

Chairman's Welcome by John Oldham

Welcome to another issue of the Esk Valley Trust Newsletter.

During the winter months enjoying the delights of the paths along the Esk Valleys might need a bit more in the way of warm and waterproof clothing than is the case in the summer. With fewer leaves on the trees, though, there are different views to enjoy and some features appear that are not present at other times of the year.

The weather can affect our enjoyment of the rivers and their environments in other ways too. Landslips in the Roslin Glen and at Ironmills Park have limited access to paths and the weirs along the Esk, especially the Gunpowder and Polton weirs, have been challenged with the consequences of high rainfall. Both of these weirs are now completely passable to migratory fish and the collapse has helped increase in-stream habitat through the release of gravels.

During the winter we have been involved in some interesting discussions with the Mavisbank Trust (see 'Treasures of the Esk') and the Midlothian Tourism Forum. I think it is important for the Trust to have good liaison with other organisations where we may share aspirations. If you have views on these discussions (or indeed on other links that we should strengthen) do please let us know.

In the dark evenings I looked through some of the old papers of the trust (that I have now inherited from previous chairmen). One of the striking things is that the problems that we have with gaps in the path that we want to establish 'from source to sea' have been with us for some time. Progress with the Melville High Drive, transit through the Dalkeith Country Park, passage under or over the Waverley line near to Ironmills and an acceptable way between New Hall and Penicuik has not been great. On this last one, though, there is reason to be optimistic. Peter Raine, with the help of Sir Robert Clerk and Cathy Hooper (Penicuik Estate Ranger), has been exploring a possible new path that might solve the New Hall to Penicuik issue. It is too early to know what may be needed to make this a viable option but a gleam of an idea and very constructive support to explore is a good start.

You will see that we have been reactivating plans to manage the Hewan Wood. As owners of this woodland, which forms part of an important corridor of woodland along the valley of the North Esk river, it is important that we manage it sensitively for its long term future and for the enjoyment of people who visit it.

We continue to look for ways to expand membership of the Trust and to get more younger people involved with and enjoying the charms of the Esk valleys. If you can help with this in any way do please contact us (enquiries@eskvalleytrust.org).

ESK VALLEY TRUST AGM

The 2016 Annual General Meeting will be held in St David's hall, Dalkeith at 7pm on Tuesday 3rd May. Following the usually brief AGM business we have a very topical talk:



"What can we do about floods?"

By Alan Werritty,
Emeritus Professor of Geography at Dundee
University

Alan is also Director of Dundee's Centre of Research on Water. He is an expert on how rivers work and especially on floods and their effect on people.

As always we welcome friends, family and anyone else interested, to come along and listen to the talk, and hear about the work of the Esk Valley Trust.

Managing the Hewan Wood

After the talents and enthusiasm of our membership the Esk Valley Trust's main asset is the Hewan Wood, a 12.4 hectare (30 acres) area of woodland that lies to the south of Polton Road (Loanhead) and west of Polton village.

The woodland was bought in 2002, not long after the formation of the Trust. With great enthusiasm and commitment the Trust's volunteers established fencing, improved existing paths and created the new pathway and steps that give access to the Maiden Castle. You may well have been one of those volunteers.

All woodland needs management and in 2010 a comprehensive Woodland Management Plan was developed. This was part of a strategic woodland management plan that covered woodland along the valley of the North Esk from Roslin Glen to Mavisbank.

While volunteer working parties have worked regularly to keep the paths clear it was obvious, when we came to review the plan last year, that too few of the actions listed in the plan had, in fact, been completed. Many of these go beyond what volunteers alone can deliver. Money will need to be spent, especially where specialist skills are needed. So we will need to find the funds to do what is needed to sustain management of the woodland for long-term benefits.

One of the obvious sources of funds to help with management of the woodland is the WIAT (Woods In and Around Towns) scheme that operates under the Forestry Grant schemes within the Scottish Rural Development Programme. To qualify for grants under this scheme we need to have an up-to-date and approved management plan (the 2010 plan effectively lapsed in 2015) and we need to register the land with Scottish Government's Rural Payments and Services. Achieving registration has not been as straightforward as it sounds. Here we are dealing with the same new computer system that is struggling to deal with CAP payments to Scottish farmers. However we have just about completed that step and can now proceed to bring the management plan up to date.

