

Scottish Borders National Park

NEWSLETTER | ISSUE 3



Teviotdale is one of the Borders' hidden gems, and lies at the heart of the proposed Scottish Borders National Park.

The Rule Valley's story is just one chapter of this area's unique history, and now the Campaign for a Scottish Borders National Park (CSBNP) together with Archaeology Scotland (AS) and partners are showcasing what could be achieved by making much, much more of it. The Twelve Towers of Rule project demonstrates how a Scottish Borders National Park Authority (SBNPA) could, as project manager, coordinate diverse individuals and groups and knit together the many strands of this area's extraordinarily rich - and largely undiscovered - cultural and natural heritage to benefit as many people as possible. It would also answer questions about a poorly understood but critically important period in the Borders and Scotland's history.

In autumn 2021, the CSBNP team kicked off the first phase of the Twelve Towers of Rule project with a series of excavations and events at Bedrule Castle.



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Bedrule Castle © Richard Strathie

The Twelve Towers of Rule

A South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) funded feasibility study has made a strong case for developing the heritage project that will bring to life the story of the Twelve Towers of Rule – a day of devastation in 1545 in the Rule Valley during Henry VIII's 'Rough Wooing' campaign. As well as uncovering the mysteries surrounding the towers that were burned to the ground, the Twelve Towers team aims to tell the tales of how the families survived - some of their descendants still live in the valley today - and follow some of the famous local clans who now have members all over the world including in North America and Australia.

The Twelve Towers project already involves a number of heritage agencies, volunteers and local groups, and is being project managed by the Campaign for a Scottish Borders National Park (CSBNP). SOSE's report and recommendations can be accessed on the website at www.borders-national-park.scot.

In line with these, consultation with local residents and groups such as the Hawick Cycling Club is identifying the best and most accessible locations for visitors; and existing and new cycle and walking routes. Archaeological

research and projects are being drawn up and executed; interpretation and wayfinding tools are being developed; and an events and activities programme devised that includes school visits and skills development workshops. Funding for initial work has been secured and complementary project funding is being sought from various sources. Archaeology Scotland, Historic Environment Scotland, Scottish Borders Council, local heritage organisations and volunteer professionals are making contributions to the specialist tasks involved.

Bedrule ruins bring history alive for Borders kids

Bedrule Castle was one of 'The Twelve Towers of Rule' burnt in September 1545 during the Rough Wooing. It had been a major mediaeval castle, and this exploration and excavation project - with a grant to CSBNP from SBC's 'Build Back a Better Borders' fund - aims to unpack more of its history and the lives of the people of Rulewater.

The first exploratory excavation at Bedrule Castle in November 2021 run by Archaeology Scotland (AS) generated huge interest amongst schoolchildren and a large group of adult volunteers keen to learn new skills in caring for our Borders heritage.

More than 120 primary and secondary schoolchildren from seven schools across the Scottish Borders (Berwickshire, Earlston, Galashiels, Hawick, Jedburgh, Kelso and Newcastleton) took part in separate workshops.

Over the ten days, the teams of schoolchildren and adult volunteers opened four trenches across the site to characterize and evaluate its archaeology. Although much of the well-cut stone appears to have been taken from the site, likely for use in the cottages, manse, church, or schoolhouse, AS events organiser Kieran Manchip believes the team has found the remains of a spiral staircase, along with a nice spindle, both of which need to be dated. He will be organising further events focusing on archaeological illustration and mapping, interpreting the results of the excavations, and engaging the public.

The next phase at Bedrule will take place in the spring. The initial group of volunteers is now a well-trained team, eager to undertake more work at this and other sites.



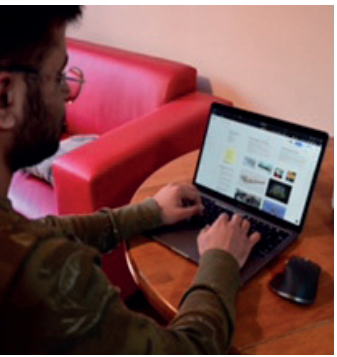
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Heriot-Watt students' digital vision for the National Park

In 2021, four Heriot-Watt (HW) masters students researched how digital technology – specifically augmented wayfinding, digital remote tourism and drone assisted biological surveying – could enhance visitors' experience in a new Scottish Borders National Park. The students, all from the university's digital design and innovation programme, collaborated with the CSBNP team during the 12-week 'live' project called Digital Borderlands.

