



## Edinburgh U3A AGM June 2013

At the Annual General Meeting in June 2013, our Chair, Meryl Kempster, stood down after three years in the post. Edinburgh U3A is grateful to her for her dedication and outstanding contribution to the success of our organisation.



She is succeeded by Christine Hawkridge (elected unopposed as Chair). Liam McDowell now takes on the role of Vice Chair, in addition to his duties as Editor of the Clarion, and the committee welcomes Anne Hay, who becomes a Groups Coordinator. The remaining members of the committee continue in post for another year: Dianne Fraser (Treasurer), Sheila Smith (Secretary), Elisabeth Hutchings (Groups Coordinator), Evelyn McPake (Groups Coordinator), Ann Dewar (Groups Coordinator), Margaret Farish (Membership Secretary), Hilary Bruce (New Members Secretary), and Bruce Cowan (Technical Support Officer). Pictures of all the committee members can be found on Page 2.

The minutes of the 2012 AGM, the Annual Report and the Treasurer's Report were all accepted and, after many years work, the New Constitution was adopted.

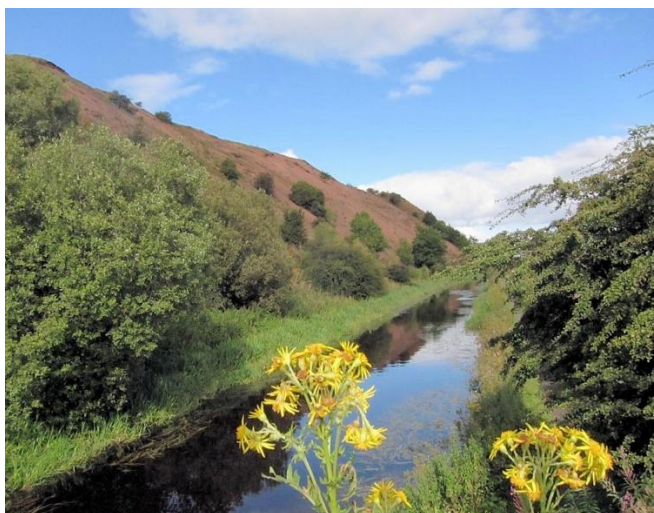
**Sheila Smith**

## FEATURE

## AMBITIONS TO BE REALISED

### Bang a Bing!

Bagging Munros a distant memory? Fortunately, if you belong to the *'If it looks like a hill, and it feels like a hill, then it's a hill'* school then there are numerous undemanding, and yet rewarding, summits within easy reach of Edinburgh.



Albyn Bing and Union Canal

West Lothian boasts over 19 bings and my ambition is to climb them all. Bings are post-industrial spoil heaps of burnt shale. In 1850 James 'Paraffin' Young invented the first-ever method of producing oil from rock and began the Lothian shale-oil industry. His process involved the retorting and distillation of naphtha, paraffin, oil, and wax. Petrochemical production peaked in 1913, but ceased in 1963 owing to competition from cheap oils from America and Saudi Arabia. Many of the then 27 bings (which contained more material than the pyramids of Egypt) have since disappeared, having been used for low-grade fill for the construction and road-building industries.

Of the 19 pure shale bings remaining, three are scheduled monuments, some have been turned into extensive community woodlands, one (Drumshoreland South) is a golf course,



## Bang a Bing! (Continued)

several contain recycling centres, and one (Niddry) has been excavated, its hollowed-out core destined to accommodate 3,500 new homes. The highest (Five Sisters) requires an ascent of 91m, the lowest (Addiewell) 9m. Both are well worth a visit.

Deans is the largest, covering 74ha, but is not particularly pleasant. Mid-Breach is the smallest at 4ha. Nevertheless, I managed to get lost in its woodlands. Oakbank is regarded, by ecologists, as having been particularly sensitively landscaped, seeded and replanted. Others have been allowed to naturally regenerate – their curious geological properties leading to varied and unusual developing plant communities. More than 350 plant species have been recorded, including locally and nationally rare flora.



Trial Bike Trails

Finding the true summit of the bings can often be more challenging than locating the top of a Munro. Many summits are extensive, gently undulating plateaus of grassland, devoid of cairns or markers.

## Unfulfilled Ambitions

Retirement brings a change of pace, and, for those of us whose professional life was governed by timetables, the opportunity to organise unlimited leisure time and convert erstwhile yearnings into achievable ambitions.

Ascents can be quite challenging, with red screes sloping upwards at angles of 35°, best climbed by ‘kicking in’ and plodding on up.



Greendykes Bing

If you like extensive views then Greendykes (the Ayres Rock look-alike), with its fabulous 360° panorama of the Highlands, Fife, Berwick Law, The Pentlands and Campsie Fells, is a must. The summit of East Whitfield (a mixed coal/shale bing) boasts an unofficial dog cemetery. Seafield, which has never been reclaimed, and instead used by the local council for tipping household refuse and sewage sludge, is actually rather pleasant – and one of my favourites.

As a final observation: if the bings sound attractive to you, then an excellent 40 page guide is Barbra Harvie’s study ‘Oil Shale Bings’ commissioned by West Lothian Council, available from their website at <http://tinyurl.com/kuqxmrv>

**Roy Thompson**

In 1998 the round of the Munros was an easy choice for me; it represented a testing but finite physical challenge which would take me to remote and beautiful places in my homeland. I started to tick them off: nearest hills on day trips first, then two- and three-day expeditions with several summits reached each time.