



THIEVES in the trees?



heading from the car park to Red Moss. I stopped them and asked politely what they were intending to do.

They were planning to dig up a couple of sacks-full of sphagnum moss for their hanging baskets. I pointed out that what they were planning was illegal and it was compounded by the fact that the area was a Nature Reserve. They were genuinely surprised that they would have been breaking the Law. I'm sure many folk just don't think that what they've always done is illegal.

So I can sleep easy, secure in the knowledge that my bramble jelly, sloe gin and Christmas wreath are all outwith the long arm of the Law.

However, please collect responsibly and leave something for the birds, other wildlife and other people to enjoy. If you do see anything suspicious, report it to the police.

Susan Falconer
Senior Ranger

I'm a gatherer. I enjoy the search for juicy blaberries, ripe, red rowans and plump brambles when I'm out and about. I look in my favourite places for sloes, marking the spot from memory when their white blossom entered my consciousness in early spring. Most years I make a Christmas wreath threaded with holly and ivy, a great way to anticipate the forthcoming festivities, but, by doing these things and enjoying the countryside, am I, and the thousands of others like me, breaking the Law? I thought I'd check this out to make sure I was on the right side of the Law.

A person who picks flowers, fruit or foliage from a plant growing wild does not steal them unless they are doing so for sale or other commercial purposes. Picking for commercial

gain would be theft under Common Law in Scotland or an offence under the Theft Act 1968 in England and Wales. It is illegal to uproot any wild plant without the permission of the landowner or occupier as all plants receive protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Mosses, lichens and fungi are included in the category of wild plants.

Plants such as snowdrops and bluebells are often in danger from large-scale illegal collectors who remove the bulbs, and often destroy the surrounding area with vehicles and machinery.

As a Ranger I have encountered only one instance of attempted theft of plants. This was a number of years ago at Red Moss Nature Reserve near Balerno. I had spotted two people, armed with sacks and a garden fork,

Editorial

The Pentland Hills Regional Park's participation in the Leader + Rural Tourism Twinning Exchange (see article elsewhere in this Beacon), is not our first foray into Europe.

For many years the Regional Park has been a member of the Eurparc Federation,

which unites National Parks, Regional Parks, Nature Parks and Biosphere Reserves with 370 member organisations in 38 countries, under the common aim of protecting Europe's unique variety of wildlife, habitats and landscapes. So we are in some very illustrious company indeed!

The Federation provides a forum to share professional experience, collaborate on technical projects and encourage co-operation and the exchange of ideas and good practice between those who work across Europe's 400 protected areas. The Regional Park has been both a recipient of and contributor to this veritable lake of expertise.

During my tenure as Park Manager I have endeavoured to provide the Regional Park with an inclusive, outward-looking approach towards the achievement of our aims. We do not operate in a vacuum and the spark of innovation and creativity is better conceived in a co-operative, communicative environment. That often means providing opportunities for us all to interact with people from outwith our immediate environs - sometimes to challenge what we do, many times to affirm our approach. It was a delight to welcome our recent international visitors. With 400 Rangers from around the world due to arrive in Scotland next year, for the International Ranger Federation World Congress, we are excited and nervous at the prospect of having our peers scrutinise our work.

The Regional Park is not just an important feature of the landscape of this area, but contributes to a European, and indeed an International, family of professionals working to manage, enhance and care for our protected areas.

Carol Huston
Acting Regional Park Manager



From the Great Glen to Glencorse

Hi, my name is Jo Booth and I'm the latest addition to the Pentland Hills Ranger Service. I have spent the last three and a half years working for the Highland Council on the Great Glen Way long distance path as a Countryside Ranger, undertaking a variety of tasks from environmental education and interpretation to maintenance work. I am looking forward to the challenges and opportunities that will be provided by living close to a major city since living in the sticks has been an enjoyable, but an all-together different experience! My interests are mainly outdoor based from rock climbing to mountain biking and I enjoy yoga and reading. This photograph was taken in July 2005 whilst I was having an adventure in the Italian Dolomites.



Promoting RURAL TOURISM

In September, the Pentland Hills Regional Park was delighted to welcome some special overseas visitors. From Sweden, France and Somerset, the 40 strong delegation came to find out about local tourism initiatives as part of a Leader + trans-national exchange.

