

Southern Upland NEWS

Newsletter of the Southern Uplands Partnership #13 Autumn 2003

South Scotland Countryside Trails – Ae Launch

There was an excellent turnout when Forestry Minister Allan Wilson officially opened a new section of the South of Scotland Countryside Trails between Ae and Earshaigs recently. This new, 24-kilometre section of the South of Scotland Countryside Trails



Allan Wilson opens the new riding trail in Dumfriesshire

(SOSCT) project will be available for multiple uses – walking, cycling and horse riding – but the promotional emphasis will be on equestrian tourism, to attract riders to visit the area and use the trail. The entire section runs through public forests managed by Forestry Commission Scotland. Originally proposed by the British Horse Society and led by the Southern Uplands Partnership, the project is establishing an integrated network of 325km of off-road, multiple-use trails, both circular and linear, using old drove roads, ancient tracks and disused railway lines where possible. It is also establishing links with wider networks of existing trails. The Dumfries & Galloway part of the network is being managed by Solway Heritage. Benefits are expected to include a greater choice of outdoor recreational opportunities for local people and visitors and economic benefits to local communities by attracting visitors. Total expenditure on the project is estimated to be £762,750, of which £218,000 will be spent in Dumfries & Galloway.

– CAP REFORM –

Changes in the Common Agriculture Policy due to come into effect in 2005 will have a major impact on farming in the south of Scotland and on the communities that depend on agriculture in one way or another. There is likely to be a shift in support from subsidising production to support for environmental benefits and diversification. It is not clear how these changes will affect communities – there are likely to be a number of knock-on effects.

The SUP is working with the Scottish Borders Rural Partnership and the Community Planning Partnership in Dumfries & Galloway to arrange two “stakeholder” discussions on the vital issue of CAP reform. These are being supported by the Scottish Executive who are keen to ensure that the potential impacts of reform are fully discussed before agreement is reached. If you want to find out how to contribute to the debate visit the Scottish Executive website www.scotland.gov.uk and click on the rural development topic.

The Southern Uplands Partnership (SUP) is a membership organisation and a registered company with charitable status. Its aim is to keep people living and working sustainably in the Southern Uplands of Scotland. We work with others to promote an integrated and sustainable approach to rural development and land use, promoting best practice, encouraging joined-up thinking and working and looking to add value to projects and initiatives by bringing them together. Projects we are currently working on include the development of walking, cycling and horse riding routes linking the Scottish Borders, Dumfries and Galloway, South Lanarkshire, Cumbria and Northumberland; red squirrel and black grouse conservation; nature-based tourism; heather regeneration; green labelling and bracken control. We are also becoming involved in renewable energy, rural housing and local food production. The “Southern Upland News” is the newsletter of the SUP. The SUP also has a website www.sup.org.uk and employs a project manager who is based in the Borders and a project officer based in Galloway. Core funding is provided by the three Local Authorities as well as SNH and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. Funds are also raised through membership subscriptions and project management fees.



TO ATTEND OR NOT TO ATTEND?

One of the most difficult decisions organisations like the SUP have to make is how to respond to the very many invitations to conferences and seminars which pour into the office on a weekly basis. To attend or not to attend?

The reality is that we must choose very carefully and be certain of the relevance to our own business objectives. With that in mind I attended for the first time, the recent Border Visions event in Dumfries. The delegate list was impressive with strong representation from both north and south of the border and much of the discussion ranged around land issues, transport, tourism, food issues, forestry.

Worthwhile? Yes, I think so. At a time when South Scotland feels isolated and undervalued, it is certainly worthwhile to exchange experience with our English neighbours. I hope that now we will see spin offs from the day in new small groups with wide representations working on common problems such as the CAP review, renewable energy, transport. Let's not wait till we meet again next year.

Barbara Kelly, Convenor

DALBEATTIE DYKERS

Drystone dykers from Spain, France and Cyprus and Dumfries and Galloway converged on Dalbeattie recently, bringing their Mediterranean flair to take part in a week-long granite dyking workshop during the Dalbeattie Festival of Granite.

Under the direction of local drystone expert Jimmy Scott, the international team set about building an impressive granite boulder dyke and gateway in the Dalbeattie Forest, adding a unique and lasting feature to the new 7 Stanes Cycle Track. The workshop enabled the foreign dykers to master building methods and techniques associated with granite, a material that was totally new to them coming from countries where limestone is the most common rock for walling.

