

## THE PENTLAND HILLS REGIONAL PARK JOINT COMMITTEE

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### Pentland Hills Regional Park Manager's Report 2005-06

30 March 2006

#### Purpose of report

- 1 To report to the committee the work completed by the Regional Park during 2005-6

#### Main report

- 2 This report supplements the report presented to the Joint Committee at its meeting in November 05 and concludes the activities of the Regional Park and its Ranger Service throughout April 05-06.
- 3 The Ranger team is now at full strength for the first time in many years. The Regional Park staff consists of the Park Manager, Senior Administrative Assistant, One Senior Ranger and Five Main Grade Rangers. This brings to a conclusion the review of the service and with a team of professional and committed staff, provides an excellent platform to develop the role of the Regional Park.
- 4 The Visitor Survey for the Regional Park is at its 6-month mark and the interim report from the consultants has been submitted to the Regional Park Manager. This reflects predominately the autumn and winter visitation levels. Figures are on a par with those from the previous survey, although the composition of visitors has varied slightly. New information has been obtained about area and path usage within the Regional Park. Focus groups and additional survey work to be undertaken over the spring and summer will examine real or perceived barriers to potential visitors
- 5 The full and final visitor survey report will be presented to the Joint Committee at its next meeting, where projections of annual visitation numbers will be available
- 6 In addition a footpath survey of all routes within the Regional Park has been undertaken by Rangers. This will provide a baseline of information about the condition of paths, coupled with visitation levels achieved through the visitor

survey will form the basis of future management of the Regional Park infrastructure

- 7 At the Joint Committee meeting of 15<sup>th</sup> April 2005 questions were raised regarding the Education service provided by the Regional Park, and how it may respond to changing educational needs.
- 8 The Regional Park undertook a review of its education service and a new plan is appended to this report. Implementation of this plan will commence in the spring of 06, with new education programmes and school visits in place. A new plan is now in place and is appended to this report.
- 9 A revised Volunteer Policy is being finalised, with an ongoing programme of recruitment and training of Volunteer Rangers. 8 new Volunteers joined the team this year, bringing the team strength to 28.
- 10 The Volunteer Ranger Service totalled 118 duty days with an additional 28 days participating in other duties including Vogrie festival, biodiversity surveying and assisting with visitor counts. This amounts to over 1000 volunteer hours spent in the Regional Park.
- 11 The Regional Park hosted the first Farmer and Landowners event in many years in September on the theme of access, where over 50 residents, farmers and business within the Regional Park attended. This meeting took on a new format providing expert advice and information about access related issues in the Regional Park. An additional meeting specific to those affected by new access rights to water was also held. Future meetings are planned as well as an annual event.
- 12 However liaison with farmers and landowners is an ongoing process in the Regional Park with 70 Rangers days spent on projects of direct benefit to the farming community. These would include the erection of seasonal signage, the purchase and erection of bridle gates provided free of charge, hosting farm visits, support of the creation of stells and promotion of Pentland Hills Produce. The Regional Park has spent in excess of £7k directly on farming related projects.
- 13 The Parks commitment to extending opportunities to socially excluded groups is being developed with new contacts made in Edinburgh and Midlothian councils, and events and programmes undertaken for women's groups, health initiatives and youth groups. Community groups continue to make good use of the Ranger Service with 24 groups and 764 participants taking part in activities. 21 groups were from Edinburgh with 1 from Midlothian and 2 from West Lothian
- 14 From April 05-06, 18 schools undertook environmental education programmes, totalling 457 pupils. 4 were secondary schools and 5 university classes. 12 schools were from Edinburgh with 3 coming from Midlothian.
- 15 Conservation Projects continue to be undertaken by a range of differing groups across the Regional Park. 25 groups, with over 200 participants have cleared drains, planted trees and assisted with mending bridges and fences. These

figures do not include the sterling work that has been undertaken by the Currie and Balerno Rotary Club and the work they have done to transform the wildlife Garden at Harlaw.