Leader + is a European funded community initiative aimed at promoting economic and community development within rural areas. Funds are distributed through the Scottish Executive to Leader + groups, of which the Tyne and Esk group, that straddles Midlothian and East Lothian, serves our area. The Leader + Groups, in turn, award grants to local projects. Such projects should seek to be innovative in nature and must demonstrate community support and involvement. The overall aim is to improve the quality of life in our rural areas and by so doing add value to local services and products. The Pentland Hills Regional Park has been represented on the Leader + Action Group, since its inception in 2001.

This visit formed part of a Rural Tourism Twinning project, where the Tyne and Esk Leader area has formed a partnership with 3 other Leader + areas from across Europe. Gapençais in France is located in the central part of the department of Hautes-Alpes, and is an area where the traditional agricultural and land based industries, like many here, have declined and the regions are seeking to diversify their economy. Nedre Dalalven area of Sweden is a wild and expansive wetland North of Stockholm. Much of the countryside there is protected, which is supported by the efforts of the landowners. The Somerset Moor and Levels is also a unique wetland requiring sensitive environmental management which recognises the need to reconcile use of land with the conservation of the natural resource. In each case the role that tourism plays in the local economy is increasingly important. The Rural Tourism Twinning project is looking at the ways and means that our respective areas can market their unique products.

The visit was assisted by the Midlothian Tourism Forum, of which the Regional Park is also a member. Their visit to us, focused on examples of farm-related tourism. Using Eastside Farm as an example, we were able to indicate the range of direct tourism businesses that operate in the Regional Park. Of course we took the opportunity to further promote our excellent Pentland Hills produce. The recreational opportunities that are available within the Regional Park were also explored.

With an evening of Scottish entertainment and a ceilidh, the delegates definitely went away with a very positive impression of our area and our hospitality. Further workshops are planned, as well as joint marketing of our areas and the possibility of having materials translated into French and Swedish.

This initiative is an excellent opportunity for the Regional Park to work in partnership with others and to support the local economy both within and outwith our boundary.

Carol Huston
Acting Regional Park Manager



A Flurry of Feathers

One evening in late July I ventured out to one of our Barn Owl haunts accompanied by two bird ringers. Our hopes were not very high, as we had been told there had not been much activity at this site this year. The aim was to catch and ring any Barn Owls and to discover whether a pair had bred successfully. This may sound straightforward but the roost was, quite sensibly, in a fairly inaccessible spot.

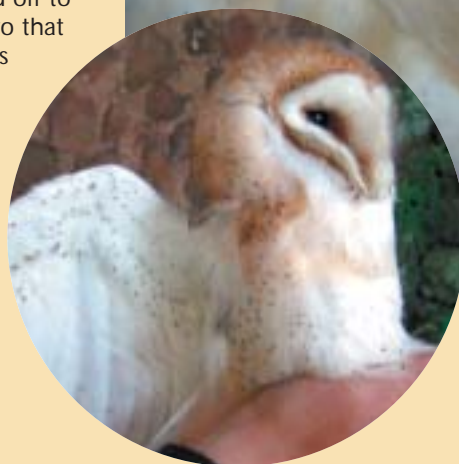
With the help of a ladder and a contraption constructed out of plastic tubing and a net mounted on some long poles, we held the net over the hole and waited. To our amazement not just one owl but three emerged! There was a brief moment when there was a flurry of feathers before two owls escaped round the side of the net and disappeared into the trees. We managed to keep one in the net though, which gave us an opportunity to weigh it, measure the wingspan and ring its leg so we will know if it returns next year. The owl was female and by blowing on its belly we were able to discern that it had a bald area, a brood patch, where it had recently incubated eggs. After our measurements we released it to fly off gracefully and silently across the fields.

A nearby barn gave us another glimpse of a Barn Owl before it too disappeared off to start its nightly hunt. We deduced that this single owl was the male and the two that escaped were fledged young, showing that this year has been successful for this family group.

Barn owls are beautiful to watch in flight and good news for farmers too, as they are avid hunters of mice, voles and shrews which can cause damage to crops and young trees. The biggest threats facing Barn Owls are the loss of suitable habitat, being struck down on busy roads and flying into overhead cables.

We are always interested to hear about owl sightings or any other interesting wildlife that you come across in the Pentlands.

