

History of Lenzie Moss

Lenzie Moss is made up of three quite separate nature domains: raised peat bog, birch woodland and unimproved grassland, covering in all some 40 hectares. It is located eight miles northeast of Glasgow, on the south-western edge of the Burgh of Kirkintilloch in the East Dunbartonshire District. The main Glasgow to Edinburgh railway line divides it north and south into two unequal portions, the greater part lying to the north of the track. It is mapped on Ordnance Survey Sheet No. 64; its National Grid reference is NS 648718. It is surrounded on the northwest, north and east by residential housing and sports fields, and on the south and south-west by agricultural land.

The principal feature of the site is, without doubt, its raised bog. This is one of the few such features still remaining in central Scotland, making it a rare habitat of international significance. Technically it is a *mountain moss* (on old maps it is actually called *Mountain Moss*).

The three habitats support a variety of flora and fauna, including several rare and endangered species, such as bog rosemary (*Andromeda polifolia*). The deciduous woodland is mainly birch, which is proliferating and threatening to invade the other areas. Additionally, this area provides a feeding ground and, in some cases, a breeding ground for a variety of wild life – including roe deer, fox, snipe and long-tailed tits. There are also several varieties of orchids and many different types of butterfly and moth.

Its history goes back thousands of years, to the end of the last ice age. As the ice retreated, meltwater formed large pools in natural hollows, one of which became Lenzie Moss. Their only source of fresh water since then has been rain, which is lacking in the nutrients normally introduced by inflowing streams. Thus, only plants which can tolerate habitats high in moisture and acidity, and low in nutrients, can thrive here; these include sphagnum mosses, and insect-eating plants such as *sundew*. At first they colonised the perimeter, gradually encroaching over the pool as the centuries passed, until they filled it completely like a sponge, their dead remains forming a deep layer of peat below. Eventually this flourishing vegetation rose above the level of the surrounding land, forming a domed shape, hence the official term *raised-bog wetland*.

Almost nothing is recorded of its early *human* history. The name itself “Lenzie” probably comes from the Gaelic “leinidh” or “leine”, meaning a boggy plain, a clear indication that the area’s distinctive feature had been recognised from a very early period. We know that in 1226 a charter granted by King Alexander II of Scotland to Cambuskenneth Abbey, Stirlingshire, allowed the Canons of the Abbey to remove peat from the Moss (at this period Kirkintilloch lay in Stirlingshire). This right was later enjoyed by the burgesses (freemen) of the burgh, who were known, significantly, as the “Peat Lords”.

The Moss’s importance to the historical burgh is shown by a group of 17th-century landowners being ordered to allow access to it across their properties. During that century a certain Walter Rankin was recorded as having set fire to the peat “for severall yeares bypast” – an occurrence still not unknown!

Its mirey nature has always prevented it from being built on, but towards the end of the 19th century the construction of the Glasgow-Edinburgh railway made possible the development of a fast-growing commuter village directly to the east of the Moss, very suitable for people who wished to travel to work in Glasgow. In addition, uses were found for various parts of the site in the 19th century, such as a municipal rubbish dump (mainly coal ash, bottles and pieces of crockery), a rifle range for volunteer soldiers (No. 10 Company of the Dunbartonshire Rifle

Volunteers raised an artificial mound at the west end of the Moss to act as a barrier to their bullets), and a grazing ground for sheep, whose close cropping of the turf kept at bay the invidious invasion of trees and shrubs.

It was at this period that the area's value as a local amenity was recognised for the first time, and in 1898 the Lenzie Ward Committee raised the possibility of preserving it as a public park, while in 1914 Kirkintilloch Town Council set up a committee to look into the various rights of way across the Moss, and to establish the pattern of land ownership; however, no action seems to have followed!

The growth of the use of peat for horticultural purposes after the Second World War (now environmentally frowned upon) saw the introduction of large-scale extraction by the Lenzie Peat Development Co., working through a private railway siding west of Lenzie Station. It ceased operations in the 1960's. This activity is responsible for levelling the original dome shape and creating the baulks and ditches over much of the present surface, obliterating all traces of earlier domestic working. More recently, the illicit removal of peat for local garden purposes and the invasion of water-thirsty birch saplings have served adversely to lower the water table. In 1985 an association called *The Friends of Lenzie Moss* (FoLM) was started, then in 1990 a planning application for housing brought the existence of this hitherto largely unrecognised local amenity prominently before the public gaze, and the *Friends of Lenzie Moss* now attracted much increased support; its members, under the energetic chairmanship of Beatrice Rae, contributed considerably to the successful outcome of two public enquiries, which resulted in the application being turned down.

From then onwards the *Friends* continued to keep before both the public and the authorities the pressing need to stop further deterioration of the area and to put in place a proper scheme of management, especially to halt the encroachment of invasive birch saplings – which compete with the bog flora and cause the Moss to dry out. Back in its Strathkelvin days the local authority put on record its commitment to establish Lenzie Moss as a Local Nature Reserve. This finally came into being in 2009 under East Dunbartonshire Council. It is now the remit of the Council, aided by the East Dunbartonshire Rangers, to restore, manage and interpret the Moss as a valuable and irreplaceable community asset. Works already undertaken comprise upgrading of the main right of way, formation of a good circular path (including sections of boardwalk) around the bog, and installation of dams to raise the water table. The Council also arranged a professional hydrology survey to aid with future management of water levels.

A Management Plan for 2009 to 2014 is now in place. Work continues with the help of volunteers (including FoLM members), under the guidance of E.D. Countryside Rangers, to clear the encroaching birch saplings. In 2010 the Friends, together with the Rangers, put together a programme of events on the Moss for that year, to celebrate both its designation as a Local Nature Reserve and the International Year of Biodiversity. Help with funding was provided by Scottish Natural Heritage.

We hope to continue having a programme of events every year from now on.

Heartfelt thanks are due to Joe Fisher, formerly Librarian in charge of the Glasgow Room in the Mitchell Library, for most of the historical information in this article.

For more information on Lenzie Moss and the Friends of Lenzie Moss, visit our website www.friendsoflenziemoss.org.uk