



**Abriachan Produce Show** ran with a 2020 difference, thanks to coronavirus restrictions. Rather than us all gathering in the village hall for post-judging inspection and cup of tea we organised neighbourly rivalry and, by all accounts, folk really enjoyed their afternoon meandering around the community's displays. Sue Mullins kindly judged the tabletop entries, taking copious notes, doing her best to ignore stray cats, persuasive children, sudden showers and a variety of points-scoring umbrellas thrust into her hands!



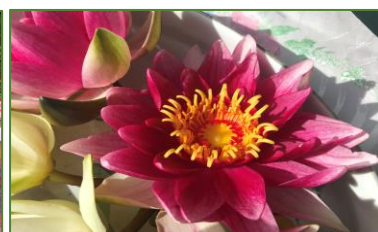
Autumn 2020

**The results were –**

- Most eccentric – Balchraggan**
- Most creative – Schoolhouse area**
- Most diversely classy – Blackfold**
- Most Sustainable – the Clachan**
- Most Mouthwatering – Balmore**
- Best in Show – Achpopuli road**



**Entry donations raised  
£175 for the  
Highland Hospice  
Thanks everybody!**







## Bramble season is upon us

The bramble is a member of the rose family. It is native to Scotland and their delicious berries have been foraged throughout the ages. The Scots language has many names for brambles including Blackbides, Brammie, Bumblekites, Drumlie -droits, Garten-berries and Scaldberries.

There are several Gaelic names for brambles but the commonest is Dreas or Dris in the plural. It is also known as Grian mhuine- the thorn bush that basks in the sun, and Smear phreas- the bush that smears. This is similar to the origin of the Dutch smeeren. and the German, schmieren. - to smear or daub.

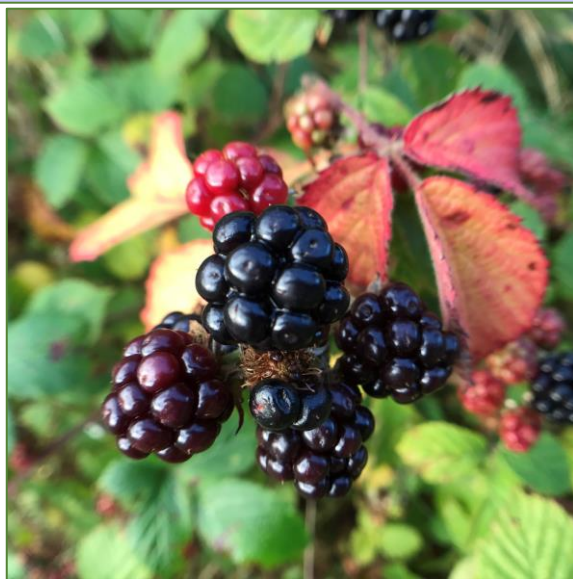
The bramble was highly valued by the Highlanders. The fruit was used for food, the twigs for dyeing and the leaves which have astringent properties had various medicinal uses. Lightfoot in his Flora Scotica published in 1770 reports that poultices made from an infusion of the leaves were found to be effective in relieving the symptoms of erysipelas, a very unpleasant streptococcal infection. He also mentions that a “tolerably good wine” could be made from the berries.

According to ancient Highland tradition, the bramble was regarded as having protective powers and was known as an druse beannaichte- the sacred bramble. This is based on the belief that Jesus used a switch of bramble to drive the money lenders out of the Temple and he also used switch of bramble to chivvy the donkey along when He rode into Jerusalem. Margaret Bennett records bramble swatches being used above door lintels on houses and byres to ward off the evil eye.

There is a belief common throughout Europe that after the 29th of September brambles should not be eaten because they acquire a bitter taste. This is the result of the devil being expelled from Heaven on Michaelmas Day, the 29th September. He landed on a bramble bush and cursed it by spitting on it or peeing on it, he definitely defiled the brambles by placing his cloak over them, depending on where you were in the Highlands!

Brambles are beginning to appear all around the easy access paths around the classroom – not helpful when children or pets get stuck in them but they are a great “nurse” crop protecting young oaks, hazels and aspens which seem to be the hare’s favourites!

All the rugosa family are also really important sources of nectar throughout their extended flowering season for a wide variety of pollinating insects – hoverflies, bees, moths and butterflies like the speckled wood and Scotch argus pictured on the right.



