

Kilfinan Forest Community News

Edition 2 – Winter 2020-2021



Volunteer Cowal South West was set up:

- To link local people with volunteer opportunities.
- Support local organisations and charities, such as the community forests and the school.
- To enhance community resilience and well being during a crisis or emergencies such as the recent pandemic.



Frontline volunteer in locally-made PPE.

I would like to thank all the volunteers for:

- Coordinating the delivery of prescriptions to help prevent the cross infection of COVID 19.
- Packing and delivering food parcels to over 30 local families, to reduce; waste, food and fuel poverty.
- Sewing and labelling Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), to keep volunteers the recipients safe.

- Sewing masks and maintaining public hand sanitisers.
- Distributing PPE to volunteers.
- Production of and contribution to this newsletter with the aim of encouraging community cohesion during and after the pandemic.
- Support for the school with provision of midge jackets and building of a shelter and compost toilet to facilitate safer learning outdoors.
- Helping with the Rhododendron management and tree replanting.

And much more.....

We have some wishes;

- To buy a computer and lock up to keep all the volunteer and other personal data safe.
- To have secure dry storage for all our tools and equipment, and a toilet facility with hand washing facilities at Kilfinan Community Forest.
- To source 2 electric bicycles and an electric van for volunteer transport to reduce wear and tear on personal vehicles and to reduce our fossil fuel consumption.

If you would like to get involved or comment please write to:

Nicola Greenall
Kilfinan Community Forest
Tighnabruaich
PA21 2BD



or email info@kilfinancommunityforest.com

Coming together for a brighter community

For next issue send in

- Articles about Spring
- Contributions for our new letters page
- Local job opportunities/your resume
- Local volunteer opportunities

NEXT ISSUE: MARCH 2021

Please send any articles or advertisements for future publication to info@kilfinancommunityforest.com
Cost for adverts; full page £45, Half page £30, Quarter page £15, Eighth page £8.

Clan MacEwen

By Sandra McCuin (Volunteer for Volunteer Cowal South West)

During this time, having my husband working from home also when he is usually travelling the world for work, we have been able to get the Clan MacEwen Heritage room and shop ready at our house at Jocks Lodge, Kilfinan. Kilfinan is our ancestral homeland and the MacEwen castle ruins are a lovely walk past the beach and through some ancient woodland. We have been welcoming MacEwens here from all over the world since we moved here almost 2 years ago, and this is where we run the Clan MacEwen Society from also. MacEwens have been drawn to Kilfinan from around the world for decades and the Kilfinan Hotel and local community have been most welcoming to our Clan.

We are in the final process of getting our Clan Chief after 500 years and when that happens, everyone is invited to a pretty big party! We have been thrilled to bring the International Clan Gathering back to Kilfinan as an annual event during the first week of June. Last year's gathering had to unfortunately be cancelled but we are looking forward if we are able to gather and have a week long celebration from June 2nd-7th 2021 in Kilfinan with workshops, plays, ceilidhs, walks, etc.

In 2019 we had a record breaking 100 + MacEwens in Kilfinan, and this year we are looking to surpass that number (provided we are able to gather!). Last year should have seen the first Ancient Cowal Clan Gathering with Clans Lamont and MacLachlan, so we hope to make this an annual event all being well.

We are "The Clan who Plants Trees", working with the woodland trust towards planting a MacEwen woodland in the area as well as encouraging as many people



as possible to plant native trees wherever they live around the world.

Bringing back the native Cowal Gaelic dialect is another project we are working on with Adhamh O Broin, who grew up in the Tighnabruaich area and is more recently known for being an advisor for the Outlander series. He has with the help of some native local speakers (many of whom have sadly passed on), and his lovely family, resurrected our dying gaelic dialect. We have an introductory series of 12 classes on our clan website and

Adhamh is working on the next series now. He will also be at our gatherings in person and will be providing classes on Cowal Gaelic and traditional music.

We are usually out and about at Highland Games and Events worldwide, whilst we have been putting most of this online these past few months, we look forward to getting out and about again meeting people. We are currently on History Scotland's Virtual Gathering.





If you or anyone you know is interested in anything Clan MacEwen related, please visit our website at www.clanmacewen.com or visit our social media pages. Even if you would just like to chat over a cup of Eve's (Argyll coffee roasters) MacEwen's roast coffee, or want a guided walk to the cairn and castle ruins, or just shop some MacEwen merchandise, stop by Jocks Lodge, Kilfinan or call 01700 821138. We always shop locally as much as possible and encourage others to support our local community, our merchandise is sourced as locally as possible (our furthest supplier is Glasgow!).

