

# CRAG & PEEL

ISSUE 21 SUMMER 2011

News from the Holyrood & Linlithgow Parks Ranger Service



## A BRONZE AGE EASTER - CAIRNPAPPLE BURIAL SITE

By Ian Lewis, Linlithgow Ranger



Cairnpapple Bronze Age burial site

Sitting on top of one of the highest points of the Bathgate Hills in the middle of West Lothian is a Neolithic and Bronze Age site. It is possibly every bit as significant as some of its more famous contemporaries on the Orkneys. It maybe doesn't have the visual impact of the Ring of Brodgar, or the atmosphere of Maes Howe, but Cairnpapple is a site with a long history, and, on a good day, even longer views. This hilltop was in use as a ceremonial site all the way from the late Neolithic 5,500 years ago through to the height of the Bronze Age around 4,000 years ago.

What brought these ancient people here time and again is a bit of a mystery until you stand by the burial cairn on a clear day. You are then on one of the highest points in the Central Belt with clear views all the way from Bass Rock in the East, over to Arran, rising out of the ocean to the West. West Lothian can claim a long history of settled agriculture, and some of the first farmers of Britain clearly wanted a ceremonial site which gave a view over the landscape they were beginning to shape and control. Their ditch and bank Henge with its twenty four posts of timber or stone is a classic Neolithic monument; and like all such structures we have very little real idea about how it was used.

What we do know is that their Bronze Age inheritors felt the sight was significant enough to bury an important person in the middle of the Henge, with the classic Beaker pottery vessels as well as some more unusual accessories giving a possibly unique burial practice with a small cairn topped with a large headstone.

Subsequent to that there were a number of additional burials, each slightly different in style, and possibly three overlapping cairns in all, each bigger than the previous one.

Beyond that, we know little about these people, so in order to give some feel for their lives the Linlithgow Rangers and Monument Stewards put on an event over the Easter Weekend. This included workshops with a potter making historical replica pots in the Bronze Age Beaker style and an artist demonstrating the use of natural rock and clay based ochre paints. Our wattle fenced enclosure and open fireplace lent an air of authenticity to the site, particularly on the Saturday when a thick haar cut all the modern world from view, including the giant radio mast a mere 100m away.

Sunday was much better, with a clear sky for our guest archaeologists to demonstrate kite flying aerial photography techniques, and sunshine to bring out some visitors and help the pots dry.

The first weekend in September will be a free weekend at Cairnpapple with a number of similar activities, so come along and form your own ideas about how our ancestors lived.

### Moving on - From one Royal residence to another



Nathan Bryceland, the Education Ranger based at Holyrood Park has left our green expanses to move up to Edinburgh Castle, in the post of Education Officer.

Everyone in the team is delighted to hear that he will be pursuing his interest in education at Historic Scotland and the nation's number one visitor attraction.

## IN THIS EDITION

A Bronze Age Easter

Moving on

Volunteer profile

Dragons in the Park?

Loch Catchment group

Did you know?

Linlithgow volunteers

Get in touch

Look out for the autumn edition in September

# VOLUNTEER PROFILE - BILL THOMSON



Name?

Bill Thomson

Are you based at Holyrood Park or Linlithgow Peel?

I am a Volunteer Ranger at Holyrood Park.

How long have you been a Volunteer Ranger?

I completed my training in 2009.

What do you enjoy most about being a Volunteer Ranger?

I enjoy learning more about the Park and helping other people to discover and share it.

Have you learnt any new skills?

It has been good to refresh my first aid training and to become confident in the use of a stretcher.

Have you found anything challenging since joining the team?

The most challenging thing for me is to make the time to participate in patrols and events as much as I would like to do.

What is your most memorable moment?

Watching the sun rise over the snow covered Lammermuirs as the moon set behind Calton Hill.

## DRAGONS IN THE PARK?



Large Red Damselfly - one of our rarer Park residents

Dragonflies and their smaller damselfly cousins are the jewelled dragons of the insect world. Although only a little over an inch long, with a wingspan to match, they're important residents of Holyrood Park. Graham Checkley, Volunteer Ranger, tells us why.

'Dragonflies and Damselflies are the top predators of the insect world. They spend the early part of their life in water and the rest flying and catching insects, so their presence in the Park is an indicator of clean water and air. Also, the fact that we have 6 different species is an indication of the variety of habitats available, everything from the marshy edges of Hunter's Bog to the reed beds of Duddingston Loch.

