



Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

NEWSLETTER

www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk

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WINTER 2004

CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS

Introduction

FOLK's Chairman, Julius Marstrand, opened the Annual General Meeting, on Monday 25th October, by welcoming members and guests to Leckhampton Primary School and reminding everyone of why so many people are interested in the future of the Site:

- The importance of the Site in defining Cheltenham;
- The way the Site frames Cheltenham when you look at the town, from many different directions;
- The steep 'unimproved limestone' grassland banks of Charlton Kings Common;
- The wooded slopes of Leckhampton Hill;
- The crowning glory of Deadman's Quarry, & Upper & Middle Incline Quarries;
- The Site's status as a SSSI;
- The Site's proposed designation as a Local Nature Reserve;
- The Iron Age Fort and Barrow, which are scheduled Ancient Monuments;
- The Industrial Archaeology;
- The mutual love of the Site by a wide range of different visitors.

Thanks

The Chairman thanked members of the **Executive Committee** for their support and the work that they had put in during the year, especially the other Officers, Secretary **Vic Ellis** and Treasurer **Anne North**; **Judith Frazer-Holland**, Coordinator of Site Management Sub-committee & member of the Leckhampton Hill Consultative Group; **Allan Wood**, Co-ordinator of Working Parties; **Annette North** – for Editing the Newsletter; **Wendy Twist** – for producing the Minutes & **Tony Clifford** – for producing the display.

James Blockley – of the Community Park Ranger service

Members of **Leckhampton Hill Consultative Group**

Jenny Phelps - Cotswolds AONB Grasslands Officer

Paul Hackman - English Nature

Mark Campbell - Gloucestershire Geoconservation

Nick Russell - County Archaeological Service

Liz Dack – of DEFRA who was responsible for processing the application for an ESA grant.

Areas of Controversy

The Chairman drew attention to some of the areas of controversy that FOLK has had to grapple with:

- **Environment v Recreation**

In a year when a 'Right to Roam' has finally been granted by Parliament, we should perhaps remember that Leckhampton Hill was purchased by Cheltenham Town Council 5 years before the Ramblers' famous mass trespass on Kinder Scout

"We shall acquire not only a valuable property, but we shall maintain for the public the **right to roam over Leckhampton Hill**. We shall be handing to posterity a large open space which can be visited by each and every inhabitant of this town."

It was only designated as a SSSI many years later and would not have been available to be designated if it had not been purchased by the Council for recreation. Whilst it is essential to

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conserve the biodiversity, we cannot ignore the Site's importance as a recreational area, right on the edge of the town.

- **Management v Nature**

We should also remember that Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common are not purely 'natural' landscapes they are the product of several thousand years of human intervention, interacting with nature.

Neglecting the Site would not result in it staying as it is, but it would degenerate. It needs to be managed. The issue is not whether it should be managed, but how it should be managed.

- **Timing of Mowing - Early or Late Cut**
- **Grazing Fences & Obstruction of Tracks**
- **Mountain Biking v Walkers & Conservation**

The Chairman insisted that we should not allow differences over these important issues to detract from our shared love of the Site. He said that we must find ways of accommodating different views & working together despite our differences.

FOLK is always seeking to find the right balance between these aspects of the Site. We won't always get it right, but hopefully we won't ever get it very wrong & do irreparable damage. Whilst some mistakes have been made, so far, the Chairman felt confident that, on balance, we have generally got conservation management right.

GRAZING REPORT

Our final calf for this year was a bull born on the 28th of September. All four calves are doing well.

The cattle continued to graze on the Common until the first of December, when they returned home to await the arrival of the bull the next day.

The calves have been brought inside to undergo halter training, to make for easier handling.

From April to November, we have erected five paddocks of approximately 8 acres each, which means the cattle have covered 40 acres, and this is double the area grazed during 2003.

Anne North

Your Executive Committee Members are:-

CHAIRMAN - Julius Marstrand (01242 518846)
E-mail julius@marstrand.co.uk

SECRETARY - Vic Ellis (01242 230442)
26 Mead Road, Cheltenham, GL53 7DY

TREASURER - Tony Meredith (01242 516393)
14 Greatfield Drive, Cheltenham, GL53 9BU

Stuart Bond	Tony Clifford
Judy Frazer-Holland	John North
Christine Ryder	Jack Shepherd
Wendy Twist	Allan Wood

Co-opted Anne North
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

All new membership applications and renewals should be sent to Anne North C/O Shackleton, Daisybank Road.

