

The Voice

The magazine of the Friends of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs

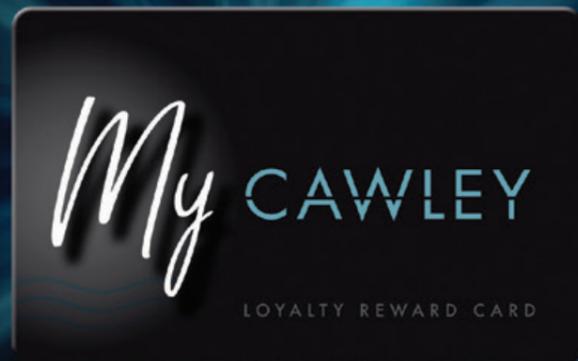


ALSO INSIDE
THIS ISSUE:

James Fraser appreciation; A82/83 latest; Global warming - the Friends respond... *and more*

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*A word of welcome
from John Urquhart
our new Chairman*



WELCOME to the Autumn/
Winter edition of *The Voice*.

It is now five months since James Fraser stepped down and I took over as Chair of the Friends. From the outset my main concern was how on earth could I possibly maintain the astonishing output which James delivered during his long tenure. Just the production of this magazine itself is a mammoth task which James delivered more or less single handed, often writing much of the copy himself.

Inevitably I will do things differently. And some of those differences will be immediately apparent in this edition. As well as featuring a range of voices, I want to give more prominence to the work of the Friends' part time Project Support Officer, Jennifer Plunkett, who is proving to be a huge asset to the charity. In this edition, she writes about Young Friends, an inspirational project she has been leading to introduce as many youngsters as possible to the National Park. Like so many of our recent projects, the initial stimulus for Young Friends came from James Fraser.

I would like to express sincere thanks to five stalwarts of the Board of Trustees who have stepped down

this year, namely James Fraser, Joyce Deans, Bill Dalrymple, Paul Saunders and Fergus Wood for all their hard work and the many great contributions they have made to the work of the Friends.

I would like to welcome two new Trustees to the Board, namely Dr Roddy Yarr, and Mr Stewart Gibb. Roddy is a respected sustainability expert with considerable public and private sector experience in sustainable development. As Director of Sustainability at the University of Glasgow, Roddy leads the operational response to net zero, climate resilience and social inclusion. Roddy also advises and works with a wide range of collaborative sustainability groups and is an external advisor to the Scottish Parliament's Sustainability Board and to the Glasgow Metro Project. Stewart has held senior posts in the local authority and housing association sector in England and Scotland and has had a long standing commitment to improving access to supported living services for people with additional needs. He has spent many years walking Scotland's mountains and moorlands and is now looking forward to working with the Friends to the betterment of the National Park.

Funding is always a concern for charities and we have just written to members appealing for them to dip their hands in their pockets a little more. There is plenty of news in this edition about the great work the Friends are doing to help look after our precious National Park. It all costs a lot of money and if you want to help us to keep going and to do more, do please make a donation or perhaps a provision for us in a legacy. If you are not already a member, do please join us.

All the very best,
JOHN URQUHART

Chair - Friends of Loch Lomond
and The Trossachs



Cover pic: The 1953 paddle steamer *Maid of the Loch* is hauled out just now on her slipway at Balloch Pier, while she is being restored by a determined and resourceful bunch of volunteers. This team is working on rebuilding the starboard paddle wheel.



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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The Voice is the magazine of the Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs, the only independent conservation charity working to protect, promote and provide projects and services for this most precious part of Scotland – The Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park. To join us or to find out more about our work please visit www.lochlomondtrossachs.org.uk or use the form inside.

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JAMES FRASER

A FRIEND FOR ALL SEASONS



When he took up the Chairmanship of the Friends, it would probably be fair to say that James inherited an organisation which was struggling to find its way forward. From the Friends' inception, Dr Hannah Stirling had been the guiding light, but by 2010 Hannah was becoming very elderly and was really in no position to provide the leadership that was needed. James brought new blood with him onto the board and by identifying a series of practical projects where

the charity could make a real contribution to preserving and enhancing the features which make the area so special, he broadened the scope of the Friends' activities tremendously. New themes like Celebrating Park People were developed, with projects like the refurbishment of the neglected Lauder Monument in Cowal and another one celebrating the life of Tom Weir, which saw the creation of Tom Weir's Rest in Balmaha on

what was once neglected council land. It is now a hugely popular picnic site, the statue of Tom that the Friends helped to install becoming a must do selfie shot for park visitors. Donation posts were established at Tom Weir's Rest and at the Lauder Monument and the website was completely redesigned and brought up to date. There was of course the complete overhaul of this magazine plus related income generating ideas like the Friends Business

Supporters Scheme and the visitor-giving system, Friends of Our Park, which was modelled on a similar scheme in the Lake District National Park – all still going strong. These were just some of the initiatives he introduced. The Friends are now well known and respected for the work they do, whether it is the MAD (Make a Difference) days where volunteers turn out to do what they can to look after the environment, or the hugely successful Two Lochs Visitor Management Project which employed seasonal Visitor Services Wardens and installed and serviced portaloos and 20 litter bins along the A82 corridor between Arden and Arrochar, a stretch of trunk road previously notorious for being one of the dirtiest in the country.