How do we know? Last summer saw the completion of my second Dragonfly and Damselfly survey for Holyrood Park. Most importantly this has allowed the Ranger Service to look at the population changes of these species over a 5 year period and provide information for use in future management plans. The Scottish Wildlife Trust, for example, is currently doing a lot of management work at Duddingston Loch, and this report tells them which places are most critical for these insects.

There is still more work to be done. I'll be monitoring the outcome of the Duddingston management work, and that plus the rest of the Park should keep me busy until 2016!



Hunter's Bog - a new habitat for Damselflies

# LINLITHGOW LOCH CATCHMENT GROUP



Linlithgow Loch - there to be enjoyed and protected

## Protection of Linlithgow Loch Takes Centre Stage Linlithgow Ranger, Andy Smart tells us more.

Linlithgow Loch is a nationally important nature conservation site with a Site of Special Scientific Interest designation, hosting a range of endangered aquatic plants and water birds.

In recent years, the native ecology of the loch has suffered due to potentially harmful algal blooms caused by nutrient pollution.

These algal blooms turn the water to “pea green soup” and pose a health risk to the public and their pets.

Blooms are often reported by the local press leading to bad publicity for the area and potentially impacting on local businesses and tourism that rely on the loch.

A collaborative team of experts have been working in the background for a number of years to identify ways of managing these problems. In March 2011, the group held a symposium designed to identify the key threats to the loch and set management priorities to safeguard the ecology of the loch and its surrounding habitat.

The group will now focus on reducing the likelihood of problem algal blooms by controlling nutrient pollution, reducing the risk of flooding in the surrounding area and enhancing the habitat for endangered underwater plants, insects, fish and water birds.

Dr. Bryan Spears, a Freshwater Ecologist and organiser of the symposium said: “You only have to walk around Linlithgow Loch to see the passion and enthusiasm the public have for its native plants and animals. The threats to the loch are all too real and the group is working extremely hard to safeguard this nationally important site using cutting-edge environmental protection techniques”.

The symposium was attended by 17 experts from 9 different organisations including Historic Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Environment Protection Agency, West Lothian Council, Forth Area Federation of Anglers, the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Scottish Agricultural College, Wallingford Hydrosolutions and Scottish Water.

# DID YOU KNOW?

## Blackness Castle



Blackness Castle is referred to as "The ship that never sailed". Looking from the Firth of Forth it has the appearance of a ship and its 3 towers are known as the Stem, Main Mast and Stern.

Legend has it that King James II's Lord High Admiral was prone to being seasick and therefore preferred not to sail. In order to placate his King he promised to provide Scotland with "a ship that the English could never sink". The result was Blackness Castle!

## The Lang Rig

The Lang Rig are the rocks running toward Arthur's Seat's summit. These are a lava flow from the Castle Rock. They are approximately 340 million years old – a span of time so immense that if it were condensed into one year all human history would be over in 15 minutes.



## Linlithgow Conservation Volunteers

It's been a busy time for the Linlithgow based conservation volunteers. Since the re-launch of the programme back in November 2010 a team of nine willing and able people have generously given up their time to assist in maintaining Linlithgow Peel for the enjoyment of all.

Tasks have included clearing vegetation, preparing the wildlife garden, installing drains in the loch side path, swan surveys and monitoring the progress of birds' nests around the loch. Future initiatives include more of the same plus bee and butterfly surveys, litter picking, planting, and jellyfish surveys at nearby Blackness Castle. Where possible we try to tailor the tasks on offer to courses volunteers may be studying.

Volunteers are always welcome. Future dates for conservation volunteer days are available from the Linlithgow Rangers on 01506 842065 or at [hs.rangers@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:hs.rangers@scotland.gsi.gov.uk).

## GET IN TOUCH

We are always on the lookout for more volunteers, suggestions or ideas. If you would like more details about our range of educational services or any aspect of our volunteer or conservation work, please contact us. We look forward to hearing from you.



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## RANGER SERVICE EVENTS

For information on Historic Scotland events see [www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/events](http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/events)

Also, for information across Lothian [www.outdoor-diary.info](http://www.outdoor-diary.info) is a new website that's packed full of ideas for activities including the ones we run. Ours are marked with the code HSRS the (E) for Edinburgh or (L) for Linlithgow. There's a print version available by calling 0845 367 3787 (Edinburgh) or 01835 830 281 (Borders). Large print versions are also available from the Edinburgh number.