

Think Nature
Health Walks



Newsletter

Spring 2023



Welcome to the (almost) spring edition of the Think Nature Health Walk's newsletter

Despite another recent wintery spell of weather it's great to see some cheery signs of spring! Lighter evenings, bird song, tree buds and early spring flowers are all welcome signs that the season is changing. A lovely time to be out and about enjoying our walks.



WELCOME to our new walking groups!

Dornoch Buggy Group

Meets every Monday at 10.30am in either Ardgay or Camore Woods.

Contact: eilidh@dfgcommunity.com

Hilton Buggy Group

Meets every Tuesday at 10.30am at Castle Heather Park, Inverness.

Contact: kasia.mccubbin@hiltonfamily.support

Thurso Dementia Friends Group

Meets every Friday at 2pm at Thurso Community Cafe, Thurso Harbour.

Contact: george.ewing@cyclingkuk.org

Training for Walk Leaders

Paths for All offer regular Walk Leader Training to volunteers and Strength and Balance Workshops for Walk Leaders who are members of the Scottish Health Walk Network. Courses are free of charge, can be accessed online and last for around 3.5 hours.

If you would like more information or to book a place, or if you have any other training needs, such as Dementia Friendly Walk Leader Training or First Aid, please get in touch: charlotte@highlandtsi.org.uk



Walking Diaries

New Walking Diaries are now available to all Think Nature Health Walk groups.

The diaries have been designed to capture details of your regular walks, such as time, distance, number of steps etc, with the option of writing down what you saw, heard and how you felt whilst out in nature. The diaries are in A4 format and run for one month, so you can complete them for as many months as you like. You may like to complete an individual diary or one as a group.

Please get in touch if you are interested and I'll pop them in the post.

Email: charlotte@highlandtsi.org.uk

Week 1	No. of steps	Total time spent walking	Details of walks, i.e. location and distance	How I felt during and after the walk	What I saw and heard outdoors in nature	Details of any other journeys, i.e. bus, car share, cycle
Monday						
Tuesday						
Wednesday						
Thursday						
Friday						
Saturday						
Sunday						

Please use the other side of this page if you need more space to write.

If you would like to include a note of your target for this week's walking or time spent, please use the boxes to the right:

Target	Target Reached	Goal for next week
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EVENTS

HLH Ranger Led Nature Walks

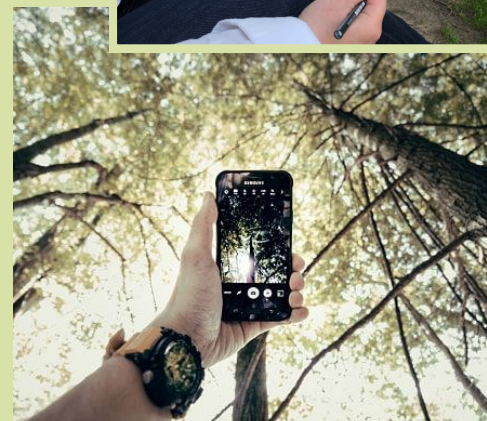
Nature walks are starting up again! With many planned for the year ahead we are starting off with these:

- Hilton Buggy** - 25th April, Castle Heather Park
- Dornoch Buggy** - 15th May, Camore Woods
- Golspie** - 22nd May, Big Burn Walk
- Lairg & Tongue** - joint group walk, date TBC
- Lochinver** - date TBC

Further dates will be posted on the Highlife Highland website. If you would like more details about the walks above or you would like your local Ranger to visit your walking group, please let me know: charlotte@highlandtsi.org.uk

Creative Walks

Creative walks are starting up again too, so if you would like to add a creative element to your walk, please let me know and we can decide on an art, craft or photography activity and set a date!



Walking for Wellbeing

Since February Think Nature Health Walks have been working with SAMH, Paths for All and colleagues from the Scottish Health Walk Network to develop new resources and

e-learning for staff, volunteers and walkers to support good mental health and wellbeing through walking. The new resources include a Walking for Wellbeing toolkit which will be available by early summer and I'll share them with all of our walking groups then.