Organised by Solway Heritage in co-operation with Dumfries & Galloway Council and with the kind help of Forestry Commission Scotland and Dalbeattie Community Initiative, the Dalbeattie workshop forms just one part of an 18 month long transnational project with Greek, Cypriot, Spanish, French and Scottish partners called "The European Network for Dry Stone" financed through the EU Culture 2000 Programme.



The dykers together with George MacQuarrie, Nic Coombey of Solway Heritage and Sandy Colvine of Dumfries and Galloway Council and Workshop trainer Jimmy Scott.

New Project Officer

Flora McDowall joined the SUP as Project Officer at the end of September and is already making a big difference. Based in Kirkcudbright, Flora brings a range of experience to the Partnership from horse breeding to community arts. She will extend the work of SUP in the west and work with Pip in developing projects, working with community groups and promoting integrated rural development and land-use.

Tel: 01644 420808. e-mail: floramcdowall@sup.org.uk



*Flora McDowall
SUP's new project officer*

Project News . . .

Black Grouse

Work is underway to survey six sites which might be suitable for giving the public the opportunity to witness one of our wildlife spectacles – black grouse lekking. These increasingly rare birds maintain a stronghold in parts of the Southern Uplands and we are keen to raise awareness of them and the need to promote land management to favour their survival. All being well, three sites will be selected and fully-costed plans developed to allow a public presence. This will form the basis of a follow-up bid for funds from the Heritage Lottery Fund who are supporting this initial phase.



Supported by the
Heritage Lottery Fund

RSSS Phase 2 gets Green Light

We are delighted to announce that the Red Squirrels in South Scotland Project has been given support through the Borders Leader+ fund and this combined with previously confirmed funding is enough to allow it to proceed. Funds have also been approved by Scottish Natural Heritage, Leader+ in Dumfries & Galloway, the Garfield Weston Foundation, the Copley Charitable Trust, the Robertson Trust, the Steel Charitable Trust, the Earnest Cook Trust and a number of other charitable trusts and supporters. We thank them all.



THIS PROJECT IS BEING PART-FINANCED BY THE
SCOTTISH BORDERS AND DUMFRIES &
GALLOWAY EUROPEAN COMMUNITY
LEADER+ 2000-2006 PROGRAMME

SUW 2004

Having produced an action plan outlining the possibilities for using 2004 – the 20th anniversary of the Southern Upland Way – as an opportunity to raise it's profile, the SUP is now keen to take the project forward. We see the need for a single "route manager" with a marketing plan and the task of developing and enhancing the route. We would also like to see the wonderful "Way Merks" project extended and new links made between the SUW and the communities along it. We hope that this approach might get funding support through Leader+ and Objective 2 and we are currently seeking the match-funding needed to allow this.

Equestrian Tourism

The SUP has been trying to promote the potential of southern Scotland as a destination for people and their horses. We see this as being one way of getting resources to the more remote parts of the Uplands – where farms and bed and breakfast businesses would be able to offer food, accommodation and services to both riders and ridden. We are now working with the Tourist Boards to try to get some market research undertaken to gain a measure of the size of the market out there and how best to target it. Once we have this it should be easier to win over the funders. We aim to hold a conference on the potential of equestrian tourism in the near future.

WIND FARMS – COMMUNITY BENEFIT

When a windfarm is built, the communities most affected by it are usually offered a "community fund" of some sort by the developers. To date the nature of the fund has been largely determined by negotiation between the developer and the relevant community.

However the issue of community benefit is now generating significant debate in the Highland region. The Highland Council considers that the level of "community benefit" contribution (or its equivalent equity) should "rise from the current rate of £1,000/MW/annum to at least £4-5,000/MW/annum".

With the current unprecedented interest in wind powered generation in southern Scotland these discussions in the north are of direct relevance to the communities of the Southern Uplands.

The SUP is currently collecting information on existing Community Benefit agreements across Scotland and how such funds are managed. We plan to make the findings of this exercise available via our website and newsletter. We would also like to feature examples of best practice. Information or comment from developers who have established such schemes would be most welcome.