Thanks,

Sandra McCuin

Clan MacEwen Society Secretary

www.clanmacewen.com

PS – Regarding my volunteer role with Volunteer Cowal South West, I do want to note that as a recent newbie of the area (almost 2 years), it has been lovely to have got to know my neighbours on a much deeper level through this pandemic and foster some unexpected friendships!





Happy New Year!!!

In the run up to Christmas we usually rehearse a performance for the Christmas school play. As we were unable to invite the community into the school due to COVID we made use of this time to make gifts for the community lunch club members and a Thank You display for the community who have been so supportive.

RAG BAG Funds

As you may know the school collects wearable clothes, bags and shoes to raise much needed funds for the school. This money is used for school outings, the music shed or outdoor wetplay gear for all the kids. Last term we received a cheque for £348 for the school fund from the last Ragbag collection. Thank you to all who brought up items to the school. The next uplift will be in February 2021 if anyone is having a New Year clearout! Bags are available at the school entrance.

We would like to thank the Kyles of Bute Shinty Club for the use of their minibus for going swimming and to outdoor locations. Last year we accumulated 1152 miles in the 2019-20 session. We give a donation to the club for this valuable resource which is much cheaper than hiring a commercial minibus.

School Roll

Last term we welcomed another two new pupils, both going into P3/4 this brings the total school numbers to 46 and the nursery will soon have 15 children aged between 2 and 4 years old.

Blended Learning

The teaching staff had little time to prepare for 'blended learning' in the re-opening of the school last August. This is where Education Scotland and Argyll & Bute Council advised maximising use of the outdoors where the risk of transmission of the virus is much smaller. Volunteer Cowal South West leapt into action:

- Shelters have been put up in three different areas in Kilfinan Community Forest and seating areas created.
- Two compost toilets have been installed for use by those in areas a bit further from the school.
- Covered areas have been created outside two entrances, making it easier for removing wet wellies and waterproofs before entering the school building.
- Midge jackets were collected from Inveraray and delivered just time for the return of the midges and were so much more effective than the midge nets.
- A team of volunteers set to creating a pattern and sewing midge jackets small enough for the nursery children.





