

# The Voice

The magazine of the Friends of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs

## Mountains and the People Project Delivers

ALSO INSIDE  
THIS ISSUE:

Park News, Friends Updates, Mountains and the People, Events, Nature of the Park *and more*





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## Chairman's Introduction

**WELCOME TO THIS SPRING EDITION OF VOICE,**  
*which features interesting articles about different aspects of the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park and news on recent activities of the Friends and others working to make the Park a better place for people and nature.*



As the only independent conservation and heritage charity covering the National Park, we continue to strive to make a difference through campaigning, fundraising and volunteering activities, working closely with partners such as the Park Authority, local communities and tourism groups.

Recently a thought-provoking annual tourism trends research paper from VisitScotland popped up in my mail inbox and the theme this year is the global consumer phenomenon of "wellness". The authors rightly argue that Scotland with its abundant natural assets of landscape, culture food and drink, and heritage is well placed to embrace and capitalise on the wellness tourism movement.

Here in the National Park we have been catering for the wellness tourist and day visitor down through the centuries and, indeed, the combination of natural beauty and a myriad of lochs and frontier hills, in close proximity to major population centres, has led to Loch Lomond and The Trossachs becoming the most heavily visited countryside recreation destination in Scotland with an estimated 4 million visitors each year. This has led to major visitor management challenges, predominantly from car borne visitors, and is one of the main reasons Scotland's first National Park was established in 2002 with dedicated staff and financial resources.

With the steady growth in visitor numbers arriving by car and the surge in walkers seeking to connect more with nature and become healthier and fitter, in recent years the area has struggled to cope. This was reinforced by events over the mild spell this winter with popular walks such as the Conic Hill at Balmaha and Ben A'an in the Trossachs being "loved to death" by swarms of visitors and associated traffic congestion which is becoming a more common occurrence on a year-round basis in decent weather. It is essential that bold measures initiatives are taken to address the growing visitor management pressures and in this edition we report on the success of the Mountains and the People initiative which has been tackling the thorny problem of heavily eroded hill paths with an impressive number of path improvement projects. The initiative is also measuring for the first time how many visitors are using certain mountain paths and remarkably over 100,000 visitors per annum make their way up and down the Conic Hill and a further 60,000 walkers climb Ben A'an. Sadly, this 5 year project comes to an end next year and the agencies involved need to urgently address what the follow on will be otherwise the hill paths will simply deteriorate again due to the sheer numbers using them.

We also report on an ambitious bid being

made by the Friends, with the support of local partners, to secure funding for pilot eco transport services in two of the busiest parts of the National Park to improve connectivity, reduce carbon emissions and get people out of their cars to enjoy some of the special qualities of the National Park by using eco-friendly buses and boats. More initiatives like these are needed to ensure visitors can enjoy the National Park in more sustainable ways in the future.

We are also encouraged that the National Park Authority is now focussing on a "back to basics" agenda with the appointment of a "Litter Guru" and welcome investments in toilet improvements at key honeypot locations with help from the new Scottish Government's Rural Infrastructure Fund for areas suffering from visitor pressures. Please enjoy reading this edition of **Voice** and hopefully the contents will inspire you to get out and about in the National Park. If you are not already a member of the Friends, please consider joining and supporting our efforts to protect, provide and promote Scotland's first National Park (see page 7 for membership details).

All the very best.

**JAMES FRASER**

Chair - Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs



Articles published in The Voice do not necessarily represent the views of The Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs. Charity No. SC015389

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Cover: The Conic Hill, Balmaha  
Photo supplied by John Urquhart



There was a large turnout at a special gathering on Friday 28th December to commemorate the 102nd anniversary of the death of Captain John Lauder who was shot and killed by a sniper in France during the First World War. The gathering marked the completion of a three year project to restore the Lauder Monument at Invernoaden in Argyll that was originally unveiled in 1921 by world famous entertainer Sir Harry Lauder in memory of his son.



## Lauder Monument Restoration Completed In Time For Special Anniversary

### Monument Rededication

There was also a wreath laying by Major Donald MacLaughlan and a rededication of the monument by Rev Dr. Robin Mackenzie followed by the unveiling of a new storyboard beside the monument by local MSP, Mike Russell who gave an interesting insight to the war memorial movement based on research from his time as a broadcaster. To close the event there was a special rendition of Harry Lauder's famous song 'Keep right on to the end of the road' which he wrote in memory of his son.

Friends Chairman, James Fraser, said: "We were delighted with the large turnout at the special commemorative event, organised by local resident Evie Campbell on behalf of the Friends, which also marked the completion of a major effort by our charity, contractors and many volunteers to restore the Monument and its approaches.



"The tragic story associated with the Monument was appropriately brought to life by very talented local youngsters at today's ceremony and a series of permanent new storyboards will ensure that visitors to the site in the future will have a greater understanding of the story of Captain John Lauder and the strong Lauder family connections with the Cowal area." Sir Harry Lauder purchased nearby Invernoaden House and the 14,000 acre Glenbranter Estate as an engagement present for his son John and his bride to be, Mildred Thomson, in November 1916 but, sadly, a month later John was tragically killed before they were married and able to enjoy family life in this special part of the National Park. The estate was eventually sold to the Forestry Commission to form part of the Argyll Forest Park, the first Forest Park created in Great Britain.

Above: MSP Mike Russell and Friends Chair James Fraser unveiling new storyboard  
Left: The monument before and after restoration



Major Donald MacLaughlan lays the wreath

The £25,000 project, which was coordinated by the Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs, involved the creating of a new 8 space car park, along with a new path link, upgrading an existing steep path with stone steps and safety railings and installing two story boards and advance signs. The impressive red sandstone monument was also carefully cleaned with the removal of moss and other vegetation that had accumulated over the last 30 years.

Funding was secured from the Argyll & Bute and South Ayrshire Landfill Trusts and the balance of the funding came from the Friends of OUR park visitor giving scheme which raises thousands of pounds annually from visitors with the help of many tourism businesses throughout the National Park. Hundreds of hours of labour were generously provided by volunteers including Friends Trustees and Mountains and the People staff who were determined to ensure the project was completed on time.

Local youngsters contributed to the commemorative event with a series of original drawings depicting the tragic Lauder story adorning the ornate railings around the monument and poignant letter and poetry readings as well as musical tributes on the bagpipes including the famous tune Battle of the Somme. Harry Lauder's poem in memory of his son, as well as Captain John Lauder's last letter home to his fiancée were read out by local youngsters Gabriella Montgomery and Pippa MacLennan.

### Theft with a Silver Lining

In the run up to the commemorative event restoration work on the monument and access improvements was put in jeopardy after thieves stole buckets from two mechanical diggers on site. However, volunteers stepped in at short notice to complete the works and the theft generated extensive nationwide publicity with most national newspapers and many regional papers as far away as Jersey carrying details of the theft and the tragic story behind the monument being erected in the first place. Friends Chairman, James Fraser was also interviewed live on the popular BBC Radio Scotland Newsdrive programme and he reckons the theft had a silver lining in terms of generating invaluable free publicity nationwide to raise awareness of what, until now, has been Cowal's best kept secret as a place to visit.





## 40th Anniversary Celebration

The Friends marked the 40th anniversary of their inaugural meeting with the planting of 40 trees in Balloch Castle Country Park with the help of local schoolchildren from Balloch & Haldane Primary School and Hermitage Academy as part of their ongoing conservation efforts. Local MSP Jackie Baillie presented the schoolchildren with young conservation volunteer certificates and Gillian Neil of West Dunbartonshire Council's Ranger Service and Jim Biddulph, Secretary of Balloch & Haldane Community Council were present to support the event.

Jackie Baillie said: "I was delighted to take part in this event and it was great to see the enthusiasm of local schoolchildren planting trees around the edge of the walled garden in Balloch Castle Country Park.

This was a very fitting way to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the pioneering Friends conservation charity who have done so much over the years to protect and enhance the special qualities of Loch Lomond and the wider area for the benefit of people and nature."

Friends Chairman, James Fraser said: "It is a fine testament to the late and energetic Dr. Hannah Stirling MBE, the late Professor Gavin Arneil and other founding members that the Friends is still a vibrant organisation, as relevant today as it was back in 1978, upholding the original vision of trying to make a difference and helping to care for what is a very special place enjoyed by millions of people from home and overseas."

The Friends were at the forefront of the campaign to secure National Park status for Loch Lomond and the Trossachs and over the years, with the help of many individuals, businesses and other organisations, have delivered a large and diverse number of access, conservation and heritage projects throughout the National Park.

*Pictured at the tree planting event are Jackie Baillie MSP (second left) and John Urquhart and James Fraser, Vice-Chairman and Chairman of the Friends (first and second second right) with schoolchildren and others from Balloch & Haldane Community Council and Hermitage Academy, Helensburgh.*



## Pilot Eco Transport Services Bid



**As a follow on from the Friends very successful two-year eco-tourism initiative, a funding bid has been submitted to the SPEN Green Economy Fund to support local partners with the delivery of a £300,000 project that involves the introduction of two innovative eco bus and boat transport services in different parts of the National Park.**

The Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park is the most heavily visited countryside destination in Scotland with four million visitors each year with around 90% of them arriving by car and contributing to traffic congestion and high levels of carbon emissions in some of the more popular areas.

