

ABRIACHAN FOREST TRUST 2008 INVOLVE & INSPIRE



This project involved a variety of Abriachan's user Groups - APEX , pupils from Charleston, Kilchuimen, IHS and Glenurquhart secondary schools, Wildwalks young mothers' group and some pupils on work experience programmes from vocational

as well as health and wellbeing alternatives to mainstream education.

The physical outcomes from the project have been the design and construction of a forest shelter, cooking, furniture features and the path leading to it. The design and construction of a wavy drystone wall and development of skills in the process which have led to additional stone-work projects in the forest.

The shelter has been in constant use since it was completed in May. Regular Forest School groups of all ages and abilities have sheltered from snow, rain and midgies throughout the seasons and each set of builders are particularly proud of their work and see it as their own resource whenever they come to the forest to learn, play, work or relax.





A completely new path was created to the new shelter by Iain MacDonald and the surface was covered using mulch of sheep wool, mypex and wood chips from the local lodgepole pine. Drainage in the peat proved a challenge and some of the worst bits of bog have been crossed using boardwalk. Teamwork and improved social skills were evident as the project progressed. It is always very clear that physical activity and sense of achievement from challenges overcome result in an increased sense of wellbeing. Tasks were allocated to different groups according to their ability and stage of engagement - so barrowing light loads of woodchips was suitable for some, whereas excavating drains and admiring the resulting hydrology suited others. Anything requiring taller civil engineers was kept for Tuesdays and Fridays!





Tom Nelson and his team started working with the Rural Skills S3 and S4 pupils on Tuesdays in February. They identified and gathered suitable stones from the roadside and then were trained in how to use large ones as foundations, medium sized flat ones as the main walls with bridging ones between the sides, then smaller as fill and finished off with carefully selected cope stones. This has resulted in a much admired feature wall that goes for a walk outside the classroom. The pupils from Kilchuimen and Charleston have also contributed to this wall and the adults in APEX will soon *build* on their skills through some further training from Tom and create a rain shelter on the blue mountain bike trail at Rivoullich. The wall was specially designed with many nooks and crannies to provide suitable holes for birds and beasts.



The project has resulted in 12 members of the APEX team, and 12 secondary pupils gaining John Muir Awards, 3 x S4 gaining Intermediate 2 Scottish Progression Awards and the S3s working towards that qualification. It also counted towards the young ladies from Wildwalks community service section of their Duke of Edinburgh Award.

Neale, who worked with Tom and the Rural Skills group one year, progressed to work experience and has now left school and is a full-time apprentice with Nelson Stonework.



TJ (14 yrs) has been coming to Abriachan for 2 years, has gained a calmer confidence and is invaluable as an assistant Forest School leader for many groups - especially primary classes.





An integral part of the programme was the Skills not Spills mountain bike opportunities for the groups. The weather sometimes led to cancellation and disappointment but each and every participant took part. These sessions were led by Simon Harry who is a qualified MTBL and encouraged even the most nervous to have a trial run round the milk carton chicane. Once each rider had gained enough confidence, the whole group would cycle round either the easy green route or the intermediate blue route. After a few sessions the most skilled would ride the new red (built by APEX) route and find air in the jump park.

Glowing faces, shouted encouragement, breathless recounting of the best bits were always a feature of the post ride de-brief back at the fireside. It is a measure of the success of the project that all the evaluations rated the mountain biking as best but also that the sense of common ownership of the paths, shelter and interpretive features was apparent by the pragmatic attitude participants had towards "their" work. Each week they would check what others might have done and evaluate and assess it - sometimes complimentary others not.

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PRIN ; LAF—Partnership for
Rural Inverness & Nairn, Local
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Tom Nelson Stonework

Iain F. MacDonald

Tom Morrow

..and of course all the participants
players and group leaders.



IMPACT

Participants in Involve and Inspire will be empowered by and supported in gaining transferable skills leading to better employment opportunities.

OUTCOMES

- increased social inclusion
- improved employability skills
- raised sense of worth/confidence in participants
- extended resources for future groups to use
- improved health and wellbeing of individuals
- sustained interest and support for community project

ACTIVITIES

- Design and build new outdoor shelter for use with 8 different Forest School groups
- Provide x 12 Skills not Spills mountain bike training sessions- for 10 Forest School groups
- Deliver activities to support 35 John Muir Awards
- Build drystone wall feature at AFT classroom with APEX , Rural Skills pupils
- Design, build and test drive 3km of red MTB trail
- Share experience gained during project with other community groups