

NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2021

Visit by Hilary Paget and family. We were delighted to welcome Hilary and her family to the wood to show off the wood and the good work (thinning trees and helping to clad the cabin) carried out by her late husband Steve along with volunteers from Birchwood some years ago. Steve tragically died following a boating accident in the Cromarty Firth in 2017.



Steve (left with cap)

Visit by HRH The Princess Royal

Evanton Community Wood enjoyed a Royal Visit on Tuesday June 8th when Princess Royal met volunteers and regular users of the wood. Her Royal Highness arrived in splendid sunshine and was welcomed by the Lord-Lieutenant of Ross and Cromarty Mrs. Joanie Whiteford.



The Princess Royal was introduced to Douglas Wilson, chair of Evanton Wood, who explained how the wood had been brought into community ownership in 2012 and had been a real asset during the Covid19 pandemic. Her Royal Highness saw the 1st Ross-Shire Rangers practising their outdoor cooking skills for their Duke of Edinburgh's award. The Rangers spoke about how they have used the wood during this time to meet weekly.

The Princess Royal then met Adrian Clark, secretary of the wood, and they walked to the Mag's Wood shelter, meeting the volunteer group on the way. Adrian was able to update The Princess on the history and management of the wood. At the shelter HRH was introduced to the volunteers who built it and the engineering team who help maintain the paths. This included Don Fraser, lead engineer on the build project; David Smith, project manager; Alan Johnstone, engineer and Patricia Snow, committee member.

From there, Penny Gray, treasurer, accompanied The Princess to the pond area where she saw the Primary 7 class pond dipping. They had spent the previous week in the woods as part of their outdoor education. Elsewhere in the wood the class were also to be seen shelter building and making art from natural objects. Celina Peoples and Deirdre James, committee members, were also present to tell HRH about the work they do to support the wood.

Everyone enjoyed speaking to The Princess Royal and found her to be very interested in their work. Douglas Wilson said, "It was a great opportunity to show the fantastic work that has been done by the dedicated volunteers over many years. We are very lucky to have such a beautiful resource so close to the village, which has really helped so many people during the pandemic."



Summer Concerts The support of The Northern Meeting has allowed us to put on 5 concerts this summer, 4 at the Mag's Wood octagonal shelter and one at the cabin. The first concert by The Simpsons (Melanie, Quin and Orin) with support from Alpha Munro was the first such event since lockdown easing and attracted over 100 people.

This was the long-awaited opportunity for a bit of ceilidh dancing.

We are very grateful to Evanton Coop for their support on this and other days. The second concert by Siannie Moodie and Sam Gillespie

followed on from a music session for the Friday Dementia group and was also well attended for a weekday lunch-time event. Fèis Rois came up with a stand-in for the cancelled Ceilidh Trail for the third concert. Matthias Hamilton and Freya Thomson stepped in at short notice for another lovely concert and were supported by Alpha Munro and Sean Clark. The final 2 concerts are by the Eagleshams and the Blackrock Ceilidh, 2 further groups from the locality.

We hope to run further such concerts next year.



The New Composting Toilet

This was always planned as part of the Mag's Wood shelter project, in order to encourage people, young and old, to feel comfortable exploring further into the wood. The funding campaign paid off, kick-started by the Coop Community Fund, with further grants from Kiltarn Community Council windfarm grants (Novar and Beinn Tharsuinn) and from Cromarty Firth Port Authority and Howdens.

It had been decided to use the same make and model (Natsol Full Access) as has been in successful use over the past 6 years at the cabin. Planning permission had been approved along with the shelter; a building warrant needed to be applied for. Eventually in early July the installation team (Alan Johnstone, Betty Fraser, Logan Matheson, Adrian Clark – supervised by Don Fraser), came together with Finian Munro from Foulis, who brought the telehandler to do the business. Within the week the project was completed and has already seen use by several visiting groups and at 2 concerts.





The grand opening took place at the 3rd concert in the wood and was performed by Betty Fraser for the engineering team and Lynda Ross for the Evanton Coop.

