

Friends of the Pentlands

Pentland Post

October 2025



Friends of the Pentlands is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation Registered in Scotland No. SC035514

Friends of the Pentlands

President: Susan Falconer



Office Bearers

Chair, Andrew Marsden: andrew.marsden@pentlandfriends.org.uk

Secretary, Ian Walford: ian.walford@pentlandfriends.org.uk

Treasurer, Iain Macleod: iain.macleod@pentlandfriends.org.uk

Membership Secretary, Bill Aitken: bill.aitken@pentlandfriends.org.uk

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Website: www.pentlandfriends.org.uk

Editorial

Welcome to the October 2025 edition of the Pentland Post. After a not so great summer last year, we've had a lovely change of pace and a warmer, brighter few months that have been a real boost for the Friends with their busy schedule.

One of the perks of being the editor of the Pentland Post is that it comes with an extra job – the editorship of the Friends calendar. Over the past few months, we've received a large number of fantastic candidate photos for the 2026 calendar, and it's been an absolute pleasure to appreciate the stunning hills and the efforts of many who have been out early in the morning and late afternoon, come rain or shine! To make this year's calendar even more special, we've decided to include more photographs. You can find more details about the calendar on the back page of this edition.

Now, let's talk about the content of the Post! This edition has a wide range of interesting and varied articles, and I want to extend a heartfelt thank you to everyone who has contributed. I hope you enjoy reading it and find it informative.

John Surtees

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

Front page - drystane wall repairs at Harlaw. Photo Gordon Cameron

View from Scald Law

Having been a "Southsider" since moving to Edinburgh in the 1970s, the Pentlands have loomed large on my horizons.

My initial enthusiasm for the Scottish hills was as a keen skier back in the days when we had reliable winters. So, my first ever visits to the Pentlands were to the dry ski slope at Hillend in the 1960s before moving to Edinburgh. And, thinking of ski-ing, I well recall a snowy New Year's day in the mid '70s when a friend with whom we had seen in the new year and who had a sideline in importing portable ski lifts, prevailed on us to join him the following day to try out one of his products. I'm not generally an early starter on 1st January and by the time we had lugged the heavy piece of kit from Swanston well up towards Muilieputchie and got it working it was already well dark and time to head for home.

And, on the same theme, I have many memories of skating at Threipmuir and Bavelaw – most notably a magical evening with a full moon, a bonfire on the ice and a friend playing the skater's waltz on the accordion, we skated while our baby daughter slept peacefully in the car parked on Redford Bridge.

As life has gone on I have become more interested in hillwalking and I am embarrassed to say that having attended the inaugural meeting of the Friends of the Pentlands and joined as a member in 2003, I somehow managed to lose touch after moving house and only rejoined some 15 years later. In 2017, after retiring from work, we decided to move to Colinton – a major "pull factor" of which was its proximity to the Pentlands. The ability to access them on foot from the house hugely mitigated the effects of the Covid lockdown in 2020.

I am involved with an informal walking group (mostly members of the Ptarmigan Mountaineering Club who have retired from work) who walk in the Pentlands every week. We very often make use of the 101 Edinburgh/Dumfries bus (long may it continue) and usually end our walks at one or other of the Pentlands hostleries like the Grey Horse in Balerno or (sadly no more) the Allan Ramsey in Carlops.

I have never kept a log of my perambulations in the Pentlands but must have walked some hundreds, if not thousands, of miles in them. So, what is their particular appeal? I lead walking holidays and, sometimes to get a conversation going, I ask my groups to come up with adjectives to describe the view we are contemplating. "Wet" is a not an infrequent response when in the UK! But, what adjectives would we apply to the Pentlands or, rather, the views from them? Sitting at my computer and without the immediate advantage of a walking group to interrogate, I put the question to ChatGPT which comes up with:

- Sweeping – wide, open panoramas stretching in every direction;
- Expansive – giving a sense of vast space and freedom;
- Breathtaking – so beautiful it makes you pause in awe;
- Tranquil – peaceful and calming;
- Dramatic – shifting skies and striking contrasts of light and shadow;
- Pastoral – rolling farmland and patchwork fields below;
- Majestic – the hills themselves feel grand and commanding;

- Ethereal – mist and low clouds often add a dreamlike quality;
- Picturesque – postcard-perfect views of Edinburgh and beyond; and
- Invigorating – the crisp air and vast horizon make you feel alive.

“Breathtaking” is perhaps pushing it slightly, but I think they all well convey the many attractions of the Pentlands that keeps me returning to them.

Douglas Tullis

News from the Board

The Board has been delighted with FoP’s progress to date during 2025. We have overseen continuing steady growth in membership (now up to nearly 500), continuing financial strength and stability, continuing increase in volunteer participation, and another excellent programme of walks and talks for members.

Our priority going forward is to continue to use our growing strength and influence to make a significant positive difference across the Pentland Hills. Thus, we are engaging with the Pentland Hills Regional Park staff on specific projects - notably encouraging and supporting the development of a plan for the high-level ridge paths - and building relationships with landowners.

At each Board meeting we also consider current or impending planning applications and whether and how we might comment, and we review our work with children and young people. During the first half of the year the Board also oversaw the completion of a review of our constitution which was approved by members at the AGM in May.

The next few months will be a period of transition for the Board. As announced

at the AGM, Andrew Marsden will step down as chairperson in May 2026 and the Board have agreed that Bob Cook (who is already a trustee) should succeed him.

The Board will also be overseeing the transition to: new arrangements for co-ordination of volunteer activity once Hamish Clark steps down as workday co-ordinator; and for co-ordination of litter-picking to succeed Andrew Gallagher. The Board are very grateful to Hamish and Andrew for their unstinting commitment over the last few years. There will be vacancies on the Board over the next 18-24 months, including in the role of Treasurer when Iain MacLeod reaches the end of his term in 2027.

