

Friends of the Pentlands Pentland Post May 2025



Friends of the Pentlands is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation

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The Pentland Post newsletter is issued to members and others twice a year, usually May and October and is posted on the organisations website

Website: www.pentlandfriends.org.uk

Editorial

Welcome to the May edition of the Pentland Post. Winter may have come and gone since the last edition but the Friends have continued to be active as usual across a commendable number of fronts including as reported on page 12 the installation of a replacement large foot bridge at Poets Glen near Currie.

Amongst other items we venture back 100 years with a delightful story centred on a wedding anniversary gift and North Esk. There are also reports of significant and important woodland creation projects at Flotterstone/Glencorse by Edinburgh University and Scottish Water where volunteers from the Friends have assisted with tree planting. Many thanks to all those who have submitted articles.

John Surtees

Editor Pentland Post

john.surtees@pentlandfriends.org.uk

View from Scald Law

Possibly the highlight of my 41 years banking career was attending an Outward Bound Course at Moray Sea School in Burghead in September 1970, which effectively granted me 26 days leave. But more importantly it sparked a life-long love of the great outdoors and a passion for camping, kayaking, climbing, and hillwalking. It also provided me with bragging rights having attained a Life Saving Certificate at King Charles's old school...Gordonstoun, and my first 3 (Cairngorm) Munros.

Around this time my then pals and I had various adventures getting to and walking in the Pentland Hills, no cars in those days. Clear memories of losing our bearings in white-out conditions west of Threipmuir and so grateful to virtually stumble into Bavelaw Mill Farm. A late afternoon teetering scarily on the edge of the quarry lip by Silverburn in thick mist and soaked to the skin (excuse coming)... the quarry was hidden in fold on my fine Bartholomew map.... however with only minutes to spare I caught the rare bus, but another lesson was learned! Of course in those days a pint in Habbies Howe Country Hotel by Nine Mile Burn was always a welcomed end to the walk.

I soon joined the Edinburgh JMCS (Climbing Club) and learnt much from very experienced members who also kindly provided transport to the big hills (thanks again to Janet and Jim Clark). We practised our rock-climbing on the Caerketton crags and on Dougal Haston's Currie Wa's. Years later as treasurer of the Bank of Scotland Hillwalking Club a colleague and I had the pleasure of dining and a dram or two with the late great Tom Weir before he gave a presentation.....but that's enough about banking.

Being very fortunate to be brought up in Portobello for my first 23 years I never

realised then that the wee Figgate Burn that we played and paddled in started its journey as the Bonaly Burn. After six years in deepest Fife Carol and I returned to Edinburgh in 1988 and quickly put in an offer for a rare property in Swanston having been smitten by the views to the Pentlands from the garden. The offer was speedily accepted, and only then did we realise that the rooms were half the size of our previous abode!

From my experience for many years as a Workday Team Leader my main advice to new "recruits" would always be to only take on work that you know is within your capabilities, particularly in the more strenuous lifts. I personally have required much physio and indeed steroid injections :- left shoulder: pulling a sodden mattress from the Water of Leith without calling on more support; right shoulder- over-stretching when positioning our longest and heaviest wooden posts onto the roof of the late John Stirling's 4x4. You sometimes just have to "curb your enthusiasm." You have been warned!

Whether planning next year's calendar, litter picking, gardening, clearing a drain, cutting gorse..... no matter what you are happy doing, it is so worthwhile, and all goes to the benefit of these wonderful hills and the people and wildlife that frequent them.

Ian Combe,

Quartermaster and Team Leader

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

A Century-Old Gift: The Story of the North Esk Radio Cabinet

A Tale of Pentlands Characters, Gratitude, Discovery, and Rediscovery



It's an early afternoon in September 2024. I'm at Michael's home in the heart of the hills. A chill wind curls round the eaves of the house, and the log fire's welcome. The lounge door opens, Michael comes in. He's carrying the cabinet in front of him. It's smaller than expected, and when opened, it's empty. Still, it's a relic of past times. The build quality's excellent, the brass fittings tasteful, and the lacquered oak shines in the firelight.

On closer inspection, it's there too. Unmistakable, towards the bottom of the unit: the little plaque I was hoping for. It recalls the presentation of almost 100 years ago to the day. A presentation founded in affection and friendship

between the folk of the hills. For me, this closes the circle of a long-standing enquiry. It will also bring me as close to a past favourite son of the Pentlands as I'm likely to get. I barely notice the cold when leaving.

