



Postcards from the West: Taliesin in Galloway

Next year will be South West Community Woodlands Trust's 20th anniversary. Alyne Jones and friends recall key moments.

From our first event, held 1,000 nights before the Millennium and blessed by the beautiful Hale-Bopp comet, we have always been a collective. All of the initial meetings were conducted in Galloway, ensuring that everyone involved had a sense of ownership and sharing. And, naturally, this is a collective article.

Taliesin has given us a focus over the years spent working together; enjoying ourselves creating community buildings, woodlands, craft items with wood, wool, stone, air and fire. All these elements which go to make a place where we meet, in a sanctuary with awareness of the nature of our species, and how we connect with nature and each other in harmony. We have flourished as an organisation principally because we bought our own piece of ground, giving us stability and inspiration to work with the land,



planting trees and giving the plants, animals and birds a place to be. Our facilities are a water pipe from an underground spring, a compost loo, and ponds we have created over the years. Blessed, thankfully, by the fact that mobile phone signals are almost nonexistent, it is always a peaceful place to whittle and carve out ideas over a few days.

The Cloud Chamber built on top of the hill was the inspiration of Galloway clog and shoe maker, Godfrey Smith, who sadly died on 12 January 2015. The willow framework was made by Trevor Leat; daub and lime overcoat by many, including Jem and Jools Cox, Godfrey and others. Inevitably, due to the passage of time and weathering, this structure as well as many others built over the years at Taliesin has disappeared, including the first ladies loo! It was replaced by the composting "loo with a view" made as a 'course'

in roundwood construction led by Jem, who then led a 'course' to thatch the roof. Building Alaskan kayaks in Galloway was the first course of its kind in Scotland, conceived and organised, again, by Godfrey. It was the wettest October in Galloway on record and we were flooded out. Despite this setback, we were all inspired to construct four kayaks and the muddy mess that was our workshop was the next project at Taliesin requiring complete trench digging and re-engineering.



At almost every Gathering we have had at Taliesin in recent years, you will see young and old busy surrounded by piles of sheep fleece. Sue Appleyard has taught all of us to make peg loom cushions and rugs over the years, and the intrepid folks who make camp in the woodland while we are having our events, have groundmats made on these looms.

Phoebe Marshall's postcard

We have run lots of great Forest School sessions at Taliesin over the last few years. Children and teachers from local primary schools and nurseries, teenagers from specialist schools, and adults with drug and alcohol issues are amongst those who have been involved. Favourite activities are always fires and dens (connecting to our basic survival instinct), but we have also enjoyed nature trails, boat building, playing games, getting wet and muddy, climbing and exploring, to name but a few. As a Forest School Leader, it is wonderful to see the changes in people engaging with nature. It really does work wonders. Most surprising, though, has been the change in the teachers. In fact, we decided to organise a workshop for the teachers run by the children and this proved a huge success. The teachers found their inner child again and the kids learn about responsibility and patience, as well as being very proud. The inspired teachers have now passed on their enthusiasm to many more at their own schools and others. Thank you Taliesin and your quiet magic.



It is the ultimate secret of camping when the night temperature drops! Our events and festivals are mostly organised organically by all the trustees, co-ordinated by Jools. Ed has kept a

wonderful photographic archive over the years.

We started running festivals by donation to avoid admin and the stress of filling the courses, and it all works just as well! We have many kind benefactors. The latest venture is the Orchards and Wild Harvest Project managed by Jools and inspired by Jools' Nature Exchange trip to Latvia. In Latvia, apple trees are everywhere and all municipal planting is of fruiting varieties. Latvians understand poverty; we should get prepared!

A year in the life of

In January 2014, Jem organised a digger to clear part of the upper pond and we plan to

Opposite, Clockwise from top: Comet Hale/Bopp visits Taliesin 1000 nights before the Millennium; thatching the "loo with a view" roof; The Cloud Chamber. This page: Bird carved from one piece of wood. All photos copyright vanishingscotland.co.uk, except for the Comet Hale/Bopp (Simon Brooke/SWCT)

clear another section this year. There is less disturbance to wildlife if we do small areas at a time. Easter Weekend was a success and we were blessed with good weather. Peg looming, stone carving, whittling - we made coat hooks, spoons, spatulas. We had a ceremonial burning of Trevor's dancing willow sculpture to make way for a new one! A willow bridge was started by Jem and Ed to span the burn, this is an ongoing project.

Kids camps for families with young children in May and September last year were a huge success with lots of pond dipping, shelter building, trail making and fireside cooking.

Knotweed bashing and covering took place over the summer, although we may have to resort to injecting the stems. Autumn saw Simon Lidwell, with his friends Alex and Sam, running a blacksmithing course using a Viking-style forge, a medieval forge and a forge representing the industrial revolution. We made pokers, bangles, glass beads and copper jewellery. Ben Glanville also ran a course in carving magnificent birds from one piece of wood. Other workshops included re-roofing the oven and a wild food foray.

Looking towards our 20th anniversary in 2016, I will be compiling a film and slide show reflecting our events and courses over the years. It will comprise a record of methods and tools used throughout the years, plus the artefacts made and should be an invaluable resource for multiple uses. We need funds and technical expertise to accomplish this so if anyone who reads this article thinks they can help in any way please be in touch.

www.vanishingscotland.co.uk

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Ed Iglehart's postcard

In 1995, the idea of a Millennium Forest stirred the enthusiasm of many people, proposing to extend and improve native woodland areas all over Scotland and re-establish and strengthen the connections between communities and their local natural history. Reforesting Scotland (RS), which developed from Bernard Planterose's *Tree Planters' Guide to the Galaxy*, was and continues to be very influential for a number of us. When RS held its annual Gathering at Laurieston Hall in 1995, there was much talk of the Millennium Forest project, and an old friend, Tim Stead pointedly noted that there were no proposals from Galloway, the most forested part of Scotland. He and Eoin Cox, stalwarts of Borders Community Woodlands, bullied Alyne Jones and myself into trying to organise local interest. Alyne organised a meeting of potentially interested folk, and I invited Tony Bonning, the owner of Taliesin, thinking he might be interested.

A local voluntary association, South West Community Woodlands (SWCW) came into being, its core being made up of folk whose interests in local environmental matters had come together earlier in response to proposals to bury nuclear waste in the granite hills at the heart of the Galloway Forest Park, the bulk of which lies in the west of the Stewartry. South West Community Woodlands Trust (SWCWT) was then formed to provide the corporate identity required by funding bodies, most notably the Millennium Forest for Scotland Trust (MFST). A divergence of priorities between MFST (countable trees and hectares) and SWCWT (people, plants, creatures, places and their relationships) resulted in a cordial separation, and SWCWT continues to develop in association with a number of local initiatives, including riparian planting along the upper Urr and elsewhere, native tree nurseries, and the creation and development of our community woodland centre at Taliesin.