This project aims to test alternative travel methods, reduce reliance on car-based travel, reduce carbon emissions, improve countryside access opportunities for a wider spectrum of the population with better transport connectivity, contribute to better visitor management and enhance the overall visitor experience while raising visitor awareness of environmental issues and climate change challenges.

It is proposed to pilot two different types of electric bus and eco-friendly boat services with two local partners, the Sir Walter Scott Steamship Company and Sandy Fraser of the Oak Tree Inn, both long time business supporters and participants in the Friends of OUR park visitor giving scheme. The pilot proposals include:

**(i) Balmaha Bay**

*Providing a new electric themed shuttle bus service between the car park and pier linking with existing scheduled boat trips and a refurbished solar boat offering waterbus and safari services between the Pier, where a new £120,000 disabled friendly floating pontoon was installed by Sandy Fraser last year, and Inchcailloch*

*Island, part of the Loch Lomond National Nature Reserve. This would provide an attractive eco visitor experience and an alternative for some car borne visitors who normally travel on the 9 miles to Rowardennan.*

**(ii) Callander-Loch Katrine**

*Providing a new electric bus service between this popular tourist town and Loch Katrine to link with the existing Sir Walter Scott Steamship cruise schedule. The 'hail and stop' service would also link small communities such as Brig o' Turk and Kilmahog and popular hill walks such as Ben A'an and Ben Venue in the Great Trossachs National Nature Reserve where there are currently no timetabled public transport services. There is potential scope to extend this service to Aberfoyle if the transport technology selected is suitable for tackling the winding and steep Duke's Pass.*

James Fraser, Friends Chairman said: "This exciting project aims to test green transport alternatives in parts of the National Park suffering from traffic congestion and high carbon emissions as well as encouraging people to get out of their cars and enjoy the special qualities of the National Park by using appealing green land and water-based transport alternatives and we are delighted to be supporting two local partners by coordinating the funding bid."

The outcome of the funding bid should be known shortly but the project has already come through a stage 1 assessment process which resulted in 100 projects being whittled down to 40. A £700,000 bid from the National Park's Countryside Trust for an electric bike initiative in the Trossachs also made it through stage 1.





# Balloch Tourist Resort Plans Revised

In response to some of the concerns raised by the Friends, Balloch and Haldane Community Council and others, some welcome modifications have been made to the plans for a £30 million tourist and leisure development in Balloch that was covered extensively in the last edition of *Voice*.

The main changes include:

- **the creation of a well-lit walk beside the River Leven between the centre of the village and the Maid of the Loch;**
- **the relocation of the monorail linking Station Square with the lochside along the edge of Pier Road;**
- **the addition of residential flats behind the restored façade of the derelict Woodbank House with the removal of most of the houses originally planned in the grounds of the former hotel and the addition of some more family holiday accommodation; and**
- **the slight repositioning of the proposed waterpark and the aparthotel to safeguard the existing lochside beach and improve car parking arrangements near the pier head.**

The Friends confirmed their qualified support for the resort development last year as they consider the plans will help deliver the vision first set out by Sir Patrick Abercrombie in the Clyde

Valley Regional Plan as far back as 1949 and in subsequent local development and subject plans for the southern end of Loch Lomond. The Friends believe the development will help strengthen Balloch's appeal as a tourist destination with a range of much needed family accommodation, activities and wet weather facilities.

The revised outline planning application for this strategically important site on former derelict land at the south end of Loch Lomond will be determined shortly by the National Park Authority at a public hearing due to the high level of interest in the proposed development and the number of representations submitted.



*The West Riverside and Drumkinnon Bay site circa 1960*



## National Nature Reserve Threat...

The Friends have lodged a strong objection to the plans for a complex of 6 large new buildings as part of a wedding functions and self-catering holiday development at a sensitive site right next to the Loch Lomond National Nature Reserve on Wards Estate at the southern end of Loch Lomond. The Friends are concerned about the creeping suburbanisation in what is a particularly sensitive area noted for its high value scenic and conservation qualities and consider the visual impact and level of disturbance to wildlife in this location will be too great.

## Drymen Housing Controversy

A major housing scheme involving the construction of 95 new houses in an area wedged between the village bypass and the entrance to the village is proving controversial and follows on from a long history of previous planning applications and a public inquiry which resulted in consent for a much smaller 36 housing scheme being approved.

The Friends and other objectors consider the proposed development is contrary to the current Local Development Plan which identifies a total of 66 houses for this area over a phased period. They argue the substantial increase proposed by the developer to 95 houses can only be achieved by increasing housing density and reducing amenity space which will be detrimental to the character of the village and its attractive setting as well as placing a greater strain on the existing village infrastructure and services.

## Make a Difference Days

As part of the Friends ongoing commitment to making a difference for the benefit of people and nature in the National Park a series of volunteer days are planned to tackle litter on Loch Lubnaiside and to maintain the views of Loch Lomond with shrub and tree removal alongside stretches of the busy A82 between Luss and Tarbet. Dates for MADD volunteer events in 2019 are 25th April and 14th November. Other volunteering events are also planned as part of the Mountains and the People initiative.



*MADD - the group of volunteers who helped to clear rubbish and open up views of Loch Lomondside near Inverbeg*





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# Help us make a difference



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## CORMONACHAN WOODLANDS PATHS EXTENSION

**Cormonachan Community Woodlands situated between Lochgoilhead and Carrick Castle by Loch Goil in the western part of the National Park, cover 58.9 ha and are a fine example of ancient Atlantic oak and hazel woodlands termed as Ancient Semi Natural Woodlands. They were first recorded on Roy's Map of 1747 and are being conserved for education, recreation and conservation by an enthusiastic band of volunteers and over 100 subscribing members of the Cormonachan Woodlands Association.**

Over the last 20 years, 2.5 km of circular paths have been created in the woodlands with a car park, Red Squirrel Hide, Contemplation Shelter, outdoor sculptures and a resource centre, Jan's Hideaway, for outdoor education for primary school children visiting the Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre where over 2,000 children a year benefit for learning about the outdoors.

The Association now has ambitious plans to extend the paths by another 2 km and open up the southern end of the woodlands at Upper Cormonachan with access to the forest road, an old village and spectacular waterfalls with another car park nearby. The new paths would have four stunning viewpoints overlooking the waterfalls and Loch Goil adding greatly to the appeal of the woodlands as a recreational resource for locals and visitors.

The Cormonachan Woodlands Association is a not-for-profit organisation and relies on its members to support its work and volunteer but having no income stream other than annual subscriptions, all its projects require to be funded by donations and grants. This project will cost over £300,000 and while it is anticipated most of the funding will be secured from grants, efforts are being made to raise at least £15,000 locally. Members and the Friends of Loch Lomond & the Trossachs have already pledged some funding support to kickstart fundraising and there is considerable goodwill for the project locally with support from the Argyll & Bute MP and MSP, local Councillors, Lochgoil Community Council, Forest Enterprise Scotland, the Community Partnership and other local organisations and businesses.

If you would like to make a donation to help support the creation of additional paths in Cormonachan Woodlands you can by logging onto- [www.cormonachan-woodlands.co.uk](http://www.cormonachan-woodlands.co.uk).



## MAID OF THE LOCH'S £1 MILLION REFIT

Maid of the Loch started her £1.1 million refit on 10th January, when she was hauled out of the water on the Balloch Steam Slipway.

For the first time in almost 40 years, the Maid was to have work carried out on the slipway. Several hundred spectators had gathered in excited anticipation of the slipping process. A plethora of media had turned up with four TV crews, radio, and many press photographers. Unfortunately, as she was a third of the way up the slipway, an incident occurred which saw her slide back into the loch on the slipway carriage. Fortunately, no-one was injured and the ship is undamaged, and she is tied up safely once more to Balloch Pier. While a set-back, the refit will continue as most of the work is due to be carried out at the pier. The scheme includes refurbishing the aft deck lounge and the aft main deck saloon re-creating her 1950's style but to

2019 safety standards and visitor comfort. A lift will be installed between the promenade deck and the main deck. The most exciting development will be to bring her majestic steam engines back into operation. The engines will be overhauled and will then be able to turn for the first time since 1981, with steam supplied by a small boiler sited on the pier. Visitors will experience a moving steam engine and see her paddles turning, so a "must see" event for 2019! The goal of the charity remains to put her back into steam operation, but with the disappointing and unexpected HLF rejection of stage 2 funding for the project, it will take longer. This is still a huge first step and the charity is more determined than ever to succeed. Full information and ways to donate can be found on their website [www.maidoftheloch.org](http://www.maidoftheloch.org) and on their Facebook page



## LOCHSIDE HOTEL INVESTMENT BOOST

Loch and Glens Holidays, the successful locally based family coaching hotel group, has given the National Park a massive vote of confidence as a tourist destination with the recent completion of a £4.6 million investment in the 96 bedroom Inversnaid Hotel and a commitment to invest a further £3 million in improvements to the 86 bedroom Loch Achray Hotel. This follows on from a £12 million investment in a 4 coach capacity new hotel on the site of a former derelict youth hostel at Ardgartan to bring their total investment in hotels in the National Park to more than £20 million since the formation of Scotland's first National Park in 2002.

