

Annual Report 2015/16

Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park



Presented to the Park Authority Joint Committee
September 2016

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1.0 Introduction

Clyde Muirshiel Park Authority is a Joint Committee of Renfrewshire, Inverclyde and North Ayrshire Councils.

The aims of Clyde Muirshiel Park Authority are:-

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, biodiversity and cultural heritage of Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park.
- To encourage and enable learning, understanding and enjoyment of Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park.
- To promote and foster environmentally sustainable development for the social and economic well being of the people and communities within the Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park area.

The benefits delivered by the Park Authority are recognised as making a positive contribution to wider national and local agendas in the areas of health improvement, active lifestyles, community engagement, volunteering and employability.

This report will present the work of the Park Authority and its staff in the year April 2015 to March 2016.

2.0 Recreation and Access

A key function of the Park is to actively promote Responsible Access to recreational visitors and education groups and liaise closely with the local landowners and managers.

The Park is represented on the Renfrewshire Access Forum and Inverclyde Local Access Forum and works closely with Police Scotland encouraging and implementing responsible access throughout the Regional Park.

2.1 Regional Park Visitor Numbers

From April 2012 visitor numbers reported to Visit Scotland have increased. Figures based on car counter data and observational records are:

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Castle Semple	339,903	346,464	344,694	320,184
Muirshiel	35,721	34,444	34,221	36,419
Greenock Cut	45,547	60,926	67,560	77,437
Lunderston Bay	185,478	173,652	198,695	215,425
Total	606,649	615,486	645,170	649,465
change (2012-13 base)	0%	+1.5%	+6.4%	+7.1%

2.2 Access Initiatives

The Locherwood Community Woodland and Ladymuir link path are still popular dog walking areas despite the waterlogged ground conditions over the winter months. The route is also well used by Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) groups navigating to and from Muirshiel Centre.

More Geocache sites have been added to the growing number situated throughout the Regional Park with staff providing advice on their co-ordinates and liaising with relevant landowners to contact for permission, as required.

A linking route between Shielhill Glen Nature Trail and Leapmoor forest continues to be promoted and has seen increased usage by DofE groups camping at Everton Scout Camp in Inverkip.

Park staff has continued to develop access for participants with additional support needs to a wide range of activities. This has been achieved by increasing our equipment fleet including our new wheelyboat and bellboats.

Our constituted cycling club, Ride 63 continues to flourish and in conjunction with the Park is spearheading the new cycling consortium looking into developing off road cycling within the Park. Additional hand cycles have been purchased this year.

2.3 Semple Trail Heritage Project (STHP)

The Semple Trail Heritage Project has been successfully delivered since 2012 and will finish in the summer of 2016. The £860,000 project has delivered a number of improvements along a 15km trail route which runs through Castle Semple Country Park and the surrounding area.

The key deliverables of the project are:

- The highly successful Windows on Wildlife project.
- Around 2km on new and improved path network and associated signage and waymarking.
- Installation of high quality, uniquely designed interpretation including 7 'lookootheries', carved chainsaw benches, seats and 20 rubbing posts.
- Repair and conservation work to the historic estate's category B – listed cascade complex structures.
- A successful activity and volunteer programme, with the latter achieving close to 300 hours of volunteer time.

Access has been substantially improved making key routes easier to use for a wider range of abilities. In addition, the Semple Trail has been made more conspicuous both locally and regionally through successful branding and targeted publicity.

The project was funded and supported by Renfrewshire Council, Heritage Lottery Fund, Historic Environment Scotland, Renfrewshire LEADER, Forestry Commission Scotland, Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and South Renfrewshire Access Network Initiative (SRANI).

Park staff has contributed to the interpretation aspects for this project and the production of a brochure on the history of the area, a Kid's passport and a leaflet.

2.4 Recreation Events

The Park develops and delivers a range of recreational events. The Park is also a resource utilised by outside agencies i.e. Local Authority Outdoor Education units, Sports Development units, Colleges, Schools and Youth groups.

Walking events this year included the annual 'Pound and Pace' charity walk of the Greenock Cut in June and the Renfrewshire Active Weekend Walk to Castle Semple in August with 47 participants raising over £400 for a local kidney dialysis charity.

Greenock Cut Centre again hosted the Scottish Western Thoroughbred Vehicle Club meeting with 50 plus vintage cars parked onsite. The event was advertised via press releases and social media and attracted over 300 people to come and take a look at the pre 1930s cars.

