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**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at Carrick Castle Estate Lodge, Carrick Castle on Tuesday 20th June 2017 at 7 pm**

**1) Welcome & Apologies**

Liz Evans, Chair of the Association welcomed everyone to the meeting thanking Darius & Hannah Mellet for use of the Lodge for the AGM and then asked the Secretary to read out the apologies (22) for those who could not attend - Forrester & Alison Cockburn, Dennis & Lynn Bolt, Ian Graham, Cecilia Ferguson, Susanna Miller, James Fraser, Jean Ferguson, Elizabeth Bain, Tim King, Donald & Mona Wickes, Anna Wynne, Tom & Moira Currie, Fraser McCowan, Jai & Vonna Cowper-Smith, Gwyneth Evans, Darius Mellet & Rowan Fraser.

Those members in attendance (13) were Liz Evans, Douglas Locke, Sheron Hambly, Jimmy & Anne Sim, Don & Lorraine Kamsley, David Thorpe, Leonard Gow, Matt Wynne, Frances Walker, Anita Phillips and Joan Neilson.

**2) The Minutes of the last AGM** held on 12th June 2016 were proposed by Sheron Hambly and seconded by Jimmy Sim and signed by Liz Evans, Chair of CWA.

**3) Chair's Report by Liz Evans**

Cormonachan Woodlands Association (CWA) was established 2 years ago in order to manage and provide access to this rare Celtic Rainforest Habitat which has evolved since the end of the ice age.

Historic Content

Cormonachan Woodlands is one of the last remnants of a large Royal Hunting Estate which extended over to Loch Eck.

The woodlands appear on the first maps drawn of this area including Timothy Pont's map of 1583 and Roy's military map on 1747. Although much reduced, it is evident on the first OS map published in 1840. These Ancient Woodlands contain Ancient & Veteran Oaks, Alder and Hazel groves and also red squirrels and pine martins. Most endangered are the small and often unnoticed mosses, lichens, fungi and algae that exist, for example, sticky glue fungi on hazel trees.

#### Historic uses of the woodlands

The woodlands we see today are a result of their use over history which has changed over time. As one walks through the woodlands there is an echo of its past uses. Coppiced hazel groves, used as a source of winter food - nuts and wood for furniture. Coppiced oak managed for building material, charcoal for cooking and later for smelting bog iron and its bark for the tanning industry.

#### The remains of buildings

The best examples are at Upper Cormonachan but other less obvious ones are scattered throughout the woodlands and tell of a time when the woodlands were used as woodlands pasture. Old walls which may have been used to keep the cattle out of the crops or their recently coppiced oaks. We know that in 1685 Duncan Mckellar lived at Upper Cormonachan as a tenant to John Campbell, the Captain of Carrick. In June of that year, he lost 11 horses and mares and 3 cows taken as reparation after the Duke of Argyll backed the losing side in a rebellion. Fortunately, we can now take a peaceful walk through the woodlands.

#### Cormonachan Woodlands Land Ownership/Management

The Duke of Argyll was the first recorded owner.

1796 Lord Dunniore's Land [Parish of Lochgoil and Kilmorich map 1796].

An unknown ownership period followed.

1960's Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) - large scale forestry plantations.

2000 to 2012 - Management agreement of 20.3 hectares to Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre under Fife Council management.

2015 - Formation of Cormonachan Woodlands Association.

December 2016 - Memorandum of Understanding with Forest Enterprise Scotland/ AOEC Trust Ltd & CWA for 58.9 hectares of Cormonachan Woodlands from Clach Bhadach by Lochwood to Cormonachan Burn.

CWA was established to:-

Manage the woodlands to protect and improve the rare habitat. With the help of Simon Franks of the Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park, we

have produced a 10 year management plan. Received funding for our 'Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS)' report on Cormonachan Woodlands. Both will provide structure to our woodlands management volunteer days. Also, once these are approved by FCS, they will be used to support funding applications for various projects. Priorities - Removal of invasive species - Rhododendron ponticum and garden plants which have jumped the road and are spreading through the woodlands. Halo thinning around mature native trees surrounded by planted conifers.

### Recreation

Provide and maintain access to the woodlands via a network of paths of various lengths and links to other routes. Provide a car park. Interactive art installations. Red squirrel feeders and potential viewing location.

### Education

Interpretation boards. Maintain the existing Red Squirrel Trail. Install new information board at the car park. Replace the temporary signs around the woodlands with permanent ones. Expand the interpretation boards around the site with more detail information about the ecology, trees and history. Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre (AOEC Trust Ltd.) is a partner organisation and uses the woodlands to provide education courses to school pupils with nearly 1,500 pupils visiting the woodlands over this last year.

