

Atholl
Estates
Newsletter

Winter News 2006/7



Welcome



Hercules Garden,
June 2006

You will have noticed the newsletter has a new look, this is a result of a rebranding exercise we are currently undergoing with our new design agents Dynam, Melanie will explain more about this below. The revised size, as you might have guessed, is prompted by the new postage rates – ever mindful of the pennies...

It has been a glorious summer after a very cold late spring. The latter was far from ideal for the lambing and the young grouse, the former much enjoyed by garden visitors and culminated in four glorious days for the horse trials, which were a huge success.

It is always a challenge to fit everything into the newsletter and one result of the new size is four extra pages, so we have tried to be slightly more liberal with our photographs and introduced one or two extra articles, as always we would be delighted to hear your comments.

With very best wishes for Christmas and the New Year Sarah Troughton

Re-Branding

The winter newsletter's new look is part of an estate-wide re-branding that began in July with the introduction of a new logo and style across all business areas. The castle image has been replaced with a contemporary suite of logos that help identify all of our operations as being part of Atholl Estates.

The works team are the first to adopt the logo on their clothing, and over the coming months, the logos will begin appearing on other team's uniforms, on signage and on stationery. New brochures for 2007 will include an Atholl Estates Visitor Guide and a Blair Castle Functions brochure, while the Blair Castle main brochure for 2007 will be re-designed and ready for early December.



The Works Department
in their newly branded
clothing & a close up of the
embroidered logo





Winter Tours at Blair Castle

From the 4th of November the Castle will be open to the public from 9.30am to 12.30pm on Tuesdays and Saturdays (and for groups on other days by prior appointment).

Last winter the newly introduced themed tours of the Castle proved popular and will continue this winter with two new themes. In November and December the theme will be 'a Victorian Christmas', with seasonal decorations. Visitors will be greeted in the Banvie Hall and led through to the Ballroom, where they will be offered a glass of mulled wine to enjoy in front of the blazing log fire, while listening to a short introduction to the Castle's history and a talk on the traditions of a Victorian Christmas. Visitors will then be able to enjoy a tour of selected rooms, followed by tea, coffee and a seasonal snack.

On 16th December, a special visit by Santa and a story-teller will delight visiting children. From January to the end of March, the theme during the introductory talk will be 'famous visitors to Blair Castle'. There have been numerous visitors over the years ranging from Queen Victoria to Ronald Reagan, and from Robert Burns to Harry Secombe.

News from Blair Castle

2006 Charity Day

The Charity Day event held in July raised £3,356 for the European Squirrel Initiative, a cause close to our hearts due to the strong population of red squirrels on the Estate.

Carols by Candlelight

A Carols by Candlelight performed by the Pitlochry and District Choral Society, under their Director Andrew Tillett, is to be held in the Ballroom on Thursday 7th December at 6.30pm. Proceeds will go to the children's charity CHAS and tickets are available from Music in Blair Atholl tel: 01796 481216 or e: info@strathgarry.com

State Dining Room

Work to install new facilities to service the State Dining Room is now complete. The room can be used for exclusive dinners for 16 to 50 guests, enabling the castle to host a wide range of functions for 16 to 220 dinner guests.

Items on Loan

Items from our collections are currently featuring in several exhibitions around the world. David Allen's portrait of Sir William and Lady Hamilton is on loan to the Albertina Museum in Vienna for their 250th anniversary of Mozart's birth exhibition. Meanwhile our model of HMS St George is featuring in Edinburgh Castle's exhibition "Prisons of War" until December 2009.

Snuff Mulls

The Edgar Browning Snuff Mull collection has proved popular with our summer visitors this year. With the introduction of new no-smoking regulations there is a revived interest in snuff and the display includes some fascinating examples of these rather forgotten collectors' items.