The Renfrewshire Feeling Fitter Walk programme benefited from funding from Awards for All (A4A) this year allowing several additional walk leaders to be trained. A4A also funded the Park staff led walk programme at various levels throughout the year. Staff led over 68 walks with 720 participants across the Park.

The Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) Award Scheme is now included in the school curriculum. Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park has developed provision of this award as part of the service it provides. Park staff provided DofE experiences directly to 377 clients.

The Park hosts a number of active water sports clubs who run regattas, training sessions and provide social as well as sporting opportunities to all ages. Castle Semple Rowing Regatta on 14 May 2015 was once again the largest club regatta in Scotland. Park staff worked alongside the regatta organisers to facilitate a successful event.

In partnership with Paisley's Coats Observatory, we once again ran 4 star gazing nights at Muirshiel Centre. One event was covered by the Astronomical Society for Glasgow and 99 participants took part in a varied programme which we aim to continue with next year.

2.5 'Branching Out'; Mental Health Programme

Twenty popular 'Branching Out' programmes in total. This course is a treatment model for referred clients with mental health problems developed by NHS Boards in Scotland in partnership with the Forestry Commission and financially supported by the Scottish Government.

During the year the Park delivered 4 'Branching Out' programmes with financial support from the Forestry Commission and 2 with support from the Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH) Inverclyde branch. These programmes have been very successful based on retention rates, feedback from participants and the views of the health professionals who accompany them.

In February 2016, CMRP was successful in acquiring funding through the Awards for All part of the Big Lottery Fund, forming the development of a new partnership with Recovery Across Mental Health (RAMH). This will provide 2 independently funded programmes for 2016/17.

A number of Park staff undertook Branching Out Leader training at the start of 2016 thus increasing the pool of staff able to deliver the programme.

3.0 Biodiversity and Nature Conservation

3.1 Biodiversity Projects and Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAP's)

Eight sites were monitored for peregrines and there were two successful breeding pairs. The records were passed to SNH and RSPB. Seabirds and wetland birds were counted as part of national initiatives and details entered to the British Trust for Ornithology WeBS site.

In the Renfrewshire Heights Special Protection Area there were no breeding hen harriers with few sightings recorded.

Work experience students from the University of the West of Scotland (UWS) Paisley were involved in general conservation work producing reports on water quality at Castle Semple Loch and Woodland survey at Muirshiel.

Work has continued for the Cample Burn juniper restoration project with weeding and propagation of cuttings and UWS students planting out juniper at the site.

Volunteers and work experience students from UWS Paisley campus have contributed a variety of reports including surveys for reptiles at Muirshiel and Greenock Cut.

UK studies are showing a decline in house martin numbers. To help research the reasons for this decline, Park staff and volunteers aim to contribute to BTO house martin surveys which are to be undertaken in 2016 once the nesting season starts.

3.2 Woodland Plans

A felling license has been submitted to the Forestry Commission for part of the woodland at Muirshiel with removal planned to commence in autumn 2016. In conjunction with Renfrewshire Council a Draft Management Plan has been prepared and will be submitted to the Forestry Commission for approval in 2016.

Work has continued with the herbicide treatment of rhododendron re-growth and the removal of wind blow. Volunteers have removed self-sown sitka saplings at Muirshiel and two hectares of rhododendrons were cleared at Parkhill Woods.

The plantation near the Greenock Cut Visitor centre has been replanted with native broad leaf by Ardgowan Estate.

3.3 Water Quality at Castle Semple Loch

At Castle Semple Loch, the Park Authority has monitored water quality since 1997. Levels of chlorophyll (a measure of algal amounts) have not increased and are around one quarter of their value (9.3 µg/l) since recording began in 2012.

The Loch does have occasional algal blooms but management protocols are in place to ensure public safety. Monitoring of water quality is required to assist the safe operation of water based activities and is also an important determinant of biodiversity. A full report on water quality parameters is presented to the Park Authority annually.

3.4 Volunteers

Volunteers continue to make a major contribution to biodiversity and nature conservation in the Park. Many of the tasks they achieve e.g. control of invasive species, establishment of native species and development of habitats are identified in the Local Biodiversity Action Plans. Volunteers are discussed further in Education and Understanding (section 5.02).

1,267 volunteers provided 3,768 hours worth of work across the Park (equivalent to 2 full time people). Volunteer work programmes are planned three months in advance and advertised so people can pick and choose which sessions they wish to attend.