- 16 Park publications continue to be well received, with the new Visitor Guide requiring a further print run. The website is now well established with regular updates an excellent portal for up to date information about path and road closures, weather conditions and ice safety alerts. It has received 112,535 hits to dates averaging 9377 monthly.
- 17 A review of the 2000-2005 Pentland Hills Regional Park Integrated management Strategy, which was previously distributed. Preparations for a new Park Plan have commenced and will be reported at a future meeting of the Joint Committee.
- 18 The Regional Park has continued to be represented at the Midlothian Tourism Forum, the Tyne and Esk Leader + Action Group, all three Local Access fora and Biodiversity Partnerships, provides the secretariat for the Pentland Hills Produce and is represented on the committee of the Friends of Pentlands. The latter group has grown from strength to strength and are planning a number of conservation day as well as over projects within and outwith the Regional Park

#### **Recommendation**

- 19 That the committee note the Park Manager's report.



**Herbert Coutts**  
Director of Culture and Leisure

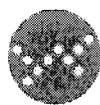
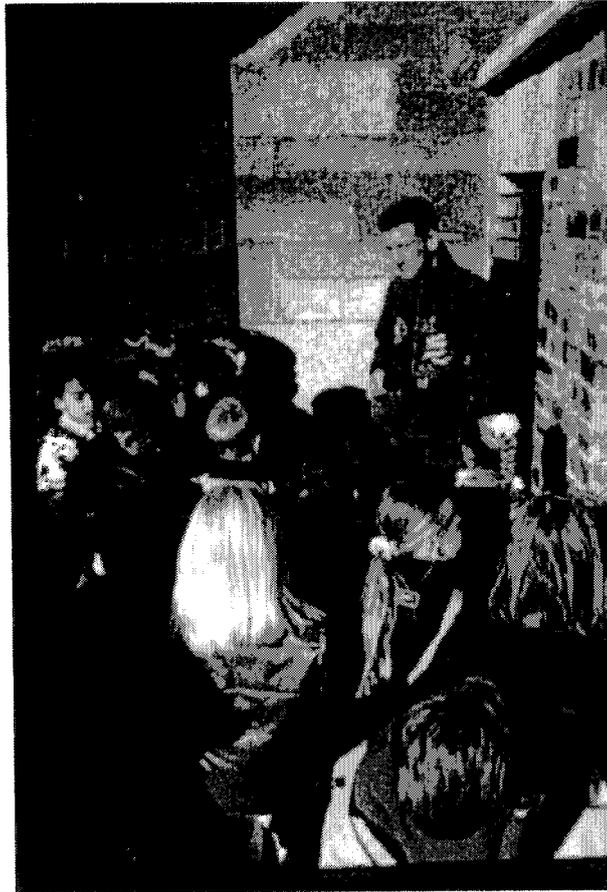
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<b>Appendices</b>	Appendix One. Pentland Hills Regional Park Education Plan.
<b>Contact/tel</b>	Carol Huston, 0131 445 3383 John Blair, 0131 561 5202 John Sheldon 01506 775278
<b>Wards affected</b>	City-wide
<b>Background Papers</b>	Available from Director of Culture and Leisure, 23 Waterloo Place

# PENTLAND HILLS REGIONAL PARK

## EDUCATION PLAN 2005-2008



pentland hills  
regional park

## **PENTLAND HILLS REGIONAL PARK EDUCATION PLAN 2005-2008**

### **1. Introduction**

The Pentland Hills Ranger Service has had a long tradition of educating in the broadest sense. Much of the Regional Park's ethos of integrated countryside management is delivered through information, interpretation, advice and education.

Visitor education takes place at many levels from advising walkers, cyclists and horse riders about responsible access during lambing to assisting post-graduate students with a dissertation. Environmental education is a common thread running through the work of the Ranger Service.

This is achieved by a number of means; *face-to-face contact* with visitors whilst the ranger is on patrol, the design and production of high quality leaflets, posters and displays, through clear signage, via school visits delivering the curriculum in a lively and interesting way, through activities at events such as Vogrie Festival, West Lothian Environment Fair and Treefest, on guided walks and talks about a variety of topics and through working with land managers, partners, agencies and the community.

### **2. Policy background**

This key area of work is underpinned by a number of related documents. The two principal documents are the Integrated Management Strategy 2000-2005 (IMS) and the City of Edinburgh Council Ranger Management Plan 2004-2007 (RMP). The IMS provides the broad policy framework and the RMP provides the strategic operational detail. Clearly, there is a much wider political agenda steering the overall direction and, such drivers as Lifelong Learning, Health and Social Inclusion are all at work in this regard. However, these broader issues are distilled within the IMS and RMP. The relevant section is IMS Policy A4 "Provide information to raise public awareness of opportunities to enjoy the hills in a responsible way. Develop, in consultation with others, a strategy designed to guide an educational programme aimed at promoting lifelong learning."