Some scene setting is relevant here. In the early part of the 20th century, and in a way which seems implausible now, it was common for residents of outlying Pentlands homes to offer hospitality and refreshments to passing walkers. Sometimes a small payment would change hands, sometimes not. But money was not the real impetus. Rather it was the opportunity to share local news, discuss matters of the day, gossip, wildlife sightings, and so on.

One couple with a reputation for welcoming visitors was William and Maria Tod of the Keepers Cottage, North Esk Reservoir. They were popular and gregarious hosts, and both had strong Pentlands pedigrees. William was the son of John Tod, or the 'Roaring Shepherd of Swanston', who was acquainted with Robert Louis Stevenson.

Prior to becoming Keeper, William had been a shepherd himself. He was also a keen angler, storyteller, and poet. Maria, or Mary as she was commonly known, had grown up at North Esk. Her father, John Garnock, had been a previous Keeper for 36 years. Callers to the Tods cottage –still standing today– would invariably sign the Keepers Visitors Book. Occasionally with a follow-up note, giving their address or employer.

The Tods had married in 1874, and Christmas Day 1924 marked their Golden Wedding Anniversary. In the run-up to this event, 50 or so local hillwalkers came together to purchase a

stylised radio cabinet for the couple. A small deputation of the walkers then attended at North Esk cottage on the day, to join with family members in the celebrations, and present the gift. A short tribute on a plaque fitted to the cabinet marks that occasion.

At one such meeting, I happened to show him the photograph. He recognised the cabinet immediately and explained that it'd been passed on to him – albeit minus the radio set– by a now deceased local resident. How that gentleman came into possession of it



The Tods with their Anniversary Gift

A few days later, a newspaper article appeared summarising these events. It features a striking photograph of the seated Tods listening to the radio.

And there the story might have ended but for a chance conversation 100 years later. I'd first been introduced to Michael on Friends business in early 2024. We met up a few times through the year and quickly recognised a shared passion for Pentlands history.

isn't known. But donation or gift out of the Tod family at some point over the last century is obvious.

And so it was that Michael and I combined the two parts of the story. He had the object but not the background; I the background but not the object. It was a revelation.

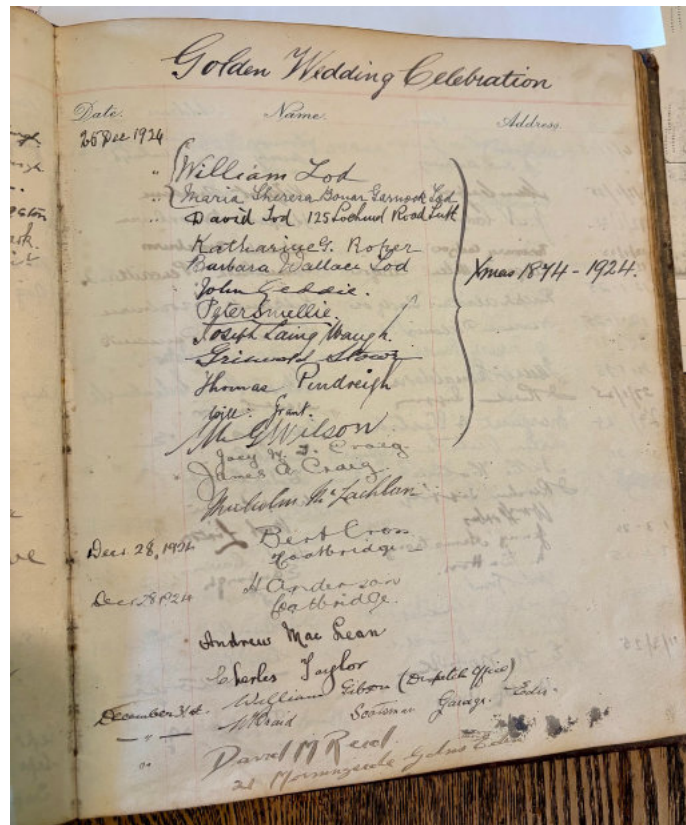
This discovery was accompanied by another treasure trove: the original Visitor Books of North Esk. These had also been handed down to Michael and he was kind enough to let me browse them at will. Meticulously maintained, the books offered a fascinating glimpse into the past. I quickly identified who'd been present at North Esk on that Christmas Day in 1924.