Clare Bury
Countryside Ranger



Progress at Harlaw Wildlife Garden

After a long wait for the new signs to be delivered, Ranger Tom Hobbs and Rotarians have installed the first two of these at the entrance to the garden and at the pond. We are very pleased with their appearance and they now give a clear invitation to passers-by to come inside and look around. The third board is placed on the gable end of Harlaw House where it provides space for notices from the Rangers about events as well as information about what can be seen in the garden. Another one of the Rangers, Clare Bury, will use the photographs we have taken throughout the previous year to create a display inside the building as a first step towards providing more detailed guides to the plants that can be seen through the seasons.



It is always remarkable how rapidly the garden changes from a rather bare open landscape in winter to a dense growth of herbaceous plants in Spring. Now, when it is approaching the year-end, we must resist the temptation to remove too much of the stems and dead foliage which provide shelter for next year's plants and insects. However, grass cutting cannot be brought to an end yet and there will still be some final tidying and weeding to complete the year. We will also be adding more plants to the wet area of the garden, close to the pond, to supplement the many orchids that appeared this year.



We had some success with our energetic "puddling" attempts to seal the original clay liner of the pond but have still had to fill it up by hose from time-to-time. It appears to be inevitable that a more efficient pond liner must be installed for next year and this will probably be the final capital expenditure from the funding raised. The pond shape will have to be modified to allow more efficient use of an artificial liner and the path around the pond will be improved to give better access for children "pond-dipping". We also intend to install some small but hard-wearing signs to provide an informative trail around the garden.

John Wilson
Currie and Balerno Rotary Club



OUT & ABOUT

Over the summer, as usual we have been out and about at various events, explaining the work of the Ranger Service. This year we attended Currie Fair and Balerno Children's Gala with displays and activities about responsible access in the countryside.

At the Botanical Gardens Biodiversity Week we joined forces with the City of Edinburgh Rangers to teach classes of children about owls and how we can help them.

We attended Vogrie Festival and the West Lothian Environmental Fair with a display of all the various homes we can provide to help animals - nest boxes for birds and bats, homes for ladybirds and hedgehog hibernation boxes. Children made homes for ladybirds and played a game that explained where animals live in the wild.

Back at the Regional Park, our guided walk programme has been popular. Visitors have had the chance to find out about a wide range of interesting topics, for example: Which creatures come out at night? What it is like working on a farm? What did people eat in the Iron Age? What plant would you use to relieve diarrhoea? There are still a few more walks over the winter months, to find their details turn to the back page.

Victor Partridge

Countryside Ranger



Gates, Paths and Bridges

The last three months have seen a range of practical projects completed around the Park.

Our programme of self-closing bridle gate installation has continued with a further six now in place. Of particular note is the path that lies to the north of Threipmuir Reservoir, two new gates now allow easy access from Threipmuir car park to Threipmuir and Harlaw Reservoirs. A map showing the locations of all the gates installed to date can be downloaded from the Regional Park website at www.pentlandhills.org.



George Fairley of Dooks, Ratho has been busy again at Swanston, this time upgrading a 50-metre section of path between the car park and the village. As you can see from the photographs, the steps installed and the new surfacing are a big improvement over the previously exposed tree roots.

Finally, those of you who use the Phantom's Cleuch will hopefully have noticed the new bridge that appeared in early September. This project was made possible through the kind donation of the materials by Constance Newbould of the British Horse Society. The BHS were planning a sponsored ride which passed through the Phantom's Cleuch but the existing bridge, made of three narrow planks, would have forced riders to dismount in order to cross. With the materials supplied, the Ranger Service was able to provide the labour and complete the project.

Martin Duncan
Countryside Ranger

Line & Level Survey

Regular readers of the Beacon may remember from the Winter 2004 issue the description my predecessor, Mike Hanlin, gave of the recently re-installed survey points at Bonaly Dam. A new survey was required to establish a set of base line data, which has now been done.

When the reservoir is full the 152 year old dam retains some 44 million gallons of water. Regular surveys of the pins allow the Supervising Engineer to identify if there is any movement in the structure of the dam and promptly investigate any changes.

RGI Surveys of Bo'ness, who carry out similar surveys for Scottish Water, were chosen to complete the work. After having shown the surveyors the locations of the 32 survey pins and target stations at either end of the dam I felt very guilty indeed leaving them to the mercy of the midges. You can see from the photograph one of the innovative methods they employed to try and keep the midges at bay whilst trying to take readings!

