



October 2011

Newsletter 40

Friends of the Ochils' Annual General Meeting

Tuesday 8th of November 2011

Alloa Town Hall at 7.00 pm

Speaker: Stirling Council Archaeologist Murray Cook on 'Hill Forts in the Ochils'.

Contents

Chair's report - 1

Members' subscriptions - 2

Beaully - Denny power line - 3

News on Old Logie Kirk graveyard - 6

Wind turbines - 7

Summer in the Ochils - 9

Would you like to be more active in the Ochils? - 10

Chair's report

The Ochils are currently at a critical juncture, with three key decisions due to be made over the coming months. They relate to the Beauly – Denny power line, the proposed additional turbines next to the existing Burnfoot Hill development, and the sand and gravel quarry in Glen Quey, Glendevon.

First, the outcome of the decision on whether or not to underground the Beauly – Denny power line around Stirling hangs in the balance but, as Nicki Baker's report shows, until a final decision on mitigation is made by the Minister, there is still some hope that the Ochils will be spared the ravages of an overhead line across Sheriffmuir and down the scarp face.

Second, decisions will have to be made by Clackmannanshire and Perth and Kinross Councils on what we now know will be three separate planning applications for 18 additional turbines around the existing Burnfoot Hill windfarm. It is a complex issue and as my report on windfarm developments shows, there are key decisions to be made on the planning procedures required to ensure that the all-important cumulative impact issue is dealt with appropriately. We will continue to press all concerned to ensure that happens.

Third, we continue to wait to hear when the planning applications (refs: 10/O2181/FLM and 10/O2182/FLL) for a sand and gravel quarry in Glen Quey,

Glendevon, will be heard by Perth and Kinross Development Control Committee. Malcolm Best, who is leading on this campaign, will already have been in touch with many of you but if you wish to receive email updates please email him (malcolmglenquey@yahoo.com). The key issue now is for as many objectors as possible to turn up to the DCC meeting at which the application is heard... and it is not necessary to have submitted an objection to attend the meeting.

Furthermore, planning applications for small numbers of large turbines in and around the Ochils continue to give concerns. Many of them appear to be submitted by renewable energy companies who do not seem to be up to the task. Their ability to deal adequately with the all-important cumulative impact of their proposals with the existing windfarms is seriously lacking and it takes constant vigilance on our part and that of other campaigners to scrutinise the applications and ensure that their failings are pointed out to the relevant local authorities.

The Ochils Landscape Partnership has moved forward significantly in the past few months, with the signing of the Constitution by the various OLP partners, including ourselves, plus the appointment of key posts on the Executive Committee and that of Sheena Stone as the Project Co-ordinator. Much work remains to be done, but FotO is represented on both the 'Learning and Participation' and the 'Project Delivery' task groups, and we

endeavour to play our full part in the development of the partnership and the Hillfoots Way in particular.

However it remains to be seen what will be the response of the OLP to the proposals to extend the Burnfoot Hill windfarm. This is a bit of an elephant in the room at the moment but my view is that the OLP will formalise its position once applications have been submitted by the developer; its response will be a key test of the commitment of the OLP to the protection of the Ochils landscape which the partnership was established to enhance.

The problems of irresponsible 'wild camping' continue to be addressed by the working party convened by Tayside Police. The issue received a very reasoned airing recently on the BBC programme 'Out of Doors', and we remain hopeful that a solution to the problem can be found that doesn't throw the baby out with the bath water and damage the right to camp wild, as detailed in the Outdoor Access Code.

Finally, a piece of good news! You may remember that in the Autumn 2009 newsletter I reported that serious damage had been done to Paradise Pool on Sheriffmuir and that it had, in effect, been drained and that swimming in the pool was no longer possible. We reported the matter to both SEPA and Stirling Council and we now hear that the landowner has reinstated the pool. Many of you who remember the pool going back many years will no doubt be delighted at this news.

Members' subscriptions

It's that time of year again! FotOs' financial year runs from the 1st of September to the end of August, so we're asking members to renew their membership. Subscriptions have been held for yet another year at £3 for concessions, £5 for individuals and £7.50 for families.

Many of you pay by standing order, and you don't need to do anything – thank you! Others pay annually, and you should find a membership renewal form enclosed along with this newsletter. Please complete this and send it, along with your cheque, to Nicki Baker, Parkhead, Logie, Stirling FK9 4LS. Those who have joined us recently won't be asked to pay again, until next year.