Cont'd. overleaf



Photos:

Top left: Weirfest event with Rhona Weir at the Tom Weir Statue, Tom Weir's Rest Picnic Site, Balmaha 31 March 2016

Top middle: Handing over a cheque to Bobby Lennox and Sir Malcolm Colquhoun for sports equipment, Luss Highland Games 1 July 2017.

Top right: With John Urquhart after inspecting refurbishment work prior to the re-dedication of the John Lauder Monument at Invernaodan near Glen Branter 3 December 2018

Left: Friends Study Tour, Loch Katrine 29 June 2017





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James Fraser (right) with a Friends' stalwart

And as you will read elsewhere in this magazine, under the Young Friends banner, Jennifer Plunkett, our Project Support Officer and only employee, has been doing tremendous work providing opportunities for 190 youngsters to experience the National Park through an exciting range of outdoor adventure pursuits.

The new ideas James introduced went right to the core of what the Friends has always been about - protecting and promoting the National Park. He became the new guiding light for the Friends and I am sure his influence over the charity will continue for a long time to come.



November 2012 trustees meeting at Ross Priory. This would have been shortly after James took office.



INTRODUCING THE NEW FOLLAT CHAIRMAN



John Urquhart was born in 1948. He was educated at Jordanhill College School before going to Glasgow University, where he studied Geology and Geography. He spent the major part of his working life teaching Geography, retiring from a position of Principal Teacher of Guidance at Helensburgh's Hermitage Academy in 2004. As well as his career in secondary education, John has a lifelong background in tourism, most recently partnering his wife Anne in their Balmillig Guest House operation in Helensburgh where they live. Since retiring from teaching, John has also operated a private walking guide service, "Loch Lomond Guides".

John is an outdoor pursuits enthusiast, enjoying hillwalking, kayaking and sailing. He has the Scottish Mountain Leadership summer qualification and in his early career worked for a time in outdoor education. A keen yachtsman, he has the Royal Yachting association's Coastal Skipper qualification and in summer is often to be found exploring the Scottish Hebrides in "Kiva", a yacht he and Anne share with another couple.

John joined the board of the Friends 12 years ago and has served as Vice Chair for most of the period since. His responsibilities have included writing the content for the interpretation panels for the Tom Weir's Rest picnic site at Balmaha, leading on the charity's Make a Difference volunteer days and overseeing the installation and servicing of the Friends' 20 litter bins which are a key ingredient in the charity's 2 Lochs Visitor Management project along the A82 between Arden and Arrochar. He also writes "A Walk in the Park", a regular feature in Voice Magazine.

John is also Convener of Helensburgh and District Access Trust which promotes and maintains the Three Lochs Way, one of Scotland's Great Trails.



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A82/83

SHOCKING LACK OF AMBITION AND OPPORTUNITIES MISSED

Following a 12-hour deluge of rain on 7 October, the A83 was once again closed following no less than seven debris flows affecting the Rest And Be Thankful to Loch Fyne stretch of the road. And it wasn't just the Rest and Be Thankful that was affected. Debris flows affected other roads over a much wider area.

Clearly Transport Scotland is going to have to completely rethink its approach to protecting this and other vital transport arteries at risk from debris flows.

Meanwhile we continue to press Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government on their questionable plans.



Transport Scotland says its proposed avalanche shelter will protect the A83 from debris flows – we are not so sure.



A82/83

SHOCKING LACK OF AMBITION AND OPPORTUNITIES MISSED

HERE IS WHAT WE SAID ON 10 AUGUST:

"In a written submission to Transport for Scotland, the conservation charity the Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs, listed 26 reasons why Transport for Scotland's preferred solution to the Rest and Be Thankful debris flow problem is wrong.

"Having completely failed to grasp the importance of the cultural and scenic value of this iconic location, Transport for Scotland (TfS) is well behind the curve on this one. "The Rest" is one of Scotland's finest and most travelled mountain passes and solving the A83 debris flow problem there should have been grasped as a golden opportunity to create a world class "Gateway" experience for travellers journeying through the magnificent mountain scenery of the Arrochar Alps.

Instead, TfS has gone for the comfort blanket approach of sticking to the existing road alignment which is to be protected by an ugly shelter comprising a concrete wall and roof, from which excavators will clear avalanche debris collected in pits dug behind the wall.

