



Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

NEWSLETTER

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WINTER 2008

CBC Site Visit

On Tuesday 25th October, no fewer than seven Councillors and three Council officials visited Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common, some for the first time, at the invitation of Jenny Phelps, of Gloucestershire Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group. The purpose of the visit was to show Councillors what FOLK had already achieved in helping CBC's Park Rangers to manage the Site of Special Scientific Interest and make them aware of the potential that might be realised from this important asset.

The visit came about partly because of concerns that decisions affecting the Site were being taken by Councillors and Officers, some of whom were not familiar with ongoing work on the Site and by some Council Departments in isolation from other Departments that might be affected. It was also to make Councillors and Officers aware of the additional funding that would be available if the Site is entered in to Higher Level Stewardship.

Immediately before the CBC Site Visit, members of FOLK met ITV

West at Tramway Cottage and recorded interviews for an item that was broadcast on news bulletins later that day and for a longer feature on the proposed sale of Tramway Cottage. The ITV reporter and cameraman joined the CBC Site Visit and recorded an interview with the Councillor responsible for the proposal to sell Tramway Cottage.

The Site Visit itself was very useful, both for raising awareness of the Council's statutory obligations under the Countryside & Rights of Way (2000) and Natural Environment & Rural Communities (2006) Acts and for informing them of the many complex issues affecting the Site. Hopefully, it also helped to improve understanding between FOLK and the Council and how the goodwill that currently exists could be jeopardised by ill-judged actions, like the proposed sale of Tramway Cottage.

Julius Marstrand – FOLK Executive Committee



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New discoveries at Leckhampton Iron Age Hillfort

In August volunteers from FOLK and the general public joined Gloucestershire County Council Archaeology Service, English Heritage and SiteScan Archaeological to take part in a geophysical survey of the Leckhampton Iron Age Hillfort.

Leckhampton hillfort is one of a number of forts constructed along the Cotswold escarpment between 500-100BC. Excavations in the 1920s and 1969/70 revealed that the enclosure bank was originally 2-3m high with a ditch 4m wide and 1.5m deep, strengthened by a wooden palisade and stone wall, with a large impressive gatehouse. Despite the excavations little was known about the interior of the fort. Thanks to the work of our volunteers the geophysical survey revealed much of the hillfort's pre-historic and later uses.

Over the course of two days a team from SiteScan Archaeology undertook a magnetometry survey of the entire interior. On day three of the survey five teams of 8 volunteers gathered further information, learnt how to use resistivity geophysical survey equipment and took part in guided walks of the pre-historic and industrial archaeology.

So what did we discover? The geophysical survey revealed clear evidence of Iron Age settlement within the fort, with evidence of hut circles and internal enclosures and ditches. The survey also showed that medieval arable cultivation had taken place within the hillfort, and confirmed the location of the Second World War installation.

What next at Leckhampton? Our increased knowledge of the interior of the hillfort will help us make better decisions about the management of the buried archaeology within the hillfort. In order to conserve the visible earthwork archaeology, FOLK will be undertaking targeted scrub control on the scheduled monument, and in the spring Natural England and the Archaeology Service will be repairing a number of erosion scars. This work is designed to conserve the hillfort for future generations to enjoy.

David Bull - Countryside Archaeology Advisor
Archaeology Service Gloucestershire County Council

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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 AGM 2008 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Work Parties. During the last year work parties have been held 3 times a month with a total of 1,280 hours worked, making a total of 8,657 hours in the last 8 years.

(These hours do not include the grazier's time nor time spent on things like the production and delivery of the newsletters, or distribution of posters, or time spent at committee and hill meetings.)

All types of work have been undertaken on the site from erecting electric fencing for the cattle grazing, scrub reduction, ragwort pulling, footpath maintenance including gate repairs, litter picking and patrols in connection with the Blooms Festival.

At the minimum wage this represents over £6,000 of work a year, but at the rates that the Council would have to pay contractors this would be considerably higher and over 8 years would have cost Cheltenham Council Tax payers nearer to £100,000.

Equally important tens of thousands of pounds of land management grants have been and are dependent on this work continuing.

I should like to thank everyone who has participated in any working parties and Allan Wood in particular for coordinating the work parties and participating in most of them.

