

Friends of the Pentlands Pentland Post October 2026



Friends of the Pentlands is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation registered in Scotland SC035514



Friends of the Pentlands

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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

Welcome to the autumn edition of the Pentland Post which I hope you enjoy. Whilst it may have been the summer holiday season since the last edition its been a very busy time on the work day front with a major project being completed on the track between Little Vantage and Gala Ford (see page 12) as well as many other tasks including a significant amount of rubbish and litter being uplifted by stalwart members of the litter picking team. A big thankyou to them and to the contributors to the Pentland Post.

John Surtees

Pentland Post Editor

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Front page on the Little Vantage to Gala Ford track - photo Gordon Cameron

View From Scald Law Ian Wells



During "Lockdown", I was forced to find hills closer to home for exercise and relaxation. For me this meant the Pentlands. Until then I confess to having spent little time exploring them properly. As I did so I became aware of what a wonderful gift they are, and the rewards to be had from revisiting a place regularly, rather than continually looking for somewhere new: the rewards of looking deeper, not wider. For the first time I think I became aware of how the landscape changed throughout the year.

Around the same time, I retired, and with more time on my hands, I knew I wanted to do something physical and outdoors, that would give something back to the Pentland Hills that had given so much to me during Covid. I enquired about becoming a volunteer ranger with the Regional Park but, by good fortune as it turned out, they had a very long waiting list. On the "rebound" so to speak, I stumbled across Friends of the Pentlands (FoP) in Colinton's "Art in the Park" in September 2022. At £16 for joint membership, it seemed good value, and Andrew Marsden (former Chair of FoP) did a good job of describing something that sounded like a close approximation of heaven.

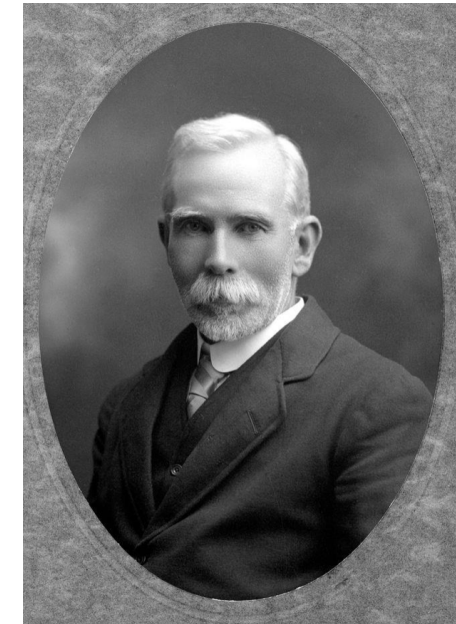
I don't remember Andrew's sales pitch mentioning crawling on hands and knees through dense gorse, in sub-zero temperatures, armed with a saw, and wearing gloves that were never going to be thick enough. Maybe he should add that to his spiel, as it has to be one of the top activities to look forward to in the winter season. In an age full of miss-selling scandals it is reassuring that Andrew and Friends of the Pentlands is

in the clear! What makes the volunteer work-parties special? For me it is the enjoyment of working with friendly like-minded people focused on a clear task. There is the opportunity to learn new skills, learn about the landscape and its management from people more knowledgeable than yourself. There is all the exercise I could wish for and at £16, significantly less than any gym membership. That said, one of the great features of the work-parties is that you do what you can: if you can lift, for example, ten planks go for it, but if you need help to lift just one, that's fine too. Last year I was asked to become a "team leader" – which basically means doing some of the more boring bits of admin and preparation before and after a workday. I was glad to accept as I realised that the reason my workday experiences were so enjoyable was in large part due to the hard work going on behind the scenes. From conversations with other volunteers, it was apparent that this was not true in many other volunteer organisations. More recently still I was asked to join the board, and I will be happy if I can make a positive contribution to the great work of the Friends.

Having extolled the many benefits I have found from joining FoP I am aware of one possible negative that has come with it. That of not being able to walk through the Pentlands with friends without pausing to point out every bridge, drain, gate, path, sign, step, tree, or wall that you have had a small hand in, replacing, repairing, planting, pruning, digging, rodding, or repainting. Fascinating to you but perhaps less so to your companions.

The Hills He Loved: William Anderson and the Pentlands

The writer who combined a pioneer's instinct for exploration with an artist's eye for the changing colours and character of the hills.



'From south to north there was a band of purple golden light, stretching down in a great sheet, always spreading slowly towards us; touching the heights, the hills, the woods, the spires with glowing gold, and throwing the shadows into magnificent masses of indescribably rich purple. We stood rapt in wonderment, waiting to be transfigured by the light.'

From 'Views in Sunshine and Storm', The Pentland Hills (1926), p.101

This passage captures two defining qualities of Anderson's writing: an astute observer's eye and an enduring sense of wonder. Published two years after his death, The Pentland Hills reaches its centenary this year. Yet it did not begin as a book. Much of its material first reached readers through Anderson's letters and articles in local newspapers, often signed simply 'W.A.' The centenary offers a timely opportunity to look behind the initials and recover the life and times of their author.

The Making of an Observer

William Forsyth Anderson was born in Selkirk on 1 February 1854. He was the second youngest of eight children. His parents, George, a stonemason, and Margaret both had strong Borders roots. The family lived in modest accommodation at Dunsdale Haugh in the town.