"As with the similarly troubled A82 upgrade, it seems the engineers have just been left to get on with it. Without proper oversight, it is hardly surprising they have come up with an unimaginative scheme which delivers the worst of all outcomes. Not only will the concrete tunnel be unsightly and noisy, in the long run it is likely to fail. Any geomorphologist would point out that "Managed Retreat" is the most sustainable way forward when faced with powerful geomorphic forces on the scale we see on the steep slopes above this road where thousands of tonnes of unconsolidated glacial debris lie poised ready for lubrication by the next extreme rainfall event."

"It is difficult to comprehend how such a short sighted and damaging scheme could ever have

been selected and we wonder if the process was perhaps driven by politicians looking for a populist headline rather than a balanced consideration of all the evidence."

And on the A82:

"The lack of ambition and imagination of the public bodies involved is truly shocking and it is beyond understanding how such a disastrous solution on the A82 could ever have been deemed optimal when the 1980s example of the Pass of Killiecrankie was there, plain for all to see. In those days it seems we had politicians and public servants who had a better grasp of what makes sense. They put the new A9 high above the existing road and the railway line, thus freeing the old road for use by local traffic and for cyclists and walkers to safely enjoy the scenic splendour of the River Garry, its historic gorge and ancient woodland - all free from traffic noise. Why can't we do the same with the A82 and save those precious eight miles of loch shore?"

"Both the A82 and A83 schemes are being promoted as being the cheapest and quickest, but we have seen that kind of claim before in relation to ferries. The reality is that neither of them make much sense"



The straight section of the old military road is to be doubled in width to form a construction "relief road", but traffic lights will be required at the hairpins.



ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE CONCRETE SHELTER AND CATCH PIT OPTION

1. It would be unsightly and spoil a famous, historic and iconic location of outstanding scenic value
2. Internal sound reverberation will make the journey over the Rest and Be Thankful an unpleasantly noisy experience for travellers
3. The traveller's view from the road of Glen Croe and its surrounding mountains will be spoiled
4. Clearing the catch pits of debris will be costly and will interfere with the free flow of traffic
5. Disposal of debris gathered from the catch pits will be expensive and damaging to the environment
6. The shelter and catch pits and their access track will be expensive and time consuming to construct
7. The shelter will limit use of the road for transporting unusually wide or high loads associated with wind turbines for example
8. Construction is likely to be held up by the threat of or actual debris flow events during periods of extreme rainfall whose frequency and impact is expected to increase in the coming years
9. The shelter itself will be very vulnerable in the case of potentially very large debris flow events triggered by the increasingly expected occurrence of more and more extreme rainfall events driven by the warming of the atmosphere
10. Widening the old military road (OMR) so that it can act as a relief road will cause delay and extra expense
11. As the hairpins on the OMR will not be widened, there will still be traffic delays during the construction period
12. An opportunity to return the southern slopes of Beinn Luibhean to nature will be lost
13. The catch pits will interrupt the normal downstream movement of debris fundamental to the maintenance of stream channel geometry equilibrium downstream. Watercourses starved of their normal debris load can be subject to channel margin scour which long term will lead to problems further downstream
14. Foundation conditions on the steep hillside required to support the shelter wall and roof may be challenging, especially given the area's known instability
15. The design seems to take little account of cyclists or walkers.



Faced with similar engineering challenges, New Zealand engineers opted for a viaduct which allows debris to move harmlessly downslope to be carried away naturally by the Oira River

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF THE VIADUCT OR VIADUCT AND SHORT UNNEL OPTION

1. As with the case of the somewhat analogous Pass of Killiecrankie, where an entirely new road was constructed, travellers will have exceptional views of the glen and its surrounding mountains. Travelled in either direction, it will provide a memorable, even iconic, "Gateway Experience", commensurate with the scenic and historic qualities of an iconic location which is one of Scotland's finest and most travelled mountain passes
2. Tried and tested engineering techniques will be used
3. Disturbance to the environment and scenery will be minimal
4. A well designed and gracefully proportioned viaduct will enhance the landscape
5. Disruption to traffic during construction minimised
6. Construction can begin almost immediately
7. No need for a relief road during construction
8. Reduced traffic noise at The Rest and Be Thankful car park
9. With the short tunnel option, space will be available for enlargement of the Rest and Be Thankful car park and viewpoint with opportunity to provide a high quality "Gateway experience" for the visitor, including provision of motor home bays, toilets and interpretation.
10. The southern slopes of Beinn Luibhean could properly be returned to nature
11. There would no longer be any need for hugely expensive, risky and quite likely ultimately futile management or mitigation of the normal downslope movement of debris which we all know is being accelerated by increasingly frequent extreme rainfall events driven by global warming
12. Debris flow and gullying processes would be free to move material downslope where it would be deposited harmlessly in natural alluvial fans which would enhance both scenic and biological diversity
13. Apart from the short tunnel, most of the engineering will be on the relatively flat floor of the glen where foundation conditions would presumably be more conducive than those on the steep and unstable slopes above
14. A largely unaltered OMR would remain available to be re-purposed as a cycling and walking route.



