

A G E n d a



Grampian 50+ Network News for

Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire & Moray



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HOW it all started

25 YEARS OF GRAMPIAN 50+ NETWORK 1998-2023



Once upon a time....., way back in the early eighties, two Community Education Workers and an Outdoor Education Instructor – John, Marjory and Brendan, had an idea. **'Why don't we set up some walking groups for older people?'**

Forty years ago there were very few activity groups for older people, and this suggestion would really challenge the stereotype! Despite some criticism from our colleagues, we found some money and in 1984 set up a pilot, 'The Triangle Project,' with three groups of older people from The Beacon in Bucksburn, Ruthrieston and Culter to try out our idea. Thus, the first three walking groups were set up. It was a success and a highlight was running a **'Discovering New Horizons'** residential week in Speyside. Soon our colleagues were setting up groups in their areas across Grampian, and many more residential weeks too.

A new post of Development Worker for Older People was created in 1989 to co-ordinate the work already established and to work with Community Education colleagues across Grampian region. Marjory D'Arcy was delighted to move into this post until 1998 when she took early retirement. It was at this stage that it was appropriate for the work to be taken over and run by older people themselves and **'Grampian 50+ Network'** was born. Now a registered charity, the network continues to be run today by volunteers.



Above - the three founders.

Left to right - Brendon, Marjory and John

Right - Discovering New Horizons



A message from the Chairperson



From 1998 – 2009 I acted as advisor to the committee before becoming Chairperson. I have really enjoyed my spell with the Network. Despite the hard work and, sometimes, sore feet at events like the Spring Fling and Rendezvous, I always experienced such enjoyment at the sight of so many happy, smiling older people enthusiastically taking part in all the walks and activities. There has never been any problem in getting helpers from the groups to supplement the Committee at events. In fact, one helper said she enjoyed helping at a Rendezvous almost more than being a participant.

In preparation for celebrating 25 years, I have read through seventy-five AGEndas (three per year) and what an interesting, reminiscent journey it has been!

The Network Committee is a working committee with everyone getting involved in the programmes, plus the special duties of secretary, treasurer, walks co-ordinator, those skilled in IT who run Facebook and the website and the two editors of the AGENDA.

Over the years I have met so many people – members, specialists such as Countryside Rangers, crafters, etc – all of whom have helped in so many ways to make the Network a success. What a privilege it has been. It is amazing to think we have been operating for twenty-five years. We even have some members whose mothers were in the first walking groups in the eighties.

I would like to make a special plea to group members to contribute, at some time, as a member of the Network Committee. You don't need any special skills, just a willingness to attend committee meetings and contribute to the programmes – and, most of all, have fun and enjoyment in doing so.

Please help the Network to continue to flourish.

Marjory D'Arcy

Chairperson

From the Committee

I joined the Committee to meet new folk,
But found new friends full of fun.
Our meetings are few, but with many a
joke
As we plan for events still to come.

I enjoyed setting up First Aid sessions,
Meeting folk from all over the area.
Everyone helped in the sessions,
From defib to treating urticaria.

The website is my little project
And I like to tinker with it.
Thank goodness for photos from members
To brighten my latest edit

We walk, we ramble, we fling and we
chat.
The Network Committee has given me
that.

Liz Major

My first experience of the network was in 2003 when a colleague of mine (Marjory) asked me to help at the Ramblers' Rendezvous, which was being held at Mintlaw. It was an eye opener to see the varied activities and the numbers involved. I helped at the BBQ and have never barbequed a kipper since!



Some years later, around 2012, I think, I became a member of the Network Committee. I am proud to be a member of this group. We have been recognised by many organisations for the work we do.

Yes, it is a working committee.

Sheila Erridge

Little did I know when I was asked to set up the Mearns 50+, Skateraw and Portlethen groups in the mid 1990s, that one day I would be on the Committee of the umbrella body for 50+ walking groups, Grampian 50+ Network 'to help with walks.' It has been an interesting journey, meeting so many great people on the way. Highlights were the Glenmore and Peebles holidays, the latter opening up tremendous walking opportunities in the Borders.

The Network walking events could not have happened without the tremendous help of our members in the different areas around the region, making it all so very worthwhile.

Thank you all.