Work Party Report, Autumn 2004

Since our last newsletter a start has been made on re-fencing alongside the bridge lay-by at the bottom of the standard gauge incline in Daisybank Road. The main purpose of this fence is to prevent mountain-bikers from exiting onto the road in a manner dangerous to walkers and car drivers. A field gate will also be erected to allow access for conservation work and emergency vehicles only. Other gates will be installed for walkers, horse riders and bikers and the surfacing improved to prevent waterlogging.

In the winter months we tend to concentrate our work on preservation of the areas of unimproved limestone grassland from further encroachment by scrub. In doing so we must not forget that both scrub and trees, which cover large areas on the hill, are very important in providing a mixed habitat. In addition to the existing large areas of open grassland, it is our aim to create a mosaic of grassland pockets, linked if possible by grassy glades. It is therefore important when cutting scrub to leave some stumps untreated to allow re-growth, resulting in areas of old and new scrub. This, when coupled with limited tree cover, will provide sheltered pockets of excellent habitat for the widest possible range of flora and fauna.

Even when trees have died, as they decay on the woodland floor they provide a home for insects and their predators, both mammals and birds, and are also an important host for fungi. They should be allowed to decay *in situ* and only be removed if they are a hazard to hill users. Many woodland areas today are too clinically managed. The importance of areas of trees on the hill, and their variety, cannot be overstated as each species provides a different habitat. The following table lists some of the species of trees on the hill and shows their individual importance.

Ash	Food source for the privet hawk moth and bullfinches
Beech	Beech nuts are eaten by many mammals and birds
Birch	Relatively short-lived tree; seeds eaten by redpolls, goldfinches, siskins and tits; a good habitat for moths
Blackthorn	Important nesting site for long-tailed tits; a source of food for some of the hairstreak family of butterflies
Field Maple	Lovely autumn colours; good for lichens
Goat Willow	Especially valuable for moths
Hawthorn	Attractive blossom; berries enjoyed by redwings and fieldfares; a food source for many insects and moths
Hazel	Excellent tree for coppicing; good nesting site for birds and dormice
Holly	Habitat for holly blue butterfly; berries eaten by birds
Larch	The winter loss of leaves is unusual among conifers
Oak	The best of all trees for wildlife
Sycamore	Tends to shade out spring flowering plants as it comes into leaf early; does not support a wide variety of birds or insects

Future Work Parties

Midweek Work Parties

Thursday 13 January 2005
Thursday 10 February 2005
Thursday 10 March 2005
Thursday 14 April 2005

Weekend Work Parties

Sunday 23 January 2005
Sunday 27 February 2005
Sunday 27 March 2005
Sunday 24 April 2005

We would welcome some new faces on our work parties as well as our regulars. Meet at Tramway Cottage car park, Daisybank Road at 9.30am. We provide the tools but wear stout footwear and bring your own gloves.

Allan Wood

Lecky Hill in the 1940's - A young boys dream of heaven

A final health & safety warning from mum.

"Try and take care of your clothes and don't be late home."

Then off to join the gang.

Up Mate's (*check the field for ambulances*), along Greenhills Road and through the allotments. Over the creaky tin bridge, into the sandpits (*no rafting today*). Along poplar walk, over the stile into 2nd Daisy. Then up the causeway and veer off between Daisybank House and Fir Tree Cottage, cross Daisybank Road and up the steps at the back of the old tea garden with swings and slides. Then, still climbing on up the side of Daisybank Quarry, avoiding the squeaky wire fence, to Abrahams mount, and a rest! (*In those days of rations even your breath came in little short pants.*)

Then decisions – left to Mountains Knoll Wood (*trees to climb, creepers to swing on, wood to light fires*) – or straight on (*hollows and ravines needing bridges*) – or to the right (*clear grassy slope to the quarries and the lime kilns - climbing, first aid stretchers, race with the poor victim down the tramway under Daisybank Road bridge*)

"Hey - whats the time? Mum'll kill me".

O.A.P

GLOSSARY

Mate's

The footpath alongside the old railway back of Mead Road

Field for ambulance

Now Travis Perkins. The ambulances were waiting for hospital trains into Leckhampton station to take wounded up to Ullenwood.

