



Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

NEWSLETTER

Free to members; non-members 25p

Issue 41 Spring
2013

Welcome to the 2013 Spring FOLK newsletter.

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The Dexter Project, recent arrivals

When the extensive grazing started in April 2012, the mood was very upbeat. The Dexter cows seemed to enjoy their new found 'freedom'. Of course there were a few hiccups to start with, such as people sometimes failing to latch gates securely and even deliberately blocking them open. We are pleased to report that such practices have abated! The latest problem regarding security has been with vehicles smashing through gates late at night.



Mo, Crumble, Guy and Jessica in the snow

One really downbeat moment for us was when one of the cows was an 'inconclusive' reactor following a routine TB test in May. In our 30 odd years of keeping cattle we had never had a reactor. Veterinary opinions vary on TB control but several vets have expressed the thought that electric fencing can assist. Having just changed to

extensive grazing it did provide food for thought. The cow that was taken had been born on the hill and the whole experience was very upsetting. Our six-month check test comes around again in March.

On a lighter note, we had four calves born in the autumn. The first was a bull out of Dotty which we have called 'Mo'. The second was a heifer out of Plum, which has been named 'Crumble'. The third was a bull out of Swan, born on November 5th, aptly named 'Guy' and lastly, a heifer was born to Red Fleur which has been called 'Jessica'. Many thanks to those people who came up with name suggestions. The next 'round' should be in October, when we hope to have up to six new born calves. Again suggestions most welcome.

And finally, you will have the opportunity to keep your 'food miles' to a minimum as we hope to have a limited supply of Dexter beef available later in the year. Anyone interest should contact Anne North on 01242 4225767.

Anne North, Grazier and FOLK member

The Word from Wayne, Wayne Sedgwick Senior Community Ranger, Cheltenham Borough Council.

A current concern is the spate of **damage to the boundary fence** of the grazing area. As well as damage to the gate at the end of the "gallops",

which has had to be replaced, there have been cases of the top wire rails on the boundary with the golf course being cut. This creates a gap for people to gain access to the hill without using the legitimate gates and stiles but it also allows the cattle to move off the Hill. If anybody sees this happening or spots vehicles where they shouldn't be please contact Wayne on, 01242 250019 or speak to the police.



Replacement gate at the end of the Gallops

We are now coming to the end of year 2 of the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) scheme and after 9 months, **the grazing project** has been a real success. Having got the Hill and Common enclosed, we look forward this year, to a full year of grazing and seeing its effects on the flora and fauna.

Wayne and John Harvey have spoken with a number of Wildlife Trusts from Shropshire to Devon to find out how **controlled burning** can be used to maintain the grassland in areas where conventional management techniques are difficult. Discussions reveal it to be a specialist area. If the council plan to follow this line they may need to involve experienced people.

Restoration work is being carried out by John Paul North, contracted by the Council, at the **eastern end of the Hill towards Hartley lane** where the SSSI's "favourable condition" status is slowly deteriorating (The classification being set by Natural England). A major cut has been carried out to address this and some controlled burning may be required if authorised. This work is supported

by the HLS funding. The area has not been touched for 10 years or more. In addition work will be done to maintain parts of the SSSI in this area which are officially in "favourable condition" but without this work they will also start to deteriorate.

Hemp Agrimony is a continuing problem and will be high on the agenda for control this year. It has been spreading in recent years. Although it is a native itself, it has limited value as food for the cattle and it threatens to out-compete the more sensitive plants in the SSSI.

Concern is growing over the condition of the **Lime kilns and associated industrial archaeology** on the Hill. These features are not listed as ancient monuments. The structural condition of the kilns needs to be established before restoration work can be planned. Advice has been sought from specialist historic building experts. Ecologists will need to be involved as well, because Natural England may have to license any work that could affect protected species living in the old quarries. This work will be expensive. The initial survey to decide what needs to be done may cost several thousands of pounds. Limited funds are available and a recent bid for grant funding was unsuccessful. Action must be taken soon if we are not to lose these important buildings. Further sources of funding are being actively investigated.



Snow covered Lime Kilns

There is a plan, with funding to place **interpretation boards at appropriate places near the Iron Age fort**. This will be done in partnership

with the Cotswold Wardens and will complement the excellent work done by them to carry out remedial work in that much visited part of the Hill.

An options appraisal is being carried out by Cheltenham Borough on the unused **Hill Farm buildings**. The council are keen to dispose of the site for suitable use.



View from the top of the Hill

Ash die back disease is a pressing concern. The Council's Trees Officer is working with the Forestry Commission and Woodland Trust to prepare for the possible impact on the Ash trees in the Borough area including the Hill.