Judy Middleton

From a member

Being a member of Grampian 50+ Network through my local 50+ walking group has been, and is, personally a great benefit to me. I have walked in places I never would have visited on my own and made friends with many people I would otherwise never have met. I have been lucky enough to enjoy several excellent holidays organised by the Network Committee. They are so well planned, researched, organised and provided by 'The People Behind the Scenes.' These holidays are walking activities, but also social contact and unobtrusive support to so many of us. It is indeed **Good to Walk** and **Good to Talk** and so help to promote **Health and Happiness in later life**.

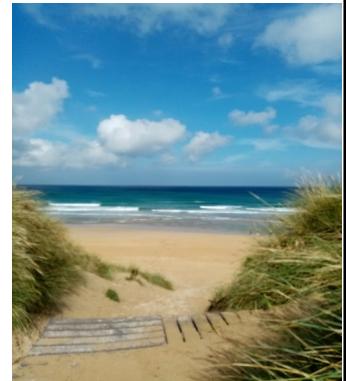
May the Grampian 50 + Network continue to flourish for many years.

Member of Fochabers 50+ Walking Group

25th Anniversary

Firstly, congratulations on reaching this milestone. Having been a group member and secretary for a few years, I can see things from 'both sides of the coin.'

As a member, I really enjoyed the fortnightly walks in the company of folks when we always blethered, exchanged ideas, maybe a recipe or two, and it was always fun. I never realised there were so many interesting walks in Aberdeenshire, my favourites being through woods or coastal. Forvie Sands springs to mind and coming over the dunes at Fraserburgh to see the most beautiful blue sky and sea. There were some gasps from us that day!! Great to have sightings of wildlife too; red squirrels, ospreys, various plants, trees, fungi, etc. I remember the late Brian Torrance, at Dunecht estate, pointing out the fungi, me coming home with a horse shoe shaped one to show to grandchildren. Autumn walks are impressive with the colours of the leaves on show.



As secretary, Rendezvous and Spring Fling days sometimes brought their own challenges. Having to make changes at the last minute to accommodate folks wasn't always easy. There was always somebody waiting for the sheets so that things could 'get going.' But we got there! I remember my first Rendezvous - a tutor called off the night before so all her folks had to be reallocated, not always an easy task as numbers on lists are often limited. I loved some of the warm ups, the most memorable was the Tai Chi. At the end of these days people with smiles on their faces went home happy. So did I!

The Network Holidays meant meeting folks with more time. I marvelled at how fit and able people were and so happy to be with other like-minded people. I think a number of friendships were made on these holidays. The first holiday for me involved being a cook for 40+ people, quite rewarding but tiring too. At least the cooks didn't have to do the washing up! Gartmore House with its very narrow gate was a lovely place to stay. The bus driver did well there!!

It was always the people you were with that made everything worthwhile, so **KEEP GOING** for another twenty five years!

Catherine McConnachie, former Network Secretary

Ramblers' Rendezvous

As the groups grew, they met to share ideas, and in 1990 we had the first 'Ramblers' Rendezvous at Leith Hall with 200 people attending.



It was such a success that the Rendezvous has continued, each year in a different venue, with local group members determining the programme.

Badges were an important aspect, often used to decorate hats and rucksacks.

To meet the needs of all, the programme developed to include a range of outdoor and indoor activities as well as walks, e.g. heritage visits, crafts, music, dance – even burlesque and belly dancing!



At a Rendezvous held at Milne's High School, Fochabers, the local authority representative was Douglas Ross, a comparatively new local councillor. After the initial speeches one of our members, Kath Sandison, led a fairly intensive warm up. Having removed his suit jacket, Douglas joined in – the only time I remember this happening. Afterwards he said he was amazed at how fit we 200+ Auld Yins were! Douglas has now moved on to become leader of the Scottish Conservatives. I wonder if he remembers our Spring Fling!

Marjorie Adams, Fochabers 50+

AGEnda

As people became involved in various activities there was a need for communication of information; four volunteers produced a newsletter for groups to share information, which, in 1995, became the AGEnda. To date, ninety AGEndas have been produced by eight volunteer editors.

Grampian 50+ Memories

It's amazing to think that the Grampian 50+ Network has reached its 25th anniversary. Although COVID and a dodgy knee brought my membership to an end, I still have wonderful memories of my time in the Network.

