

the volunteer

The newsletter for volunteers with the National Trust for Scotland • Winter 2009



In from the cold: volunteering through the winter

Inside: Recognising
volunteers' achievements



the National Trust
for Scotland
a place for everyone

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Cover photograph: Bare trees at
Kintail, North-west Highlands

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It has certainly been an exciting time for us at the Trust. Our first annual Volunteer of the Year awards ceremony in September was a huge success, allowing us to formally recognise volunteers' contribution to the organisation. The event is something we'll look forward to every year, so if you didn't nominate someone this time round there will be opportunities to do so in the future!

In this edition of *the volunteer*, we feature those of you for whom involvement with the Trust has helped to usher in change and new beginnings – in your careers, personal lives,

and at the properties to which you dedicate your time and effort. We also look ahead to preparations being made for the holidays and the coming year.

Thistle Camps and Trailblazers were sold out again early this year, indicating that we continue to inspire people to come out on outdoor conservation projects. Volunteering doesn't stop however, even in the winter months, and I'd like to thank all of our volunteers who come out to properties or on projects, whatever the season.

Finally, I would like to thank HBOs for their support of *the volunteer* and for generously printing previous issues of the newsletter.

Best wishes for Christmas and the New Year!

Violet Dalton
Head of Volunteering

Trust Holiday Offer

Erratum: In the summer edition of *the volunteer* we stated that Trust staff and volunteers are eligible for 50% off the cost of Trust holiday accommodation if the holiday is booked within two weeks of the start date. The announcement neglected to mention that **this offer only applies to a full week booking** and is restricted to Trust properties only. It does not apply to the following privately owned properties: Garden Cottage by Towie Barclay, Crovie Cottage in Banff, The Pend in Whithorn, Precinct House in Whithorn, Dun Flashader in Skye and all lighthouse properties.

To check the availability of holiday lets, visit www.ntsolidays.com. To book, phone 0844 493 2453.



Volunteer of the Year 2009

Colin Cutler, Violet Dalton, Kate Mavor, Pamela McIlroy and Robert Dey at the ceremony in Charlotte Square

On 23 September the Trust held its first annual Volunteer of the Year awards. Chief Executive Kate Mavor presented the certificates to volunteers from Falkland Palace, Branklyn Garden, Wemyss House and the Tayside Group of Conservation Volunteers.

Archivist Tom Wilkie merited the Support Award for his dedication to the work of reorganising the central archives and managing the reference library at Wemyss House. The Gardens Award went to Colin Cutler for lending his support to Branklyn's specialist seed collection and for the work he has undertaken in the garden in the last six years. When asked how he felt about his experience of volunteering at this Perthshire property, Colin spoke of his delight at having the opportunity to work with like-minded souls in the garden.

Working with other volunteers and staff at a Trust property is something that Pamela McIlroy, winner of the award in the property category, has done for almost 20 years. Pamela has conducted general and specialist tours of Falkland Palace, researched and appeared in Living History events, mentored new volunteers and staff, and contributed to books on its history. Volunteering, she says, has allowed her to have a fulfilling life beyond retirement.

Another volunteer for over 20 years is Robert Dey, Chairman of the Tayside CVs. Passion, leadership and a sincere concern for those he leads were just some of the sterling

qualities mentioned by those who nominated him for the Outdoor Conservation Award. Three days later, at the Annual General Meeting, Robert also received the prestigious George Waterston Memorial Award for his outstanding contribution to the Trust.

Finally, Special Commendations were given to Etta Hayward for her work at Drum Castle's gardens, Jess Dawson for 20 years as a guide documenting events at Pollok House, and Sandy Alexander for over 35 years of service at The Georgian House.

'Volunteers are key to the entire operation of the property. In a sense they are our most valuable asset!'

The event highlighted the level of dedication that exists within the Trust but there are still many volunteers whose stories deserve to be told. Speaking at the event, Sheonagh Martin, Property Manager of The Georgian House proclaimed, 'Quite simply, volunteers are key to the entire operation of the property. Visitors frequently compliment the guides on their friendliness, knowledge and helpfulness. In a sense they are our most valuable asset!'

Next year, volunteers will once again be in the spotlight at the 2010 Volunteer of the Year awards.

