



## NEWSLETTER No 76 Winter 2020

### **She Ran and She Ran and She Ran! How Charlotte ran 28 miles of the river dressed as an otter and raised £6,000 for the Water of Leith Trust**



*Charl-OTTER !*

*On 4<sup>th</sup> October our Community and Volunteers Officer, Charlotte Neary, ran the whole river with support runners Stephen McGee and Rob Flett. Here's a report of their day.*

The run began at 9 am with their first challenge: finding the source of the river. With a grid reference on a GPS, the intrepid trio dodged adders, cattle and barbed wire to determine the source of the Water of Leith from the hundreds of other small springs welling up from the side of Meolawther Hill. After drinking from the source (rumoured to give you the gift of eternal youth), our runners started in earnest to follow the river downstream. The first 15 miles was really hard going. Without a path, the river flows through peat bogs and agricultural fields. The ground was exceptionally wet and the river was high due to persistent rain the day before.

The only other human they met for the first five hours was Trust Manager Helen who greeted them with the support vehicle stuffed with energy-giving treats. Rob kept getting distracted by Edinburgh Water Board inspection hatches; Charlotte thought her days were numbered when she mistook her tail for an adder; and Stephen sat in a gorse bush *and* got a shock from an electric fence. Perhaps the most hazardous moment, however, was when they ran through a shooting party who must have thought they were hunt saboteurs, given Charlotte's otter ears, face paints, and long furry tail! Unperturbed, they made it to Balerno by 2 pm where they were greeted by a very chirpy Martin Lyall from the Mill Café who was brandishing a delicious birthday cake for Stephen.

The second half was much easier ground and their speed picked up. Cargo Bike King, also known as the Trust Project Officer Johnny Wells, escorted them on three wheels from Balerno to Slateford. By this time, their legs were getting tired, so ready-salted crisps and

espresso energy gel were the only thing that stood between them and crippling cramp. The sun came out and Charlotte was jollied along by intrigued children telling their parents to move out of the way because a lady otter (or cat) needed to get past. The second half only took two hours so they crossed the finish line at Leith at 4.45 pm. To our knowledge, no other runners have attempted this run so they have set the record with a running time of seven hours and 15 minutes.

**We would like to thank all the wonderful supporters who either donated on the Just Giving page or who dropped off cash or cheques. We raised a record-breaking £6,000. All this money is vitally needed by the Edinburgh community to support our work on the river during these troubled times.**

## Out on the River—Johnny’s news from the Hit Squad

With the leaves falling fast from the trees, I thought I’d take the time to sum up what we’ve achieved over the last few months and to look ahead as 2020 draws to a close. When Covid restrictions were reduced over the summer we ran 22 small volunteer tasks in August, 31 in September and 36 in October. This was all due to the energy and enthusiasm of our volunteers to get out and about. Due to the small numbers we have for each session, it has meant focussing the work more than normal and, in turn, the quality of our work has improved.

Slowly but surely we are working our way along the walkway, trimming back vegetation and discovering another foot of walkway in many places. You can really notice the progress down at Leith where we worked every Monday in October, as well as at Kinleith Mill in Currie and the reopened section near Ford’s Road in Saughton. Although it’s tiring work for all involved, it has had a really positive effect by encouraging people to use the walkway and feeling able to safely socially distance from one another.

We have continued working on the seven meadows in our care and we completed species surveys at Bog’s Meadow and Bell’s Meadow, which have increased their species biodiversity by an impressive 36% and 24% respectively. Since then, we have strimmed, scythed and raked all of them with the aim of promoting even more species diversity. Thanks also to Balgreen Primary School who raked and stomped on the meadow by the Balgreen garden as well as cutting back the hedge. They plan to keep partnering us to care for the meadow in the future. We’re always up for welcoming volunteers of all ages.

Covid is going to be with us for a while so we’ll be sticking to small groups for the foreseeable future and we post opportunities on Spond, which is our new way of getting volunteers to sign up for a task. We are conscious that our mental health is as important as our physical health right now and so we welcome volunteers to stop by the Centre for a quick chat or visit us during a task if you are having a low day (you know me, I’ll just keep on grafting as we chat). Part of our give back to the hard work of our volunteers is



*Hard at work*

that we are always happy to offer a smile and a chat if needs be. In addition, if a task doesn’t have a self-led litter picker attached to it, then you are welcome to come by, grab a litter picker and a wobble by yourself—just let me know.