Aside from the Tods, another name jumped out at me: Will Grant. The author of *The Call of the Pentlands*. I've been fascinated with Grant for years and recognised the signature. It also appeared in several pages of the book either side of 1924. Mostly on its own. Less often with 'British Linen Bank' after it.

So Grant was a regular visitor. Midway through the inspection, my fingers tingled as it struck me that he'd handled these self-same pages. I know much about his life but haven't located a photograph. This felt like the next best thing.

My last visit to North Esk was several weeks ago. I sat on the grass near the Keepers cottage. It's still occupied but seemed empty that day. I thought of the Tods, Grant, the community of past hillwalkers, Michael, myself, and the cabinet that connected us. What did it all point to? Words like kindness, hospitality, gratitude, affection, goodwill, love of the hills, came again and again. the old house behind me, the sound carrying out over the still and clear waters of the reservoir.

N D Mackay



From the Visitors Book



The Plaque

Crosswood Reservoir



The charm of the south-west Pentlands is their hidden delights. Difficult access (no bus route and limited parking) and tough walking conditions keep all but the determined away. Crosswood sees few visitors; unless you look at a map you wouldn't know that it exists. It lies above the A70 road after Harperrig and before the Tarbax turning, and below Torweaving Hill with its ruined shooting lodge.

It was built in 1868 as a "compensation reservoir". Water stored here could be released when needed to flow into the natural conduits of Crosswood Burn, Linn Water and River Almond. This helped to keep the mills on the rivers working, it could also top up the level in the Union Canal. The lade, which starts above Nasmyth bridge in the Almond Country Park still carries water to the canal at the Almond Aqueduct.

The reservoir used to have boats for angling and was stocked with American brook trout, but no longer. Like many pleasant spots around the city it suffered in covid times from poaching, irresponsible camping and vandalism, but has returned to its tranquil state, thanks to maintenance tasks carried out by Scottish Water.

The earth embankment dam offers pleasant walking, but a perambulation of the water involves either crossing soggy reeds or a wide detour at the eastern end. The reservoir offers a rewarding half-day visit, especially for its tranquillity and abundant bird life.

David Syme

Rullion Green Wood: A woodland creation project in the Pentlands. Edinburgh University

Windfalls

The trees are slowly toppling
in Sanctuary Wood;
the winds that swirl about them
take the weak ones and the good.

Dazzling light comes probing
through the gloom where they collide;
there will be no refuge here,
nowhere left to hide.

Around the broken bodies,
the limbs that have been shed,
mosses are advancing
to shroud the recent dead.

Soon we won't identify
where all the fallen stood;
the trees are slowly toppling
in Sanctuary Wood.

©Angus D.H. Ogilvy January 2025



Aerial photo showing new woodland planting - photo Lee Live

Nestled within the scenic Pentland Hills, Rullion Green Wood is a 30-hectare site, a small but significant area that forms part of the University of Edinburgh's Forest and Peatland programme. This initiative aims to create woodland and restore peatland to enhance biodiversity, remove carbon from the atmosphere and bring benefits to the surrounding area.

Progress at Rullion Green Wood

Over the last few months, over 37,000 trees have been successfully planted at Rullion Green Wood. While the site might not look like much right now, over time these trees will transform the area into a beautiful woodland. The selection of species—including Scots pine, birch, rowan, oak, and hazel—was carefully chosen to ensure the right trees were planted in the right places, ensuring a resilient and diverse ecosystem. These trees not only provide vital habitats for local wildlife but also play a crucial role in removing carbon from the atmosphere, contributing to broader climate change mitigation efforts.

Community at the heart

Understanding the importance of community involvement, the University has established a dedicated community

activity area within Rullion Green Wood. This space will serve as a place for educational workshops, guided nature walks, and various events aimed at creating a deeper connection between the local community and their natural surroundings. The Friends of the Pentlands network will hopefully be involved in these initiatives, bringing together volunteers and nature enthusiasts to participate in the woodland's ongoing development.

In February, a well-attended community meeting was held to provide an update on progress of Rullion Green Wood. Attendees shared ideas, provided feedback and explored opportunities for further collaboration, reinforcing the collective commitment to the site's success.