4.0 Commercial Activity and Marketing

4.1 Retail and Catering

Retail and Catering has been an area of concern for the past number of years as the income figures were disappointing and showed a year on year loss. However during 2015/16 performance has improved significantly and for the first time for a number of years a surplus of over £3,000 has been achieved.

The figures below show the significant turnaround in this financial year:

Income Year	Salaries	Spend	Income	Deficit (+)/ Surplus (-)
2010/11	103438	80184	177813	5809
2011/12	107655	81643	171922	17376
2012/13	103498	82499	173871	12076
2013/14	101448	80763	170287	11924
2014/15	97553	91297	171916	16934
2015/16	93615	78967	175855	-3273

4.2 Marketing and Promotional Activity

The Windows on Wildlife Project Officer continued as the 'Wildlife Expert' on STV Glasgow's evening programme 'Live at Five' as well as 'Scotland's City Safari' – a 26 week-long one night a week wildlife show. This has provided the Park with a regular television profile focusing primarily on wildlife and conservation activities both within the Regional Park but equally at other wildlife locations in West Central Scotland. The Park has provided content for BBC Radio Scotland 'Out-of-Doors'.

The legacy of 'Race 2 the Games' continued with accessible activity days taking place, press coverage for the 'Spring' and Multi-Class' Regatta, the launch of the new wheelyboat by Olympic Double Gold Medallist Shirley Robertson plus various magazines included articles on the accessible activities available at Castle Semple Centre over the year.

Pedal the Park was a brand new event in April 2015. It had its own marketing plan creating partnership working opportunities and resulted in new audience awareness for the Regional Park.

The Park produced a quality seasonal "What's on" for both summer and winter. The summer edition had a print run of 20,000. The winter publication had a new format and a print run of 10 000, it is a timely reminder that the countryside is open throughout the year. This full colour publication was supported with web listings, posters and social media activities.

Social media channels: Facebook, Twitter and You Tube continue and are used to communicate with Park users and promote Park activities. By March 2016 there were 1,660 'likes' on Facebook and 1,300 'followers' on Twitter. The videos on You Tube have been viewed over 25,000 times.

There has also been the creation of a new Instagram account featuring images of the Park. After just one month the followers are already at 100 individuals.

4.3 Events

The events programme runs throughout the year offering a diverse mix of activities aimed at all age groups and sectors of society. Over 128 events took place this year in the Park, either run or facilitated by Park staff with a total of 7,397 participants.

Park staff also presented to a range of interest groups over the year, with the Green Wood working events continuing to be a popular draw with an opportunity for the general public to “have a go” themselves.

Doors Open Day enabled visitors to access the tower at Castle Semple Visitor Centre and learn a little local history. At the Greenock Cut the Park hosted a ‘bus tour’ organised for Doors Open Day by Inverclyde Tourism Group.

4.4 Online Activities

Park Website

In addition to Social Media activities in 2015 there were 158,929 visits to the website by 82,000 unique visitors; this compared to 145,691 visits by 73,088 visitors respectively in 2015. Trends in visits increase with the seasons, culminating in 15,976 visits in July 2015.

The three most viewed pages were: ‘Castle Semple’, ‘Park sites’ and ‘Things to do’. The three most downloaded files are ‘price list’, ‘Castle Semple Loch Management Plan’ and ‘History of Castle Semple Estate’.

4.5 Campsite

During 2015/16 the booking for the campsite was amended and resulted in a slight decrease in income but this is more than compensated for by the decrease in expenditure on this sector of the business.

User numbers are presented below:

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Camping Bed nights	177	162	291	371	214
Shieling Bed nights	363	74	37	65	154
Youth Group Bed nights	1465	755	633	586	592
Youth Groups	32	29	20	21	18
Income £	9,303	11,551	6,780	8,803	7060

5.0 Education and Understanding

5.1 Education / Conservation Events

All events are advertised in the new format bi-annual "What's On" guide as well as making use of social media, the Park website and individual posters targeted to specific events.

Events included rock pooling at Largs and Seamill, a summer series of children's events, swan chat events and several survey walks to study butterflies, bees and bats.

In partnership with Scottish Orienteering, the Greenock Cut Centre (GCVC) hosted a training event with participants visiting from across Central Scotland. Over the weekend participants and instructors were out, making their way around the hills surrounding the Greenock Cut Centre.

The International One Metre (IOM) model boat club events and their championships took place at Castle Semple again this year with the overall Scottish championship booked for next year too.

