

A Sense of Place



It's all about people – people working, playing, planting, laughing, joining in. The eleven hectares of Braidburn Valley Park has a wealth of social history. Over the last century, its use has changed from farm, to park, to allotments, to park again - and generations have literally reaped the benefits of its soil. Now a little bit of history is being made again. This time, its with the park's own interest in mind, but also generating enormous enjoyment and benefit to the surrounding community. Over the last few years, the project led by **The Friends of Braidburn Valley Park** has brought people out in droves to create a wildflower meadow, plant bulbs and trees, spot bats and race ducks in the rain.



So is this all so very different to what's gone on before? Hasn't the burn seen decades of children playing poo sticks rather than plastic duck races? Didn't five thousand Girl Guides, rangers and brownies plant four hundred cherry trees here seventy years ago? Aren't our summer fetes with entertainment, music and dancing just a modern day equivalent of the Coronation celebrations in 1937, when a thousand children gave a massed display of dancing and gymnastics before an audience of three thousand? And then there were the open air theatre performances of Shakespeare in the summer of '46. In those days, people made really good use of the park's terraced bank, stage and orchestra pit.

Yes indeed, but isn't it vital that the space is still there, and these things are still happening. Look at the way our towns are gradually creeping out into our countryside and take your hat off to *any* group by whose efforts the greenspaces are conserved and enhanced.

The Friends of Braidburn Valley Park

There are many good 'Friends' models throughout the country. Apart from the 'pulling together of like-minded people', the formal creation of a Friends group gives members and the wider community a focal point for the sharing of ideas and organisation of activities, and it adds weight to group marketing efforts. And it's a great

tool for attracting public funding when city council money is spread too thinly to be of help to local activists in making a real difference.

The Friends of Braidburn Valley Park was formed in 2002 as a reaction to the Council planting some trees in the park without any community consultation. It grew quickly in membership and purpose. Committee members have changed over the years, but include people from all walks of life with a huge range of interests and abilities, from doctor, homeopath, lawyer and graphic designer to the current Chair Karen Young, who in her spare time, works for Scottish Natural Heritage.



'Early Spring in the Braidburn' by the artist Joseph Milne (1861-1911). Courtesy of Sotheby's Picture Library.

Notices posted locally and flyers direct to households produced a membership of around 250 almost immediately and the aims of the group became clear:

- To promote and encourage the local community to take an interest in the protection, upkeep and enjoyment of the park.
- To conserve, enhance and promote the park area for the benefit of people and wildlife.
- To work with the local authority and other relevant organisations to help in achieving the above.

In 2003 the Friends commissioned a habitat survey of the park, which recommended that some of the vast stretch of amenity grassland could be used to create a wildflower meadow. This, over time, would help to increase the number of species, plants and wildlife, to be found in the park. So the Wildflower Meadow Project was borne, along with a great number of other initiatives.

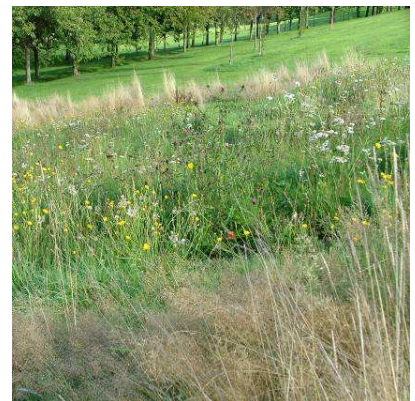
Being part of the Friends

Former primary school teacher Louise Maguire holds the position of 'Honorary Tree Warden' with the Friends of Braidburn Valley Park. She remembers playing in the Braid Burn as a child. She reminisces about the verges along rights of way which were 'burgeoning with cow parsley and associated plants' and compares them with many of those we see today, strimmed to the ground to keep the path tidy and halt the spread of seeds and weeds.

As a primary school teacher, Louise has always recognised the value of wild places for education, and feels that practical actions are vital to help children's understanding of what they have in the green spaces around them and what they could lose. From this aspect she has found being involved with the Friends group very rewarding.