A glimpse into history and nature

This summer, visitors to Rullion Green Wood can look forward to the installation of an interpretation panel next to the Turnhouse hill path. This panel will showcase the rich history of the site, notably the Battle of Rullion Green, and highlight wildlife that can be found on site. This addition aims to enrich the visitor experience by celebrating the

area's historical significance and ecological importance.

An inspiring movement

The University of Edinburgh's Community Ranger and the wider team warmly invite members of the Friends of the Pentlands to become active participants in these efforts.



Friends of the Pentlands volunteers helping at Rullion Green wood

As a network already involved in the preservation and enhancement of the Pentland Hills, we know that many members of Friends of the Pentlands will have knowledge and experience to share.

Volunteering opportunities will be available throughout each year, from tree planting and habitat restoration to assisting with educational events and community outreach. By getting involved, volunteers are contributing to the environmental health of the Pentlands and will continue to be part of a growing community dedicated to preserving and enhancing our natural heritage.

For those interested in more information please visit our website edin.ac/rullion or reach out to Julie Wilson, Community Ranger: Community.Ranger@ed.ac.uk

Together, we can ensure that Rullion Green Wood continues to thrive as a great example of ecological restoration and community collaboration.



Scots pine sapling at Rullion Green wood

Julie Wilson

Community Ranger - Forest and Peatland Programme Edinburgh University

Working with children and young people

Seamab comes to the Pentlands!



Seamab School, situated in rolling farmland, in Rumbling Bridge, Kinross, provides a very high standard of care and education for up to 19 children aged 5 - 18 years, and to a small number of day-pupils. In addition to delivering all the elements of Scotland's school curriculum, Curriculum for Excellence, Seamab lays great emphasis on helping pupils develop practical and social lifeskills and supporting their health and wellbeing.

Where better to develop skills and enhance wellbeing than the great outdoors, and it was to this end that a group from Seamab visited Swanston Farm recently, where Sam Lockhart, wearing both her FoP hat and her Swanston Farm hat, introduced them to life on the farm and put them to work.

They met the highland coos, whom they loved, the horses, with whom they bonded and they undertook a very useful task, collecting used tree guards from the woodland. They made a remarkable difference to an area of woodland in a very short time.

In all, the children expended a great deal of energy and got real enjoyment and, as a by-product, top quality outdoor learning (!) from their visit, and went away pleading to return soon!

Bob Cook

Poets Glen Bridge - replacement

This Poet's Glen Bridge is on a key route accessing the Pentland Hills from the Water of Leith in Currie. Back in April 2024 after carrying out repairs to the upper bridge and path, it was agreed with the Park that repairs were required to the larger lower bridge. A recce in the summer identified some rotten treads and supports needing replaced.



However, after a visit by the then Access Officer Tommy McMannon who obtained an engineer's report, it transpired that the bridge was no longer fit for the purpose and a full replacement was required which we agreed was within our capability. We agreed to carry out the replacement once materials had been supplied and we obtained the agreement of the Westwaters who were the land owners for the materials to be brought through their property.

Tommy went on sabbatical leave in the Summer and everything stalled until our next quarterly meeting with the Park in December. We estimated about £900 for materials and at a further recce Andrew

Marsden met a local cyclist Naomi Freireich who said that her cycling group would like to get involved. As a result the costs were split 3 ways:- FoP/Park/cyclists. MKM delivered the initial materials to the Westwaters on 14 Feb 2025. and the following day they were moved by the cyclists closer to the site. Ian Rushworth designed the new bridge and produced a comprehensive set of working drawings for the team to use.

On Wed 19 Feb 2025, 8 of us met on site at 1000 and set up a diversion and then removed the two rotten bridge ends. We then built 2 wooden templates to fill with concrete to secure a half sleeper. Landowner Peter Westwood lent a hand with his chainsaw. 90 minutes of deconstruction was followed by 2 hours of concrete making and laying.

Day 2 was Thur 27 Feb 2025. At 1000 7 of us plus a couple of extras met as we had 2 enormous heavy stringers to carry up to the location. This would form the supports for the treads. Using calipers 6 of us managed to transport the stringers one by one to the site and slide them into place. The rest of the day was spent positioning them on the sleepers in the concrete abutments. We then removed all the rotten treads and added 3 niblets to link the sleepers.

