

---

# CLYDE MUIRSHIEL PARK AUTHORITY

---



## Annual Report 2008/09

### Executive Summary



Prepared by C Woodward, Regional Park  
Manager and presented to the Park Authority  
Joint Committee. 11 Sept 2009.

## 1.0 Executive Summary

### Introduction

The past year has seen the Clyde Muirshiel Park Authority deliver on its aim to provide services that meet the needs of visitors and the communities within the Clyde Muirshiel area.

The achievements and setbacks are summarised below and described more fully in the main report available from Park HQ or on [www.clydemuirshiel.co.uk](http://www.clydemuirshiel.co.uk).

The long term £1 million project of the Greenock Cut has reached fruition with the completion of the exhibition within Cornalees Centre.

Over the year visitor numbers are down at all sites for the first time in over eight years, which can be attributed in part to the poor weather during the summer.

This year participation in our outdoor activities reduced. This reflects the downturn observed in educational and social work spending in outdoor experiences. The largest drop is in school groups attending for multi-activity courses.

The SRANI partnership project continues to bring in external funding and provide path infrastructure developments at Castle Semple.

As we reach the end of the first 6 year phase of forestry work at Muirshiel the woodlands, open areas and paths are beginning to establish themselves.

### 1.01 Recreation and Access

Staff continue to promote the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and contribute to local Access Forums and Access Strategy implementation. During the year the local authorities' task of Core Path Planning gained momentum and Draft Core Path Plans for formal consultation have been issued. The Park has contributed to this process.



While recent years have seen dramatic increases in visitor numbers to our sites, as the tables in the main report show the visitor numbers into Castle Semple Centre dropped marginally during 2008-2009 by 1% to 79,958. Muirshiel visitor numbers dropped by 20% to 11,622 and at Cornalees there has been a decrease of 29% to 9,851 (in part due to 10 weekend closures in the winter).

The Greenock Cut project has completed the construction phase with minimal disruption to public access and as this year ended the display in Cornalees Centre was completed. This project, driven for several years by the Park Authority, is an achievement for all partners and a major asset for recreation nationally. It is hoped that the new display relating to the Greenock Cut will attract visitors to the Cornalees Centre.

The South Renfrewshire Access Network Initiative (SRANI) continues to develop the path network on the ground. Over £1m of external funding has been secured to deliver the recreation, education, healthy lifestyle and economic benefits that will result. Three major phases of route development along with minor visitor facilities have been completed and funding secured for a fourth phase. A path opening event was held in May 2008, to mark the completion of path works to date. A Heritage Lottery Fund supported Conservation Statement with management proposals has been completed for the built and landscape heritage of the area. An externally funded full-time development officer has been key to these achievements.



The vision in Renfrewshire's Physical Activity, Sport and Health Strategy is in close alignment with the Park Authority and the Park contributes directly to its achievement through programmes of sport, recreation and education.



## **1.02 Biodiversity and Nature Conservation**

The Regional Park staff continue to implement actions in the Ayrshire and Renfrewshire & Inverclyde Local Biodiversity Action Plans for species and habitats.

Our Juniper project, developed on the themes of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, is now delivering "on the ground" as planting programmes begin. Whilst the project has gained international recognition it is equally important to us to be associated with Lochwinnoch Community Garden.



Work continued at Muirshiel following the 25 year Woodland Plan, with the emphasis again on Rhododendron removal and the planting of 1768 native trees. New paths and interpretive features are an essential part of the plan.

At Castle Semple Loch Site of Special Scientific Interest the Park Authority has an unrivalled knowledge of the water quality. A large variety of parameters are measured, and in general the water quality continues to improve. The monitoring of water quality is required to assist the safe operation of water based activities and is also an important determinant of biodiversity.

### **1.03 Landscape and Built Heritage**

The Park appeared at a Public Local Inquiry in June 2008 against the proposed development of a windfarm at Kelburn (14 turbines) on Blaeloch Hill. However the Kelburn development was approved by the Scottish Ministers in February 2009.

Other applications still current within the Regional Park are at Millour Hill, Dalry; Wings Law, Kilbirnie/Lochwinnoch and Kaim Hill, Fairlie. An application is expected for Waterhead Moor, between Largs and Muirshiel and for an extension to the Kelburn scheme.

The completion of the restoration of the Greenock Cut has been a major contribution to the landscape character of the Regional Park and peoples' enjoyment of it.

### **1.04 Tourism**

Linkages and partnerships with tourism bodies continue as the Park Authority seeks to support the regional tourism industry. Marketing and promotional activity has an important part to play, and event led marketing supported by posters, brochures and a developing website have contributed to attracting sustained levels of visitors.