'I like the idea of passing on enthusiasm for wildlife to future generations.'

One of the jobs Louise has taken on is to escort the children to and from the school on planting days. She tells us it's wonderful to watch them and hear what they come out with, particularly when they're on the way back, bubbling with enthusiasm. One little boy told her *'I planted nineteen worms!'*



Apart from the personal pleasure Louise gets from being involved with the Friends, her role as the voice of the community plays a very valuable part. *'People talk to me and I talk to people. I pick up lots of ideas and am quite useful to take these back to the committee. These are people who would never put themselves forward to be on the committee.'*

Louise describes the Friends group as *'an incredibly enthusiastic bunch'* and says it has been hugely rewarding meeting them and being part of the group. She told us how relieved she was to find other like-minded people, having spent years thinking some of the ideas she had were a bit daft!

Lindsay Walls, a retired councillor who was one of the founder members of the group is currently Membership Secretary. Lindsay told us how looking after the membership and distribution of the Friends newsletter, Valley Voice, increasingly via email, has become a real personal pleasure.

'It's amazing how many personal replies I get and from this, I started a sort of sub-group of people who wanted more information about things that were happening in the neighbourhood. People who are friends of Braidburn Valley Park have become almost invisible friends to me and it's a warm feeling that we're all part of something in the community. Edinburgh is not a great 'community place' but this Friends of Braidburn Valley group, I think, forms a super focused community in the Morningside area.'



What do friends do?

A key part of the Wildflower Meadow project proposal was to involve children from Primary schools at both ends of the park in the practical planting and management of the meadow, learning about wildflowers in the process. This has all happened and autumn 2006 saw the first raking which it's planned will become an annual activity.

South Morningside Primary sits at the north end of the Braidburn Valley Park and with around 630 pupils, it's one of the largest primary schools in Edinburgh, a complete contrast to Foyers Primary in Highland [\(link\)](#)



who's numbers hover around 22. The two schools do however share similar problems and advantages. On the one hand next to no school grounds mainly laid to tarmac, and on the other excellent facilities for outdoor learning close by. However, both schools are faced with the question of how to access these facilities regularly and still meet the demands of the curriculum.

The Friends had originally focused their approach to South Morningside on involving P4 children in the wildflower meadow project. It was felt the project met the objectives in citizenship and environmental studies for this age group. However, the plan soon evolved and by November 2005 most classes in the school were being given the opportunity to be part of a 'park' activity. Some classes planted trees, bluebells or wildflowers. Others took photographic records and P7 mapped out an orienteering course. November 2006

saw further planting by both primary schools, Pentlands and South Morningside, together with all the Sunday schools of Greenbank church – 245 children in all.

The schools see these projects as providing hands-on practical experience of the natural environment. In effect 'doing it makes it real'. The relationship between the schools and Friends continues to develop. P7 pupils do regular litter picks throughout the summer term and the orienteering course is taking shape. Pupils are gaining confidence about ownership and responsibility for the park. Remarkably, they even feel able to approach dog owners in an effort to reduce fouling.

The Friends are developing a Wildflower Education pack in liaison with the South Morningside Primary which senior staff feel will give all teachers the opportunity to make good use of 'out of classroom experiences' at very local level. This resource will also allow the facts and information on traditional uses of some of the plants to be shared with a new generation.

All the other projects

A range of projects keep the Friends busy. They claim to have taken a 'fairly opportunistic and scattergun approach', but by accident or design, they seem to have chosen a range of activities which will appeal to a wide range of different people. The



common thread is action, and lots of it, which often requires a considerable amount of 'rolling up of the sleeves'.

Park clean ups featured early on and are ongoing. To say they still 'attract' 40 volunteers each time would be to imply enjoyment, but it's an exercise which has a tangible end result and there's nothing like doing the dirty work to illicit a feeling of pulling together.

When the Friends promoted one of the first **bulb planting** events in the park, their publicity included an appeal for any of the Girl Guides or their relatives who had been part of the original Silver Jubilee cherry tree planting event in 1935 to come and join them. Incredibly over 40 ladies turned out and joined today's Guides, Brownies and Rainbows to make the event a very special occasion for all.