Six hours later with all the pins surveyed and tied in to the OS Active Network they wasted no time in packing up and escaping back to their van! I hope for their sake there is more of a breeze when they return in three years time.

Martin Duncan Countryside Ranger

The long awaited green fleece!

For more information about our Volunteer Ranger Service contact Victor on 0131 445 3383 or email victor.partridge@edinburgh.gov.uk

I decided to become a Volunteer Ranger because, after years of being a visitor, I wanted to be more involved in the Pentland Hills Regional Park. I wanted to learn more about the hills, and 'put something back' seeing as they had given me so much.

During the course of my training all of these wishes have been fulfilled. Each training day, which is spent assisting a Ranger, has been different. I have cleared drainage channels on the path over Scald Law, looked after the Visitor Centres at Flotterstone and Harlaw, and talked to dozens of visitors. I have also had the opportunity to see places in the Park which I had not been to before.

The Rangers' knowledge of the Pentlands seems inexhaustible. I have learnt so much from them about the wildlife of the hills and the people who live and work in them, as well as many names of tracks and woods that do not appear on the maps. All of this has given me the sense of greater connection to the Pentlands which I was seeking. I am looking forward to the training weekend in November and finally getting my green fleece!

Paul Knights
Volunteer Ranger



The Pentlands group at work in the woods



The Pentlands Group. Colinton community compost and their new tipper truck

A HELPING HAND FROM THE PENTLANDS GROUP

The Pentlands Group is part of Tiphereth-Camphill, Edinburgh. We are a conservation project working with adults with learning difficulties under the curative principles of Rudolf Steiner, catering for an individual's physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

We work in liaison with the Pentland Hills Ranger Service. Our definition of work is "that which you do for others." Our tasks in the Regional Park are varied, including litter picking (at Swanston, Hillend, Bonaly, Harlaw and Little Vantage car parks) making and repairing footpaths and ponds, weeding, clearing drains, thinning woods, tree planting, making wild flower beds, as well as rhododendron and sycamore bashing. Most recently we have been clearing gorse which obstructs the footpaths at Black Springs and Threipmuir woods. This all takes place on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Colinton Community Compost is run by the Pentlands Group on Tuesdays and Thursdays. We now collect garden waste on Tuesdays from 600 households around Woodhall Road and the Bonalys in Colinton, working in conjunction with the Council's brown bin scheme. We distribute 2 green bags per household, to be collected weekly. Any excess waste is charged at 25p per bin bag or £40 per trailer load (suggested donation) in order to encourage home composting. We welcome enquiries/visits to Torphin Quarry to learn how to make your own compost.

At the height of summer we were collecting 7 tonnes of garden waste every Tuesday, making a big new heap! Hence, we have recently employed a Deputy and Site Manager in order to maintain a healthy balance between our care work and business obligations.

On Thursdays, we turn heaps, sift and deliver compost and collect more garden waste as well as chop and deliver firewood.

Recycling is an important issue in today's society, with ever increasing pressure on finding sustainable alternatives to land fill. On average 40% of your household waste can be composted. Community composting is where emphasis is put on communication and education rather than large scale processing. Interaction and involvement with the wider community is the key issue with Colinton Community Composting.

Please phone us on 0131 441 3479 or visit us at Torphin Quarry anytime. We look forward to hopefully answering all your questions.

Gavin Jones
The Pentlands Group

Do you recognise this view?



The Victorian artist, **William Matthison** (1854-1926), painted this scene. He was born in Harbourne, near Birmingham and spent most of his life based in Oxford. However, he travelled widely throughout Scotland, England and Wales painting mostly watercolours of landscapes and seascapes for several postcard companies. He is known to have painted scenes from Arran, Skye, Edinburgh and Fife. Many of the views have been traced to locations that would have been on the rail network.

We have been asked, by a collector and enthusiast, if this scene could be in the Pentlands and we thought that the more eyes that see it the better. If you have any ideas about where it might be or more information about the artist please contact me on 0131 445 3383 or email clare.bury@edinburgh.gov.uk.

Clare Bury
Countryside Ranger

PLEA for Pentland Poet!

