

Summer 2023

The Ardtornish Newsletter



Kenny McLaughlin

Ardtornish

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We always celebrate summer at Ardtornish, as the longer days and happy returning visitors raise the spirits. But it's not been the easiest of seasons so far. The absence of the Corran Ferry – off completely for two months, then off and on intermittently, and so consistently unreliable that trip away from the peninsula becomes a lottery with time – has undermined our community, businesses and confidence. Highland Council's carelessness has been thoroughly sobering. With Calmac's services also in crisis, our only road in and out is for many now also the main route to Mull – proving the small and geriatric MV Maid of Glencoul, the Corran standby-ferry vessel which is all we've had for nine months, completely inadequate for the task.

We've been sad to say goodbye to a number of colleagues in the Ardtornish team. On-site energy expert Chris Cowsill has returned to NE Scotland, and head gardener Dennis Footman is moving back to the chalk soils and drought of SE England. We're sorry to see them go, and in addition to needing to fill their posts are still recruiting for a new Landscape Manager to help with the farm, woodlands, ecology and fieldsports.

The cottages have never been better, and though with cost-of-living troubles it's not been by any means our best season, the quality and range of what we offer, and the satisfaction of our guests, have both reached new levels – and reflect so well on our team.

Both gardens have seen huge improvements, and we take great pride and celebrate the farm and garden teams' hard work by selling more and more of our own products in the farm shop. Many of our cattle are now sporting radio collars as the farm team tries a brand-new virtual fencing system, and the silage cut's been gathered in successfully for another year.

The management team and Raven family are hugely grateful to both our hard-working home team and visitors alike. Ardtornish continues to evolve to stay the same.

Hugh Raven

Summer news from the Tourism department

Kat Mclaughlin

Guests visiting in late May and early June were treated to an extended period of sunshine, temperatures exceeding 30 degrees. Some of the home team took to the loch and tried their hand and tested their balance with a stand-up paddle boarding session.



The Yacht Flat renovation is now complete, the end result far exceeds our initial expectations.

The renovation of West Pier House is now underway. Once complete, a spacious, coastal three bedroomed house, with stunning Sound of Mull views, will be a nice addition to the holiday-let portfolio. The scope of work will include internal insulation, bathroom and kitchen upgrade, internal redecoration and carpets throughout.

Guests staying in the Boat House and Keepers cottage will benefit from lightning download speeds thanks to the satellite Starlink system now installed

Staggering our holiday-let arrival days means we can with a smaller team, though we're still looking to recruit two more housekeepers.

Lochaline Quartz Sand – the sandmine in the village - has taken a short-term lease on the Old Post Office for staff accommodation.

We are delighted to have trialled and launched our own ready meals, including Venison Chilli, Beef Bolognese, Lamb curry, Squash and Spinach curry, Beef curry, Venison Stew and Beef casserole. Sales so far suggest this will be an extremely welcome addition to our food enterprise. To complement this, we've installed a zero-waste food station in the farm shop - selling dry goods including rice etc by weight using paper bags to reduce packaging.



Keepers' cottage is the first of our holiday lets to have had their short term-let licence approved – an obligation on holidaying letting enterprises recently imposed by the Scottish Government.

We have begun the process of re-branding the business, appointing the design agency Nixon. The design team paid us a three-day visit and hosted a series of team workshops. It's an exciting project and we look forward to sharing the end result with our guests over the coming few months.

A Gardeners World

Dennis Footman

There have been some obvious and not so obvious changes with the main garden since the last newsletter.

The area from the Eucryphia garden up to the kennels has had major tree work done. With tree extraction complete, we are left with an area with lots of potential: carefully planted trees and shrubs along with some original stone steps that were found on the bank down into the garden, this will become another exciting section of the garden for visitors to explore. It has also opened up some spectacular views when looking from the area above the Kennels.

The pond has come along nicely since it was re dug earlier this year. Work is still ongoing to make the area around the pond look more inviting but the pond is now sitting proudly on the lower lawn. The local wildlife has already made the pond their home, including some small fish that have been seen catching flies from the water. The pond also looks good from Big Rock now the view has been opened up.