If you have any problems or queries, please don't hesitate to contact Nicki on 01786 833399, or email her at: nicki@baker-pearson.net

We do hope you will choose to stay a member; as you know, we do all our campaigning work in the name of you, our members, and so the larger your numbers the more clout we may have!

Beauly – Denny power line

Nicki Baker's tireless efforts to represent Friends of the Ochils in the Beauly – Denny saga continue.

As members will know from the letter we sent recently, we have now entered into the next and possibly final round of events regarding the permission Scottish Power have been seeking to construct their enormous, extra high-voltage power line across Sheriffmuir and down the scarp slope of the Ochils at Logie. Some of you were able to attend the public meeting held by Stirling Council on the 26th of September in Wallace High School. It was a very impressive meeting; despite all the years this has been going on (seven or eight, depending on when you count from) and all the times people have made their views known, only to be ignored by the Scottish Government and the power companies, some 175 people turned out.

Stirling Council's landscape architect consultants gave a presentation, showing clearly that they agreed with us that Scottish Power's latest 'proposals' for the mitigation of the visual impacts of their overhead power line differed very little from the minimalist ideas they had put forward for consultation a year ago. Indeed, the consultants made plain that Scottish Power's proposals amounted to very little, as they had not done the most basic work to underpin the ideas they put forward – such as talking to landowners.

In the Ochils area, Scottish Power's ideas amount to little more than compensating for the construction works, and making good the damage they will do – i.e. improving the car park at Cocksburn Wood, making a footpath from there to the start of the main path up Dumyat, rebuilding dry stone walls, and putting right the Dumyat car parking area at the end of the years of construction (estimated to be 2020).

Additional 'mitigation' amounts to:

- repairing the rest of the dry stone dykes between the top of the scarp and Cocksburn Wood, and by Yellowcraig Wood;
- putting in a number of trees at Cocksburn Wood, beside the road at the top of the scarp and at the next bend in the road (potentially including some 'giants' such as Douglas Fir);
- waymarking paths through Yellowcraig Wood; and
- painting two or three pylons up the scarp a darker colour.

Although a number of these ideas would make some difference, none have been developed to any credible stage, and even together they will most certainly not offer anything like sufficient compensation for the huge visual damage the power line would impose on the Ochil Hills Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV). You will be able to see the plans of the proposals if you come to the AGM on Tuesday the 8th of

November, and we will welcome your comments.

The Council's consultants also put forward some ideas they had for mitigation, but these amounted largely to using somewhat smaller pylons (38 metres high, compared to the 50 metre-high pylons proposed, and the 25 metre-high pylons currently in position), and entirely ignored the AGLV.

We have already written in robust terms to Stirling Council to express our rejection of Scottish Power's proposals and our dissatisfaction with the consultants' suggestions, and our views have been acknowledged by them. The main thrust of our argument related to three outrageous claims by Scottish Power:

1. Undergrounding brings only limited environmental benefit

Of course this is rubbish! Putting the line underground to the west of Stirling:

- saves the Sheriffmuir Battlefield (now formally Listed by Historic Scotland);
- saves the Dumyat access area (40,000 visitors per year – the Ochils' biggest honeypot);
- saves the Ochils scarp (Scottish Natural Heritage's paramount concern);
- saves views of and from the National Wallace Monument; and
- removes the existing power line entirely from both the Area of Great Landscape Value and the environs of the Wallace Monument.

While undergrounding may disturb some as yet unknown archaeology, and would be unsightly for a couple of years, it is just nonsense for Scottish Power to claim this as only limited environmental benefit!

2. Scottish Power can't propose undergrounding because of their duties under Electricity Act

Scottish Power say they can't propose undergrounding because of their duties to provide economy and efficiency under the Electricity Act. But National Grid, the electricity transmission operating company for the whole of England and Wales, which is bound by exactly the same legislation, is also starting to plan for major new extra high-voltage power lines. They drew up some initial plans, which followed similar thinking to that of Scottish Power and SSE in Scotland. But then they consulted widely and, as a result of all that the people told them (all very familiar to us in Scotland) they now:

- accept that they were focusing too narrowly on "economy and efficiency";
- recognise that they also have duties under the legislation to conserve natural beauty; and
- are prepared to consider putting stretches of line in the most visually sensitive areas in England and Wales (especially but not solely designated areas) underground.