Allotments

Now Greatfield Drive

Sandpits

The Old Pats playing field and the childrens play area

Poplar Walk

Southfield Approach

The causeway now completely blocked by under growth

Abrahams Mount

The peak that juts out at the top of Daisybank Quarry. In those days clear with a few blackberry bushes, now covered with thorns of various types. Haunted by cyclists.

Mountains Knoll Wood

Climb trees? swing on creepers? - Too dangerous, you might fall.
Light fires - you might get burnt.

The Hollows

Either impassable undergrowth or taken over by bikes

The Grass Slope

First vandalised by a larch plantation.

The rest abandoned, now also taken over by cyclists

The bridge in Daisybank Road

Filled in underneath - now a mud pond (presumably to stop the town being flooded by rain on the hill).

MANAGEMENT OF THE LIMESTONE GRASSLANDS

In accordance with the approved management plan for Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common, FOLK fully support the efforts of Cheltenham Borough Council to restore the unimproved limestone grassland to a more favourable condition as required by English Nature.

It is generally recognised that the best method of achieving the necessary improvement is by the grazing of cattle whenever this is practicable. Care should be taken to ensure that the grazing does not affect the enjoyment of the site by the general public and, wherever possible, ensure that the temporary fencing erected on the site does not obstruct rights of way and other popular tracks, thus recognising that the site was originally purchased to give the citizens of Cheltenham the "right to roam" freely and public enjoyment always plays an important part in deciding the action to be taken in managing the area.

There are areas on the site where it is not practicable to graze cattle and, in these areas, the best alternative to grazing is to carry out an annual hay cut or mowing to keep down the coarse grasses and scrub which shades out the finer grasses and wild flowers. Members will have observed that mowing has already produced a great improvement in the quality of the grassland on the flat area at the top of the south-facing slope of Charlton Kings Common. English Nature recommended that this cut should not be taken before early July but for practical reasons the area has been mown as soon as possible after this date which in 2003, for example, resulted in the area being cut when it was in full flower with lots of colour and attendant wildlife present. Some members of FOLK felt that, by making the area dull and lifeless, mowing at this time in early August completely ruined the area for the enjoyment of the general public as well as preventing many species of late summer flowers from being able to set seed.

Much of the grassland on the top of the site, particularly on the western side, is rich in late

summer flowers such as scabious, knapweed and harebells which attract many butterflies and other insects in late summer when the area is most popular with visitors. In addition rarer late flowering species such as devils-bit scabious, clusterered bellflowers and autumn gentian are also present, and early mowing will prevent the public from enjoying these beautiful wildflowers. As these areas are not really in a bad condition and also contain a good flora including many wild orchids in spring and early summer, I do not feel that it is necessary to follow such a rigid management regime in these areas. A balance needs to be struck between achieving too rigid a regime as recommended by English Nature and the need to ensure that the area remains attractive for visitors during the whole of the summer. It should be possible for the Council to take a much more flexible approach which:

- a recognises the different types of flora present on the various areas;
- b takes account of the microclimates of the different parts of the hill; and,
- c ensures that there are always areas of wildflowers available for the enjoyment of people and the various insects that rely on them.

I hope therefore, that members would agree that the Executive Committee should continue to press the Council, and English Nature, to work with FOLK in agreeing a more flexible mowing programme each year which takes account of the varying conditions throughout the site. This might mean that some areas would be mown later in the summer (weather permitting) whereas border areas might only be cut every 3 or 4 years. It would be necessary to keep a close watch on the condition of the grassland and where, for example, there was a re-growth of brambles or coarse grasses, it would be necessary to follow a stricter regime for a year or two to keep control of the situation. It is most important however to consider each area on its merits and to maintain as far as possible the biodiversity of the site not only for the wildflowers but also the birdlife, insects and other wildlife in the area.

Vic Ellis

MANAGEMENT OF PARTS OF LECKHAMPTON HILL AND CHARLTON KINGS COMMON SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST (SSSI) BY HAY CUTTING

English Nature is working hard with other government departments and owners to achieve favourable condition on its SSSIs. Large parts of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common SSSI is unfavourable and a partnership of organisations are working together to put this right, including Cheltenham Borough Council, FOLK, Cotswold AONB, Defra and English Nature.

The Hill consists of unimproved limestone grassland, mixed scrub and secondary woodland. Stock grazing provides the ideal environment for enhancing the limestone grassland and English Nature sees this as the only way of ensuring a sustainable future for this important species-rich resource and achieving favourable condition.

