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## Tentsmuir National Nature Reserve

### NEWSLETTER No. 40

### July 2020

We hope you and your loved ones are safe and well during these challenging times for us all. It's been a very strange few months, working from home, not being able to work in the office, or getting out onto the Reserve. Things are slowly changing and we can now go for walks and visit our NNR. I'm sure, like me, you are looking forward to returning to some normality, but I suspect there will be lasting changes all around.

Welcome to the 40th Newsletter, now in its 22nd year and the last one that I will produce as I retire at the end of June.

Marijke also comes to the end of her year as our Student Placement at Tentsmuir NNR and what a brilliant colleague Marijke has been! More very exciting news inside.



Marijke Leith and I - Image taken by Marijke before Covid19

Tom Cunningham & Marijke Leith.  
Tentsmuir National Nature Reserve

## TENTSMUIR NNR

### GOODBYE TOM - HELLO MARIJKE - INTRODUCING THE NEW NATURE RESERVE MANAGER MARIJKE LEITH

Exciting news! When I retire, I will miss everybody and everything about Tentsmuir NNR. However I am so pleased to announce that Marijke Leith was successful in gaining the job of Managing Paradise NNR. This is absolutely brilliant news!

Marijke has been an inspiration to everyone she works with, and the people she meets on the Reserve. She is brilliant at leading volunteers and volunteer groups, assisting and leading on Education visits and Guided Walks. Marijke produces awesome Facebook posts on our Tentsmuir NNR page which reach a very broad range of people, and attracts several 'likes.' She is enthusiastic, and I know she will use her creative talents and everything she learned on her placement, to great effect. Congratulations to Marijke!

Marijke here; Tentsmuir has stolen my heart and imagine many others would say the same. I am delighted that although my year of being a student placement is ending, my journey at Tentsmuir is not. I am so pleased to be the next Reserve Manager. I look forward to being able to continue working with Alex, Caroline, the brilliant team of Tentsmuir volunteers, and the wider network of SNH colleagues. Everyone has been so welcoming and supportive and I can't thank you all enough!

### TOM'S LAST DAY AT TENTSMUIR NNR

Tom's last day was on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June and it wasn't the day that everyone had in mind pre Covid-19. A small group of us met at Morton Lochs (socially distanced of course) to give Tom his leaving gifts and



cards. A huge thank you to everyone who sent messages, cards and donations for Tom and here he is receiving his original Derek Robertson watercolour paintings.

In his speech he shared one of his proudest moments “My dream was realised last year when Francesca, our CEO, Ruby O’Hare and Louise Anderson, two students from Newport Primary, cut the ribbon at the official opening ceremony. We were piped to the Education Pavilion in great style by Stuart MacQuarrie. That was a very emotional day – proud to have seen the job through, proud to have worked with Caroline, who shared my frustrations, worries and then pure joy when the funding finally came through!

## **TOM’S TOP FOURTEEN BEST MOMENTS**

I was challenged to write my Top Ten achievements on Tentsmuir NNR and but with so many to choose from had to have my top 14!:

Firstly though, just to put it on record, I have had the privilege of having Caroline Gallacher as my Manager for 23 years and we made a great team. Caroline has supported me all the way, she is so knowledgeable and creative. Alex Easson has been the Assistant Reserve Manager for 21 years and we must be the longest serving NNR team in Scotland. Alex has a unique employment situation as he is employed by Forest & Land Scotland and manages some of the forests in Tay District, and also job shares for SNH, here on Tentsmuir NNR. Not only do I have an office at Fetterdale but I also use the Fife Office in Cupar. Some of my colleagues there support us at Tentsmuir and almost all help at our Family Day events.

1. Tentsmuir NNR developed the first specifically designed Education Pack, for any NNR in Scotland. *Life in the Sands*, it was published in 2002/03. The packs were distributed to all the Primary Schools, High Schools in Fife, Dundee, Angus and later on requests throughout the UK, France, Russia and China. It proved to be such a great success, we produced an updated second edition in 2007/08.
2. I estimate that over 10,000 children and students have experienced an education visit to the Reserve. We have had over 500 visits by schools, colleges and universities, and they have used and enjoyed various activities on Tentsmuir NNR. These figures do not include the nursery visits or Nature School at Morton Lochs.
3. We have been working to the Reserve Management Plan and enabling all the management tasks and projects to get Tentsmuir Point, Tayport Heath and Morton Lochs in the best conditions possible and in favourable condition. For example, in my first two years we felled 95% of the trees and scrub on Tentsmuir Point, restoring the dune heath system. This has been incredibly satisfying to see the dune heath, especially the heathers and cross leaf heath, spread over what were essentially bare soils, overshadowed by the trees and scrub. Over the years, it has been satisfying to be able to observe the increase in the numbers of ground nesting birds, butterflies and other invertebrates.
4. The volunteers are, without doubt the most important people on the Reserve. Indeed, they are the lifeblood of the Reserve, and carry out an amazing and diverse range of management tasks; from the hands-on management tasks and projects, they monitor a whole host of wildlife flora and fauna and contribute to our wildlife data base, and achieve all our management targets. These groups are my favourite groups of people. Some volunteers have been with us for over 20 years, and most have well over ten years volunteering here.

5. Student Placements. We have had four Student Placements at Tentsmuir NNR. The first was Blair Johnston, a young student out of Elmwood College. He was a quick learner and enjoyed his year here. Blair enjoyed the Family Day event activities, and events on Tentsmuir. The second was Ruari Dunsmuir, who was exceptional; totally dedicated. His wildlife knowledge was fabulous and he understood all that was needed to enjoy a great year. He went on to join SNH as an Operations Officer in the Dunoon Office.