Day 3 was Tue 11 Mar 2025. It was yet another nice sunny day although quite chilly. 5 of us had a long day with Naomi the biker who did the maths in order to work out where correctly to position the treads and supports. Once secured the buttresses were added and the anti-slip treads secured. We called it a day at about 1700.

Our final day was Wed 12 Mar 2025 and there was 6 of us on the job. After finishing off the buttresses the railings had to be fixed to both sides. Meanwhile 'Engineer Ian' was designing the step for the west end. After the two rails were affixed the 12 posts had to be cut and

capped. Then Ian designed a platform for the west end to lead up to the step. This was constructed and laid in cement. The diversion signs were removed, all the rubble cleared up and we got finished after 1800 just as the sun was setting.

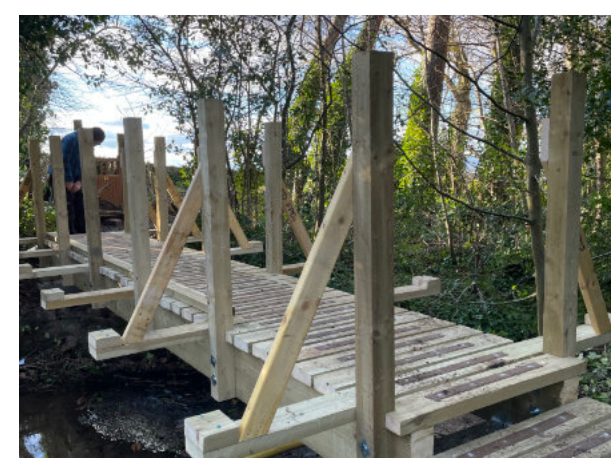
The new bridge was open.

Gordon Cameron BEM





Poets Glen bridge building in progress



To a Skylark near Bells Hill

It seems to me to be absurd
That you, a tiny moorland bird,
Can rise into the springtime sky
With wing-beats faster than the eye.

As if this act were not enough
Your tiny frame still has the puff
To fill the air with steady song
Melodious, all morning long.

Such lung control I can't imagine.
I wish I had your skylark engine

David Syme

Biodiversity Surveys in the Pentland Hills Regional Park

Biodiversity surveys are carried out in the Regional Park to observe, count, and record information about the wildlife found in the Pentland Hills. It is important we know what plants and animals live and use our beautiful hills as one of the main aims of the Regional Park is to protect and enhance the landscape and habitats. If we don't know what flora and fauna there is, we cannot protect it.

Each year we carry out eight wildlife surveys which are part of the Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan. We invite members of the public to join us on these surveys so they can learn a little bit about surveying and help us, as several pairs of eyes are better than one. Our first surveys are for breeding birds on Bonaly Moor. Species of birds are a great indicator of how healthy the habitat is. A good variety of birds, indicates plenty of insects and a variety of plants for them to eat.

The green hairstreak butterfly is a locally rare butterfly. It is quite fussy about where it lives as it needs blaeberry for the caterpillar to feed on and the butterfly likes to sit on tall vegetation like gorse in a sunny spot. Back in 2004 we agreed with the landowner to fence off two areas of blaeberry to stop sheep eating them. This was successful and encouraged green hairstreak to colonise and every year now we check that the butterfly population is doing well.

The small Pearl bordered fritillary is also a locally rare butterfly and is found at Bavelaw Marsh and Red Moss. We survey these areas each year to make sure butterflies are still there.



Raven - regularly seen on the east side of the Pentlands

Wild flower meadows have become a rare habitat. At Bavelaw Marsh we have managed an area of grassland over the last 17 years to improve it for wild flowers. This is achieved by mowing it once a year in September after all the flowers have set seed. All the cuttings are then raked off and removed. This reduces the fertility of the soil and means dominate species cannot take over. Every year in August we check this management is working by identifying all species of plant.

Our regular surveys only cover a few species in a few areas of the Park. You can help us keep an eye on the other hundreds of species, by recording your sightings on the iNaturalist App.

Victor Partridge, Pentland Hills Regional Park

Scottish Water and Friends of the Pentlands volunteers team up at Glencorse Reservoir



The following Scottish Water news release was made available on 27th February 2025

A team of Scottish Water volunteers have joined forces with a local environmental charity to help plant hundreds of trees near Glencorse Reservoir.