Choosing which actions to include in the plan needs careful thought. WIAT funding will not cover the likely full costs of all of the work that we might want to be done. This means that we must be realistic about the range of actions that we put into the plan (in another five years' time we want to look back on a list of things done and not still pending). It also means that we should seek other support to cover all of the likely costs.

You are welcome to help on both of these points. If there are specific tasks that you think are important for the long-term development of the Hewan Wood or if you have ideas about sources of supplementary funds do please get in touch (enquiries@eskvalleytrust.org).

Our Spring Hewan Wood clear-up is on Saturday 28th May (details on back page). We will be clearing the paths in the wood and doing some other general tidying. Also please note Tuesday 6th September as an Autumn working day in the wood alongside the Midlothian Paths team.

Celebrating Springfield Mill

On February 9th Pete Cain (Convenor of the Springfield Mill Action Group (SPAG)) and Jo Cooke (Senior Ranger with Midlothian Council) gave the latest evening talk to the EVT in St David's Hall in Dalkeith.

Pete gave us an overview of the geological and industrial past of the site and the challenges that were presented in the 1990s when the post-industrial present (at the time) included plans for housing development. The paper mill that had been active on the site from 1742 until the late 1960's had left a legacy of buildings, ruins and waste that was inherited by Midlothian Council. It steadily became derelict and overgrown – but also a haven for wildlife.

Through the initiative of SPAG, support from Midlothian Council and funding from WREN and SNH the site was protected from development for housing and has been transformed into a delightful reserve that is accessible to people of all ages. Jo gave insights into the wildlife and ongoing development of the site, emphasising the extensive use of it by groups of young people and some views on its future evolution.

For more information see: http://www.midlothian.gov.uk/info/113/parks_and_other_open_spaces/275/springfield_mill.



Spring has sprung at Springfield Mill

Tourism in Midlothian

The Midlothian Tourism Forum Steering Group are planning a new Midlothian Tourism Strategy for 2016 – 2020. The Strategy will emphasise seven themed areas: Business Tourism, Food and drink, Cycling, Outdoor Activities and Nature, Heritage and Culture, Events and Young People.

The EVT was invited to one of the focus group discussions (on Outdoor Activities and Nature) in Dalkeith Arts Centre on 27 January 2016.

One of the big discussion points was Midlothian's identity. In a world of sound bites and limited attention span how might Midlothian identify itself attractively? Are we Edinburgh's countryside? What are the features of Midlothian that can be developed to attract visitors – always on the assumption that that is a good thing.

This exercise will culminate in the first Midlothian Tourism Forum Tourism Conference on the 26th May. There is still time to contribute, if you wish. Ideas for product development to attract more visitors to Midlothian are particularly welcome. The address to send your thoughts to is: Aileen.Scobie@midlothian.gov.uk.

Treasures of the Esk

The valleys of the Rivers Esk, both North and South, are full of treasures of many kinds as readers of this newsletter are fully aware. Some are man-made; others are natural. The prime purpose of the Esk Valley Trust is to stimulate public interest in and care for those treasures (which are presented as the beauty, history and character of the Esk valleys in our constitution).

We are not alone. Several other organisations around the valleys of the Esk share this enthusiasm, often concentrated on particular features or communities. One of those groups is the Mavisbank Trust. While best known for their interests in Mavisbank House and its policies (which can engender passionate and diverse views) the Trust has been taking a broader look at the built heritage of the Esk Valleys. What is it? Who owns it? How accessible is it? How well promoted is it for the benefit of local residents and for visitors? And perhaps especially importantly, how can the various groups with interests in the Esk Valleys work together to achieve their various aspirations for the Esk Valleys and their constituent parts?

In developing their thoughts about the built heritage of the Esk ('The Villas of the Esk' has been the working title for the concept) the Mavisbank Trust has been particularly keen to involve the Esk Valley Trust. So far we have had two meetings - an initial one

Damage to paths



Landslide in Roslin Glen The landslip has worsened and the path in that part of the glen is now closed for safety. At the moment the walking route between Roslin and Polton needs to use Manse Road (in Roslin) and the high level path to the Hewan Wood. Options to create an alternative path that can avoid the landslip are being explored.

The heavy rains in January resulted in further land slippage at the steps down to Ironmills Park in Dalkeith. The steps are closed and Midlothian Council are carrying out further survey work to come up with a lasting solution to the problem. Additional barriers prevent access as people were still trying to get past and use the steps. The land is very unstable and there is a real possibility a large portion of the bank could slip. This all serves to remind us, if that is needed, that our rivers and paths are dynamic entities.

in September 2015 at which we were introduced to the grand aspirations of the 'Villas of the Esk' concept and a second one, in December 2015 when we began to discuss practical actions. John Oldham and Peter Raine represented the EVT on both occasions.