Although William did not begin school until the age of eight, he had already taught himself to read using local shop signs, bills and receipts. Five years at Selkirk Burgh School culminated in his being named Dux (top pupil). However at the presentation ceremony, the shy prize winner retreated to his desk and thrust the medal and ribbon into his pocket, having, as he later wrote, 'all a boy's dislike of fuss and millinery'. During these years, William began taking long walks through the Selkirk countryside,

Neil Mackay continues with his series 'The Golden Age of Pentland Hills Writing'



Between 1908 and 1934 a notable cluster of books about the Pentland Hills appeared. These included works by Robert Cochrane (1908), George Reith (1910), Dr Lauchlan MacLean Watt (1913), William Anderson (1926), and Will Grant (1927 and 1934). Earlier works such as The Pentland Hills: Their Paths and Passes (1885) by Walter A. Smith had largely been practical route guides, but this new generation widened the scope to include the hills' history, landscape and character, alongside more personal reflections on their appeal.

The new books found a receptive market. The early 20th century saw a surge of interest in the Pentlands. Key influences included a rising interest in rambling, improved transport links from Edinburgh and surrounding towns, romantic literary connections with figures like Robert Louis Stevenson, and growing demand from city residents for countryside escapes beyond the industrial city.

But who were these authors? What did they individually bring to, and take from, the Pentlands? How does their work assist our understanding and appreciation of the hills? We'll address these questions through three profile studies, first was Will Grant in the May edition of the Pentland Post and next in the trilogy is **William Anderson**.

using a natural gift for sketching to record the places and features that interested him. This habit of walking, observing and recording the landscape would last a lifetime.

On leaving school, Anderson began work at a local tweed mill. Two years later, he followed his father into the building trade as an apprentice mason, before changing direction again to become a draughtsman. His flair for sketching proved a real asset in this role and the work took him to Galashiels, where he lived for several years. In 1889 he moved to Edinburgh, bringing him within reach of the landscape that would define his later writing: the Pentland Hills.

Home, Family and Working Life

By the time he moved to Edinburgh, Anderson was describing himself professionally as an architect and supporting a growing family. He had married Mary Scott, also from Selkirk, in 1878, and the couple had six children—five daughters and a son.



Mary Anderson, c 1902. Photograph by E.R. Yerbury, Churchill. Edinburgh. Courtesy of Barbara Nicholas



The five daughters of William and Mary Anderson. Date and photographer unknown. Courtesy of Barbara Nicholas

The Andersons settled in Morningside, eventually making their home in a main-door flat at 49 Falcon Gardens. Surviving records reveal little about their daily domestic life, but the family's early years in Edinburgh appear to have been settled and reasonably secure. Anderson established himself in architectural work, with regular employment providing a steady income for Mary and the children. From Morningside, the Pentlands

lay within easy reach, and his walks among them would soon find their way into print.

‘W.A.’ in the Local Press

To readers of the local press, Anderson was often known simply as ‘W.A.’ His long-form articles, short notes and letters appeared most frequently in *The Scotsman*, with others published in the *Edinburgh Evening News*, *Midlothian Advertiser* and *Southern Reporter*.

Around thirty contributions have been identified, all published between 1908 and 1922. They range beyond the Pentlands, but among the hill pieces, the longer articles describe unfamiliar routes, landscape views, nature and seasonal change. Some were later incorporated into the book.

The shorter notes and letters deal mainly with birds and other wildlife. Although most were signed ‘W.A.’, one or two carried Anderson’s full name. Whatever their setting, they reveal his inquisitive eye and capacity to notice the unusual. A good example is this brief letter, published in *The Scotsman* on 12 July 1922:

‘AN ALTRUISTIC THRUSH

49 Falcon Gardens, Edinburgh

SIR—As I was crossing Bruntsfield Links this morning I saw an adult song thrush feeding a young blackbird, which was almost fully enough fledged to be able to forage for itself. —I am, &c.

WILLIAM ANDERSON’

The birds themselves were commonplace; what distinguished Anderson was his ability to notice the unusual interaction between them.

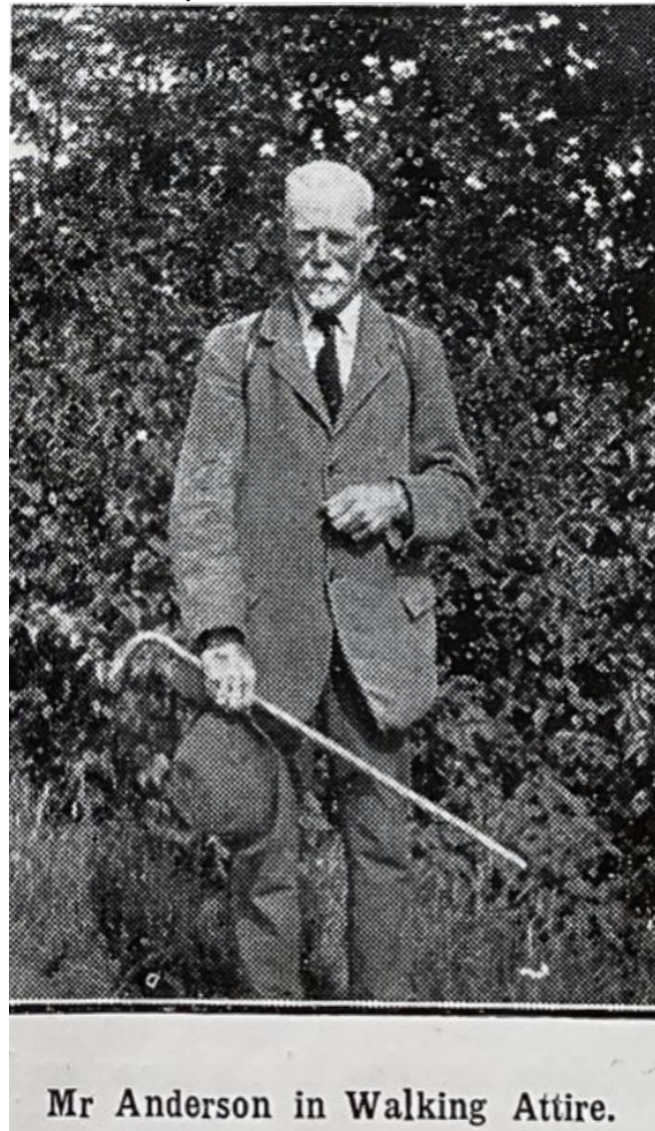
The Man Behind the Initials

The initials concealed a personality more fully revealed in an interview published in the December 1919 issue of *The Border Magazine*. The interviewer signed himself only as ‘R.C.’ Research strongly suggests this was Robert Cochrane, a fellow Edinburgh resident and author of *Pentland Walks—Their Literary and Historical Associations* (1908).

