

TRACKING PKCT

THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF PERTH & KINROSS COUNTRYSIDE TRUST



Ghostly goings on at Scone Palace



Fergus Cook as David Douglas beside the Scone Douglas fir

Hundreds of excited school children met the ghost of David Douglas at Scone Palace in May this year. On a journey through the grounds, they learned about the impressive contribution the plant collector made in shaping the landscape of Perthshire Big Tree Country (PBTC).

Douglas introduced a huge number of species of plants and trees to Scotland, including the Douglas fir, the tree that bears his name. Fergus Cook, Perth's Greenspace ranger, played the part of Douglas, regaling

tales of plant collecting in North America, as part of a forest education day for schools throughout Perth & Kinross.

It was Douglas who sent back seeds for the Sitka spruce and a drive up the A9 gives testament to his spectacular contribution to forestry in Scotland ... but his influence doesn't stop there.

"Hardly any gardens in Europe or the United States do not feature flowers, shrubs and trees collected by David Douglas nearly two hundred years ago," said Fergus. "Few people are aware of this son of Scone, the trials in wilderness areas he suffered to further botanical knowledge, or the exceptional skill and dedication he showed."

And as if that wasn't enough excitement for one day, the plant collecting theme continued up in Kinnoull Hill Woodland Park. Groups of children assisted woodworker Robin Wood to carve a large wooden Douglas fir cone. The resultant sculpture remains on-site and will form part of the wider interpretation of PBTC.

Children were also given the chance to try their hand at willow working; traditional rope and broom making; and green woodturning.

The importance of this type of learning cannot be over emphasised, and the day was an excellent example of partnership working between the Trust, Perth & Kinross Council, and Forest Enterprise, Tay Forest District.

Niall Lobley, senior countryside ranger said: "Outdoor learning allows children to understand their place in the world and to make connections to their environment. It is a healthy option, complementing the sedentary classroom life and encouraging children to develop a sense of pride in their surroundings. Above all else, it reminds us all that learning can be lots of fun."

But the quote of the day goes to the small boy who asked: "Was that really David Douglas or was it an actor?"

Endorsing the Woodland Bus

As an educational resource, the Woodland Bus has surpassed expectations in popularity and demand. But don't just take our word for it ... here are some examples of what the children have to say.

Guildtown Primary School

"Thank you for coming to this school with the woodland bus. The wasp bike was interesting because I saw all the honeycombs inside."

"Thank you for coming on the woodland bus it was great fun. I loved actually being on the bus. I thought that it was great getting to clap the fox and badger they were really cute."

Caledonian Road Primary School, Perth

"Thank you for sending Julian, Fergus and Ian to our school yesterday I liked it when we went on the bus and saw the stuffed animals. It was excellent."

"Thank you for sending Julian, Fergus and Ian to our school yesterday. The best bit was when we were talking about wood."

"I liked the woodland bus be cos it was cool."

The next round of schools visits will take place in autumn of this year.



All aboard the Woodland Bus

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Projects on the go...

Exploring the Cateran Trail

The recently launched guide, *Explore the Cateran Trail*, written by Chic Leven and Ken Roberts, acts as a handy companion for those wishing to tackle the 64 mile circular route.

The result of years of hard work, the Cateran Trail has been in place for seven years and is a dream come true for Trust chairman, Councillor Bob Ellis.

"Having been involved at the very start of the project, I'm delighted that the trail is now established enough to merit such a guide," said Bob. *"It took dedication and patience to get the trail up and running, and thanks is due to the land owners and managers – around 44 at last count – who helped make it possible."*

The book is a real asset, informed by Chic's knowledge of local history throughout Blairgowrie and the surrounding area. It contains maps, photographs and a mine of information ... in fact, were you to keep the book with you and take in all the kilns, stones, lochans and historical sites, you would need enough spare clothes and money to last you for at least a fortnight!

Make sure you pick up a copy of the book before you set out on your walk around the trail and

really make the most of your experience.