This toilet (unlike the one at the cabin which is open 24/7 and is regularly cleaned by Dee James) will be opened up for events and activities. Keys are to be provided to the school and some local groups. Others may book access as appropriate. <https://www.evantonwood.com/index.asp?pageid=662441>

Dementia Friday Group



Remarkably we managed to keep the Friday sessions for People living with Dementia going over the lockdown last autumn by transferring them online. It meant a learning and supporting experience for some but three households were able to participate. Lizzie MacDougall hosted the sessions which were led by musicians Sam Gillespie and Siannie Moodie. They all had such fun that they continued the sessions continued informally after the contracted period.

Then in January Lizzie managed to run 3 sessions relating to Rabbie Burns and she

hosted an online Burns tea party on 25th January, along with the aforementioned musicians and invited members of the board.

There was then an extended break until the end of May when Karrie and Chris from Creativity in Care ran a Poetry in Motion session for the dementia group and their own volunteer team. In mid-June we were able to relaunch the regular Friday sessions and started with a 4-week series run by Karrie and Chris with painting trees as the focus. Participants (we were now joined by some new faces) painted initially in the style of some great artists and ended with their own abstract pieces.



We then managed to get hold of the musicians Siannie and Sam (up from the central belt) to run a music workshop using some well-kent traditional songs (*see concerts above*).

This provided inspiration for the following 3 sessions with Lizzie as the participants made their own pictures (imprinting leaves and other plants) on the theme of the songs sung previously.



The programme has continued with a trip to the pond for pond dipping, a trip to the new shelter for an exploration and the creation of a joint Few Words about Evanton Wood:

"I sat on a log, a red squirrel came, I followed it and found badger paw prints". Next came upcycling plastic bottles to make bird feeders and planters. Now we are pleased to report that, thanks to Life Changes Trust, this lovely programme will run, with input from various talented creatives, to the end of the year. Thereafter we plan to continue weekly sessions on a slightly less structured basis. (This is where donations from supporters is so important!).



In addition to the specialists the sessions are supported voluntarily by Penny, Adrian and Blandine, with additional cooking by Barbara.

Other Groups:

Home Start

We ran 4 half-day sessions for family groups from Home Start over the summer. Activities included improvised storytelling, sculpture making, pond dipping, a scavenger hunt and Vikings!

<https://www.facebook.com/509083182562931/posts/2067653730039194/>



Milton Primary School Holiday Scheme visited on 3 days for activity programmes that we ran with the help of Kerry Dolan and Gregor Comrie. Up to 24 children enjoyed a wide range of activities including shelter making, hide and seek, pond dipping, beastie hunting, clay modelling, story-telling, mallet making, fire lighting, marshmallow roasting - and more.

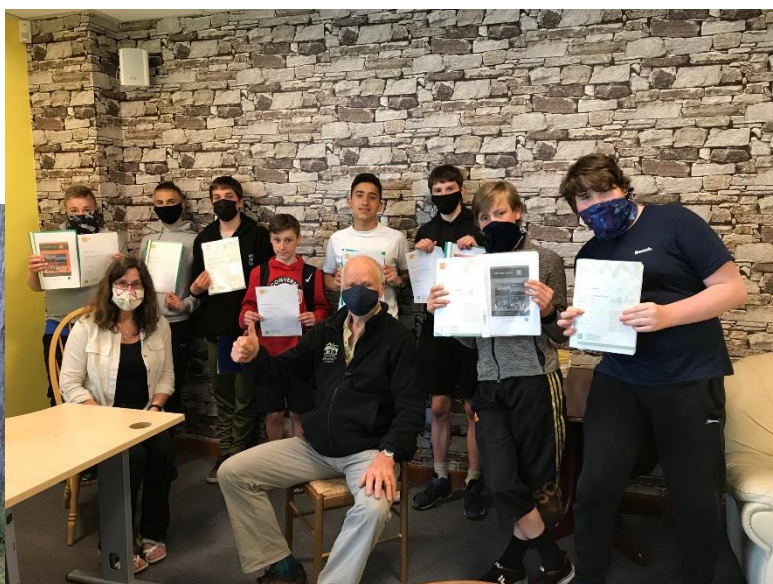
Highlife Highland also ran their own programme of 8 sessions for families from the Alness area over the recent summer.