The bramble features in many Gaelic proverbs **Am fear a readadh ’s an druse dhomh, Readhainn ’s draighionn da.** He who would go into the bramble for me, I will go into the thorn for him.- the equivalent of I’ll scratch your back if you scratch mine.

**Às an dris , ann san droigheann-** Out of the bramble into the blackthorn- the equivalent of Out of the frying pan into the fire Is fear and **druse na ’n draighionn als fearr an draighionn na ’n donas** - Better the bramble than the blackthorn Better the blackthorn than the devil

**Ch crosta ris and dris** - as irritable as a bramble (as irritable as a cat)

**Cho sgrìobach ris dris-** as abrasive as a bramble- (As abrasive as sandpaper)



## Abriachan Forest School : Early Years

The tale of the nursery provision seems to have been a long and corona-convoluted one but the important point to note is that it is now up and running very successfully – appreciated by children and their caring adults alike.

On Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays the woods ring out with happy voices shouting and singing, cooking and creating, jumping and bouncing, splashing and guddling. Initially in early March we had children from Merkinch family centre but after lockdown the logistics of transporting them became too complicated and costly. So now the children come from the local area, are dropped off by family members and often share their Scottish

Government funded hours between Abriachan and other providers – school nurseries or childminders. We are registered with the Care Inspectorate, partnered with Highland Council and the 3 staff are all members of the SSSC (Scottish Social Services Council), and working towards the relevant qualifications and CPD. For these levels of staffing the maximum number of 3 – 5 year old children attending each day is 12. Experiential learning through play is the name of the game and they are all making amazing progress, coping well with rough ground, sharing and being kind to each other, managing frustrations and solving lots of problems in the process. The Peace path fire pit area is the current main location but there are daily forays to the garden, the woodworking shed, the tree house, hide and, favourite of all, the burn! To provide a second shelter option we have recently erected a yurt in the garden area. This, easier weather protector, will save the tarpaulin system having to be used every day.

Evidence of development and meeting learning targets is being collated by the keyworker staff, shared with parent/carers and is available for Highland Council quality assurance and Care Inspectorate assessors. The main curriculum areas are numeracy, literacy and health & wellbeing but we do lots of science, technology, engineering and expressive arts too...even Gaelic songs some days. This all means many, many, many photos are taken and annotated every week!



Maree Todd, MSP: Minister for Children & Young People: March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2020



BBC Scotland's Landward TV crew were filming in the forest at the end of October and interviewed Sam Hesling who is Katharine Stewart's grandson and dad to one of the nursery children. His Granny was the initial motivator and a great supporter of the community's stewardship and ownership of the forest. She was also the Trust's first Patron.

The reason for this feature is because Abriachan is a finalist in the 2020 Nature of Scotland Awards.



## Another Award Recognition

Scotland's Finest Woodlands' Judges awarded Abriachan Forest Trust a Highly Commended in the Centenary Award of the 1919 Forestry Act.



1919 Forestry Act Centenary Award  
2019 Highly Commended

[www.sfwa.co.uk](http://www.sfwa.co.uk)

This was a great honour and testament to the hard work of those delivering the forest school programmes and sensitive forest management of Andrew and Dietrich. Here is a summary of the judges' comments...." The Forest Trust acquired this woodland area of 540ha in 1998. Originally planted 20 or so years earlier, with timber production as the key objective, the woodland had been subject to a period of management neglect before being acquired by the community. Subsequently the way the forest has been utilised by and for the benefit of the local community and other stakeholders has revolutionised the value of the forest as a local resource reflecting the upsurge of interest in community engagement in woodland ownership and management over the last 30 years or so.

Particularly impressive were the developments on initiatives on health and well-being and the educational and outdoor learning facilities in the forest which were clearly popular and well-used as well as the number of locals involved in enjoying and utilising the woodland in one form or another. This was reflected in the way the forest is now managed and in securing key streams of financial support to sustain the approaches adopted as well as in the variety of forest users evident to the judges during their visit.

Nor had the basics of woodland management been neglected. It was clear that timber income was important and highly valued in the forest and current planning and operations reflected that through additional planting of bare land, a viable local firewood business and the acquisition of harvesting equipment. Silvicultural decisions had been made with the clear intention of maintaining a productive woodland capacity for future managers to utilise.