A recent enquiry into the Pentland Regional Park office has raised more questions and unearthed a mystery, rendering the initial enquiry unresolved!

The Regional Park has often quoted the poem "In Pentland Wine" in its publications and more recently in its website. Cited as by the Borders poet, Will Ogilvie, it has transpired, following an exhaustive search by the Scottish Poetry Library, that there is no record of Will Ogilvie having been the author!

So we are asking Beacon readers of a literary bent, or those with a passion for detection to help uncover the mystery poet. If you can help with any information, please contact the office on 0131 445 3383, or pentlands.enquiry@edinburgh.gov.uk



In Pentland Wine

Up here with the wind in our faces,
And the brown heath under our feet,
We look through the shimmering spaces
Over tower and steeple and street
To the lion splendidly sleeping,
To the tall Craggs silent and grey,
To the Castle its grim guard keeping,
And the shining shield of the Bay.
Behind us the mists of the valley
Lie low on the moorland's breast,
With the bonnie banks of Bonaly
In the grey of the winter dressed.
The west wind, wanting, is chiding
Glencorse with the scourge of its whips,
And the wild ducks over it riding
Are tossed like storm-tossed ships.
Up here with the clean winds blowing,
I look to you, City of mine,
I fill me a goblet o'erflowing
And pledge you in Pentland wine!
With a full heart thrilled by your story,
While the hills stand round you, like kings,
I drink to your lasting glory
In the wine that the hill-wind brings!

Change of address

Please note that our email addresses have changed. All general enquiries should be addressed to pentlands.enquiry@edinburgh.gov.uk in the first instance.

Individual email addresses are:

carol.huston@edinburgh.gov.uk
Acting Regional Park Manager

susan.falconer@edinburgh.gov.uk
Senior Ranger

jo.booth@edinburgh.gov.uk
Countryside Ranger
(Communities and Estate Management)

clare.bury@edinburgh.gov.uk
Countryside Ranger
(Interpretation & Visitor Management)

martin.duncan@edinburgh.gov.uk
Countryside Ranger
(Access and Estate Management)

tom.hobbs@edinburgh.gov.uk
Countryside Ranger
(Nature Conservation & Country Parks)

victor.partridge@edinburgh.gov.uk
Countryside Ranger
(Education and Volunteers)

gwen.stewart@edinburgh.gov.uk
Senior Support Assistant

MY LAST DAY as a Pentland Ranger

Sunday 11th September was my final day as a Ranger working in the Hills. After eighteen years service it was to be a day full of reflections and memories.

The first task was to nip round to Harlaw to open the Centre. What a transformation this area has seen over the eighteen years. When I started, Harlaw House was a two-story building occupied by Ted, the waterkeeper, and his family. As a visitor area, Harlaw used to rank about fourth or fifth in terms of numbers of visitors. However, with the new car park, path improvements and the expansion of Balerno and Currie I would guess it is probably as busy, or a close second to Flotterstone now.

Next, round to the Park HQ at Boghall where I've been based for 12 years. I will probably remember Boghall mostly as the place where a squirrel fell on my head! Here, after a quick glance skyward, I met with a new Volunteer Ranger. I can look back with a good deal of pride at my efforts in establishing what was then, the first Voluntary Ranger Service in Scotland. It was a little controversial at the time, however, it has been very successful and a great asset to the Regional Park. Some terrific characters are involved or have passed through the VR Service, and I'm always inspired by the time, effort, expertise and experience they give.

We opened Flotterstone Visitor Centre, chatted to some walkers and then went round to Bonaly, to see what delights the night shift had left us. Bonaly used to be very popular with campers, seldom less than two or three groups of youths on a Friday or Saturday night. Now, you get around one or two groups per month. This is good from the point of view of litter and vandalism, but sad in quite another way. It suggests that the youth of today are becoming even more distant from the countryside. Young people are missing out on the valuable outdoor experience that camping provides.

Next back to Boghall, for lunch, a cup of tea and a squirrel burger. Before the Pentland Hills, I'd completed a season with the Lake District National Park where footpath erosion was a major issue. Erosion in the Pentlands was on a different scale to the Lakes, however the path on Scald Law did measure 25m wide in places. Working with Pathcraft, one of the first professional upland footpath contractors, we engineered a path. A walk on my last afternoon confirmed that the path is holding up well and the eroded 25m scar has now healed. We cleared a few drains on our way back down to Flotterstone to hand out leaflets and chat with people in the car park.