The Pentland Hills Regional Park Education Plan 2000-2005 addressed this, with the focus on environmental education and interpretation. A new education leaflet was distributed to all schools in Edinburgh, Midlothian and West Lothian. The Ranger Service also attended Crucial Crew, an event managed by Midlothian Council, Although now no longer running.

The RMP reflects the external influences from many sources including international, European, national, Scottish Legislation and the constituent local authority policies.

These policies are aligned with the Essential Aims of Scottish Natural Heritage, the agency that provides core funding for ranger services.

SNH Aim	IMS Theme	IMS Policy	CEC RMP Strategic Aim
Raise Awareness and Understanding	The Enjoyment of the Hills	A4 Provide information to raise public awareness of opportunities to enjoy the hills in a responsible way.	To provide opportunities that seeks to diversify the range of visitors to countryside areas, continue to provide quality environmental education programmes and interpretation media which promotes the significance of Edinburgh's protected areas and the PHRP to all

The objectives stated in the RMP in relation to the strategic aim are:

- Promote the Scottish Outdoor Access Code
- Identify specific access user groups and develop programmes and SOAC material accordingly
- Raise the profile of the work of the Edinburgh Ranger Service and the resources and facilities and services available to the public, in the City of Edinburgh Council and the Pentlands
- The commissioning and creation of habitat/natural history displays for visitor centres in Edinburgh and the Regional Park
- Continue to develop and deliver high quality and innovative interpretive material
- Increase partnership working with other departments across and outwith the council
- Utilise the production of the SOAC as a means of promoting health initiatives in Edinburgh and Pentland Hills Regional Park.

### 3. Purpose of this plan

Given this range of broad objectives it is the purpose of this plan is a review an evaluation of the formal education service offered by the Pentland Hills Ranger Service.

The first plan was written in 1994 and reviewed and revised in 1999.

### 4. Analysis

The two tables below show the total numbers of children from each of the three local authorities who have met with the Pentland Hills Ranger Service. Table1 shows contact via a visit by the ranger to the school or a visit from a class to the Pentlands. Numbers of Midlothian pupils have decreased from 2004. This is the result of the cessation of 'Crucial Crew', a community safety programme run by Midlothian Council for all primary 7 pupils.

**Table 1**

Year		Midlothian		Edinburgh		West Lothian		Other Areas		Totals	
		Schools	Pupils	Schools	Pupils	Schools	Pupils	Schools	Pupils	Schools	Pupils
2000-2002	Nursery										
	Primary	19	476	12	350	1	33			32	859
	Secondary			2	80					2	80
	Tertiary			2	23	3	35			5	58
	Others	5 days crucial crew	525	1 Special Needs	8					6	533
2002-2003	Nursery			2	24					2	24
	Primary	12	326	5	142	1	22			18	470
	Secondary			1	84					1	84
	Tertiary			3	72	4	15			7	87
	Others	4 days Crucial Crew	420							4	420
2003-2004	Nursery			2	40					2	40
	Primary	5	134	10	239	2	51			17	424
	Secondary	1	6	2	160					3	166
	Tertiary			2	58	1	15	2	34	5	107
	Others	4 days Crucial Crew	420							4	420
2004-2005	Nursery										
	Primary	3	63	3	89					6	152
	Secondary			3	190					3	190
	Tertiary			4	4	1	24			5	29
	Others										
2005-2006 up to 31/10/06	Nursery										
	Primary	3	78	10	273					13	351
	Secondary			4	105					4	105
	Tertiary			1	12					1	12
	Others										

On a more positive note, rangers have used every available opportunity to meet with children and young people in an informal setting i.e. at an event or through a community group activity. Events such as Vogrie Festival and the West Lothian Environmental Fair are one way to engage with young people and get over messages about responsible access, natural heritage and enjoying the outdoors. The figures are illustrated in Table 2.

