



FOLK SIXTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Chairman's address.

This AGM is an important milestone for FOLK, because it marks the end of our fifth year. When we started out, I don't suppose that anyone really knew exactly what we would be doing over the next five years, or how far we would have come. In particular, although we were very determined, I am not sure that any of us imagined that we could have mustered the resources to have had a significant impact on Leckhampton Hill, Charlton Kings Common and Daisybank Fields.

Hopefully all FOLK members should have received copies of the last two Summer and Autumn issues of the Newsletter. If you did, you will have had an opportunity to read my review of the last five years. I don't intend to bore you by duplicating most of what was contained in those two articles, so my introduction will be mercifully short! Anyone who hasn't received the Newsletters, please see us afterwards.

FOLK essentially has two distinct roles:

1. The first is **influencing policy**, particularly CBC's policy relating to the Site. This was probably most significant during the formulation of the Site Management Plan, adopted by CBC's Cabinet two years ago. Originally we were a little sceptical about the Council investing so much money in preparing yet another Management Plan and might have preferred to see the money spent directly on conservation work on the Site.

However, the SMP has since enabled CBC

and FOLK to secure more funding than the Plan cost for conservation work – although this might not have happened had FOLK not been in existence to insist on implementation of the SMP.

2. The second is actually **carrying out conservation work on the Site**, either directly by our own volunteer Working Parties, or indirectly working with contractors and others.

There are two main points that I want to make at this AGM:

1. When we started, we faced a daunting prospect. The Site had received some TLC over the years, from CBC's Parks Service, the Cotswold Volunteer Wardens, British Trust for Conservation Volunteers working parties and others, but over all the level of 'management' of the Site was not keeping pace with the rampant pace of nature – as a whole the Site had been sadly neglected.

Parts of it were becoming impassable, one of the top twenty sites of unimproved limestone grassland in the whole Cotswold, was gradually overgrown by coarse scrub, ash growth and mature woodland; and nationally significant Jurassic limestone exposures were being obscured, by scree, trees and erosion. It was the grassland and the geological exposures that had led to the Site being notified as a SSSI in 1954 and subsequently in 1986 & 1991.

When FOLK working parties first started work, in the autumn after we were formed,

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we had some very big working parties, but we felt that we were barely scratching the surface. We could spend a whole morning scrub-bashing and the area we had been working in would have looked a lot better, but against the backdrop of the whole hill, we had barely scratched the surface.

Gradually, however, as work progressed and areas that we had tackled started to be joined up, it became possible to see the impact that we had made. Some of you may not remember that, at one point, the scrub immediately below the top of the scarp slope had grown so high that it was virtually impossible to see the view across the Severn Vale from larger parts of Charlton Kings Common.

The Cotswold Way had become so overgrown with gorse along the Eastern ridge that it was down to a single narrow, muddy track. The bridleway down Windass Hill had become so overgrown by gorse that walkers, bikers and horses had to share two narrow tracks along the edge of the scarp slope. Opening up the Cotswold Way and opening up 'windows' in the scrub to reveal the view across Cheltenham and the Vale and opening up Windass Hill were amongst the early successes. Cutting the grass on the flat areas of Charlton Kings Common helped reduce the gorse and bramble and preserve the open nature of the top of the Common.

2. There are inevitably many conflicting interests involved in a Site as complex as this one and close to the pressures of the 'urban fringe'. The Site was originally purchased by the Council for 'recreational purposes', but thirty years later was recognised for its environmental importance.

FOLK has been trying to reconcile these conflicting interests, but in accordance with our stated Objectives, giving environmental considerations the priority, whilst supporting those recreational activities that do not seriously damage the environment.

In a recent Local Strategy document CBC dropped phrases like "...conserve and enhance..." the environment, in favour of the far weaker "...not harm..." the environment. Let me make it quite clear that as far as FOLK's Executive is concerned "...not harming..." Leckhampton Hill or Charlton Kings Common, is not good enough. We definitely want to "...conserve and enhance..." the Site.

Currently the Site is not considered by English Nature to be in a 'favourable condition'. As owners of the Site, the Council has a statutory responsibility to bring it into 'favourable condition' by 2010. We believe that in adopting the Site Management Plan, the Council's Cabinet signed up to a policy of 'conserving and enhancing' the Site.

FOLK is certainly working to improve the Site, to conserve what we can and to enhance the biodiversity.

Thanks

It has been my privilege to be the Chairman of FOLK throughout its first five years of existence.