If you feel you have the skills to make a difference across the Pentlands by serving on the Board in any capacity, please do contact either Andrew Marsden or Ian Walford (the secretary). In addition to the normal responsibilities as a trustee, all we expect is that you attend the five Board meetings each year.

These are always friendly and constructive gatherings. If you would be interested specifically in becoming treasurer then Iain MacLeod would be happy to have a chat with you.

Ian Walford, Secretary

ScotWays vintage signs in the Pentlands

Restoring History: The Westside Signpost

ScotWays was founded in 1845 to protect and assert public rights of way, particularly around Edinburgh. We installed our first signposts in 1885 in the Pentlands, the Cairngorms, and along the path through Roslin Glen.

A Link to the Past

One such sign was installed above Westside Farm, where the right of way from Balerno to Nine Mile Burn ascends between Braid Law and Cap Law. This sign is historically significant – not just for its age, but for its continued presence within the Pentlands since at least the 1920s or possibly the 1880s. Few people see it today, as most now take the more direct route over Cap Law.



Original Westside sign before repair (taken 1980, by E.I. Lawson)

The land at Eastside and Westside has long been in the Cowan family, with Charles Cowan MP owning the estate when the sign was first erected. His father, Alexander Cowan, was a successful businessman and philanthropist and an original director of ScotWays.

Repair

In 2022, we noticed that the Westside sign was beginning to lean. Though stable, the wooden post was weakening. With permission from Jenny Cowan, we planned a restoration. Instead of a full repaint, we agreed to highlight the original lettering in white and seal the sign with clear varnish, preserving its aged and weathered character- a testament to its long standing.

Then, in February 2024, strong winds finally brought the sign down. Thankfully, it remained intact.

ScotWays volunteer Rod Dalitz carefully refurbished it and, in May, with the help from volunteers Declan Valters and Tim Simons and staff member Neil Birch, it was reinstalled on a new, sturdy larch post, and slightly repositioned to better reflect the route.



Reinstallation process (Finley Jackson)



Completed restored sign on new post (Neil Birch)

Over the decades, ScotWays' signs evolved, reflecting both practical needs and changing design preferences of the times:

1920s: Damaged and missing signs were replaced.

WW2: Most signs were removed for fear of aiding invaders.

1950s-60s: Green and white cast aluminium signs were introduced.

1964 onwards: Flat-aluminium signs with vinyl lettering were adopted, though not universally loved in rural settings. Local authorities, including the new Pentland Hills Regional Park, began using wooden fingerposts, adding to a mix of signage styles across the area.

Late 1990s, Pentland Paths project: the growing number of visitors - and the patchwork of sign types - prompted a rethink. In 1998, ScotWays partnered with the Regional Park to create a consistent signage network: the Pentland Paths. Cast aluminium signs with a clean, unified style were installed, clearly marking the most used routes. Our name appears proudly on these signs at road ends, with smaller markers guiding walkers at junctions.

Only three original cast-iron signs remain in the Pentlands today:

- Slipperfield, south of West Linton Golf Course.
- Summit of the Cauldstone Slap.
- Westside, the only one still in its original position.

Want to learn more about the history of our signs?

Visit:

<https://scotways.com/ken/the-changing-face-of-scotways-signs/>

Finley Jackson ScotWays

Walks and Talks

Friday 18th April 2025 Spring Walks to Balerno

15 walkers, and organiser John Hutton, met at Bonaly for the “strenuous” walk. Grey cloud cloaked the distant northern hills with an occasional glimmer of sun lighting the slopes of the Ochils.

We headed for the Upper Car Park and, once above Sanctuary Wood, climbed steadily towards Bonaly Reservoir then swung round the western side of Harbour Hill. The decision to exclude the cloud-capped Capelaw proved sound.



Harbour Hill remained clear, providing views along the Pentland Ridge to the Kips and over to Threipmuir, with occasional patches of blue sky appearing.



After a refreshment stop on the south slope of Harbour Hill we dropped to the main path to Harlaw and then down to Balerno using a network of farm tracks,

field edge footpaths and woodland strips. Most of the hedges were long gone but many old trees remained. In the resulting large fields, oil seed rape was just showing the first yellow and the woodland was bright with blossom, bluebells and the fresh green of newly emerged foliage.

Passing through the grounds of Malleny House – and sadly ignoring the advertised Easter Egg hunt! - we reached the Currie Chieftains Community Hub just before 14:00.

The “easy” walk group, five strong and led by Linda Hutton, had set off from the end of the Water of Leith Walkway at Graham's Garden.

The garden was looking good and was well admired. [As an aside, the garden is a commemoration of author Dr Graham Priestley, a local of Balerno, the High Bailiff of the Water of Leith for 24 years, and a founding member of the Trust.]

The threatened rain didn't appear and the group was soon flower spotting along the Walkway. The blackthorn was in full flower, as was lesser celendine. Bluebells, mostly native, provided a lovely mist of blue. The differences between Few Flowered Leek and wild garlic were discussed in detail. No one in the group should be in any doubt now!

The steps at Currie Kirk were descended to the road to examine the damage to the riverside path caused by flooding earlier in the year.

Half way now, so up Kirkgate a little and along the road past Lymphy.

Lots of “wildlife” to be seen: ponies of all shapes and sizes, goats and young lambs.

A familiar path for most, but a new one for a recent member in the group.

And so to join the “strenuous” group in the Hub, just a few minutes behind them.

Most of the combined group stayed on to enjoy hot drinks, cake, and more blethering!