A recent welcome spin off from this investment has been a complete makeover of the Inversnaid public car park which is popular with visitors to the spectacular falls nearby. The car park is owned by Stirling Council but was in a very poor condition with no prospect of investment due to pressure

on the Council's limited roads and car parking budget. Lochs and Glens Holidays stepped in with an investment of more than £50,000 in resurfacing works which was undertaken by the Steamship Sir Walter Scott's Task Group. Neil Wells, Managing Director of Lochs and Glens Holidays and a long time Business Supporter of the Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs, said: "It is important as one of the major employers in the National Park that, in addition to ensuring our portfolio of hotels are maintained to a very high standard to remain appealing to our loyal customer base, efforts are made to ensure the public realm at popular visitor locations such as Inversnaid are in good shape too. We were therefore pleased to step in and fund the upgrading of the public car park at Inversnaid as part our ongoing commitment to helping the Friends and others to make the National Park a better place to visit and enjoy."





## LUSS ESTATES DIVERSIFICATION SUCCESS

**As part of a bold diversification plan, which has seen Luss Estates invest in tourist and leisure enterprises in and around Luss, two unusual recent ventures are proving to be very successful in providing visitors with the opportunity to enjoy the village environs and other parts of the estate on West Loch Lomondside.**

Loch Lomond Adventures opened in Luss Village last year. It was founded by Luss Estates as a way to bring together local activity providers to give visitors a central point to source and access these activities and to encourage the visitors to enjoy the scenic qualities of the National Park. Operators include Loch Lomond Leisure with watersports and bike hire, Cruise Loch Lomond with loch cruises, 4x4 Adventures with exciting off-road driving experiences, Peninsula Trikes with motorcycle tours and In Your Element with gorge walking, river sledging, axe throwing and much more! Loch Lomond Adventures has an online booking system which enables visitors to book their activities before arriving in Luss. Loch Lomond Adventures is also the starting point for the very successful Loch Lomond Faerie Trail which was also opened last year. The Faerie Trail is a family friendly outdoor activity trail on the river and quarry paths close to the village of Luss. The trail is decorated with handmade wooden faerie houses, fitted sympathetically throughout the woodland. Tickets include a wristband and a guide booklet to help visitors solve the faerie mystery through clues found on the trail markers. All those who solve the mystery receive a special certificate of thanks from the faeries of Loch Lomond. The trail has welcomed over 22,000 visitors since opening in March 2018. The majority of visitors are families with young children who are being given the opportunity to experience the wonder and beauty of the woodlands around Luss.

Commenting on the success of the new trail, Patrick Colquhoun, Head of Retail and Leisure at Luss Estates, said:

“We are really excited to have received so many visitors on the Faerie Trail in our first year. At Luss Estates we are committed to building for the future through our stewardship of the land and support for the local environment. We are delighted that the Faerie Trail has helped so many young people interact with nature and gain respect for our spectacular surroundings.”



For more details see:  
[www.lochlomondadventures.com](http://www.lochlomondadventures.com)  
[www.lochlomondfaerietrail.com](http://www.lochlomondfaerietrail.com)

## LITTER CHALLENGE TO BE MET HEAD ON

In response to growing pressure from the Friends, Park Board Members and others, coupled with some of the worst years on record for large accumulations of litter at popular beauty spots and along busy tourist corridors, the National Park Authority has risen to the challenge by making litter their number one priority for the next 5 years and introducing a series of measures to tackle the problem head on.



Last summer two additional staff were recruited to focus on litter prevention and enforcement at weekends and Rangers carried out extra litter picks at busy lochshore sites. A new senior appointment has also recently been made with the recruitment of Nik Turner to the post of Litter Prevention Manager. Nik, who previously worked as Lead Campaign Officer for Keep Scotland Beautiful, will have the challenging tasks of trying to get partners with responsibilities for litter management to work in more coordinated, consistent and effective ways to improve the litter situation on the ground as well as driving positive change in the behaviour of the many irresponsible individuals dropping litter in the first place to prevent litter continuing to spoil the natural beauty of the National Park.

There are plans to draw up what will be an action orientated litter strategy for the National Park with the input and support of a range of partner agencies. It is to be hoped there will be an inclusive approach to drawing up and implementing the new litter strategy with the involvement of bodies such as the Friends of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, trade groups, community groups and local businesses who all have a close interest in improving the litter situation in the National Park and often get involved in voluntary litter-related activities in recognition that litter is the responsibility of everyone. Last year the Friends called for there to be a more pro-active approach to dealing with the litter problem and suggested a five-point action plan should be adopted as part of a drive to ensure the National Park is a cleaner and safer place for people to enjoy and for wildlife to thrive.

## LIGHTING UP ABERFOYLE

St Mary's Episcopal Church, which for the past 120 years has been a landmark feature overlooking the eastern end of Aberfoyle, now provides an attractive night time spectacle. A new external lighting scheme, unveiled in December at the annual Carol Service, highlights some of the architectural features of this attractive building which was designed by James Miller in the 'arts and crafts' style that was popular in the 1890s. For the first time, audiences attending popular monthly Sunday afternoon concerts inside the Church can enjoy the detail of the fine stained-glass windows which have been specifically illuminated. This project, made possible by a generous legacy from a former member of St Mary's, puts the finishing touch to the major renovation of the Church fabric which was carried out 10 years ago. Initial reaction suggests that the new lighting will add greatly to the enjoyment of the congregation, villagers and visitors alike.

## PEOPLE POWER SUCCESS IN STRATHYRE

With the help of their local politicians Strathyre villagers have managed to persuade telecoms company Arqiva to put the installation of a controversial 13.5 metre mast in a prominent site in the centre of the village on hold and to look at alternatives.

The mast was granted planning permission by the Park Authority last November despite strong objections from the Balquhider, Strathyre and Lochearnhead Community Council and the submission of a petition signed by 114 local residents.

Local campaigners have successfully argued that the visual impact of siting a mast beside National Cycle Route 7, and within a close distance of the northern entrance to the village, would be too great.

The announcement was widely welcomed locally and by elected members.





# The Mountains & The People Project Delivers



Contributed by  
Tom Wallace, Project Manager

As *The Mountains & The People* project approaches its fifth and final year this edition Tom Wallace, Project Manager takes a look at some of the iconic mountain paths this unique, landscape scale, partnership project has improved and recognises the role that Friends of Our Park visitor giving supporters have played in helping facilitate such essential conservation activities alongside other funding partners such as National Park Authorities, Forestry Commission Scotland and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Over five years, The Mountains and The People project, which is led by the Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland, will improve around 125km of the sprawling mountain path network found across both the Cairngorms and Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Parks. Aiming to tackle path erosion and encourage responsible access the £6.4m project has made use of highly skilled Upland Path Contractors, Trainees and Volunteers to improve and maintain this popular and important recreational resource within some of our nations most cherished yet fragile landscapes.

In 2015 the Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs recognised the importance of this work to protect and conserve our National Parks natural assets and committed to contributing some match funding through the Friends of Our Park visitor giving scheme they operate in partnership with 100 local tourism businesses who collect donations from visitors by a variety of means.

This article looks at a range of the 19 paths within Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park tackled over the past four years, examples of the Our Park contributors whose generosity has supported the work and highlights the role you can play in ensuring these paths remain in good condition for generations to come.







# Respect Reskill Repair

## Lomond & Arrochar

The steep sides of Ben Vorlich rise up from the west banks of Loch Lomond with over 10ft of rain recorded in the area during 2017 alone. Designing a path which would meet the demands of increasing footfall and the need to withstand prolonged periods of wet and wild weather was essential. Over 150m of hand built stone pitching was constructed to allow the worst damaged sections of the popular route from Loch Sloy to be improved.

West of Ben Vorlich, The Cobbler sits at the heart of the Arrochar Alps. This very popular route includes a number of paths including the approach, the Southern Main Path and the Northern Return Path. Over a period of two years all of these paths received some well needed TLC costing around £150,000. All paths remained open during the works which were undertaken by specialist teams of hand build contractors, winning material from the surrounding area and sympathetically landscaping out desire lines and erosion scars.

Other paths tackled included improvements on Ben Lomond and the Conic Hill which are some of the most popular hill walks in Scotland due to their proximity to major centres of population.