Thanks to members of FOLK's Executive Committee, both present and past, for all their support.

Thanks to FOLK's Site Management Sub-Committee and in particular its co-ordinator, Judith Fraser Holland, for planning and co-ordinating the conservation work that has been done.

Thanks to various CBC Councillors for their support and to CBC's Park Ranger Service and in particular James Blockley and his predecessors.

Thanks above all to all the volunteers who have turned out on Working Parties in all kinds of weathers. Everyone of us owes them a debt of gratitude because without them very little of the conservation work would have been done, in particular the Working Party Co-Ordinator Allan Wood and Judith again for her support, but also to Tony Clifford and others who have turned out regularly.

Julius Marstrand – Chairman 2000-2005

FOLK Work Party Report Autumn 2005

No major projects have been undertaken since my report for the summer edition of the Newsletter. Our work has mainly consisted of clearing patches of scrub and young ash seedlings from paddocks that were grazed during the summer, and assisting Anne North, our grazier, with repositioning the temporary electric fencing. However, the majority of this work and the day-to-day management of the cattle and sheep have fallen to Anne and her family, which has amounted to about 200 hours work since grazing started in the spring. We hope the recent wet weather will not prevent the grazing from continuing through the coming months on the eastern slopes of the hill, overlooking the Cirencester Road.

In the coming months we will continue with the clearance of scrub and rank grassland, mainly in small pockets scattered across the hill. A number of footpaths need clearing, and where necessary resurfacing in gateways. No major work involving contractors is planned. The damaged notice boards will be replaced and we will install new litter bins in the car parks.

Dates of future Work Parties

Midweek Work Parties

Thursday 12 January 2006
Thursday 9 February 2006
Thursday 9 March 2006

Sunday Work Parties

No December Sunday Work Party
Sunday 22 January 2006
Sunday 26 February 2006
Sunday 26 March 2006

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.

Allan Wood

Your Executive Committee Members are:-

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Tony Clifford
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Serena Meredith
Christine Ryder
Roger Smith

Allan Wood

Co-opted

Julius Marstrand
CBC Ex Officio

Anne North

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

Bramble - a nuisance - or a haven for wild life?

It can be both, of course.

Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*), or blackberry, is a widespread and very familiar plant. It occurs in a variety of forms, about 40 having been described for Britain. It succeeds on a wide variety of soils and can tolerate shade quite well. Where it grows in woodland, it can form a dominant field layer no more than about half a metre high. In open situations and hedgerows, it can scramble to more than two metres in height, using its arching stems to colonise new ground. It does this by growing new roots where it contacts the soil and can quickly form dense thickets. Bramble does not have to expend its energy in forming much woody tissue like other shrubs and trees and so can quickly dominate a situation.

The berries are very attractive to many birds such as blackbirds and thrushes, which disperse the seeds to new ground, complete with their own small quantity of manure. In fact, it seems that by passing through the gut of an animal, the seeds are prepared for quicker germination. However, some small mammals, such as mice and voles, chew the seeds as well, so are not helpful in this respect. Leaf-mining insects and various wasp species eats the leaves.

One of the most familiar characteristics of the bramble must be the thorns or prickles, which grow on all stems and leaf stalks. They serve the plant well in several respects. They deter grazing by some animals, they form supportive wedges where the plant scrambles over other shrubs and itself, and it protects itself from damage by larger mammals including Man. The bramble's characteristic of forming dense, invasive, impenetrable and prickly thickets does nothing to endear the plant to many people.

However, the presence of bramble should not be viewed with total gloom. A mosaic of bramble thickets with open grassland and other areas of limited scrub can offer the best conservation solution. Many animals need a mixture of habitats and the fringe areas between them. Thus some birds gain the protection of bramble for nesting sites where larger predatory mammals and birds can not reach them. The ripe blackberries and leaves attract many insects, which in their turn form prey for spiders, birds and reptiles. On Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common, we may frequently see speckled wood and ringlet butterflies, the adults of which feed on bramble flowers although their caterpillars feed on grasses.

Parts of Daisybank Field have become really dominated by bramble thickets and measures will have to be taken to restore the land to that useful mixture of grassland and patches of scrub, including some bramble which can promote biodiversity but also allow pleasant recreational activity. Once unwanted bramble has been removed, well managed grazing by cattle seems to be the best way of conserving the area.

Jack Shepherd November 2005

And Finally.... The FOLK committee wishes all its members a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year



Cheltenham in Bloom
working in partnership with FOLK
in the year of the volunteer