The Penfield Project

The Penfield Project is a local partnership set up to manage two lochs for the benefit of the community and disabled people in an innovative and sustainable way

Objectives include the development of 'All Abilities Trails', fishing platforms, picnic sites, car parking facilities and other amenities for all but particularly for disabled people, at two locations known as Penningham Pond and Whitefield Loch in Dumfries & Galloway. The partners also wish to create economic and employment opportunities through 'green tourism' marketing activities and the creation of a demonstration 'centre of excellence' in respect of all abilities access, management and participation that can be used for training and education purposes. The main partners are: Dumfries & Galloway Association for the Blind, Dumfries & Galloway Centre for Independent Living, Fieldfare Trust, Forest Enterprise, Glenluce Angling Club, Heriot University Open Space Programme, Luce 2000, Newton Stewart Activity & Resource Centre, Newton Stewart Angling Association, Newton Stewart Community Support Team and Wigtownshire Coalition for the Disabled. Funding has been secured from a number of sources including Leader+, New Opportunities Fund, Dumfries & Galloway Regeneration Fund, Solway Heritage and Forest Enterprise. To find out more contact: Peter Ross (Peter@ross999.fsnet.co.uk)

CREAM O'GALLOWAY

Cream o'Galloway was started by David and Wilma Finlay as a farm diversification into tourism which opened to the public in June 1994. Initially the facility comprised a dairy making ice cream, a shop, playground, small car park and two nature trails over farmland. Around 6,000 people visited the facility in its first year. Since then the popularity of the attraction has soared, mainly through word of mouth. Cream o' Galloway now attracts around 60,000 visitors annually and was Galloway's most popular Visitor Attraction in 2002. They are delighted to be one of three shortlisted for the Thistle Awards for Tourism and the Environment in 2003.

A crucial part of the move towards environmental and sustainable tourism was the appointment in August 2002 of an Attraction Manager with stronger environmental qualifications. The manager works closely with allied environmental organisation and individuals (SNH, NTS, Dumfries & Galloway Council Rangers, etc.) as well as with the Education Authority's Business and School Liaison Officer and the Soil Association's Organic Farm Network Co-ordinator.

The farm itself is now organic and the interpreted nature trails have been upgraded so that there are five different trails – one of which is dedicated to dog walking. Of the four miles of trails a total of two miles are now accessible by wheelchair. In addition to a trail through ancient semi-natural woodland, four trails circumvent the 23 ha of newly planted mixed broadleaf woodlands (25,000 trees) and two new ponds and associated wetland areas. The trees in these areas were planted with the help of volunteers and local school children (plus HRH Prince Charles).

Cream o'Galloway and the farm have had assistance from SNH, Scottish Enterprise – Dumfries & Galloway, the Forestry Commission and SEERAD. 'Never be afraid to ask for advice from others on the ground and for financial assistance from economic and environmental government organisations' said Wilma, 'we wouldn't be here today without both'. Cream o'Galloway is close to Gatehouse-of-Fleet and can be contacted on 01557 814040.

2003 How has it been for the Local Tourism Industry?

Obviously the year is not yet over but according to Scottish Borders Tourist Board:

FIGURES	PLUS OR MINUS ON 2002
Total Visitors	Plus 6%
UK Visitors	Plus 9%
Overseas Visitors	Minus 9%
Local Bookings	Minus 13%

Golf pass sales are marginally down on 2002, however initial indications for September suggest a better uptake. Overall the expectation is that the year has been a good one for most tourism businesses.

And in Dumfries & Galloway Tourist Board's point of view:

- From January to August 2003, the number of people visiting visitor attractions was up 12% on last year.
- In the first seven months of the year, 5 out of 7 months had the highest occupancy figures in four years for B & B and self catering accommodation.
- 63% of members of DGTB thought that business in the first half of 2003 was either about the same, or better than last year.

THEMED TOWNS



Several towns in Dumfries and Galloway have chosen a particular strength or historical connection to theme their promotion. Reports from four such initiatives suggest that all the hard work is paying off as identities become established. Encouraging news for those moving into this area of marketing.

CASTLE DOUGLAS FOOD TOWN

With bakers, bars, a brewery, butchers, cafes, delis, a fishmonger, a greengrocer, hotels, a meat producer, restaurants, supermarkets and takeaways Castle Douglas saw the opportunity to promote itself as 'Castle Douglas Food Town'. A new Co-ordinator will be in post soon to help market the town and plans are underway for a "Christmas Extravaganza" in the shape of a Food and Craft Fayre in mid-December. This year the "buzz" in the town has been better than ever and businesses have commented on what seems to be an extended season, with a lot of tourists and visitors still around in early October. Many visitors are returning, a sign of businesses pleasing them when they are there.