In the vicinity of these iconic mountains the Friends of Our Park scheme has raised funds from visitors via the Inn on Loch Lomond, Cruise Loch Lomond, Loch Lomond Arms Hotel and the Oak Tree Inn through opt out £1 donations on bookings. Other participating businesses include Gardiners Cottages, Cameron House and Fasadail and Mansefield Guest Houses in Arrochar. It's great that customers making their donation can look out and see first hand the improvements their money is helping to happen.

## Strathfillan

Ben Dubhcaig has seen two of its three phases of contract work completed to date. Phase one saw the replacement of a dilapidated bridge with a new and innovative designed structure called the 'Struan', named after the engineer's grandson who was present for the opening. The bridge blends in with its surroundings whilst offering walkers a safe means to cross the river. Thereafter works were delivered within the wooded section by former trainee turned contractor Ryan Hamilton, whose story you can find here: <https://youtu.be/cdZn0NrGZFs>. Later this year the final approach path to the bridge will be improved, completing our work on this hidden gem.

Ben More towers over Crianlarich and is a popular Munro for visitors heading to the north of the National Park. Its popularity however has resulted in sections of the main access route becoming badly eroded and in need of urgent attention. In late 2018 experienced path contractors Cairngorms Wilderness Contracts started to prepare the site and will return in spring 2019 to complete over 2000m of improvement.

On either side of Ben More, Friends of Our Park supporters Portnellan Chalets and award-winning hotel and restaurant Monachyle Mhor and Mhor 84 encourage their visitors to give a little something to help protect the special qualities of the Park which make their visit as memorable as it is.

## The Trossachs

Ben A'an was the first path to be improved as part of the project. Part funded by project partner Forest Enterprise Scotland these works were complex due to the steep nature of the route and large-scale forest operations that were planned to coincide with the closure of the path. The result is a

substantially improved path through a now open landscape which will in time become part of the Great Trossachs Forest. Three different contracting teams alongside a team of trainees have worked on this route using a combination of machine build and hand build techniques to create a route which is dry and comfortable to walk on. The installation of a people counter on this site has allowed us to record that around 60,000 visitors a year take on this mini mountain.

On Ben Ledi, both the main access and the Stank Glen route are part of this project with the main route completed in 2017 and the Stank being worked on as this article goes to press. This site held technical challenges due to landslips and the presence of protected species. Local stone was used to repair this route which is popular with both walkers and mountain bikers.

Within the Trossachs a range of businesses of all scales and sizes contribute to the Friends of Our Park scheme and include the Steamship Sir Walter Scott at Loch Katrine, Deli Ecosse in Callander and Venachar Lochside Café where visitors donate via 10p from every coffee sale or a specific menu item. Every little helps, and your contributions really have made a difference to these three mountains.

## Play Your Part

It's not just contractors who are involved in maintaining our mountain habitats. Over the past 4 years The Mountains and The People project has supported almost 1000 person-days of conservation volunteer activity. Volunteers have reported on issues, cleared drains, fixed paths and cleared invasive species. This work is essential to ensuring the improved paths remain in good condition for years to come and that the surrounding habitats continue to improve.

**Between April and October 2019 we will be offering a further 38 volunteer work parties will be run. For more information checkout the website at [www.themountainsandthepeople.org.uk/events](http://www.themountainsandthepeople.org.uk/events) or by emailing [volunteering@themountainsandthepeople.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@themountainsandthepeople.org.uk)**



Local historian and literary expert Louis Stott provides some fascinating insights to the world of fairies in the National Park.

# Fairy sites

## IN THE NATIONAL PARK

**S**ITH' AND 'SITHEAN' are found in place-names like Glenshee 'fairy glen' or 'glen of the fairy hills', and Schiehallion 'fairy hill of the Caledonians, both in Perthshire. On The Bottle Imp website Alison Grant a Senior Editor at Scottish Language Dictionaries continues:

*Related to sith is the term sithean or sidhean (pronounced shee-an) which also refers to a fairy hill. The sithen are often small conical hills, and in Celtic mythology they were reputed to have hollow interiors, with the fairies dwelling inside. Belief in the 'wee folk' continued into relatively modern times, with the Reverend Robert Kirk, a minister and Gaelic scholar from Aberfoyle writing in 1691 a book entitled The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies in which he described these creatures and their subterranean habitat in a remarkably candid manner.*

The website goes on to point out that there are many hills named simply Sithean 'fairy hill' or An Sidhean 'the fairy hill' throughout Scotland. Among many others she mentions Sidhean Sluaigh 'fairy hill of the host' in Argyll, Sithean a' Chata 'fairy hill of the battle' in Balquhider, Beinn an t-Sithean (Ben Shian) in Strathyre in Perthshire. It can be noted that at Luss and Balloch Park on Loch Lomondside, and at Balfron and Aberfoyle further east are "fairy villages" of tiny houses carved in the trees and much lore about diminutive creatures. They are, of course, for the entertainment of children. It should be recollected that the fairies who were believed in locally, and described by Robert Kirk, were much more like an alternative society to our own. Scott supplied the following note to Lady of the Lake: "Fairies, if not positively malevolent, are capricious, and easily offended. They are, like other proprietors of the forest, peculiarly jealous of their rights of vert and venison".

Perhaps the best-known fairy site in the National Park is Puck's Glen, the most popular short walk near Dunoon, a characterful gorge enclosed by rocky walls, draped with mosses. In 1870 the Greenock sugar refiner, philanthropist and art collector James Duncan (1834–1905) bought the Benmore estate, and

added the adjacent Kilmun and Bernice Estates to it. It became Benmore Botanic Garden, managed by the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. Duncan arranged extensive plantings, including more than six million trees around the estate, and added paths leading up the Eas Mòr gorge so that his visitors could enjoy the magical atmosphere of the glen, which reminded him of Puck, in A Midsummer Night's Dream. Henry Younger the Edinburgh brewer bought the estate in 1889, and with his son, Harry George Younger, made further improvements to the woods and the gardens.

Benmore House, for long Scotland's best-known botanic garden, was celebrated for "Puck's Glen with its amber stream cutting a channel through moss-draped schistose rock and tumbling from one silver rock-chalice to another." The Royal Scottish Arboricultural Society described Puck's Glen as "a striking example of how man, working hand in hand with nature, has made what was once a bare hillside ravine into one of the most lovely walks imaginable"

On the west side of Loch Eck (on the former Bernice Estate) is Coire an t-Sith", Gaelic for "fairy corrie", the name of a considerable amphitheatre, overlooked by Beinn Mhor. The Allt Coire an t-Sith empties into Loch Eck at Coirantee, showing the way in which, such names may be transliterated into English.

Fairy Knowe, a volcanic plug between Strachur and Newton, just outside the National Park, is a landmark from many parts of Upper Loch Fyne. The hill's name is Sith an t-Sluaire (see above). The summit is easily reached from the



Puck's Glen



## Fairy, or Faërie

*A supernatural being, fond of pranks but generally friendly;  
in Gaelic Duine-sith (also Daoine Sidhe)  
a fairy person, or fairy folk, people or peace.*

south side. Extensive views from the top include the peaks of Arran, the Puck's Glen, Paps of Jura, Cruachan, Beinn Bhuidhe, Inveraray and Loch Fyne. Ben Lomond has two fairy sites: Creag a' Bhocain [NN 3498 0441] which signifies the Craig of the hobgoblin or sprite, is applied to a feature forming part of the brow of the eastern height of the hill. The second site is a fairy hill, An Sithean, on the principal path from Rowardennan to the summit of Band en Lomond which commands a stunning view towards the south-west.

On the opposite side of Loch Lomond north of Inverbeg is Lochan Uaine, the green lochan; often called the Fairy Loch, derived from stories told to children that the fairies had used this lochan to dye wool. The West Highland Way follows Bogle Glen the original route of the military road west of Crianlarich. At the foot of Loch Lubnaig, the National Park has named a site on its scenic route Sloc Nan Sitheanach, the Faerie Hollow. This is a quiet stopping place on a very busy road, the A84. The fairies are the mystical creatures associated with places connected with "peace" and "tranquility". The Architectural Designer is Ruairidh C. Moir.

The site filters out the road noise and opens onto the loch. The poetry at your feet, 'Now Winters' Wind Sweeps' is by local poet Alexander Campbell, born at



*An Sidhean, Strathyre*

Tombea. It depicts man's place in natural cycles, and encourages the visitor to reflect on their fleeting presence in the landscape.

Beinn an t-Sidhean (often anglicised to Ben Shian) is a steep-sided hill that shelters Strathyre from westerly winds. Its sides are clothed with forestry plantations but from the moor above there are excellent views, in particular from a prominence called An Sidhean. It is a view very much like that from Ben Lomond. On the opposite side of the village is Cnoc an-t- Sidhean, a neat fairy hill, where the war memorial is situated. At Balquhidder Robert Kirk was minister of the parish from 1664 to 1685. It was there that he published his metrical psalter, and began to investigate highland superstitions, which he was to publish in *The Secret Commonwealth*. The hill rising above the kirkyard is called Tom nan Aingeal, "hill of fire". Sacred fires lit on Beltane (1 May) and Samhain (Halloween). Sidhean Dubh is found at the foot of Ben an-t Sithean in Glen Buckie. At the head of Balquhidder Glen where it abuts on Glan Gyle at Parlan Hill is Sidhean an Chatha, the site, probably of a clan battle'.