Eight unspoilt miles of Bonnie Banks at risk



Action on climate change is essential

Securing the future of our National Park

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



The recent flood events that affected communities across the National Park were a stark reminder that climate change is already having an impact on people's lives and livelihoods.

More than ever before, it is clear that collective action is required to reshape the Park as a climate-resilient place where people and nature thrive together.

There are already excellent examples of community groups, schools, individuals and businesses playing their part to tackle climate change and nature loss here in the National Park.



Green revetment work at River Goil



Children created small areas of woodland in their school grounds

A tree planting project recently supported pupils from 11 schools within the National Park to work with Park Rangers and create small areas of woodland in their school grounds. Collectively, the mini woodlands will improve habitat connectivity by building wildlife corridors, as well as soaking up carbon from the atmosphere.

In Strathfillan to the north of the National Park, a specialist plant nursery has been created to support an extensive woodland expansion project in the area. Thousands of locally collected seeds are being reared and will – including Oak, Rowan and Caledonian Pine – which will grow into trees - including Oak, Rowan and Caledonian Pine – are being reared and will eventually be planted out across the Strathfillan landscape, expanding native woodlands and creating wildlife corridors.

Meanwhile in Lochgoilhead, the local community has undertaken projects to improve wildlife habitats along the River Goil and this work has already increased the number of wild salmon redds (salmon and sea trout nests).

Despite suffering substantial damage to other community projects during the recent floods, the river revetments



The Ranger team on Loch Lomond now have an electric boat

remained intact, demonstrating clearly the benefits of working with, rather than against nature.

The National Park Authority itself has committed to becoming a Net Zero organisation by 2030 and a range of measures is being employed to reduce our emissions, including solar panels at visitor facilities, air source heat pumps and transforming the vehicle fleet used by Park Rangers away from fossil fuels.

The scale and urgency of the climate and nature crises are the main drivers for the next five-year plan for the National Park, the National Park Partnership Plan.

The views of people who live in, work in and visit the Park are being incorporated into that long-term plan, which aims to secure a positive, sustainable future for the area.

The scale and urgency of the climate and nature crises are the main drivers for the next five-year plan for the National Park, the National Park Partnership Plan.

During a consultation between April and July this year, local residents, businesses and community groups shared their views on the National Park's future, particularly on how to tackle significant challenges for nature, climate and people. This included key issues such as nature restoration, land use change, travel and transport, jobs, skills and housing.

We were open about the challenges facing the National Park, particularly in terms of the twin global crises for nature and climate, and the need for bold action here and now. It has been encouraging to see that the vast majority of people agree on these priorities and the joined-up effort needed to address them.

All the feedback received will be used to inform the final National Park Partnership Plan which will be presented to the National Park Authority Board in December for approval, before being submitted to Scottish Ministers.

We look forward to sharing that final plan with communities and visitors in Spring 2024 – and to coming together to restore nature, tackle climate change and ensure greener economic growth for the National Park.



Scan code to sign-up for updates on the National Park Partnership Plan.

Draft National Park Partnership Plans can be found at Balmaha Visitor Centre and Duncan Mills Memorial Slipway in Balloch.

More information about the upcoming National Park Partnership Plan visit: lochlomond-trossachs.org/future



National Parks Minister Lorna Slater at the Drymen Green Cycling Hub

COMMUNITY ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

The Drymen Green Cycling Hub is a project developed by the Drymen Community Development Trust (DCDT), with support from the National Park Authority.

The village of Drymen experiences a high volume of visitors, most of whom travel by car. Given their location on a popular cycling route, the local community identified that providing better facilities might encourage more active travel visitors.

They presented the National Park Authority with a proposal for a Green Cycling Hub offering free e-Bike charging, e-Bike loaning and bicycle maintenance facilities. They also highlighted that repairing the bus shelter would encourage use of public transport. Solar roof panels were installed on the bus shelter to provide electricity to the Green Cycling Hub, now that's circularity!

Ewan MacKay of the DCTC explained: "We should all be encouraging improved ways to enjoy the National Park without using cars. It is a lot of hard work, however, we need to put the effort in to ensure our children's future."



Solar panels on roof - Oak Tree Inn



Biomass woodchips

TOURISM BUSINESS AIMS FOR NET ZERO

Tourism businesses within the National Park are increasingly aware of the special landscape in which they operate and the need to balance commercial challenges with the priorities of restoring nature and tackling the climate emergency.