Inverness Walking and Wheeling Festival

The Inverness Walking Festival will be a week long celebration, 20th - 27th May, of walking and wheeling aiming to shine a light on the wonderful opportunities available in the heart of the Highlands to enjoy the benefits of being active outdoors! The festival is being organised by Partnerships for Wellbeing and many groups and organisations will be joining them to offer all kinds of walking & wheeling experiences.

Find out more: www.wawfest.com

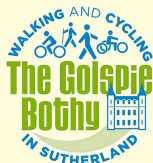
WHAT'S ON with Walking Groups

Here are some of the amazing things that are going on with our partnership walking groups over the next few months. If you have any other events on this year, please let me know and I can include them in the next newsletter.

Golspie Bothy

Walks, Talks & Rides into History
At Brora Heritage Centre during April and May.

The Golspie Bothy and Clyne Heritage Society have an exciting programme planned which includes walks, talks and rides along the Brora Heritage Trail, River Brora and the beach. Tea & coffee are provided at the talks.
To find out more contact Amanda on 07833 938938 or email: amanda.wagstaffe@cyclenguk.org



Dornoch Buggy Group



27 March - Easter Egg Hunt & Picnic

Plus walks with lots of other exciting activities including arts and crafts during April, May and June.

Mondays at 10.30 a.m, during term time. Meet at either Camore Woods or Gearrhoille Community Woodland, Ardgay.

To find out more contact Eilidh on 07732714490 or email: eilidh@dfgcommunity.com

Tongue Walking Group

The group will be walking at **Borgie Forest on 29th March** with Milly Revill-Hayward who works for the RSPB and is based at Forsinard Flows. She will be giving a general talk & walk and a brief presentation about the Flow Country at the Kyle Centre in Tongue, with refreshments.
To find out more contact Ruth on 01847 611327



Skye U3A Walk & Talk Pop-up Event Friday 21st April, 11am - 4pm, Skeabost Memorial Hall, by Portree

Following on from last years popular Arthritis Awareness Walk & Workshop, Charlie will be leading workshop sessions discussing a variety of group walking and walk leading topics. There will also be a local walk, with refreshments and lunch too.

To find out more contact Charlie on 07557 514469 or email: cwvharris@hotmail.com



Birds & Buggy Walks



Hilton Buggy Group were delighted to see swans and mallards on their walk in Castle Heather Park.



Dornoch Buggy Group recently enjoyed a bird themed walk around the Meadows in conjunction with RSPBs Big Garden Birdwatch. Everyone listened out for bird calls, spotted different birds on a nature trail and looked at books to learn about identifying features and eating habits. After the walk everyone made bird feeders to take home for their gardens.

Engaging with nature

It is hard to over-estimate the value of being in nature for our physical and mental health. As spring approaches it is a brilliant feeling to see the first swallow appear in the skies or the first butterfly. It is great time to get out and about and appreciate the wildlife all around us. But have you ever thought about recording and sending in those observations?



Orange Tip Butterfly

Wildlife is in trouble and we have seen a 25% decline in nature over the last 30 years but we can all do our bit to help. The first thing we need to do is find out what we have. Believe it or not, although the Highlands have some brilliant wildlife we have very few people recording what they see.

Wildlife recording can seem overwhelming at first: what do I record and how can I be sure of my identification? But the value of someone or a group walking a regular route and seeing changes over time is incredibly valuable to conservationists.

You can record everything and anything but a few good quality data is better than quantity. You could start by inviting a Ranger or expert along to your walks who has identification skills. You could get involved in some of the annual surveys e.g. recording where frog spawn occurs. Or you get into the habit of sending in records of anything interesting you see.

Learning to observe is a skill that takes practice. It is so easy to go home and check the book and realise you cannot remember what colour the stem was or shape the beak of that bird was. But photographs make life so much easier. You could start by downloading an identification app on your mobile phone such as iNaturalist or iSpot. They do all the hard work and even make suggestions as to what it is.