Interesting as these sites are, there are further sites in the Trossachs which are treated in a future article.

### Now Winter's Wind Sweeps

*Now winter's wind  
sweeps o'er the  
mountains*

*Deeply clad in  
drifting snow*

*Soundly sleep the  
frozen fountains*

*Ice-bound streams  
forget to flow*

*The piercing blast  
howls loud and  
long*

*The leafless forest  
oaks among.*

Alexander Campbell  
(1764-1824)



*Loch Lomond from An Sithean, Ben Lomond 814m*

**Louis Stott** was born in Brighton in 1934 and now lives in Aberfoyle. He is the author of a number of books on Scottish history and literature, including *Smollett's Scotland*, two volumes on Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Enchantment of the Trossachs*, *Literary Loch Lomond* and *The Waterfalls of Scotland*.



# Making the most of your National Park

Gordon Watson, Chief Executive, Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park



**Spring has finally sprung and no doubt many people's minds are turning to enjoying the outdoors again. Last year's amazing summer brought a record number of visitors to the National Park and over the Autumn and Winter we have been busy preparing for the upcoming season.**

There are many fantastic ways to get out and enjoy the National Park and it's important to us that everyone has the best experience possible whilst also helping to take care of this special place.

Camping remains one of the most popular ways to explore the National Park and the seasonal camping byelaws, in effect from 1st March to 30th September, help to protect the environment and manage the volume of visitors to some of our most popular lochshores.

You can camp in these areas but you will need a camping permit or to stay in a campsite. You can still wild camp in the vast majority of the National Park outside of these areas.

We have used feedback from visitors, communities and staff to make a range of improvements over the Winter.



This includes new signage on East Loch Lomond to provide advice to West Highland Way walkers on where and how to camp and updates to our booking system and website to provide more information and images to help them choose where to camp.

Our new campsite at Loch Achray is now open, offering another opportunity for people to experience a wilder camping experience in a spectacular location but still with the comfort of having toilets, running water and car parking spaces at hand. Our similar campsite at Loch Chon has proven really popular over the past two years so we're looking forward to welcoming people throughout the season to enjoy the beautiful surroundings of Loch Achray too.

And we're not just looking to improve the experience for those coming to camp. Over the next few months a series of improvement works will be carried out at some of our key visitor sites at Inveruglas, Tarbet and Luss. This will include upgrades to toilets, car parking and bins.

We will also be working with partners and the community on East Loch Lomond to follow up on the positive discussions held last year on ways to

address the issues caused by the very high volume of traffic experienced on busy weekends and holidays.



Another key issue we'll be working with others to address is litter. This is one of the key priorities in the National Park Authority's Five Year Plan. Recently, we appointed a Litter Prevention Manager who will be working to develop a National Park-wide litter prevention strategy, working with partners to drive positive change.

We expect this year to be another busy season and we will continue to listen to feedback to refine and improve as we go to ensure everyone enjoys the National Park safely and responsibly.

We are incredibly lucky to have this special place on our doorstep. Working together we can make sure that people can continue to enjoy the National Park for years to come.

For more information on camping or to book a permit, visit [www.lochlomond-trossachs.org/camping](http://www.lochlomond-trossachs.org/camping)





# The sky's the limit for Callander's Landscape

## In the last edition of The Voice we told you about the ambitious Callander's Landscape project.

This exciting project focuses on the dramatic landscapes that surround Callander, improving natural and cultural heritage and ensuring that more people can access this awe-inspiring place.

Thanks to National Lottery players, £1.43million funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund will help the project transform the town over the next three years. Partners, volunteers and other grant funders are all contributing to this landscape-scale project's overall value of around £2.2 million.

Over the next three years the project will deliver 19 projects in and around Callander covering the four themes of 'restore, explore, research and engage'.

A number of projects have been getting underway over the Autumn and Winter period with events and volunteering opportunities.

The stars aligned for a successful evening of astronomical activities in November to introduce the Dark Skies project.

A staggering 240 people coming along to McLaren Leisure Centre to enjoy stargazing, planetarium shows, telescopes, virtual reality headsets, dress up space suits, family space challenges and presentations by local experts.



The Dark Skies project connects Callander's Neolithic heritage and conservation of the night sky and provides people with a fun and informal opportunity to better understand the area's landscape.

Since the event, a team of eight volunteers have been trained and carrying out audits of the night sky to identify the darkest and most accessible places for stargazing in and around Callander.

From the sky above us to the ground below us, the heritage theme is continuing throughout the Spring with a series of archaeology workshops and training events running through until June.

These community archaeology sessions, which are free and open to everyone, will be taking place in Leny Woods, helping to uncover the area's historic past and unlock the cultural heritage of Callander.

Leny Woods is situated at the Highland Boundary Fault and holds archaeological sites from the prehistoric, Roman occupation, and beyond and the workshops are a

fantastic opportunity to develop new skills and work alongside experts from Northlight Heritage.

The archaeology programme is funded by Forestry Commission Scotland and is being run by Northlight Heritage. Volunteers can sign up for as many sessions as they like and no previous experience is necessary.




The archaeology project will culminate with an excavation in May and a week-long traditional kiln event in June. This latter event will include story-telling, music, woodland skills demonstrations, and information about conservation.



The event will be a celebration of the cultural heritage of Leny Woods and will provide a unique opportunity for outdoor archaeological learning.

The archeology programme is funded by Forestry Commission Scotland and is being run by Northlight Heritage. Volunteers can sign up for as many sessions as they like as the programme has been designed so people can drop in and out of workshops and no previous experience is necessary.

To find out more about these sessions or Callander's Landscape go to:

-  [CallandersLandscape.org](https://www.CallandersLandscape.org)
-  [facebook.com/CallandersLandscape](https://facebook.com/CallandersLandscape)
-  [twitter.com/CallandersLandscape](https://twitter.com/CallandersLandscape)

Callander's Landscape brings together 15 partners from across the community, public bodies, voluntary sector organisations, local businesses and landowners all working together to develop the vision and road map for delivering this ambitious set of projects.



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A unique trail links an eclectic collection of fun sculptures and ornamental installations, visible from the roadside or National Cycle Route 7, for an entertaining way to explore four villages in the east of the National Park. Kim Proven, Chair of the Loch Earn Tourism Information group (LETi) tells its story.

# Experience the Award Winning BLISS Trail

**The BLISS trail links Balquhidder, Lochearnhead, Strathyre and St Fillans villages. Started in 2016 to make visitors smile, it now has 25 permanent structures, with occasional visiting works, and an audio guide app for smartphones. BLISS derives from the capital letters of each village, and the 'i' represents the international tourist information symbol and innovation.**

The eye-catching structures include a dragon bike, 3m steel thistles, an 'Airliephant', a look-out cabin (often hidden by its reflection of lochs Doine and Voil and the Braes of Balquhidder) and a red telephone box that appeared in the film *The Thirty Nine Steps*. The artists and architects include Kev Paxton, June McEwan, Lynne Schroder, MHOR Collective and Perthshire College UHI art degree students. Mediums comprise willow, galvanised steel, copper, mirror, stone, tartan cloth, and sustainable and drift wood.

LETi won the coveted VisitScotland Thistle Award for Innovation in Tourism in 2018. The prize included an opportunity to work with GeoTourist, world audio tour enablers. LETi recruited artists, school children, Sustrans Scotland, a national park

officer and local residents to record stories about each installation. Download the free GeoTourist smartphone app, select the GPS mapped BLISS trail tour to trigger those stories from <https://geotourist.com/tours/2040>.

Stories include memories of Scottish heavyweight champion, hotelier and tourism hero Ewen Cameron, the West Highland Terriers of The Craggan (where Cycle Route 7 starts in Lochearnhead), the drovers' hostelries in Strathyre, and the miracle fortune-telling fish in St Fillans. Did you know that Sustrans Scotland's milemarker 'The Cockere!' holds clues to a puzzle? Listen to the MHOR coo's fun puns en route to Balquhidder and to six-year-old Ruby doing her best to explain the origins of Thistle the Heilan' Coo in Strathyre in return for a sweetie. Hilarious! The latest installations are the Vessels series 1 to 4 by Alex Tedlie-Stursburg, LETi's first international artist. They are positioned at Strathyre village shop and the Clachan Cottage Hotel on Loch Earn and were secured in collaboration with the Sculpture Placement Group (SPG) from Glasgow. Kim Proven Chair of LETi said: "We are proud of the way that our BLISS trail has evolved and that communities and

visitors have embraced it. You can follow the BLISS audio trail from point 1 at Loch Lubnaig, although there is no right way to do the trail or best place to start. Drive, cycle or walk with friends and family. It's fun for all ages. Split the trail into manageable sections around eating and resting stops and return to discover other works at your leisure. We encourage everyone to do it their way. Chat to sociable villagers for assistance. Stop for a cuppa, ice-cream or a meal.

