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THE ARDTORNISH NEWSLETTER, SPRING 2015

Hello from Ardtornish

"This shimmering twilight of the gods..."

Outside, watery sunshine and the first of the birdsong tell us spring has now returned. Believe you me, it's welcome. We did have fun in the winter - a few parties and lots of projects, with more and more going on - but it's been a tough time too. Gale after storm swept in from the Atlantic, force eleven winds (that's 'Violent Storm' on the Beaufort Scale) and trees crashing round our ears. Our nonagenarian neighbour Chubby reckons it the wildest weather for decades.

That means plenty of rain. So Angus is happy.

And rain means we can do things, as power sales fund growth. We're finishing off the new biomass plant, with an office upstairs, tool store and potting space for the gardening team, a new car park on the lower lawn and an upgrade to the drive. We've replaced the cattlegrid in the fence to the Ardtornish House garden, while restoring the gates and adding another in the manner of the Victorian originals.

Our building team is extending and renovating Claggan Cottage, to which Simon and Liz will move this summer from their current Torr Molach home.

At Achabeag, groundworks for the next eight house plots are well underway on the phase below the road, two more houses are



Loch Aline on the way home



nearing completion, and the new residents will soon number fifteen. The six remaining magnificent sites for sale through Strutt and Parker are prompting a good deal of interest.

Our housekeeping team has been full tilt all winter, with a polishing programme to gladden the heart of the most extravagantly house proud. New bathrooms in Achranich and Castle Cottage are being painted as I write.

Just as our last newsletter was circulated, a lovely piece about Ardtornish appeared in the top UK glossy travel magazine. *Condé Nast Traveller* - which outsells all others in the crowded market for travel dreams - attracts some illustrious writers and photographers. They don't come much grander than the novelist Justin Cartwright. Justin fished and walked and ate his way round the estate. **His piece celebrates** Loch Tearnait, the Aline, Whitehouse Restaurant, Rose Cottage, and *'the wonderful light and the endlessly unrolling landscapes... in this shimmering twilight of the gods'*.

Oli Pilcher's photos capture the *'peace'*, *'the infinite space'*, and *'numinous quality'* of this place. *'I have an urge to come back'*, Justin writes. We hope he does. And we hope you will too.

Hugh Raven

Busy winter - much to report

I'm pleased to announce that we have a new face - familiar to some - to welcome you in the Information Centre this season. Janette Mowat has joined the visitor team as our Information Centre manager and will be on hand to help with all day-to-day enquiries.

The Housekeeping team has worked tirelessly to spruce up all apartments and cottages ahead of throwing the doors back open for another season. They've been focused on a few key projects, deploying several gallons of brasso, metres of wire wool, litres of vinegar and a whole ton of elbow grease. Their commitment and efforts have seen many an original feature in Ardtornish House restored to its former glory. Service bells gleam, brass stair rods glisten, and the floor of the Great Hall is freshly oiled in anticipation of the next round of ceilidhs and celebrations.

We thank you for the valuable feedback on our customer care forms. We've listened, and I am sure you'll agree that things have improved. From new bathrooms to new floor coverings, reupholstered window seats to re-sharpened knives - we hope you approve.

Congratulations to Elaine Paget, the lucky winner of the Feedback form competition we ran last year. Elaine and her family get to spend a week's holiday at Ardtornish in the property of her choice. Remember to complete and return your forms this year to be in with a chance of winning your 2016 stay with us.

Richard Van de Peer has joined the visitor team part time, maintaining the cottage gardens. Early projects include building and installing bird tables, assisting the construction of dry stone BBQs, and reinstating the cutting garden so Isobel once again can fill the house with the scent of fresh cut flowers.

Finally a huge thank you to the Ardtornish brides who nominated us in this year's Scottish Wedding Awards. We are now officially the Best North West wedding venue! We are delighted.

It has been a long winter, and the team are looking forward to welcoming you back.