*Tools easily transported*

Despite the challenges of this year we have delivered 131 small volunteering tasks with this Covid secure Hit squad team amounting to 1265 hours – over half of these were spent maintaining the walkway with the rest supporting litter removal, habitat management and invasive species removal. In addition we have developed a protocol to bring back youth volunteering and have supported 12 tasks with the ‘Roots Programme’. **An average of 4.75 tasks per week since April.** A scroll though twitter shows what we have been up to on an almost daily basis :

<https://twitter.com/WOLCT>

We love that our volunteers keep coming out. Some are weekly, some are monthly and others yearly. Together we will keep the river and the walkway great.

### Update from the Chair

Hello everyone from Pat Dawson, Chairperson of the Trust

I don’t need to tell anyone what an especially difficult year it has been. I am so very proud of our great staff and volunteers for keeping so much activity going. However like many charities and businesses our income has fallen especially from our cafe and visitor centre. The Trustees have agreed to use some of our reserves this year but the shortfall could be anything up to £40,000.

I know many of you already give so much to the Trust but if you are in a position to consider making an extra donation we would be extremely grateful. The river has been a lifeline for many this year and we so want to continue all aspects of our work and your help is greatly appreciated. This QR code take you to our Paypal donation page or visit our website for details : **[www.waterofleith.org.uk/donate](http://www.waterofleith.org.uk/donate)**

I would also like to thank those who attended our virtual AGM on 5<sup>th</sup> October. The minutes and impressive 2019/20 Annual Report are on our website and I am also pleased to say the revised Articles of Association were approved at the meeting.



## Kingfisher Nature Club Fun in the woods for all



We have launched our very first Friday afternoon fully outdoor nature club, for 7 to 11 year olds, aimed at bringing together children who want to learn more about the river and the woods. The club is about to meet for its third time and has learned how to look for animal tracks in winter, as well as meeting the three survival challenges of finding and cleaning water, fishing for food, and building shelters and a fire. Highpoints so far include Sandie providing a moving target for target practice with windfall crab apples and a polar bear shield, laying tracks with sticks for the other team to follow together with making up our club rules under the tarpaulin shelter in the horse chestnuts.



Kingfisher Nature Club

School-aged children have had a difficult time over the pandemic. They were home schooled over the summer term and although they returned to school in August many of their extracurricular and in-school activities have had to be cancelled. However, the woods and the river are relatively safe place for them to explore, to learn and to play, particularly with our Covid-mitigation procedures in place. It has been a pleasure to watch these 16 children make up their own rules to explore the woods safely, to discover a bullhead fish in the river, and to vote on an 'I'm safe' sound for games of hide and seek. It gives them a chance to regain some control over their world, to breathe some fresh air and explore the gloriously Covid-free natural world every week.

Our October and November classes were our pilot sessions and we are looking forward to our next session in January. Bring your mittens and be ready to find out how animals adapt to the chills of winter!

## INNS work continues

We are coming to the end of our invasives work for the season. In addition to the amazing feat by Charlotte and volunteers Ian and Tony to spray the river for Giant Hogweed during lockdown this spring, we have also continued our work to reduce Himalayan Balsam along the river over late summer and autumn.

There was a huge amount of pulling of Himalayan Balsam up and down the length of the river with big sections destroyed at West Bowling Green Street, Edinburgh Tennis Club, Murrayfield and Slateford. Many people have told us about the difference they have seen on the river with native species taking over in the last few years.

In autumn we turned our attention to another particularly aggressive invader, Japanese Knotweed also nicknamed 'Godzilla Weed.' The most effective treatment is to stem inject the plants with a small amount of weed killer which then travels to the roots to kill it at source. Luckily it does not spread well through seed. This method is time consuming but it uses the least amount of chemical and has proven to be very successful at reducing populations along the river. In addition to spraying the plants with weed killer, like Giant Hogweed, we map the locations of Japanese Knotweed to monitor our progress at reducing this noxious plant.



Japanese Knotweed

## Resources for Projects

We're thrilled to announce that we have received a grant from Action Earth to buy £250 of wild flower seeds and bulbs for our meadows and community gardens. This will keep us busy through November.