In 2008, I joined Oldmeldrum Ramblers and shortly after answered the call for volunteers to help with the production of the AGEnda. The 'interview,' led by Marjorie over a cup of tea at Lochter, is still etched in my memory. It was there I met the other volunteer, Jean Pritchard. It would have been difficult to find two people who were so different. Jean had moved up from the South of England, worked in the oil industry and was a keen member of U3A, while I had lived in the North East all my life, was happiest speaking Doric and was a lifelong member of the SWRI - but the combination worked wonderfully. I focused on the content and Jean was in charge of the layout and we had great fun co-editing the magazine for almost ten years. The Summer 2017 edition was one of our proudest achievements. The Network had been involved in creating a Dragonfly Trail at Castle Fraser and we were given permission to use colour photographs on the covers. The result was quite spectacular.

I obviously enjoyed reading all the reports sent in by the group representatives but I also thoroughly enjoyed attending the 50+ events. The hilarious warm ups are unforgettable. One I particularly remember was where we had to reach across and touch our neighbour's bottom, or was it knee? The military precision with which people were directed to their activities was also impressive. Group leaders stood around holding their banners high while Marjorie in her own inimitable way encouraged folk to 'get a move on.' The events ended with the tired, but happy, members tucking into a plateful of food while enthusiastically sharing their experiences.

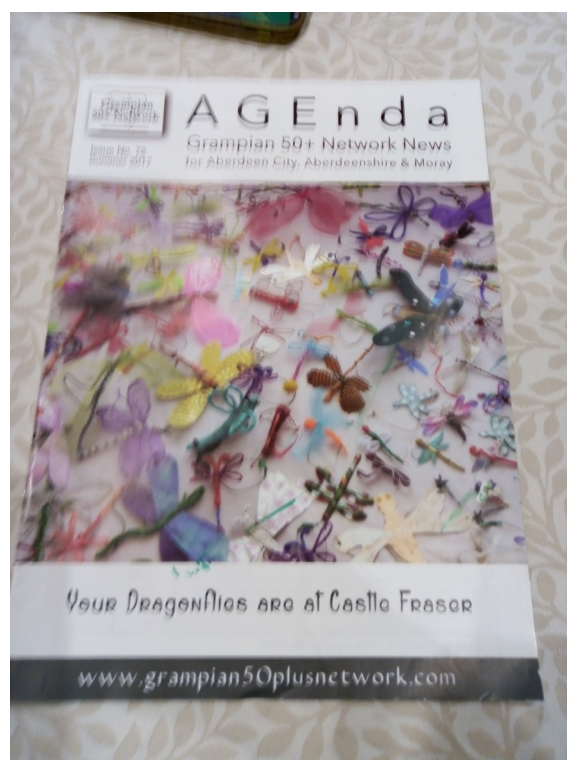
Attending the different events allowed me to visit lots of different towns around the region, all of them

unique. I remember the dolphin watching at Forres, the aqua aerobics at Banff, learning to drum at Kemnay and revisiting my childhood at the open air pool at Stonehaven. I particularly enjoyed the heritage walks and will never forget the story of the bed being blown out of a house when a bomb fell on Peterhead!

But I think the most memorable aspect of being a member of the Group was meeting so many interesting people, and realising that age is only a number. Folk can, and do, live life to the full long after their working days are over.

So, a big thank you to everyone who has helped in any way over the last twenty-five years to make the Grampian 50+ such a success, and let's hope it can continue for many years to come.

Jennifer Leys
Past Co-editor of Agenda



Spring fling

Other regular events have been the Spring Fling / AGM, Spring walks and Autumn walks.

The Spring Fling grew out of an idea to encourage members to attend the AGM and is similar in format to the Rendezvous, but with more indoor activities. The result is that we can boast of 200 members at our AGM. Spring and Autumn Walks provide opportunities for representatives of groups to learn new walks.

A most convenient Spring Fling this year, only half a mile from home and within easy walking distance.