Meet the new Blair Castle Caravan Park team



John Keay, Lisa Galey, Stef Adams, Mark Royle, Julia MacGregor, Anne Muirhead, Rosalind Gray, Sandy Gibbons

Sandy Gibbons, the new Park Manager talks about his career & plans for the park. Having successfully studied for a music degree many people often ask me how on earth did I end up running a campsite... well I suppose you could say it was all a bit of an accident!

A year out after university was spent working for Canvas Holidays on campsites in Europe which somehow turned into something more than just a year out. Interspersed with occasional attempts at finding a proper job in the music industry, the appeal of working on a campsite for some reason kept luring me back to Canvas where, during my 6 years, I held positions from Campsite Courier right through to Recruitment and Training Manager.

Latterly I have worked with PGL Travel who specialise in childrens' activity holidays. My role was to take these activities and work with operators such as Center Parcs and implement similar style experiences for their clients.

Running the park is an excellent opportunity for me to combine my previous skills and experiences and I'm looking forward to the challenges that lay ahead by improving on the already very high standards and levels of service that we offer at the park as well as ensuring profitability, value for money and making the park an enjoyable and satisfying place to work and visit.

Another Great Season

2006 was a very successful season with the good weather encouraging many people to enjoy a camping holiday. Joining the team in the middle of August, I've been lucky to see the park operating at full capacity, giving me an excellent picture of how everything fits together.

Let's Get Busy

As we approach winter it often surprises people to learn we are preparing for what can be our busiest time of year. During the winter there are many tasks to complete (often with Mother Nature working against us) to get the park ready for opening at the start of March.

This winter we will embark on a major project to renew and upgrade the electricity supply and distribution infrastructure. Phased over four years, the project will ensure the adequate supply and distribution of electricity around the park. As the park has expanded over the years it has become essential that we invest in developing the infrastructure too. This particular project will enable us to meet the current, and future, demand for power from park users.

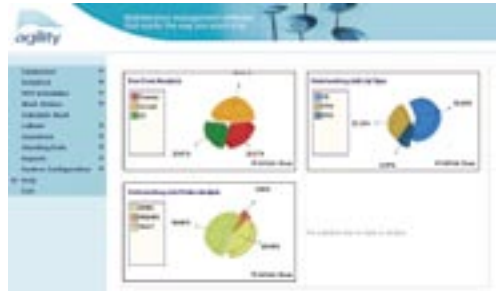
Log cabin development

Plans are being developed for cabins to be sited in the woodland behind the park. The proposed cabins will provide a range of accommodation that compliments our existing accommodation.

Works Maintenance Management System

With the number of properties on Atholl Estates, and the constant amendments to current regulations, the Works Department have invested in a new software system (Agility) that will help with prioritising, scheduling and communication on all levels.

The Estates' Works Manager, Angus MacDonald, says "a lot of time and effort has gone into choosing a system that will take us forward, and we felt that Agility is the best



system for us. Christine McNicoll and I will spend a lot of time inputting data into the system, which will have a huge benefit in the long term."

A key operator of the Agility system is Christine McNicoll, who will log calls, raise work orders and give tenants a reference number, which

can be quoted when telephoning. Christine will liaise with tenants regarding arrangements to gain entry to inspect/start works. The Agility system will take the Works Department into the 21st century with the ability to look instantly at sites, assets, equipment and registers. We can now set up Planned Preventative Maintenance on our housing assets, and have instant access to our inventory/stock. The system will be beneficial to both tenants and to the Estate, and will give a more professional approach to our maintenance.

Remember if you have a maintenance problem with an Estate property telephone 01796 481355 and ask for Christine.

Property Development News

Baltimore - located just to the north of Ballinluig on the old road. Originally a hamlet of 4 cottages and outbuildings, now in various stages of dereliction, the site will be taken forward in partnership with Tighmor to provide 5 detached mid sized homes for sale.

Blaircroisk - originally our intention was to convert the redundant farm steading into 3 new build house plots but planning constraints and financial modelling have prompted a review towards a single significant steading courtyard dwelling for sale.