We've also got £1000 worth of tools from Sustrans to keep the N75 sections of the walkway tidy. This includes a much sought after extendable pole saw so we can cut back some of the overhanging branches to let more light onto the path.

In December we're getting 500 trees from TCV (The Conservation Volunteers). Many of these trees will be smaller like dogwoods, hazels and hawthorns which will be planted in the areas where we've cleared the invasives. Thank you to Action Earth, Sustrans and TCV for giving us the resources to deliver these great projects.

## Anyone for Tea at the Centre ?

### New opening hours

Tuesday to Friday : 11.00am to 3.00pm  
Weekend : 10am to 4pm

Each purchase helps us to look after the river and we plan to keep our outdoor seating going throughout winter, weather permitting

We are also delivering 'covid respecting' activities such as outdoor holiday activities for children, outdoor birthday parties and evening 'badged' group visits. Sadly our interactive exhibition space will remain closed for the foreseeable future as the water exhibits pose a risk.

## The Trust sadly says good-bye to former Trustee Brian Henderson

*Trustee, David Hudson shares his memories of former trustee Brian Henderson who passed away this November*

I first met Brian in the 1980s when I was an Insurance Broker and he was Head of Business Development at Norwich Union, in Edinburgh. Whilst he was extremely good at his job, he was also delightful company to be with and very popular with both his customers and his staff.

Brian was never boastful and it was only through others that I learnt what a fine sportsman he had been, the pinnacle of which was the 12 caps as a centre playing for Scotland Rugby between 1963 and 1966. He was also in demand as an after dinner speaker and I had the pleasure of listening to him at several Insurance Institute dinners.

In 1994 Brian retired from Norwich Union and our paths did not cross for several years but you can imagine my delight, in 2007, as a new Water of Leith volunteer to discover Brian was a very active Trustee. I recall that at that time Brian was one of only two people authorised to use a chain saw which he wielded very efficiently but with great care and he was regularly called upon to saw up large trees in and around the Water of Leith so that they could be taken out of the river or allowed to continue on their way downstream. When fellow Trustee and friend Graham Priestley passed away in 2004 Brian set about creating 'Graham's Garden' in Balerno, a lasting memorial and wonderful addition to the walkway. His gifts as a speaker were once again called upon to 'record' tracks for our audio trail, his passion for the river and its history preserved forever.



*Brian hard at work by the river*

It was Brian, in 2012, who suggested that I might like to consider becoming a Trustee, and with his encouragement, I sat in on a few Trustees' meetings before being formally adopted later in the year. As a Trustee, Brian always had a well-considered contribution to make and he was always listened to with great respect.

He was a supporter of a number of charities and one of his great achievements was to walk from Land's End to John O'Groats at the age of 57, a feat which he carried out in only 38 days, whilst carrying a 20Kg pack on his back!

### River News Round-Up

- ◆ Scottish Water has begun its upgrading works to the combined sewage overflow network at Juniper Green and Colinton. At Juniper Green, work was slowed down initially due to the discovery of an old underground culvert/lade which needed to be infilled before the main construction works could begin. Work to construct the new chamber has also begun in Colinton with the site compound being situated in Spylaw car park. This means that access to the car park is limited to weekends only. Minor diversions at both sites will remain in place for the duration of the works.
- ◆ The beautiful mural at Colinton Tunnel has been completed and is brightening up everyone's winter walks. The longest community mural in Scotland, this art work took four years to complete and is the combined work of artist Chris Rutterford, 500 school children and other community volunteers. It was even featured on the STV 6 o'clock news on October 21<sup>st</sup>!
- ◆ Walkway closures remain in place in Dean Village and around the bridges in the Dells. However, on a positive note, the new stretch of the walkway is now open at West Bowling Green Street.

**How to join the Water of Leith Conservation Trust** - Complete the form and post payment to the address below or visit [www.waterofleith.org.uk/join](http://www.waterofleith.org.uk/join) and join through our PayPal account

<b>Individual membership</b>	£16	<b>Concession (retired, student, unemployed)</b>	£10
<b>Family</b>	£30	<b>Group (schools and voluntary bodies)</b>	£32

Name..... Date.....

Address.....

Email..... Tel No.....

**Post to: Trust Administrator, Water of Leith Visitor Centre, 24 Lanark Road, Edinburgh, EH14 1TQ**

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