The event saw around 20 staff get involved in the scheme, joining volunteers from Friends of the Pentlands who helped provide equipment and expertise, and together they planted around 400 native broadleaf saplings such as oak and birch across a 0.5 hectare area which sits above the reservoir.

The project is part of a wider woodland creation programme that Scottish Water is delivering to help protect water quality at its reservoirs in the face of climate change and improve biodiversity on its sites, as well as locking up carbon emissions.

Scottish Water project manager Steve Garbett said: "Ensuring that we work together with local organisations and charities is a key part of our woodland creation programme and it was great to link up with Friends of the Pentlands to organise this event.

"Together we planted a mix of around 400 native broadleaf trees which will complement the existing native ancient woodland at the site, while also tying in with the University of Edinburgh's Rullion Green Wood scheme, creating that valuable wildlife corridor between the two woodlands and making sure they are joined up and not separate."

General Manager Zero Emissions at Scottish Water, Elise Cartmell, added: "Through our woodland creation programme we want to ensure we are protecting the water quality in our reservoirs by stabilising the soil on the surrounding land, improving biodiversity and helping to lock up those carbon emissions that we can't entirely reduce from our essential processes.

"It was great to get hands on as part of the planting team at Glencorse and brilliant to see more of our projects being delivered at a local level across Scotland."

Scottish Water staff are entitled to spend two days volunteering each year, helping to engage with communities and support a flourishing Scotland.

Hamish Clark, a volunteer with Friends of the Pentlands, said: "Friends of the Pentlands were very pleased to join Scottish Water planting these trees. The main Scottish Water objectives of the woodland creation programme in relation to carbon reduction, response to climate change, and improvement of biodiversity and water quality align with those of Friends of the Pentlands".

"In years to come, these trees will further enhance the very attractive view above Glencorse reservoir enjoyed by the many visitors to this popular part of the Pentlands."

Walks and Talks

Tuesday 29 Oct 2024 Talk - Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland - Dougie Baird

On 29th October, we had a very informative presentation by Dougie Baird, CEO of the Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland.

Dougie briefed us on the origins of the Trust and got quickly into the detail of the opportunities the Trust has been able to find -and the challenges it faces.

We learned about how the sources of funding have changed significantly in a very short time, the point being made very clear by the figures we were shown. We also learned about the rigorous work that is done before boots hit the ground to evaluate options, and estimate costs and payback.

The interest of the attendees led to a good-going question and answer session, which might have gone on longer had time permitted!

A very enjoyable evening for all.

John Hutton

Sunday 5 January 2025 Winter Warmer Walk

To start the 2025 activities, in line with recent tradition, our Walks Organiser John Hutton offered a 5-mile, 1100-foot walk over White Hill, Capelaw and Harbour Hill or a low-level circuit from Bonaly using the Water of Leith Walkway and the track by Lymphoy. Seasonal refreshments were arranged at the Breakout Hub of Currie Chieftains Rugby Club in Balerno. About 40 members signed up for the walks.

However, as January 5 approached, it became clear from the weather forecasts that the “Winter Warmers” would be “Winter Freezers”. On 2 January, after checking the terrain, John cancelled both walks on safety grounds. A combination of slush, ice and hard packed snow made even the low level tracks hazardous, particularly for a large group. However, members were encouraged to meet at the Rugby Club in the afternoon as planned. About 20 people made it through the slush and the sleet, this proved a very pleasant and sociable occasion. A generous supply of excellent mince pies and mulled wine (alcoholic and non-alcoholic) were offered as well as the venue’s usual offering of soup and light snacks.

Members arrived wetly in ones or twos, in a range of warm clothing and a variety of footwear. Some had braved difficult driving conditions and the hike across the car park while a few had managed sections of the low-level walk. The walk along Lymphoy track had been particularly memorable, with the cloud hovering just above the trees and views restricted to fieldscapes rather than landscapes, dominated by the winter shapes of the mature hedgerow trees.

Our thanks to John for arranging the event and then re-arranging it so successfully!

Judy Cantley

Wednesday 5 March 2025 Talk - A century and more of Scottish Cross Country Routes - from the Cheviots to the Western Isles - Tim Simons

Tim's very well attended talk at Merchiston School was based on the publication of Scotways Hill Tracks book (6th edition) a few months ago. The background to the books, which have been a great favourite of walkers since the first guide was published in 1885, was covered and the latest book which was a number years in the making, covers 350 routes in Scotland including 12 in the Pentland Hills.