Stell Park - the final phase of development in this part of Birnam (started in the 1980s) is being worked up with Perthshire Housing Association to provide in the region of 10 social let properties and a further 10 private houses for sale.

Fit for the next 500 years?

Conservation at Blair Castle

Although no contents have survived from the original castle of 1269, as the centuries have passed the family has accumulated many items of importance which now make up the present collection. One of the main functions of the Blair Charitable Trust, in addition to care of the Castle fabric, is to ensure that the collections inside will survive for future generations to enjoy. A budget of around £10,000 is set aside each year to cover a planned programme of conservation work on textiles, furniture, paintings and weapons. The final expenditure depends on the pace of conservators work and the queue for their services.



Cleaning one of the Castle's many guns

Preservation is also important to ensure that as little damage as possible occurs to the collection. Things have changed from the time of the second Duke, when Duke William asked his brother, Lord George Murray, to try to protect the pictures of their father and grandfather from fire during his bombardment of the Castle in the 1745 rising. Regular monitoring of environmental conditions assists with preservation and so humidity and light levels are checked monthly, dehumidifiers are used when necessary and ultra violet film has been placed on most windows. As well as intruder alarms, smoke detectors are also fitted in every room. Regular fire drills and exercises

are carried out to identify items to salvage, and familiarise all staff with removing items as efficiently as possible.

Fundamental to the preservation of the Blair Castle collections is the cleaning done by Madge and her team of five cleaners. Each day they start at 7.30am to remove grass and the muddy footprints of the previous day's visitors. During the winter closure days, they clean every item and corner of the Castle with the attics being the most challenging task according to Madge!

NADFAS volunteers working on the curtains from the Blue Bedroom



When the conservation began it was the textiles, curtains, bedspreads and chairs that were most in need of repair. Some had been worn out by the family before the Castle opened; others had been wrapped in plastic to protect them from the prying fingers of visitors, but this had attracted damp and dust. It was decided in 1991 to use volunteers from the Perth NADFAS Group, under the supervision of conservator Alison Docherty, to undertake conservation work. Since then, the silk damask curtains in the Small Drawing Room, the Blue Bedroom and Tapestry Room have been sewn between fine net. The major project has been the remounting of the embroidery of the Drawing Room curtains onto new fabric.



Detail of the refurbished Drawing Room curtains

There is also a regular programme of picture conservation, formerly at Clare Meredith's studio at Hopetoun House, and now with her former pupils in Dundee. The most difficult part can be the transport of full length portraits – which require George and Neil to borrow (and then clean) the farm livestock trailer. I'm always expecting them to be stopped and asked to produce their animal movement licence!



Some things never change!

Left to right: Betty Brailsford; Ian Brailsford; Anne Paxton; Pat Farron; Meg Farron; Linda Melville. circa 1980



Sally Farron and Karen Haggart
2004

In addition to planned work, accidents do happen and there are crafts people throughout Scotland who mend marble, china and leather screens. We are lucky to have a "clockman" resident in the village to give the many clocks in the Castle the regular maintenance they need to keep working.

The archives might be less visible to the rest of the Castle, but they have their own budget from the Charitable Trust, both for routine storage – where a pack of acid-free stiff card costs £150 for 8 sheets – and for specialist repair work, usually carried out at the Dundee University workshop. Over the last few years a programme of digitally copying records onto CDs has started – both as a backup in case of fire or theft, and also to preserve records with reduced handling. This is a long term project.

It might surprise the past Dukes and Duchesses to see their possessions still intact today and receiving such attention, but hopefully this will ensure that the collections will be attracting visitors to Blair Castle for many years to come. Jane Anderson



Building on success

Blair Castle International Horse Trials and Country Fair was once again a huge success in 2006! The following facts and figures will give you an unusual insight in to the event.