See you soon

The Boat House under water!



Mist settles over the estate



Achabeag ... in step with its surroundings



Ardtornish rooms restored ...



Nicki receives our award ...

Kat and the visitor team

Energy update

And the rain keeps falling down!

2014 was the wettest year since our records began in 1988. January and February 2015 have been 20% above average and March is looking pretty wet too. Everyone here blames the energy department.

I reply that it's not our fault. The weather is something we can't control. But secretly we're quite pleased.

The Rannoch and Tearnait schemes have worked wonderfully well over winter. Construction of the new scheme at Uileann has been incredibly tough, with massive amounts of very hard rock on the pipe route. We're on target to commission the first part this April - next month - and our thanks go to the team of rock breakers from D.A Macdonald Contractors. They've worked tirelessly in terrible conditions.

We hope to make a start on the Achranich Archimedian Screw Turbine scheme this summer, largely using an in-house team. Great care is being taken on its design, as it will lie right in the heart of the estate, among the buildings at Achranich.

The Ardtornish House biomass boiler has kept the house warm through its first winter. We've had cold weather and it's coped well. We held our first Burns Supper in the house in January without burning any oil - a combination of woodchip and whisky did the trick. There's no reason that other winter events like this shouldn't follow, now that Ardtornish House can offer a toasty warm winter welcome.

Angus Robertson

Birding

Those of us who live and work on Ardtornish are extremely lucky to have Loch Aline on our doorsteps. First time visitors never fail to be impressed by the spectacular setting of the House and its surroundings. Many regular visitors come for the walking and wildlife associated with the loch and its tides.

Conscious I might be in danger of taking it all for granted, I decided recently to count the loch's waterbirds as part of the [Wetland Bird Survey \(WeBS\)](#). WeBS monitors waterbird populations throughout the UK and has run for over 60 years. The site was last counted in 2002 so has been under-reported for some time. While the count days are fixed (timed counts take place on one set day each month), we would nevertheless be interested to hear about any unusual birds you might see during your stay. If they happen to be still about I would try and find them and include them in the count on the appointed day.

As I write wintering wildfowl such as wigeon are here in good numbers, our resident mallard population is thriving, and a solitary goldeneye has been seen. Up to 30 curlew* feed on the flats at low water. Our usual complement of over-wintering greenshank are regularly bobbing about the head of the loch and Miodar bay. Recently for the first I saw a pair of black guillemots or 'tysties' fishing off the marina pontoons.

Do please let us know what you see when you're here. The birds are one of the things we love most about this place.

Alan Kennedy

*Editor's note - in the last few days there's been a whimbrel here



Best North West Wedding Venue 2015



2014 our wettest on record!



Eider



Redshank

too.

The Studio

This month the Studio at Old Ardtornish celebrates its first anniversary. This time last year saw a party for forty friends to celebrate completion. Two years of intensive planning, design and construction turned twelve mature larch and Douglas fir, felled and milled on site, into both the frame and cladding. Local expertise - Jake Willis of Soundwood, and Riverside Builders - came together with a wider group of designers and makers, all under the experienced eye of Brocklehurst Architects.

A year ago, it sat in a sea of post-construction mud. We planted a hundred tree seedlings - larch, Douglas fir, Scots pine, oak, birch, blackthorn, cherry and rowan - in deer exclosures, with the help of Allan Davidson: most still flourish. Discovery of the wonderful flammable qualities of even damp brambles led to further clearing to the south. Stock fencing keeps sheep at a respectful distance and enthusiastic scattering of grass and wildflower seeds last April helped out-compete the docks in the greening process.

Over the summer, Donald Kennedy built two drystone walls, re-using the vast blocks of the ruined remains of the eighteenth century house. The estate completed a new deer fence, allowing us to removed the ragged wires from the original stone garden walls as you approach the site.