The '**Living History**' project has allowed memories of the area and park to be gathered together and has even included documenting the words and music of the Tree Song, sung at the tree planting ceremony in the '30s.

In Summer 2006 the Braid Cubs and Beavers put up 10 newly made boxes and learned more about **bats** during the quiz the Friends put together. Already home to Pipistrelle Bats, the park and bat detector teamed up to thrill its new audience. Warned by the signaland then 'a bat appeared! And two of the boys ran back to the boxes to see if the bats had taken up occupancy already!' There's always hope.

See for yourself

A walk along Braidburn Valley Park takes about 10 minutes at a fair lick or can last half an hour at a stroll. You can choose the lower path along the burn, or the higher, which has finally been formally way-marked as part of the Stevenson's Way. The route links the city to the surrounding countryside and eventually takes the walker to Robert Louis Stevenson's family home in the Pentlands.



The trefoil of cherry trees planted by the 1935 Guides is still there and blossoms profusely in the spring. 2007 should see the first flowering of many bulbs and the second of the wildflower meadow. If you turn up in the summer, you might happen on one of the community events which are growing in strength. Year three saw a total of five hundred people coming along.

And at any time of year, the casual visitor can make use of the two wonderful interpretation panels designed and erected by the Friends. These cover at the north end, the history of the park and at the south, its biodiversity.

Champagne and cake keep everyone going

As always, we wonder how these enthusiastic individuals keep going. This group relies on the usual strategies of sharing the load, encouraging new blood and keeping it all fun.



But they also admit to going out for committee group meals where they '*slap each other on the back and celebrate their successes*' and '*occasionally we have champagne at our committee meetings – which of course, we pay for ourselves! At the last AGM, we had a cake made in the shape of Braidburn Valley Park. You know, little touches like that bring a smile to members' faces*'.

Karen Young tells us '*I've never been a member of a committee where so many people have come to committee meetings*'. I wonder why! It's clear that the Friends of Braidburn Valley have found the right balance between enjoyment and hard work, motivating and enthusing people without overdoing it.

Karen tells us the group is at a high point at the moment. They've started lots of things which need to be seen through and sustained. Lots of people have contacted them recently for help and advice and they're reeling a little from one minute being a good local project and the next being an example of best practice.

Karen Young: *'we must maintain a balance between continuing to do things, being receptive to new ideas coming forward and telling people about what we're doing, so that the credit to the school and to the community groups and supporters who have quietly helped up till now are given the due recognition they deserve. And the question then boils down to capacity. How much capacity do we have to keep exciting ideas going and not exhaust the people who are doing it at the moment, but help to bring forward fresh blood on to the committee and fresh interests to make it as welcoming as possible so people can feel they can join in and make a contribution.'*


Everyone's park

Really, Braidburn Valley Park has become a people place again, as it clearly always was – it was just neglected for a few years in between. What the Friends have achieved is to persuade local people to take ownership of the space as they see it – 'the local park'. The more people who grow up feeling as Louise Maguire does, the better: *'I lived here as a tiny child, so it's my park, by burn, my area.'*

The Friends of Braidburn Valley Park would like us to thank everyone for all the help they've been given to make projects happen. Officials, councillors, other groups and local people with specialist knowledge, those who have given time or equipment, local businesses and everyone in the community who has played a part.