It was evident on the ground as to how the various management objectives were being reconciled though that might have been a little clearer in the planning documents submitted.

The Forest Trust and the approach adopted at Abriachan has clearly acted as a pathfinder for other communities in Scotland wishing to get involved in woodland ownership and management. It thus amply reflects how this latter aspect has evolved in the last 30 years or so and sets a clear example of what might be achieved when an apparently unremarkable woodland area is opened up to local enthusiasm and dynamism underpinned by financial acumen."



Above : birch regen and mixed native planting around the easy access paths.

Left: Scots pine replant growing well on eastern slope of Carn na Leitir

Below : sitka logs harvested beside the Great Glen Way, SP mosaic on hill in background



The financial impact of coronavirus restrictions on the income this year has been mitigated by the 2019 harvest and classroom staff being furloughed on Job Retention Scheme x 3.5 months.









## Round House / Bronze Age Dwelling

Our lovely roundhouse, built in 1999 by local young people, thatched with reeds and rashes, with more recent input from secondary pupils and volunteers, burned down on a busy day last July. So now, just when we are getting ready to start up again post COVID-19, we have one less shelter in which to tell stories, to use as a base for our nursery children, to inspire our pupils when finding connections with the first foresters and in their learning for sustainability.

We quickly started a crowd-funding campaign to help cover maintenance and repair costs. This has resulted in us getting lots of very positive messages of appreciation and raising the amazing sum of almost £12,000.



Thanks so much to everyone who has contributed. It has been quite humbling. The thatcher has started harvesting reeds from RSPB Loch Tay and the new 7m larch frame has begun to rise from the charcoal...a very messy job with lots of dirty faces! The wall is requiring more repairs than expected due to the heat of the fire splitting the stones. However the A team are on the job and the bottom photo is of Marco on the shave horse skinning number 4 of more than 150 very resinous noble fir branches. ...it will take a few weeks!

(They have precisely the best sweeping curve for the job don't you know? )

If we have a kind winter we hope Peter the thatcher will be able to keep working and complete the roof without having to stop too often for snow. In retrospect, February 1999 was surprisingly fair and mild, enabling reeds to be bundled and rashes to be scythed.





**Multi-Trails Project**

Community Woodlands Association has been collaborating with some European trail networks in a demonstration project. Aigas, Laggan, Lochcarron and Abriachan were the Scottish partner locations. The Multi-trails project is funded by the Highland and Cairngorm LEADER programmes, co-financed by the Scottish Government and the European Commission. and is part of a transnational cooperation project to share and disseminate best practice between the Community Woodlands Association in Scotland and the Sjö, Skog & Fjäll LAG in Sweden for sharing innovative techniques and best practice for the construction, promotion and management of mixed-use trails.

Under the Multi-trails project in 2018 the AFT was invited to join a small contingent of volunteers for a trip to Sweden. The aim of the visit was to share trails’ management experience and learn alternative methods of trail construction and economic opportunities arising from the trails used by the public.

We visited two sites run by local communities, Are and Funasdalen both located in the central west close to the border with Norway. Both sites are famous in Sweden for alpine skiing and have developed alternative activities to expand tourism opportunities through the summer. In Are the biking and walking trails are run by a private enterprise, we walked the paths network and the first snow didn’t help in appreciating the work that has been done. The selection of the right contractor and the wise use of machinery to limit the construction impact on the environment was heavily emphasised.

In Funasdalen the local community is all involved in the hospitality business and in the development of a network of footpaths and bicycle tracks aiming to provide employment for locals and direct the tourists to the resorts scattered in the area. Working together for the wellbeing of future generations was the key message.

As a result AFT will start shortly the construction and maintenance of a short stretch of foot trail within the project framework to be likely lengthened with AFT resources.

Thanks for the great hospitality of our Swedish friends who visited Scottish sites, including Abriachan a few months later.

**Marco Baglioni**



4 The Inverness Courier  
www.inverness-courier.co.uk

# Plucky teen to brave shave

By Val Swanney  
val.swanney@inverness-courier.co.uk

A HIGHLAND teenager diagnosed with an aggressive childhood cancer at the age of two is shaving her hair to raise money for cancer charities.