A good place to start might be butterflies as there are not so many different species in the Highlands that you cannot learn quickly. It can make a walk more interesting looking out for one to spot. iRecord Butterflies is a free app that will guide you through the identification of any butterfly that you see and allow you to add your sighting to a national database. Or you could email one of the Rangers if you get stuck.



Meadow Brown Butterfly



Primroses

Warning! - it can be addictive. And remember the more you know about something the more you come to love it. Maybe folk will get inspired and want to do more to help nature.

There are eleven Highlife Highland Rangers that cover most of the Highlands.

If your walking group would like one of the Rangers to accompany you on one of your walks, please contact us. You can find us at: www.highlifehighland.com/rangers

Andy Summers
Senior Ranger for North Highlands

Many thanks to Andy for providing this very interesting article and beautiful photographs.

Out and About with Think Nature Health Walks

Photos below show just some of the exciting things we got up to last year!



Tree Planting and Walk in Uig Woods – Skye U3A walking groups and members of the public joined the Woodland Trust last October to plant 65 trees, enjoy a woodland walk and learn more about the local environment and path network. There was a real sense of camaraderie and doing our bit for the environment, replacing trees lost in recent storms and improving the woodland structure.



Eilidh, our wonderful Dornoch Buggy Walk Leader, was nominated for Volunteer of the Year. We were invited to the awards ceremony at Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh where we heard more about many inspiring walking projects.



We met up with some of the Walk Leaders from Castletown, Thurso and Wick Walking Groups for a get together over warming bowls of soup after a refreshing walk along Dunnet beach. It was great to catch up and hear about what's going on in the groups.

Out and About with Think Nature Health Walks

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MSP Maree Todd joined us in Evanton Woods to celebrate the continued funding for Green Health Partnerships in Scotland and to mark Social Prescribing Week. We all benefitted from a walk through the woods, various nature activities and discussion with other green health service providers.



We attended two excellent events hosted by Paths for All last year. At the Expert Lecture in November we explored the links between walking, nature connection and wellbeing. And 'meeting local needs: communities, wellbeing and health' was the theme at the Scottish Health Walk Network Annual Conference.



At the Community Health & Wellness Winter Learning Event we enjoyed a nature health walk in the woods above Portree.



Sharing information and great conversations about walking at the We Want Health Festival in Thurso.

Photo Gallery



Walker leader Ruth and walker Greg, both members of the Tongue Walking Group, share this cheerful shoe story:

On a recent walk to the Countess's wooded drive in Tongue to see the snowdrops we had an amusing incident, which we think sums up how the walkers care for and look after each other, feel comfortable together and can laugh at their own mistakes. We arranged that Colin would drive Greg to the Countess's drive as he is unable to walk far and we wanted him to walk up the drive and see the snowdrops. The other walkers started at the hostel and walked to the drive from there. Greg got out of the car when we all reached the drive and within minutes Nadine noticed that he was walking more awkwardly than usual and spotted that he had his shoes on the wrong feet! Nadine's son has done this in the past so she was alert to the possibility. We found a suitable perch for Greg (a wheelie bin on it's side!) and proceeded to change his shoes to the correct feet amongst much hilarity. He thought it was great fun having two women changing his shoes for him, in the middle of a wood while he sat on a wheelie bin! Once sorted we continued on our walk and were rewarded by the sight of lots of beautiful snowdrops and a more stable Greg.



The Skye U3A Walking Group pictured above following a walk at Sligachan, standing below the Collie and Mackenzie Mountaineers Monument.



Golspie Bothy Walking Group on a recent walk in Dunrobin Woods near Golspie.

CONTACT

Please get in touch if you would like any further information or support, or if you would like to feature an article or photo in the next edition of the newsletter. Many thanks,

Charlotte

Charlotte Mackenzie, Health Walks Project Manager

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