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THE ARDTORNISH NEWSLETTER, AUTUMN 2014

Hello from Ardtornish

And welcome to our autumn newsletter.

Our lovely but strange Indian summer is now over. What an odd time it was - warmer than May, but the hills turned russet and the birdsong was on mute. It has rained enough, gratifyingly, for the hydro turbines to spin - though if you were out in the bright sunshine these last few weeks it would surprise you to hear it.

Our autumn colour particularly caught the eye of the *Scotsman's* gardening writer Claire Black. In a very nice piece in their 8th November weekend magazine, she interviewed Faith Raven about the history of the gardens, reflecting on the gardening dynasty of Faith, daughters Sarah and Anna, and Faith's parents before her.

She was much taken by the place: *"The landscape which surrounds Ardtornish is some of the most spectacular in Scotland, combining ancient woods, stunning coastline, and boasting views across to the Hebridean mountains. Golden eagles and sea eagles dot the skies, and otters, dolphins, minke whales and basking sharks populate the waters - it is, without exaggeration, idyllic."* Thank you. We agree.

Those waters have also been getting attention elsewhere. The Scottish Government has designated a small proportion of



Sound of Mull - protection?

Scotland's seas as marine protected areas (MPAs). We're proud to say that in this immediate area we have not just one such zone but two.

Loch Sunart is exceptional for its rare combination of bottom-dwelling marine life - flame shell beds, feather stars, and one of only three sites in Scotland where the organ-pipe worm forms reefs.

It's also important for Common Skate - which, as its name does not suggest, is now officially critically endangered. Formerly common throughout UK waters, it's been wiped out by overfishing in most of its recent range. Loch Sunart, the Sound of Mull, the mouth of Loch Linnhe and the Firth of Lorne down to the Sound of Jura has been declared protected to safeguard that remnant population - though whether the designation will be meaningful is a matter of serious doubt.

The government, while offering protection to the deepest waters where little fishing is done, is unsure whether to limit the most destructive fishing gear in the shallower waters where skate spend part of their lives. We think they should. If you have a view on the survival of this magnificent large fish, you can see the consultation website [here](#), and if you'd like to see our response, from Ardtornish, please let us know [here](#) and we'll gladly send it to you.

Below, Kathryn tells us about changes to our visitor arrangements, and Nicki reflects on another year of parties. We have Angus's update on energy and heat, and Alan's nature notes on the ardour of the Ardtornish stags. Faith tours the garden in autumn, and the Whitehouse team of Jane and Sarah update us on their news.

We hope to see you soon: you know where to find us, so please do get in touch.

Hugh Raven

STOP PRESS: we're also thrilled that Ardtornish is the subject of a long, beautifully-illustrated article, by celebrated novelist Justin Cartwright, in *Conde Nast Traveller*, December edition (on the newsstands now). More on this next time.

Visitor update

Dia duit a thabhairt duit go léir

I cannot believe how quickly the season has passed. With many friendly faces, both old and new to greet, it has been fast-paced but thoroughly rewarding.

As I was forewarned, the unique weather extremes we find on the peninsula did not disappoint, seeing me caught out in the strangest of outfits. Having spoken with many of our seasoned guests on this subject, and hearing of their own packing challenges, I fear I have much to learn - but see this as an excuse to shop.

The team has been hard at work, not least rearranging the basement of the house to transform the space into a well organised and efficient storage area for all our bits and pieces. With the investment in the biomass unit, the House has never been warmer - which has been noticed and welcomed by many of our guests.

Events

The season did not slow down for events, with us busy organising and making arrangements for the celebrations of two autumn brides. As we see the gates close to the House for another season, our efforts turn to the estate children's Christmas party, annual school quiz, and of course the eagerly-anticipated News Year ceilidh hosted by the Munros. Nicki Barnett, our events co-ordinator, elaborates on events below.



The colours of Autumn



Common skate



Sunlight on the water



Relax in style!

The year ahead - holiday activities

We're in discussion with a well-recognised local outdoor activity provider, and plan to work together to develop a range of exciting land and water based activities here at Ardtornish from 2015 onwards.

Through customer feedback on the accommodation surveys we circulate, we've identified a number of key projects for our winter maintenance and housekeeping programme. We hope you'll enjoy and approve of our investments. More news on this soon.

Kathryn McLaughlin

A few words from our events coordinator, Nicki Barnett

It has been another successful year for events and weddings at Ardtornish, with exciting, ambitious plans for more in 2015 and beyond.

It's a real privilege to work on an estate, and in a house, that really comes into its own for a party! From ceilidhs to rock bands, we've hosted them all this year, and enjoyed the energy and positive feedback from our couples and guests. Many are coming back for holidays here, so we must be doing something right.

Outdoor services with the spectacular loch backdrop have been the most popular for nuptials - particularly suited to the four-legged bridesmaids. Once again, the *Whitehouse Restaurant* in Lochaline has worked with us to provide delicious local produce at all our events.