At this stage it is too early to say exactly what will emerge from these discussions. Others involved so far have been Midlothian and East Lothian Councils and Historic Environment Scotland (previously known as Historic Scotland). The next step is likely to be work towards a listing of the important built features of the Esk Valleys, their ownership and accessibility. Perhaps this will expand into a better listing of the many other heritage features (cultural, social, industrial, physical etc) working on the basis that it is helpful to know what you have if you want to promote it!

As promoting understanding of what we have and improving access (especially through our paths) is right at the heart of the EVT's purpose our involvement in these discussions is important and, we hope, helpful to achieving our goals.

We will keep you up to date with progress through the website (<http://www.eskvalleytrust.org>) and through this newsletter. If you have a particular view on this development please let us know via enquiries@eskvalleytrust.org.

Walking Leaflet Lasswade to Dalkeith

Alison Chisolm of Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust has produced a fifth walking leaflet for us showing the walking route from Lasswade to Dalkeith on the North Esk Way. The leaflet is available on the website under the Explore The Esk – Lasswade/Eskbank pages, along with a wealth of information about the area. This route includes a detour which avoids Melville High Drive (see article below).

Dates for your Diary

Tues 3 May – EVT AGM, 7pm, St David's Hall Dalkeith

Sat 28 May – Hewan Wood Clear-up, 10.30am

Sat 11 Jun – EVT taking part in Whipman Festival

Wed 27 Jul – Bat Walk, Springfield Mill, 8pm

Tues 6 Sep – Midlothian Paths Team, Hewan Wood

See News & Events page of our website for full details

Funding the Trust

Some of the things that we do can be achieved by volunteer action. But other things need money. Some of that comes from membership subscriptions and the enormously helpful donations that we receive from time to time.

To sustain our activities at the current level, though, for the day-to-day running of the Trust and to have funds to 'fill the gap' that project grants can leave (see for example the plans for the Hewan Wood) we need to increase our income.

If you can help with ideas for funding support, sponsorship or increasing membership please get in touch (enquiries@eskvalleytrust.org).

Alternatively if you, or someone you know, wants to make a donation please do (again using enquiries@eskvalleytrust.org or the address below).

Melville High Drive (Right of Way LM 178) – John Pope updates us on a long running dispute

Sadly there is not much progress on this difficult problem. I met with a ScotWays lawyer recently; who was diffident about the prospect of legal action. Midlothian Access Forum visited several years ago and found that access rights applied along the route, but the owner of the middle third of the route disputes that it is a right of way, and has neglected the area, so that several large trees have fallen across the route. The Forum is considering another visit in the better weather to assess the present state of the trees.

I walk it a couple of times a year, snipping at any vegetation which may obscure the route, and would encourage members who want to preserve the right of way to do the same. It would be good to do so when the nettles are having a growth spurt, as they

tend to be troublesome from late May onwards.

It would be sensible to walk the route end to end, from Wadingburn Lodge to Melville Lodge on the B6392. There is always the prospect of a coffee at Dobbies, or even a cake...

The Council have been preoccupied with the Crichton- Borthwick right of way, which- fingers crossed- may be clear end to end shortly. The necessary gates at the railway bridge are all in place, and negotiations regarding a deer fence are nearing a conclusion. Updated information will be on ScotWays website. Once that matter reaches a satisfactory conclusion, the Council may be more inclined to look again at the High Drive.

Esk Valley Trust Executive Committee

Chairman

John Oldham Loanhead

Company Secretary & Treasurer

Rennie Frazer Fairmilehead

Directors

Roger Crofts Musselburgh

Pat Frankland Newbattle

Shelagh Jenkins Polton

Jan Jerome Lasswade

Peter Raine Carlops

Administrator

Victoria Bullock Roslin

Contact us at:

The Esk Valley Trust,
c/o Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust,
109/11 Swanston Road,
Edinburgh, EH10 7DS

Email enquiries@eskvalleytrust.org

Website www.eskvalleytrust.org

Facebook www.facebook.com/eskvalleytrust

Esk Valley Trust Registered Scottish Charity SCO31951

Printed by Graphic Impressions, Eskbank 0131 654 0521