Heading deeper into the garden and just above Keeper's path is an area known as the Amphitheatre – part of the garden where I have spent the least time working, mainly just checking the paths for fallen branches and a little light pruning. Only having heard but not actually seen it until recently, is a wooden bench known as the Great Oak Throne. Tucked a little off the main path that runs through the Amphitheatre, the oak throne sits in amongst the Bilberry with views of Lochaline in its sights. Now with the paths reopened to the throne, it will hopefully get more visitors instead of people walking past unaware of its presence.



All About Energy

Kyle Smith

We're past the west coast's driest period of the year and the team have put a couple of major repair projects behind them, with the hydro schemes ready to generate as we move into the wettest period.

The Rannoch turbine intake screens were replaced as the original screens had corroded and a couple of sections had buckled over a decade of operation. This required lowering the reservoir and providing safe access for AJT engineers to remove the old screens and lower the new screens into the intake shaft.

As part of this refurbishment the team worked with IES of Fort William to overhaul the intake cleaner (which is a basket grab that automatically lowers into the intake shaft to collect debris off of the screen). Thanks to IES, AJT and the Ardtornish team's effort we're now ready to generate at full power.

The Archimedes screw turbine received an inspection and replacement of its lower bearing. The engineers at Mannpower (the original suppliers) worked with the Ardtornish team to dewater the bottom area of the screw to remove the bearing for inspection and refurbishment in the Socaich workshop. Over time, the seals on this bearing can fail allowing water to enter. This bearing has now been fitted with an improved sensor to detect water ingress before it becomes a problem.

After almost three years at Ardtornish Chris Cowsill (our onsite service engineer) and his family have decided to move back to the east coast for new career and family opportunities. Thanks to his work in preparing the Hydro Handbook, the Ardtornish team can continue the day-to-day operations onsite with support from external contractors.



From the Kitchen Gardens

John Turner

Since the last newsletter, all the main beds in the Kitchen Garden are open and planted. The use of Strulch has enabled them to be put into production and to help maintain a balance of maintenance also. Still it is a fine line between the weeds fighting through and taking over. All the tunnels are producing, with the entire first crop of Carrots almost sold out, amongst other things.

As we all know, weather plays a crucial factor in everyday life, especially on the West Coast. Recently the rain departed for a long, hot dry spell; with many people saying it is something of a rarity. Luckily, I was somewhat prepared, over winter I had assembled an outdoor irrigation set to cover the expected open areas in the unlikely event of drought. They were in use for over six weeks, with most crops hardly affected. Some yields were affected with a slightly smaller yield than expected, however if there was no irrigation then we would have lost crops.

Leading from weather, soil plays a crucial factor also. So, a program of amendments will be implemented on a yearly basis to build topsoil and create more fertility. This would aid water retention as well. The reclamation of the site constantly presents challenges and the largest issue is not natural regeneration and old growth but the soil. As we expand into new areas we find contamination from old debris and stripping of topsoil in some zones, with others suffering from a mixing of subsoil with the topsoil.

Nevertheless produce has been growing and sales increasing through word of mouth and our online presence. The veg boxes of seasonal produce have had a lot of positive feedback. They are harvested fresh on the day except for stored goods like potatoes, garlic, onions etc., and constantly change depending on the availability of produce and requirements of the consumer.

In summer the Garden cycle has shifted to a maintenance mode - a cycle of propagation, planting out, harvesting, with the maintenance of basic chores squeezed in. At the same time a list is being compiled for larger tasks to be completed throughout the Winter ready for 2024.

With the mention of Winter and 2024, the propagation of vegetables is changing now that the summer solstice is behind us. 'Winter Greens' are being sown to provide something for the 'Hungry gap' we experience - salad crops that can tolerate lower light levels and temperatures. It is yet to be seen if they are a worthwhile crop in this environment, but a worthwhile experiment as the tunnels will be bare anyway.

Volunteers have helped greatly in the quick turnaround of the Kitchen Garden, most coming via WWOOF UK and a few off their own initiative. Sarah has been with us for approximately five months, and as a student has been able to translate her classroom work into a practical environment. They all have provided a helpful workforce and proven what can be achieved with more hands. With some larger jobs on the horizon

over the Winter it is an avenue that I may possibly utilize year-round to assist in the reclamation of the Kitchen Garden.