Other regular groups have restarted including the **Ross-shire Rangers** who use the cabin area on a Monday evening. **Evanton Toddlers** make use of the Play Area most Friday mornings. There have been some campers (fortunately all responsible) and loads of family and other groups enjoying the woods over the summer.

We are open for bookings of the cabin area and the Mag's Wood shelter.

<https://www.evantonwood.com/index.asp?pageid=662441>

The **Schools programme** was rather curtailed last year but ran with **Dingwall Academy** weekly in the autumn term and from the end of April. Sessions resume in September, again focusing on the John Muir bronze award.



Kiltearn Primary school and nursery have also made excellent use of the woods under their own steam since August 2021. P7 spent 4 days in the wood as part of their special expedition and were led by instructors from Alltnacriche Outdoor centre.



Marybank Primary school came for a day of activities. Gregor's **Highland Bike Academy** has made good use of the wood.

There have been numerous family groups making good use of the wood, especially the play and pond areas, over the summer and right through lockdown. Many positive comments have been received from visitors, many of whom are en route to the Blackrock gorge. We are currently looking into the best way of encouraging small donations from visitors to the wood.

Other visiting groups have included the Nairn Walking group and a delegation from Transition Black Isle. Deirdre Mitchell of the Scottish Invasive Species Initiative has visited to advise regarding treatment of the small area of Japanese knotweed by the cabin.

New Signs

We are thankful to Andrew Easton and Dave Sanderson for some new finely carved signs.



New Pathways

The engineering team, led by Don Fraser and ably supported by Alan Johnstone, Betty Fraser and Nick Young have created a fully accessible path to the Mag's Wood shelter. And Alan, Don and Betty have done a power of work in creating a new path with steps down to the old pipe bridge. Thanks to Pat Munro for providing gravel and to Unn and Russell Morrison for use of their mini tractor.





Volunteer Sessions

Regular weekly sessions continued through the first Covid lockdowns, with a Wednesday session being added to the Friday one – always with small numbers and social distancing in place. The main work has been thinning and brashing two areas, either side of the first turning to the pond.



These areas were quite dark and uninviting and are now pleasant places in which to walk, explore and sit. (One even has a forest bathing bench – although the mossy mounds are equally comfortable!). The team has also been involved in path maintenance and clearing and looking after the play area. Our thanks to Alan James, Bryan MacLennan, Logan Matheson – and to board members Douglas Wilson and Adrian Clark.

Friends & Members

The Friends of Evanton Community Wood scheme was established 2 years ago and has 7 regular subscribers. The amount raised over the past year has covered, as an example, the bulk of our accountancy costs or the annual fire insurance for the wood. These regular donations are most welcome. To subscribe online go to <https://www.evantonwood.com/index.asp?pageid=701520> or phone 01463 830286.

We currently have 50 life members and would welcome new members (annual or life).

<https://www.evantonwood.com/index.asp?pageid=205304>

We appreciate that many people help look after the wood by picking up litter, and that most dog owners are responsible in the removal of their dog waste. Most people making fires and having gatherings do tidy up after them, taking their own litter home. We are grateful for this - it helps to keep the wood a lovely place to visit for all.

We are very grateful for the many acts of kindness – to mention just a few: Billy MacDonald has made a great pizza paddle for the pizza oven made for the wood by Kennie McCusker. This has been used to good effect for the dementia sessions.



Chris Macalister and Jamie Urquhart lent cement mixers for the installation of the composting toilet. A big thank you to all our supporters and to our funders!

We are always keen to involve people in the running and maintenance of the wood. This includes the regular Volunteer sessions, the Eco (or Biodiversity) group, Forest Management Group, Events Group – and indeed the board itself. To discuss any of these please phone Adrian on 01349 830517 or Douglas on 01349 830444.