Leckhampton Hill Fort a postscript from the Cotswold Wardens

Over a four month period, from September 2012 to January 2013, the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens of Central District undertook the clearance of the ramparts and ditches of the Iron Age Hill Fort at Leckhampton Hill. Leckhampton is one of three escarpment hill forts the wardens have cleared in the past year. Some 500 manhours were expended at Leckhampton. The shape and extent of the hill fort is now fully visible, probably for the first time in several decades. The Wardens will be keeping the hill fort clear over the coming years. It is hoped that an Interpretation Board will shortly be erected on site, part-funded by the Wardens.

David Burwell, Cotswold Warden

Measuring Change in our Species-rich Grassland the role of butterflies

Last year, John Harvey, retired University Lecturer, wrote of the need to monitor changes to the fauna and flora in order to ensure that the management applied to the site was improving rather than degrading the habitat. To this end, a botanical survey was set up to record the frequency of a small number of plant species over a number of years. I would now like to see the survey work extended to record butterflies. These are considered to be good indicators, in that certain species will only be present if the habitat is suitable, with the advantage, under good weather conditions, of being active (and therefore visible) and relatively easy to identify on the wing.

A transect walk is the ideal method: a fixed route is walked once in every 7 days between April and September under ideal weather conditions, and a count is made of the individuals of each species seen within a set distance either side of the route. Given the large area covered by the 2 Commons, and the nature of the terrain, between 3 and 6 separate transects would be needed to cover the most suitable butterfly habitat.

An alternative would be single species monitoring. Whilst this must follow the standard transect methodology of following a fixed route, the focus is on recording only a single (or a small number of) species (such as Duke of Burgundy, Small Blue, Chalkhill Blue and Grizzled Skipper) rather than every species. This reduces both the time required to walk each transect and, more significantly, the number of weekly counts, as most species are only on the wing for about 4 - 6 weeks.

As a last resort, simple recording of species present at fortnightly intervals between early May and early September would help give indications of what, where and when butterflies are present, and guide future management work to optimise areas suitable for colony expansion.

This will only be possible if there are enough people prepared to go out on to the Common and the Hill to collect the necessary data. What will be expected of the volunteers? The key requirements are:-

- Prepared to spend approximately 2 hours on 1 day a month (though preferably more) on the Commons at least 3 times (though preferably more) between April and September
- Know, or willing to learn, how to identify the butterfly species present (training will be given and identification guides will be made available)
- Completion of either the paper based recording form or the computer based transect walker format which can be downloaded from the internet
- Not averse to working in an area in which there are cows (though it will also be possible to work in other areas such as Brownstone Quarry and Leckhampton Hill)



Duke of Burgundy butterfly

If you would like to help with this survey work, please get in touch with me to register your interest. I would hope to be able to pair up surveyors so that they can take it in turns to do their surveys, and provide mutual cover for holidays/other activities. Once I know the number of volunteers, the frequency of their commitment, and preferences as to the areas to be walked, I can decide which of the 3 types of survey would be the most appropriate to undertake.

Initially, please *get in touch by email with 'FOLK Butterfly Survey' in the subject line to gmeredith308@btinternet.com or phone 01242 524138 (leaving a message giving your name and phone number) after 12th March 2013, and I will get back to you.*

Serena Meredith, FOLK member

Braving the winter conditions by pedal on the hill.

You would think that after a whole summer of wet weather and muddy cycling conditions, the mountain bikers who regularly ride across the hill and common would be used to it come the winter. Well the hardy just get on with it no matter what Mother Nature throws at them, while others ride less and prefer dreaming of dry dusty summer trails (I've forgotten what these actually look like!!)

It is not a bad thing that cycling slackens off in the worst ground conditions. The rocky tracks we ride on top of the hill will stand up to winter riding but the woodland downhill tracks can suffer quite a bit. When the tyres of a bike slip around on the corners of our purpose built routes, wear is much quicker, creating more work in the spring to repair them. As for the dirt jumps in Daisybank Fields, well in the winter just forget it!! These jumps can only be used when the mud has dried out. In the spring and summer the site can go from sodden to rideable within a matter of days. In the winter there is rarely enough time for it to start to dry out before the next band of rain arrives.

However, around this time of year we do start to get the site ready for the spring by reshaping jumps, modifying the take-off and landing ramps and trying to make the drainage better on the jump lines so puddles don't form where we want to ride. Once the mud has started to dry out, it can be very hard to dig, so now is a good time to put in this extra effort. Very rewarding come a (dry..) summers day.