Midge Jackets for School Children made by a volunteer

Thank you from the Head Teacher Mrs Hamilton

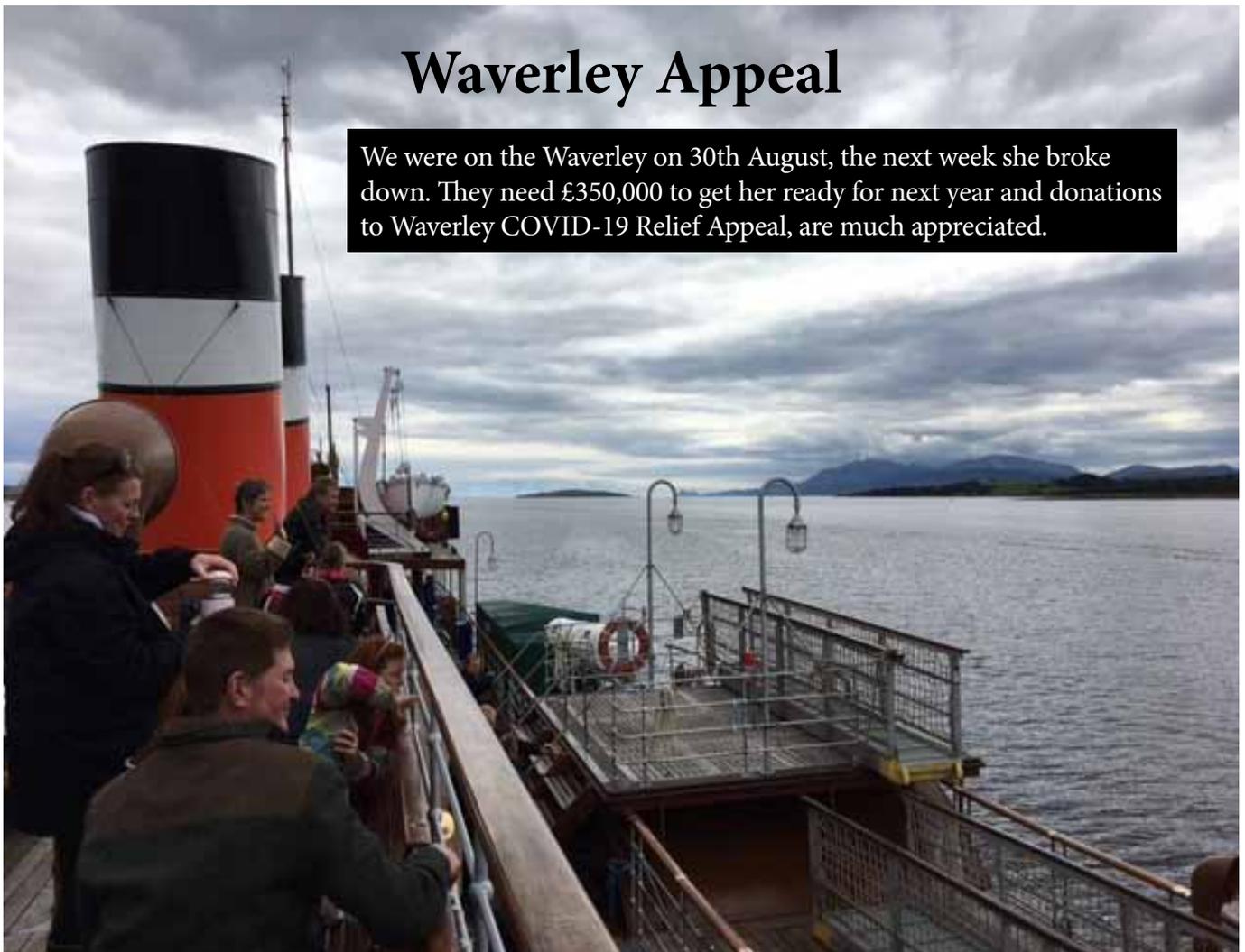


As only staff and essential contractors are allowed in school we were unable to access the support of volunteers working directly with the children or with groups outside. We look forward to being able to make use of this support once restrictions ease.

Tighnabruaich Primary School says a huge THANK YOU to all the volunteers who have made such a difference to the practicalities of being in and out in our lovely Argyll weather. It is a comfort to know there are so many in our community willing to offer their help.

The midge jackets were beautifully made and we are very grateful. The volunteer Kate gave all her time to make the pattern then sew the jackets. We'll be well protected from the wee beasties come the spring.

Huge thanks again, Katie



Waverley Appeal

We were on the Waverley on 30th August, the next week she broke down. They need £350,000 to get her ready for next year and donations to Waverley COVID-19 Relief Appeal, are much appreciated.

Forest Access Upgrade at Kilfinan Community Forest

Article by Willie McAllan and David Blair

Since the lower path network was created there has been a steady increase in the number of people walking the lower forest. The new proposed track offers something for everyone who uses the community forest and will lead to even more people visiting our wonderful resource.



The existing Kilfinan Way recreational path network within the community forest will be upgraded by extending the network East of the Allt Mor burn. This will create a range of circular walks of approximately 5km and 3km via the reservoir dam and a spur that gets up on to the open hill offering spectacular views over the Kyles to Arran. The proposal includes ground prepared viewpoints with picnic tables and would open new areas for active forest management.

The new track will develop the existing route along the Kilfinan Way to Tighnabruaich reservoir into a circular walk. Going clockwise the path will be through the soundscape and movement of the forest, then the open vista of the reservoir followed by the return along the new track facing south onto the spectacular views of the West Kyle, Inchmarnock and Arran. This will be a stunning walk of about 5K and well within the abilities of most people and families.

The new track will allow people, unable to ascend Barr Liath, to access the rugged terrain of the lower slopes. We will be able to develop new routes from the track into some of the presently difficult to access gullies perhaps leading to the discovery of more Shieling sites.

The new track will extend the range and routes for mountain bikers. Presently the forest tracks tend to be 'one way' for mountain bikers - downhill from the Powder Dams. The new track will provide a circular

route from the lower forest that I am certain will be particularly attractive to families and younger cyclists.

There will also be the opportunity to make a new circular route, which takes in the Barr Liath summit by joining the lower sections of the present Shieling and Reservoir routes. This would be attractive to the fitter walker. The forest environment will benefit from better access infrastructure for replanting native and commercial tree species and access for deer management will be improved on the open hill areas and is essential in maintaining a healthy deer population.

The new access will benefit families, visitors to the area, cyclists, and local walking groups. By improving and creating additional recreational opportunities contributes to the overall wellbeing and physical fitness of our local and wider community. Recreational users enjoy circular walks and having picnic benches allows for opportunities to enjoy the views across the Kyles of Bute to Arran.