The exchange indicates that the two men were well acquainted. Anderson emerges as softly spoken but determined, trustworthy, well read and capable. He speaks fondly of his family and of his interests in gardening, cricket and a recent enthusiasm for watercolour painting.

Hillwalking is never far from the discussion, and he refers to several long journeys through Scotland’s hills and mountains. He also mentions completing his sixth end-to-end traverse of the Pentlands, from Dunsyre to Swanston or vice versa. The

interviewer suggests that Anderson was perhaps ‘the first person to do this’.

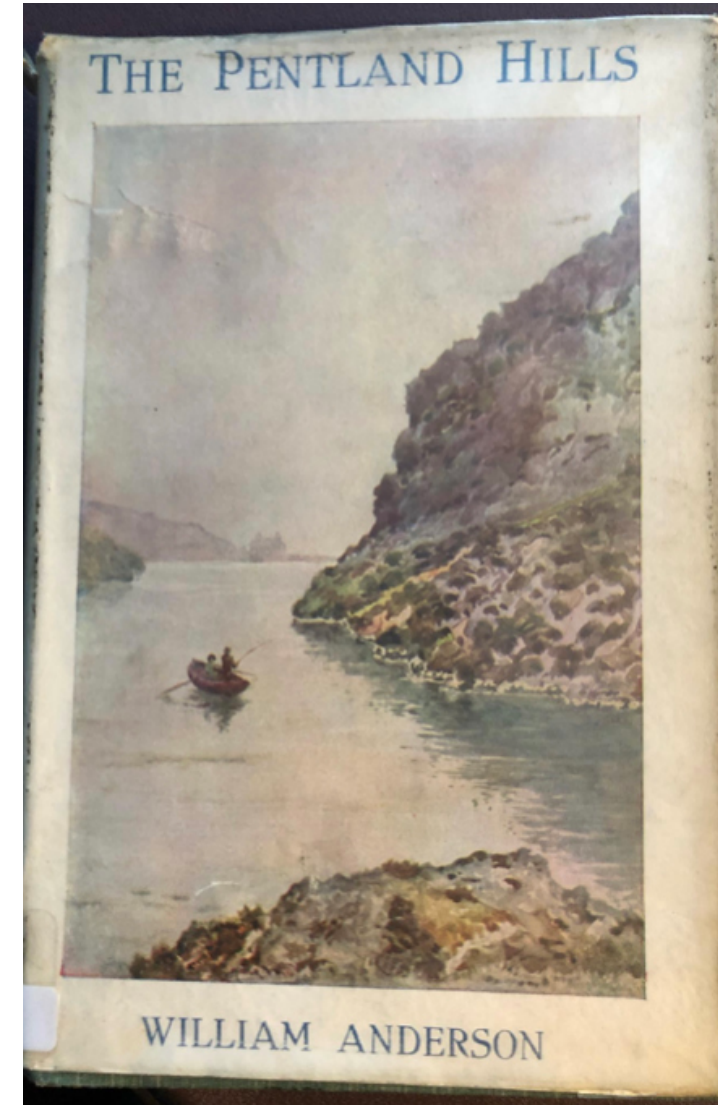


William Anderson dressed for the hills, 1919. Photographer unknown.

Near the end of the interview, Cochrane turns from Anderson’s walking achievements to his writing. His account suggests that Anderson was considering using three articles already published in the press, together with a fourth awaiting publication, as the basis of a larger work. This, Cochrane adds, ‘may run to a book of about 200 pages, for which he has made many pencil sketches of his favourite nooks and views’.

From Newspaper Contributions to Book

The interview provides the clearest evidence that a book was contemplated as early as 1919. The volume published seven years later did not quite reach the projected 200 pages. It ran to 164 and contained 24 of William’s pencil sketches. Most were positioned beside or immediately below the passages they illustrated, closely reflecting the integration of words and pictures described in the interview.



The original dust jacket of *The Pentland Hills* published by W & R Chambers Ltd in 1926. Photograph by N. D. Mackay.

The finished book confirms Cochrane’s broad picture: four long-form newspaper articles can be traced within it. One clear example of this transition is ‘The Pentlands Sunsets’, first published in the *Midlothian Advertiser* on 28 November 1908. It reappears almost word for word in the chapter ‘Views in Sunshine and Storm’, alongside further descriptions of sunsets, sunrises and changing weather conditions. Anderson did not live to see his book in print. He died in 1924, two years before publication, leaving the manuscript’s state and route to the publisher uncertain.

No surviving correspondence or publishing record has resolved these questions. What is clear is that the project described by Cochrane in 1919 eventually appeared in recognisable form. Whatever its route into print, the completed book brought Anderson’s words and drawings together in a distinctive portrait of the hills.

