



Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

NEWSLETTER

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SPRING 2010

Join us for the Cotswold Wildflower Week Walk on 15 June

On Tuesday 15 June 2010 we have arranged for 2 wildflower experts to lead a walk around the top of the hill, to show us and identify both the common and specialist plants growing there, which the current management regime is trying to promote. Come and learn more about the unusual flora on this important site. Meet in Brownstones Quarry car park (grid ref SO 950179) at 6.45pm for a prompt 7.00 start. If you are unable to join us, check out the Cotswolds AONB website at <http://www.cotswolds-aonb.org.uk/events> for details of other walks taking place in the local area.

Historic Dry Stone Walling Project...

Dry stone walls are one of the most characteristic features of the Cotswolds. They were used to mark the boundaries of estates and around fields to keep livestock in. In the days when most of the population couldn't read notices, they were also used to mark the boundaries of Gloucestershire's Common Lands.

The wall around Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common is about 4.5km long. Most of it has fallen into disrepair and in many places there is very little of it left and what does remain is gradually crumbling away.

Whilst there has always been a desire to restore the historic boundary walls, the cost of stone and skilled labour is such that it never seemed to be a very realistic objective. Every metre of dry stone wall takes at least one tonne of stone, for a 1.2m high section of wall. Cotswold stone costs between £60 and £100 per tonne, or typically about £90 per tonne.

Cotswolds AONB training courses have been used to restore a small section of the historic wall to the East of the Iron Age Fort, but it would take many decades to restore a significant proportion of the wall using nothing but training courses.

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Land Stewardship

The site currently receives funds under the Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) scheme, and a Single Farm Payment which is shared with the grazier. Natural England regards grazing as the most cost effective and sustainable method for maintaining limestone grassland, particularly on a steeply sloping site, like the scarp slope of the Cotswold Hills, which cannot be mown. The only other viable alternative is burning.

The funding has been used to subsidise the current grazing regime, using temporary electric paddocks. This regime is gradually improving the quality of the 'unimproved limestone grassland' on Charlton Kings Common, but it is very labour intensive.

CBC and FOLK want to apply for Higher Level Stewardship (HLS), which will release more DEFRA funding, but to qualify for this Natural England wants a more sustainable grazing regime to be adopted. This involves restoring parts of the boundary of Charlton Kings Common.

European funding

A small proportion of the money levied by the European Union is invested in environmental projects. Natural England administers some of this money on behalf of the EU, but if they don't spend it, the money has to be returned to Europe and would then be spent on environmental projects elsewhere in Europe – it would not be available to pay for other public services in Britain.

In the autumn it was recognised that some of this money was available and could be used to restore part of the dry stone wall around Charlton Kings Common. A European grant of up to 80% of the value of the project can be obtained. The remaining 20% can be found from a combination of grants from other sources and 'work in kind'. This means that every £1000 of grant funding or work-in-kind releases another £4000 of the European grant, so in effect every £1000 is worth £5000 to the project.

The cost of the project is around £¼m and the total value of the project, including the value of training that will be delivered as part of the project, is closer to £800k. Of this European funding will meet £618k of the cost.

Cheltenham Borough Council, who own the site, will contribute about 1% of the cost, the Cotswold Way National Trail slightly less, Gloucestershire Environmental Trust, using money provided by Cory Environmental, has offered slightly more as a grant to FOLK. We are now seeking grant funding and individual donations to make up the balance of the 20% and release the remainder of the European funding.

You can make a donation at: <http://www.fwag.org.uk/pledge/leckhampton.htm>

The benefits of the project:

- 1.3km of dry stone wall will be restored, along the prominent scarp slope of the Cotswolds Hills, immediately adjacent to the Cotswolds Way National Trail.
- The wall will form part of a sustainable grazing enclosure that will allow the site to be raised from ELS to HLS status, which will increase grant funding available for managing the site.
- Although the condition of the site has improved over the last ten years, arresting many years of decline, the S.S.S.I. is currently still in 'unfavourable condition'. The intention is to raise it to 'unfavourable recovering condition' and ultimately restore it to 'favourable condition'.

- Between ten and twenty, or perhaps more, dry stone wallers will be trained and have their dry stone walling skill levels raised from Level 0, or Level 1 to Level 2. Applications are already being received from prospective trainees.
- Around 2,320 tonnes of Cotswold stone will be procured from local quarries, creating further local work.
- All the cash will be spent locally, injecting money into the local economy.
- Stone removed from the remains of the existing wall, estimated to be up to 1,000 tonnes, will be re-used in the new wall where possible, or crushed up to repair the surfaces of the very well used car parks and access tracks to the site.

Walling project underway...