KIRKCUDBRIGHT ARTISTS TOWN

Kirkcudbright has attracted artists for well over a century, several of the "Glasgow Boys" worked and lived in the town. Recognising the opportunity to use the artistic heritage as a "hook" to attract visitors a branding exercise resulted in Kirkcudbright Artists' Town. Kirkcudbright Forum was established in 2000 as a Community Initiative with funding from Dumfries & Galloway Council and the Rural Challenge Fund to study and promote Kirkcudbright and to drive its development forward. The Forum sits alongside community volunteer groups which run events throughout the year. Recent activity has seen a focus on marketing to the Travel Trade. A major piece of research to consult local residents and businesses on how they believe the town should develop is planned and work is ongoing to develop links with other community groups.

MOFFAT – AT THE HEART OF WELL BEING

In a wonderful setting and – thanks to its history as a coaching stop and a spa town – enjoying an unusual level of independent shops and places to eat and stay, Moffat is well placed to promote itself as a centre for healthy and relaxing holidays and short breaks. In developing and promoting Moffat as "a town at the heart of well being" Moffat & District Community Initiative is drawing attention to the town's Scottish spa heritage and natural assets. Projects include refurbishing the sulphurous well, improving signage, bringing history to the fore in the local museum and a programme of spa festivities scheduled for Easter 2004. Further plans include an interactive website to be launched early in 2004 and increased maintenance, signposting and development of the infrastructure to make more strenuous walks accessible.

WIGTOWN – SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL BOOK TOWN

There are literally miles of bookshelves in the 23 bookshops in Wigtown and Bladnoch – books for everyone, whatever age, interest or budget. The towns promoters also point out a wide range of things for visitors to see and do around the town. The surrounding area is rich in the history and wildlife. In 2004 Wigtown's annual festivities and celebrations will start early with the International Festival of Book Towns in May. Book Towns from all over the globe will be heading to Galloway, from the USA to Malaysia to Australia, Wigtown will take centre stage in this international celebration of Book Towns.

FUNDING UPDATE

The Scottish Borders Rural Partnership is pleased to offer a new small grants scheme to help community groups who are interested in trying out a rural community transport project.

In brief small grants of up to £500 (100%), with maximum of £1000 for larger projects, can be used for:

- Research e.g. to carry out a feasibility study, visit other schemes, etc.
- Training e.g. driver training such as MiDAS (Minibus Driver Awareness Scheme).
- Pilot projects e.g. to try a shared taxi scheme for a month, or using a Scottish Borders Council minibus as a community bus scheme for a trial period.

Who is eligible? Constituted groups within the Scottish Borders region whose main beneficiaries are outside the urban areas of Galashiels and Hawick. Decisions on these grants are made by the Rural Community Transport Project Board of Scottish Borders Rural Partnership, notification will be given within 14 weeks. For more information please contact Suzanne Nugent on 01835 824125.

Digital Photographers TAKE NOTE

We are seeking positive images of rural south Scotland – for use in the newsletter, on the website and possibly in a book. If you have a digital photograph you think says something about the landscape, wildlife, history, economy or communities of the Southern Uplands and are happy for it to be used – email it to us. As an incentive, we will select the best image and award a prize at the end of the year and we will put all suitable images on the forthcoming website gallery.

E-mail list for those who want to be kept up to date

In 2004 we hope to establish a more dynamic relationship with SUP members. We would like to do this electronically and we propose emailing out regular notices to members – highlighting events, meetings and news – the detail of which will be put on the website. To make this work we will need you to register. Please send an email to the address below saying you would like to be included. This service will only be available to paid-up members, so if you are not a member please consider subscribing using the form on the back page. Remember membership runs January to December so if you are not paying by standing order please renew now. We would also ask you to consider paying by standing order as this saves future administration costs. If you would like to set up a standing order please use the form on the membership page of our website, or ask us to post you a copy. Membership subscriptions are a vital part of our core-funding.

piptabor@sup.org.uk

THE SIR WALTER SCOTT WAY

EMPLOYMENT COULD become even harder to find if we do not look to tourism and the selling of our countryside. My interest is in the growing market of long distance walking and under utilised and marketed assets.

The Southern Upland Way could be as attractive as other routes but length, inaccessibility of accommodation, sameness of some landscapes and poor historic associations have worked against success. The Sir Walter Scott Way answers these issues. It brings partnership with a historic attraction by re-routing a part past Abbotsford. The Way is full of interest and links to one of the Borders' greatest sons, providing for an international and domestic market. Local communities on alternative routes, under consideration, could also benefit from the Scott connection.

The Sir Walter Scott Way should be quickly generating several million pounds for local economies per annum, something much needed in communities such as St Mary's Loch, Traquair, Longformacus, Abbey St Bathans and Cockburnspath.