Article and images

Judy Cantley

Tuesday 13 May 2025 Talk Charlotte Neary, Forth Rivers Trust

‘River Restoration in the Forth Catchment’

Many of us remember Charlotte from her Water of Leith days, of which there were very many! But she's moved on, and was keen to tell us about her new challenges.

She began by giving us some context about the Trust. She reminded us of just how extensive the Forth catchment is: large tracts of Fife, Central Scotland, and the Lothians, including, of course, the Pentlands.

She explained her role in managing components of pan-European projects, underlining the commonality of the environmental challenges faced across western Europe.

Going on to the detail of her day to day work, we heard about the techniques and practices involved in flood prevention and peat restoration. Leaky dams. Scrapes. Slowing the water. Encouraging rivers to meander. Preventing cattle getting down to the water edge. And, at all times, trying to engage the local communities to build in sustainability. [And also taking a lead from beavers, who have mastered many of the core skills involved here!]

The closing Q&A session could have gone on quite a bit longer; Charlotte was in full flow! We had got on to eel ropes and the downsides of weirs! But a halt had to be called and Charlotte got a well-deserved show of thanks as we switched the lights back on.

John Hutton

Little Sparta

Friends of the Pentlands were given the opportunity to learn and discover more about Little Sparta this summer by way of an excellent talk at the Gibson Craig Halls Currie by Magnus Linklater then a memorable visit to the the garden. John Yellowlees reports on the talk and John Hutton on the visit.

Wednesday 16th May 2025. Talk. Magnus Linklater, Chair Little Sparta Trust



*Magnus Linklater (left) with John Hutton
Photo: John Yellowlees*

Magnus Linklater has been chair of the Little Sparta Trust for 20 years, but it was four decades earlier that Ian Hamilton Finlay and his bride Sue first came to the farm at Stonypath near Dunsyre. What they found was bleak and exposed, yet they would develop what V&A Director Sir Roy Strong hailed as the only original garden to be created anywhere since the war.

Ian Hamilton Finlay CBE (1925-2006) is impossible to pigeonhole whether as a poet, artist, printmaker, wit or campaigner who trod on many toes. He took on the Edinburgh establishment, renaming Stonypath as Little Sparta in reference to the sworn enemy of Athens. His garden became laced with hints of menace - the fin of a submarine rising by a lochan, Apollo as the bearer of missiles, the slogan "bring back the birch" at an aspen grove - because he wanted people to think for themselves. The landscape would become a prison for Finlay when he contracted agoraphobia. With only his wife and two children for company, he waged war against Strathclyde Regional Council, whose categorisation of his Temple of Apollo as a converted warehouse made him liable to pay rates. A sheriff sent to confiscate artworks in lieu found himself confronted by a battalion of supporters, but returned later to remove one item for which he sent Finlay a personal cheque.

Finlay's second great battle was over the bicentenary of the French Revolution where a change of government in Paris was followed by an accusation of antisemitism that culminated in cancellation of his commission to line the route from Versailles to Paris with statues. He had a gentler side, loving to debate how to control willowherb or why the World Cup would never be complete without Scotland. Miraculously a second stroke removed his agoraphobia, and in his last years he was free to travel.

The Trust has fallen heir to the land and 270 artefacts, and now aspires to acquire the Temple of Apollo. Finlay had said that if they could not keep it going, they should let the garden go back to the hills, but the Trust are determined to conserve, protect and enhance it, combating the impacts of climate change and sustaining its claim to international renown.

John Yellowlees

Thursday 14th August 2025 Visit to Little Sparta

13 members visited the garden at Little Sparta, near Dunsyre on a fine afternoon. Participants were asked to submit their thoughts about their experience.



Photo: John Hutton

- Beautiful, tranquil, a surprise round every corner, thought provoking, enigmatic.
- We were lost in philosophy, thought, time and nature.
- One of Ian Hamilton Finlay's central themes was the never-ending battle between art and nature, and nature currently seems to be winning - lovely and thought-provoking as always, but some artworks seemingly lost and others in decay while nature (or bits of it) flourishes.
- A tranquil place in a beautiful setting, interesting to explore and enabling the visitor to wander at will.
- An interesting visit to a green cultural oasis in the Pentland Hills near Biggar.
- Visiting Little Sparta was a beautiful, peaceful and thought provoking experience.
- Somewhat bizarre to a gardener, but intriguing and thought provoking.
- So many lovely paths; did I walk them all; did I get lost?
- Little Sparta is a hidden treasure in the Pentlands; art and nature in a beautiful setting, a really exceptional afternoon.
- The sun was shining, time was not pressing and there was a superb opportunity to experience Hamilton Finlay's outstanding artwork, to appreciate his love of languages and language, his use of cryptic, puns and double entendres.
- A legacy that demonstrates the endurance and hard work of Finlay and his wife on their house and garden - and the breadth of his interests and creative ability.

'The King of the Pentlands'

Local history enthusiast Neil Mackay and his delightful article about the life and times of the hardy shepherd John Wood

On a July morning in 1893, an elderly shepherd awoke in his home at Easter Howgate, Midlothian. He breakfasted, dressed smartly, combed his fulsome grey beard into shape and then walked the 3 miles to Penicuik town centre. He would retrace his steps a few hours later.

The shepherd was there to hear William Gladstone, the Prime Minister of the day, deliver a speech.