The Oak Tree Inn is a local tourism business based in Balmaha that has set a target of reaching Net Zero by 2040.

The Fraser family, who run the business, have produced a Net Zero Strategy and have already made strides in their mission, embracing

new technologies and taking any challenges head on.

In the last few years they have invested heavily in installing a biomass shed and fitting solar panels.

The biomass supplies heating to all areas of the business in Balmaha and over 200 solar panels produce power for the kitchen, bar, restaurant and refrigeration units. Even on duller days (not infrequent in Scotland!) they can still make more than enough electricity to keep things ticking over.

OUT & ABOUT

YOUNG FRIENDS ENJOY THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Thanks to a grant obtained from West Dunbartonshire Council's Year of Young People Legacy Fund, the Friends has worked with local youth groups to encourage young people to experience outdoor activities whilst also learning about how to care for and appreciate the natural environment.

Over the last 15 months, the Friends co-ordinated outdoor events for 175 young people between the ages of 8 and 17 from youth groups in the West Dunbartonshire area, namely Tulloch, Y-Sort-It and Ben View. A combination of residential stays, day trips and half-day trips were arranged with Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre, West End Adventure, In Your Element, Blairvadach Outdoor Education Centre and the Bird of Prey Centre. Activities undertaken included learning bushcraft skills, weaselling, canoeing, paddleboarding, climbing, archery and hill-walking, whilst practical action such as litter-picking was also incorporated into some of the events! Feedback from participants and youth leaders has been extremely positive, with the young people enjoying all activities whilst also learning about the natural environment and acquiring new skills. The most recent (and final) event took place on 19th November at the Bird of Prey Centre at Loch Lomond where 19 young people from Ben View in Dumbarton will learn about the different species of birds and watch one of the superb flying shows. Jennifer Plunkett, Project Support Officer with the Friends, said: "It has been so worthwhile and rewarding to work with local youth groups, knowing that so many young people have benefitted from getting out and about in the National Park to learn about nature whilst trying out new activities and having fun at the same time. This has only been possible with the funding received from West Dunbartonshire Council. I would like to thank everyone involved in making these trips and activities a reality."



Volunteers Make a Difference on Loch Lomond Islands

Sunny and very hot weather greeted a Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs volunteer squad at Luss jetty on Wednesday 14 June. "We had a great team who ensured that we had a very successful Make a Difference Day, litter-picking on the islands of Inchmoan, Inchconnachan and Inchtavannach which are the most heavily used for camping and picnicking", said Friends Chair, John Urquhart who helped organise the event. Thirteen enthusiastic volunteers came from the Glasgow office of the multi-national engineering design and consultancy firm AECOM who were very keen to make a difference. John also commented: "My take-away message from the event was that there was less litter than there had been 10 years ago, the last time the Friends did a similar exercise there. Much of the litter I personally picked up was well over a year old. It's not that there has been any less camping and picnicking, I suspect people may just be becoming more responsible and that is doubtless a testimony to the hard work over the years by the National Park on education and clearing up. The National Park ranger staff, who helped provide the transport and took away the 20 or so bags of rubbish at the end of the day, were excellent. We would also like to extend a big thank you to Loch Lomond Leisure who were kind enough to assist with transporting volunteers to and from the islands." Some members of the public on the islands made a point of speaking to the volunteers, offering compliments and encouragement. At the start of the day, one proactive couple helped to pick up litter near to Luss jetty when they spied the Friends' Project Support Officer arriving with the litter-picking gear and bin bags!

THE STORY OF LOCH KATRINE'S STEAMSHIPS



Morag in the wheelhouse of Steamship Sir Walter Scott

A relative of the first two captains of Steamship Sir Walter Scott, Morag Jeffrey (nee MacKinnon), recently opened a new exhibition at Loch Katrine celebrating 180 years of Steamships at the popular Trossachs destination, funded with grants from Stirling Council and National Lottery Heritage Fund. Sir Walter Scott's 1810 poem *The Lady of the Lake*, set at Loch Katrine, put the Trossachs on the map. The landscapes described so vividly in his poem and the dramatic paintings of Victorian artists such as John Knox inspired early tourists to visit Loch Katrine to see them for themselves, which is why it is rightly considered the birthplace of Scottish tourism. Rowing boats and galleys took visitors onto the loch until they were replaced by the arrival in 1843 of *Gipsy*, Loch Katrine's first steamship, which was quickly sunk by oarsmen who saw the first steamship as a threat to their jobs. Two Rob Roy steamers followed in succession, with Steamship Sir Walter Scott taking over in 1900. The iconic 123-year-old steamship resumed sailing this summer following a £750,000 restoration replacing cracked boilers, decking, and other significant repairs funded by a successful public appeal, grants, Steamship Trust reserves and a bank loan. For the exhibition, Morag provided