As part of the partnership approach to the hill, a five year action plan has been produced. This had a wide consultation and local concerns about the re-introduction of grazing were raised. As a compromise, English Nature has agreed to a more selective re-introduction of grazing. FOLK, the North's (the stock owners) and Cheltenham Borough Council are currently trialling the stock grazing of Charlton Kings Common with electric fenced paddocks. This, at present, does not include the flat areas on top of the Common (area 19 etc). Again as a compromise, English Nature has agreed that

these areas will receive a hay cut as a trial in the absence of grazing. It was agreed that this would be carried out by a local farmer who has the right equipment and the hay could be fed to the stock during extreme winter weather. This would then fit in well with the aims of providing a sustainable system for managing the Hill.

It is vital that any grass material that is cut is also removed to prevent the build up of nutrients and the mulching of the grassland sward. The Lowland Grassland Management Handbook produced by English Nature and the Wildlife Trusts recommends cutting from mid July with occasional late cuts (in August) where there are later flowering plants. However, the later the cut, the less likely it is that a local farmer will be interested in the hay and the more difficult it becomes to remove. Hence the land owner will then have to find alternative methods of cutting, removing and disposing of the arisings. This could prove to be costly and certainly would not be very sustainable.

For Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common SSSI a late cut would only be acceptable if an alternative method for cutting and removing the material had been agreed. It should be noted that the reasons for leaving areas until September would be based on aesthetic, rather than nature conservation, reasons.

Paul Hackman English Nature November 2004

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

PROVISIONAL WORK PROGRAMME NOV 04-MAR 05

	FOLK		CBC		Others	
	Administrative	Conservation	Administrative	Conservation	Administrative	Conservation
	1	2	3	4	5	6
A	Discuss mountain bike slalom course	Put stone in potholes on Gallops.	Discuss mountain bike slalom course with FOLK	Continue trial grazing on Charlton Kings Common.	Seek funding for 1, 2, & 3 adjacent.	1. Carry out Baseline Archaeological Survey
B	Membership drive with a new leaflet delivered to local residents.	Trim foliage at side of Gallops.	Grant a new grazing licence in plenty of time.	Site visit with FOLK & Mary King GCC to agree DBFields PROW clearance. PROW clearance.		2. Carry out structural survey of Limekilns
C	FOLK to write to TBC re poor repair of DB Road surface,	Site visit with CBC & Mary King GCC to agree DBFields PROW clearance.	Continue consultation & investigation over wheelchair access	Cut grass over ramparts and barrow to encourage complete grass cover.	Apply for SCHEDULING of site of quarrying as an Industrial Archaeological Site	3. Conduct Geophysical Survey of Iron Age Fort
D	Contact local schools with a view to trying to get Duke of Edinburgh Award candidates to participate in conservation work. Send CD of SMP. CBC to supply CDs.	Repair fence alongside Motorway ASH47, Daisy Bank Road Bridge car park. Erect fence round headland when FP ASH 40 has been moved.	Apply for combined Modification Order for Rights of Way: a) As recommended in the SMP b) To provide Bridleway access from South West of Site c) Progress or combine application for re-classification of Sandy Lane & 'The Gallops' by means of a Path Creation Order (without necessarily seeking a Traffic Restriction Order on the old Tumpike Road)	Repair FP ASH 35 where side is breaking away & dangerous. Clear adjacent scrub.	NR to prepare plan for removal of vegetation from ramparts and centre of Hill fort, repairing eroded areas of ramparts and surface round Topograph. To include industrial & ancient historic environment. Plan to be discussed together with possible sources of funding.	Glos. Geoconservation to clear exposure on Motorway (Ash 47)
E	Establish what fees, if any, may be payable for agreed Modification Orders for Rights of Way-meet on site with GlosCC Highways Dept. and CBC.	Decide on positions for Fixed Point Photography for biodiversity monitoring.	Arrange for Fixed Point Photographic Survey of the Site covering: a) Vegetation; b) Geoconservation; c) Historical. Especially in grazed & mown areas.	Provide litter bins for Salterley & Brownstone Car parks.	County Archaeological Service- Prepare a STATEMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE of site & get it approved by English Heritage.	
F		Routine Path Clearance	Advise on progress of LNR status. LNR designation events?	Take photos for Fixed Point Photographic Survey in July.	LHCG Geoconservation review.	
G	Continue consultation over interpretation boards.	Cut & clear area 16 in Aug/Sept. Fell trees to facilitate entry of trailer to remove cut grass.	Prepare Job Description for Project Officer & discuss possible sources of funding, in consultation with FOLK & LHCG. JB.		Monitoring of grazing trial. EN.	
H	Discuss timing of hay cut for 2005.	Assist grazier with erection/dismantling of electric fence. Finish grazing the whole of CKC apart from areas 19, 23 & 24 and parts of 27 & 33 by April 2005.	CBC to supply Management Plan CDs to be sent to schools with a view to getting D of E candidates to participate in conservation work.	DB Fields - increase scrub edge by cutting through bramble thickets & to prevent scrub from spreading further.		
I	Keep records of where & when grassland is grazed.	Scrub reduction from September onwards (as detailed in SMP Action Plan) esp. areas 3, 5, 14, 18 & 26.	Discuss proposals for ESA Conservation Plan with FOLK.	Scrub reduction as detailed in SMP action plan esp. areas 9, 22, 25, 26, 27 triangle, 2, 3, 5, 14, 18, 26, 31. NB. Eastern end of 26 requires further discussion.	Develop & publicise guidance on the collection of specimens of rock & fossils. LHCG & Geo cons.	
J	Discuss possibility of co-option of grazier on to FOLK Committee after AGM 2005.	Mow & some limited scrub clearance in area 23 (horse circle) in September.		Continue repair of stone boundary walls as required under ESA agreement. Priority: 1. On rampart 2. Salterley to CKC 3. Others.	LHCG to review action plan. Develop revised 5 year plan & roll forward by 1 year	
K		Cut ash seedlings anywhere.				
L	Organise walks/talks for members & general public.	Litter picking	Discuss what to spend ESA acreage payments on with FOLK.		GSIA work party Feb incline 4 & others to be agreed.	