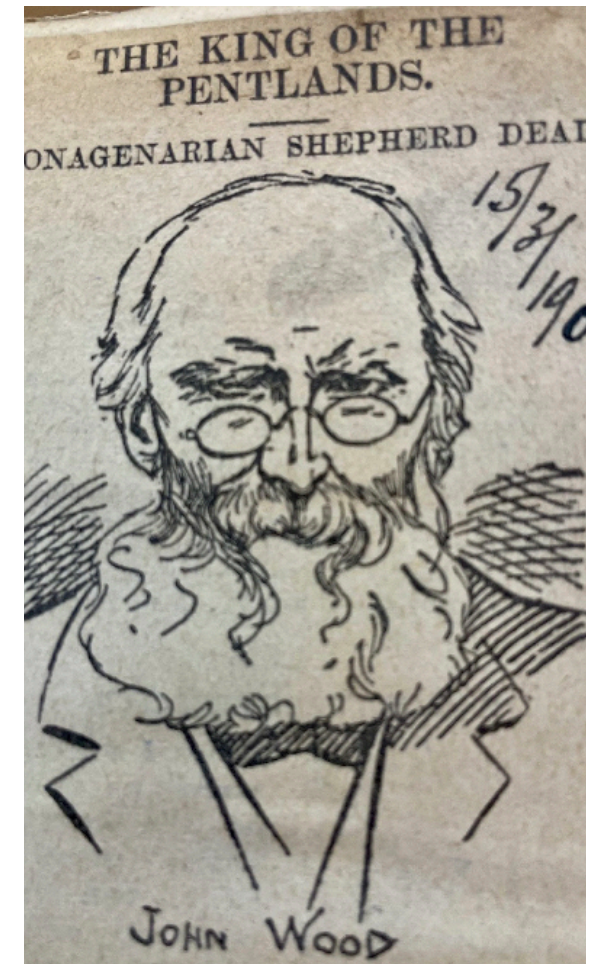
Afterwards, the two men were introduced to each other by local dignitary Sir John Cowan.

"Gladstone had, in fact, just met Pentlands royalty. For this man, John Wood, was the King of the Pentlands".

Whilst they came from vastly different backgrounds, Gladstone and the shepherd had at least two things in common. The first was age. Gladstone was 83, his new acquaintance 89. Average male life expectancy at the time was 42.

The second thing that united them was status. Gladstone was a political colossus and nearing the end of his fourth term in office.

But the shepherd was no slouch in this regard either. Gladstone had, in fact, just met Pentlands royalty. For this man, John Wood, was the King of the Pentlands.



Sketch from a newspaper obituary of the time



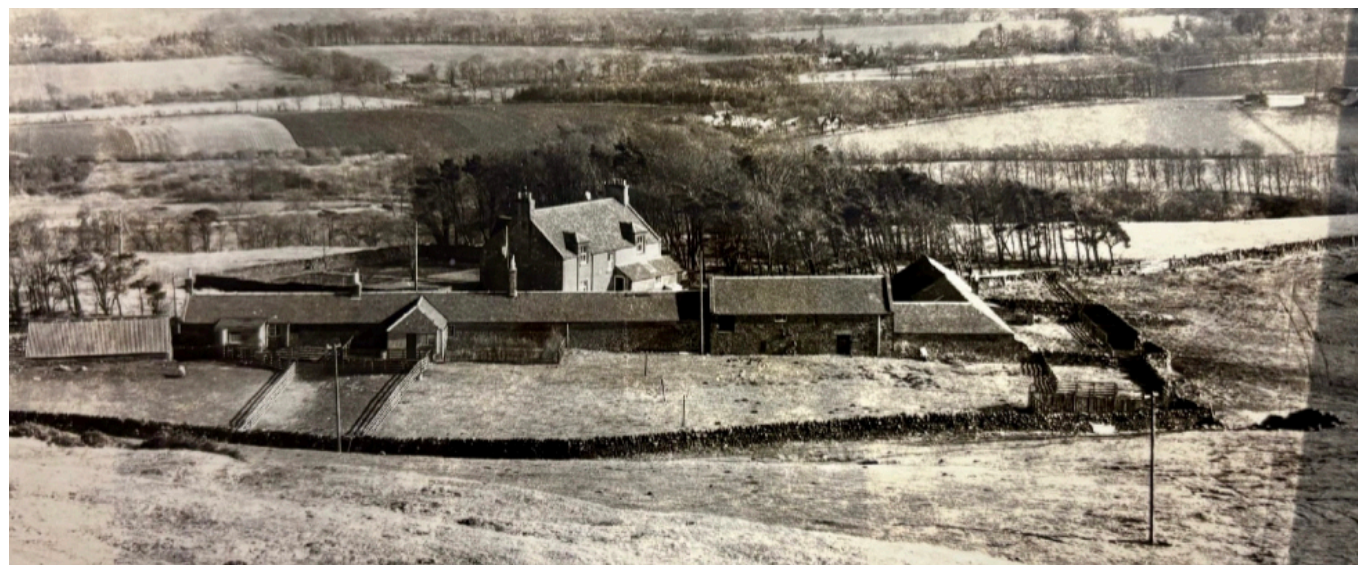
PM William Gladstone c. 1894

John was born at Newby Hope near Peebles on 6 April 1805, to parents William and Christian Wood. Legend tells of his birth being attended by Mungo Park, the celebrated explorer and a forerunner to David Livingstone and Henry Stanley. It's a good story. But Park only started practice as a country doctor in Peebles 3 months after the event.

William Wood was a shepherd, and John was steered in that direction from an early age. By his teens, he had already left home and was tending sheep at Spittal Farm near Nine Mile Burn. After a short stint at another farm near Fala, he returned to the Pentlands and settled down as the shepherd at Castlelaw in Glencorse. He was to remain in that position for almost 50 years, serving under four separate masters.

The Working Shepherd

His was a grafter's life. Castlelaw was a large farm, extending from Fulford in the northeast to Turnhouse Hill and Rullion Green in the southwest.