The book can be bought in the Blairgowrie Tourist Information Centre, and The Bookshop, Blairgowrie.

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Enjoying the Cateran Trail experience



An apple a day ...

Orchards have been known in the Carse of Gowrie for over 800 years, developed as part of the farms and granges owned by medieval abbeys. Many of Scotland's heritage apple varieties originate from the area, including the Bloody Ploughman, Oslin, Hood's Supreme and the Lass o' Gowrie.

Throughout Britain, traditional orchards are disappearing at an astonishing rate, with two thirds being ploughed up or built over in the last four decades. There is an urgent need to take stock of what is left, determine their present condition and produce an action plan to safeguard their future.

Building on its successful work in conserving and protecting Perthshire Big Tree Country,

the Trust has joined forces with Forestry Commission Scotland and the Tayside Biodiversity Partnership to launch the Carse of Gowrie Orchard Project. The project aims to safeguard and enhance the existing orchards within the Carse by raising awareness of their history, ecotourism, biodiversity and even commercial value.

The Trust has commissioned Dr Crispin Hayes of CW Hayes Associates: Eco-Consultancy to carry out an investigative study this summer. His report will be published in October at an orchard management training seminar.

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Keep your eye on the sky

That Perthshire Big Tree Country (PBTC) has much to offer by way of amazing trees, breathtaking views, and interesting bird and wildlife, is not in doubt. But it also offers much more. It has inspired artists, poets and musicians including Robert Burns, Beatrix Potter and Niel Gow. It is the birthplace of Scottish Forestry and the home of two of the most successful plant collectors, Archibald Menzies and David Douglas.

It is the latter two individuals, along with the 'planting' Dukes of Atholl, who transformed the landscape we know as PBTC today. The late 18th and early 19th centuries saw millions of trees planted and hundreds of trees, plants and herbs introduced to the area from expeditions from far flung corners of the world. And, thanks to the Perthshire Big Tree Country Heritage & Access Project, this

passion, combined with the area's beauty, is about to be celebrated.

During the summer, the project is working with local film production company Speakeasy – based in Stanley – to capture the highlights of PBTC on film. For that extra frisson of excitement, Speakeasy is filming both on the ground and from a helicopter for that real wow factor. Using the character of David Douglas to introduce the flyover, the aim is to inspire awe, in visitors and locals alike, at the amazing legacy left for us by these extraordinary people.

The flyover forms part of the Perthshire Big Tree Country Interpretation Strategy which is being produced and implemented by market leaders Imagemakers.

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Signs are good for working with communities



Following the signs

As part of the 200th anniversary celebrations to mark the relocation of Scone to its present position, the Trust worked with community groups to upgrade a popular 8km path.

Located to the southeast of the village, the path wends its way through the wooded areas of Scone Den, up to McDuff's Monument and the Lynedoch Obelisk, from where spectacular 360° panoramic views across Perthshire can be enjoyed. The path returns to Scone via Murrayshall Golf Course and Balgarvie.

The community made their own contribution to the project through the Scone 50+ Walking Group, which paid for the installation of the new signposts for the route. The signs were installed recently and the group took the opportunity to inspect them as part of one of their regular walks.

Pleased with the project, the group commented on the path improvements saying they had greatly improved access for their less able members.

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New paths improve access

The Big Tree Country Heritage & Access Project continues to grow, with access improvements taking place in many of Perthshire's key woodland sites.

Projects reaching completion include significant improvements to the path leading to the upper bridge at the Falls of Bruar. This route, popular for decades, suffered tremendous wear and tear from hundreds of pairs of feet, and erosion from flowing water in periods of heavy rain.

Work to improve the Bruar paths took significant dedication and skill from contractor WB Grieve of Aberfeldy. They successfully created a new path surface by regrading the exposed rocks and filling in the eroded sections with locally sourced sand and gravel. The end result is a smooth, well drained surface, making the route to the upper bridge much more accessible.