We facilitated an Outdoor Access Event at Castle Semple run in association with the Renfrewshire Access Officer and various other countryside groups (Police, Gleniffer Rangers, British Horse Society, Sustrans cyclists and a local dog trainer). This event was designed to promote and encourage responsible access with over 340 people attending.

Eighty six people took the opportunity to take part in the GCVC summer events. These events were tried and tested popular events from previous years. They included rockets, mask making, pond dipping, GPS treasure hunt and rock pooling. A pilot event for woodcarving was held at the Greenock Cut Visitor Centre, it was fully booked by paying visitors and there has been demand for another.

5.2 Volunteers

Once again in 2015/16 there was an increase in the number of volunteer groups and individuals giving up their time to volunteer at Castle Semple, Muirshiel and Greenock Cut Centres.

Several corporate groups volunteered (including Rolls Royce, New Caledonian Woodlands and Ordnance Survey & Insight Vacations). They contributed towards their local community working mainly on alien species control (rhododendron, sitka spruce and Himalayan balsam). Other activities included path maintenance and drain construction, pond clearance, tree planting and maintenance, hedge laying, painting, dry stone walling, wildlife surveys and litter picking.

The Thursday adult group is increasing steadily in numbers as is our DofE youth group with those attending working their way from bronze, through silver to their gold awards.

Our regular Assisted Needs Groups are continuing to help landscape around the centre areas and Community Networks will be applying to do their second John Muir Award Explorer Level at Muirshiel Centre. The group did the first Discovery Level award in 2014.

Whilst the Park Authority is committed to the principle that the primary beneficiary of volunteering should be the volunteer, the Park Authority is also extremely grateful to all our volunteers for their help in conserving the natural beauty of the Regional Park.

5.3 Work with Education Groups

Providing outdoor learning opportunities for all ages and abilities is still one of the main outputs for Park staff with 5,495 participants taking advantage of this service in 2015/16.

Educational experiences are directly linked to the Curriculum for Excellence for school pupils of all ages. Subjects cover a range of activities from building bug hotels and bat boxes to willow weaving and map skills.

The formal education programme also includes Eco School visits where staff are involved with practical conservation tasks within the school grounds such as establishing wild flower meadows or giving advice to the schools eco committees.

The majority of the visits to Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park are by local pre-school and primary school children learning about the natural environment.

This year saw:

	Number of visits	Number of pupils
Assisted needs	26	164
College/University	10	177
Nursery	17	218
Primary	130	4236
Secondary	24	700
TOTALS	207	5495

5.4 Activities

The Park has worked hard to provide an extensive programme of courses, including kayaking, sailing, canoeing, powerboating, cycling, and multi-activity courses, principally at Castle Semple for people of all abilities.

As shown in the table below we have continued to build on the legacy work of Race2thegames by increasing Addition Support Needs (ASN) provision.

The new wheelyboat "Discovery" has been doing fantastic work allowing us an increase of more than 50% in accessible powerboating. It should be noted that Discovery is also used in the multi activity sessions that make up the numbers in the junior and adult ASN numbers.

The launch event of the boat combined with the press coverage has encouraged new groups to get in touch and book to use the boat.

Places used in various categories:

	2014/15	2015/16
Mainstream Taster/multi activity course places	1948	1120
Additional Support Needs (ASN) Junior taster/multi activity places	2085	2545
ASN Adult taster/multi activity places	274	956
Mainstream school multi activity places	829	1238
Places on the accessible powerboat	201	470
Duke of Edinburgh provision	0	377
Coaching course places across all disciplines	571	295
Total places provided	5908	7001

We have delivered a number of large events during the year to showcase the range of accessible sports on offer within the Park, these include:

- Spinal Injuries Scotland para sport day with 90 people taking part in various sports at Castle Semple.
- Scottish Multiclass Sailability Regatta at Castle Semple.
- Supporting the Scottish Disability Sport Para Festival at Strathclyde Park, with approximately 55 people taking part in accessible sport. The 2016 venue is at Castle Semple.

6.0 Management & Resources

6.1 Financial Management

The Management team have continued to develop the systems for grant management and have assisted the Park Treasurer by further refining payroll phasing and other aspects of expenditure profiles. The use of a Corporate Purchasing Card and the online purchasing system 'Pecos' continue to assist in streamlining the Park's procurement process.

6.2 Health and Safety

The Park management continues to work to align Health and Safety policy and practices more closely with those of Renfrewshire Council, the servicing authority. Five Health and Safety training courses were attended by 36 members of staff.