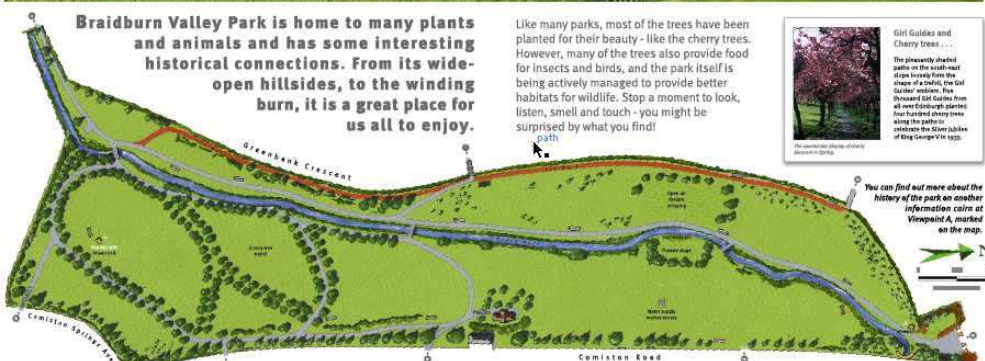
Braidburn Valley Park

More than meets the eye!




Braidburn Valley Park is home to many plants and animals and has some interesting historical connections. From its wide-open hillsides, to the winding burn, it is a great place for us all to enjoy.

Like many parks, most of the trees have been planted for their beauty - like the cherry trees. However, many of the trees also provide food for insects and birds, and the park itself is being actively managed to provide better habitats for wildlife. Stop a moment to look, listen, smell and touch - you might be surprised by what you find!



You can find out more about the history of the park on another information card at viewpoint A, marked on the map.



Girl Guides and Cherry Trees...
The pleasantly shaded paths on the south-east slope in early form the shape of a bowl. The Girl Guides' website has all over 1000 photos of the trees along the path to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of King George VI in 1935.

Legend

- Park entrance / exit
- Terrace path with oak sheep grids
- Loose walking path with oak sheep grids
- Steps
- Burn
- Information path and mapstand

'Good to eat, and wholesome to digest, as a worm to a toad, a toad to a snake, a snake to a pig, a pig to a man, and a man to a worm'

The park is like a restaurant - the animals and plants that live here are the diners and waiters. And like a restaurant, the more variety there is on the menu, the more diverse the diners. Planting new plants and trees, and managing the park, provides both.

All of the plants and animals described here can be found in the park. Some of them are on the menu, although not all of them are here and need to be looked after.

Small Invertebrates and Plants
The tiny insects and plants that live in the soil are the diners and waiters. They are the most important part of the food chain. Without them, the plants and animals would not be able to survive.

Why Bees Bees?
Bees are the most important insects in the park. They are the only insects that can fly. They are also the only insects that can see. They are the only insects that can taste. They are the only insects that can smell. They are the only insects that can hear. They are the only insects that can feel. They are the only insects that can think.

Plants
Plants are the most important part of the food chain. They are the only plants that can grow. They are the only plants that can live. They are the only plants that can die. They are the only plants that can be eaten. They are the only plants that can be used. They are the only plants that can be made into things.

Animals
Animals are the most important part of the food chain. They are the only animals that can move. They are the only animals that can breathe. They are the only animals that can see. They are the only animals that can hear. They are the only animals that can feel. They are the only animals that can think.



Species List

1. Tufted Vetch (*vicia cracca*)
2. Betony (*stachys officinalis*)
3. Ribwort Plantain (*plantago lanceolata*)
4. Meadow Cranesbill (*geranium pratense*)
5. Birds Foot Trefoil (*lotus corniculatis*)
6. Autumn Hawkbit (*leontodon autumnalis*)
7. Meadow Vetchling (*lathyrus pratensis*)
8. Field Scabious (*knautia arvensis*)
9. Yarrow (*achillea millefolium*)
10. Common Knapweed (*centaurea nigra*)
11. Cowslip (*Primula veris*)
12. Campion, Red (*Melandrium rubram*)
13. Lady's Smock (*Cardamine pratensis*)
14. Self Heal (*Prunella vulgaris*)
15. Meadow Buttercup (*Ranunculae acris*)
16. Common Bent (*Agrostis tenuis*)
17. Meadow Foxtail (*Alopecurus Pratensis*)
18. Sweet Vernal Grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*)
19. Crested Dog's Tail (*Cynosurus cristatus*)
20. Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*)
21. Lady's Mantle (*Alchemilla vulgaris*)
22. Common Poppy
23. Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*)