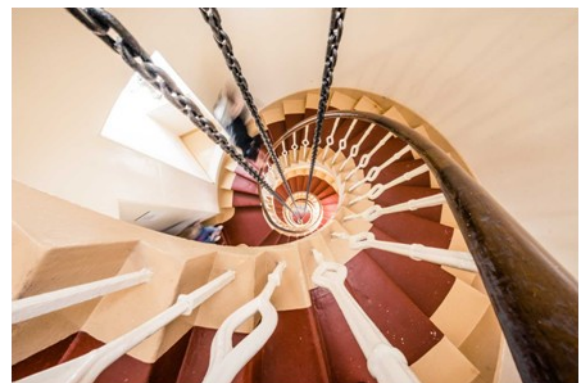
A lovely sunny spring morning, an early walk with Sally dog then down to the Broch Academy for the 09.30 start time. To my disbelief I was last to join the group - and I was leader! Why is it that those who live nearest are always last? I hurriedly collected the activity sheet and distributed them to the group, everyone in expectation to see what they had been allocated for the day. I was very happy with my own allocation, a visit to Fraserburgh Lighthouse Museum in the morning and ten-pin bowling at the Leisure Centre in the afternoon, I couldn't have asked for better really. A quick cup of coffee, then outside to where members of Fraserburgh Walking Club (that year's hosts) were waiting with their pennants displaying each activity. After joining the lighthouse group, we all jumped on a bus and were driven just over half a mile to our venue - very nice too. We met our guide in the foyer and our first adventure was to the lighthouse itself, a truly amazing structure.



Kinnaird Head Lighthouse first began as a giant lamp placed on top of the ancient Kinnaird Castle ramparts, then in 1787 when structural problems began to appear, engineer Robert Stevenson designed an amazing solution. A deep foundation inside the old castle and a round tower with internal spiral staircase rising to a height of 82' to reach the lamp-room, now projecting upwards above the castle roof. A surprising number of people don't know the lighthouse is built within the 16th century castle, a fact that makes Kinnaird unique in the world. A long climb to the lamp-room and fabulous views from the top, the amazing old clockwork mechanism still ticking away like the day it was made nearly 250 years ago; what a tribute to the engineers of old.

Next, a visit inside the ancient 10' thick castle walls to what was the paraffin room in the days of the paraffin lamp, the walls solid and strong to stand up to the fearsome north-east gales. A real privilege to be able to step inside such an ancient and amazing building.

On then to the oldest building in Fraserburgh, the mysterious and enigmatic Wine Tower. Plenty of theories have been put forward to its purpose but no one knows for sure. The seven strange bosses on the ceiling carved with heraldic and religious symbols, a monument of national importance, firmly guarding its secrets. Finally, a return to the museum building and the vast array of artifacts from around Scotland; massive glass lenses weighing tons, lamps, tools and a vast amount of information you could immerse yourself in for weeks.



Thank you, Grampian 50+Network, for a truly delightful and absorbing morning spent here.

Doug Simpson - Mintlaw Ramblers

Memories



ANOTHER HAPPY MEMBER -

and another celebration!

Mary Penny, Millbank Ramblers, is 90 this month!

She is obviously having a bit of fun here, watched by members of her group.

Many happy returns, Mary.



Other Events Over the Years

- Early 90s: **Intergenerational project in Cullen.**
- 1999: **International Year of Older People**, the highlight of which was 'Tea on the Water.' Turriff group had theirs on the pond in the Haughs, Aberdeen group on the Dee and one group had a trip to Loch Ness to have tea with 'Nessie.'
- 2000: **Live it Up at Glenlivet** a five day environmental project on the Glenlivet estate, involving making paths and drystone dykes, clearing streams and planting trees and shrubs.



- **Discovery Award**, similar to the Duke of Edinburgh Award but for older people. We have supported this award for years and many members have received their Gold Award for hobbies, interests, volunteering and Journey of Discovery. The skills acquired by people completing this award have benefitted the network.
- 2011: Our **Website**, grampian 50plus network.com was set up and has since had several upgrades. We also now have our successful **Facebook** page.
- 2012: **The Walking Strategy for Older People's Walking Groups in Grampian**, co-ordinated and led by Alan Melrose, was set up by the network. Its purpose was to create more opportunities for older people by creating new groups and helping existing groups to cope with changing membership.
- 2013: 47 groups took part in the **Network Challenge** as part of the **European Year of Active Ageing**, recording the number of members x the miles they walked. The total was 137,837.2 miles.
- Between 2000 and 2020 we took part in **research by the University of Aberdeen**, most recently to look at the success of the Network and the benefit of being a member of a walking group.
- Over the 25 years the Network has offered many **training courses** in eg first aid and map reading. In addition, a Resources Book and a Welcome Pack for new members were produced.
- 2017: The Dragonfly Challenge at Castle Fraser was a very successful project. In partnership with the National Trust we invited our members to make dragonflies to hang on trees between the car park and a large pond which is popular with real dragonflies, to encourage people to go on this walk in the castle grounds. Members rose to the challenge, making 200 dragonflies from all kinds of materials, which were on display from the Spring till October. (see below)