Works for this year include construction of bookcases by Jim Partridge and Liz Walmsley - the Shropshire duo who created the bridges in the big house garden, and creation of a woodstore to keep firewood dry for the extremely efficient Charnwood stove.

Amanda Raven

The Ardtornish Garden

By the beginning of March the garden is coming into its usual spring beauty. We've already enjoyed the way in the last few years Ian Lamb has spread out the groundcover of snowdrops. We can now delight in wide drifts in February as we walk up and down the Front Drive and through the Rockery. We look out for the special named ones, but *Galanthus nivalis* is just as beautiful. We've moved some from the wood at Old Ardtornish, which must originally have been planted in the eighteenth or early nineteenth century. They're a very old variety.

Iris unguicularis is planted under the veranda round the house. I pick the delicate flowers to put in a vase on the kitchen table. The daphnes in the Rockery have come into flower and each spray is strongly scented. The early daffodils are showing yellow.

The joys of spring reward any walk round the garden, but this year it's impossible not to notice the damage wrought by gales. A large silver birch - a great favourite of mine, admired from the windows of my flat - came down on the lower lawn, snapped off at the base. A huge Scots Pine fell from the Rockery and snapped the precious davidia on the drive. We've pollarded it back to ten feet. There will be fewer beautiful white handkerchiefs for the next year or two. Luckily we've planted young specimens elsewhere in the garden.

As we walk round we see several other trees down and much tidying to be done. Steve Hardy has spared us a few hours of his time to help and Allan Davidson is back following his ankle operation. Ian Lamb will be re-joining the team for a few days in April. By then we will be looking forward to the full burst of spring.

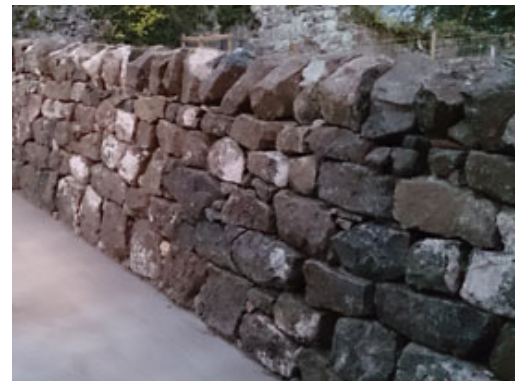
Faith Raven



Greenshank



The Studio in the gloaming



Drystone wall using recovered stone blocks



Snow drops in January

News from the Whitehouse

We open on 27 March and are raring to get stuck into some serious cooking for 2015. Mike and Lee travelled far and wide this winter, including a spell in Japan. We wait to see what oriental influences work their way into the Whitehouse this year.

Our catering is going strong and we love cooking up a feast for a party (or just to give you a night off). We're much better organised this year about our ready meals, so please let us know if you'd like something awaiting you on arrival in your accommodation. We'll be cooking with Ardtornish beef and lamb, and pork from two farms on Mull. And Lee is going to make some delicious puddings.

Thanks to Torquil and Archie (aged 8 - who has expanded his business empire from supplying just our eggs), we now have a more regular supply of the finest langoustine. There's never any guarantee we'll be able to get them, but if you're particularly keen to eat them please give us notice when you book and we'll do our best to ensure those crustaceans are caught.

We look forward to welcoming you in 2015!

Jane, Sarah, Mike and Lee

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 ...

[Conde Nast Traveller article online](#) ••• [Peninsular communities get ferry fare respite](#) ••• [Ardtornish scoops Best Wedding Venue award](#) ••• [Another hydro first in Morvern](#) ••• [Morvern Community group buys Achnaha woodlands](#) ••• [Good Food Guide likes our local resto](#) ••• [Scottish Business Insider highlights Achabeag development](#) ••• [Garden at Ardtornish feature in The Scotsman](#) ••• [Morvern recognised as wildcat hotspot](#)

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



Daphne-J-Postil



Scots pine felled in the storms



Local produce, beautifully cooked



Langoustines on the menu ... just ask



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