As well as the CSBNP team, the students – two from Scotland and one each from China and Canada – engaged with more than 20 local and regional stakeholders to uncover different groups' needs and ideas, and with young people living in the Borders to encourage them to think about what the region's landscape would look like in the future, how it would attract visitors, and what could be done to help both visitors and local people better understand the places around them.



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Wheel Causeway to be restored

Another of the interlinked projects in Teviotdale and Liddesdale with which the Scottish Borders National Park campaign is working is the Wheel Causeway route south of Hawick. CSBNP is working with the community councils, SBC, Tilloch Forestry, and Forestry & Land Scotland to reopen the route. CSBNP leader Professor Jane Bower explains: 'The objective is to open up to walkers, horse riders and mountain bikers a scenic, ancient right of way which is a scheduled, heritage path. It is currently very overgrown, with some boggy bits and almost impassable.' Storm Arwen has blocked even more of the route with fallen trees so the project may be delayed until foresters across the country have dealt with all of the essential post-storm clearing up.

Originally, this route most probably ran from coast to coast. Currently, only about 11 miles from Liddesdale - where the Kielder road crosses the Border - to just above Bonchester is clearly marked on maps. The route was in use in mediaeval times, and the section which is scheduled and a right of way is marked on old maps as a Roman road. The mediaeval village and a church beside the route have yet to be fully examined, and there may be other archaeology to be discovered.

The plan is to restore and signpost the mapped section of the Wheel Causeway, so that it becomes a real asset for local people and visitors to the area.

Where next for the Campaign for a Scottish Borders National Park?

In January 2022, Julian Glover's long-awaited Landscape Review was published providing recommendations on how England's National Parks can be safeguarded for future generations. Many of these also apply to Scotland's existing National Parks, and CSBNP hopes that the Scottish Government considers these recommendations along with the Scottish Campaign for National Park's recently published strategy on where and how to create more National Parks.



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Scotland needs to catch up with the rest of the UK in creating new National Parks. CSBNP welcomes any means that highlights the huge contribution our National Parks can make to tackling the climate emergency and nature crisis while promoting a truly green recovery and improving public health all while leveraging in additional funds to help to support an area's natural and cultural heritage.

The creation of a new National Park - and the project management role of a National Park Authority - in the Southern Borders will be a live issue for everyone concerned about looking after our countryside for future generations.



Thumbs up for Ruberslaw paths network

An exciting proposal for a community footpaths network around Teviotdale's iconic hill, Ruberslaw, which overlooks Rulewater, has been given the thumbs-up in a study by the Southern Uplands Partnership (SUP), supported by the South of Scotland Economic Partnership (SOSEP). Currently, unmade, informal paths lead up from Denholm, Bonchester Bridge, Bedrule and Cavers to the virtually unspoilt 360-degree views from the summit. Some of these paths link to Hawick and Jedburgh along the Borders Abbays Way. Upgrading and extending these existing routes with signage, gates and stiles, parking, and path improvements would help the growing numbers of walkers climbing the hill. New visitors staying in local

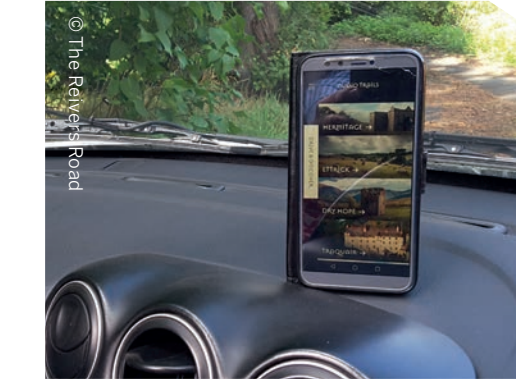
campsites, self-catering and B&Bs would find well-signposted interconnecting walks, making the area a more attractive destination. Businesses, landowners and community groups in the immediate area are broadly supportive of the proposal. A key benefit for farmers around Ruberslaw would be that walkers would be managed and guided by formal pathways, improving safety and reducing difficulties in stock management caused by walkers. Some farmers already actively encourage walkers and have, or are planning, tourism diversification, and many are keen to promote responsible access that a defined paths network could encourage.