Anderson's Vision of the Pentlands

On the opening page, Anderson states: 'This is not a guide book; it is rather an appreciation of the Pentland Hills by a lover of them.' The distinction is understandable but not absolute. Although thematically structured, the book frequently acts as a guide: his walks can be followed on the ground, while practical recommendations identify viewpoints, geographical features and places to observe wildlife.

His writing is at its finest when colour and changing light allow him to paint the landscape in words. The sunset passage opening this article, with its glowing gold and rich purple, is an outstanding example. Yet his descriptive skill was not confined to expansive views or dramatic colour. At Crane Loch, he uses sight and touch to immerse the reader in the experience of crossing rough, marshy ground:

'Many of the tufts turn out to be of sphagnum moss, into which the foot sinks, while the moss closes over the top of the boot, in a way quite beautiful to look at, and the water is squeezed as if from a sponge, and percolates insidiously to the soles of the feet.' (p.25)

The book also preserves half-forgotten features, including an old seat inscribed 'Peace Perfect Peace', high among the rocks at the head of the Logan valley.

Anderson's end-to-end walks were not simple north-east to south-west traverses. When plotted from the book on a map, they reveal wide-ranging excursions through both the northern and southern hills. By sharing his own adventures, Anderson does more than celebrate the Pentlands. He encourages readers to explore the hills and make discoveries for themselves.

The book is not infallible. Anderson claims that Mount Maw is higher than The Mount (p. 90) and misidentifies East Cairn Hill as Wether Law (p. 92). More revealing of changing attitudes is his advice that litter could be covered with stones, pushed into holes or 'hidden under a heather bush' (p. 24). This is certainly a striking contrast with modern expectations. Such errors and period assumptions qualify the book's authority without diminishing the value of its first-hand observations or the pleasure of its writing.

Family Losses and Final Years

Anderson's later years were marked by successive family losses. His only son, George, a second lieutenant in the Machine Gun Corps, was killed during the Somme offensive in 1916. Three years later, his daughter Margaret died during the influenza epidemic. In 1920, his wife Mary died of heart disease.

His architectural work continued until 19 March 1924, when he collapsed and died while viewing plans at the Edinburgh Corporation offices in the High Street. His death was attributed to a heart attack, with one newspaper reporting that he had suffered from poor health in the preceding months.

Rediscovery, Descendants and Memorial

William was buried with Mary and Margaret in the family lair at Morningside Cemetery, Edinburgh; George lies in France. My research located their unmarked grave and traced three descendants. One introduced me to another family branch, whose members supplied photographs reproduced here.

Among the descendants is Rab Anderson, an established outdoors writer and author of another popular *The Pentland Hills* (2011). I proposed a memorial stone and Rab drafted the inscription, linking the authors across a century.



The Anderson memorial at Morningside Cemetery, erected in 2025. Photograph by N. D. Mackay.

An Enduring Legacy

The memorial stone restores the family's names at their resting place. Anderson's deeper legacy is the book. Its pages still reveal the hills in all their colour, character and wonder.

N. D. Mackay © 2026

Under the Boardwalk “We’ll be having some fun”

The re-making of a Heritage Trail



The Cross Borders Drove Road aka. "The Thieves Road" (due to the night-time cattle raids carried out by the early 19th century reivers) is probably the most important heritage trail across the Pentland Hills. Though the sections from Kirknewton to the Little Vantage (LV) car park and from the Cauldstane Slap (or pass) down to West Linton are in fairly good shape, the LV to the Slap track is not good, crossing peat bog and exposed waterlogged open moorland. The Gala Ford (GF) section to the Slap was addressed by the Friends about eight years ago with the construction of over 40 sleeper bridges but the LV-GF section was consigned to the “too difficult” basket and the plans to restore the path on this section have been five years – at least – in development. The last formal survey carried out by the Pentland Hills Regional Park was in 2022 – it concluded that contractor-installed side drains and formal re-surfacing would be needed – huge costs and complex logistics. A more recent survey

suggested that the worst sections could be repaired using boardwalks (most of the old sleeper bridges having rotted and/or submerged into the bog) whilst some of the less treacherous parts of the path could be “re-surfaced” using steppingstones created from the collapsed, redundant lateral boundary wall. Boardwalks have an advantage over sleeper bridges in that the deck height can be raised above extremely wet areas.

We agreed, with the Regional Park, to start the work in the Spring of 2026 with the Board identifying £5000 reserves to pump prime the project, though it was not until the summer of the year that work could get underway. The timber procurement was shared between The Park and The Friends though a huge boost to the budgeting came when it was decided to donate a legacy from the late Friends member Michael Good together with ring-fencing of a donation from the Carnethy Hill Runners. Lord Morton and

the Dalmahoy Estate very kindly facilitated the use of a drop-off point for timber deliveries on the Drovers’ Cottage Road off the A70 – though it was a good third of a mile walk-in across the fields to the build sites. The Carnethy hill runners provided tremendous support carrying in materials on four occasions. Six workdays involving 20 volunteers on each occasion providing 500 hours of work (plus all the incidental supporting tasks) saw the bulk of the project completed.

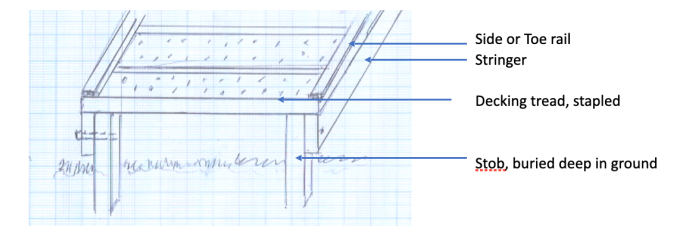


The build involved four sections of boardwalk measuring 9.6, 9.6, 28.8 and 9.6 metres respectively. That’s 24 lengths of “stringer” at 4.8m and almost 600 decking strips which had to be cut from the full length and stapled to provide grip. Fixing the stringers to the upright supports or stobs proved challenging – these sank into the deep bog and the first construction session had to be undertaken wearing waders.