At nearby Blair Atholl, newly completed paths at Diana's Grove complement the cathedral-like nature of the woodland area and enable people of all abilities to enjoy some of the tallest and finest trees in Scotland.

Finally, new woodland paths at St Mary's Monastery in Perth offer great views of the Fair City, and a recently improved route adjacent to Stanley Hill at Dunkeld improves the link to the cathedral, and new paths developed by the Hilton Dunkeld House hotel.



Before: original path at Falls of Bruar

After: testing the new paths



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Final piece in the jigsaw

The installation of the bridge across the Cultullich Burn saw the final piece of the Aberfeldy to Grandtully route slot into place. The new 6km scenic route follows the River Tay through agricultural land and riparian woodland using the disused railway line for much of its length.

You can now enjoy the quiet solitude and wildlife of the semi natural woods, wave at canoeists and rafters as they pass on their way downstream, or watch a fisherman casting into one of the pools.

The creation of this route was made possible through direct grant aid from the Trust and the funding of a project officer who, along with other members of the Aberfeldy Paths Group, successfully negotiated agreement with landowners.

The group has also been busy improving access to Dull Wood, and replacing stiles and kissing gates with more user friendly versions.



New bridge at Cultullich

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And there's more...

The last word ...

It is now time to write my bit for the second issue of this informative newsletter.



Trust Chairman, Councillor Bob Ellis, contemplating life at Falls of Bruar

After the recent elections, it is most certainly a pleasure to be back on board with a dedicated and hard working team. At this point I would also like to welcome our new council member, Willie Robertson. Willie is no stranger to the workings of the Trust and countryside as a whole as he is also the current chairman of TRACKS – the local Kinross paths group.

We now have a further slight change as far as staff is concerned. With the promotion of Paul McLennan to the post of Trust manager, Andy Barrie was successful in his application for the post of the Big Tree Country project officer. This now means that our staffing levels have dropped to four, and such is the amount of work that they are all doing, I take my hat off to them for keeping the ship on course.

At the last Trust meeting we were treated to a presentation on the workings of a project which is investigating Crannogs around Perthshire and more widely, around Scotland. As well as being educational, it could boost the economy of the area and we are looking forward to more information and a visit to the site at Kenmore where we will see at first hand, and possibly underwater, what these structures are like.

On a final matter, we will be hosting an update meeting for all of those who attended the community workshop in Pitlochry last November, to discuss projects from all over Perth & Kinross.

Rewarding work in Big Tree Country

In celebration of the 10th anniversary year of the Trust, it is hosting the first of what it hopes will be an annual event, the Big Tree Country Awards. The theme of this year's awards is ACCESS, in the widest sense of the word, and there are three categories: business, community and education.

The trophy was designed, as a result of a competition open to all schools in Perth & Kinross, by Rachael Lennon of Perth High School. Three runners up joined Rachael at a wee celebration held in the Gleneagles Hotel, which will also play host to the awards ceremony on Sunday 23 September.

Further information and an application form are available to download on www.pkct.org or by contacting Angela Hughes.



Award winning design

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Family fun in fancy dress

Happy days at Buckie Braes

A recent fun filled, though unfortunately not sun filled, family day at Buckie Braes enjoyed lots of support from the local community. The event, run jointly with the Trust and Perth & Kinross Council ranger service, celebrated recent improvements to the popular woodland park.

Hot off the press

At the June meeting of the Trust, the executive committee approved a total of £15,500 in grant aid for three community projects:

- Path improvement works at Aberfeldy Golf Course (£4,000)

- Carse of Gowrie Paths Group for works at Ballindean (£7,500)
- Portmoak Paths Group (£4,000)

The latter is for the rebranding and interpretation of the Tetley Trail, to be renamed The Michael Bruce Way after the local poet who wrote about the area. The interpretation will include quotes from his poetry.

In addition £4,000 was committed to a survey of the orchards of the Carse of Gowrie.

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The Gannochy Trust

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