Cultivating Success

by Jayne Whitehead

Volunteers give their time to the Trust for different reasons, some to gain experience in a specific role and serve as a springboard to their new lives. This was certainly true for Jayne Whitehead, who came to Branklyn Garden in 2006. For Jayne, the Trust helped to plant the seeds of success – and we're more than happy to see them coming into bloom!

When that first gentle spring morning finally arrives, some of us will beg in longing to be out in our gardens, chasing the lengthening daylight and mesmerised by every new bud and shoot. If you are lucky enough to have gardened in one of the National Trust for Scotland gardens, I'd like to bet your thoughts turn there.

I started gardening for the Trust as a volunteer two and a half years ago, following a career change. The Head Gardeners welcomed me and I met volunteers of all ages, backgrounds and levels of expertise, which is one of the pleasures of volunteering. Branklyn Garden in Perth became 'my garden' and I volunteered there for 18 months. It's a real plantsman's garden and one of the great joys of working there, rather than simply visiting, is that you come into more intimate contact with the plants. Hours spent on hands and knees, below the rhododendrons and tree peonies, reveal all sorts of hidden gems. Indeed, many of the delights at Branklyn might have been overlooked in a busy working day but for the inside knowledge of the gardeners, who would always have a tip for what to go and see in flower at lunch time – whether rare orchids, demure in their sheltered beds, or the great, strong trilliums bursting into life along a path I had not taken that day. It is a real privilege to spend even one morning weeding beside one of these Trust gardeners – let alone several!

Although some people volunteer in the gardens for only the summer months, I loved

experiencing the whole gardening year. In autumn, there is endless leaf sweeping to be done. At Branklyn the leaves in question are jewel-bright, and the burnt sugar smell of the *Cercidiphyllum japonicum* (*katsura tree*) lingers for weeks in the corner near the compost. Of course, it does rain sometimes and once I remember the air being so cold as I weeded the alpine bed that I felt my head

had been put in a frozen vice.

My other experience of volunteer gardening came at the opposite temperature extreme, a blazing hot week in Culross Palace. Culross is a very different garden to Branklyn: a recreated 17th-century walled garden, with very impressive vegetables and the constant heady scent of herbs. I had a wonderful week and rekindled an old interest in medieval herbs – studying them partly so that I could answer the many questions of visitors who

don't distinguish between staff and volunteer gardeners!

While volunteering, I set up my own garden design business, whose success swallowed up my volunteering time in the end. The experience and contacts I made as a volunteer have been invaluable, however. Last year I completed a project at Culross which proved a fantastic chance to design a period garden, and one which I am sure I would never have got without my volunteering work. Great things have certainly come through my involvement with the Trust! I hope my experiences will encourage other keen gardeners to volunteer. Do it for the love of the gardens and what you can learn, but who knows where it will lead.



In Brief

Bat plan begins

Nature Conservation Adviser Lindsay Mackinlay is keen to establish a Volunteer Bat Group. The group would aim to carry out essential bat survey work to ensure that building works and tree management do not disturb or destroy bats and their roosts on Trust properties. If you are interested in joining, please contact Lindsay at lmackinlay@nts.org.uk or on 0844 493 2454.



Tweet words of love

Robert Shepherd, co-editor of *the volunteer*, recently launched the National Trust for Scotland's Twitter page. For up-to-date news on the Trust and Scottish heritage, follow the feed at http://twitter.com/N_T_S

Quay developments

Plans to relocate the Trust's Edinburgh Office to Hermiston Quay have been finalised. The organisation intends to move from its current base in Edinburgh's Charlotte Square in October 2010.

Fraser Quest

Pupils from Bucksburn Academy are widening their community involvement on a new conservation project, the first of its kind to take place at Castle Fraser. The Community Partnerships Programme, which is funded by BAA, aims to give the children insight into the world of work and a sense of achievement and pride in the work that they complete.

St Ronan's calendar now on sale

The 2010 St Ronan's calendar is now available at Robert Smail's Printing Works in Innerleithen. The calendar, which is exclusive to the Trust property, is printed on-site using traditional Victorian presses. The calendar costs £2, and can be sent anywhere in Britain via mail-order.