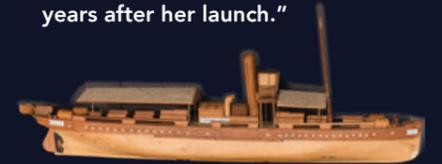
family documents about the roles of both Captain John MacKinnon, skipper of Steamship Sir Walter Scott from its launch in 1900 until he died in 1939, and his son Donald (Morag's great uncle), who succeeded him following his death. As Morag explains, Steamship Sir Walter Scott is a massive part of her family story: "Like many of the day, Captain John was fascinated by the 1810 poem *The Lady of the Lake*, set at Loch Katrine. He would read extracts of the poem to passengers and regale them with legends of the loch, such as clan chief turned outlaw Rob Roy MacGregor, who was born nearby. It must have been difficult for son Donald to become captain after his father's sudden death; however, I am pleased that the MacKinnon involvement continued despite the tragedy.



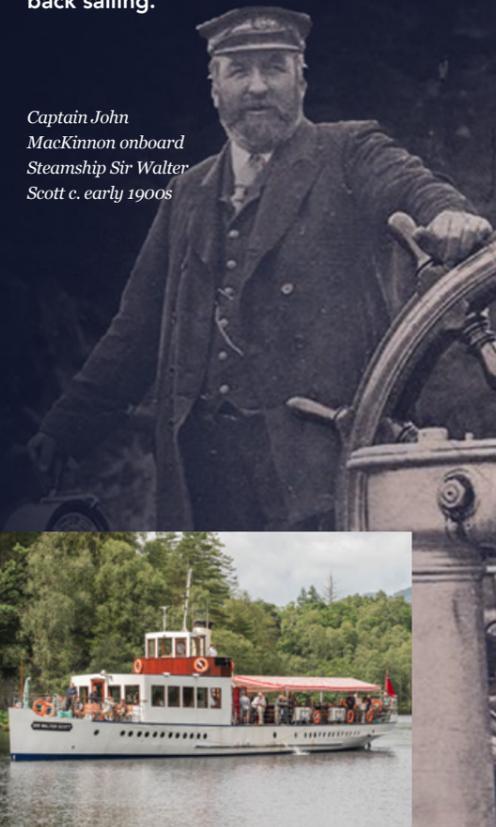
Morag Jeffrey with Gordon Allan, MD of Steamship Sir Walter Scott at the official opening of the exhibition.

"I am also fascinated by the roles of John and Donald's daughters, who assumed responsibility during the two World Wars. John's daughter Rachel steered the boat during the First World War, fell in love with a US serviceman who came for a sail and eventually eloped with him to Missouri in the United States. Donald's daughter Helen carefully hid the Steamship by one of the islands during World War II, camouflaging her to ensure

she wasn't a target for German bombers. "I am sure John and Donald would have been surprised but delighted to know she'd still be sailing 123 years after her launch."



The exhibition includes a wooden model of the Steamship Sir Walter Scott, with braille interpretation, providing a tactile element for visually impaired visitors. This element of the exhibition is part of a range of positive improvements to the inclusivity of the site, with many disabled guests delighted that the wheelchair-friendly Steamship is back sailing.



Captain John MacKinnon onboard Steamship Sir Walter Scott c. early 1900s





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A WALK IN THE PARK

RENEWABLES AND AN ANCIENT FRONTIER AT THE HEAD OF BRANCH LOCH

*Here our new chairman continues his series
describing some of the best short walks in and
around the National Park.*



*With an undemanding 70 metres of ascent, this lovely 5km circular
walk should take you around 2 hours to complete*



Crossing the Donich Water

The name Goil comes from the Gaelic gobhal, which means branch or fork, likely a reference to the way Loch Goil branches off from Loch Long in such dramatic fashion just south of Carrick Castle.

Lochgoilhead is reached by the B839 which branches off the A83 at the Rest and Be Thankful. You begin the walk at the free public car park in the centre of the village just opposite the characterful post office. Identify the rough and overgrown track just to the left of the shop and follow it uphill between the shop and the Scouts' popular Outdoor Centre. You soon emerge onto more open ground where you pass through a gate and join the dirt road which climbs steadily along the edge of a forestry plantation. After 500metres the gradient begins to level off, you have the trees on both sides now and the distant sound of rushing water announces the presence of the

Donich Water at the bottom of its gorge on your left (it seems Donich might mean of the lord; or it might just mean brown). After 300 metres, just after the trail crosses the Donich Water, take the left branch which climbs up beside the Eas Garbh (which translates as rough cascade). Sadly the wonderful waterfall is much reduced now as most of the water is piped down to the community hydro power facility at Inveronich (Donich Mouth). This is part of the price we have to pay for the move to renewable energy supplies, and it is only right the local community gets substantial income from it. You can still see the rough cascade in all its glory, but you'll have to visit during or immediately after heavy rain.