Network Holidays

Network holidays have become very popular and successful.

After a few trips abroad in the early days of the Network, we decided to stay nearer home and explore walking in Scotland. From a Youth Hostel in Drumnadrochit, we have stayed in a boarding school in Glenalmond and hotels in Dunkeld, Gartmore, Aviemore and Peebles. The holidays attract members from across Grampian, are geared to all levels of ability and are particularly beneficial to those who live alone or do not have anyone with whom they can go on holiday.

I have great memories of the wonderful 50+ holidays I have been on – Austria, Kitzbuhel, Hotel Edelweiss.

Klaus and Veronika were the epitome of excellent hosts, so much so that I returned there on two occasions for ski holidays. The walks and the camaraderie enjoyed on this holiday were second to none. Firm friendships were made and the subsequent Rendezvous and Spring Flings have meant that we can meet up on a regular basis. Other holidays were all great for different reasons:

- Glenmore Lodge for the Dingbats and the sadly departed Brian's enthusiasm for fungi
- Gartmore for the wonderful weather and gin on the lawn
- Peebles in a beautiful hotel, just in need of a little TLC

None of the above was possible without the enthusiasm and commitment of the Network Committee. I owe them a great debt of gratitude for what has been a very enjoyable early retirement. Here's hoping that I can continue to get out there and enjoy the years to come.

Fiona Robertson, Alford Ramblers



Dunkeld



Peebles



Peebles



Joining Grampian 50+ fifteen years ago was one of the best things we've done. It opened up a world of adventure we never anticipated. Since joining we've been to places in Scotland and Europe and made friends with people that we'd would never have done otherwise.

The holidays to Peebles, Dunkeld, Aberfoyle and others were fantastic and introduced us to places which were previously only names on a map. Alan Melrose's guided tours of Austria, Switzerland and the Dolomites are an everlasting memory.

My wife and I joined the Ramblers to meet people and make new friends, and we have succeeded. The events such as the Spring Flings, the Rendezvous, the Spring and Autumn walks are all expertly organised and well worth attending.

Thank you Grampian 50+ - you are all champions!

Sandy McIntosh

Oldmeldrum Ramblers

On the Jungfrau



Terrified in the Dolomites



1989



Ballater 2004



Glen Prosen 2019

Stonehaven 50+ Walking Group

Our group initially started in January 1989 with 30-40 members, and has continued with some changes since that time.

Stonehaven joined the Grampian 50+ Network from its initial development. Joining the Network brought the local walking group the opportunity to participate in the wide range of Network activities. Rendezvous, Spring Flings, Autumn Walks have all been well attended and enjoyed.

Locally we have hosted, with lots of support, two Rendezvous events and Spring and Autumn Walk programmes, all of which have given insight into the challenges of these events but also a great deal of enjoyment to all participants,

Network holidays have enabled members to spread their wings further afield and enjoy making and renewing friendships with walkers from other areas. Participants always remark on the laughs, sociability and enjoyment of these events as they mix and mingle. The Network holiday in Austria was greatly enjoyed. Members have responded positively to the courses offered in Map Reading and First Aid, developing their confidence with new skills.

Everyone agrees that being out and about enjoying a good walk, great scenery and a friendly natter is the best therapy for us all. The Grampian 50+ Network provides an excellent framework and guidance to encourage all the Groups to continue and flourish.

Betty Luurtsema - Stonehaven 50+



And all the groups walked happily ever after!

www.grampian50plusnetwork.com - **DISCLAIMER:** the views expressed in articles are not the responsibility of the Network