© Frank Wielbo

Reivers Road driving route

Borderers Deborah Webster and Alastair Cunningham are tempting more people down to the Borders to try out a driving experience with a difference. The driving route has six different trails starting in Langholm, Hawick, Selkirk, Kelso, Peebles and Coldstream, that not only encourage visitors to explore the region, but also capture the history and heritage unique to the Borders. Cutting-edge technology delivers a virtual tour guide, allowing visitors to experience stories, history, drama and music as they explore the local area. The app is GPS activated and works offline, so users do not need a phone signal to experience the tour. Each trail starts in an easily accessible location, such as car parks, and drivers follow the route displayed on screen. The audio content is like having a real-life tour guide in your car, and also features music, ballads with actors bringing the Reivers to life.



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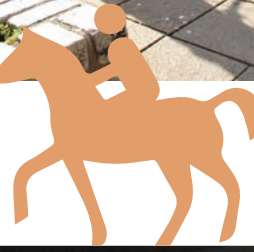
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New circular ride and walk at Monteviot

Still in Teviotdale but developed by the Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland's (RHASS) presidential initiative with support from Scottish Borders Council and Lothian Estates, this new nine-mile circular horse riding and walking route around Monteviot, near Jedburgh, was opened in July 2019. The new signposted, safe and multi access circular route uses Woodside as the primary access point. It is waymarked with directional arrows to provide a truly amazing walk or ride along the River Teviot, rising to the hills near the Wellington Monument. The route also includes information boards highlighting the arable, livestock and forestry farming practices along the way.



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Re-enactment event

Torch-bearing horse-riders leave the scene of a raid in the Rule Valley in a dramatic re-enactment of the burning of the Twelve Towers of Rule in 1545. Scottish Borders' ace stunt riding team, Les Amis D'Onno, were filmed by Galashiels-based Phoenix Photography early last year. Although Covid restrictions meant that filming was not allowed in Mary Queen of Scots' house in Jedburgh, well-known Scott's Selkirk re-enactors of Sir Walter Scott's court cases John Nichol and Kenneth Gunn stepped in to provide context and atmosphere – all accompanied by the wild sounds of Matt Seattle's Border Pipes. The video, co-directed by CSBNP and Phoenix, received rave reviews following its launch in March 2021 as part of the virtual Hawick Reivers Festival which has been viewed by tens of thousands of people all over the world – much to the delight of the Scottish Borders National Park team members who are coordinating the Twelve Towers project.



© Phoenix Photography Scotland



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Keeping (almost) everyone in the countryside happy

In its three-part review (see www.borders-national-park.scot), CSBNP draws on other National Parks and public spaces' years of experience in welcoming the vast majority of responsible visitors, mentoring the newbies, and dealing effectively with the minority of not-so-well behaved visitors.

Managing visitors – largely but not exclusively – with sufficient knowledgeable, welcoming, enthusiastic and professional rangers, together with the provision of sufficient high quality, well maintained infrastructure, services and facilities would promote responsible access to the countryside and healthy outdoor recreation as well as sustainable economic and social development.

Best of all, providing for visitors' basic needs would help local people too.