Other options for cyclists at this time of year include using the new Verderer's Trail in the Forest of Dean, which is an all-weather armoured trail

(covered in imported rock). Cleeve Common is a good option for us as the site usually drains very well. On that note we are still in discussions with the Board which manages the common and we aim to agree a 'code of conduct' for cycling with them this spring. Then it may be a simple matter of getting out on the bike, some of us will ride road routes to at least keep up our fitness ready for the better conditions.

Mountain bikers of all ages are so like children when the snow comes. It really does get us out there and this January was no exception. After a ride around Cleeve Common one weekend we headed over Leckhampton Hill the next and found much more snow there!! A photo here of the group that ventured there....



Mountain bikers enjoy the recent snow

Roger Smith, Cheltenham Cycling Club and FOLK member

Work Party Report, Spring 2013

We have had a very busy autumn, working to a programme of scrub clearance planned by the FOLK management sub-committee. Good progress has been made on conservation of the grassland. The intensive grazing of the cattle across all of Charlton Kings Common introduced in April 2012 means FOLK work parties have not had to put up temporary paddocks. We therefore have been able to concentrate on conservation projects. We have also been able to complete some footpath repairs. More improvements to paths are planned in 2013.

Volunteer numbers have been good over the year and FOLK work parties have contributed approximately 1000 working hours on Charlton Kings Common and Leckhampton Hill.

If you think there are areas on the hill that need attention please let us know. We will always try to act on suggestions that fit into the management plans for the hill and our works programme

In partnership with a contractor and the Community Service Team we have cleared a large area of gorse at the top of Charlton Kings Common adjacent to the Cotswold Way. The purpose of this project is to re-establish an area of grassland which had become overgrown with gorse. This work is part of the approved Grassland Management Plan for the hill. We have also worked in support of the Cotswold Wardens who have had a number of work parties clearing the ramparts of the Iron Age Fort of weed growth and shrub. The FOLK work party mowed and cleared the Barrow and also cleared and burnt cut shrub.

As part of the Grassland Management plan, we have been looking at the best way we can manage the grassland on Leckhampton Hill (areas that are not grazed by the cattle). See '**The Word from Wayne**' for more details. We are also planning to cut areas of grass and remove the cuttings on an area above Salterley Quarry, this will prevent thatching and encourage the wild flower area and ensure we keep the SSSI in a favourable condition.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank a number of members and other walkers on the hill that on their own initiative clear litter from the hill. This activity, by these 'unsung heroes' helps considerably in maintaining the hill for the pleasure of all users. If you clear litter it can be left by the red bins in the car parks to be collected by Cheltenham Borough Council. If there is an area of litter or fly-tipping that you think requires attention please let us know.



Devil's Chimney in a winter landscape

FOLK work parties are on the 2nd Thursday the 3rd Tuesday and the 4th Sunday of each month dates for the next 6 months are printed below. You are always welcome to join us on one of our work parties, Tools are provided by FOLK and we start at 9.30, working for approximately 3hrs. For your own safety please wear stout footwear and tough gardening gloves. We meet at Tramway Cottage Car Park Daisy Bank Road at 9.30am.

For Further information Contact Mike (01242 238790) or Geoff (01242 244165)

Mike Donnelly FOLK Work Party Coordinator

Work parties for 2012/2013

March 2013	Thursday 14 th	Tuesday 19 th	Sunday 24 th
April 2013	Thursday 11 th	Tuesday 16 th	Sunday 28 th
May 2013	Thursday 9 th	Tuesday 21 st	Sunday 26 th
June 2013	Thursday 13 th	Tuesday 18 th	Sunday 23 rd
July 2013	Thursday 11 th	Tuesday 16 th	Sunday 28 th
August 2013	Thursday 8 th	Tuesday 20 th	Sunday 25 th

FOLKtalk

Apologies and corrections

The last edition of the Newsletter included an excellent aerial picture of the Iron Age site. Unfortunately this picture was not attributed, so apologies are extended to Hamish Fenton who took the picture using a novel kite aerial camera he has developed. If you would like to find out more about Hamish's pictures he can be contacted at 2.hamish.fenton@photo.hdf.me.uk

Also in the last newsletter there was reference to a Roman burial ground in the area of the Iron Age ramparts. It has been pointed out that there is no

evidence of Roman remains in this area so apologies again for the inaccurate reporting.

Round up of the AGM

A lively audience of 40 members attended the 2012 AGM at Leckhampton Primary School on a November 14th evening. To start proceedings, the Chairman gave an upbeat account of the progress on the **grazing project**, which has seen the cattle adapt well to their new extensive grazing. Work parties have continued to do sterling work in helping the Hill regain its limestone grassland status.