"We hope that everyone will enjoy the experience, tell others, benefit from the fresh air and fun. Hopefully visitors will want to return... perhaps in different seasons." Share your photographs, videos and blog stories with LETi on Twitter and Facebook @Robroycountry.

A plaque with the artist's name and the web address [www.robroycountry.com](http://www.robroycountry.com) is displayed at each point, thanks to a grant from the Friends OUR Park visitor giving scheme.

**If you enjoyed the BLISS trail please share your experience at: <https://www.tinyurl.com/blisstrailsurvey> (for visitors) or [www.tinyurl.com/blisslocalsurvey](https://www.tinyurl.com/blisslocalsurvey) (local residents).**



*The Bliss Trail -  
A Soaring Eagle and Airliephant*



*Lookout Loch Voil & Doine*





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# The Winnock

## A POPULAR FAMILY RUN HOTEL IN DRYMEN

### TOP TEAM



**PAM BELL** joined The Winnock in 2014 as a food services supervisor. Working closely with David, Pam assists with the administration of the travel trade. Born in Glasgow, she grew up in Arran and moved to Balfron in 2004. Pam loves the variety of the job and says that it has greatly boosted her confidence. She says: "I enjoy working with David and have learnt a lot from him. He is always very approachable, even when he is frowning!"

**STUART ALLAN** who is from Drymen started working at The Winnock in 2015 as a barman and is now a duty manager. The hotel has played a big part in the working lives of Stuart and his family.

Stuart says: "I used to come to the hotel in school holidays as my mother worked in housekeeping when I was young. I have two brothers, James who is older previously worked at the hotel and my younger brother Russell works in the hotel bar. I really enjoy meeting guests from all over the world."



**H**ERE WE FEATURE the success story of long-term Friends Business Supporter David Warnes of The Winnock Hotel who, along with his family and dedicated team of staff, has made a huge and positive impact on the village of Drymen and Loch Lomond over the last 30 years.

From all corners of the UK (and often further afield) coaches arrive in Drymen, the gateway village to the eastern shores of Loch Lomond. Parking at the pretty square, passengers disembark and make their way along the pathway across the middle of the green, into The Winnock Hotel.

Exactly 30 years ago Friends Business Supporter, David Warnes saw The Winnock for the first time and like his many customers since, immediately fell in love with the hotel on Drymen Square. David had been a rising young star in the hotel industry, working for Trust House Forte. At just 23 years old he cut his management teeth at the Holiday Inn Hotel in Edinburgh, which at the time was one of THF's more challenging hotels. This was David's first introduction to Scotland, and he liked what he saw.

Another promotion followed, this time as General Manager of their Stratford-Upon-Avon hotel. By then David had the clear ambition to own a hotel in Scotland.

Back to David's first impressions of The Winnock and Drymen and as he says it was location, location, location "Scotland is rightly known for its incredible landscapes, it is rare though to find a village quite as beautiful as Drymen. The view of the hotel on the green at the heart of the village made the decision easy for me, which is just as well as the interior needed an awful lot of work!" From those early days three decades ago, the job was to turn The Winnock from a busy pub into a vibrant hotel. When purchased there were poor facilities, which unsurprisingly delivered just 20% annual occupancy, the hotel had also lost its 2-star rating.

Long term investment in facilities, such as additional rooms has paid off. With annual occupancy levels in some years around 95%, plus there is now a 3-star rating. David's parents invested in the business from the start in what



turned out to be a successful venture for both them and their son.

In those early days David discovered that previous owners had gone into administration. The reputation of the hotel was soon turned around, in part due to a policy of employing local staff and a focus on providing a warm welcome to customers.

David has developed a European market, in part by attracting customers from Holland on DFDS Seaways boats to Newcastle. Drymen is less than a 3-hour coach journey from Newcastle. Special packages and experiences, as well as routes, help operators to attract customers. David has worked hard to create unique and special opportunities for his guests to enjoy during their stay.

A close relationship with the travel trade helped The Winnock to weather difficult times. During recessions, most recently the international banking crisis of 2008, David even had 5-star hotels in Glasgow undercutting him. The quality though of his Loch Lomond location and long-term partnerships helped the business through challenging times.

Marketing The Winnock and Loch Lomond in Europe and beyond has grown tourism in the National Park. For example, many coaches make the spectacular journey from Drymen to Loch Katrine across the Duke's Pass, near Aberfoyle. Quietly and without fanfare David supports many local causes and groups. Beneficiaries include Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs, Drymen in Bloom, Drymen Church and the Strathendrick Pipe Band, who perform regularly on the square each summer.

Having spent half his life now in Drymen, this is where his roots are firmly placed. His children Livi and Michael grew up here and he loves living on Loch Lomondside. Travel is in his blood though, so occasionally warmer climates, safaris and scuba diving tempt him away for a well-earned holiday.





Keith Graham writes about the rich variety of wildlife in the National Park and how different species adjust to the changing seasons.

**L**AST YEAR, SPRING was seriously delayed by the 'Beast from the East', a sudden reversion to wintry conditions which ensured that any notions of an early spring very quickly ran into the buffers! Nature, of course, adjusts to these foibles of the weather and no two years are ever the same. For example, last year the snowdrops seemed reluctant to bloom, whilst this year they were fluttering in the breeze right from the start of the year. Thus is the arrival of spring something of a moveable feast, sometimes revealing itself notably early, sometimes delaying according to the weather! Early or late, it will inevitably and eventually re-vitalise the landscape.

Sooner or later, the season moves into gear and we can look forward to seeing and indeed hearing the plants, birds and animals responding to the lengthening days that herald a new season of re-birth. Those early snowdrops are merely a foretaste of the sense that the cycle of new life is already galvanising itself. Spring days welcome primroses and daffodils. The rat-tat-tat of great spotted woodpeckers drumming their messages of availability was resounding through the Park as early as mid-February. They are clearly eager to enter the spirit of spring courtship as soon as possible as are the male great tits. That assertive two-tone delivery, 'tea-cher, tea-cher, tea-cher' also rang out loud and clear. Spring was on its way!

Now will begin the feverish activity that marks the urgent nature of this crucial time of the year. In the coming weeks and months, serious courtship rituals will be followed and cock birds especially will enrich the air with their myriad voices. Territorial rites will be proclaimed, defended and challenged and good nesting sites will become a priority, a prerequisite of the females the males hope to attract. Some, like little cock 'Jenny' wrens, will begin the process of building long before any females have responded to that amazing vocal burst of song which produces no fewer than 56 notes uttered in just over five seconds! Indeed, a really ambitious cock wren may build no fewer than eight and in exceptional circumstances as many as ten structures as a means of persuading a suitable female that he is the mate she should choose. Although all the noise – in the form of song – comes from the male birds, it is almost universally the females that make the choices and the key decisions. Which lung bursting cock wren will she pick? Which of the many nest sites will she select? These are the vital choices that soon must be made. And then, when will it be most appropriate to surrender herself to his desire? But first she must be confident that the territory he has claimed has the necessary food-supply to sustain the forthcoming nest full of young, hungry wrens.

*It is the brown hare which enjoys the reputation of being the 'Mad March Hare'*



# Another way of saying let's party

## Hunting Sparrowhawk

Competition is, of course, intense and there is a remarkable series of key factors, depending on the species, which may influence the females' choice of a mate. Colour is one, size another and quality and variety of song is a further factor. But, for example, it isn't necessarily sheer size that might attract a hen great tit to her mate. A large male great tit may find itself rejected in favour of a slimmer rival, simply because the larger one may not so easily avoid the clutches of a hunting sparrowhawk. This would critically leave the female without the help of a partner when a family comes along, so maybe the slimmer the better! A bold black band on the chest however, is a sign that a male great tit is fighting fit!

Furthermore, there is the question of timing which is especially vital when it comes to the laying of a clutch of eggs. Again, the hen great tit must time the production of her eggs to coincide with the emergence of the caterpillars upon which she and her mate will feed their brood of youngsters. Indeed, she must be doubly observant to ensure that this vital food supply for her young is available just when they need it. We may think such things come automatically but the effect of global warming has been shown to have brought forward the breeding cycle of the moths whose caterpillars are so vital to the growing great tits. Therefore, the great tits must also advance their own breeding cycle.

One of the real spectacles of March is the madcap behaviour of brown hares. In fact, there are two types of hare to be found in the Park. The mountain or blue hare is an animal of the hills and mountains, an animal, which of course, changes the greyish colour of its summer pelage to white during the winter months while the brown hare is generally confined to lowland parts of the Park. The blue hare is our only true indigenous hare, the brown hare having been introduced to Britain back in Neolithic or Iron Age times. However, it is the brown hare which enjoys the reputation of being the 'Mad March Hare'.