So Scotland stands to be left behind, with the entire Beaulieu – Denny power line put

overhead on giant pylons, while England and Wales get more consideration when their turn comes!

3. The costs of undergrounding are 'too high'

Scottish Power says that the costs of undergrounding are too high, but to put the whole line underground to the west of Stirling would cost each household in Great Britain about £1 per year, for 20 years, with a total cost to Scottish households of approx. £2.3 million per annum.

Meanwhile, Scottish households are already paying their share of the costs of undergrounding a power line for the London Olympics – at £450 million, that's about £2 per household per year, or twice as much as the Stirling undergrounding. And given National Grid wants to put in many hundreds of miles of new extra-high voltage lines, with key stretches likely to be put underground, Scottish households are set to pay a great deal more for English undergrounding, without getting any of their own!

“Scottish Power paid their highest-paid employee some £1.3 million last year – more than half the total cost of undergrounding, for just one person!”

If this wasn't enough, Scottish Power paid their highest-paid employee some £1.3 million last year – more than half the total cost of undergrounding, for just one person! This was with no discussion, and

no concern that this was too expensive, or unaffordable!

Well, we're convinced, but will Scottish Government Minister for Energy, Tourism and Enterprise Fergus Ewing MSP take all this in and make the sensible, if radical, decision to tell Scottish Power to put the line underground through Stirling?

We will be writing to him, inviting and exhorting him to come and see the area for himself, before coming to any decisions. Stirling Council will also be writing formally to him, in considerable detail, telling him they reject Scottish Power's proposals.

So there we are for now. Still writing letters, still standing up in meetings to advocate the importance of the Ochils, still going to see politicians to try to keep their support – and, in the case of our constituency MSPs Keith Brown and Bruce Crawford, trying to get them to stand firm on the opposition they expressed so publicly just before the elections...

You can help, too, by writing to politicians and by going to see them, to emphasize the importance of the Ochil Hills, and the need to find a solution that preserves them for us all and for future generations.

Fergus Ewing could decide to approve Scottish Power's proposals, and if he does, there's going to be precious little we can then do. So now is the time to act!

New lease of life for graveyard at Old Logie Kirk

Members and friends of Logie Old Graveyard Group had cause to celebrate on the 4th of June, when Provost Fergus Wood came along to re-open the site following the long-awaited repairs to the ruin.

The Group was constituted four years ago, when the dangerous and overgrown state of the site was noted. Since then teams of



volunteers have worked regularly, pruning bushes, weeding and doing many other gardening chores. After long and often frustrating negotiations, applications for funding, inspections, and complying with awkward conditions, work on the ruin began in January and the site was brought back up to a high standard in time for the official opening in June.

The Watch Hut has been converted into a small interpretive centre for the site and there is a family history resource available for interested researchers. While the hut is

usually locked, it can be opened by appointment and will open regularly in conjunction with the 'Open Sundays' at Logie during July and August every year.

The project has attracted a lot of interest both locally and internationally, including members in America, New Zealand and the Netherlands (the latter even made it to the opening!).

While the Watch Hut is now up and running and the ruin is secure, there is still quite a lot of work to be done before the site is fully back in pristine condition. This autumn the contractor will do some repairs to the eastern enclosures and the entrance steps, but we are anxious to have the schoolhouse area repointed before the damage there goes too far and it becomes another costly repair. The project has been accepted for an RBS Community Force Award, with public voting for projects during October. Please take a look at the RBS Community website and vote to help us move on to the next part of the project.

The trustees of Logieegg are very grateful to everyone who has supported the project; the volunteers, the funders, the contractors and Stirling Cemeteries Department for their help and advice.

FotO notes:

Find out more: www.logieegg.com

For an appointment at the Watch Hut:

logieegg@btinternet.com

Vote for the project at:

<http://communityforce.rbs.co.uk/project/80>

Wind turbines

Stuart Dean provides an update on further threats to the Ochils.

