

Castle Loch Lochmaben Community Trust Newsletter

October 2026



SCO 044045

Editorial

A lot has been happening at Castle Loch since the last newsletter and there are articles about them all in this issue. They show what a lot of work goes into looking after the footpaths, roads and habitats around the loch, which I am sure a lot of walkers do not appreciate.

We have people-counters on the meadow path and the bowling green paths to find out the numbers of walkers who use the footpaths, and these show how well used the paths are. Not only walkers, many with dogs, but also runners, bird and wildlife watchers and whole families. While we are very pleased that the site is so popular this means that there is a lot of wear and tear on the paths, so they need frequent work to keep them in good condition. The trees also have to be checked for safety where they are close to footpaths and some have to be removed if they present a hazard. Rhonda and her team of volunteers have been numerous planting tree saplings to replace these and also to establish new areas of woodland.

Contents

Page 2

Habitat Officer's Report
New shed

Page 3

Fungi
Board walk repair

Page 4

Castle Road Repairs

Page 5

Memorial Plaques
Otters at Castle Loch



This photo shows Castle Loch in October sunlight.

It was from this viewing platform that CLLCT volunteer Fiona watched an otter swimming among the reeds –

See Fiona's article on

'Otters at Castle Loch' on Page 5

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Habitat Officer's Report

Volunteers have spent a good amount of their summer volunteering hours addressing the Himalayan Balsam around Castle Loch. This year we did notice a reduction in certain areas around the Castle in comparison to last year. Himalayan Balsam *Impatiens glandulifera* is an invasive plant which is primarily found along riverbanks and water ways. Introduced in the 1830's by a botanist who thought it as a pretty garden flower, it soon spread quickly into the countryside with its exploding seed pods and prolific seed dispersal. Although a great attraction to bees the invasive plant takes over, creating competition for other native species.

Spot the volunteers pulling the balsam in the photographs below -



New Storage Shed

Other exciting news at Castle Loch involved the completion of our new storage shed, which has freed up our barn to be used as a workshop. After receiving a truly kind donation of workshop tools, our goal going forward is to be more self-sufficient, doing our own signage and having the space and tools to work on small projects with volunteers.

Castle Loch is incredibly grateful to the George Hunter Trust for their funding and support of this project. With many thanks to the local Councillors for backing of this development.



Fungi at Castle Loch

With the change in seasons at this time of year, we see an increase in fungal finds around the Loch.

This year you cannot miss the Chicken of the woods (*Laetiporus sulphureus*), well established in rotten wood alongside the path in the Lochside Plantation. Called Chicken of the woods as it reportedly has a chicken-like texture when consumed. This fungus can be seen growing in large brackets, in bright colours from orange to yellow colour. Underneath the bracket fungus you can see a soft spongy like surface full of pores. Generally found in rotten wood like oak, it can also be found on Yew, Cherry and Sweet Chestnut, from late spring to autumn.



Chicken-of-the-Woods
growing on a tree trunk

The underside of the
fungus – showing its
yellow pores

Rhonda Graham



Boardwalk Repair

For those of you who walk round the Loch Circular Path, you will be aware that there is a small boardwalk behind Castlemains Farm Cottages. This boardwalk was built around 10 years ago but, over the years, the structure has been adversely affected by a drain which exits from the banking of the adjacent field. The boardwalk, although still usable, has been weakened by the deterioration of supporting timbers and our intention is to replace it, and to that end, we have requested quotes from 3 contractors.

To improve the working conditions during the replacement of the boardwalk and to increase the longevity of the new structure, we have managed to get a pipe under the existing boardwalk to pipe the drain's contents 24 metres further into the wood where it will no longer be a problem. A contractor has been selected and hopefully work will begin soon.

Unfortunately, that section of the path will have to be closed during the repair which will hopefully only take a few days.

The diversion will require you to walk to the end of Castlemains Farm Road and walk along the main road (B7020) past the Farm Cottages and join the path again at the bottom end of the Dalton Road Wood (as used to happen in the 'old days') or vice versa depending on the direction of travel.

This is very unfortunate from a safety point of view so please take great care while walking on the main road.



The existing boardwalk
showing uneven boards

The new pipe taking
drain water under the
boardwalk

*Thanks to Dougie for the
text and photographs*



Castle Road Repairs

If you cast your mind back to the last Newsletter, you will recall that the Castle Access Road was in a bad state of repair. Well, since we last communicated, the road has been repaired and is now in very good shape.

In the last few years, we have been of the view that the only effective repair would be to have it sculpted like a Forestry Road, high in the middle and a slope running off on either side to take the water away, however this degree of work was beyond the scope and ability of the Volunteers with their hand tools.

We approached Scott Young & Sons, a local firm based in Lockerbie, and having extensive experience in building and maintaining Forestry Roads, and Scott agreed.

In a very short space of time, a Digger appeared and the operative made an excellent job of scarifying the potholes and shaping the road and only required one 20 ton load of stone to repair the car park end of the road, otherwise using the material already in the original base.

During the planning stages of this repair, I approached Historic Environment Scotland, as it is our road that visitors use to travel to their castle, and they agreed to a contribution towards the costs and we also received a small award from the George Hunter Trust towards the repairs.

We are very grateful to all concerned.

Thanks again to Dougie for the text and photographs



George Hunter Trust

CLLCT is grateful to all these funders and to those who wish to remain anonymous

Memorial Plaques

Castle Loch Lochmaben Community Trust is now in a position to offer visitors to Castle Loch the opportunity to purchase leaf shaped commemorative plaques for display on the wall of the new storage building, facing the loch beside the cottage.

Some of the leaves available are oak, beech, maple and hornbeam. This would allow you to provide a long-lasting memorial to a family member, a friend or a pet who has enjoyed walks round the loch.

Once we are able to gauge the level of interest in this service we will produce an order form, available for collection from the cottage, to be completed and returned to the cottage.

The form will allow you to choose which leaf you would prefer to order and will have space for you to include your choice of wording. Information explaining the maximum number of words will also be available. Once you have completed the order form, we will order your plaque and let you know when it has been delivered to us. We will then arrange a date and time of your choice for the plaque to be displayed.

The cost of a plaque, which includes engraving, postage and fixing in place on the Memorial Wall would be £150.



A sample plaque will be on display in the cottage. If you think this is something that you might be interested in please feel free to come in to the cottage, have a look at the sample plaque and leave your contact details on the sheet which will be on the table. One of our Board members would then contact you and confirm the arrangements.

Ripples in the Reeds: The Otters of Castle Loch

A glimpse into the secret life of Lochmaben's sleek and silent swimmers.

In Castle Loch, Lochmaben, a sudden ripple or the brief flash of a sleek brown head may be the only sign that an otter is nearby. The Eurasian Otter is Britain's only native otter and lives wherever there is clean water, enough food and quiet places to rest.

Otters are built for swimming, with streamlined bodies, webbed feet, strong tails and dense fur to keep them warm. They feed mainly on fish, but will also eat frogs, insects, birds' eggs and small mammals.

- Look for ripples, bubbles and a low shape moving through the water.
- Otters are most active at night, dawn and dusk.
- Five-toed footprints and droppings called spraints can show where they have passed.

Otters have made a welcome comeback after years of decline, but they still need clean rivers, healthy lochs and quiet bankside habitats. We can help by reducing litter, protecting waterways and watching wildlife from a respectful distance.



Otter
(picture from Google)