ROYAL ACCOLADE FOR CASTLE SEMPLE

Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal visited Castle Semple Centre to view Scotland’s first ‘Sailability’ Centre of Excellence. She chatted to sailors with special needs, watched a demonstration of hoisting into an Access 303 sailing dinghy and viewed a Challenger Trimaran, rafted canoes and adaptive equipment.

Photo Competition YNS 2013

Inspired by ‘Year of Natural Scotland 2013’ entrants were asked to submit striking images of the best that nature in the Park has to offer. Top prize £200. During the winter a touring exhibition will display the winning photo and the best images from each category.

Literally Different - Naturally

The Countryside Ranger Service gets many requests to deliver talks but Kings Oak School in Inverclyde raised the bar. They challenged the Greenock Cut Ranger Service to link visits to books that the children were reading in class. The first book ‘The Owl who was Afraid of the Dark’ by Jill Tomlinson, was linked to activities about the life cycle of Barn Owls. Rangers read ‘The Gruffalo’ by Julia Donaldson and used the characters to explain food chains and food webs. An outing to the Greenock Cut Centre will then allow pupils to see real examples of the habitats talked about at school. Their teacher Morag Cowe said ‘As usual the Ranger Service came up with the goods, delivering lessons which were both fun and informative. We are now looking for new literature to challenge them further!’

Winter is a wonderful time to be out in the hills and woodlands. The good news is that Clyde Muirshiel is open all year round, though as can be seen from the photo it is occasionally a challenge! The Visitor Centre at Castle Semple Loch is open every day (except 25 Dec and 1 Jan) and the other Centres are open at weekends.

Commenting on the wildness maps produced by the research, Charles Woodward, Park Manager said “Clyde Muirshiel has the highest level of wildness in the Central Scotland Green Network area. These are important findings and we must strive to protect these characteristics. After all, our visitors tell us that what they value most about the Park is its scenery and tranquillity”.

It’s Official — Clyde Muirshiel is WILD!

Clyde Muirshiel is on a par with the wildest land in Scotland. The moorland heart of the Park has been listed as one of only 43 “Core Areas of Wild Land in Scotland” by Scottish Natural Heritage. ‘Wildness’ was based on perceived naturalness; ruggedness; remoteness from roads etc; and absence of modern artefacts. Wild land is a component of the current draft Scottish Planning Policy.

During the summer, visitors along the Greenock Cut Nature Trail have had to watch where they step as baby common lizards have been warming up in the sunshine on the boardwalk. Adult lizards also like to bask in the sunshine but have learnt to do so out of harm’s way on the stone dykes. Local student, Kathleen McMillan, from the University of the West of Scotland has been carrying out a study of these reptiles. A photo exhibition and report on her findings is on display at the Greenock Cut Visitor Centre.
As well as meeting the special needs sailors there was time for HRH The Princess Royal to meet invited guests from Rotary (funders of the hoist), Park Authority, Scottish Natural Heritage and Royal Yachting Association as well as Active Schools Managers and Regional Park staff.

Park Chair Cllr Gilmour said “HRH saw how sailing can make a real difference to people’s lives. She saw young people learning skills, contributing to their community and having fun”.

HRH The Princess Royal formally named two Access 303 class dinghies ‘Phoenix’ and ‘Tranquility’. The names were chosen by Craigmarloch School, Port Glasgow and the Disability Resource Centre, Paisley.

Charles Woodward, Park Manager said "Developing disability sailing has taken a lot of time and effort. David Hill and colleagues have been working on this for three years. Staff from partner organisations must also be thanked for their contribution towards making recreation more accessible at Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park”.

Susan Todd, PE Teacher, Hillside School, Cumnock said “I really love the sailing programme at Castle Semple. We get such strong reactions from even our non-verbal pupils it really makes it all worthwhile. Our children get so much out of their sailing it certainly is the highlight of their week.”

After the visit a letter was received from Buckingham Palace praising ‘Sailability’ at Castle Semple Centre and passing on “Congratulations to everyone involved in such a magnificent organisation.”

THE MISSING LINK

Visitors have voted with their feet - the new all abilities path is a hit! The new section of path completes the link between Johnshill and Parkhill Wood, and has resulted in a fourfold increase in use. One local said “It’s fantastic - I cheered as I ran through the stone wall (instead of having to clamber over it). The pathways are a great addition for the village!”

The completed path, (90% externally funded) is an early phase of the Semple Trail Heritage Project, an initiative to enhance the heritage of Castle Semple Estate.

The new circular route (the Johnshill Loop) takes people through parts of Lochwinnoch and should benefit local businesses.

SCOOTER RAMBLE

A partnership between Inverclyde Council on Disability (ICOD) and Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park has improved access for disabled people.

Three off-road scooters are now available at Greenock Cut Visitor Centre and are free to hire. One user said “The new service is wonderful. It’s been years since we have been out together as a family in the countryside”. The Park is actively seeking funding to extend this service to Castle Semple Country Park.

BRANCHING OUT – 10 OUT OF 10!

‘Branching Out’ is an award winning activity programme in the countryside to improve the mental health and well-being of people diagnosed as suffering mental ill-health.

Participants learn bushcraft skills, create environmental art and develop their communication and teamwork skills one day a week for 12 weeks to gain the John Muir Award. These programmes have also been successful in improving social skills and physical health.

One participant wrote “This is brilliant as it gives me a purpose to get up and out. Even the weather didn’t put me off.”