Castlelaw Farm and Cottages c. 1901

It likely had several hundred sheep. At that time, it was common grazing practice for them to be moved between high and low ground on a daily basis. So John would have been out in all weathers and at all hours. It should be remembered there was little or no mechanisation back then. Access to the

hills was solely by foot and contemporary records state that shepherds would cover anything between 12 and 18 miles a day.

Modern Castlelaw Hill, with its military connections, firing ranges and conspicuous stone tracks is much maligned. In fact, the nature writer Jim Crumley calls it the 'sacrificed hill'. Nonetheless, it's a hill that still holds attractions. Probably the most iconic view in the Pentlands is that from the summit looking southwest towards the main range.

There is too -shooting access permitting- the south corrie, with its high rocky outcrops and flanks of heather that colour deep purple in summer. Sometimes I imagine John in these places. Here, resting on his crook and looking up the valley of the Logan Burn. A faithful collie or two at his heels. There, crossing rockfall to reach a distressed lamb or injured ewe.

John's home was something of mystery. Initially at least.

Archives showed that he lived in one of three houses called Castlelaw Cottages, which at one time sat near the farm. But I could find no trace of them, aside from a foot-wide section of mortared wall that now forms the southwest side of the sheep pens. Then I got a lucky break. I met Frances, a retired schoolteacher then living at Bush Loan Cottages. An

elderly lady, she was formidably intelligent and possessed of a fine memory. It turned out her childhood was spent at Castlelaw Cottages, and she recounted life there fondly and in great detail. Some months later, I uncovered a photo that mirrored her description exactly.

Home and Social Life

Given the circumstances, you might have expected John to be a solitary individual with a narrow world view.

Far from it. John married Helen Bruce from Temple, and the couple had 2 children: a son and daughter. They were a sociable family and regularly welcomed visitors to their home.

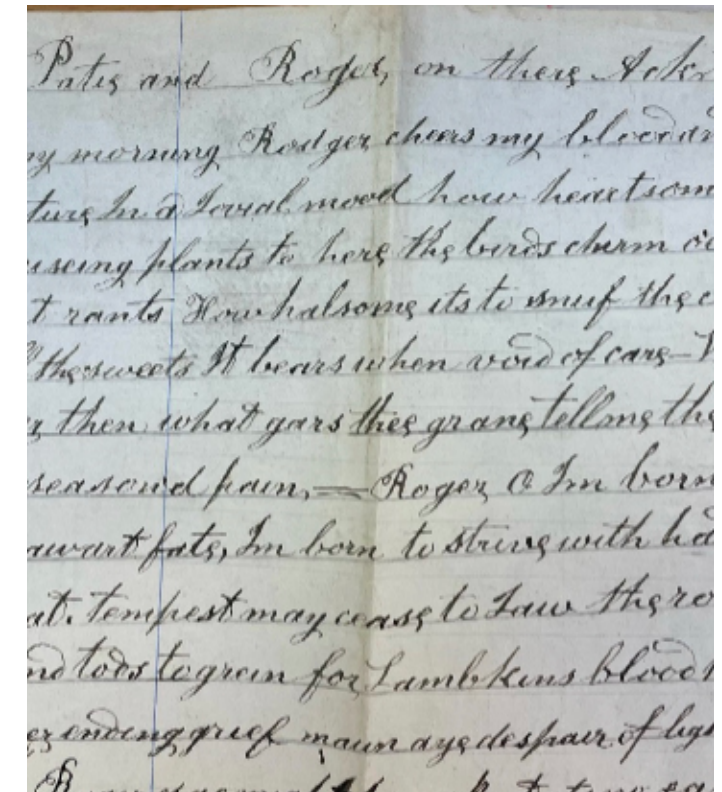
Their friends and neighbours cut across social circles, so these included the aforementioned Sir John Cowan (some of whose descendants still farm at Eastside today) and the scholarly Fraser Tytler family from Woodhouselee. John was a popular host and would often regale callers with tales of his adventures in the hills.

"John also had exquisite penmanship. It's said that at one time he could write the Lord's Prayer in a neat legible hand on the back of a postage stamp".

Despite his limited education, he read widely, attended literary events, and kept abreast of the daily news. He took a special interest in politics and remained a lifelong Liberal.

John also had exquisite penmanship. It's said that at one time he could write the Lord's Prayer in a neat legible hand on the back of a postage stamp. A later example of his handwriting was found in archives, and a section is shown below. It's an extract from The Gentle Shepherd by poet Allan Ramsay. This was written when John was 91 years old. Some 75 years earlier, he had recited a fuller

version of the work to admiring audiences at Carlops.



Handwritten section of 'The Gentle Shepherd'

The King'

At some point in this busy life, John became The King of the Pentlands. This was an informal and by no means regular title. In fact, I can find only one other person in history to have been granted the sobriquet. This was another shepherd named Archibald Martin from Bavelaw Estate in the early twentieth century. The criteria for 'coronation' were to have:

- Lived and worked in the Pentlands for many years;
- Reached old age;
- Gained an intimate knowledge of the hills; and
- Performed services and/or offered support to the hills communities.

Less is known of Archibald Martin but John Wood certainly ticked all the boxes.

Later Life and Death

In 1875, John retired and he and his wife moved to a small cottage at Fulford just off what is now the A702. Helen Wood died in 1892 and not long afterwards John relocated to live with his daughter and son-in-law at nearby Woodhouselee Gardens.

The King of the Pentlands died of natural causes in 1901 and is buried alongside his wife and daughter at Old Glencorse Kirk. Unfortunately a modest gravestone erected at the time has since disappeared, presumably vandalised. However old records mean we can still pinpoint the family lair. It lies towards the west side of the burial ground. As ever, his old friend Sir John Cowan remains close. He predeceased the elderly shepherd by 5 months and is buried just a few metres away.