Lying 600metres or so above Eas Garbh, where it was dumped by the receding ice on the slopes of Ben Donich around 13,000 years ago, a



Inveronich hydro electric turbine house. The blue and white pole marks the position of the pipeline.

huge boulder of Schist, Clach a' Bhreatunnaich, marks a 500AD frontier between the native, Welsh-speaking, British to the east and colonising Gaelic-speaking Scots who were spreading out at that time from their heartlands along the west coast of Argyll. The name means stone of the British. Having crossed the Eas Garbh, the narrow path climbs up to a forestry road where a left turn starts you on the 1.5km descent to Inveronich. (It is possible to reach Clach a' Bhreatunnaich from this road, but it involves a climb through the brash of recently felled conifer – not to be recommended!). The final few hundred metres of the descent to Inveronich is quite steep and eroded and I found my walking poles really useful there.

Turn right just after the hydro-electric turbine house and follow the road north 300metres to where you turn left onto the B839. Having crossed the River Goil, be sure to go through the gate on the left to take the delightful riverside path back to Lochgoilhead. The path and its interesting interpretation panels were paid for by earnings from the community hydro project. Look out for the otters!

PATH IMPROVEMENTS AT THE CONIC

With over 100,000 walkers every year, the access path up Balmaha's Conic Hill had steadily been getting worse and worse, but last year the National Park managed to secure funding for a major upgrade. As this summary of their progress report shows, the £900,000 project is well on schedule.

Due to projected cost increases going above the National Park Authority's procurement thresholds, the path improvement contract had to re-tendered. The successful bidder was Hamiltons Environmental Ltd who have worked on upland path contracts on Ben Vane, Ben Nevis, Dreish and Mayar in the Cairngorms and in the Mourne Mountains, Northern Ireland. The 2022-23 phase of work was completed in early June 2023. A total of 443 metres of stone pitching has now been built since work on the ground started in the first week of November 2022. This, along with a further 99m of aggregate path improvement, all associated drainage, revetment wall building and landscaping, took seven months to construct.

The current plan for the winter and autumn of 2024-25 is for a further 308 metres of pitching and 117 metres of new 2m wide timber steps to be constructed. However we are also looking at the option of continuing working throughout the spring and summer of 2024 and to complete the work on other remaining path sections in one continuous push. Discussions on this re-scheduling are ongoing so please look out for further updates for confirmation. There will be further short-term closures in 2024 for at least one more set of helicopter flights and for initial work on the summit path and these dates will be confirmed nearer the time.

CONIC HILL is located on the eastern side of Loch Lomond, beside the small village of Balmaha and must be included in your Loch Lomond road trip. The hill itself lies on the Highland boundary fault line that separates the highlands from the lowlands. Conic Hill is a small, yet steep hill however, you don't need to reach the top to get the best views. Around a third of the 361m climb and you will start to see expansive views over Loch Lomond and the surrounding islands. Ben Lomond, which is Scotland's most southerly munro, is also visible from Conic Hill.

MAINTENANCE PLAN

We will undertake four maintenance runs a year (roughly February, May, August and late October/early November) to clear out all drains and ditches and keep the path free of surface debris. This will also help us identify any defects that may require contractors coming back to fix e.g. pitching breaking up or aggregate being washed out, or areas where we might need to do some more work to stop things getting worse in the future, such as short cuts appearing that might need blocking, further ditch digging to prevent running water getting on the path etc. We plan to carry out the first maintenance run in late October 2023 to clear ditches of summer vegetation growth before winter rains kick in.



Eroded Conic Hill path



Walking off piste to avoid eroded path



Here Strathard hill farmer, musician, tourism and corporate events operator and Friends trustee, Fergus Wood, writes with a heartfelt plea for a more sympathetic and joined up approach to planning along the scenic B828 corridor, which contains the lesser known, but still very busy visitor honeypot site of Kinlochard, where visitor facilities are poor or non-existent, despite its perennial popularity, with large numbers wanting to access the beautiful Loch Ard itself or to climb Ben Venue.

Unfortunately due to advancing years, Fergus has just let us know that he has had to step down as a trustee. Thank you Fergus for your service to The Friends!



Beautiful Loch Ard, Ben Lomond in the background

THREAT TO THE SURVIVAL OF RURAL COMMUNITIES

Following a multi-agency study of Strathard in 2015, the National Park found:

"A strong desire to have a more co-ordinated partnership approach to land use and development decisions."

The future viability of small rural communities in the Park depends on housing and jobs for young people. We live in a Park with a declining and ageing population with few property opportunities for young people and an unsympathetic planning department who appear obsessed with SEPA/Stirling Council dictates on flooding and land usage.