The methodology used was described in a well illustrated and informative talk. Tim was the Chair of the Scotways Editorial Team with 12 other members for the project and his enthusiasm and in depth knowledge were much appreciated by all those in attendance.

John Surtees

Friday 18 April 2025 Spring Walks Bonaly to Balerno and Currie to Balerno - report to follow in next edition



Walkers on Harbour Hill

Snippets

Steading Tool Store

Thanks to Ian Combe, Ian Rushworth and Richard Maguire for their work on improvements to our “Steading” tool store. Ian R’s solar installation is performing really well and, at last, allowing us to see what we are doing. And Richard’s carpentry skills have provided an outstanding tools organiser racking system - so we can see where everything belongs - and whether anything is missing!

E2 European long distance path

Thanks too, to the Logan Estate and the late Alastair Salvesen for their professional work repairing and resurfacing the important and popular track over Maiden’s Cleuch. Some seriously sturdy culverts and side drainage ditches should prevent water streaming down the track as previously. The completion of this work has facilitated the final section of waymarking for the E2 European long distance path linking the Pentland Way from Glencorse over the Cleuch and down the Poet’s Glen (with its impressive new footbridge) to the Water of Leith walkway. This link will allow the long distance walker to follow signed routes from the Southern Upland Way and the Cross Borders Drove Road to the John Muir Way and the West Highland Way and northwards to John O’ Groats.

North Tweeddale Paths Group

We are sorry to note the winding up of the North Tweeddale Paths Group, a conservation charity which, in the early days of the Friends of the Pentlands, did excellent work in creating a range of way marked hill paths, bridle ways and rights of way in the southern Pentlands hills. A significant share of the assets from that group including tools and equipment has been, generously, gifted to the Friends of the Pentlands.

Andrew Marsden

Chair

Friends of the Pentlands Quartermaster’s Award November 2024

The prestigious QM’s award for 2024 (this time a heavy obsolete tamper base plate) was presented to Stewart Watton at the volunteers meeting at Currie in November.

Quartermaster Ian Combe explained:

"Stewart Watton was the recipient of the QM Volunteer’s Award this year as he particularly made an outstanding impact on the Boghall path (well you would expect that with a tamper). The tamper weighs in at 7kg (15 lb in old money) so no wonder he has a great golf swing!"

Stewart accepting replied:

"Being the recipient of such a prestigious international /recognised global award, it's almost like winning the Oscars of FOP”.

A day in the South West Pentlands

The morning was a bit chilly, with clouds and a brisk breeze, but the views were long to the east, and we were to cross a remote part of the Pentlands. Our small group of four was in high spirits as we travelled down the Lang Whang, with the weather forecast predicting a quiet day. But our walk had a specific purpose—we were gathered for the annual inspection of the waymarking on a well-known but little-used track, from the Tarbrax turn-off across to the Covenanter’s Grave. We then had a further four miles to our day’s end destination at West Linton.



Was it really nearly two decades ago that I travelled out to this part of the hills as a member of the Friends? Back then, the ‘South West Pentlands’ project was just starting, with its mission to review, replace, and maintain way-marking and countryside furniture across large areas of moorland in this corner of the Pentlands.

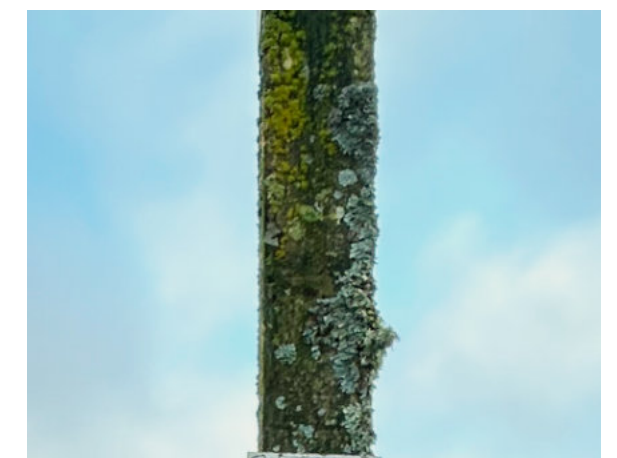
One standout feature of the project was

the installation and replacement of many tall line-of-sight posts, standing about 8 feet above the ground. Friends of the Pentlands, formed just two years, played a big role in the project, working alongside others to contribute. Many of the posts installed then still stand today.