The base of the missing Wood gravestone in the foreground; Cowan stone marked in background.

N.D Mackay

News from Patieshill wildlife reserve

Biological recording at Patieshill

Despite extremes of weather 2025 has seen major achievements at Patieshill wildlife reserve, notably in the field of biological recording. In June 2024 FoP representatives met colleagues from the regional park and other interested parties to discuss - among other things - cooperation on standardising and sharing records of fauna and flora across the Pentlands: lots of data existed in various databases but was not easily available or relatable. A worldwide citizen science app called iNaturalist, with 3.8 million observers and nearly half a million identifiers, was mentioned as a possible solution.

On investigation we discovered that Patieshill could be established as a 'project' on iNaturalist, following in the footsteps of the regional park. So we embarked on a journey. One of the park's Natural Heritage Officers offered basic training and technical know-how, an FoP member provided digital mapping skills and with a bit of IT fiddling - hey presto - we had an online project (which immediately picked up four existing records).

This is when we started to recognise the magnitude of the task. In the ideal scenario, a recorder takes a photo or sound recording, automatically stamped with time and GPS coordinates, and uploads this into iNaturalist, with or without a suggested identification. There it is checked and - hopefully - verified by an accredited expert (an 'identifier') as a Research Grade record. Observations with insufficient photographic or audio support are left for further inspection or stored as Casual records.



Dark Green Fritillaries, Bob Douglas



Red Damselflies, Bob Douglas

This calls for a certain level of expertise and technical skill and works best with plants and families of insects that are obligingly static. So we quickly realised that expert input was required. In May the reserve had an awayday visit from a group of regional park staff, including Natural Heritage Officers, rangers and estate workers. There were useful discussions, several people took the opportunity to hone their skills with iNaturalist and the project started to take shape.

Around the same time, one of our members suggested that Edinburgh Natural History Society might be interested in organising a field trip to the North Esk Valleys - a noted Site of Special Scientific Interest - along with Patieshill. This led to productive contacts with David Adamson of ENHS. Plans for a joint inspection were thwarted by the weather but David made a couple of reconnaissance visits and subsequently led an official ENHS trip at the beginning of July.

Pentland Hills Regional Park



The overall outcome can be described as transformational. At the end of June the project listed 40 species; at the end of July it listed 225. One of David's trips recorded - among much else - 19 different species of hoverfly. By now the sun was shining on us, metaphorically if not always literally. Through a chance encounter outside the FoP toolstore at Hillend we made contact with Sue Jury, the Midlothian county recorder for the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland, who also expressed interest. This led to an interesting but scientifically unproductive session on one of the wettest and windiest days I have ever encountered at Patieshill. Undaunted, Sue later returned with a colleague to do a systematic survey that produced a list of 144 vascular plants.

We still had plenty of work to do since Sue, following BSBI practice, did not use iNaturalist but added her records direct into the iRecord database, with an Excel spreadsheet copied to FoP. At this point one of our helpful volunteers took on the job of transcribing these records, plus some older records lurking in the BirdTrack database, into a format acceptable as iNaturalist Casual records. This is where we are now on our journey. The Patieshill project currently lists 544 observations, 344 species, 88 identifiers and 15 observers. It is worth noting the 88 identifiers - experts located all across the globe - who have taken the trouble to examine and confirm the identification of 'our' wildlife - citizen science at its best. It is also worth noting the 344 species, compared with 1,205 for the Pentland Hills Regional Park as a whole: not far off 30% of the species recorded in the eastern Pentlands have been found in the twelve acres of Patieshill reserve.



The wildlife reserve, John Surtees

There is still a long way to go. The moth populations, for example, have barely been looked at: night-flying moths are hard to catch and even harder to identify. Many bird species - annoyingly mobile - have been seen but not yet recorded to iNaturalist standards. There are certainly roe deer but none has yet been photographed. For the trees' sake we hope there are no rabbits but that's still an open question. But things have come on by leaps and bounds compared with where we were a year ago, and we can now start to recognise the rich biodiversity on our doorstep.

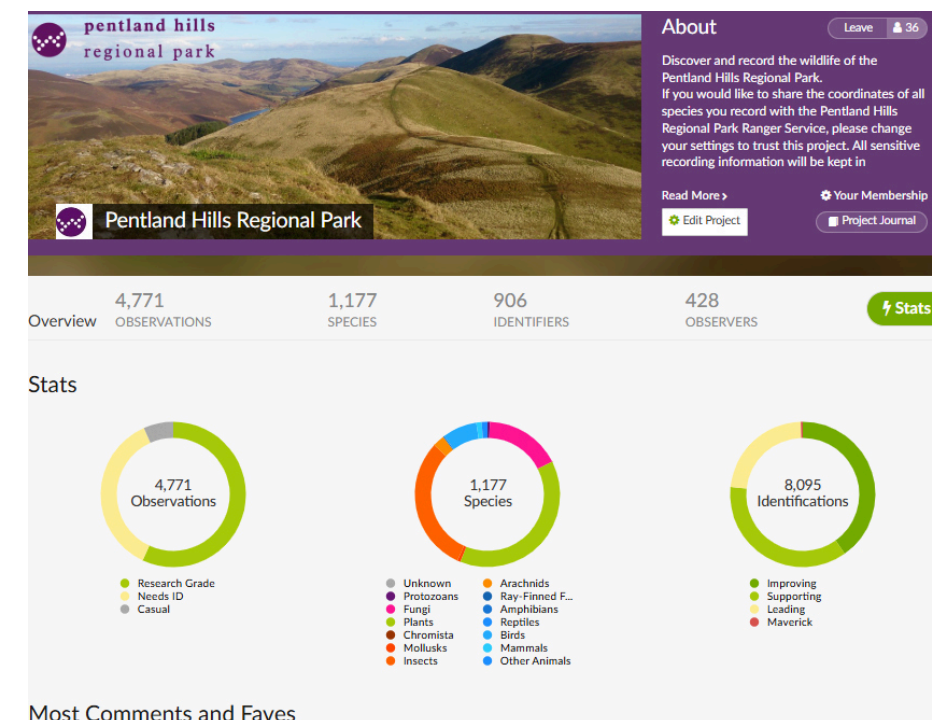
The iNaturalist app is freely available to download and works on both phones and laptops or iPads. Our page can be found under Projects as 'Patieshill wildlife reserve'. If anyone has any questions or would like to get involved, please contact me at dennissmith@pentlandfriends.org.uk.