Accident rates in the Park remain low with only minor injuries, although one incident with an archery group could have resulted in a serious injury. This incident was investigated and recommendations made were included in the operating procedures for this activity to prevent a recurrence.

Thirteen injuries to visitors were recorded and these were mainly from falls when cycling in the Park and illness. There were no RIDDOR reportable incidents or illnesses. These figures are very low given the 1.23 million visits annually to the Park and the range of activities taking place.

6.3 Incident Reports

Staff routinely monitor incidents using a system developed many years ago, although care should be taken when reading trends over time into the tables. A summary of the incidents are as follows:-

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Vandalism	17	22	14	12	5
Theft	6	5	4	2	4
Abandoned Vehicles	3	2	1	0	3
Fire/Alarm Call Out	4	5	5	0	3
Health & Safety	36	29	38	57	16
Law & Country Code	24	25	22	16	11
Maintenance	27	12	12	12	1
Accident Assistance	8	4	2	4	4
Other	6	23	25	17	5
Total	131	127	123	120	52

6.4 Feedback and Complaints

Formal written complaints by form, letter or email for the period related to:

Castle Semple:

Lack of Boat Hire	1
Toilet Opening Hours	1
Semple Trail – Cows on Trail	1
Responsible Access Issues	2
Japanese Knotweed	1
Vandalism to memorial bench	1

Muirshiel

Closure of Cafe over Winter	1
Responsible Access Issues	1

Greenock Cut

Customer Service Issues	2
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6.5 Park Authority

Cllr Christopher Gilmour is the Chair of the Clyde Muirshiel Park Authority Joint Committee.

The Park Authority members are:

Cllr Christopher Gilmour	Renfrewshire Council
Cllr Andy Doig	Renfrewshire Council
Cllr Derek Bibby	Renfrewshire Council
Cllr J MacLaren	Renfrewshire Council – replaced Cllr Doig
Cllr John Caldwell	Renfrewshire Council
Cllr Anthea Dickson	North Ayrshire Council
Cllr Tom Marshall	North Ayrshire Council
Cllr David Wilson	Inverclyde Council
Cllr Innes Nelson	Inverclyde Council

6.6 Financial Performance Summary

The extracts below exclude accounting adjustments relating to pensions, short term accumulating absences and accrued employee costs. With the exception of 2015/16, all extracts are from the Audited Annual Accounts for the year to 31 March, the extract from 2015/16 is from the unaudited Annual Accounts for the year to 31 March 2015.

Expenditure

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Employee Costs	1,002,025	1,030,524	864,549	809,781
Property Costs	49,836	47,890	49,940	45,807
Supplies and Services	304,877	215,585	207,780	137,213
Contractors	21,155	12,368	17,590	17,201
Transport and Plant	73,325	74,540	63,855	49,566
Admin Costs	96,929	93,850	90,231	85,954
Payments to other Bodies	1,412	1,433	1,400	1,600
Total	1,549,559	1,476,190	1,295,345	1,147,122

Income

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Grants	(24,628)	(39,458)	(89,507)	0
Sales Fees & Charges	(152,671)	(138,093)	(133,088)	(197,921)
Retail & Catering	(173,887)	(171,685)	(175,916)	(175,855)
Miscellaneous	(153,610)	(85,622)	(21,693)	(12,374)
Requisition from member authorities	(1,039,900)	(1,022,200)	(857,500)	(808,100)
Total	(1,544,696)	(1,457,058)	(1,273,704)	(1,194,250)
(Surplus)/ Deficit	4,868	19,132	21,641	(47,126)

These figures show a reduction in cost per visitor to the unitary authorities from £1.60 in 2013/2014 to £1.24 in 2015/2016.

The final accounts for 2015/16 show a surplus of £47,126 against a targeted break even position. This allows an increase in reserves following an agreed budgeted deficit in 2014/15 to assist Park Management in meeting the Park Authority's service obligations.

6.7 Grant Income

Grant funding has been important to the many projects managed by the Park Authority. The schedule below illustrates some of the projects funded by Grant Awards during 2015/16 as follows:

Grant	£	Project
Sportscotland – legacy active places	42,000	Installation of new pontoon
Wheelyboat Trust and partners	35,000	Purchase of new wheelyboat
Awards for all - paracycling	10,000	Purchase of handcycles
Tesco local community scheme	10,000	Castle Semple conservation group pond project
Awards for All - RAMH	7,300	2 x Branching Out programmes
Forestry Commission	8,800	2 x Branching Out programmes
Awards for All – Erskine Hospital	10,000	Activity programme