



Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

NEWSLETTER

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AUTUMN 2007

CATTLE GRAZING PROJECT SECURES LARGE GRANT

Left to its own devices the delicate limestone flora and the insect life that depends on it, would gradually be swamped by coarse grasses, which would in turn give way to gorse and brambles, then scrub, like hawthorn and blackthorn, then ash woodland and finally beech wood. All stages of this progression can be seen on Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common.

The grassy slopes of Leckhampton Hill, left after quarrying ceased in the early part of the last century, have long since been wooded. Even the 'golden crowns' of Deadman's Quarry and Upper Lime Kilns Quarry that catch the evening sun over Cheltenham are gradually being obscured by the trees below them and the 'Devil's Chimney' can no longer be seen from many vantage points.

The sweeping grassy curves of the Northern and Eastern slopes of Charlton Kings Common were beginning to go the same way.

Adjacent meadows, to the East of the Hill, owned by the Council, but tenanted to a farmer, have been put into 'set-aside' and gradually deteriorated. These fields used to be rich in limestone flowers, but moss has choked much of the grass and more delicate flowers. Low-grade scrub is gradually spreading from the verges, pushing the Cotswold's Way further and further into the field.

Similar deterioration has been avoided on Charlton Kings Common by the grazing regime introduced by FOLK, in co-operation with the Council and a local farmer – assisted to some extent by the fire on the Eastern slope

three years ago. Unfortunately, although the fire cleared a lot of gorse and bramble, it also killed a lot of the small wildlife, from Roman snails and small reptiles to nesting birds.

It is not practical to manage the steep scarp slope by mowing, so grazing is the only effective way of doing it. Grazing is also recognised by Natural England (formerly English Nature), who are responsible for monitoring the condition of SSSIs, as the most effective and sustainable way of maintaining limestone grassland.

However, even grazing involves a lot of hard work. Extensive grazing, allowing cattle and sheep free range over the entire site, would be easier, but many users, not least dog walkers and horse riders have always opposed this. It would also involve the permanent fencing of the Common Land – something that there has been a century of opposition to!

Consequently FOLK has supported an 'intensive' grazing scheme. This doesn't mean that the site is grazed any more heavily, merely that a series of temporary paddocks is used, rather than allowing livestock to roam 'extensively' over the whole site.

'Intensive' grazing is much more labour-intensive. It involves the erection and dismantling of temporary electric fencing around each paddock, often working on steep ground and driving posts into rocky ground. This has also been repeatedly sabotaged by wanton vandalism, or by opponents of the grazing regime!

It also involves supplementary feeding and watering. The latter has been done using

Contents:

FRONT PAGE - Cattle Grazing Project Secures Grant PAGE 2 – AGM PAGE 3 – Work Party Report
Spring/Summer PAGE 4 – Spring Bird Song/BBC Radio 4 Visit

bowsers and water troughs. Even the bowsers have occasionally been targeted by vandals puncturing them with knives. In winter it is often difficult to get the full bowsers out to the paddocks, even along the foot of the scarp slopes.

Now, working with Cheltenham Borough Council and a neighbouring farmer, with the support of the Cotswold AONB, FOLK has helped to secure a Heritage Lottery Funding grant to pay for a mains water supply that will feed up to eight water points.

This is the largest ever grant that has been secured to support management of the S.S.S.I.

on Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common.

Severn Trent was unable to confirm that there was sufficient water pressure in the mains on Daisybank Road, so the supply is being brought in from the Severn Springs end, via Hartley Farm.

Work has already started on the supply to the farm and should extend onto the East end of the Common in October. The supply will come down from the top of the Hill, along 'The Gallops' at the foot of the Eastern escarpment, to Five Ways and along the unmade section of Daisybank Road at the foot of the Northern escarpment
Julius Marstrand – FOLK Executive

Your Executive Committee Members are:-

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Co-opted Vic Ellis
CBC Ex Officio

Articles for the newsletter can be sent to the Editor, Annette North, Shackleton, Daisybank Road, Charlton Kings Common, CHELTENHAM, GL53 9QQ or email anorth@leckhampton.fsnet.co.uk

**The Eighth Annual General Meeting of FOLK
will be held at Leckhampton Primary School
At 7pm on Wednesday 14th November 2007**

Followed by an illustrated talk on
**THE HISTORY, LANDSCAPE AND PEOPLE OF
LECKHAMPTON HILL.**

By Eric Miller, Local Historian

ALL WELCOME

The views expressed in the articles are of those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of FOLK or its Executive Committee

FOLK Work Party Report, Spring/Summer 2007

Because of the mild winter and early warm spring, only one work party had to be cancelled due to bad weather. The final winter task was to make a start on coppicing some of the woodland area at the southeast end of Charlton King's Common. This had been coppiced many years ago and will need further work in the coming years to encourage an improved mix of habitat.

There has been a pleasing increase in the number of helpers on the Sunday work parties over the past months, with an average turn out of fifteen FOLK members. Our Thursday meets have continued to attract a regular band of six or seven members. For those of you who like a few statistics, the last twelve months have seen a total of 499 man-hours of work on the hill. The majority of those hours, 438, were involved with the cattle-grazing project. This includes scrub clearance, ragwort pulling and litter picking from the areas to be grazed, and the most time consuming task of all, re-positioning the fencing around the grazing paddocks. These figures do not include the many hours put in by the North family in looking after the cattle on a daily basis.

The man-hours involved in work parties can be counted as match funding for grants at £10 per hour, which can be used towards future projects on the hill. So remember, next time you are toiling for three hours on the hill, you could be attracting £30 towards funding for future projects. Other tasks receiving our attention included a short section of hedge laying, and fence and gate repairs.

