

BUTE COMMUNITY FOREST SUMMER-AUTUMN 2023 NEWSLETTER

With the rain we've had lately it's safe to say it feels like summer is long gone, but it was a busy summer it's been out at the community forest – one we are continuing into the Autumn!

COMMUNITY PROJECTS AND EVENTS

SCHOOL GROUPS

Our engagement with local schools and nurseries is at an all-time high, with an average of 8 Forest School sessions a week spread since the start of this academic year. These are spread across Rothesay Primary, North Bute Primary, St Andrews Primary, Apple Tree Nursery and the joint campus Early Learning Centre. This term many of the groups have been keen to focus on outdoor bushcraft skills and they've been busy learning all kinds of skills from lighting fires with flint and steel to safe foraging practices to some forest First Aid.



ACHIEVEMENT BUTE

Whilst the schools were off over the summer we had three sessions with Achievement Bute out in the forest. The first session was a particularly windy day so we decided to pivot from forest schools to beach schools as we learned about some of the critters that call our coast home. For the second of these sessions, we headed out to Balnakailly to learn more about what food we can forage from the forest as we walked up to the WW2 bunker. We got caught in the heaviest showers we'd seen this year but spirits remained high. Our final session was spent in Moss Wood making charcoal pencils on the fire - but much to the children's disappointment we didn't teach them how to turn that charcoal into gunpowder for obvious reasons...



GATHERING THE OAKS EVENT

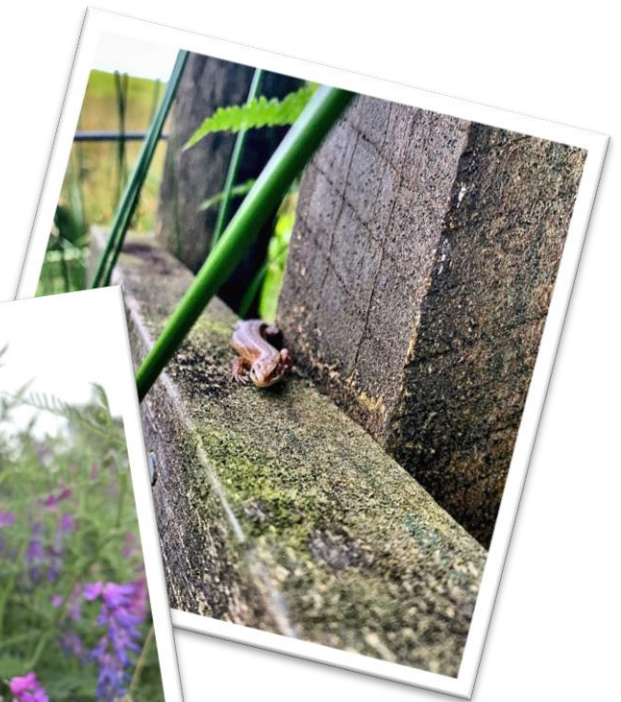
Overgrazing has proven to be an issue in our ancient oak woodland in the past and this year we are beginning to tackle this to safeguard the future of this woodland. This was a two-part event where we gathered oak saplings from the woodland and planted them up in an area safe from grazing. Our goal is to establish a tree nursery where we can bring on seeds and saplings to supplement those growing elsewhere in the forest.

FUNGI FORAY

This year we've had our third fungi foray – another great success with the event being fully booked within the first day of being advertised! Prof Paul Thomas led this talk with Prof David Kothamasi with a foraging session followed by some thorough identification.

CONTEMPORARY ART AND POETRY EXHIBITION

Our first Art & Poetry exhibition ran from 10th June till the end of August in the Balnakailly Old Oak Woodland. This featured three contemporary art installations from international artist Grace Siregar, large-canvas photography from Anthea Spivey's Albino project in Senegal and poetry from Andrea Dow. There was a strong environmental message and theme to the exhibition which encouraged us to think about our relationship to the natural world and each other. We are running more arts and culture-based events and activities through the remainder of 2023 and into 2024 – watch this space!



FOREST PROJECTS

COMMUNITY SHELTER

One of our building projects this year is our community shelter – all made from Isle of Bute wood! This structure is located in Moss Wood and will serve two main purposes. The open canopy area will provide a sheltered spot for forest schools classes on a rainy day and for picnickers and walkers alike. Under the cover, there can be benches and tables for when the weather is that bit too miserable to be outside, but you still want that woodland experience. The enclosed area next to the open shelter will function as our office and ranger station whenever our team is working out in the forest. If you see the door open feel free to pop in and say hello! We will also be using this for delivering our catering for forest events in Moss Wood – there is a wee serving hatch between the enclosed area and the open space!



ROUNDHOUSE

We've also been hard at work creating our very own Bronze Age roundhouse. This will provide an area for historically themed Forest school sessions and events alike. The goal is to give people a connection to our island ancestors and learn some traditional skills along the way. We'll be hosting an open day to officially unveil the roundhouse soon! A massive thank you and shout out to Gordon Stevenson, Jessica Herriot and Jim Rodger for leading this project – we will be forever grateful for their support, knowledge and insight.

MOSS WOOD MANAGEMENT PLAN

We're still waiting to hear back from Scottish Forestry about our submitted Woodland Management Plan which covers the Forest from Moss Wood up to the Rhubodach main entrance. We are starting our groundworks very soon ahead of our replanting of the timber-harvested area. This is a truly exciting phase of the development of the Community Forest as we embark on creating brand new habitats out of what was previously plantation woodland. This will create our very own Aspen woodland, Scots Pine forest and flooded woodland.

BALANAKAILLY MANAGEMENT PLAN

Earlier this month we met with Nature Scot to discuss the future management of the Balnakailly Oak Woodland SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) and how we can best protect it. We now have approval to push forward with boardwalks, better signage and benches to help make this area of forest as accessible as possible.

OFF GRID HUTS

We completed the first summer season of our two off-grid huts (Birch and Alder) that are situated in Moss Wood. These have been a tremendous success and the feedback we have had has been extremely positive. The Huts – locally designed and built by GetMade – have already won design awards and are proving to remain popular for bookings in the autumn. Special thanks to Shelley Pescod for proactive and positive management of the Huts – supported by Laura McFarlane. The Huts are a great way to experience the Forest at close quarters. Here is some of the feedback from the 5-star reviews:

The Charcoal Huts are an amazing way to switch off in a peaceful surrounding. There are some gorgeous walks that you can access from just outside the door. The hut was cosy and warm even during a storm!

Absolutely perfect stay at the huts - the kids loved it and wanted to stay longer! Clean, cute and so memorable, with a beautiful location. Will be back! Xx

An adorable and thoughtfully arranged power free hut was a really nice experience. We visited on a rainy week late September but it did no harm for the stay, the log fire kept us warm and cosy! The moss forest path was perfect for our dog walk and took us right to the beach!

QUARRY SITE WELCOME HUB

Last but not least, we are delighted to report that we have acquired the Quarry Site in Moss Wood, Shalunt with a view to creating a visitor reception area, complete with a welcome hub, car parking, bus stop and cycle facilities. The plan is also to provide a toilet and shower block – which will also increase the amenities available to those staying in the off-grid huts. We are grateful to the support of the Scottish Land Fund in providing 95% of the purchase price – and to Mount Stuart Trust for their positive support through the sale process. Over the next 12-18 months we are hoping to develop this project in full with the support of Argyll and Bute Council and Highlands and Islands Enterprise – and the local community.

Thank you!

As always, you can follow regular updates on the Community Forest on our website www.buteforest.org and our Facebook page [Facebook](#).

You can also contact us at info@buteforest.org