The Clyde Muirshiel Rangers have now delivered the 10th programme and presented nearly 100 John Muir Awards – one sixth of the Scottish total!
VOLUNTEERING in the PARK
The Park hosted a group of International Volunteers from Xchange Scotland, at Barnbrock Campsite. There were volunteers from Germany, Spain, France, Russia, Japan and the Czech Republic as well as a few Scots! During their two week visit, they took part in a variety of activities and conservation tasks; otter holt construction, bracken bashing, kayaking, woodland management, and boardwalk repairs. They also tried ceilidh dancing and the local pub quiz!

WOW.... HAPPY BIRTHDAY
Windows on Wildlife, part of the Semple Trail Heritage project is one year old. It’s been a busy year for the Windows in Wildlife (Wow) Project Officer, Hayley Douglas and her volunteers. There have been over 80 school visits, film clips of Clyde Muirshiel’s wildlife to collect and share on the Park’s YouTube page and of course the project’s 1st birthday celebrations. Renfrewshire school children have learnt the basics of macro photography and one lucky pupil, Connor Burns, age 10 of Woodlands Primary in Linwood, won a brand new digital camera in the Newspaper Report Competition. The project continues for another year, so why not join Hayley over the winter for animal tracking or bird ringing demos? Details in the What’s On guide or on the Project’s Facebook page.

CYCLING FOR ALL
Bikes for all ages including adaptive bikes are available for hire at Castle Semple Centre. You can take advantage of the level Sustrans cycle route beside the Visitor Centre or go for a more challenging trail. A successful Cycle Consultation has taken place to develop ideas for cycling in the Regional Park area. Scoping work and funding applications are currently underway.

CLYDE MUIRSHIEL EXPLORER SAILFARIS
There has been lots of interest from individuals, groups and corporate clients in the Sailfaris launched for YNS 2013. Sailfaris provide a unique opportunity for visitors to combine marine wildlife watching with learning to sail an ocean going yacht. Trips operate from both Largs and Kip Marinas.

Please contact our Skipper david.hill@clydemuirshiel.co.uk for details.

A FISTFUL OF DOLLAR$..
The Park’s commitment to special needs visitors received a helping hand with an award of $2,000 from the International Yachting Fellowship of Rotarians. The cheque was presented by the Commodore of the Clyde Fleet, Dr Tom Clark, on behalf of the European/Africa region of the fellowship. “It is the Park’s first ever international award and we will put this towards buying an Access 303 dinghy for disabled sailors”, explained Park Manager Charles Woodward.
View from the Top

By Councillor Chris Gilmour
Chair of Clyde Muirshiel Park Authority

The Year of Natural Scotland 2013 has seen the delivery of excellent new events, services and facilities in the Park. I am particularly delighted with the new partnerships that have been formed with the Gryffe Camera Club and the EE Call Centre in Greenock, while existing partnerships with Rotary, Forestry Commission and ‘Third Sector’ organisations have gone from strength to strength.

Throughout the year Clyde Muirshiel offered volunteering opportunities and I am pleased that some of our volunteers have been successful in securing employment in the Park. The Park provides expertise to many environmental projects some of which are linked with the University of the West of Scotland. Behind the scenes, staff contribute to tourism initiatives through local partnerships and the Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions.

I enjoy spending time in the Park, whether helping to plant trees at Castle Semple or launching the Clyde Muirshiel Explorer at Largs. Recently I was down at Lunderston Bay where new public and staff facilities are being built for us by Inverclyde Council. My Park Authority colleagues and I would like to thank Park staff and our partners for ensuring that the Year of Natural Scotland 2013 delivers social, health improvement, tourism and environmental objectives. We look forward to Homecoming 2014, when ‘Scotland Welcomes the World’.

‘SOLAR POWERED’ VEHICLE

You may have seen the Park’s new electric vehicle plugged in at Castle Semple Centre. On a good day the array of solar panels on the Visitor Centre roof produces more than enough power to charge the vehicle - all part of our efforts to be greener and reduce our carbon footprint. On a full charge of free power the vehicle can easily drive all the way round the Regional Park. Staff and the wildlife appreciate its silent running!

LAST ALIEN STANDING

The Park is celebrating the cutting down of the last rhododendron at Muirshiel Country Park. This site has been plagued by the alien species, which grows quickly and out-competes indigenous plants. Native trees will be able to re-colonise the area, providing food and new habitats for wildlife. David Lang from Scottish Natural Heritage said “Fantastic news. This is indeed a significant milestone. Well done.”

AUTHORS in the PARK

Louise Turner read from her debut novel ‘Fire & Sword’ and signed copies at a launch event at Castle Semple. Her novel is about the life of John, 1st Lord Sempill, who died along with a third of the Scots nobility at the battle of Flodden in 1513. His tomb is at Castle Semple Collegiate Church.

Keith Watson gave an illustrated talk about his new reference book The Flora of Renfrewshire. It contains information on over 1500 species. The book will be a great asset for staff and naturalists.

How to get here

By Train: Lochwinnoch station is on the Ayr/Ardrossan line from Glasgow Central. Use the Semple Trail to walk along the lochshore to the Castle Semple Visitor Centre.

By Car: From Glasgow Airport or Irvine take the A737 to the Roadhead Roundabout turning onto the A760 for Lochwinnoch and then follow the brown signs. FREE PARKING AT ALL PARK SITES

Check the ‘find us’ page on our website for details on visiting other centres within Scotland’s largest Regional Park.

www.clydemuirshiel.co.uk tel: 01505 842882

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