As we walked through big clumps of tussocky grass, my mind started to wander as I thought about these posts standing tall in the flat mono landscape maintaining a lonely vigil to keep walkers guided. What other uses had they I mused?

Well, starting from the top and working my way down, I couldn’t help but notice that these posts are handy bird perches in a desert of tall objects. And guess what? Adding plastic yellow post caps a few years ago hasn’t stopped them! Their distinctive markings are still very clear!

Further down, I noticed that the posts were covered in amazing collections of lichens. The best



ones were growing like fur, waving in the wind, and wrapping the posts in a green jacket. I read somewhere that lichens are a sign of clean and pure air and there are many different types - the Regional Park’s species list records dozens.

At the bottom of the posts, you'll see that many of them are wearing away a little . Countless numbers of sheep use them as back scratchers and exercise spots while they walk around. Or, they might just be useful social gathering spots for a good chat and to pass the time.

But my thoughts were interrupted when the next post came into view. We followed our usual routine: checking if it was still planted securely and not wobbling, looking at the signs for order or needing replacement or a little makeover, and making sure the next post was still 'in line of sight'. With the results of our post shaking and sign checking and cleaning faithfully recorded, we set off to the next post.

Now, maybe it was time to think about other important things, like where our small group might find sustenance on the other side of the hills when our day was done.

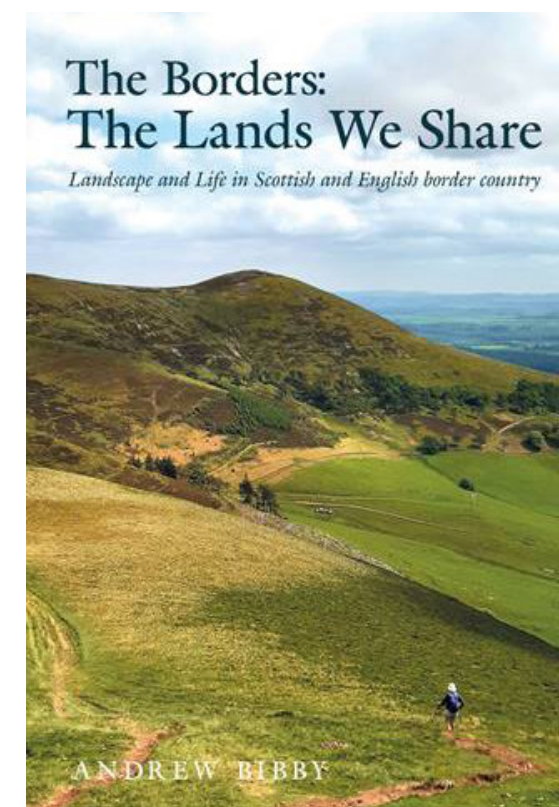
John Surtees

Book Review

The Borders: The Lands We Share

Landscape and Life in Scottish and English border country

Andrew Bibby



Andrew Bibby, writer and journalist, takes the reader on a thought provoking journey of more than 200 miles in 13 days from Edinburgh to Catterick in North Yorkshire via the Pentlands, Cheviots and Southern Uplands. How a wide variety of historical and current issues have affected and shaped the countryside are skilfully interwoven throughout the sections of the book. They have been comprehensively researched and are presented in a very readable and informative way. The Pentland Hills feature early in the journey (with the Friends of the Pentlands being mentioned too).

It was a journey I thoroughly enjoyed.

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John Surtees

*and finally.....***Reminders**

AGM

The 13th Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Pentlands SCIO will be held at 8.30pm on Tuesday 13th May at the Gibson Craig Hall, 158, Lanark Road West, Currie, EH14 5NY.

The AGM will be preceded at 7.30pm by a talk by Charlotte Neary of the Forth Rivers Trust, formerly of the Water of Leith Trust. Charlotte will talk about "River Restoration in the Forth Catchment".

Refreshments will be available from 7pm.

2026 Calendar

Photographs, which will be gratefully received, are needed for the 2026 Friends of the Pentlands calendar '*Favourite Corners Of The Pentland Hills*'

Photos in landscape format should be sent to john.surtees@pentlandfriends.org.uk by 31st July 2025