

# A Thousand Huts: into the second year

*Nearly a year after its launch, Reforesting Scotland's high-profile campaign A Thousand Huts continues to attract new followers and media attention. Now, the time has come to take it to the next level, urges campaign convenor Ninian Stuart.*

As I write this, 11 months since we started on Facebook and ten months since the launch of the campaign, we have just welcomed our 780th virtual hutter to the Thousand Huts Facebook group at <http://on.fb.me/thousandhuts>. Since its launch at Greyfriars Kirk on 15 June last year, the campaign has attracted press coverage in *The Scotsman*, *The Herald*, *The Sunday Herald*, *Scotland on Sunday*, *Holyrood Magazine* and *The Guardian* (where it was the third most read UK story online for much of the day) and broadcast interviews on *BBC Reporting Scotland*, *Good Morning Scotland* and the *Shereen Show*. Not

bad for our first year, one might say. But the first year has been simply a time to share the dream and sow the seeds. Now is the time we need real diggers, not just dreamers, if we are to achieve our goal of a thousand new huts within three years and more...

## Seeds of inspiration

The campaign is still bursting with inspiration, with many regular Facebookers saying that the Thousand Huts Facebook group is one of the most enjoyable sites. As a Facebook novice, this has opened my eyes to a great number of stories and photos of people building huts, salvaging old huts and their social history and even (despite this novice's concern when someone posted it) to the delights of 'cabin porn' at <http://freecabinporn.com> – lousy name, great site.

Inspiration has also been coming with the winds of change from our Nordic neighbours. Thanks to the work of journalist Lesley Riddoch and fellow Nordophile Dan Wynn, a group called Nordic Horizons is running a series of talks, debates and papers on different ways of doing business, democracy and culture. Naturally, huts are an intrinsic part of Nordic culture. In early March, the Nordic Horizons event 'Building Cabins and Building Character', held at the Scottish Parliament, revealed how deeply huts and hutting affect the way people live there. Ellen Rees of the University of Oslo likened the place of huts – between civilisation and wilderness – to the erotic qualities of the shieling, while Ralf Westphal of Edinburgh University spoke about the value of huts in bringing ordinary

people into contact with the natural world, highlighting issues of outdoor access and landownership patterns.

## Landownership and stewardship

On the subject of landownership, the last few months have seen a few encouraging signs. Firstly, Scottish Land and Estates (the Scottish landowners' body not always associated with land reform, but who spoke out in support of Carbeth hutters in 1999) has been interested and supportive of our campaign, particularly through Daye Tucker, one of their Board members. Secondly, a number of folk are exploring the possibility of collectively purchasing woodlands to use as hut sites. And thirdly, the Carbeth Hutters Community Company has reached agreement to purchase the site from the existing landowner – enabling this remnant community of hutters to take forward this iconic hut site (now listed as a historic designed landscape) into the future.

## To the hills, to our huts and to happiness

In late February, prior to giving a talk about the campaign to a packed audience at Newbold House in Forres, I was invited to hear about the local laird's plans and interest in developing a flood plain for community use, with the possibility of a place for some huts. Naturally, the small, wooded hill in the flood plain attracted my attention and I asked whether we could climb it. Called Wrights Wood, it seemed to me the natural place for a small clachan of huts, set apart a little from the town but within easy walking distance, a semi-wild place with good views to the north, south, east and west. I reckoned it could accommodate maybe 12 huts, each



with its own space, where people could go to clear their heads, to hear the birds and see more clearly. The talk seemed to go down well, but the challenge for the good folk of Forres is to work out what might work for them, and to get building and investing in the future.

### Next steps

Meanwhile, our small campaign steering group has been plodding and plotting with support and advice from Maf Smith (Director of the Sustainable Development Commission in Scotland until its demise at the hands of the government), land campaigner and author Andy Wightman and others, while seeking additional resources to help take the campaign to its next level. In the months to come, we hope to achieve the following:

- Lay the foundation for a new Scottish Hutters' Federation, with a public launch at Big Tent 2012 at the end of July
- Prepare and promote information on how to acquire a hut
- Work with landowners and would-be landowners on how to develop and run a hut site
- A new festival of huts and hutting.

### What you can do to help

To achieve these next steps in the campaign, we need more hands-on support. Please get in touch if you:

- Know of a hut site near you, ideally with contact details of someone responsible or involved
- Have built, are building (or planning to build) a hut
- Have time and skills to offer the campaign, particularly if you are well organised and have strong communication skills
- Are an experienced hut builder with free time to offer us in late May, June or July.

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

*Ninian Stuart is a Director of Reforesting Scotland and convener of the Thousand Huts campaign steering group.*

Left: The hut-building course at Falkland last summer. Right: The Big Tent Festival. Photos: Mark Bramwell and Ida Maspero.

# Big Tent 2012

*Ninian Stuart gives a sneak preview of the Big Tent festival, which returns this year to the Falkland Estate in Fife on 21 and 22 July.*

The Big Tent is known for its vibrant programme of talks, musicians and activities that engage heads, hearts and hands. This year's will be a festival of the land and of the good life that can be enjoyed by all, even at a time of cuts and austerity.

### Heads up

The theme of this year's talks programme is 'Changing times, changing places, changing ourselves', following the focus on Rio +20 in June and in celebration of the Year of Co-operatives. Topics for talks sessions include: land, life and livelihoods; craft, culture and community; wood, wealth and well-being; heritage, hardship and hope; soul, soil and silence; energy, ecology and equity; food, farming and the future; people, places and potential; and money, money, money – does it make the world go round?

The full talks programme is to be announced by the end of April. Watch the website or register your interest by email, [bigtent@centreforstewardship.org.uk](mailto:bigtent@centreforstewardship.org.uk)

### Hands on

Whether you're six or 66, there will be lots to do at Big Tent 2012 – from building dens and enjoying a clachan of huts to a taste of forest gardening. Indeed, Big Tent is teaming up with Reforesting Scotland (RS) and others to present Scotland's first festival of huts and hutting as part of the RS campaign for A Thousand Huts. And if you'd like to get involved with the Big Tent team, or have sound, inspiring proposals to bring to it, just let us know. Though it has limited cash and can make no promises, the team is open to ideas – email [bigtent@centreforstewardship.org.uk](mailto:bigtent@centreforstewardship.org.uk)

### Hearts

This year's music line-up includes the Proclaimers, Salsa Celtica, Karine Polwart, the Treacherous Orchestra and Breabach. Daytime music will be acoustic, so remember to bring your banjo, fiddle or tin-whistle. Big Tent is all about building a movement for change, and all movements need good music!

[www.bigtentfestival.co.uk](http://www.bigtentfestival.co.uk)