- 39,750 visitors came to the 2006 event, that's over 3,000 more than in 2005
- 25,662 people visited the website during August 2006
- 1,170 horses and ponies were on site this year, competing in either the three-day event, BSJA show jumping, Highland Pony Show, Hunter Show, NPS Scotland Finals or Pony Club Games, or performing in the arena displays.
- 300 more than at the World Equestrian Games in Aachen, which happened at the same time as Blair and which hosted the World Championships for Eventing, Dressage, Show Jumping, Endurance, Vaulting, Driving and Reining
- 300 packed lunches are handed out on cross-country day to officials and helpers
- 112 winners across the four days, the red rosettes going to the winners of the CCI*, CCI** and CCI*** three-day events, 20 Highland Pony Show winners, 13 Hunter Show winners, 22 National Pony Society winners, 23 BSJA winners, the Clydesdale winner and 30 winning team members in the Pony Club Games
- 55 animals other than horses were involved in the Country Fair displays. These included 30 dogs, 15 birds of prey and 10 Indian Runner Ducks
- 29 horse and rider combinations have won the three-day event classes at Blair since they started in 1989 - that's 10 one-star winners, 15 two-star winners, and 4 three-star winners
- 6 members of the Blair team had birthdays during the event
- 3 riders have won at Blair on more than one occasion: Lucinda Fredericks took the CCN* on Daliane in 1997 and the CCI** on Tina's Gold in 2000; Ruth Friend won the CCI** in 1999 and the CCI*** in 2003, both times riding Matthew II, the only horse to have won more than once at Blair; and Lucy Wiegiersma won the CCI** in 2001 on River Vally and in 2002 on Friday Morning, the CCI*** in 2004 with Shaabrak, and the CCI* in 2006 on Porloe Alvin, making her the only rider to have won the CCI*, CCI** and CCI***

Next Year

Next year, Blair will be busier than ever before, running not only the CCI*, CCI** and CCI*** that we did this year, but also the FEI Young Rider European Eventing Championships over a Championship CCI** track. The dates are 23rd to 26th August 2007.

Game-keeping – more than just keeping game

At the time of writing the Estates' Game-keeping team are in the midst of their busiest time of year. Returns from walked up Red Grouse shooting in August and September show a total bag for the whole Estate of 735 brace; a reasonable return in comparison with similar Highland Scottish estates, but a pale comparison with returns in post-war years up to the late 1980s.

There is much speculation, both scientific and anecdotal, on the causes of the decline in red grouse populations. Climate change, tick burden, habitat degradation, intestinal parasites and predation are all routinely cited.

One aspect which is central to both grouse and deer management is the sustainable management of the moorland habitat. At Atholl Estates, the moorland has been managed in hand for over 600 years and not surprisingly a long term view is taken. We are implementing different strategies on the Clunes and Dalnamein Beats on the northwest of Atholl Estates.



red grouse

At Clunes, grazing sheep were removed in 2000. A combination of historic overgrazing and heather beetle damage had caused the heather cover to degrade. In summer 2004 an 80 acre paddock was enclosed in a section of the lower hill, which was particularly badly degraded, and cows grazed from June to end September. The cows helped to graze down the molinia grass and their hooves opened up the surface of the ground. After two seasons, it is extremely encouraging to see vigorous young heather plants growing from seed in the hoof prints. We hope to move the grazing plots to another area next year.

At Dalnamein, a flock of 500 Scottish Blackface ewes continue to graze the hill. Historically deer numbers had increased and the hill was providing grazing for an estimated in excess of 2,500 hinds. Although many of the deer born at Dalnamein ultimately disperse to the adjoining beats, the moorland habitat could not sustain the population level in the long term. Over a period of 3 years, the in-season hind cull was increased by over 50% to reduce the population to a target of around 2000 hinds. This additional cull demanded a considerable effort by the Estate stalkers but has proven worthwhile – judging by the abundance of fresh heather shoots and heather blossom this spring and summer.