When I first walked in the Pentlands I thought them greatly inferior to the Lake District, my favourite landscape, but over the eighteen years I have grown to love them, especially the views. These are stunning, vary with the hour, the weather and the season, and are always inspiring.

Finally back to Boghall to finish up, a nervous last sprint under the 'squirrel attack tree' to the van and round to lock up Harlaw. I chatted with Sandy Fleming, the farmer at West Kinleith, whose fortunes and misfortunes I've followed closely over the years. I'm delighted his lamb and beef venture is doing so well and I hope the news that he has employed a shepherd is a sign that the decline in farming in the Pentlands is now on the reverse.

I'm proud of my contribution to the success of the Park and happy that I've left my mark on them in terms of paths made, trees planted and signs erected. The team of Rangers remaining is, without a doubt, the most experienced and skilled in the time I've been there and in their hands I'm convinced the future of the Park is secure.

Duncan Monteith
Acting Countryside Ranger Supervisor
Hermitage of Braid



2006

LOOK OUT for the new City of Edinburgh Council Ranger Service calendar. This will give details of all our Ranger events in Edinburgh and the Pentlands accompanied by some great photos and walking ideas.

SUBSCRIPTION Reminder

For only £2 per year, to cover postage, you can get this quarterly publication delivered to your house. Otherwise it can be picked up for free from Flotterstone or Harlaw Visitor Centres.

Please send your name and full postal address, along with a cheque for £2, made out to the City of Edinburgh Council, to:

Pentland Hills Regional Park
Boghall Farm
Biggar Road
Edinburgh
EH10 7DX

stop press... stop press... stop press...

Why not explore the hills in the knowledgeable and friendly company of a Pentland Hills Ranger?

Our next events are:

Sunday 13th November

BACK ON TRACK 2.00pm - 4.00pm

Exercises to teach or refresh compass skills in preparation for winter hillwalking.

Saturday 21st January

CALORIE BURN 2.00pm - 4.00pm

Introduction to one of the very best forms of exercise - walking uphill. Find out how to climb in comfort without collapsing. Fresh air, great views, new friends and lots of Pentland interest guaranteed. Bring waterproofs and walking boots or trainers with a good sole. A moderate walk with a steep ascent, suitable for adults.

These walks are free. To find out more details or to book a place please contact us on 0131 445 3383 or email pentlands.enquiry@edinburgh.gov.uk Check out our website to find details of our other events at www.pentlandhills.org

The Pentland Beacon is produced by the Pentland Hills Ranger Service, which operates within the Pentland Hills Regional Park.

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The Pentland Hills Regional Park H.Q.
Boghall Farm, Biggar Road
Edinburgh, EH10 7DX

Telephone: 0131 445 3383

Fax: 0131 445 3003

e-mail: pentlands.enquiry@edinburgh.gov.uk

www.pentlandhills.org

 pentland hills
regional park

 SCOTTISH
WATER

 SCOTTISH
NATURAL
HERITAGE

 Midlothian

 EDINBURGH
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL
CULTURE AND LEISURE

 West Lothian
Council

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For additional copies, please phone 0131 445 3383.

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ITS هاتف: 0131-242 8181 وذكّر الإشارة 05966

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ট্রান্সলেশন সার্ভিসকে 0131 242 8181 এই নাম্বারে এবং কোড 05966 উল্লেখ করে টেলিফোন
করবেন।

如欲查詢本文件的翻譯資訊，請電愛丁堡市議會傳譯及翻譯服務
部(ITS)及說明檔案編號05966，電話：0131 242 8181。

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We hope that you enjoyed the articles in this publication.

If you encounter any difficulties or disappointment, please do not hesitate to contact a member of the Park staff, or ask them for a copy of the City of Edinburgh Council's 'Make Contact' form (for complaints and suggestions). After you have gone through the Council's complaints process, if you are still not happy, you have the right to take your complaint to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, 23 Walker Street, Edinburgh, EH3 7HX. Phone 0870 011 5378. Generally, if you want to do this, you must contact the Ombudsman within one year.

The views expressed by contributors to the Pentland Beacon are not necessarily the views of the Pentland Hills Regional Park.