This is an exciting and timely development, which will enhance recreational opportunities within the community forest for visitors and the local community.

Funding has been secured with Kilfinan Community Forest Company supporting 50% and Tighnabruaich District Development Trust match funding the remaining 50% and Donald McVicar has started the work.

Proposed New Forest Access Route

Existing Path

Proposed New Path



Deer management in Kilfinan Community Forest

Deer numbers are at a high level in West Cowal and present a big challenge due to difficult terrain and access. Fragmented land ownership adds to the challenge with no common approach to managing deer numbers.

Wild deer are part of our natural heritage, but they need to be managed as they have no natural predators. For the health of the deer and to prevent disease their numbers need to be controlled in a humane and sustainable manner. This balances their population as well as protecting new plantations, native woodlands and other natural habitats. If deer numbers are not managed this can prevent natural regeneration of trees and influence our fragile ecosystems.

Willie McGhee, forestry consultant says; 'Currently, using any tree species other than Sitka Spruce risks failure due to deer browsing, in fact Sitka observed on the slopes of Sron Plocach and Barr Liath, resemble Japanese topiary specimens due to the pressure of deer browse. It is uncommon to see such intensity of deer browse, and it indicates very high deer numbers'. We recognise that effective deer management on a small area is difficult to achieve but working together with neighbouring landowners will be more likely to succeed. The community forest may be able to help this to happen.

Wild venison is a healthy, wild and organic free ranging food and could be a valuable economic resource for the

local community. A sustainable deer management plan is about managing deer to achieve the best combination of benefits for the environment, the community, and the economy for us all, and our future generations. If we wish to increase the diversity of native and plantation tree species, for number, biodiversity and amenity then the recent large clear fells provide a good opportunity to do this.

If you would like to learn more about deer management in the Community Forest the stalker, John Short, has covered a guided walk and talk about what is involved. (See contact below.)

We are looking at ways of making more of the deer culled in the Community forest available locally for home processing, if you would be interested in attending a course to learn the art of butchery or of being part of a local network for the distribution of dressed deer 'in the skin' then please contact info@kilfinancommunityforest.com for further information from this article.

Article by John Short and David Blair.

Glenan Wood

Rhyddian Knight (*Forest Ranger on behalf of Friends of Glenan Wood*)

'Better Out than In'

Rhyddian Knight at Glenan Wood reckons there's never been a better time to renew your commitment to spending time inside the Book of Nature.

Should auld acquaintance be forgot?

'Feeling Lonely? Caffeine headache? Stuffy with central heating? Carpet static crawling at your feet? Too much screen time with pressures of external communications? Household members competing for attention with important but divergent needs? Sugared on shortbread? Short on time? Shorter on temper? It's that wonderful time of the year.

'Get Outside! Get Out the box! Open & Listen! Take a Break!'

Speaking for myself, it's sometimes easy to forget to plan in time for unstructured time amidst the responsibilities and stresses in daily life. Adding our 'C-19' pandemic to this: the monitoring of news feeds, daily cases by ward; shielding or caring for relatives ... it's fair to say this winter has brought with it an added component to the usual cabin fever. Extrapolating from my experience along with my extended families' and neighbours'; there is a collective form of grief that's hard to find a time or place for. There is trauma in trying to maintain lifes chores amidst what they're the calling 'new-normal' just now.

It's not surprising, but most of us are left depleted, far removed from the other conveyors of meaning-making, our hearts and hands. We become atrophied, caricatures of ourselves, stuck operating off our heads. There's never been a better time to renew your commitment to spending time inside the Book of Nature.

And never brought to mind?

It's well documented that unstructured solo time in nature is not just a form of recreation, but an essential component for human development.

James Kaplan, after a nine year study of wilderness programs, conceived the idea of the 'restorative environment'; he outlines that in unstructured, spontaneous experience in the outdoors lies the optimal way to train coordination and concentration. He went on to prove that: "Directed attention fatigue," (is) marked by impulsive behaviour, agitation, irritation, and inability to concentrate... If you can find an environment where attention is automatic, you allow directed attention to rest. And that means an environment that's strong on fascination".



In his summary of Kaplan's research, Richard Louv goes as far as to say that: "the fascination factor is restorative, and it helps relieve people from direction-attention fatigue. "For those of us fortunate to employ static or mobile time outdoors as a core routine; you don't need an expert to school you in the benefits to restoring mental health, replenishing emotional resilience and reinvigorating our animate spirits."