The construction followed a standard pattern (see figure) with the fixation of the stringers to the stobs using hex timba-screws and all the decking treads being screwed in place.

Utilising the volunteers across a number of build sites was a logistical challenge. We hit on a formula using a number of teams (cut and carry, prepping, build, finishing etc) with experienced and not so

Cross-sectional view of a Boardwalk



experienced members in each team aiming to vary the experience and expertise across the work days. Participants experienced all the elements of boardwalk construction and all proudly agreed that the finished results justified their input.



Whether the work we put in achieves our goals remains to be seen – we plan to go back in the winter when the weather conditions are at the worst and see what effect the construction has had. And then we need to return to the section beyond Gala Ford – and see what that’s like. A never ending commitment but justified in view of the importance of the trail.

Andrew Marsden



8 April 2026	Walk: Carnethy Hill, Dens Cleuch and Poets Glen
30 April 2026	Bat watch walk: Roamers Wood, West Linton
6 May 2026	Walk: Crammond Brig to South Queensferry
19 May 2026	AGM talk: Mapping the Pentlands
30 May 2026	Visit: Bavelaw Bird Hide
27 July 2026	Walk: The Pentland Way

Walk Carnethy Hill, Den's Cleuch and Poets Glen

Wednesday 8 April 2026

'An enjoyable 'strenuous' walk in the Pentlands'

On a bright, cool and windy Wednesday, seven of us met on the Houstons101 bus to Dumfries. It is a highly recommended bus service to access the Pentlands, and we met up with others at Flotterstone car park. Nine of us set off at 1025 and made good steady progress up the steep ascent of Turnhouse Hill, where we had a well-earned five minute breather amongst the trees. Conversation flowed well as we continued steadily upwards across the contours of the hill before the final ascent into the cold south-westerly wind as we approached the huge cairn pile at Carnethy summit. Warm layers were quickly put on and photos taken of the wonderful views in all directions, particularly showing our route north.

We then descended steeply, on a minor path which plummeted directly down to a perfect lunch break spot by the wooden bridge across Logan Burn, near Logan House. The sun shone and it was a great place to rest and admire the wooden bridge and the sleepers which the Friends of the Pentlands replaced a few years back. Here we were joined by another walker who had started the walk earlier. We then turned onto the tarmac road downhill towards Glencorse reservoir. After 500m we turned left onto a muddy path, which followed the southern wall boundary of Logan Cottage towards Dens Cleugh.

Considering the recent fair weather, this short section was surprisingly swampy but just passable, and it led to a very pleasant path through Dens Cleugh; a tranquil, atmospheric pass and a new route for many of us. This was followed by a short but steep ascent up and around the northern flank of Bell's Hill to the northern end of

Maiden's Cleugh. There, we turned left onto the much more travelled track back to Wester Kinleith. We enjoyed a very pleasant 15 minute rest in Poet's Glen, admiring the recent FOP work repairing the upper bridge, before descending across the new lower bridge and admiring the new FOP Information Board at the bottom of Poet's Glen.



Good conversations continued throughout the walk, and we arrived back on the Lanark Road in Currie at 1545, alas just too late for the Corner Café but ideal to catch buses home. At 8 miles and 2000 feet of ascent, this was my first FOP strenuous walk, but it had been a very sociable and enjoyable experience, full of interesting conversation and through a part of the Pentlands which is highly recommended and rarely travelled. Thank you to all involved and particularly to John Hutton for his organising, planning and helpful updates.

David Trundle

Bat Watch Walk at Roamers Wood near West Linton

Thursday 30 April 2026

If you went down to the woods on this evening, just as the sun was setting, you may indeed have got a surprise to find a party of some 22 'watchers' quietly but intently studying the twilight sky above the tree canopy.

The Friends on this evening joined with a number of local residents and supporters of the organisation Sustainable West Linton. We were fortunate to be hosted by Emma and colleagues from Ellendale Environmental specialists in ecological and environmental surveys. After an introduction to the world of uk bats and the habitats of Pipistrelles, Natterers and Brown Long-Eared bats we were given guidance on the use of some of their high tech kit which we were assured would help us during the evening. So armed with thermal imaging binoculars and Bat Detectors (Heterodyne Detectors a combination of ultrasonic microphones and high frequency oscillator) we waited a short while for the first bats to show themselves above the trees as twilight progressed.

Then almost on cue the first bat was sighted and then another and another. The

detectors detected and quickly they did their job and we were able to distinguish between bat species as they performed their mightily impressive high speed aerobatics in search of their evening meals. The thermal imaging equipment revealed an almost alien world with clouds of hitherto invisible insects rising just above the tree canopy oblivious to their fate!



As the sun dropped below Muckle Knock in the far distance it was time to leave the remaining bats to finish their evening feast and for the party to make their way back to their transport.

Altogether a fascinating evening and one which the writer will remember for a long time.

John Surtees

Walk Cramond Brig to South Queensferry

Wednesday 6th May 2026

This was a pleasant walk from Cramond Brig to South Queensferry with a bit of confusion at the start. And a bit of mischief at the end!

As planned, four of us got on the bus at Edinburgh's West End. One who had signed up wasn't there (and couldn't be contacted) and one who hadn't signed up, was! I knew exactly where we had to get off the bus, but one of the four insisted on getting off at the stop prior, and we had to wait for him. And the one who wasn't there, at least till that point, appeared! She'd got the earlier bus! Got all of that?

