

Annual Report 2019/20

Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park



Presented to the Park Authority Joint Committee
December 2020

1.0 Introduction

This Annual Report seeks to outline activities and operations in Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park within the context of the priorities for the Park Authority and as set out in the Park Strategy 2016 -2021 to promote : -

- Leisure activity and health
- Education and outdoor learning
- Environmental management

This report presents the work of the Park Authority and its staff in the year April 2019 to March 2020.

2.0 Leisure Activity and Health

2.1 Outdoor leisure activities will be resourced and developed in line with market demand.

2.1.1 *Maintain standards for related governing body accreditation.*

Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park gained Adventure Activity Licencing (AALA) Accreditation, Royal Yachting Association (RYA) Accreditation and British Canoe Union (BCU) Accreditation.



2.1.2 *Provide for Duke of Edinburgh Awards (DofE).*

Duke of Edinburgh activities continue to increase in the Park with groups coming from across the central belt to undertake their expeditions. More than five hundred (532) young people made use of the Inverclyde countryside for Bronze expeditions this year. Actual numbers may be higher as unfortunately not all groups liaise in advance.

2.1.3 *Develop accessibility within the Park and its activities.*

2019/20 saw another positive year for clients with disabilities. New client groups took part in activities increasing participation numbers in some areas. The numbers of people wanting to come for accessible powerboat trips from care services rose by almost 50%.

2.1.4 *Develop cycling within the Park and surrounding area.*

Pedal the Park sportive took place (again) in May attracting 300 riders.

The Park was asked to support the HSBC Go Ride Glasgow event in August by providing accessible cycling at Glasgow Green.

In partnership with Inverclyde Project Community Tracks a number of cycle repair stations have been installed at key locations across the Park, they help cyclists undertake basic repairs and maintenance while out and about.

2.1.5 *Provide certified activity courses for the public.*

A variety of certified coaching courses ran in sailing, powerboat and paddle sports for nearly two hundred (182) participants.

2.1.6 *Provide bespoke courses for client organisations.*

In total over five thousand (5372) outdoor activity sessions were provided for client groups, this includes mainstream schools, ASN schools and various adult and junior care and support services.

2.1.7 *Develop / provide specialist activity days.*

This was the sixth year that we have provided mass participation events for both Scottish Disability Sport and Spinal Injuries Scotland. Both days were hugely successful with people coming from all over Scotland to take part in accessible sports, have discussions with support services and find out from the sport governing bodies what activity they could do in their own locality.

2.1.8 *Develop / provide specialist events.*

Events for the period have included, Pedal the Park 100km cycle sportive, Stargazing Nights, Model Yacht Championships, Accessible Sailing Regattas, sponsored walks or runs and a Classic Car Show.

The second Clyde Muirshiel Walking Festival took place in May 2019 with 82 people taking part in 13 walks led by 26 volunteer walk leaders. Most of the volunteer leaders were members of local rambler or hill walking groups.

The internationally renowned Original Mountain Marathon (OMM) was held in the Park with close to 2000 entrants from across the world taking part in a two day race. The competition started near Largs and made use of both Renfrewshire and Inverclyde hills. OMM staff and volunteers liaised with Park staff before, during and after the event with all participants visiting Muirshiel Country Park and camping overnight in a neighbouring field.

2.2 **The Park will continue to work with health services to facilitate health improvement activities.**

2.2.1 *Facilitate volunteering opportunities with community care groups.*

Park staff worked with Community Networks Adult Assisted Needs Group who provided 85 hours of volunteering at Muirshiel Country Park as well as 12 hours of volunteering at the Greenock Cut Centre.

2.2.2 *Facilitate Health walk programmes.*

There were 34 programmed walks by Rangers with a total of 383 participants. This included 25 Community Health walks around Lochwinnoch with 219 people and 9 walks with 164 people taking part from the Inverclyde Health Walking Group.

2.2.3 *Develop and deliver ecotherapy programmes.*

The 'Branching Out' Mental Health Referral programme at Muirshiel Country Park ran over 12 weeks providing 151 participant activities, this was part funded by the Forestry Commission in partnership with CMRP. Inverclyde SAMH completed a

branching out programme with 94 participant activities recorded within the time scale of this report.