Ideas are being developed to contribute to the Homecoming 2009 initiative in all Council areas, in Renfrewshire this will focus on the Semple Clan. The launch of a photographic competition and shadow puppet performances of Tam o' Shanter have already taken place.



The wide variety of attractions and events for which we are well known has been continued with events as diverse as radio control model yachts, farmers' markets, and rowing regattas, whilst Green Woodworking demonstrations, stargazing and climbing walls offer a participatory experience.

A Visitor Survey was undertaken at the main Park sites during the summer of 2008. The top three 'likes' remain 'scenery', 'paths & walks', 'wildlife'; while dislikes are 'vandalism', 'road to Muirshiel', 'poor road signage' and 'toilets'.

Live pictures of Hen Harriers were once again beamed into Muirshiel Centre but other aspects of the partnership were less successful. There was good image quality, but the ageing equipment picked up interference on sound. Ranger staff stepped in when RSPB failed to meet its commitments and 113 days were spent on the project. There were 6990 visitors to the project and all school groups visiting Muirshiel had a short talk – 467 pupils this year. Guided walks attracted 120 people, and again a minibus was provided on six Saturdays, used by 28 people.



The full facilities of the campsite; 8 shielings and a new facilities block for groups have been available for their first full season with 1141 bed-nights generating an income of £8,412. The linkage between these facilities and our outdoor recreation activities is being strongly promoted.

Income generation has also been sustained and 48,588 coffees and teas have been sold.

## **1.05 Education and Understanding**

Ranger events continue to provide inspiration and fun as well as education and understanding in their programme, which now



includes storytelling and shadow puppetry. Increasingly guided walks are in partnership with health initiatives where the social as well as physical benefits are now well recognised. The green woodworking and Hen Harrier film footage demonstrated at agricultural shows, highland games and country fairs brought our work to the attention of around 6,000 people outwith the Park area this year.

The Park continues to offer a range of services and opportunities for formal education. 298 Ranger days were utilised delivering our educational programmes to 9,308 pupils at our centres or at schools. Eco Schools are a way of interesting children in their natural surroundings and sustainability. Ranger staff have assisted in 20 Eco School projects in the three council areas.



Family orientated summer programmes of events have replaced our “nature clubs”.

Volunteering opportunities continued to be offered in the Park. Twenty eight Secondary pupils were taken on work experience by Rangers. Adopt - a - Beach took place quarterly at Lunderston Bay. 223 volunteer days were recorded. Supervised Adult Training Centre groups worked at Muirshiel on tree planting and woodland maintenance. This year a new partnership with Johnstone High School saw 220 participants deliver 900 hours of volunteer time on biodiversity and access projects. We also facilitated some of the volunteer effort into the Lochwinnoch Community garden.



Increasingly our activities staff are working with individuals with special needs from vulnerable and socially disadvantaged sections of communities to provide outdoor learning and recreational experiences. Courses are “tailor-made” to maximise their learning and recreational potential. 549 courses were delivered to 2,608 children and 1,605 adults. Whilst our focus remains within the Regional Park our staff have designed and delivered courses in schools and also at various locations across Scotland.

Staff continue to assist university students and groups and have been able to assist a foreign Ranger on a study visit.

The Park Authority has also made a significant commitment to its own staff's learning through induction programmes and academic qualifications as well as skills training.

## **1.06 Management**

The Senior Management Team comprised of the Regional Park Manager, two Assistant managers (part-time) and the Development and Marketing Officer. To achieve savings targets some posts were not filled.

The number of incident reports doubled, with significant increases in vandalism; fire alarm call-out; health and safety and maintenance.

Nine people completed customer complaint and feedback forms, a reduction on the thirteen of the previous year.

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has been a major supporter of the Park Authority and the Park Authority in turn has done much to assist SNH in the delivery of its aims. Changes in the way central government funding is directed means that from 1 April 2009 SNH will no longer be in a position to offer the Park grant aid.

The Park Authority has, for some time, recognised that the facilities for staff and visitors at Lunderston Bay are poor on this important recreational site. The Joint Committee receives regular updates on progress on aspects of the difficulties and their proposed solutions and has urged the landowner and Inverclyde Council to resolve issues over a new lease

The challenges of communication between multiple sites have been reduced with the establishment of satellite Broadband at Cornalees and Muirshiel centres.

The Joint Committee of the Clyde Muirshiel Park Authority met four times under the chairmanship of Cllr. David Arthur and the Consultative Forum met twice.

The Annual Accounts showed a surplus of £27,192 which was carried forward to Revenue Reserves.