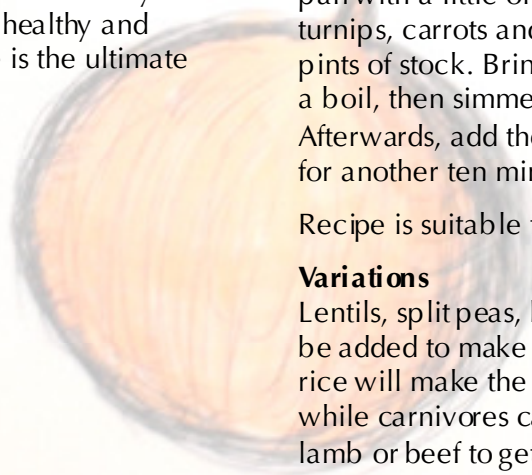


Recipe: Hearty Vegetable Soup

As the nights begin to draw in, vegetable soup can be just what you need to relax after a hard day's volunteering. Cheap, healthy and sustaining, this recipe is the ultimate comfort food.

Ingredients

3-4 large onions
9 sticks of celery
3 leeks
6 medium potatoes
3 parsnips or turnips
12 carrots
1 cabbage
3 or 4 stock cubes
a splash of oil
salt and pepper



First, prepare and chop all the vegetables. Lightly fry the onions and celery in a large pan with a little oil, then add the parsnips or turnips, carrots and leeks along with eight pints of stock. Bring the resulting mixture to a boil, then simmer for a further half hour. Afterwards, add the cabbage, and simmer for another ten minutes.

Recipe is suitable for vegetarians; serves 12.

Variations

Lentils, split peas, beans and barley can all be added to make a thicker broth. Pasta or rice will make the soup more sustaining, while carnivores can add shredded chicken, lamb or beef to get their meat hit!

Young Romantics

When *the volunteer* popped across the road to visit The Georgian House this autumn, we found the building heaving with enthusiastic young volunteers. From school children and students to recent university graduates, young people of all kinds are contributing a great deal to the running of the property. Like all volunteers within the house (around 230, most of whom are retired), these young people take on impressive and extremely varied roles: guiding, working at the ticket desk, dealing with membership, helping out in the gift shop, and taking part in Living History events.



Recent graduate Kirsty Fairhead is one such young person. Clad in eye-catching Georgian attire for a Living History rehearsal, Kirsty told us how she came to the house last November after an unsuccessful job search. She has since clocked up an impressive 186 hours, highlighting her commendable dedication to the role. Kirsty was happy to tell us that since joining the team she has gained a wealth of knowledge and invaluable experience, which will almost certainly aid her future career.



The house also offers placements for international students seeking internships and relevant experience abroad. Charles Helmke, currently studying towards a World Heritage Masters in Germany, is someone who has benefited from such an opportunity. He recently completed an eight-week internship which involved shadowing the Property Manager alongside additional voluntary roles.

Current students are also amongst the young volunteers looking to gain useful experience or simply keep busy on their days off. Chris Small, a biology student, first came to the property in June expressing an interest in Scottish history after his grandfather had whetted his appetite by taking him to Trust properties as a child. Like the other volunteers we spoke to, Chris assists at the admissions desk, in the gift shop and as a guide.



Over the last few years, the property has been actively building relationships with schools. Work experience placements are provided for 4th year pupils at local high schools, while young people taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme are encouraged to fulfil their service section by volunteering in the house. Sixth year pupils from George Heriot's also volunteer to help them better understand the day-to-day needs of running a historic house.

Property Manager Sheonagh Martin believes that the involvement of young people brings a different atmosphere to the house. She advises that the key to having such a large number of young volunteers is the encouragement and warm welcome they receive from staff and other volunteers, who make them feel part of the team. Sheonagh likes to engage with young volunteers and discover their interests and ambitions so she can better tailor their individual voluntary roles. She is clearly very enthusiastic and appreciative of the youngsters' involvement saying, 'they provide an invaluable extra pair of hands which contributes greatly to the smooth running of the property'.

Young people benefit greatly from volunteering – and the Trust benefits from their involvement. Overall, it seems an ideal match!

And so, Mrs Christmas

The Trust is an organisation with a large number of festive traditions, from the youth theatre pantomime at Haddo House to the St Ronan's calendar produced every year at Innerleithen's Robert Smail's Printing Works. It is Pollok House, however, that has perhaps the most enduring tradition of any Trust property. From the end of November right up until Christmas Eve, Mrs Claus herself takes up residence in the property, eager to listen to the wishes of children who come to visit.



popular baby book where parents can share their experiences. One baby came visiting on the day he was born, and Mrs Claus sits among the very first photos in his baby album!

