



Annual Report 2019-20

This report covers 15 months since the AGM of 5 October 2019 – 6 months prior to Covid-19 restrictions, 9 months since.

The Cabin

After considerable time spent in negotiation with the authorities, and the involvement of an architect in revising the drawings, we finally received a building warrant completion certificate for the original cabin and composting toilet in early February 2020. No significant additional physical works were required but we had to pay a fee for retroactive submission. The board organised a mini celebration on 29 Feb. It meant that we were once again in a position to use the cabin and stove; to date, because of Covid, we have not actually used the cabin interior for any activities. The new wood sheds are now full with firewood logs.

The Octagonal Shelter

This had been completed in September 2019 and there were plans to host a series of musical events in summer 2020, cancelled because of Covid (we hope to be in a position to run such a series in summer 2021). There is now a much-improved footpath to the shelter from the turning circle thanks to the efforts and expertise of Don and Betty Fraser. The regular volunteers have also arranged log bench seating for around 60 people. The shelter has seen occasional use by groups and private users.

Access

The wet and muddy access via the Knockrash vennel is no longer a disincentive neither is the kissing gate. A smart new non-slip decking walkway covers the flood area (the work of Don Fraser and Alan Johnstone). The kissing gate has been removed and Andrew Easton has created an easy access gate in its place. Positive comments have been received from neighbours.

In addition to the improved path to the shelter (above), a new track has been created to allow easier small tractor access to the felled trees beyond the shelter.

A new road-sign was installed at the Chapel Road/Balconie Street junction by Highland Council (invoiced accordingly).

An improved track to the old pipe bridge is in progress (thanks again to Don and Betty, and to Russell Morrison for use of his mini tractor).

Damage

There was a short spell of vandalism at the cabin area in July, when the picnic benches were overturned and partially broken and the patio window of the cabin was smashed with a brick, amongst other minor nuisance. Police action came to nothing. Insurance claim covered most of the window replacement. Don Fraser, with Betty's support, created a secure wooden shutter to protect the window. We also mounted a CCTV and Wild Life Camera and motion-sensitive lights. There has been no further damage in this area. At the shelter there was some minor interference with the pole-lathe and burning of one of the shave-horses, so we transported pole lathe and the remaining other shave-horse back to the cabin area.

Covid-19

Lockdown in March 2020 put the schools programme on hold until September. The dementia programme has continued successfully online (see below). The regular volunteer programme has been able to continue as social distancing is entirely feasible. There was an initial drop in the use by families of the play area but this was fully reversed in the summer holidays. The toilet (with hand sanitiser available) has been left open for all to use.

Woodland Management

- Volunteers have continued with low impact thinning and brashing of about 6 areas, in the process opening up the areas for public use (newly signposted). Piling of wooden poles for future use.
- Cutting of overhanging branches: Douglas Fir at Drumore path; sycamore at Chapel entrance; transporting of logs to cabin for use as firewood.
- SSE have provided training in the wood on one occasion over this period, in the process felling 2 tall trees near the Chapel entrance, that were deemed to be a potential risk.
- Some of the (leaning) larch trees which were felled as part of the shelter project were recovered and collected by Henry Fosbrooke in part (residual) payment for his work on the shelter.
- 200 native broadleaf trees have been planted, by schools and volunteers (100 each winter – from TCV).
- Protective tubes were reinstated on some the healthy (7-8 year old) saplings at the main windblow area as there were signs of deer damage to the bark.
- A few people continue to take up the 3-month Scavenge Licence

Regular Users

- Walking Groups. The Evanton Walking groups continued to make good use of the wood until Covid. The Inverness and Black Isle group has visited.
- Dog Walkers
- Bikers
- Families
- Evanton pre-school mums
- Special needs user with 2 helpers

Other Visitors

- UHI School of Forestry. 2 visits.
- Dornoch Woodland Group. Zoom chat and visit
- Clarity Walks – group walk
- Wildcat Bushcraft – initial activity
- The Inverness Sling Group (mothers and babies)
- Ardross Book Club
- Overnight campers (incl. 3 Syrian families)
- Informal youth gatherings (booked)
- Ditto (un-booked and random)
- Ld. Lieutenant Joanne Whiteford and Deputy Lieutenant Moira McKenna

Events

- Christmas Family Event 2019. C60 attended. Fun Run, crafts, baking and pancakes.
- Celebration event Feb 2020.
- Dementia Group Ceilidh Aug 2020 (*see below*)

Dementia Programme

- The initial Life Changes Trust programme concluded in November 2019. The independent review, which appeared recently, states: *'The Evanton Wood used the wood to successfully engage people living with dementia, and their unpaid carers, with meaningful opportunities to be outdoors, connecting with nature. The project has contributed greatly to creating better lives for people living with dementia'*
- Funding through LCT's 'Creating Better Lives in the Highlands' for a further project was achieved in mid-2019. This project commenced in early March 2020 (winter sessions had not been possible because of the restriction on use of the cabin until the building warrant came through). Only 2 weeks later, with lockdown, the project was moved online, initially just for 2 pairs of people, and without participation by the Isobel Fraser Care Home, which had participated over the previous year. The 5-week art and craft project was successfully completed; the same provider continued for a further 5 weeks with a storytelling and traditional music project, using 2 freelance musicians. This culminated in a small-scale ceilidh event at the shelter in August. Film [here](#) on youtube. The programme recommenced in September with an animal art series of 6 sessions, followed by 5 further music sessions.