CWA is an association run totally by volunteers

1. Volunteering by becoming a member and paying your annual subscription. Payment covers the running of the Association.
2. Volunteering to serve on the committee. Thanks to all members past and present and thanks to Sheron Hambly who is stepping down, for all her work.
3. Volunteering to help on CWA stands at events such as the Gala Days and Open Days.
4. Volunteering to help undertake desk top research about the history of the woodlands. Volunteering to lead a project/develop a green woodworking course, etc.
5. Physical volunteering, training and helping to maintain the woodlands.

Future short, medium and long term ambitions

Finances - day to day running costs paid for by membership fees.

Project costs - External funding to cover capital costs.

Volunteers undertaking the work, for example, the 'Mighty Oak' Project.

## Short Term Projects - 2017/2018

Action plan mainly concentrating on completing the car park and associated work.

## Medium to Long Term Project Ideas

Low capital cost projects with most work being carried out by volunteers. 'Mighty Oak' - ancient & veteran trees - Identify the trees, GPS position, photograph and halo thin the surrounding Sitka spruce to increase the light.

Desk top research , mainly using a computer to record the history of the woodlands and settlements. Also, contact the Duke of Argyll estate to see if they have any records or maps. Carrick Castle/Captain of Carrick/ Drove roads, etc.

Archaeological Survey of the woodlands - GPS and photograph potential sites and map. Charcoal Platforms - Walls/Dykes - Old Buildings - possible Outlook Points - Drove Roads - Meanings of Gaelic words. Interactive online map to record management information and results of the above projects.

## Relatively low capital cost projects

Green woodworking courses for members, spoon carving, walking sticks, using shaving horse and pole lave. Interactive art installations - fund material for projects, e.g. Totem Pole Shelter.

Wild life hide - Funding to cover construction/shelter. Access path.

Squirrel feeders/information boards. Bird feeders.

## Long term major project (High Cost)

Upper Cormonachan settlement project. Consolidate the structure, interpretation boards, etc.

Cormonachan Waterfalls - walk. Linking paths to existing access/Carrick Estate/FCS forest road.

## Conclusion

We have achieved a lot in 2 years. Now expand the opportunities and projects and reflect the interests of the members. Increase links with organisations, such as National Park. Successful funding applications need evidence that the major projects are backed by the community and appears in the new Community Action Plan now being prepared. Such as Rhododendron ponticum removal, more paths in the woodlands, especially to the waterfalls and development of Upper Cormonachan settlement.

#### **4) Treasurer's Report by Jimmy Sim**

The Association's finances were reported to be in a good healthy order as will be seen in the accounts with a balance of £2,912.91 at the 31st May 2017 that included £780.00 of subscription prepayments for the new year 2017/2018. The current bank balance as at 20th June 2017 was £3,142.91. The committee managed to keep the running costs below the subscriptions income and funded all projects including training, equipment, tools, etc. from 100% grant funding. The donations received for the 'Car Park Fund' totalled £1,695.81 of which £500.00 came from Friends of Loch Lomond & Trossachs and £1,195.81 from local fund raising and members donations. The car park lease legal fees came to £1,080.00 that have been paid from this fund. The Scottish Landfill Communities Fund have agreed to pay £2,192.00 from the LandTrust (North Ayrshire Council) and £2,367.00 from EB Scotland (Argyll & Bute Council & Shanks Argyll & Bute). Douglas Locke will be presenting the Summary Accounts as they are quite complicated as we have to show the volunteering aspect and donations/funding in some detail in order to acquire further funding in future where funders want to see the Association's members are actively giving support by volunteering. We also wish to thank Douglas Locke for advancing all cost payments as grants are only paid against receipted invoices - this has applied to all training and equipment and will do so for the costs involved with the car park. It is a difficult situation to manage as organisations have to find the money for a completed project before any grants can be paid. Douglas Locke then talked through the accounts and answered the few questions asked. The Summary Accounts can be viewed on the website.

#### **5) Secretary's Report by Douglas Locke**

This has been a very busy year for me as Secretary of the Cormonachan Woodlands Association. I have had to put in over 700 hours of volunteering time that averages to almost 2 hours a day every day in the last year. It's a good job that I am retired to have been able to do this work...

The setting up of the Association in the previous year took 537 hours, about 1.5 hours a day on the same basis. The good news is that this coming year the work should reduce very considerably now that we will have the new car park funded and underway & have a lease to 31st May 2037; the woodlands agreement to 30th November 2026 as a "Memorandum of Understanding" from FES that took 2 years to agree and

most of the funding for volunteer members training. Committee members stand for a maximum of six years so someone else will need to take over the work of the Secretary in the future.