It is important to acknowledge that, although the Estate is managing the moors as a sporting resource, the benefits of a well-kept moor are wider than healthy stocks of grouse and red deer. A thriving heather moor sustains a much more diverse range of plant and insect life than degraded heather or molinia grass. In addition, management of predator species such as foxes, weasels and crows (which is an integral part of grouse management), also generates thriving populations of other bird species, particularly ground nesting birds such as meadow pipit, skylark, stone chat, wheatear, capercaillie, black grouse and of course hen harrier. David Greer

A year in the life of the Atholl Highlanders



Len Brailsford, RSM Atholl Highlanders, reviews the year.

The start of our year depends on whether new recruits are being admitted to the Atholl Highlanders, and in 2006 it was decided that 12 recruits would be invited to keep up the strength of the Regiment.

Invitations were issued to the twelve men – all of whom accepted. Of the twelve, two were drummers and one a piper – all had previous band experience and presented no problem from a training perspective. However from the rank and file point of view, this began a long winter of training sessions held in the ballroom of Blair Castle. These sessions were held every Tuesday and Thursday evening, starting about 7.30pm, for approximately two hours, and began in January running through to March.

On reaching a reasonable standard of foot and arms drill, all were stood down until the beginning of May, when the practice sessions for all Atholl Highlanders commenced prior to the Annual Parade held on the last Saturday of that month. The presentation of new colours by Her Grace the Duchess of Atholl made this year's parade extra special. The Atholl Highlanders also paraded and opened the Atholl Gathering on the Sunday. This included a Highlanders' race - which was quite a spectacle!

The Atholl Highlanders also turned out twice this year for the Keepers of the Quaich, a society formed by the Scotch Whisky industry, which is based at Blair Castle. This requires 24 men for Guard of Honour duties outside the main Castle entrance, and Escort and Standard bearer duties

inside. Throughout the year there can be several turnouts for Guards of Honour at weddings, or sadly at funerals.

Sometime in 2005 a challenge was issued by the Lonach Highlander Pipes and Drums, who fancied their chances at golf. After some organisation by CSM Graham Jack, a date was set for 18th June 2006, for a match to be held at Braemar Golf Course. Graham and his squad – Kevin Simpson, Ronnie Hepburn, Jocky Crichton, Sandy Crerar and Gordon Learmonth - upheld the honour of Atholl and there is no doubt this will be a standing engagement from now on.

An Atholl Highland presence was also maintained at the world famous Lonach Gathering in Strathdon. For many years now RSM Len Brailsford, CSM Graham Jack and Drummer John Brooks have been in attendance by invitation.

Also this year a contingent of men, under the command of Sgt George Farron, attended the Birnam Games and took part in the opening ceremony. The men were Sgt Ian Crichton, Pte Danny McIntosh, Pte Brian Farron, Pte Douglas Bell, Pte Neil Beaton, Pte Ken Chisholm, Pte Sandy Crerar, Pte Donald Martin and Pte Tom McDonald.

As can be seen from the foregoing, the Highlanders Kilts are never left hanging in the wardrobe for any length of time.

Len Brailsford. RSM Atholl Highlanders

Covent Garden Market Christmas Tree

Once again this Christmas the Estate will be providing a 65ft tree for Covent Garden Market in London. This year we have partnered with other Perthshire businesses to hold a stand at the market's Festive Food & Fun Festival from 16th - 19th November promoting 'Big Tree Country'.

Atholl Glens will also be taking part selling beef and lamb to the thousands that visit the market every day. Working with the 'Press & Journal', a competition (sponsored by Covent Garden Market) for a Scottish family to win a trip to London to switch on the tree's lights with a celebrity was run in early November.

Hercules Garden Sculptures

Two new sculptures by Paul Vanstone have been acquired for display in Hercules Garden. The works, titled 'Running Vein' and 'Red Web', are based on the human form and show two female figures sculptured in Rainforest Marble from Jaipur, Rajistan, India.