Discover, Record, protect: Exploring Nature in the Pentland Hills Regional Park with iNaturalist.

The PHRP iNaturalist project invites nature lovers, visitors, and citizen scientists to explore our scenic landscape while contributing to biodiversity research. Since the project began, over 4,700 observations have been recorded and an impressive 1,168 species identified- thanks to the dedication of our growing community.

From soaring buzzards and mountain hares to rare vibrant wildflowers and UK BAP species of invertebrates, every sighting helps build a clearer picture of the park's rich ecosystem. We're especially keen to encourage observations of common species too - knowing where and when they appear is just as vital as spotting rare finds.

Through iNaturalist, visitors can log sightings, share photographs, and help identify species, turning a simple walk into a valuable scientific endeavour. This crowdsourced approach is assisting in creating a living database of the park's flora and fauna, helping conservationists like us track changes in biodiversity and detect environmental shifts.



Whether you're a seasoned naturalist or a curious walker with a smartphone, your

observation matters. The project not only fosters a deeper connection with the land but empowers everyone to become stewards of the Pentlands natural heritage. Join the community, sharpen your skills, and help change the future of this landscape.

You can download the free iNaturalist App or join our project free online at: www.inaturalist.org/projects/pentland-hills-regional-park

Lucy Hutton, Pentland Hills Regional Park, Natural Heritage Officer

Pentland Hills Junior Ranger Programme

The Pentland Hills Junior Ranger programme started in August 2023 and is part of the Scottish Countryside Rangers Association (SCRA) Junior Ranger project.

The Pentlands Junior Rangers meet on the third Friday of each month between 2 and 4pm and is free to join. We participate in a variety of activities from practical work, wildlife identification, biological surveys, education on antisocial behaviour and to keep it fun, compare home baking.

The most exciting news of the year so far is that we have been shortlisted for the RSPB Nature of Scotland award in the youth action category. More news on this to follow hopefully!!



If you know of a young person between the ages of 11 and 18 who would be interested in learning more about the work of Countryside Rangers please contact Pentlandhills@edinburgh.gov.uk for more information.

Brian Robertson – Pentland Hills Regional Park Ranger team

Winter Trek Tae Logan Lea

Strikin oot frae Bonaly
up ower Harbour Hill,
wind frae the east bites at the cheeks
wi a snell Siberian chill,

doon frozen moss tae Glencorse loch,
wi the water reflectin like glass,
deep in the lee o Turnhouse's bulk
whaur the icy wind willna pass,

then trudgin the glen tae the Logan brig
unner White Craigs Heids tae the nick,
whaur that wind micht scoop ye aff yer feet
if ye havenae a pole in yer grip.

It's a skitie scrammle tae Carnethy's tap
wi the heaped up cairn in the cauld,
then ower the peat hags, slidderin aboot,
till ye get tae the trig o Scald.

Ye micht think ye've achieved yer goal the day,
an its time tae sit or lie ----- is it hell!

It's doon tae the cafe at Logan Lea
for a coffee or tea an a pie!

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Loganlea (or Loganlee) Reservoir

This narrow reservoir was built in 1851 to supplement Glencorse Reservoir's supply of water for the Penicuik mills and Edinburgh's water requirements. It is on the route linking Flotterstone and Threipmuir by way of the Green Cleugh - a very popular cross-Pentlands link. Although only minutes from Edinburgh, the walk along the quiet road beside the reservoir, nestling between Black Hill and Carnethy Hill, lets you feel that you are many miles from the bustling capital.

The reservoir itself is 1 kilometre long; shallow and reedy at the south-west end and some 15 metres deep at the north-east dam wall. The Logan Burn acts as feeder and outlet drains the Green Cleugh, turns below the rugged crag of Lover's Loup and passes The Howe, the erstwhile gamekeeper's home. Beyond the Loganlea dam the burn flows down to Glencorse Reservoir; dippers flit from stone to stone, herons and cormorants flap overhead and in spring cuckoos can be heard in the surrounding woodland. The Logan Glen is a tranquil, beautiful scene.



Loganlea Reservoir, Photo: David Syme

Sadly, the tranquillity was disturbed in January 1985, when a soldier from Kirkliston Camp carried out a clumsy robbery of the Glencorse Barracks bank run and murdered three fellow soldiers. He drove to Loganlea and disposed of the bodies at the gate below the dam wall. There is a discreet black memorial plaque marking the scene at ground level by the wall below the waterman's cottage.

Halfway along the reservoir road is the cabin of Loganlea Fishery, which stocks the water with rainbow trout, tiger and blue trout and sells permits for fly-fishing. The owner has revamped the cafe facility to a high standard. As well as catering for anglers it is open to walkers, runners and cyclists, who can sit outside on a good day to enjoy the view. Behind and above the facility is the ruin of Howlet's House, reputedly the home of the monk who looked after the chapel of St Catherine in the Hopes, which since 1822 lies under water at the elbow of Glencorse Reservoir.