So off we set, the five of us. The weather was ideal as we strolled northwards to the shoreline. The woods in the Dalmeny Estate were looking splendid in the spring sunshine.

We spent a few minutes examining Eagle Rock for signs of the eponymous bird, but left a little disheartened. We concluded someone must have had a good imagination. At least we'd had our feet on the beach.



Our lunch was taken at a lovely wee spot overlooking Barnbougle Castle. A shoot was on at the place, but they apparently needed no extras that day. Onwards we tramped before we got too comfy and soon the Rail Bridge loomed overhead.

Our pace quickened as we sniffed the Manna House coffee. In we piled.

I was first up to be served and tried to show how it was done, a simple process though it is. And then it all went wrong. The next guy started eating a sponge that had been ordered by one of the others. So, its rightful owner got the other one's tart. The problem being, it wasn't gluten-free. And she was gluten intolerant. It was all sorted in the end. But really!

We had a good natter on the bus back, except one of us went upstairs for the view, and so took no part.

A good day out!

John Hutton

Talk at AGM Mapping the Pentlands

John Bartholomew

Tuesday 19th May 2026

Our speaker was John Bartholomew, who gave us a very interesting account of how maps, and in particular Pentland Hills maps, have evolved over the last 200 years. And we learned about the leading role his own ancestors played in that evolution.

We saw maps, clearly "of their time" - 200 years old - and which used written words, symbols and little sketches to define points of interest. Some of these simple methods are still used in touristy leaflets today.

Shading. You could see that being taken on board to help with 3D visualisation.

We then saw the major changes brought about by the use of contours in the mid eighteen hundreds. How had we managed without them before? Quite well, actually, looking at some earlier maps that didn't have them! Or is that just a romantic view?

John made sure we understood why, as well as how, mapping evolved over the years. The needs of the military was an obvious one, and business growth another. But tourism, too, generated high demand as more people started to have a little leisure time.



John Bartholomew

By the end of the talk, we were happy to feel we had a good grounding, and the background we needed to investigate further. I spent a while examining and discussing John's Pentlands map from 1945, brought up to date with more accurate elevation data, but still containing the lie of the land as it was then. Is that where the railway went? I remember this bit, but that must have gone by 1960. What are those buildings? That's a play park now!

I expect a few of us will be dusting off the paper maps at the back of the cupboard, and having a closer look!

A fascinating subject, and full marks to John for showing us how maps have got to where they are.

John Hutton

Spring/summer visit to Bavelaw bird hide

Saturday 30 May 2026

On Saturday 30th May, John Wilson and I led our third members' visit to the Robin Aitken bird hide.

Twelve of us met on a pleasantly warm, still morning at Threipmuir carpark and set out to stroll slowly towards the bridge. A variety of birds were singing from the trees on either side of us and although they were largely hidden amongst the leaves, we could identify a number of different species. There were the familiar songs of a chaffinch, blackbird and several wrens. Along with them we recognised the songs of summer visitors such as chiffchaff, willow warbler and the fruity, flutey tones of a blackcap. Away in the distance we even heard a cuckoo calling.

Reaching the bridge, we looked out over the flat calm water and, using our binoculars, we made out clusters of tufted ducks, coots and a few little grebes. A solitary mute swan swam serenely across our field of vision. Later, on our way back, it had joined its partner along with eight small, fluffy cygnets.

A few swallows circled overhead as well as sand martins and a pair of swifts, all migrants from sub-Saharan Africa. A buzzard hung in the air over the distant trees but there was no sign of the ospreys, which, we were told, were nesting a few miles away.

Following the boardwalk, we reached the hide and opened up the shutters. In accordance with RSPB guidelines, the feeders are not put out in the summer months, so our focus was on the water. A grey heron and a cormorant put in brief appearances and a lonely drake mallard swam around looking a little lost.

Then came two surprises. The first was a male wigeon out in the middle of the reservoir. We had seen these ducks in fairly large numbers on our winter visit but were not expecting to see any at the end of May as they are predominantly winter visitors to Scotland and most head off to the Arctic to breed. Had this one been left behind?

We then noticed a brown duck on the far side of the reservoir with four darker ducklings beside it. All five were feeding by diving down and popping up a few seconds later. Ducks can be neatly divided into one of two categories: divers and dabblers. Tufted ducks and little grebes dive down to feed while wigeon and mallard stick their rear ends in the air while they dabble with their beaks amongst the vegetation. None of us could work out what this diving duck could be and we went home scratching our heads, reaching for our Collins Bird Guides and eventually resorting to Google to solve the mystery. It turns out that on rare occasions, mallards do dive below the surface to feed. So this female mallard, possibly the partner of the lonely male we had been watching from the hide, was not only displaying unusual behaviour, it was teaching its offspring her new trick.

All-in-all we counted 30 species in about 2 hours - a decent count for a very pleasant morning's birding.

Philip Shinton

The Pentland Way Walk

Monday 27 July 2026

Ten of us hopped on the 101 bus as it wound its way down to Dolphinton. A fine walking day greeted us; no sign (yet) of the strong wind. We nipped smartly up to the start of the Pentland Way at Dunsyre and headed eastwards. A hare was soon spotted, its ears standing out above the corn. It was one of many, and eventually we decided not to spot any more.

We waved to the golfers at West Linton and dropped a gear for the steep bit past Roamers Wood.



At the descent into Carlops, we were treated to a very welcome lunchtime break at a Member's house. Many thanks, Shirley! Refreshed, onwards we marched to Ninemileburn. 11 miles on the clock. Three of our party decided, as planned, to bus it back from there, and another had to divert to deal with urgent phone problems.