The development of a youth program based on the successful Branching Out model has progressed with the Inverclyde Council Active School team. Funding is being sought for a series of Ranger led sessions for secondary students.

3.0 Education and Outdoor Learning

3.1 Promote the Park as a platform for Outdoor Learning

3.1.1 Facilitate school, college and university visits

The Park location, its infrastructure and staff help facilitate many visits to the Regional Park.

Nearly six hundred (559) young people engaged with Park staff and used the Regional Park for Duke of Edinburgh Award training and expedition activities during the year.

One secondary school of over one thousand pupils used the Greenock Cut trail for a sponsored walk.

3.1.2 Raise awareness of the Park and its resources through marketing and promotion via professional networks.

Park staff contribute to a number of networks and partnership activities such as 'Marine Conservation Society Beach Watch', 'British Marine Scotland', 'Sport Scotland Professional Officers Group', 'Local Area Tourism Partnerships' as well as work with Scotland's Rural College (SURC), University of the West of Scotland (UWS) and University of Glasgow.

Park staff contribute and often host both the Inverclyde and Renfrewshire Access Forums. As part of the Inverclyde Local Access Forum, Regional Park staff represented the Park at the National Access Forum conference. Park staff contributed to National & Regional Park Reviews and National Ranger Service Development.

Staff membership of the Scottish Countryside Ranger Association Council (SCRA) continues, with staff contributing to the SCRA child protection policy.

3.2 Deliver, monitor and review a programme of informative events for visitors of all ages, linking into curriculum outcomes where appropriate.

3.2.1 Deliver learning activities to groups, including schools, youth organisations and summer groups.

The total number of educational participants in the year was 2559. An additional two thousand (2254) people took part in events.

Learning activities ranged from work with school groups to family friendly events such as responsible access events and walks, habitat and wildlife awareness activities. Outdoor learning includes basic pond dipping and rock pooling sessions



with nursery pupils, introduction to food chains and mini-beast surveys with primary schools to bush craft skill and earth science with secondary school pupils. A breakdown can be seen in the following table:

| Learning Activity Age \ No. at Location | Greenock Cut & Lunderston Bay | Muirshiel & Castle Semple |
|--|--|--------------------------------------|
| School - Nursery | 173 | 28 |
| School - Primary | 604 | 514 |
| School - Secondary | 373 | 81 |
| School – College/Uni | 0 | 55 |
| Talks | 44 | 148 |
| Eco-schools | 0 | 0 |
| John Muir/DofE | 0 | 557 |
| Total | 1176 | 1383 |

Where possible most learning sessions are delivered within the Park, however outreach work is undertaken and delivered within the community or at schools if more appropriate such as visiting day care centres or residential homes.

3.2.2 *Establish clear links between educational activity and Curriculum for Excellence (CfE).*

Rangers continue to work alongside teachers, to ensure that educational visits cover numerous sections within the curriculum. Educational visits not only include the sciences but provide a connectivity to a wide variety of outcomes and experiences from across the whole curriculum.

3.3 **Use the Park’s digital resources to maximise the scope for learning.**

3.3.1 *Maintain the Park’s online profile, expanding reach where possible.*

Online, the website has regular blog content. Social media content reflects this and other messages/stories of relevance/engagement. All channels making regular interactions with the public, promoting events, activities and the day to day working activities of Park staff.

Social media engagement continues to increase, in March 2020 there were 4154 followers on Facebook, 2074 on Twitter and 1126 on Instagram. You Tube has been viewed over 140,000 times. TripAdvisor content is also monitored and actioned as appropriate.

3.3.2 *Provide a contemporary suite of accessible digital information.*

Outdoor activity courses and countryside events are all bookable online.

The mobile enabled website allows more information to be easily viewable, as new resources are developed; content is being made available online, examples of this include the Conservation Volunteer Programmes, Management Reports and Route

Guides for walks or cycles. A workshop was delivered and attended by six staff on how to produce engaging blogs.

Our library of digital images is key to delivering talks and presentations.