For the past 2 series the participant numbers were doubled, in one case through one-to-one instruction in Ipad use.

Education Programme

- Schools
 - Kiltearn Primary, particularly P7, have made very good use of the wood over the autumn term (health and well-being is a key element of the curriculum during Covid). The whole school have attended on 2 occasions.
 - Dingwall Academy have continued to come regularly (apart from easter and summer terms 2020) for a structured programme, led by AC, of short courses towards the John Muir Bronze award.
 - Alness Academy attended for a few sessions in Nov/Dec 2019; teacher illness and Covid has meant no further visits.
 - The Home Education Group comes to the wood on the last Friday of each month and make good use of the play area and the octagonal shelter.
 - Obsdale Primary School continued to come on an occasional basis pre-Covid.
 - St. Clements continued to come frequently prior to Covid

- Out of School Groups
 - DNA Dance (Alness Academy) [Wild Woods Project](#)
 - Guides & Rangers come nearly every Monday evening
 - Mountainbike Training run by Highland Bike Academy – regular programme, busy during the holidays.
 - Activity Agreement. KM takes one local lad for one-to-one weekly training through a contract with Highland Council.
 - October Holiday programme run by Highlife Highland for 3 different families from Alness area for 4 days. Deemed to be a success.

Volunteer Programme

- Friday sessions have continued every week and have been attended by a committed team of 5 people plus occasional others (= av. total around 4)
- Wednesday sessions were added during lockdown at the request of one individual and continued for a few months
- Saturday sessions continue monthly and now have relatively low attendance.
- Total of 75 Volunteer Sessions in 2020 alone (not including Don's mini team)
- Projects undertaken: improving the top path by Drumore farm (removal of overhanging branches); removal of overhanging branches of sycamore at wood entrance; thinning and brashing many areas, esp. removal of western hemlock and sitka spruce, some beech; clearing of leaves and mud from paths; tree planting; log and pole moving; green woodwork; other tasks as needed.

Films and Media

- Multi Trails. We were interviewed for 3 short films made by Community Woodland Association as part of a LEADER project with Swedish partners. These also feature the Highland Bike Academy using Evanton Wood. See YouTube:
 - [Film 1: Sustainable Visitor Management](#)
 - [Film 2: Trails for All](#)
 - [Film 3: Trails and the Rural Economy](#)
- The films were showcased at the end of project online conference in September 2020
- They were also shown at the CWA conference in October, which we attended online
- Our Facebook site has 1666 followers and normally high views per post:
Evanton Guides – 617; [Deirdre Eaglesham photos](#) – 955; Nature Art Gallery – 1688; DNA Dance -466; [Home Education post](#) - 681; Dementia Ceilidh in the Woods – 624; Families in the Wood – 1282; Tadpoles – 1273; Vandalism – 12,607!; Rainbow artwork - 1152
- Our Website www.evantonwood.com: 3551 sessions in 2020 (4351 in 2019)
- A series of stunning photographs by professional photographer Becky Duncan for CWA.
- The Ross-shire Journal carried a photographic report of the Christmas visit by Kiltearn P.S.

Finance and Funding

We are grateful to:

- Life Changes Trust for ongoing funding of the Dementia programme
- Kiltearn Community Council for funding of £1k towards the new walkway at Knockrash.
- The Northern Meeting for £1k towards a programme of music and storytelling (postponed to 2021).
- The Coop Community Fund which has raised the magnificent sum of £3,397 through the one per cent scheme. This is earmarked for the proposed new composting toilet at Mag's Wood, for which fund-raising is continuing.

Membership and Friends

- There are currently 47 life members
- A Friends of Evanton Wood scheme was launched in September 2019 and now has 6 members who contribute on a regular basis. This is a great support towards the wood's regular costs and towards match funding for future projects.

Practical Support

- Regular Friday (& occasional Wednesday and Saturday) volunteers: Logan Mathieson, Bryan MacLennan, Douglas Wilson, Alan James, Adrian Clark
- Occasional volunteers (since Oct 2019): Alistair Clunas, Sam Clark, Sean Clark, Rebecca Watts, Kelsea Herbst, Nigel Campbell, Beth Dixon, Trevor Black, Eleanor Wilson, Andrew Wilson, Rob ?, Ray Simpson, Quinn Simpson, Anya Myeshkova and Niamh, Sarah McRory, Chris Lee, David Jardine, Rosaline ?

- Small project team: Don & Betty Fraser, Alan Johnstone
- Trevor Black – architectural services
- Billy MacDonald, Hugh Lynch - electrics
- Russell Morrison – use of mini tractor
- Andrew Easton – gate construction and installation
- Setting up the Friends scheme: Penny Gray, Trish Snow, Andrew Easton
- Social media, Art in the Wood: Blandine Lynch
- Log cutting: Dave Smith
- Kennie McCusker – tool servicing etc.
- Christmas Event gang: Tom, Sarah, Kerry, Barbara, Trish, Penny, Dee, Esther, Andrew, Paul
- Dementia Programme specialists who have gone the extra mile: Lizzie MacDougall, Siannie Moodie, Sam Gillespie, Chris and Karrie Marshall
- All Board Members: Douglas Wilson (chair), Celina Peoples, Trish Snow, Penny Gray (Treasurer), Blandine Lynch (membership)

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Adrian Clark, Hon. Sec., 28.12.20/7.01.21