We're finding that more and more event guests choose to extend their stay to enjoy all that we and the surrounding area have to offer - a growing range of fun and festivities for all ages. We've witnessed some pretty serious competition during the mini Highland Games, as the groom's family take on the bride's, in a pre-wedding 'clan gathering'. Hog Roasts and flowing beers on tap have massaged sore legs and bruised egos.

I'm looking forward to 2015 and the great line up of weddings and events it will bring.

Nicki Barnett

Our energy from Angus

Hydro is all about weather - and plenty of rain means plenty of power. Frost or drought can have the opposite effect.

We can't complain about the weather this year.

After last winter's record rainfall, we had a glorious summer, with long spells sunny and dry, but a deceptive amount of rain to keep energy output above expectation in all but June and September. Our two hydro schemes have been running well, providing financial support for many of the exciting things going on here at Ardtornish.

We've spent the summer working on construction of the new scheme at Uileann. All is good, except digging in the main pipeline. The land around Uileann is all ultra-hard granite directly beneath a layer of peat - among the most challenging combinations in which to lay a pipe. We're breaking rock from before dawn to after dusk, but average just one pipe a day - when nine would be normal in good conditions. Despite these challenges, we expect to be operational in March next year, although there will be work to finish well into the summer.

In June, we commissioned our first biomass boiler, using woodchip from our own woodlands to provide heating and hot water for Ardtornish House. The boiler house, designed by estate architect John Renshaw and built by estate staff, is an exciting new feature



Riding



Rose Cottage sitting room



The wedding breakfast awaits ...



... with the party to follow

in the designed landscape of the gardens. We now enjoy a warm Ardtornish House in the winter without being consumed by the guilt of causing damage to the environment - a great step forward, and one that we hope to replicate elsewhere at Ardtornish in the near future.

Angus Robertson

Peat glorious peat!

This year's rut was much later than usual. The warmest and driest September on record saw to that. When eventually the roaring started in earnest, the large, peaty wallow half way between my house and water supply was a busy place. Close by, and in plain view, it tends to get used mostly during the night and early morning - and don't we know it!

There are a number of reasons why both stags and hinds use wallows at different times of the year. For stags at the rut it's all about sex and presentation. Frank Fraser Darling, in his classic 'A Herd of Red Deer', writes about how the cooling effect brings on sexual drive, as darkening of coat and mane instils fear into rivals.

There's no doubt a roaring stag with inflated black bristling mane is an impressive sight. Both young and old get in on the act. These two would-be lady killers were photographed just outside my garden.

Alan Kennedy

The Ardtornish Garden in Autumn

For much of September and early October, the Ardtornish Garden was radiant with the sun lighting up deciduous trees as their leaves began to turn. We looked along Loch Aline to the hills of Mull though a blaze of scarlet, orange and pink. The prunus were especially good, soon overtaken by the stunning hues of acers, then the more sober succession of oak.

Just as the oak come last into leaf in the spring, they hang on to their leaves longest at the other end of the year, so give the main colour in the garden in November. The glowing berries of the two berberis bushes either side of the main arch through the house welcome visitors arriving to the flats.

The gales from America caught Morvern as they swept through from the west. Luckily a garden photographer, Ray Cox, came before they hit us. He stood on the roof of the house and could enjoy and record the colour mix of some trees still green, with others in full autumn colour.

Allan Davidson kept the lawns in excellent condition through the summer. Ian Lamb came from his retirement home in Linlithgow for many days of work, controlling the ever-invasive scrub and brambles. He opens paths and cuts back overhanging branches, so that more delicate shrubs could enjoy the autumn sun and visitors avoid having to pick their way through head-height branches. He found spaces for nerines in the beds under the veranda and the dry months of the late summer had suited their vivid pink flowers. The willow gentians he had planted last year are still flowering, and the autumn gentians spread sapphire jewels between the mossy rocks. Their blue flowers compete with the crimson leaves overhead.

Faith Raven

News from the Whitehouse

The Whitehouse Restaurant is shut now, and as they travel through Asia, Mike and Lee can reflect on our best season ever. Thank you to all who came and ate with us, and our many visitors who again



The beauty behind the power



Rutty stag Uileann



Rutty stag in full voice!



Enkianthus

gave us the [Tripadvisor reviews](#) we love - with five stars, we're pleased to say, the dominant verdict. We hope to see you next year: we shall reopen before Easter, and [our website](#) will confirm the date in good time.

Jane & Sarah

We hope to see you at Ardtornish soon.

From all the team at Ardtornish

News Flashes

Recent news items on the website which you may have missed ...

[Marine protection workshop for Sound of Mull and Loch Sunart](#) ••• [Rash fox](#) ••• [Public meeting – Scottish Wildcat Conservation in Morvern](#) ••• [Independence referendum](#) ••• [Two Marine Protected Areas \(MPAs\) announced in Morvern waters](#) ••• [Ardtornish Scottie – Top Dog at Salen Show](#) ••• [Royal Highland Yacht Club midsummer muster](#) ••• [Do eagles eat frogs?](#) ••• [Achabeag phase three sites on sale](#)

We regularly post news from Ardtornish on the [website](#) and our [Facebook page](#) - so please remember to drop by or follow the links above.



Autumn gentian



Acers



Oak in the autumn



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