4.0 Environmental Management

4.1 Enhance the Park's natural heritage whilst safeguarding key species, habitats and landscape character.

4.1.1 *Deliver a comprehensive regime of inspections and maintenance whilst undertaking and contributing to environmental surveys and information gathering exercises.*

Inspections take place at all the visitor centres to ensure compliance with Health and Safety (H&S) legislation.

Countryside Rangers undertook nearly eighty (78) biological surveys during the year and submit their findings to national data bases to help monitor ecological trends. In Inverclyde butterfly, mammal, lizard and wetland bird surveys were undertaken as well as regular Osprey monitoring during breeding season. In Renfrewshire 45 surveys including wetland birds, butterflies and grey squirrel were undertaken.

Following last year's first ever Regional Park osprey pair successfully raising two chicks, this year, three young fledged and were ringed by Park staff.

High levels of cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) is now recognised as a very likely annual summer feature of Castle Semple Loch. Permanent signs to inform the general public of the potential of toxic blue-green algae have been placed at three key points of lochside access. Occasional testing is recommended to confirm that the algae present are cyanobacteria and staff continue to inform visitors through online and on site communications when these levels are notably high.

Lunderston Bay Bathing Water quality is monitored by SEPA throughout the bathing season. The water quality is described as 'excellent, good, sufficient or poor'. Based on the last four years of monitoring data, Lunderston Bay has been categorised as 'Good'.

4.1.2 *Manage conservation volunteering activity.*

Overall, volunteers have contributed nearly four thousand (3945) hours of work. The work plans for all the Regional Park hosted volunteer groups are co-ordinated, planned and overseen by the Countryside Ranger Service. All of the tasks undertaken by our volunteers contributes to the successful maintenance of the Park.



Youth Volunteer Groups at Muirshiel/Castle Semple, many of whom are working towards their Duke of Edinburgh Award contributed 897 hours. Those working on their John Muir Award contributed 135 hours.

The Castle Semple Conservation Volunteers (CSCV) did 1377 hours of work, this included tree preparation and planting, alien species removal, hedge maintenance, litter removal and wildflower garden work.

In Renfrewshire, business groups including RBS, Scottish Enterprise and Ordnance Survey contributed 189 hours of conservation work.

The Greenock Cut Conservation Volunteers (GCCV) did 1519 hours of work, this includes their attendance and contribution to the larger public volunteer events such as the quarterly beach cleans. The group were finalists in the 2019 Inverclyde "Reach for the Stars" Environment and Heritage Team Award.

In Inverclyde, an additional 168 hours volunteer hours were contributed by companies such as EE, Insight Vacations, RBS, Scottish Enterprise and Community Networks and a group from a local Boys Brigade.

The two Conservation volunteer groups worked together and jointly raised £1,652 by selling handmade wooden Christmas crafts.

4.1.3 *Undertake local conservation projects and input to regional schemes where appropriate.*

At Muirshiel preparation work for tree planting included the burning of the Sitka brushings. Local volunteers and a group from Ordnance Survey have planted around 1500 native broadleaf and Scot's pine. An additional 2500 trees will be planted by the Park staff.

The Greenock Cut based Rangers continue to collect data gathered at our beach clean events for the Marine Conservation Society. This is then collated for the Scottish and National Government to be used as part of the EU's "Marine Strategy Framework Directive 2020".

Scottish Water started their essential maintenance project on the dam on Loch Thom. Prior to work starting they liaised with the Ranger Service as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment.

4.1.4 *Engage staff in training and CPD opportunities to maintain and improve upon skill level.*

Park Staff are continually encouraged to look for and apply for training appropriate to the tasks they undertake in their job role. This year Scottish Ambulance HART team provided a day's training on how to deal with casualties in remote Park locations inaccessible to 'normal' ambulances. There were Ranger training visits to Eglington Park and Whitelees Wind Farm, cycle leader, blog and First Aid training.

4.1.5 *Seek funding for environmental management projects.*

Park staff support the Volunteer groups apply for funding to delivery conservation activities in the Regional Park.

The Semple Stories Lochwinnoch's Glories Heritage project commenced with the employment of a Development Officer in October 2019. Project funding of £37,242.70 is from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Greater Renfrewshire and Inverclyde LEADER programme. The 11 month project will engage with volunteers and SRUC Auchincruive to provide interpretation boards, leaflets and guided walks. Oral histories will be gathered from the Lochwinnoch area. Schools engagement will enable them to learn about their local historical environment.