New technology course aims to open up Borders' natural and cultural heritage

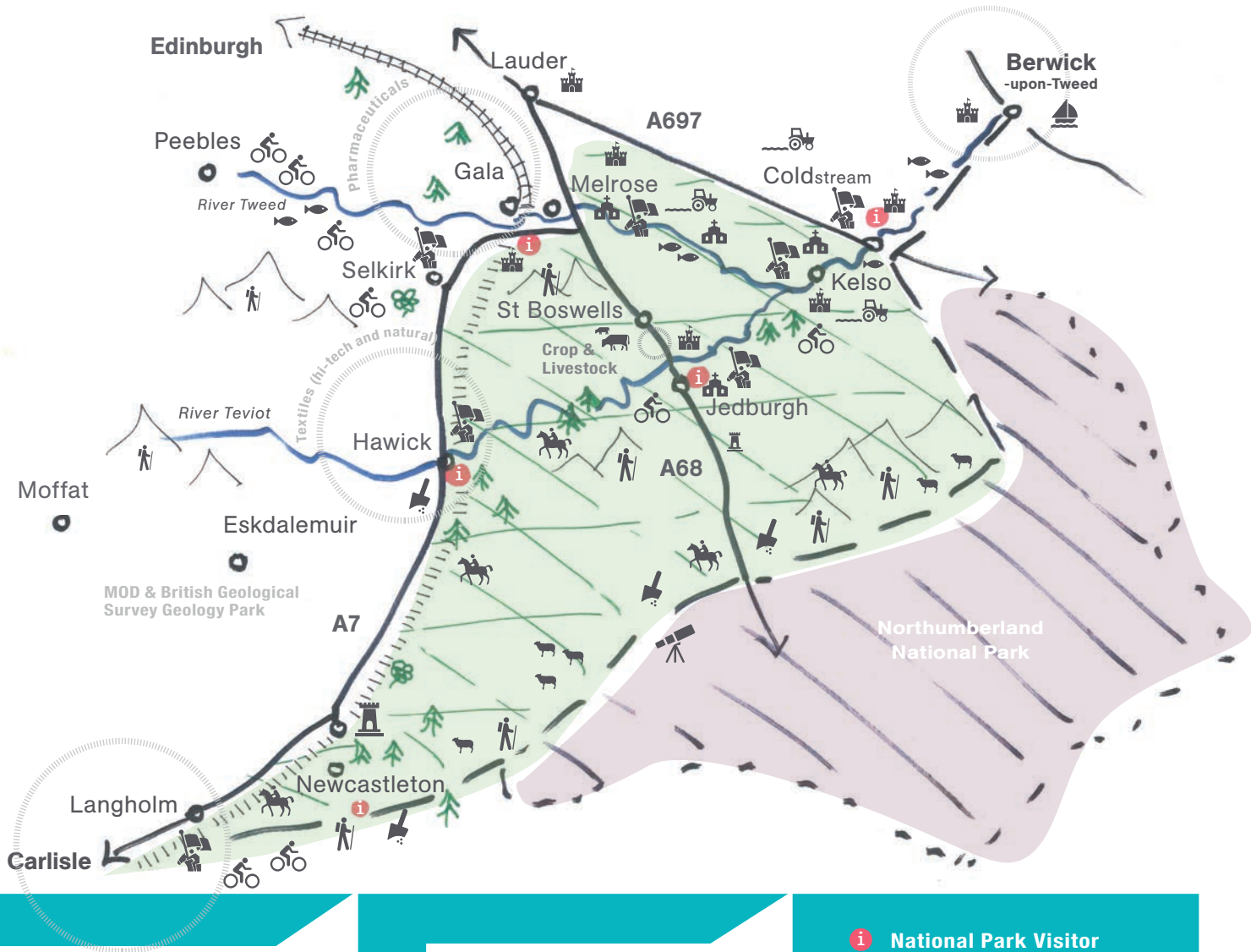
The success of the Digital Borderlands course has inspired a second 'live' course, the MA in Digital Design and Innovation, at Heriot-Watt. Like the 2021 pilot course, this has been designed to

teach students how to communicate predominately digital ideas, concepts and proposals with clarity, technical accuracy and skill. Students will be exploring how a new National Park, as key stakeholder, could use mobile immersive technologies more effectively and cheaply to bring the past to life at heritage sites as is already happening at more museums and heritage sites around the world.

The students will also be seeking to improve the amenity of the area for local people and visitors through the creation of a set of interpretative, immersive, and accessible tools to bring alive the area's stories and legends as well as maps, apps, games, and informative material that will enrich visitors' experience.



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Where would the SBNP be?

The Scottish Borders National Park would be centred on the old County of Roxburghshire but could be extended to the Berwickshire coast, and to take in the Ettrick & Yarrow Valley, if there is local demand.

Ever since land was set aside in Main Ridge Reserve of Tobago in 1776 the need to protect, admire, conserve, and learn from the landscape has been interpreted in a multitude of ways. As more and more regions became protected the idea of what constituted a national park further expanded to include the cliff-hugging coastal community of Cinque Terre in Italy, and the rolling hills of England's densely populated, intensively farmed South Downs. Today national parks reflect a diverse collective of human and natural connections retaining a sense of place, belonging, and a unique interpretation of how people value, need and use these protected but constantly evolving landscapes.

What would the National Park Authority do?

- ✔ Marketing & Information
- ✔ Conservation
- ✔ Paths & Visitor Infrastructure
- ✔ Policing & Monitoring
- ✔ Education, Skills & Training
- ✔ Job Creation
(Paid & Volunteer)
- ✔ Planning
No planning authority - SBC already has a Planning Department
- ✔ Land Use Policy
This is a Scottish Government responsibility.

- i** National Park Visitor Centres - potential to share with existing facilities
- o** Enterprise Zone
- 🐎** Riding
- 🐟** Fishing
- ⚓** Harbour
- 🚲** Cycling
- 🚜** Agriculture
- 🏰** Castle
- 🏰** Stately Home
- 🏰** Abbey
- 🐎** Common Riding
- 🚶** Hill Walking
- 📡** Dark Skies
- 🔍** Archaeology