At a recent meeting between planners and Stirling Council's flooding experts, apparently they agreed that there would be no further planning support for building applications on the entire length of the B829 from Aberfoyle to Inversnaid until the resolution of the flooding issue at Aberfoyle to make the road accessible to emergency vehicles. I have lived on the

B829 for over 40 years and while we have flooding from time to time, I have never known of a problem regarding emergency vehicles. In any event helicopters can and have been used to expedite emergency evacuation.

(The major deluge of the 7th of October last did indeed lead to Aberfoyle's main street being flooded, but not sufficient to prevent the passage of emergency vehicles. Ed)

This effectively hobbles for ever more the provision of homes or any serious visitor facilities or indeed any economic development at all at Kinlochard, Stronachlachar and Inversnaid. You cannot write off three fragile communities at a stroke!



Kinlochard Community's efforts to manage visitors

RESPONDING TO THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Here Friends' Chairman John Urquhart writes about how the Friends needs to adjust its stance on renewable energy projects in and around the park.

We have entered an era dominated by the interlinked crises in climate, energy and nature. Because it is leaving a clear set of signals in rocks currently being deposited on sea and lake beds all over the planet, Geologists have dubbed it the Anthropocene. Due to the increasing awareness of the existential challenges the crises represent, the UN has just called for "radical changes in the way the world works" and says existing efforts have to be "massively scaled up."

As part of its effort to cut our carbon output, the Scottish government has shifted its planning presumption stance on large scale wind farms, which it now favours.



Scottish and Southern Electricity is proposing to partially convert their Sloy Hydro electric scheme to pumped storage. How ironic that now the Friends will be enthusiastically supporting their project.

If we are serious about our conservation aims, the Friends is going to have to look too at its response to global warming. I have no doubt we have an important role to play in addressing the issues which are being created at our local level, so "thinking globally and acting locally", last month our trustees agreed the following:

1. Tackling the interconnected crises affecting energy, climate and nature define the current period and influence every facet of the national park. The Friends agreed policy priorities are to Provide for the Protection, and Promotion of the Park's special qualities. In that respect there is now an ever strengthening argument that there is nothing more important than reducing damaging atmospheric emissions.
2. We all have an individual responsibility to help in the process of tackling climate change. In the past the Friends have supported small scale community based renewable projects, such as the hydro-electric projects at Callander, Lochgoilhead and Arrochar. Now we need to reconsider our position in relation to larger schemes.
3. Due to its upland glaciated topography, high rainfall and proximity to Scotland's major centres of population, the National Park area possesses a unique combination of advantages for renewable energy production, storage and distribution. These activities are already major land users within and around the park without causing significant environmental damage.
4. As it is the cheapest and most rapidly delivered technology, the rapid roll out of land-based wind power and energy storage systems are essential measures in decarbonising the atmosphere and improving the country's energy security situation.
5. Decarbonising the atmosphere is essential to the resolution of the climate and nature crises which threaten the special qualities of the National Park, the protection of which lies at the heart of FOLLAT's raison d'être.
6. FOLLAT believes that renewable energy regeneration, transmission and storage schemes, such as pump storage schemes and battery installations, sited in appropriate locations on the edge of (and perhaps in certain special circumstances, in carefully selected areas, even within) the National Park need not be unduly detrimental to the park's special qualities..
7. Bodies benefitting financially from energy production, distribution and storage and other related installations which may impinge one way or another on the National Park have a special duty to contribute towards the preservation of the Park's special qualities and any "Community Benefit" funds which may accrue to FOLLAT from agreements with such bodies should be used to support FOLLAT's work helping to provide for the preservation, promotion and appreciation of the Park's special qualities.
8. FOLLAT believes a share of income from such developments can create substantial benefits and opportunities for visitors, communities and nature. One example of this might be support for the rapid introduction of a modern low carbon park wide public transport system.
9. FOLLAT should be adopting a leadership role in recognising the critical importance of renewable energy and storage systems and should therefore be actively encouraging and facilitating their development on appropriate sites within and around the Park.

Without doubt this is a radical departure for the Friends, but the trustees believe the current circumstances give them little option. Nonetheless, for some, it remains a controversial matter, so we have asked our members to make sure we have their backing. To date, only 5% have voiced dissent. Thank you to the members who responded to our chairman's recent letter. We would welcome any further comments either by post or email at info@lochlomondtrossachs.org.uk.

The Friends was set up almost half a century ago to fight plans for a pumped storage hydro-electric installation which was to be built inside Ben Lomond, much the same as was done at Ben Cruachan further west on Loch Awe. That campaign was successful and the Ben Lomond scheme was never built. Nowadays our energy planners would give their eye teeth to have such a facility and, had it been built, the road access to Strathard and Rowardennan would probably now be so much better!

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