For auld lang syne

For many, Glenan is a wholesome place. I recognise this as, when I'm truly on my own there, away from humans & headphones; slowly, my mental focus shifts away from media driven hubris and more to humus. In natural time, an awareness comes that I am not 'on my own' at all. In reality, when I come to my senses, sure enough there is life all around me ... natural mysteries begging for my attention.

Give your mind a moment unplugged in the woods, & Chronos gives way to Kairos. We create a space for the magic of timeless-time to seep in; we might call it Nature's grace, or Reality. A timeless panacea for this

ridiculous so called 'Post-Truth' era that the news keeps barking on about.

Nature is a salve for the senses. Our sensory input is the gateway to our mental focus. Our mental focus is what creates our habits. A culture that recognises the role of our common land in changing behaviour for the better is on to a good thing. When I take an inventory of things to be grateful for the Right to Roam in a local community owned rainforest is definitely one of them.

We'll tak a cup o' kindness yet

There are two core routines I wanted to broadly outline here, there is ample space for at Glenan to accommodate them for all of us. You may have different names, but I'm going to call them by the names my mentor gave them: 'The Sit-Spot' & 'Wandering' Sit Spot – A sit spot is a special go to spot; known only to yourself; where you can slow down and pay attention. This is a place you can get to know better than anyone else. A sit spot can be visited at different times of day and weather; so I tend to have mine pretty close so I can access it.

There's no 'to-do' list at a sit spot. It's a place to slow down and observe and see who shows up. A space to tend gossamer thin threads of connection to yourself, other species; anything that captures your attention between the subsoil & the stars! Given enough attention

and time, threads become thicker & thicker strings which finally become strong ropes of connection. Enough ropes to creation help keep us anchored and grounded when the going gets rough.

Wandering – A sure fire way to get out of ones head and into the body is a good wander! The main goal of wandering is to get out of your agenda driven ruts and tune into where your body wants to go in a way it wants to move. For those of us born into the star wars era, there are plenty of fun metaphors for tuning into our body's in built radar. It sometimes needs a little practice, at least for me, but sooner or later you'll find yourself off path and following your curiosity, your nose, your bliss; or whatever words you have for it. Finely tuned, wandering is the gateway to successful foraging/ gathering and you'll find your body has led you to whatever you've been looking for.

For the sake of auld lands syne

I recognise the woods is a place for many to reinvigorate soul, and is not just a playpark or a reserve for ecological regeneration; hopefully all these needs will be reflected in the work Friends of Glenan Woods is doing on your and the parish's behalf.

Wishing you continued renewal in these dark months, stories to bring home from the wild; & kith & kin to hear them.

Kilfinan Community Forest Company is seeking a Bookkeeper

Kilfinan Community Forest Company is a registered Scottish charity formed in 2007.

The forest stretches from Tighnabruaich across the Kilfinan peninsula to the Powder Dams on the Kilfinan road. We are responsible for managing the land with and for the community and the felling and replanting of the woodlands. We deliver a variety of additional benefits to the Kilfinan community including the development of recreational facilities, further employment opportunities and the provision of affordable housing and crofts.

The site currently includes a timber processing yard, firewood processing and hydroelectric scheme, all of which generate income for the forest. The path network allows easier access to the forest for walkers, bikes and horses.

Bookkeeper Job Responsibilities:

- Maintain records of financial transactions by establishing accounts; posting transactions; ensure legal requirements compliance.
- Maintain historical records by filing documents.
- Complete monthly payroll including PAYE.

- Maintain VAT records.
- Prepare financial reports by collecting, analysing, and summarizing account information and trends.
- Comply with legal requirements by studying requirements; enforcing adherence to requirements; filing reports; advising management on needed actions.
- Use Xero software to keep the accounts. (Similar to Sage and Quickbooks.)

Person Specification, desirable skills / qualities

- Experience of working with a volunteer board.
- Ability to deal with complexity.
- Good data entry skills.
- Good attention to detail.
- Able to deal with confidential information.

The post will be for 8 hours per week and working hours are flexible. 30 days pro rata (Equates to 12 days) paid holiday a year is included. Hourly rate is £10.33. Contact info@kilfinancommunityforest.com

Closing date for applications is the 12th of February 2021.

Cowal's Ghost Bird

My eyes strained to pick out the grey shapes of trees and potholes on the track. I had turned off my bike lights in the hope of seeing something wild. What I had not expected was the white owl coming to find me. It flew over me, hovered, watched me. My heart hammered: my first Cowal barn owl!