Although this bizarre behaviour may well begin during the month of February, it is in March when it becomes more evident and you may see hares standing up on their rear legs, boxing with each other with their front legs. At times, hares can also be seen chasing and leaping over each other and generally losing their natural shyness, simply because they are so pre-occupied with their endeavours to find a mate. In reality, several males may pursue a single female – generally she is marginally the larger – and she will repel the advances of her suitors by 'boxing their ears'. She is, therefore, the main aggressor and will only accept one of her suitors when she is absolutely ready.

## Season of Regeneration

The arrival of spring is signalled in many ways. The rising crescendo of bird song provides us with sonic evidence that the season of regeneration is upon us. The sky fills with the sounds of countless birds proclaiming their territorial integrity. Some of course, such as the lowland based yellowhammer are looking forward to raising multiple families - as many as three - before the summer is over. Titmice generally settle for a single brood and raptors are also generally content with one. In the case of the Park's golden eagles, the process is indeed lengthy. The choice of nesting site may have been made before the year had turned and their off-spring are unlikely to be self-sufficient enough to leave home and seek territories for themselves until late summer. It is indeed for them a long and tiring process. At the end of March, the first summer migrants begin to appear. Ospreys are among the first to arrive and in recent years there has been a steady increase in the number of these fantastic 'fish hawks' nesting in the Park where of course, they plunder the many lochs for their succulent fish. The sight of one of these birds first hovering high above the water before entering a spectacular dive and then hitting the water with a mighty splash to grapple with their scaly prey, provides a truly inspirational moment for the watcher. Then, like the mythical phoenix, the bird rises in triumph clutching a writhing victim before heading off for a meal.

Wherever there is water and there is plenty of it throughout the Park, there is wildlife to watch. Dippers bob up and down before arcing beneath the surface of loch or river in a constant search for water insects and their larva. All manner of waterfowl may be seen, from the common or garden mallard to a whole range of wild duck. Pied wagtails strut comically beside the water's edge, long legged herons stand patiently by the shore, ready to wake from their apparent inertia and stab at a passing fish before gulping it down that sinuous neck. Soon the bird may take to the wing and on those voluminous wings translocate to a new fishing station where another vigil will follow.

And, if you are lucky, that sudden swirl seen in the water may turn out to be one of the many otters that inhabit the Park's lochs and rivers. In our woodlands, red squirrels romp and now too do new generations of pine marten. These once rare arboreal mammals have now become regular residents here and have given the red squirrel a new lease of life by eliminating the introduced alien grey in many parts of the Park.

## Bambi-like Kids

The woods welcome a plethora of new life. In May the 'gentle roe deer' gives birth among the bluebells to her Bambi-like kids, almost always twins. These kids are extremely vulnerable and wherever you are, should you ever come across one please resist the temptation to stroke it. Laying your scent upon this innocent newly-born is likely to cause its mother to abandon it resulting in a slow and miserable death.

More migrants sweep in, martins, swallows, an array of tuneful warblers and finally in May, the cuckoos. Amazingly, cuckoos will only stay long enough to complete their courtship, lay their eggs in other birds' nests and then leave us as soon as July. Swifts too arrive in May and village rooftops fairly echo with their wild screaming before they depart in August with their newly fledged young.

Meanwhile, birds of every size and hue rush hither and thither in order to fill countless gaping mouths. The race is well and truly on to rear the next generations. A landscape that has been transformed from the bareness of early spring has become well and truly greened, with the leaves on trees at first a fresh and really bright green. As summer runs its course, the hills slowly assume different hues until in July a purple haze begins to appear.

And, in July, a strange silence falls on a previously vibrant landscape. For most birds the breeding season has by now come and gone. This is now a time for a different kind of renewal as the birds, free of the responsibility of nurturing those new generations, now begin their annual moult in order to grow a fresh suit of clothes as they renew their feathers. As a result, flight is impaired so it is not a good idea to advertise one's presence by singing. Silence for a few short weeks is golden!

Maturing colours now slowly begin to burnish the landscape. The season of regeneration is coming to an end. The business of the year, the rearing of new generations is done. Migrant birds will turn their heads to the south and eventually leave for warmer climes. Others will begin to prepare themselves for the challenges they will face as first autumn and then winter approaches. Meanwhile, geese, wildfowl and many Scandinavian birds will start to arrive from their breeding grounds in the far north to escape the harshness of an Arctic winter. Up in the glens our Highland-based red deer are preparing themselves for the rut, the climax of their year.

But that is another story to be told in the autumn!





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LOCH LOMOND

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## Dates for the diary

### WEDNESDAY 15TH MAY ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The annual member's event with a buffet meal and interesting guest speakers. To be held at Ross Priory in Gartocharn with stunning views overlooking Loch Lomond. An optional buffet meal will be served between 6.00pm and 7.30pm followed by the AGM and guest speakers with a 9pm finish. Please book the buffet meal in advance (£10).



### INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S CELEBRATION CRUISES

Join us on one of a special series of daytime cruises with musical performances from McLaren High School on board the Steamship Sir Walter Scott.

For full details of any of the above events, or to make a booking, please email Marie Harvey at [info@lochlomondtrossachs.org.uk](mailto:info@lochlomondtrossachs.org.uk) or call 01389 727761 between 9.30am and 4pm Tuesday to Friday. Our office address is Carrochan, Carrochan Road, Balloch G83 8EG.

### SATURDAY 6TH JULY LUSS HIGHLAND GAMES & FRIENDS WELCOME TENT at Luss Games Field

Come along and enjoy one of Scotland's oldest Highland Games events and visit our welcome tent to meet some of our Trustees and volunteers. The Games take place from 11am to 5pm and more details are at [www.lusshighlandgames.co.uk](http://www.lusshighlandgames.co.uk)

### SATURDAY 13TH JULY TO SUNDAY 28TH JULY CALLANDER SUMMERFEST

Callander & Trossachs Summerfest is back for its 6th year from 13 to 28 July, more than 50 events and activities celebrating Callander's culture and landscapes. [www.incallander.co.uk/summerfest](http://www.incallander.co.uk/summerfest)



### WEDNESDAY 14TH AUGUST A LOCH LOMOND SUNSET CRUISE

Held in conjunction with the Lennox Literary Society, this evening event offers members the chance to enjoy a scenic trip on Loch Lomond complete with musical entertainment. Leaves Sweeney's Boatyard in Balloch at 7pm, returning at 9pm. Tickets cost £12 and booking in advance is essential.

### 4-6 OCTOBER CALLANDER JAZZ AND BLUES FESTIVAL

The Callander Jazz and Blues Festival, from 4 to 6 October, is the largest rural Jazz & Blues festival in Scotland, this year featuring over 50 gigs performing live jazz, blues, soul and boogie.

### FRIDAY 27TH OCTOBER TO SUNDAY 29TH OCTOBER COWALFEST 2019

Unfortunately the committee were unable to organise the regular, 8/10 day festival for 2019 due to financial and organisational reasons. However, they are offering three days of hill and trail walks on the 27th, 28th, and 29th September, 2019, to tie in with Dunoon Presents Outdoor Festival. See [www.cowalfest.org](http://www.cowalfest.org) for more details.

### SUNDAY 24TH NOVEMBER CHRISTMAS AT ROSS PRIORY

Begin your festive celebrations with a popular informal gathering with musical entertainment and light Christmas fare. More details will be published in the autumn edition of Voice, but our annual reception is worth pencilling into your diary now.

For full details of the events, or to make a booking, please contact Marie Harvey email [info@lochlomondtrossachs.org.uk](mailto:info@lochlomondtrossachs.org.uk) or call 01389 727761.



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# Callander

## HIGHLAND GAMES

Sunday 28th July 2019

**GATES OPEN 11.30AM**  
**PARADE 12.30 PM**  
**GAMES START 1.00PM**

### Let the Games Begin!

We are now looking for any local stall holders , food vendors or local businesses who want a stall in the games arena to please contact  
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# EAGLE FALLS NO MORE?

Friends Vice-Chairman, John Urquhart describes one of the unfortunate consequences of a hydro scheme on what was one of the finest and most accessible 'hanging valley' waterfalls in the National Park.



*The diminished Eagle Falls – the dark area on the rock face shows their previous normal extent*

**Last Spring I wrote about finding the normally impressive Ben Glas "Eagle Falls" in Glen Falloch much diminished. I had walked further up into the 'hanging valley' above to investigate how much a new hydro installation was contributing to the lack of flow and, failing to realise that both Ben Glas burn's main tributaries had been dammed, concluded wrongly that it was the hard frost which was causing such a reduced flow.**

It was Nick Kempe who first drew my attention to the existence of the second dam. He writes the hard hitting "Park Watch" blog <http://parkswatchscotland.co.uk/blog/> and is not slow to hold the authorities' feet to the fire when their decisions seem questionable. Over the last few years he has been closely studying the landscape impacts of the 40 or so small-scale hydro schemes approved by the National Park Authority, compliance with planning conditions and adherence to the National Park Authority's award-winning good practice guidance on renewables. He is not complimentary about the resultant widespread scarring of upland landscapes with a plethora of roads, exposed pipelines and intake dams.