**Table 2**

Year		Midlothian		Edinburgh		West Lothian		Totals	
		Groups	No of People	Groups	No of People	Groups	No of People	Groups	No of People
2000-2002	Under 16's	2	32	17	236	5	160	24	428
2002-2003	Under 16's	7	65	9	141			16	206

	Events	1day Vogrie Festival	93						93
2003-2004	Under 16's			7	73	1	17	8	90
	Events	1day Vogrie Festival	93						93
2004-2005	Under 16's	4	24	8	137			12	161
	Events	1day Vogrie Festival	93			2 days WLEF	125		218
2005-2006	Under 16's			11	170			11	170
	Events	1day Vogrie Festival	93	2	100	2 days WLEF	125	5	318

Concern has been expressed about falling numbers of children having contact with the ranger service.

In order to explore possible reasons for this and to discuss a possible way forward, a meeting was held with Peter Gorrie, Quality Improvement Officer for 5-14 Science and Marion Randall, Science Development Officer with City of Edinburgh Council Education Department in September 2005. Discussions were also held with education staff from Midlothian and West Lothian, who concurred with Mr Gorrie's analysis.

- Firstly, the crowded curriculum with so many subjects competing for the limited time available to the teacher and class, it is vital that the topics offered meet the needs of the curriculum and deliver material that the teacher wants. The programmes offered by the ranger service does already address this because they link directly to attainment outcomes and stands within 5-14 Environmental Studies, Society, Science and Technology. However, it was decided that the links should be made more explicit and clearer for teachers to see where the curriculum was delivered directly. This would be achieved by linking with the Edinburgh Grid for Learning and re-designing the teachers' leaflet, and page on the web-site.
- Secondly, transport costs. This can be tackled by the ranger visiting the school and delivering programmes in the classroom or school grounds. This service will be emphasised in the revised leaflet and web-site. However, caution must be exercised here in that one of the underlying goals is to encourage teachers to visit the Pentlands, using the outdoor classroom and all the unique assets that are unavailable in school and school grounds.
- Thirdly, risk assessments and health and safety issues. The safety of the class and teacher on a visit is paramount and health and safety information is provided beforehand. Rangers carry out their own risk assessment of the activities and site prior to a school visit although it is the class teacher's responsibility to do this also. The ranger always speaks to the teacher before the visit to discuss the programme, activities and any issues.

- Fourthly, to some extent ranger services (of which there are 8 in the Lothians) are in competition with each other for schools. There is also competition from organisations such as Edinburgh Zoo, the Royal Botanical Gardens, Butterfly World and Gorgie City Farm.

## 5. Recommendations

Given these challenges, the Pentland Hills Ranger Service has already moved to address some of these issues, as well as prioritising the next steps of action.

- Link the Pentland Hills Regional Park web page on education with the Edinburgh Grid for Learning.
- Set up a programme of activities for pilot schools in Midlothian under the Natural Connections project.
- Provide teachers with information about sites to assist them with risk assessments.
- Draft an education plan to examine reasons for falling school visits and address these.
- Establish links with community groups.
- Review the educational activities offered and make clear links with the relevant sections of the 5-14 Environmental Studies curriculum.
- Establish contact with West Lothian Council Education to explore links
- Train rangers in new curricular topics.
- Re-design the teachers' leaflet and mail drop.
- Re-design the education page on the web-site.
- Work with pilot schools in the Natural Connections project.
- Contact other ranger services to discuss their education plan; joint working and sharing resources.
- Host activity sessions for children at ranger centres.
- Write an article for the Pentland Beacon about our schools programme.
- Re-design the schools booking forms, leaders' notes and evaluation form.
- Undertake 20 school visits, 3 tertiary group visits, 6 events and 25 community groups (these represent a maximum number of visits given the present staffing and resources)
- Monitor school numbers and target areas with low numbers.
- Continue to evaluate teachers' feedback and improve/alter where appropriate
- Use events such as West Lothian School day to 'sell' the ranger service to encourage follow up session in the Pentlands.

## 6. Conclusion

Despite the concern over falling school numbers, the ranger service is confident that the programme of activities offered is relevant, exciting and progressive. The figures demonstrate that we are more than compensating for the falling numbers of school groups by being responsive and flexible to change.

Feedback from teachers and children is very positive and numbers are now rising

This review and programme of actions is designed to give the educational programme new impetus and direction and to build upon the excellent work of the ranger service achieved so far.