Pollok's Mrs Claus, who goes by the name Jennie MacLeod in the non-winter months, has

The first appearance of Mrs Claus at Pollok House took place 11 years ago when staff and volunteers were searching for an exciting Christmas event to be staged inside the house. With Santa already present elsewhere in the country park, Volunteer Manager Robert Marshall hit upon the idea of putting a different spin on the tradition of meeting Saint Nick. The event was a huge success and has continued over the years. Today, children ranging from the very young to early teens queue up to meet Santa's loyal wife and tell her what they want for Christmas. She'll then pass the message on to her husband herself – though she can't make any promises as to what he'll bring! In recent years an increasing number of babies have come to visit Mrs Claus, and the house has established a

an obvious passion for her role and a genuine love for children. She believes that she gets as much enjoyment out of the role as the children do, feeling like a traditional grandmother figure as she listens to their whispered wishes and hands out presents. Young people, she thinks, can often feel threatened when meeting Santa Claus because of his large, bushy beard, and the opportunity to have a similar experience with an unintimidating woman is something that many children welcome.

The highly anticipated visits of Mrs Claus are made possible by dedicated volunteers and staff at Pollok House, from Mrs Claus herself to a queue monitor, a team of Christmas helpers, and even special parcel wrappers. Each Christmas, Pollok offers a tale of kindness and giving, keeping this property firmly in the hearts of the families that return year after year during this magical season.

Putting Volunteers on a Pedestal

In our summer edition, we featured Head of Volunteering Violet Dalton's stint on Trafalgar Square's Fourth Plinth as part of the 'One & Other' arts project. Violet, however, was not the only one to promote volunteering with the Trust during her hour on the plinth. Jackie Kemp, Social Convenor for the Glasgow Conservation Volunteer Group, had his spell on the famous pedestal on 27 August – where he dressed up as several Glaswegian landmarks to the astonishment of passers by!

'The first 10 minutes seemed slow', he reminisces, 'then my time seemed to fly. I got lots of good banter and response from passers-by. It was a fantastic experience.' For his effort, Jackie impressively raised over £340 for the Glasgow CVs through sponsorships.



Jackie dressed as the famous Finnieston Crane

People

New Members of Staff

The Trust is pleased to welcome Robert May and Maria Laskowska into its Volunteering Department.



Robert May

Robert, our new Community Partnerships Coordinator, will help to establish and carry out community projects using funding generously provided by the BAA Communities Trust. These projects will provide opportunities for young people who have not traditionally accessed the National Trust for Scotland to get involved in its vital conservation work. Robert, who comes from a teaching background, is well aware of the positive impact that such programmes can have on youngsters, building their confidence and skills and

preparing them for a future of greater achievement.

Maria, meanwhile, joins us as our new Volunteer Coordinator. Having come to the Trust as a volunteer in 2008, Maria transfers to the department from her role in Estate Management.



Maria Laskowska

She is excited to meet the Trust's volunteers, who she feels make a valuable contribution to the organisation. Maria is also eager to promote inclusiveness of all kinds, intending to encourage increased levels of communication among volunteers and to attract people of different nationalities by actively promoting volunteering.

If you meet either of them, do say hello!

Thistle Stop Tour



Bas Dielen

Nature lovers will be pleased to know that preparations for 2010's Thistle Camps are already underway – and that volunteers are involved in making them happen! One of these volunteers is Bas Dielen, a student from Holland, who has been working tirelessly on next year's brochure with the Outdoor Action team to tailor it to the needs of future campers.

When interviewed, Bas told us that volunteering offered him practical experience for his studies in rural development and a chance to live and work in the heart of Scotland. During his two-month placement,

he joined in camps and surveyed volunteers to gain greater insight into what motivates Thistle Campers, which should certainly come through in the brochure when it is released in February. Reflecting on his time with the Trust, he shared candidly, 'It gave me the opportunity to achieve personal growth, which I did. It was the perfect place to gain some experience.'

Thistle Camps are working holidays that offer people 18 years and over a chance to help conserve the Trust's countryside properties. Whether volunteers are repairing footpaths, searching for wildlife or other exotic activities, the camps provide a truly unique experience. But 16 and 17 year-olds needn't feel left out – the Trust also runs Trailblazer Camps specifically catering for younger folk.