



THINK NATURE HEALTH WALKS



SPRING 2024 NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the Think Nature Health Walks newsletter for **Spring 2024**! The weather is continuing to improve, the leaves are coming out on the trees, and nature is buzzing with energy! What a fabulous time of year to enjoy the many benefits of being outdoors.



National Walking Month

For the whole month of May we are celebrating **National Walking Month** and promoting the benefits of walking for physical health, mental wellbeing, and community connection!

We've also got **Green Health Week** happening from 11th - 18th May! This is an opportunity to raise awareness about the value of enjoying the outdoors and connecting with nature for supporting our health.

Plus, Green Health Week coincides with **Mental Health Awareness Week** and this year's theme is 'Movement: Moving more for our mental health'. So it's the perfect time to promote our fabulous walking groups and to help attract new walkers!

Tongue Walking Group

“January probably now seems a long time ago but for the Tongue Walking Group it was a month to remember. We rarely cancel our weekly walks but had to abandon four consecutive walks this January. We were thwarted firstly by wet weather and gales, then by two weeks of snow and finally by yet more gales. Yvette our 97 year old walker and artist, who trained at the Glasgow School of Art, recently painted and had printed some cards for us to sell to raise funds for the group. Fittingly, these depicted walkers out in inclement weather!

It was like a reunion when we eventually managed a walk on 14th February. Seventeen of us walked alongside the Kyle of Tongue. The tide was low so there was lots of bird life to see and hear including, curlews, oyster catchers and mergansers. It was such a pleasure to walk up the drive at Tongue House to see carpets of snowdrops in full bloom. From the drive we continued to Eddie’s Garden, a walled garden given to Eddie by the Countess of Sutherland on his retirement and now lovingly cared for by his daughters. There was an amazing amount of colour in the garden even so early in the year. It was a beautiful sunny day and we enjoyed a short break in the garden and a picnic of hot spiced ginger punch and heart shaped chocolates. Refreshed we retraced our steps, still warmed by the sunshine and catching up with each other’s news.

Back in our weekly walking stride on 20th March we celebrated with cake the 80th birthday of Mary, one of our regular walkers. It was another beautiful day so 18 of us, including Yvette, walked at Achiniver with the burn at one side of us and the sea ahead. Spectacular, uplifting views. Hopefully, the worst of the weather is now behind us and we can look forward to many more sunny walks.” - Ruth, Tongue Walk Leader





Dunvegan Walking Group

Dunvegan group enjoying a walk at the end of March along a local track to one of the walker's childhood homes.



Wick Walking Group

One of the walking groups in Wick enjoying the blue skies and sunshine!

Our groups are always looking to welcome new walkers and volunteers.



Walks at the Plock

Bruidhinn Gàidhlig air a' chuairt seo! Speak Gaelic on this walk!

The Kyle group have been incorporating Gaelic into their walks and enjoying nature, exploring the bluebell woods and discovering the bird song of spring!






Walking Group Visits

I enjoyed a beautiful coastal walk with the group in Golspie on the 29th April, and then joined the Tongue and Tain walking groups at Aldie Burn for a woodland walk and lunch on the 1st May. Brilliant to get together and enjoy walks in nature!




New Walk Leader Volunteers



"I really enjoyed the walk leader training and have enjoyed implementing my learning with the Fort William group. Walking with the group has been a pleasure. Everyone is so welcoming and friendly and it has given me a real sense of purpose and inclusion in the community." - Madeleine, Fort William Walk Leader



Baby & Toddler Buggy Walks in Hilton



"I have noticed that my son is calmer after Buggy Walk. He runs with other children, feeds ducks, sing songs with Kasia (Walk Leader) and on the way back is tired, ready for his nap. It is also good for me to chat with other mums and just be on fresh air". - Walker

"I made new friends during Buggy Walk." - Walker

"It helped me to open up about motherhood with the coordinator and other mums. It is easier to do when you don't have to have eye contact and in smaller group. It is very relaxed group." - Walker

Volunteer Reminder

Please ask new walkers joining your group to register, either by using the online link or by completing a paper form. Any questions, please get in touch.

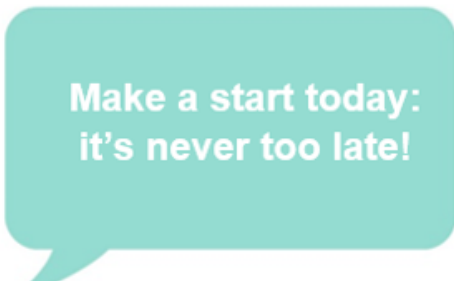
And here is a copy of the key updated messages for physical activity guidelines to share:



Some is good, more is better



Every minute counts



Make a start today: it's never too late!

How can I benefit from the five ways to wellbeing as a volunteer?

Be active > by walking

Keep learning > with training

Take notice > of nature & local place

Connect > with others

Give > back to your local community



Ways to Wellbeing

Volunteering with your local walking group is a fabulous way to support your wellbeing.

Volunteering is a great way to give back to your community, and benefit from fresh air, fitness, and friendship.

Do you know someone that might be interested in volunteering? Please encourage them to get in touch by emailing isabel@highlandtsi.org.uk

Beltane blessings!

The 1st May marked the earth festival of Beltane! It is traditionally held about midway between the Spring equinox and Summer solstice. Beltane symbolises the arrival of Spring, and the beginning of Summer. A walk in nature is a perfect way to celebrate Beltane and observe the unfolding beauty of the changing seasons!