Walking Support / I-Net Support believe that the partnership of private and public sector can prove a winning combination. It will also take, in our view, a much more pro-active approach by all in the communities to seize the opportunity before other rural areas secure our potential market share.

John Henderson, Walking Support / I-Net Support.

"sirwalterscottway.com" is the website giving the information on this eastern section of the Southern Upland Way.

Rural Post Offices – what's been happening?

UP TO 2001 THERE had been a steady loss of rural Sub-Post Offices across the south of Scotland. Along with village shops, they have become harder and harder to sustain, even though they play such a vital role in rural communities. Changes, introduced this year, in the way that benefits are paid have resulted in the loss of a large part of every Post Office's income.

Last year the Government announced a three-year £450m fund to help Britain's 8,500 rural Post Offices to continue to provide access to services (although no funding is given directly to rural Post Offices). In return for this funding Post Office Ltd is having to maintain the rural network and prevent all avoidable closures. The funding seeks to ensure that customers have access to services in rural areas where they would not otherwise be provided on a commercial basis. It is not yet clear how effective this has been, but there are indications that support in Scotland has been less effective than that given in England.

There are 70 Sub-Post Offices in Dumfries & Galloway and 69 in the Borders and while this number has not changed over the last two years, many are opening for shorter hours and many remain vulnerable with poor profitability.

Locally efforts have been made to assist Sub-Post Masters with the changes. Local Enterprise Companies have helped with training workshops concentrating on the customer approach and on specific Post Office subjects including computerisation of the network and looking at opportunities to replace lost income through diversification. There are some success stories, with Post Offices branching out into catering, internet cafes and even baking.

Post Office Ltd and the Government have tried to bring new business to rural Post Offices through the provision of banking services. However, whereas in England most high street banks can be accessed through local Post Offices, in Scotland several of the main players still cannot – reducing the viability of Post Offices and making it harder for rural customers to access their accounts. Post Offices in England have also received help from the Countryside Agency which has been promoting the role of Post Offices, pubs and village shops through a number of initiatives such as the "Pub-is-the-hub" scheme.

Scottish Enterprise Dumfries & Galloway believe that support should continue to be given by way of training courses – for example, marketing, specific retail advice, customer care, health and safety, etc. Assistance from Business Advisers in the Small Business Gateway can be valuable. This fits with LEC strategy to provide support to fragile rural economies by helping to create more innovative and farsighted organisations and transforming the region into a more inclusive economy.

The key question is whether a Post Office should be considered as "just" a business or whether it has a wider community role. What do you think?

Case Study: The Auchencairn Initiative

THE AUCHENCAIRN INITIATIVE was formed when it was found that elected bodies such as Community Councils are limited in the funding mechanisms which can be exercised for projects and advice. Much help was given by other local groups such as the Dalbeattie Initiative and SCVS at Kirkcudbright, who were and still are extremely helpful and supportive.

Faced with the imminent closure of the village Post Office the Initiative negotiated the use of land owned by the pub, obtained planning permission and secured funding to erect a Portakabin to house the Post Office with a basic shop. This was all done against compressed time-scales and accomplished in less than six months.



Phase two will be the development of a local village enterprise centre. A new build is envisaged containing Post Office, flexible business premises and at least one domestic apartment for rent – all community owned. Currently a feasibility study and business plan is being carried out by Dumfries & Galloway based consultants. The Auchencairn Initiative Post Office project has received funding from Dumfries and Galloway Enterprise, Leader + and the council Post Office Grant Scheme.

Membership

The Southern Uplands Partnership is a membership organisation and depends on subscriptions for a significant part of its core funding. Members elect the Directors, receive regular newsletters and play a major role in determining priorities.

If you are not a member, please consider becoming one. If you sign and return the Gift Aid declaration it allows us to get extra support from the Inland Revenue.

To apply for membership either use the form below or visit www.sup.org.uk and complete the form on-line.

Membership category please tick box: Individual member ☐ Group member ☐

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Individual waged per year £10 ☐ Individual unwaged per year £5 ☐ Individual life £100 ☐

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If you would like to pay by standing order please contact the office for the necessary form.

Please make cheques payable to the SOUTHERN UPLANDS PARTNERSHIP.

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Signature Date

Return to: The Southern Uplands Partnership, Freepost SC05012, Studio 2, Lindean Mill, Galashiels TD1 0BR

The Southern Uplands Partnership

The Southern Uplands Partnership was established as a company limited by guarantee with charitable status in 1999, with the aim of promoting sustainable land-use in the Southern Uplands of Scotland and thereby keeping people living and working here.

Company No 200827 Charity SC029475

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