On one of our recent work parties we were concerned that French might be the order of the day when we were joined by two French engineering students, Sebastian and Dan, from Cheltenham's twin town, Annecy. Fortunately we didn't have to scratch our heads to translate "ragwort pulling" as they were encouraged to speak only English. It was an opportunity to save our legs and let the youngsters run up and down the slopes.

There have been several reports of camping on the hill in recent weeks. Some of the sites have been deserted but the campers have left behind tents, camping equipment and even personal clothing, together with a mess of litter that has all had to be cleared up and removed from the hill. It is very difficult to police this illegal camping; more notices are being prepared but will probably have little effect. If any members come across camping on the hill would you please report its location to Cheltenham Borough Council on 01242 774511, or any FOLK committee member.

In May the 102 mile walking route of the Cotswold Way became a National Trail, adding to the existing 2,500 miles of National Walking Trails. There will be some minor adjustments to its alignment on Leckhampton Hill, which have been discussed with FOLK. The guidebooks and maps will be updated in due course, but all alterations will be signposted on the ground.

We have decided to run a second mid-week work party during the months of October to March. As you will see from the above figures, a very high percentage of our current work parties involves helping with the grazing project. This is an important aspect of the grassland conservation but leaves us little time to tackle other important tasks. We hope that the additional Tuesday morning work parties, listed in the schedule below, will attract more helpers. Do come and join us: you know you're worth £10 an hour!

Dates of Future Work Parties

Midweek Work Parties

Thursday 8 November 2007
Tuesday 20 November 2007
Thursday 13 December 2007
Tuesday 18 December 2007
Thursday 10 January 2008
Tuesday 15 January 2008
Thursday 14 February 2008
Tuesday 19 February 2008

Weekend Work Parties

Sunday 28 October 2007

Sunday 25 November 2007

No Sunday W/P in December

Sunday 27 January 2008

Sunday 24 February 2008

Meet at Tramway Cottage Car Park, Daisybank Road at 9.30am. We provide the tools but wear stout footwear and bring your own gloves. If you require any further information please contact me on 01242 233116. We'll look forward to seeing you there.

Allan Wood

WALK FOR BIRD SONG 2007

The Walk for Bird Song was arranged for 12th May 2007. Unfortunately the weather was un-obliging with leaden sky and threatening dark cloud. A steady drizzle began at 9.15 but despite this a party of 8 stalwarts began the walk at 9.30, led by Tony & Francis Meredith.

The group included one ex-pat from the USA with his American fiancée and a keen bird-watcher who had driven over from Chipping Campden and though we were a small group the interest and enthusiasm was evident from the outset. This was just as well as the birds themselves were, in the early part of the walk, taking cover from the rain. Despite this there were sufficient short songs and contact calls to identify the sheltering species.

Fortunately the weather improved after half-an-hour and we began to enjoy the walk along Daisybank and up towards Windass Hill, before descending to the Gallops. A total of 28 species were seen and/or heard, which was 6 fewer than last year but the poor weather was obviously a major factor. Four RED-listed species were observed (BULLFINCH, LINNET, MARSH TIT, SONG THRUSH) and Six AMBER-listed (GREEN WOODPECKER, HOUSE MARTIN, STOCK DOVE, SWALLOW, TREE PIPIT, WILLOW WARBLER).

SUMMARY

WARBLERS	BLACKCAP, CHIFFCHAFF, WHITETHROAT, WILLOW WARBLER
FINCHES	BULLFINCH, CHAFFINCH, GREENFINCH, LINNET
THRUSHES	BLACKBIRD, ROBIN, SONG THRUSH
TITS	BLUE TIT, LONG-TAILED TIT, MARSH TIT
CORVIDS	CARRION CROW, JACKDAW, JAY, MAGPIE
PIGEONS	STOCK DOVE, WOOD PIGEON
OTHER SPECIES	BUZZARD, DUNNOCK, GREEN WOODPECKER, HOUSE MARTIN, PHEASANT, SWALLOW, TREE PIPIT, WREN

Tony Meredith

BBC Radio 4's visit to the Hill

The 'Open Country' programme on Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common was broadcast at 06:10 on Saturday 14 July. Unfortunately I wasn't given enough notice to alert everyone, but some of you apparently did hear it.

Richard Uridge was in Cheltenham, where he learnt about a mass trespass that predated the famous right to roam protest of Kinder Scout.

In 1902 & 1906, around 2,000 residents from the Cheltenham area invaded Leckhampton Hill. Their grievance? The local quarry owner's decision to close down access to the hill for recreation. This history, unknown to many, was explained to Richard by Julius Marstrand, former chairman of FOLK.

People, industry and bird life, have all had to learn to share the hill. Richard walked with geologist Dave Owens from the Gloucestershire Geological Trust, who took him on a trip back in time millions of years to explain how the limestone got to the area. Industrial archaeologist Dr. Ray Wilson gave the real reason behind the area's most visible monument -- a tower of rock called the Devil's Chimney. Finally, Richard listened to the songs of the numerous birds who make the hill and nearby Charlton Kings Common their home and even got a chance to glimpse the elusive yellowhammer.

THE CHELTENHAM AND COUNTY CYCLING CLUB HAS DONATED £250 TO FOLK. IT IS HOPED THAT THIS MONEY WILL BE USED FOR A FUTURE MATCH FUNDING PROJECT.

Newsletter sponsored by the
Parish Councils of Charlton Kings, Leckhampton with Warden Hill, and
Shurdington