The threat to the Ochils from wind turbines continues, and we are now at a stage where further development could turn the Ochils into a windfarm landscape. The threats come from two directions:

Firstly we are shortly expecting Wind Prospect to submit planning applications for 18 additional turbines, each 102 metres to blade tip, close to the existing Burnfoot Hill Windfarm. It would appear that three separate applications will be submitted sometime in November. They will be for the Rhodders Windfarm, consisting of nine turbines (18MW), the Frandy Hill Windfarm, consisting of seven turbines (14 MW), and a small extension to the existing Burnfoot Hill Windfarm of two turbines (4MW). Despite being close to the existing BFH windfarm, the Rhodders and Frandy windfarms are apparently being described as separate windfarms rather than extensions and, therefore, the planning authorities will need to assess them as separate windfarms as well as considering their cumulative impact with existing windfarms and with each other.

In planning terms, this must create considerable complexities, increased by the fact that two local authorities are involved – Clackmannanshire and Perth and Kinross. The Rhodders application will be submitted to Clackmannanshire Council, whilst the other two will be submitted to

Perth and Kinross Council. At the time of writing, neither council seemed to have much idea as to how the planning system can best handle such complexities, but we will continue to ensure that the applications are processed in such a way that cumulative impact is dealt with appropriately. Given that windfarms already exist in the area, cumulative impact will be a critical issue in their determination.

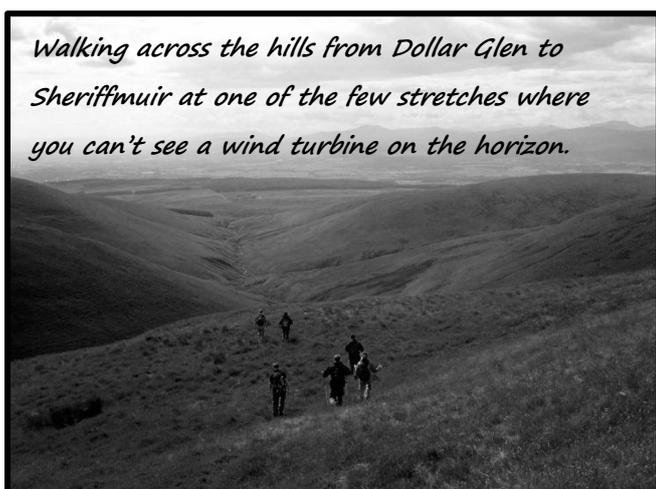
An unmitigated disaster awaits the Ochils if these additional 18 turbines are approved. From the top of Ben Cleuch and other tops in the range, the views, particularly those northwards, would be dominated by turbines and we would be looking at a windfarm landscape in which the view of turbines predominate.



The existing separation between the Burnfoot Hill Windfarm and Green Knowes would be eroded and from many viewpoints the turbines would appear as one large windfarm stretching many kilometres across the central part of the Ochils.

Not only are we having to deal with the BFH situation but also a plethora of applications for large turbines applied for under the Feed in Tariff (FIT) scheme, not only in the Ochils themselves but in the surrounding area. Often these applications are seriously flawed and lacking essential detail and we and others have had to spend time reviewing the applications and pointing out their weaknesses to the relevant local authority.

Two applications in the Ochils, one at Mains of Struie, near Path of Condie, grid reference 078108 (Ref: 11/00805/FLL), and the other on Common Hill above Glendevon, grid reference 940053 (Ref: 11/00678/FLL) were withdrawn and refused respectively because of weaknesses in the applications. The Common Hill application lacked any cumulative impact information in spite of its position almost exactly half way between Burnfoot Hill and Green Knowes.



Walking across the hills from Dollar Glen to Sheriffmuir at one of the few stretches where you can't see a wind turbine on the horizon.

However, to add insult to injury, one of those applications, that for two 46 metre-high turbines on Common Hill, has now been resubmitted to Perth and Kinross

Council (Ref: 11/01560/FLL) and the so-called cumulative impact study doesn't even recognise the existence of Burnfoot, nor the three proposed applications outlined above!

“The situation in the Ochils is getting messier and messier, with no end in sight to the attempts to cover the hills with turbines.”

The situation in the Ochils is getting messier and messier, with no end in sight to the attempts to cover the hills with turbines. We need your support more than ever. Please object to any new developments whenever possible and ensure that your councillors and MSPs and the press are aware of your concerns that slowly and surely the Ochils are being turned into a windfarm landscape.

Also please ensure that I am made aware of any applications that you know of in and around the Ochils. We can't always guarantee to be on top of all the applications submitted to the local authorities, particularly those for small developments progressed under the FIT scheme, but it is important that we know what is going on.