I do not want any prospective new Secretary in the future to be put off by the past work input into the Association as these hours in the future will not be the norm. It is a very responsible position being the Secretary of the Association and I have enjoyed the work and the challenge and am committed to making the Cormonachan community woodlands a successfully run organisation and don't intend to retire yet.

So what has the Secretary done to accumulate all these hours? Perhaps it would be helpful to the members to understand what is involved.

The Secretary runs the Association for the committee and the committee for the members. As there are no paid employees, everything that is done for the Association is done voluntarily including administration and woodlands maintenance. In the last year, I have received 1,402 incoming e-mails and sent out 1,273 outgoing ones. Prepared the agendas for committee meetings and AGMs and follow up Minutes of these meetings and kept members informed with Members Updates - 18 to date.

The Secretary runs the membership data base and at the end of the last financial year, we had 62 members including 1 corporate member, 1 life member, 45 full members, 11 associate members, 1 young person member & 3 child members (free).

So far this year we have 57 members including 2 corporate members, 3 life members, 39 full members, 11 associate members & 2 child members and 12 members up to the AGM have yet to renew their memberships due on 1st June 2017.

Risk assessments have had to be prepared for all work carried out by volunteers in the woodlands with volunteer days set up and tasks prioritised. Training has had to be funded and we have had to find members willing to be trained, for training such as first aid, strimming, chainsaw use for felling trees and pesticide spraying, all requiring certification to work as volunteers in the woodlands. You will note in the summary accounts that 19 members were trained at a cost of £4,340 for which we managed to obtain 100% funding from Forest Commission Scotland and Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority community funding schemes. The agreement with those members being trained and obtaining their certificates was that they would freely give up time volunteering in the woodlands for those activities when required.

Pesticide training was obtained by three members however the Lochgoil Community Council obtained this funding for local people and our members. This training will be particularly suitable for the eradication of our *Rhododendron ponticum* invasion and is part of our five year eradication plan for the woodlands.

We are still in need of more trained strimmers as the availability of the six certificated members is not always possible when required and there are currently 2.5 km of paths to keep under control. We are therefore looking for a further six members to be trained on a one day course costing £950 in total, for later this year once we have sourced funding. We now have three strimmer units of which one was funded by the National Park (they also funded a chainsaw too) and two have been generously donated by members to the Association.

Over the last two years, we have attended many meetings with Forest Enterprise Scotland (FES) ending up with a Memorandum of Understanding for the Association to manage 58.9 hectares of Cormonachan Woodlands. The agreement lasts to 30th November 2026 when it will come up for renewal.

The agreement sets out the management of the woodlands between FES, Ardroy and the Association. This is a big responsibility for the Association and the National Park have been helping with a Management Plan for the next ten years. Annual Work Plans are agreed with the partners and so far we have achieved our annual target with the help of our member volunteers. Member volunteers are essential to achieve the tasks we are committed to and those members who have been volunteering in the community woodlands say they enjoy helping that is much appreciated. This Management Plan is required so that the Association can apply to the Scottish Government's SRDP scheme for woodlands funding.

You will notice in the summary accounts that 975 children in the last year have helped clear the *Rhododendron ponticum*. You will also notice that 2,110 hours of volunteering time has been given to the Association by members and others that equates to a value of volunteering of £14,094 at FCS rates.

Over the last year, funding and donations have been the major project in three directions:-

A) Car Park Fund, where we raised £6,254.81 from our initial target of £4,000. Funding has been agreed but is yet to be paid to the Association from the Scottish Landfill Communities Fund amounted to £2,367 from

the LandTrust through North Ayrshire Council and £2,192 from EB Scotland through Argyll & Bute Council & Shanks A&B. £500 was a grant from Friends of Loch Lomond & Trossachs and the balance of £1,195.81 from local and members donations. Planning permission for the car park extension was received from the National Park Authority and written support for the project was received from our MP, MSP, Ward Councillor, ex-MP, ABC Roads Department and Forestry Commission Scotland. The committee agreed to take over the car park legal fees debt from the Lochgoil Community Trust since they advised they had no money to pay Drimsynie's solicitors and the project could not go ahead without their debt from the past being paid. The solicitors fees amounted to £1,080.00. By the time of the AGM, we hope that the car park will have been started, if not it should still be open in June.

B) Training of Members, already mentioned, where we raised £4,340 for the training of 19 members in three skills - First Aid, Trimmer & Chainsaw Certification.

C) Equipment & Tools - We received £671.91 from Forest Commission Scotland and £879.60 from the National Park Authority in community funding for a variety of chainsaw personal protection equipment, chainsaw & ancillary tools, a strimmer and 6 face masks, 2 sets of pesticide spraying equipment, pesticide storage cabinet, pesticides and more.

We would like to thank all those involved in helping the Association raise 100% of funds for the car park, the training and the equipment & tools.

