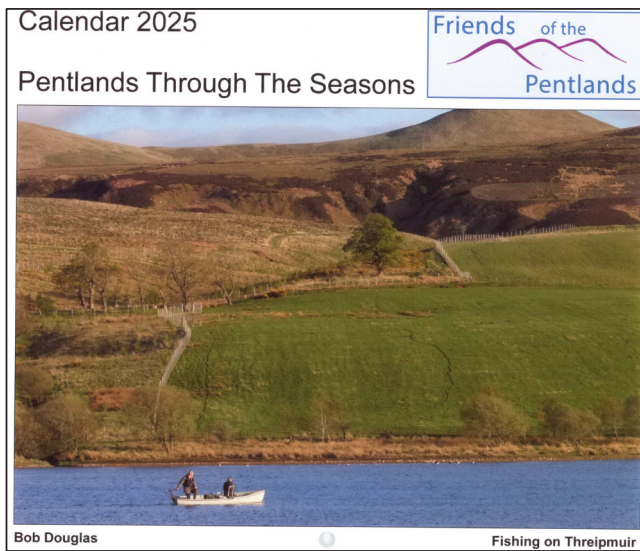
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The theme for the 2026 calendar is *"Favourite Corners Of The Pentlands"*. Photographs in landscape format, which will be gratefully received, should be sent to John Surtees by 31st July 2025 at john.surtees@pentlandfriends.org.uk