Now six, we started to head uphill, past the Font Stone and over Cap Law to West Kip. The wind started to freshen into a full-blown gale as we reached the top. An amusing consequence of this was that two walkers had their specs blown off! Snatched from their faces and deposited metres away! How we laughed!

Undeterred, we battled on over East Kip, Scald Law and Carnethy. At least the wind was (sort of) behind us. Eventually we were having the last break of the day on the descent of Turnhouse Hill.

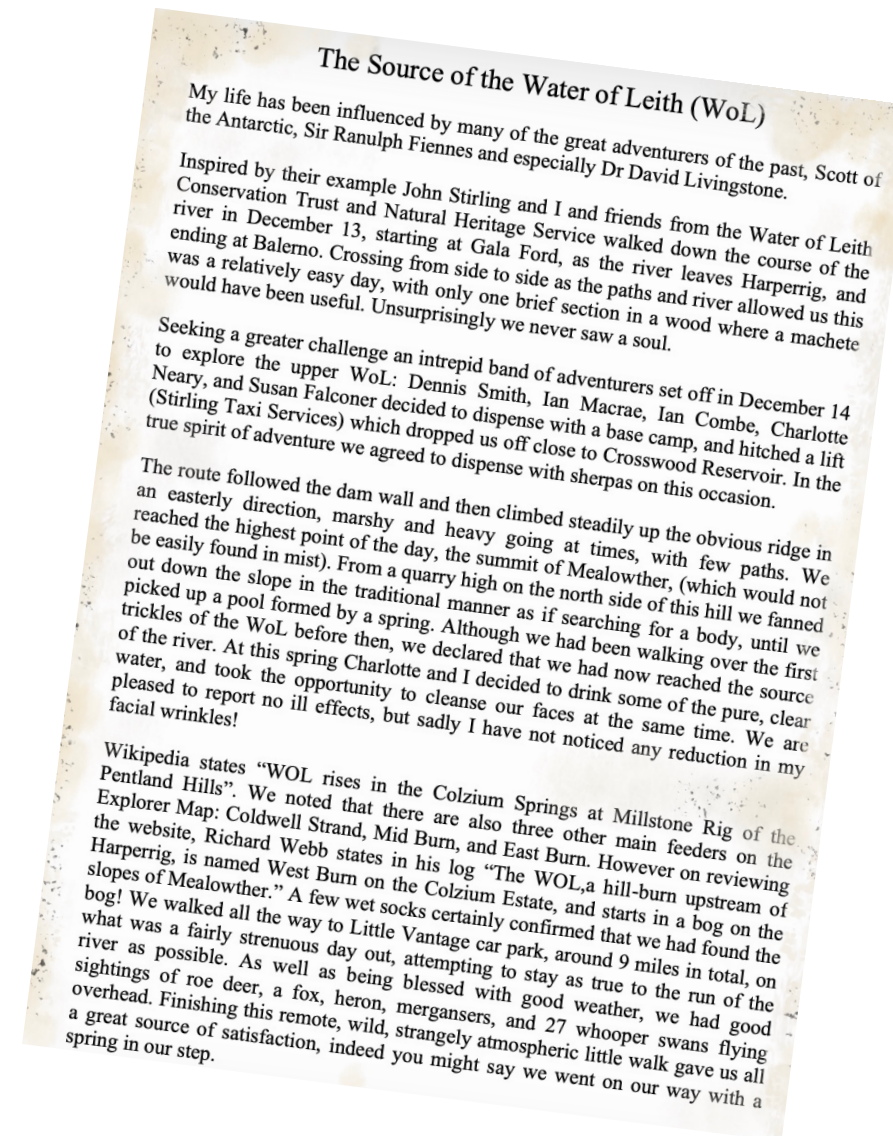
A walker left at Flotterstone to hoof it back to his house. The remaining five dug deep and set off for the last five miles round Castlelaw, over Allermuir, down to the end of the Way at Swanston, and along to the public roads for transport home.

Over 23 miles. 4000 feet up. 11hrs:30. No bad for the one day!

John Hutton

The Source of the Water of Leith

Pentland Post 2015 revisited



Ian Combe reviews his article of 2015 - and suggests a couple of updates

Since authoring the above article my life has continued to be influenced by many of the great adventurers and philosophers of the past and present for example: Captain Lawrence Oates of the Antarctic ("I am just going outside and might be sometime"); Sir Ranulph Fiennes ("I go on expeditions for the same reasons estate agents sell houses"); and Stewart Watton** ("what kind of people dump all this stuff?")

The WoL Conservation Trust held a fund raising event in June 2015 when a stalwart group managed to walk the full distance of the river to the Leith basin. On a recent visit I headed upstream from the little car park at the west side of Harperrig Reservoir. Good walking on the single track road until you reach the Colzium Shooting (!) Range and the route passes through this area. It would be worth checking if there will be shooting at the Range before walking this route.

From here though the vegetation was particularly dense and overgrown with nettles etc hiding any paths there may have been, the few small bridges were mainly in very bad condition, and there are serious barbed wire fences, and no apparent gates.....

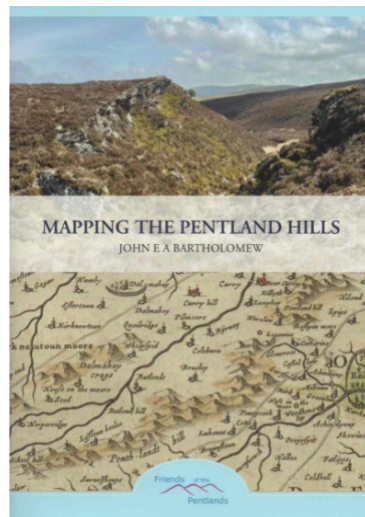
Ian Combe

** Stewart Watton is a member of Friends of the Pentlands and a long serving work party veteran. Ed

Book Review

Mapping the Pentland Hills

John E A Bartholomew



Mapping the Pentland Hills is a most informative book describing how the hills have been mapped and printed over nearly four centuries, from the earliest known map around 1610 through to the present day.