Barn owls, as their common name suggests, have long been associated with people. In the wild they will nest in hollow trees, even caves, but ever since people have settled, they have moved in. They have been welcomed as natural pest controllers, consuming the rats and mice that also enjoy living near the warmth and food created by people.

Unfortunately, barn owl numbers have declined across the UK. The main factor is loss of habitat in which they can find food. They need rough, tussocky, grassland full of voles. If grass is grazed or cut too short, there is nowhere for their prey to hide. This year, however, many in Cowal have been noticing large numbers of voles and mice. This is great news for barn owls, also kestrels and short-eared owls.

What isn't so great, is when rodenticides are used to kill mice and rats. Non-target species such as voles and wood mice eat the bait and die. If owls eat them, they can then die from secondary poisoning. Studies have shown that 95% of barn owls contain sub-lethal doses of rat poison. If further poison is ingested (up to three treated mice) the owl will die, while lower doses may reduce breeding success and survival.

Luckily, large numbers of people have stopped using rodenticide. Instead, they are choosing to create perfect habitat for barn owls to flourish. In addition to rough grassland, owl boxes can be attached inside or outside of buildings to attract barn owls (and tawny owls) to roost and nest. If you would like to make a home for your local owl check out www.barnowltrust.org.uk. You can also help by sending your barn owl sightings to Argyll Bird Club.

And if you hear an eerie screech in the night, it was the Cowal ghost – the barn owl!

Katharine Lowrie
Ecologist and Writer, Millhouse



Tighnabruaich Reservoir Walk

A favourite walk of mine is to Tighnabruaich Reservoir. It is only 4K there and back but the walk is packed with interest. The route is gently uphill on well surfaced paths and the round trip takes just over one hour.



Start from the KCFC offices at the poly tunnel and follow the 'Round House' path (photo). The Round House was constructed by one of the KCFC's groups set up to support people with mental health issues. In ancient times Kilfinan had many round houses as evidenced by the man made platforms in the otherwise hilly landscape. Later these flat areas were used by charcoal burners and it is not uncommon to find pieces of slag from iron smelting. Sadly most of these platforms have been eroded by forestry planting.

Follow the path alongside the Allt Mor gorge until you reach the Victorian Falls. These look natural but they are actually man made by the diversion of a burn as part of the waterworks. The falls are spectacular after heavy rain. A few meters after the falls you'll find an old metal gate. It still moves smoothly on its hinges despite being over 100 years old.



There's a pond to your left where you can observe the busy water life and perhaps be lucky and see a newt. Newts are real life dragons as the information board will tell you. On your right there's more evidence of the old water works as you pass 2 small reservoirs and sections of the old cast iron pipe which supplied the village with fresh water. Keep walking up the path passing the bridge leading to the settlement tanks and the route to Barr Liath and join the Kilfinan Way track.

Try to avoid getting your feet wet when crossing the burn on the stepping stones. You will now see a large rock on your left. This was named 'elephant rock' by one of the local young people – can you see why?



Follow the track up through the trees and eventually the reservoir comes into view. It is possible to get down to the dam wall by carefully picking your way through the debris of tree felling. We are planning to clear a route to the dam wall and on to the hillside in the Spring. You will see sections of an old wall from an earlier dam. This collapsed in the 1880s and sent a wall of water roaring down the Allt Mor. It must have been a terrifying sight but fortunately there were no casualties.

The event was covered by a newspaper in the North of England but strangely not by the Scottish press. The return journey is by the same route but with the added bonus of spectacular views towards Bute, Inchmarnock and Arran. Safety First – Tell someone where you are going and when you expect to return. The phone signal is intermittent. Obey any signs relating to tree felling operations. Surfaces on the bridges and boardwalks are slippery when wet so take care.

Volunteering – If you enjoy the outdoors for health and fitness consider volunteering with Kilfinan Community Forest. Volunteers build the bridges, plant trees, maintain paths and more. Contact info@kilnancommunityforest.com

Willie McAllan & Vrackie, KCFC Volunteers.

THINK TWICE

Don't touch me - please

Think you've found a baby deer, abandoned and all alone huddled in the grass?

Think again.

More likely than not the baby is lying low and has not been abandoned by its mother who will be nearby.

Do not be tempted to pick up the deer or touch it – your smell may stop its mother returning to feed her baby.

Keep your dog under control.

Every year deer are killed and maimed by dogs running out of control. If in doubt place your dog on a lead in areas where deer may be likely to be.

Don't rescue me! I'm a wild animal please leave me here



british
deer society www.bds.org.uk