



FRAW News

October 2018

Work Parties

So far this year we have held a number of successful and well attended work parties – thanks to everyone for their hard work. At the start of the year the woodchip paths were extended in the Community Woodland. This was followed up by two sessions on the section down-river from Cramond Brig to improve vistas of the river. More recently, an enormous growth of Himalayan Balsam, an invasive species, was removed from near Fair-a-Far Mill and a general tidying-up of the area performed. John Crutchfield, our invaluable work party organiser, has also continued to work single-handed at various odd jobs as they crop up.



Our hopes to improve the drainage at the seated area at Peggy's Mill have been delayed because of archaeological concerns but undeterred we have moved our immediate focus to the territory leading from the School Brae car park to Fair-a-Far. Here the remedial work following the installation of the Fish Ladder has not been completed, so we are pursuing this. However, we plan to make the whole area more attractive and have a work party scheduled for October to get started. This includes revealing more of the interesting geological feature shown here.

It is perhaps worth reiterating what our general aim is? The Walkway is a popular place, heavily used at times. It is also an area of quiet beauty and natural diversity. Therefore a balance is required which we try very hard to achieve. Nobody wants the Walkway to turn into a tidy 'park' but locals and visitors alike must also enjoy their experience. For instance, without some clearing, stretches of the path would be through a tunnel with no view of the river. What we have done, with the agreement of the Council, is to manage the woodland along part of the banks by the selective thinning of trees and saplings, mainly self-seeded species such as sycamore and ash and also infestations of laurel, a non-native species. The trees are cut at low level and as they are deciduous, most will re-grow and the security of the river bank is retained. Much of the resulting 'brash' is piled up which is good for insect life and with it good for birds also. In fact the volume of vegetation removed is a very small percentage of the 'total stock' and is far outweighed by new planting elsewhere. In addition, some larger trees are felled by the Council and there has also been considerable felling over the river on the Dalmeny Estate.

Invasive Non-Native Species Update.

Our constitution states that our principal purpose is to improve, promote and enhance the heritage and natural environment of the River Almond Walkway, carry out environmental improvement and practical conservation. As such we have a duty to do what we can to manage invasive species along the walkway.

We have a number of plants growing along the walkway that are regarded as non-native but only a few of these are regarded as "invasive". In the UK, there are 1377 identified non-native plants of which only 108 (8%) are regarded as invasive.

We have Himalayan Balsam, Japanese Knotweed, Giant Hogweed, Few-flowered Leek, Spanish Bluebell, Yellow Variegated Archangel and Rhododendron Ponticum that are invasive. In addition to Himalayan Honeysuckle, Snowberry and Cherry Laurel that are non-native, garden escapees.

Our approach to each of these is different depending on species:-

- Himalayan Balsam – pulled out by hand. We find it easier when the plant is mature but before the seed heads mature.
- Japanese Knotweed – sprayed with herbicide.
- Giant Hogweed – either sprayed with herbicide or cut or injected with herbicide.
- Few-flowered Leek – this is beyond our efforts to control. The plants have spread throughout the walkway and hand pulling or burning has failed. The plants produce a large number of bulbils both from the flower and base which roll along the ground to grow into new plants. The only treatment would seem to be herbicide spraying but this would be over a huge area and as the herbicide is non-selective, it would kill everything. Fortunately it is a short lived plant in the spring season.
- Spanish Bluebells – Also difficult to control.
- Yellow Variegated Archangel – dug out when seen.
- Rhododendron Ponticum – not currently growing on our area of control but we monitor it to ensure it does not.
- Himalayan Honeysuckle – dug out when seen.
- Snowberry – dug out and kept under control.
- Cherry Laurel – cut back and roots treated with herbicide.

It is illegal to remove the invasive plants from the site unless it is done by a registered waste carrier. We try to minimise the use of herbicide, but as mentioned above, it is sometimes necessary. We have one certified operative who is licensed to use the herbicide along the walkway.

Whilst we do what we can to manage the non-native plants along the walkway our neighbours do not help as there are huge Giant Hogweed plants growing along the Dalmeny Estate river bank together with Himalayan Balsam that spread their seeds into the river to be deposited downstream. There is an infestation of Rhododendron Ponticum adjacent to the path from the Queensferry Road upstream that is growing on land not owned by the Council and on other land owned by the Dalmeny Estate. Further upstream is an enormous amount of Japanese knotweed on the MOD owned river bank at Craigiehall.

We have managed to considerably reduce the amount of non-native plants along the Walkway. We can perhaps fairly claim to have this under control but we will never be able to say that we have eliminated them.