**Our first lunch on the first day of being locked out of the office, keeping the recommended distance apart.**

Our fourth Student Placement is Marijke Leith, and she is just brilliant and has been a great member of the team. All the experience and knowledge Marijke has gained over the year, will serve her well, as she takes on the post of the NEW NATURE RESERVE MANAGER AT TENTSMUIR NNR!

6. I was fortunate to be able to appoint three incredibly talented people to work and help us on the Reserve. The first was Derek Robertson, RSA, one of the country's foremost wildlife and landscape artists. He was appointed *Artist in Residence* in 2023/14 and produced some magnificent art. Derek also worked on numerous collaborative projects & events with scientists and other creative practitioners over the 18 months. The second was Dr Jim Stewart, who approached me (it was indeed another one of my highlights) and asked to be appointed *Poet in Residence* in 2013. Jim crafted some beautiful poems and had been held in high esteem by his students and peers, for his work on Virginia Woolf, about whom he had published several articles and books.

Jim taught English at the University of Dundee, and went on to work with the university's Writing Practice and Study program. Jim's work appeared in various national and international publications, and he was reviewed extensively. My wife Pete had been one of Jim's students, and we became friends. Sadly, Jim died in June, 2016, and is very sadly missed.

The third wonderful person, is the incredibly talented and knowledgeable, Steve Buckland, who became our *Photographer in Residence in 2019* and he continues to take fantastic images and share his incredible wildlife species data. Steve also contributes his wildlife species lists to our records which we are extremely grateful. See Steve's article coming up.

7. Family Day events on Tentsmuir Point. We started the very popular Family Day events in 1999 and we have held 20 events in July, every year since. Over 150 people book into each event, sometimes I have a list of people on the waiting list in case someone is unable to attend. Along with 20 or more staff & volunteers we keep the visitors happy and informed. We have been very fortunate with the weather, as the sun always shines on Paradise! 😊 The events consist of seven or eight activities and parents and young people can chose to attend one activity or them all! We then have a break for refreshments and then we have a star turn. Sometimes it's been storytellers, puppet shows and all with a Tentsmuir theme. The stars for me were Dr Bunhead aka Tom Pringle who is internationally renowned as a pioneer of performance science. His mad cap experiments had everyone enthralled. The most entertaining were over the last 4 events we had Cat Franchetti who wrote and performed plays again all about Tentsmuir. They were hilarious, for example Pirates Wear Pants related to local history and fun and the children and adults loved them. We also had husband John who did the Scotland's Natural Larder – very yum yum.



The Pirates Wear Pants performance with Cat & Pete.

Also our joint Family Fun Days with Forestry Commission Scotland usually three over the summer school holidays, all were fun and enjoyable and well attended as they were free and they were held at Kinshaldy.

8. A personal achievement that is one of my favourite and one that is rarely ever seen is the Reserve Bibliography. When I started here the bibliography was 7 pages long and contained about 160 items related to Tentsmuir and the surrounding area. 22 years later there are 2170 items

consisting of reports, books, research papers, events, etc. in 102 pages.

9. The Time Line was developed from many of the historical records from the Bibliography and we produced the Time Line Trail through Morton Lochs, the forest over to Tentsmuir Point. Sadly the leaflet is out of print.
10. Developing great working partnerships and relationships with a host of many universities, schools, groups, people and organisations: Professor Rob Duck who is a hero of mine, Professor Bob Crawford and many others, RSPB, FCCT, Tayport Community, Tayport Trust, many loyal contractors, local farmers Robert & Robbie Lamont, FCS now FLS, etc.
11. Working with Pammy Johal of Backbone and the women's groups based in Dundee was just awesome.
12. The WOW factor. Watching visitors faces as they walk from the forest, into Tentsmuir Point via the Icehouse gate, walking up to the dune edge and looking at their faces as they see Paradise for the first time. WOW
13. Showing everyone what Tentsmuir NNR is all about... brings goose bumps to me!
14. The Tentsmuir Education Pavilion – Our greatest achievement. An enormous amount of work by Caroline, the Reserve Staff and of course the architect Kirsty Maguire. Heartache & tears when we weren't successful in gaining the funding, but great joy when we did one year later. And the enormous jubilation when it was completed and won a prestigious award.

## **FUTURE NEWSLETTER**

As said previously, this is my last newsletter and so will be the last in this current format. We will be changing to a quarterly e-newsletter. However, if you do require a paper copy then please contact Marijke on 07341788344 or write to her at SNH [Scottish Natural Heritage | Elmwood Campus | Carslogie Road | Cupar | Fife | KY15 4JB](#) at to provide your name and address and we can arrange to post you a paper copy.

Don't forget to follow our [Facebook](#) page – search for [Tentsmuir National Nature Reserve](#) .... and "Like" it. Or just email the new Nature Reserve Manager at Tentsmuir NNR [Marijke.Leith@nature.scot](mailto:Marijke.Leith@nature.scot)

## **AND FINALLY**

I say a very fond farewell to you all, stay safe, I hope you all keep fit and healthy. And keep on visiting Scotland's beautiful NNRs especially here at Tentsmuir.

My wife and I hope to be travelling on the Preservation Railway Heritage Lines for a very long time so toot toot chuff chuff. Going to gigs, the theatre, art exhibitions, walking the hills and things like that.

Love n hugs

Tom

PS I think I am very happy as Raith Rovers won promotion; we won the league in this rather crazy ending to the season. Now, typical of a Rovers fan, we worry about the ability to stay in the league and win games.