It was hoped that work on the wall would start before Christmas, then in January – although, in view of the weather it is probably good that it didn't start then. Clearance of scrub along the line of the wall did begin, but finally, after several months of negotiations and frustration, substantive work on the project started on 25th February. This involves clearing more scrub and dismantling what remains of the existing dry stone wall.

Unfortunately, this does involve some disruption and inconvenience on site - In particular along the route through Hill Farm to get stone and plant onto the site. The contractors are doing their best to minimise the impact and clear the mess they inevitably create as they proceed, but some inconvenience is inevitable. We can only apologise for the mess that has been created and ask for forbearance until the wall is completed.

The new wall will be between 1.2m and 4m high in places, where the land requires it. It will extend 1.3km from the Eastern end of Charlton Kings Common, along the Cotswolds Way National Trail, to the point where Charlton Kings Common meets Leckhampton Hill. It will be one of the largest conservation projects of its kind in the country.

Julius Marstrand



Since these pictures were taken in early March, considerable progress has been made and a good proportion of the section between the boundary with Leckhampton Hill (from the footpath entrance from Brownstones Quarry) towards the path to Hartley Farm has been completed. Obviously, it all looks rather stark and new at present but should weather gracefully, at the same time providing habitat for all sorts of wildlife. My thanks to Wayne Sedgwick from CBC for the pictures. Ed.

FOLK Work Party Report, Winter 2009/10

This report covers the period from November 2009 to February 2010. The poor weather over this time resulted in the cancellation of three work parties, due to either snow, ice or heavy rain making conditions underfoot very dangerous. Looking back on previous years, this has been the worst disruption since work parties began in 2000. However, despite these problems, 1015 man-hours were worked which is about average over the years. We have also had a considerable number of hours support from Cheltenham Borough Council workers and of course those spent by the graziers managing the cattle. These hours are not recorded by FOLK.

During November we concentrated on moving the grazing paddocks. Since then, the poor grazing on the hill has resulted in the cattle being taken off the hill and moved to the North's fields or to Daisybank fields, where they will remain until the hill grazing is available in the spring. In recent weeks our work parties have been clearing a strip of scrub along the site of the walling project above Charlton Kings Common. These hours will contribute to match funding towards the cost of this project. The work is not quite on a par with building Hadrian's Wall but conditions at times have given us a taste of what it might have been like. Let's look forward to the spring and some warmth and sunshine for our hardworking work party members.

Dates of Future Work Parties

Midweek Work Parties

Thursday 8th April 2010

Tuesday 20th April 2010

Thursday 13th May 2010

Tuesday 18th May 2010

Thursday 10th June 2010

Tuesday 15th June 2010

Thursday 8th July 2010

Tuesday 20th July 2010

Thursday 12th August 2010

Tuesday 17th August 2010

Thursday 9th September 2010

Tuesday 21st September 2010

Weekend Work Parties

Sunday 25th April 2010

Sunday 23rd May 2010

Sunday 27th June 2010

Sunday 25th July 2010

Sunday 22nd August 2010

Sunday 26th September 2010

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'd love to see a few "new faces" to join the "old ones"!

Allan Wood

Community Service Work Party

Work to repair the steps leading from Daisybank Road up towards the "lonesome pine" has been started. We are grateful to a Community Service group for undertaking this task in less than ideal conditions during some of the worst winter weather in recent years. As soon as some crushed stone becomes available from the old boundary wall, further work on this route will be done. If you notice any other routes/paths that need attention please contact Allan Wood (work party coordinator) or any other committee member so that they can be surveyed and repaired during the summer months.

Now you see it.....



Views to the Devils Chimney from the path below have been restored following clearance work undertaken by CBC and contractors. The iconic pillar of stone standing alone against the skyline, which for so many years was shrouded and surrounded by vegetation, is now visible again. If you have not used the path running from Salterley Quarry to Limekilns Quarry (around the western and northern boundary of Leckhampton Hill) since the New Year, it is well worth a detour so check it out!



Pictures courtesy of Guy Meredith.

New blood on the Executive Committee

We would like to extend a warm welcome to Dr John Harvey, who has agreed to be co-opted on to the committee. He has extensive knowledge and experience relating to plant ecology, nature conservation and natural history, and we look forward to working with him. More volunteers would still be welcomed, so please do not be shy in coming forward to offer your services, especially if you have strong feelings about the current and/or proposed future management of the site.

Continued support from Parish Councils

We would once again like to thank Leckhampton with Warden Hill as well as Shurdington Parish Councils for their continued and generous sponsorship, which is greatly appreciated, especially given the current financial climate. As a result the whole of the cost of producing and distributing this newsletter for and to the FOLK membership in 2010 will be covered.

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

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CBC Ex Officio

Articles for the newsletter can be sent to the Temporary Editor, Serena Meredith
(details above)