The Branching Out programme was supported with a £4,000 grant from the Forestry Commission.

4.2 **Work collaboratively with other stakeholders involved in the provision of outdoor management.**

4.2.1 *Consider opportunities for cooperative outdoor management where there is benefit to the Park and its visitors.*

This work is ongoing and includes the Forestry Commission, Scottish Power, Scottish Water, Original Mountain Marathon (OMM) and local landowners and stakeholders.

5.0 **Park Management**

5.1 ***Park Visitor Figures***

Over seven hundred thousand people visited the Regional Park in 2019/20. Visitor figures are reported as the number of visitors per site, as outlined below, this is based on car counter data and observational records.

| | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Greenock Cut | 53 797 | 70 664* | 60 549* |
| Lunderston Bay | 218 221 | 228 288 | 225 961 |
| Castle Semple | 335 438 | 320 052 | 392 612* |
| Muirshiel | 37 426 | 38 376 | 38 652 |
| Total | 644 882 | 657 320 | 717 774 |

*educated estimate, full car counter data not available

5.2 **Maximise opportunities to improve park assets and infrastructure.**

5.2.1 *Carry out review of assets and ensure they are yielding maximum benefit.*

Progress has been made reviewing Park assets. Processes are underway to consolidate Park resources to improve efficiency and accessibility. Opportunities to improve the visitor facilities at Castle Semple Visitor Centre continue to be explored through the Castle Semple Infrastructure Enhancement Project, funded by Renfrewshire Council and Greater Renfrewshire and Inverclyde LEADER.

5.2.2 *Seek appropriate funding opportunities.*

Alternative funding streams continue to be explored in order to improve service. Grant funding has supported activity and mental health development programmes and conservation volunteer activities.

5.3 **Maximise income generation via commercial activity.**

5.3.1 Outdoor Activities income was £148,741. More than five thousand (5554) individuals participated in organised outdoor activities as detailed in the table below. Covid19 impacted on operations during March 2020.

| | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 |
|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Mainstream Adults Taster/multi activity | 705 | 745 | 431 |
| Mainstream Junior Taster/multi activity | 1584 | 1814 | 1554 |
| ASN Junior taster/multi activity | 1191 | 1967 | 2153 |
| ASN Adult taster/multi activity | 1166 | 840 | 522 |
| Accessible Powerboat Experiences | 225 | 371 | 712 |
| Duke of Edinburgh provision | 245 | 135 | 0 |
| Coaching course places all disciplines | 219 | 272 | 182 |
| Total places provided | 5335 | 6144 | 5554 |

5.3.2 Retail and Catering income this year was £145,217 down slightly on the previous year. Efforts to reduce costs and streamline operations while still providing a countryside welcome and visitor information continued.

5.3 *Marketing Activities*

Activities took place throughout the year utilising local press, websites, posters, leaflets and social media channels. The Park continued to support content and material for Paisley.is and DiscoverInverclyde.com

Events, such as the Walking Festival and Pedal the Park had their own marketing plans and created partnership working opportunities, media coverage and new audience awareness.

Various corporate groups volunteered in the Park and created media coverage.

5.4 *Health and Safety*

The Park continues to work to align Health and Safety policy and practices with those of Renfrewshire Council, the servicing authority. There were no RIDDOR reportable incidents.

5.5 *Feedback and Complaints*

Feedback is received in many forms including social media channels, via survey monkey from courses and events, paper forms and thank you letters.

Considering the visitor numbers, complaints remain minimal and minor in nature, written complaints for the period are:

| | | |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Regional Park | Fly tipping | 1 |
| | Information on walks around Largs | 1 |
| | Communication | 3 |
| Muirshiel | Toilet Opening Hours | 1 |
| Castle Semple | Responsible Dog Ownership | 1 |
| | Litter/Wild Camping | 1 |
| | Lack of Wreath Making Event | 1 |
| Greenock Cut | Signage/Toilet Opening Times | 2 |
| Lunderston | Knotweed | 1 |