Braised Steak Casserole

500g Atholl Glens Organic Braising Steak
Seasoned Flour

Selection of Vegetables – Carrots, Turnip, Parsnip, Butternut Squash, Onions, Leeks
Bouquet Garni of Thyme, Bay leaf & Marjoram
Vegetable or Beef Stock, Seasoning
Groundnut Oil & Butter for browning

Cut braising steak into large pieces & toss in seasoned flour. Melt butter & oil in a good, heavy casserole dish & brown the steak. A little more flour may be added for extra thickening if required. When steak is well browned, remove from heat.

Special Offer: 3 for 2 on packs of Atholl Glens Braising Steak (normally £5.65 per pack), Casserole Steak (normally £4.47 per pack), and Steak Mince (normally £4.47 per pack).

To order telephone Atholl Glens on 01796 481482 and quote 'Winter Newsletter Offer'

Offer applies to first order only and does not include p&p. Valid to 31st January 2007.

With the garden season now over for the year, it is not just a case of sitting down - there are still many things to be done in the garden.

Here are a few tips from our two gardeners on which jobs should now be tackled.

- Clean and oil your lawn-mower and tools - as you are unlikely to have time when they are required - or take it to a professional and have them serviced before the start of the busy Spring Season.
- Other jobs to tackle during the winter is to give the greenhouse a good clean out, insulate if necessary, ventilate on mild days and also keep an eye on indoor plants, removing all dead leaves.



Cut vegetables into chunks and blanch in the stock. Add a little of the stock from the vegetables to the browned meat. Add half the vegetables, stir, and then add bouquet garni. Bring casserole to simmering point on top of stove, then place in a medium to slow oven for at least 2 hours.

Remove casserole from oven & add the remaining blanched vegetables. Return to oven and cook for a further 20 minutes.

Take casserole from oven, remove bouquet garni, sprinkle with fresh, chopped parsley & serve.



Forthcoming Events



7th December
Carols by Candlelight at
Blair Castle
see details on page 3.

16th December
Blair Castle Christmas
Festive Day
9.30am – 2.00pm

1st April 2007
Blair Castle Summer
Season starts

Staff News

Miss Diane Scrimgeour joined the Accounts Department at the Estate Office at the end of August.

Mr Sandy Gibbons joined the Caravan Park as the new Manager in August (see article on page 4)

Mrs Christine McNicoll, in the Estate Office, celebrated 30 years on service (joined 29/09/76)

Mr A Cameron & Mr A McNicoll received the Lude Medal for long service at the Atholl & Breadalbane Show in August 2006 - both have served on the Estate for 32 years.

Congratulations to Mr & Mrs J Hodge, Wayside, Kindallachan, who celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on 25th August 2006, and also to Royce & Suzanne Davidson on the birth of their new daughter Keira Maree, born 12th October 2006 weighing in at 7lbs 12ozs.

We were very sorry to hear of the deaths of Mr J Sutherland (ex Woods Department) on 8th June 2006; Mrs Jesse McMillan (wife of Donald McMillan, shepherd at Balachallan Farm) on 14th June 2006; Mrs Effie Crichton (wife of Jocky Crichton, ex Home Farm Balanloan) on 25th June 2006; and Mr Donald Grant (ex Estate Office) on 19th July 2006 - Donald's step-son has written a lovely poem in his memory, which is held in the Estate Office for anyone who wishes to read it.

Newsletter Team

Sarah Troughton
Andrew Bruce Wootton
Stephen Farthing
Christine McNicoll
Hannah Wilkins
Melanie Hoskin
Brian Thompson
Polly Freeman
Susan Learmonth

Contact Details

Atholl Estates Office
Blair Atholl, Pitlochry
Perthshire PH18 5TH
Tel: 01796 481355
Email: enquiries@atholl-estates.co.uk

Blair Castle: 01796 481207
Blair Castle Caravan Park: 01796 481263
Lodges: 01796 481355
Ranger Service: 01796 481355
Pony Trekking: 01796 481568
Atholl Glens Organic Meat: 01796 481482
Blair Castle Horse Trials 01796 481543

Websites

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