



# A Thousand Huts: the launch, the story, the campaign

*The previous issue of the Reforesting Scotland (RS) journal, spring-summer 2011, marked the birth of the new RS campaign called A Thousand Huts. Ninian Stuart reports back on what's been happening.*

**O**ur campaign for A Thousand Huts has flourished into existence since we announced its launch in the previous journal. Andy Wightman has completed a scoping study and campaign outline, which RS Directors have now adopted. We have made contact with a range of existing hutters, past hutters who have been cleared off sites, landowners with an interest in creating hut sites, forestry and crofters' organisations – all convincing us that the potential of the campaign is even greater than we first thought. And in mid-June, we had a memorable meeting at Carbeth where we saw at first hand the value and benefits of a hut site that has been in use since early in the 20th century.

We have been delighted, if at times overwhelmed, by the growing interest from the public and national media. So as the following article shows, Reforesting Scotland has managed to plant some seeds and nurture the early stages of growth of the campaign. We are now seeking support from every member, as well

as new partners and allies, to help us deliver the campaign challenges and realise the full potential of huts and hutting to the people of Scotland.

## The launch

Some 130 people attended the launch on 15 June at Edinburgh's Greyfriars Kirk, and what a fantastic event it was. It is hard to capture the passion, learning, creativity, experience and vision that people shared. In the morning, we looked back on forest culture, huts and hutting helped by speakers as diverse and erudite as Royal Historiographer Christopher Smout, Historic Scotland's Head of Heritage Management Ranald MacInnes, and Fi Martynoga. Then we heard from a range of speakers on the current state of our forests (Gordon Gray Stevens of Scottish Native Woods), about living in a forest (Mandy Haggith from Assynt), on timber building in Scotland (from Bernard Planterose) and about the unfolding story of hutting at Carbeth (from hutter Gerry Loose).

During lunch, people milled about, looking at huts (one emerging log-pole structure by Caledonian Log Homes inside and a small hut from the Forest of Falkland outside the

church), swapping stories, enjoying exhibits and joining in some beautiful and moving bothy ballads, led by Eva Schonfeld.

To begin the busy afternoon programme, broadcaster Lesley Riddoch introduced Glaswegian James Rowling, who spoke movingly about the hut he and his family once had at Barry Downs before it was destroyed and he was thrown off the site. Lesley then spoke about how this could all be different. Drawing from her PhD comparing cabin traditions of Scotland and Norway, Lesley showed how the Nordic tradition of owning huts in the country could transform Scotland and enable rootless Scots to reconnect with the land. Next, social entrepreneur Nigel Lowthrop spoke about his experience of revitalising an ancient oak wood by building a range of timber buildings, and Andy Wightman told us about the evolving campaign.

Finally it was the time for the people's voice. We broke into small groups to explore a range of topics – from hut-building to hut-living and campaigning – before ending with a plenary session, spurred on by Lesley Riddoch in the chair. A great day,

Above left to right: Participants working at the Falkland hut-building course; log building built by David Blair and team at last year's Big Tent Festival. Photos: Mark Bramwell, Willie Whitelaw.

with many memorable moments – from Mandy Haggith's poetry on the joy of living in a wood to the applause when Sir Maxwell Macleod pledged the first donation towards setting up a Hutter's Federation from the memorial fund of his father, Sir George Macleod.

### Media, politics and social networking

One of the joys of the campaign so far has been the huge interest shown by the national media. Since the end of May, there have been features on huts and hutting, including a cover story on Carbeth in *The Herald Magazine* ('The land of the common people'); and an article by Louisa Pearson in *Scotsman Magazine* ('A woodland charity has ambitious plans to restore Scotland's once proud hutting tradition'). There have been articles in *The Herald* by Dave Ross ('Scotland could be a dacha haven with 1000 forest huts') and by Collette Douglas-Home ('Let's go back to the land to cure our country's ills'). And recently, a two-minute radio feature on Good Morning Scotland and Reporting Scotland.

Alongside this, political interest is growing. We've had reports that a couple of Scottish ministers are interested (one warm, one cooler); Alison Johnstone MSP of the Scottish Green Party lodged a motion in support of the campaign; and an intriguing and supportive feature by Rab McNeil for *Holyrood Magazine*, a publication which aims to reach Scotland's key movers and shakers.

Facebook and Twitter are being put to good use in building a strong and vibrant virtual hutter's community. The Thousand Huts Facebook group now has over 500 members and is growing fast. As a reluctant Facebooker, this has shown me the power and potential of social media in communicating and sharing anything, from how to build a hut to

the latest campaign news and views. Log on and join in the conversation at <http://on.fb.me/thousandhuts>

### The way ahead

The Thousand Huts campaign aims to promote huts and hutting – the building and enjoyment of simple structures (usually wooden) for living, working and recreation in the countryside. This will be achieved by securing a change of culture, attitude and law reform so that those who wish to build huts and pursue hutting could do so more easily.

A Thousand Huts will work with a wide range of organisations to deliver change in a number of areas, some of which will take time (e.g. legal, planning etc). Our campaign will focus on the following areas of activity:

#### Raising awareness of huts and hutting

- Research and publish material on the Scottish history and culture of huts and hutting, in the context of the European tradition
- Research and document current state and extent of traditional hutting
- Develop [www.thousandhuts.org](http://www.thousandhuts.org), plus Twitter and Facebook campaigns
- Curate exhibitions of huts and hutting.

#### Huts, hutting and sustainable rural development

- Encourage urban and rural community, youth and cultural groups to build and use more huts in the countryside
- Work with landowners to develop woodland hutting communities and/or hutting retreats for people who don't own land
- Develop models of land tenure to facilitate the expansion of hutting and promote the benefits of hutting as a way of stimulating the rural economy
- Develop, organise and promote good hut design and building techniques.

#### Huts legislation and hutter's rights

- Initiate and support the establishment of a Scottish Federation of Hutter's
- Lobby for proper legal protection against eviction for existing hutter's
- Publish a report on the laws and planning regulations surrounding hutting in different European countries
- Lobby for a change in planning legislation to create a 'hutting consent' and a new building class of 'hut' within building regulations.

#### What can you do?

A Thousand Huts is a head, heart and hands campaign trying to make the dreams of a thousand aspiring hutter's a reality. We have initiated the campaign with hardly any funds, from within a small environmental organisation with only a part-time administrator and most work undertaken by volunteers.

#### How you can help:

- Spend time in a hut to prepare for the journey ahead
- Build a hut or attend a hut-building course
- Follow the campaign on Facebook
- Join our simple hut circle email list for occasional updates
- Lend a hand to our small campaign team
- Make a donation (from £10 to £1,000) towards the campaign
- Tell us your suggestions of how you might help.

To offer any help or find out more, contact [huts@reforestingscotland.org](mailto:huts@reforestingscotland.org) or visit [www.thousandhuts.org](http://www.thousandhuts.org) and <http://on.fb.me/thousandhuts>

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Left to right: Satisfied smiles at the Falkland hut-building course; participants survey their completed composting toilet; visiting a straw bale shelter. Photos: Mark Bramwell, Willie Whitelaw.