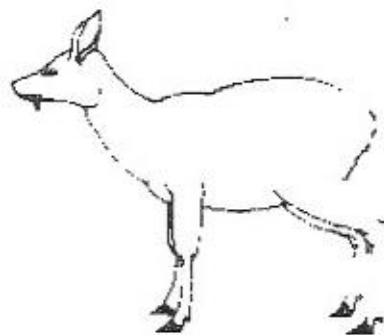
MUNTJAC DEER SPOTTED ON HILL

Muntjac deer have been spotted on several occasions on Leckhampton Hill. They were originally introduced to Britain from China in the middle of the nineteenth century. Unlike the Roe Deer, which is a native species, Muntjac are feral having escaped from an estate in Bedfordshire around 1900. Since then this hardy species has gradually spread over many parts of England. They are smaller than Roe Deer being up to 50cms in height (20 inches) and an adult mass of about 11 – 14 kg; the female is smaller than the male. Only the bucks have simple, very short and backward pointing antlers with a distinctive band of fur around the bottom half. They are a bright chestnut colour but are darker during the winter months. The buck has clearly protruding canine teeth used in aggressive interactions.

Their preferred habitat is open woodland with a good shrub layer, especially bramble, and grassy areas. Although they are shy creatures and are more often heard than seen, they may be found on land near gardens and other sites with human activity. They are frequently seen as solitary animals although buck and doe pairs occupy the same area for some years. They breed throughout the year and at seven months the does start mating producing one young after a seven months pregnancy. The fawns become active quickly and begin grazing after a few days.

Muntjac feed on bramble, ivy, yew, grass, fruits and woodland flowering plants. They will also take garden plants, arable crops and orchids which is what many people would not wish to happen. Fortunately their dispersal behaviour prevents the formation of dense populations and they do not form herds. However they can be pests in gardens and may have a damaging effect on both farms and conservation areas. With such a small population at present it does not look as if a general deer management scheme needs to be put in place.

What is worrying is that the appearance of deer on the Hill may encourage some people to think that here is a free supply of venison! However the Deer Act of 1991 (Section 1 (1)) states quite clearly that it is an offence for any person without the consent of the occupier or other lawful authority to enter any land in search or pursuit of any deer with intent to take, kill or injure it. Instances of suspected offences should be reported to Cheltenham Borough Council and the Police.



Jack Shepherd November 2004

And Finally....

The FOLK committee wishes all its members a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year



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