## STRIKING A BALANCE

Rich in the potential energy of falling water and scenic beauty, our wild mountain areas present Park planners and decision makers with difficult choices. Hydro power helps meet the urgent need to decarbonise electricity production and meet Scottish Government renewable energy targets and normally generates a useful additional source of income for landowners and communities. The construction access roads provide new bog free approaches to favourite mountains, yet the intrusive construction tracks, dams and pipelines damage habitat and spoil the wilderness experience for the hillwalker and mountaineer when they get there. Reduced water flow must presumably impact on wildlife such as dipper, the little black and white 'bobbing bird' which finds its food in fast flowing water. As ever the answer lies in striking a balance between competing values, needs and demands - a cost/benefit analysis - easy to say, but not so easy to do. Stronger enforcement of planning conditions in relation to narrowing and removal of tracks and surplus building materials post-construction would also help reduce environmental degradation in wild land areas. So what about the Ben Glas Burn's 'Eagle Falls' - how do you put a value on them? Before they were switched off by the hydro dams, they were one of the finest and most accessible 'hanging valley' waterfalls in the National Park. A text book example of the feature, the falls were clearly visible to motorists on the A82, while walkers had a grand stand view from the West Highland Way trail which passes within few metres of their base. The falls were without doubt a major scenic feature and attraction in lower Glen Falloch. They were priceless, but now it seems they are very much reduced, only reaching something like their former glory at times of sustained high rainfall and/or snowmelt. The question is did the National Park planners reviewing the planning application back in 2009 get their impact assessment wrong? In their 30 page plus report to the Planning Committee they concluded "that the character of the falls is unlikely to be significantly affected" but this was on the assumption that the scheme would not operate during the day. Sadly, limiting the hours of operation does not appear to have been included as a planning condition.



*These photos show that any talk of restoration of the damage cause by hydro schemes as currently constructed is misleading. They create permanent change to the landscape.*



# A WALK IN THE PARK

## CONIC HILL

*In this the third of a series of articles covering some of the best short walks in the National Park, Friends Vice Chair, John Urquhart, revisits Conic Hill where Highland meets Lowland.*

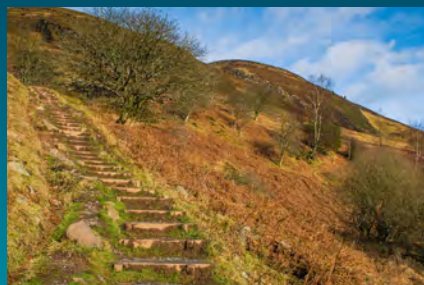


Its ice rounded heathery dome rearing up abruptly just north of Balmaha on the eastern shore of Loch Lomond, Conic Hill, or as the locals correctly call it, "The Conic", is climbed by around 100,000 people every year, making it the single most popular short hill walk in the National Park.

"The Conic" name is an anglicisation of the Gaelic "An Cnoc", meaning "The Hill". Cnoc also conveys the sense that the hill is isolated and steep sided. The Conic does indeed have steep sides, but far from being conical in shape, the hill takes the form of a long ridge topped by a series of rounded ice worn summits. It is one of the more prominent examples of what is a continuous feature which crosses the country diagonally coast to coast from Campbeltown in the southwest to Stonehaven in the north east. The alignment is determined by an outcrop of hard conglomerate rock which lies along one of Scotland's defining geological features, our famous Highland Boundary Fault.

### West Highland Way

Only 40 minutes from Glasgow, The Conic is very accessible and with an altitude of 361m, you can easily be on the summit within an hour of setting out, obviously important factors for tour operators like Rabbie's Trail Burners and Timberbush



whose buses can be seen in the large car park beside the Balmaha Visitor Centre every day. The approach trail is also part of the West Highland Way, Scotland's most popular long-distance walking route, walked by over 50,000 every year. But there are other reasons for its popularity. Balmaha's Oak Tree Inn of course makes a great watering hole, but the key factors are Loch Lomond and the geological contrasts associated with the Highland Boundary Fault. The resulting combination provides a magic interplay of scenery - lowland on one side and highland on the other, farmland, woodland, moorland, mountain, island and loch - coming together in a memorable feast for the eye. From Balmaha car park the approach trail angles up through the woodland on the south side of the conglomerate ridge heading for the steep Bealach an Ard (High Pass), which cuts the fault line at right angles and delivers you onto the ridge's northern side where the glistening loch comes into view, its broad island dotted southern expanse narrowing north to a mountain girt ribbon, bounded to the east by the massive profile of Ben Lomond, the "Light Mountain". Behind the western shore, the Luss Hills stretch north towards Arrochar's alpine skyline, the bulk of Ben Vorlich, the largest and most northerly of the group, carving a distant backdrop in grey blue.



### Uncomfortable Staircase

The path, badly eroded by the constant passage of 200,000 pairs of feet, now turns right to follow the northern flank of ridge. As the going is quite steep many of the walkers prefer an off piste route on the more forgiving grass on either side of the uncomfortable staircase of stone pitching installed by the National Park a few years ago in an unsuccessful effort to minimise the erosion. The problem exists all the way to the summit, so much so that the erosion scar can clearly be seen from 10 miles away on the other side of the loch. 100,000 a year of us love to climb this fault line Cnoc, and it's our fault we are in danger of loving it to death! Under their 'Mountains and The People' programme, the path works charity, The Scottish Outdoor Access Trust, has been charged by the National Park with providing a remedy, but it will need all their path construction expertise to provide a lasting solution to this difficult problem. The Friends are committed to providing financial support for 'Mountains and The People' and you can help by making a donation at: <http://www.lochlomondrossachs.org.uk/donate-online>.





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Love Loch Lomond is a recently formed industry led Destination Organisation that operates in the Loch Lomond, Strathendrick, West Dunbartonshire and Clyde Sea Lochs areas. It is dedicated to working on a collaborative basis to capitalise on the area's strong tourism potential.

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[www.scottish-cycling.com](http://www.scottish-cycling.com)

### • MAID OF THE LOCH

The Pier, Pier Road, Balloch G83 8QX  
Tel: 01389 711865 [www.maidoftheloch.com](http://www.maidoftheloch.com)

### • FOREST HOLIDAYS

Argyll Forest and Strathyre Tel 08451308223  
[www.forestholidays.co.uk](http://www.forestholidays.co.uk)

### • WWW.HOLIDAYCOTTAGES.CO.UK

Tel: 01237 426287  
[www.holidaycottages.co.uk/scotland](http://www.holidaycottages.co.uk/scotland)

### • APPLEJACKS

2 Ancaster Square, Callander FK17 8ED.  
Tel: 01877 330370

### • PAUL SAUNDERS PHOTOGRAPHY

7 Gartness Court Drymen, Glasgow G63 0AX  
Tel: 01360 661029  
[www.paulsaundersphotography.com](http://www.paulsaundersphotography.com)

### • FORTH INN

Main Street, Aberfoyle.  
Tel: 01877 382372 [www.forthinn.com](http://www.forthinn.com)

### • DELI ECOSSE

Ancaster Square, Callander FK17 8ED.  
Tel: 01877 331220  
[www.deliecosse.co.uk](http://www.deliecosse.co.uk)



# Stay & Sail Breaks at Loch Katrine



## Easter Mad Hatter Cruises

**Saturday 20th & Sunday 21st April**

Eggexplorer Easter Egg Hunts from 10.30am.

Mad Hatter Sailings - 11.30am, 1.00pm,  
2.30pm and 4.00pm.

*Don't be late for this very  
important date.*



The Steamship Sir Walter Scott  
is fully wheelchair friendly



- Steamship cruises on the iconic *Sir Walter Scott*
- Legends of the Loch cruises on the *Lady of the Lake*
- Lochside Eco Lodges & Campsite • The Steamship Café
- Katrine Gifts • Katrinewheelz - Cycle Hire

## MAKE A DATE WITH NATURE

The Loch Katrine Eco Camp provides an opportunity to re-connect with nature. There are plenty of wildlife watching, cruising, cycling & walking options available. Take a break in one of our 8 cosy Lochs and Bens Eco Lodges (4 en-suite with underfloor heating) suitable for 2 – 4 people.

Includes: kitchenette with combo microwave, fridge and sink, freeview HDTV, wifi and heating. Alternatively park your motorhome at one of our specially designated spaces near Trossachs Pier. Each bay is equipped with water, metered electricity and WiFi internet access.

Book your stay today and enjoy a special 20% discounts on sailings and on cycle hire.



Trossachs Pier, Loch Katrine,  
by Callander, Stirling FK17 8HZ

T: 01877 376315/6 • enquiries@lochkatrine.com • www.lochkatrine.com





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