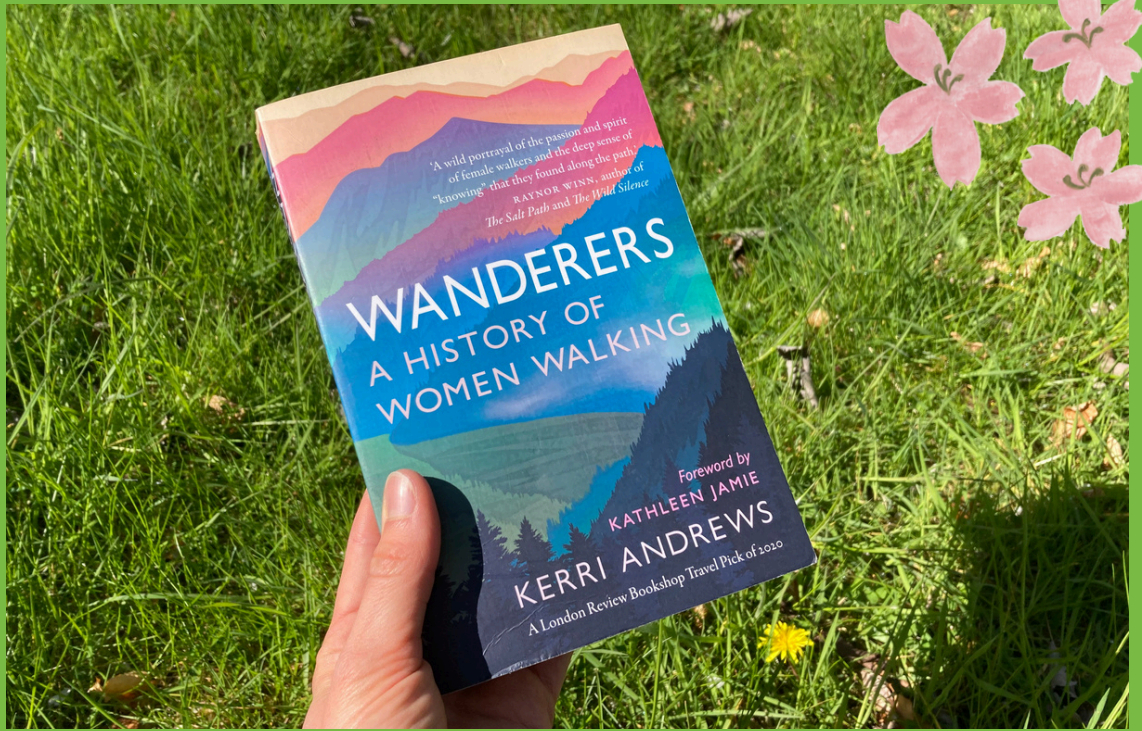
Sustainable & Active Travel

For my recent visits to walking groups I have been able to use a combination of the train and my bicycle to get about!

Choosing more sustainable and active forms of travel where possible is a great thing to do for our health and the planet.

For those of us heading North or West, make sure to make use of ScotRail's Highland Railcard which gets you 50% off all local journeys! It's only £15 per year too.





Walking & Reading

In each newsletter I will include a suggested book to read to inspire you to get outside, connect with nature and enjoy walking. This month we hear from Ruth, our Walk Leader in Tongue who recently read 'Wanderers: A History of Women Walking' by Kerri Andrews:

"This book follows the experiences of ten women walkers, some well known like Dorothy Wordsworth and Virginia Woolf and others less so. Some of them walked centuries ago... At the time walking, particularly when alone, was regarded by some as dangerous, unseemly and believed to be injurious to the health of women.

Variously these women used walking to escape from the drudgery of their employment, from the class they were born into, or the mundaneness of their lives. Some read as they walked and were writers who used walking to inspire them about characters and places. They felt torn between writing and walking, and sometimes used walking to escape from writing, returning refreshed and inspired. Walking was a way of restoring physical and mental health. For some, walking helped them to deal with the difficulties they faced such as domestic violence or a contrived divorce. They felt a sense of freedom and of their own "littleness" when walking in vast open spaces. It was time to think and connect with nature. Walking was a health giver. Walking was "fuel" for the mind.

These women used walking to familiarise themselves with places, "to get to know the Lake District" for example or "to know the hills of the Cairngorms". Nan Shepherd saw the mountains as "her friends and lived among and within them"... For some, they felt a connection between mind and feet and mention walking in "trance" like states. Reading about these women is quite humbling. You appreciate their confidence, endurance and resilience. They walked without all the comforts we take for granted today. No sophisticated walking boots or waterproof clothing and in some cases without maps or a compass. No mobile phones for them! This is a book you can dip into and just read about one or two women or even read about them all. I would definitely recommend it to anyone but particularly to walkers."



The Highland Charter for Climate, Nature & Health is launching this month!

The Charter is a pledge to put **climate, nature, and the benefits of green and blue health** at the centre of decision-making and action, so that the natural environment and people have improved health, wellbeing, and resilience. It builds upon the previous Climate Charter by bringing together three elements that are essential for the wellbeing of the planet and people. **The Charter is for everyone, including businesses, organisations, community groups and individuals.**

[More information here](#)

Free Training for Volunteers

I have now completed Paths for All's cascade training, so I am able to deliver the following free training, online or in person, to volunteers:

Walk Leader Training - for those who want to volunteer to organise and lead local walks.

Dementia Friendly Walk Leader Training - to provide skills to develop and deliver walks that are safe, accessible, and inclusive of people living with dementia. The course explores walking environments, routes, risk assessment and the role of the Walk Leader.

For further information on any of the training courses above please get in touch:
isabel@highlandtsi.org.uk



Social Media

Please follow the **Think Nature Health Walks** project on social media - find out about local opportunities, news and other walking groups!

@thinknaturehealthwalks



Isabel McLeish Health Walk Coordinator

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 (please email me by the end of July).

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