John Bartholomew is a descendant of the renowned family of Edinburgh mapmakers Bartholomews who were founded in1826. Their maps were highly regarded for their detail and use of colour. John has enjoyed a career in international publishing, and has a long and extensive interest in cartography, so is very well qualified to take the reader on a journey to learn how the Pentlands have been mapped. At the start of this year the Friends were delighted to become involved as publishers with the intention that all profits from the sale of the book were to be used by the charity to assist with its aims and objectives.

The book is well structured and richly illustrated. It also covers the work of the Ordnance Survey, the development of maps for the Pentlands for leisure as well as science. In recent years other maps connected with the Pentlands have been published including by the Pentlands Hills Regional Park and the Friends of the Pentlands. The reader is also invited to explore the National Library of Scotland Map Viewer, which gives access to a significant number of historic maps connected with the Pentlands and a list of suggested further reading.

I enjoyed the book and to learn of the great efforts that have gone into accurate map making, how it has progressed over the years, and more particularly of course because it is focussed on the Pentlands.

John Surtees

Paperback. No of pages 42
Published 2026. Publisher Friends of the Pentlands, SCIO No. SC035514
ISBN 978-0-9934-160-3-3 Price £8

Work Days

Since May 2026 Pentland Post



April
Litter picking at Harlaw
Litter picking - A702 lay-bys
Line of sight post and stile repairs Crosswood to Covenanter's Grave track
Path maintenance between Hillend & Boghall
Path and drain maintenance at Buckie Brae
Tree plantation maintenance at Turnhouse
Drystane wall repairs at Harlaw
Maintaining willow spiling at Baddinsgill & Garvald
Litter picking at Bonaly
Corporate workdays repairing way-marking posts and stile between Selm Muir Wood & Little Vantage
May
Litter picking - A702 lay-bys
Corporate workday repairing steps between Hillend and Snowsport Centre
Litter picking between Flotterstone & Loganlea Reservoir
Boardwalk installation, pond and meadow work at Patieshill
Broken fence repair at Torduff Reservoir
Maintenance at Harlaw Wildlife Garden
Little Vantage to Gala Ford track - boardwalk installations -several visits
Litter picking at Hillend
June
Path maintenance Silverburn to Lowries Den track
Litter picking Flotterstone
Little Vantage to Gala Ford track - boardwalk installations - several visits
Litter picking Bonaly, Torduff & Clubbiedean
Corporate workdays drain laying and clearing at Threipmuir
Litter picking at Harlaw
Corporate workday repositioning and staking of logs at Flotterstone car park
July
Litter picking at Bonaly
Bracken removal at Loganlea Reservoir
Branch removal and clearance at Carlops
Tree guard removal at Dean Burn Gorge
Litter picking at Dreghorn
Drain clearance at Phantom's Cleuch
Vegetation clearance Silverburn to Lowries Den track
Litter picking at Harlaw & Hillend
Boardwalk extension at Little Vantage
August
Boardwalk extension at Little Vantage
Path maintenance at Bavelaw bird hide
Litter picking Harlaw
Litter picking Flotterstone
Dry stane wall repairs at Harlaw
Extension of boardwalk at Patieshill
Vegetation cut back at Flotterstone , Carlops and West Linton arboretum



Friends of the Pentlands membership

We are an environmental charity focused on the whole area covered by the Pentland Hills. Our motto is "Conserving, protecting and enhancing". We aim to promote the natural beauty and diversity of the hills, their cultural heritage, the quality of life of those who live and work there, and the enjoyment of recreational visitors.

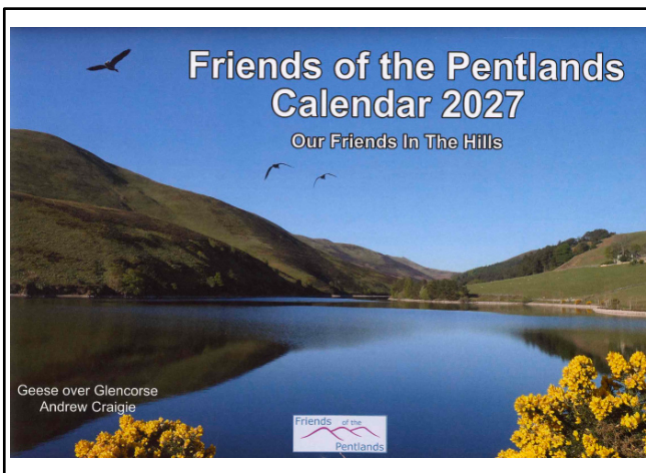
By joining Friends of the Pentlands you will be supporting our work to preserve and enhance the environment across the Pentland Hills. You will be able to take part in a range of social and volunteering activities. Your subscription will help us to achieve our objectives, and our organisational impact will be enhanced by increased membership.

You can join us immediately at most of our open functions or by visiting our website www.pentlandfriends.org.uk and clicking on Membership and Donation.

The Friends 2027 Calendar is now available

Price £8 or three for £20

**Friends can buy direct from Averil Sutherland (07720049705)
Cash or cheque to Friends of the Pentlands**



The theme for the 2028 calendar is
Postcards From The Pentlands'

Photographs in landscape format, which will be gratefully received, should be sent to John Surtees by 30th June 2027 at john.surtees@pentlandfriends.org.uk