Phoebe Macaskill (14), of Abriachan near Loch Ness, was given just a 20 per cent chance of survival after being diagnosed with neuroblastoma.

But after gruelling treatment she has been in remission since 2009 and is now shaving her hair off to raise money for Neuroblastoma UK and Clic Sargent, as a thanks to organisations which helped the family when she was ill.

Phoebe, a pupil at Charleston Academy, Inverness, is donating her hair to the Little Princess Trust, which provides free real hair wigs to children and young people who have lost their own hair through cancer treatment or other conditions.

She was diagnosed with stage four of the cancer in 2008 after she complained of a sore tummy and stopped eating. Doctors found it had spread to her lymph nodes, bone marrow and was in 95 per cent of her bones and thought there was little chance of a cure. She needed eight rounds of chemotherapy, a nine-hour surgery to remove the tumours plus a stem cell transplant, high dose chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

During treatment, her immune system was severely compromised and complications from the chemotherapy left her in a critical life-threatening condition.

She ended up in intensive care on life support for 15 days, but thankfully responded well to the rest of her

she said. "I don't remember a thing. My uncle Darren, who sadly passed away from diabetes, was planning on fundraising by doing a skydive. Before he passed away he also shaved his hair to raise money when I was in hospital."

"He inspired me to give back to those who are in need. I am planning, like my uncle Darren, to shave all my hair off. This means a lot to me as it is a big opportunity to help all the children and their families who are in the same position as my family and I were in," she said. "I hope this has a good impact on these children's lives."

Her proud mother Rona said: "It was a truly horrible time when Phoebe was ill and one I would never want to repeat. Although awful, there were many amazing things that have come out of our experience. We have met many amazing people on our journey and the support and care we received was incredible."

She hopes to raise £5,000 and anyone wanting to donate can do so at [www.justgiving.com/team/Beboldbeald](http://www.justgiving.com/team/Beboldbeald).

Phoebe Macaskill is having her head shaved to raise cash for charity.

treatment and in May 2009, the doctors confirmed she was in remission. Phoebe is doing her fundraiser in tribute to her late uncle Darren who shaved his own hair to raise money while she was in hospital.

"My mum and dad tell me that I had one year of gruelling treatment,"

I hope this has a good impact on these children's lives.

Phoebe Macaskill

Phoebe during her gruelling treatment for an aggressive childhood cancer.

Phoebe is daring to donate her lovely hair to raise money for making wigs for children like herself who lose their hair due to illness as well as for the Neuroblastoma and Clic Sargent charities.

[www.justgiving.com/team/Beboldbeald](http://www.justgiving.com/team/Beboldbeald)

100% pasture-fed  
hogget & mutton  
from Achpopuli Farm.



The next batch will be back from the butcher soon, contact Katharine on [Achpopuli.farm@outlook.com](mailto:Achpopuli.farm@outlook.com) if you want to reserve any, or want her to come round with the cool boxes so you can have a look! More information on the farm and the methods can be found at [www.achpopulifarm.net](http://www.achpopulifarm.net)



## ABRIACHAN VILLAGE HALL

### Annual General (Zoomy) Meeting

November 18<sup>th</sup> 7.00pm

1. Welcome
2. Minutes of 2019 AGM
3. Matters arising
4. Chairperson's Report
5. Treasurer's Report
6. AOB

All are welcome, Zoom link will be emailed nearer the date.

Email:

[pollypatterson123@gmail.com](mailto:pollypatterson123@gmail.com)



So far we have engaged with BT Openreach Community Fibre Partnership

- We've submitted all interested households into the BT Openreach Community Fibre Partnership Desktop survey.
- This will give us a good idea of how much it will cost for BT to bring fibre to each of our homes and a good starting point for the next step as it is probably the uppermost cost for bringing fibre in. We expect a response from them in about 30 days.
- We have engaged with Broadband for the Rural North Ltd (B4RN) and will continue to develop this relationship.

More interest? Let us know and we will add the extra households to the survey.

[AbriachanFibre@outlook.com](mailto:AbriachanFibre@outlook.com)

### Newspapers...a rarer commodity nowadays ?

If you have old newspapers, please could I have some to cover my floor once the puppies are running around in about a month. Once they're out and about, playing in the garden, do come and visit. Vizsla pups are gorgeous.

Helen Wood, Barravourich