With no trees to mask the view, walkers find the stretch along Loganlea refreshingly open and uplifting, and it would be unusual to pass others without a smile and a friendly greeting. It must rank as one of the most attractive reservoirs in the Pentlands.

Favourite Corners of the Pentlands

Readers will know that this is the theme for our 2026 calendar, and I'm sure there will be some excellent entries. I am more of a scribbler than a snapper, so I would like to share four of my favourite corners in word form.

Torduff Hill lies between the reservoir and Bonaly, and is an excellent short walk, either from Bonaly or Torphin. The wonderful view over the city and beyond is easily gained. It's a great place to bring a person with no hill-walking background and for this reason it deserves a place on my list.

Dunsyre Hill is more of a challenge. The southern Pentlands are rarely visited so you can enjoy solitude in beautiful surroundings with only the bleating of sheep and chirruping of grouse to break the silence. Dunsyre Hill can be the final stage of an expedition which includes Bleak Law and Covenanter's Grave. At its summit your tired limbs are rewarded with a "I'm the king of the castle" moment as you survey the fine views in every direction.

Bell's Hill has long been a firm favourite. The steady climb from Harlaw or Flotterstone makes it an easy ascent, and on a good day the views to the bridges, over to the main Pentlands ridge and beyond Castlelaw to the Moorfoot Hills are magnificent. This was my first hill after the second hip replacement. I stood on the summit for ages counting my lucky stars. My "go to hill" if undecided.

My fourth choice is actually not mine, but I have adopted it. The late Robin Aitken told me about a seat in a cleft of rock high above Green Cleugh. In the cleft, Robin said, is a wooden seat put in by a miner from Penicuik many years ago. The seat is for one person only and requires a scrambling approach. Facing north it offers a fine view over The Howe and Loganlea Reservoir.



Seat above Green Cleugh. Photos David Syme

The words "Peace Perfect Peace" are carved into the wood, and if you sit on the seat that is what you experience. Definitely a favourite corner.

Workday Workwear

– or sartorial tips for the well-heeled mattock wielder!

Those of us who work regularly in the hills will have our favourite clobber to wear – over the years I have researched and discovered some useful examples of work wear and should like to share my experiences, particularly with those who are commencing regular volunteering and considering what to buy – or have given for Christmas!!

Work wear need not be scruffy. The breeches I use were first shown to me by a sheep farmer who could have been on his way to a social event! They were made by Mascot which tailor high strength, high quality materials into an extremely functional yet smart-in-appearance product. Features include zip-off cargo pockets (for when you don't want to look as if you've just left a construction site); zip-in and Velcro pocket kneepads protected by a Cordura knee covering; detachable ID flap; zippered pockets for wallet and phone; sturdy belt and tool loops; ankle adjustment; and other useful features. Though not inexpensive, they should last a lifetime. Complementing the trousers Mascot have a range of T shirts, both short and long sleeved, which are colour matched to the trouser design. A Buff neck cooler/warmer completes the outfit.



Andrew Marsden

Hats and Gloves

My choice of hat was influenced by fellow work day member Arthur McKenzie who was always seen in his Lowe Alpine (or Berghaus) mountain cap with its wired peak, ear flaps and elasticated dome (to stop it blowing away). Insulated and waterproof, it can protect from a storm yet provide some cooling and sunburn protection in warm weather. Though the least sartorial of my apparel (my wife calls it my “silly hat”) I go for functionality over style!

The Friends provide gloves appropriate to the task (lightweight or heavy-duty thorn proof) but, if you want your own, consider Skytec Argon which, though rubberised to give more than the average thorn protection, allow you to use your fingers when

operating tools. They are warm and snug in the cold weather. The glove clips (sourced by Andrew Gallacher, another work day member) allow them to be firmly attached to the belt when not in use.

Footwear

Industrial standard boots with reinforced toe caps (sleepers are heavy!) and good sole grip are essential – there are many brands and models from the DIY stores including JCB, De Walt, Helly Hansen etc. More frequently, though, I am in favour of (heavy duty) wellies – even in summer there are bogs and streams to work in and, coming over the trousers, they provide a reliable barrier to ticks and clegs. My “Chore” Muck boots which I have used for many years have recently, due to availability, been replaced by Grub's boots. These have all the necessary safety features including ceramic toe caps and silicone uppers. They are lined, boasting thermal protection down to -200. It's important to remember that wellington boots require regular cleaning and treatment to stop them cracking especially where the uppers attach to the welt – a spray silicone oil protector is available from the manufacturer.

Outer wear

The Friends have provided its volunteers with navy Berghaus Polartec fleeces branded with our logo at heavily subsidised cost. These give most of the external protection you'll need but, in heavy rain or wind, an old Gortex jacket will give additional defence. I have sourced a charitable facility which can provide personalised breast badges. Another batch of fleeces should be available for next season.

So those are some of my ideas. But I'm sure you'll have some of your own – if so drop us a note and we can use these columns to share our idiosyncrasies!

Andrew Marsden, Chair

The Friends 2026 Calendar is now available!

With fabulous Pentlands pictures

Price £8 each or three for £20

Friends can buy direct from Averil Sutherland (07720049705)

Cash or cheque to Friends of the Pentlands



Calling all photographers!

The theme for the 2027 calendar is 'Our Friends In The Hills. Photographs in landscape format, which will be gratefully received, should be sent to John Surtees by **30th June 2026** at john.surtees@pentlandfriends.org.uk