A **reduction in income resulting from a trend of declining membership** was reported by the Treasurer but the continued support of our Parish Councils and generous donors was noted. Members agreed to an increase in annual subscriptions, the first since FOLK was founded. Most of our funds are taken up by the costs of insurance for the work parties. More members are needed to ensure the future viability of our organisation.

Increasing concern is being expressed about the **deterioration in the industrial archaeology** in the limestone quarries. We need to get on with preserving our heritage in this area.

The meeting was rounded off with an informative and entertaining account by Malcolm Watts, describing the **grassland management work of the Cotswold Conservation Board**.

Life membership was awarded to Lloyd Surgenor and Tony Clifford for their unstinting and long service to FOLK, long may they enjoy it.

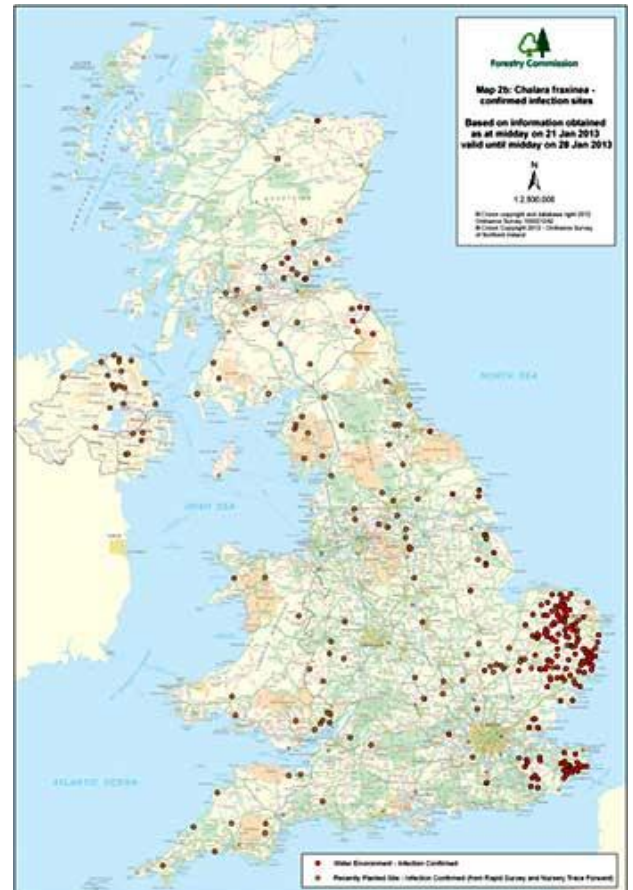
Ash Die Back

Chalara fraxinea. A Latin name striking fear into the hearts of foresters, landowners and lovers of the countryside alike. Ash Die-Back disease is stalking the many ash trees on Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings common.

Natural England recently notified Cheltenham Borough Council about the disease and detailed their responsibilities for dealing with the disease in the SSSI. They have offered guidance and support.

The Forestry Commission are recording and reporting on the incidence of infected trees, in the UK. A map, dated January 21st 2013, on their website shows Gloucestershire to be disease free but there are affected sites on the Monmouthshire side of the Wye and near Bristol. These are uncomfortably close. This spring will reveal whether we are still in the clear.

Cheltenham Borough Council's Trees Officer is actively pursuing the problem with the Forestry Commission and the Woodland Trust to locate any disease in our ash trees and deal with it effectively. Let's keep our collective fingers crossed.



Map of UK showing distribution of Ash Die back outbreaks in early 2013

Parish Council support

Our Treasurer, Geoff Holt, wishes to record the thanks of FOLK to the Charlton Kings, Leckhampton and Warden Hill and Shurdington Parish Councils for the continuing financial support of our work on the Hill and Common.

About FOLK

FOLK is an organisation set up to work with landowners, to promote the conservation and management of the ecology, geology and archaeology of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common. We support sustainable recreational and agricultural use of the land.

We welcome new members to support and help us in this important work. If you wish to join (either as an individual or as a family) please contact any of the people listed below. Annual membership is £6 per year for an individual or £9 for a family.

If you have any comments on the Newsletter or would like to contribute an article to the next edition later in 2013 please contact Peter Whalley on 01242 517024 or email to: whalley-p@o2.co.uk Articles of around 500 words plus a photo at any time but by mid-June at the latest, would be most welcome

Contact FOLK

Anne North, Membership and Grazier: 01242 522767 Mike Donnelly, Working Parties: 01242 238790

Julius Marstrand, Chairman: 07717 326610 folk@marstrand.co.uk Geoff Holt, Treasurer: 01242 244165

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