The Association has no income stream other than from its annual membership subscriptions which pay for the running of the Association. All projects have to be funded therefore by 100% grants that have to be applied for and with donations from the members. The Association now has over £4,000 worth of equipment and tools.

The next long term project will be for a new path connecting the top south west corner of the Squirrel Trail to the old village of Upper Cormonachan and the waterfalls that is currently being used by Ardroy as an 'Adventure Trail' for their visiting primary school children staying at Ardroy.

We have now started fund raising for this project that is expected to take a few years to achieve a significant amount of money for work to begin. The easiest way to achieve the funding is through a very simple method

that costs members nothing. If you shop online, we ask you to help raise money for Cormonachan Woodlands Association and its projects by visiting <https://www.goraise.co.uk/cormonachan-woodlands-association>. You buy the same things at the same price, the only cost is to the retailer and the retailer passes the Association a small percentage. At this point Douglas summarised the GoRaise fund raising as most members will have seen the e-mail about this but read on to refresh in the minutes.

To make it very easy, you set up the GoRaise '[donation reminder](#)' tool. Once installed, it means that you no longer have to visit GoRaise before you shop online, as it reminds you whenever you land on a partner retailer site and gives you the percentage that will be donated to us.

There are almost 3,000 retailers in the scheme ready to make a donation, including ebay, John Lewis, Aviva, thetrainline, Marks & Spencer, Boots, TK Maxx, Currys, Argos, Vodafone and thousands more online retailers - it doesn't cost you a penny extra! If all members use it and encourage their friends and family to do so as well, the Association's projects will benefit enormously.

It takes 30 seconds to register, so please give it a try and visit <https://www.goraise.co.uk/cormonachan-woodlands-association> and please use the "Donation Reminder" so you don't even have to see if your supplier is on the system as it will tell you at the top of the screen in pink automatically.

We will of course be applying to other funding sources for this project and today I learnt that we should be able to get a 100% special grant for the new path and then use the donations to fund signage. Planning permission will be required. An onsite meeting will shortly be held to discuss the costs and funding for this new path.

I would like to point out to members that the Association's website is kept up to date at [www.cormonachan-woodlands.co.uk](http://www.cormonachan-woodlands.co.uk) as is our Facebook page with Latest News. You will also find under History on the website, Minutes of all meetings and Members Updates.

To finalise this report, I would like to encourage members to volunteer in the woodlands to help maintain the paths and help in other ways such as helping run the Open Days and Gala Days. Remember there are no paid

staff to run and maintain the community woodlands, just volunteers who do everything!

A very big 'Thank You' to all our volunteers - you are just so important to Cormonachan Woodlands... By the way, we are in need of the paths being strimmed again so need our strimmer volunteers to help please.

We hope you enjoy these lovely ancient woodlands as much as we do...

## **6) Financial Year End**

At the request of the Treasurer and the recommendation of the committee, the members were asked to vote on changing the financial year end of the Association from 31st May to 31st March in line with the normal tax year and Forestry Commission Scotland's (FCS) year end. The Association's year end of 31st May commenced as a result of membership subscriptions commencing on 1st June 2015. The volunteers hours recorded also have to match FCS year which they currently do to 31st March so it would simplify matters for the committee. A vote was taken and agreed unanimously to change the CWA year end to 31st March. This would also mean that the AGM could be held in April before the midge season.

## **7) Plans for the year 2017/2018 & Beyond**

Liz Evans briefly covered the main points for the years ahead and said that each year a work programme is agreed with Forest Enterprise Scotland and Ardroy and that last year, the target was achieved and that we were on course to achieve this year's target. We are of course reliant on volunteers coming to Volunteers Days to maintain the woodlands. All future plans were briefly mentioned again.

## **8) Membership Subscriptions**

The committee recommended the membership subscription rates should remain at the current amounts. A vote was taken and it was agreed unanimously to keep the same subscription rates as in 2017/2018 for 2018/2019. The renewal date will however be on 1st April 2018.

## **9) Election of Officers**

Sheron Hambly stepped down from the committee and was thanked for her support. David Thorpe agreed to serve on the committee taking over as the corporate representative for Ardroy from Simon Garnett who was thanked for his support whilst on the committee. Liz Evans, Chair; Douglas Locke, Secretary; Jimmy Sim, Treasurer & Don Kamsley, Member, agreed to remain on the committee. There is one vacant position available now for a member to be co-opted.

Thanks to all for attending. Matt was asked to pass on the members thanks to Anna Wynne for preparing the car park plans and revisions without charge that were crucial to obtaining planning permission. The car park is now currently under construction and will shortly be finished. Thanks again also to Carrick Castle Estate Lodge for providing the AGM venue.

The AGM closed at 20.00 hrs