You can contact me via telephone or email:
01259 781551 spdean@lineone.net

Summer in the Ochils

Newcomer to the Ochils, Rob Wright shared his first impressions with Foto.

Time spent in the Ochils is time well spent, so the chance to stay in the Sheriffmuir hills this summer was one I couldn't pass.

A lot of people's experience of this sparsely populated part of Scotland is to take a drive from Stirling or Dunblane for an afternoon and maybe enjoy a walk up Dumyat.

On a clear day expansive views east towards the open mouth of the Forth can be seen and in the evening the light catches the gleaming ribbon of the river as it makes its way to its source in the west. Living here has allowed me to grow more familiar with the hills and begin to understand the characteristics that make it a very special place.

The area around Sheriffmuir is steeped in both history and beauty. As I got to know my few neighbours I found them to be a fascinating source of knowledge about both the landscape and the scenes it has witnessed. The Battle of Sheriffmuir in 1715 and its significance in the Jacobite rebellion, as well as the importance of the Sheriffmuir Road as one of the most used drove roads in Scotland were two points of interest that captured my imagination.

Working outdoors also allowed me to be immersed in the daily cycle of the hills.

Repairing a stretch of the dry stone wall on the old drove road, mornings would begin fresh, with muscles rested and coolness in the air.



Tying a line of string from one end of the broken wall to the other, I organised the wall rubble into piles and slowly started re-building, with large rocks to the outside of the wall and small stones in the middle, to create an interlocking formation. With the craftsmanship of the existing wall evident, it was a privilege to make my own contribution – hopefully it, too, will stand the test of time!

The occasional break from my labours would allow me to take in the changing moods of the panorama towards Ben Vorlich and the Trossachs. Clouds and mist and sunlight would paint an ever changing vista that – if one was not careful – could become a distraction.

A lovely way to end a day's physical work was to make my way to Paradise Pool for a refreshing dip. This series of pools and waterfalls, noted to be one of the best wild

“A lovely way to end a day’s physical work was to make my way to Paradise Pool for a refreshing dip.”

swimming spots in Scotland, had a reviving effect on tired muscles, a little like a Jacuzzi (though a good deal more chilly!).

I will remember my summer spent in the Ochils for a long time and look forward to exploring this special part of Scotland further in years to come.



Would you like to be more active in the Ochils?

As you know, the Friends of the Ochils is involved in a number of campaigns, particularly:

- against multiple applications to build or extend windfarms or wind turbines in or near to the Ochils;*
- against the proposed giant Beaully – Denny power line where it crosses Sheriffmuir and down the Ochils scarp to Logie and on past the National Wallace Monument; and*
- against the huge quarry application in Glen Quey.*

There is also at present one particularly pleasant development that we are promoting. The Hillfoots Way will be a new (or newly-signed and improved) footpath along the southern foot of the Ochils, largely following the old King’s Road. This is a key part of the Ochils Landscape Partnership, and we are also involved with the governance of this project.

We also get involved in responding on behalf of the Ochils to such things as the Councils’ emerging Local Development Plans, the National Planning Framework, and other important strategic developments.

There is, of course, loads more we could do – if only there were more people who wanted to contribute actively to our work!

As an organisation we are also wanting to:

- increase our membership;
- develop a new website (work on this is now getting underway – see below);
- get a wider set of articles written for our newsletter; and
- find a replacement Treasurer and Membership Secretary.

If so, why not join the committee, and/or make proposals for other activities that you could contribute to, in the name of the Friends of the Ochils?

To have a chat, or to find out more, just ring our Chair Stuart Dean on **01259 781551**, or our Vice Chair, Treasurer and Membership Secretary Nicki Baker on **01786 833399**.

Giving something back to the Ochils can feel so worthwhile!

Does any of this ring a bell with you?

FotO notes:

We are always looking for contributions to the newsletter. If you would like to share your experiences of the hills, or even just some photos, then please get in touch with the Newsletter Editor Catherine Kilgour. You can email or send via post to:

Powis House

Stirling

FK9 5PS

catkilgour@gmail.com

FotO members can also look forward to a re-launch of our website before the end of the year. Please email me if you have any thoughts or ideas about what you'd like (or not like) to see. All suggestions welcome!