Bloom Festival. The Committee were very concerned when they heard that a four day music festival was to be held at Hartley Farm in August, immediately adjacent to the S.S.S.I. In particular the risk of some festival goers camping and lighting fires on the common. The Bloom's security was well organised and our FOLK patrols did not find any problems. Unfortunately some people living downwind were disturbed by the noise of the music.

Geophysical Survey. David Bull, the Rural Archaeologist for the County Archaeology Service organised a Geophysical Survey of the Hill Fort and an Open Day for members of the public at the end of August. FOLK volunteers were pleased to act as stewards. 40 members of the public had an opportunity to get hands on experience of Geophysical surveying. David presented the results after the business part of the meeting had finished.

Talks. FOLK has not as yet arranged any talks for members this winter. If anyone has any ideas for topics or speakers perhaps they could contact me or any member of the Committee.

Biking. FOLK and CBC have been liaising with bikers over points of conflict. Particularly redesigning downhill courses to reduce bike speed at points where the courses cross designated footpaths and in Daisybank Fields where the jumps have been made safer with courses for novice and more advanced riders.

The bikers spent a good deal of time writing a management plan for the site but CBC's legal department prevented it from being published.

A code of conduct leaflet with a map letting riders know where they can ride is still being held up by the legal department. We hope that the final version will be completed and circulated soon.

Tramway Cottage. The Executive Committee were very disturbed to discover that the Cheltenham Borough Council Cabinet were proposing to sell Tramway Cottage to help fund a tiny part of the short fall in the Council's current budget, especially as there had been no consultation with FOLK before a recommendation was first put to Cabinet. There was a chance to discuss this under "motions for discussion" after the officers reports had been completed.

Water turn on. Having obtained a very generous grant from The Heritage Lottery Fund through the Cotswolds Conservation Board, the water pipeline to supply drinking water to the cattle troughs was completed and officially switched on in May. Keeping the bowser topped up, particularly during the winter when access was sometimes difficult, was a major task for the grazier. The pipeline means one less job for the grazier and makes the grazing regime more sustainable.

I should like to thank the whole of the North family for all the hours that they put in to looking after the cattle and also special thanks to Annette and the printer Mr. Langsbury for the production of the Newsletter.

Arable reversion. Peter Jenner has retired and given up the tenancy of the land he farmed at Hill Farm. CBC has agreed that approximately 8 hectares of the land next to the common can be used as extra grazing for the cattle. This land has

been seeded with grass and a wild flower mix this autumn and will be fenced and supplied with water so that the cattle have somewhere to go in winter and the Common is not overgrazed or damaged by their feet when it's wet. Supplementary feeding can take place here in bad weather if required and there will be a place for handling the animals for the TB test etc.

Grassland Assessment. The cattle have been grazing 24/7 which is gradually improving the grassland. Natural England arranged a grassland assessment of Charlton Kings Common in July. This showed that whilst the grassland is improving it has not yet reached "favourable" status, or even technically "unfavourable improving" status. Leckhampton Hill is considered in "favourable" condition and will not be assessed again until 2011.

It is Natural England's target to get all SSSI grassland into favourable condition by 2010. In order to do this Natural England recommends:

1. Some scrub removal and some areas where the scrub is left and the grass left long for some species that require this type of habitat.
2. More grass cutting in areas that are not grazed.
3. A sustainable grazing regime with higher grazing pressure.

Higher Level Stewardship. To implement these recommendations Natural England suggests that CBC applies for Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) which will bring in increased payments from the government for land management.

Options Appraisal. In order to apply for HLS, there needs to be a study of possible grazing regimes -

Either: to continue with the temporary paddock system

Or: to permanently fence all round Charlton Kings Common – the perimeter grazing system

Or: a hybrid of these two systems

This is a complicated site with many groups interested in its management from users, to the owners and the statutory bodies.

I hope that through discussion an amicable compromise can be found.

On behalf of FOLK, I should like to take this opportunity to thank Jenny Phelps again for her support on securing the funding for the water supply for the grazing and over the grazing regime and Tramway Cottage. We were very concerned that we might lose Jenny's support when her role at Cotswolds AONB came to an end, but are delighted that she is now an Advisor for Gloucestershire's Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group, which means that she is still available to help us and CBC to manage the site.

Natural England are giving funding to FWAG for Jenny to help with pre-HLS application work and help with the options appraisal of the grazing regime. I am assured that Natural England would expect proposals to consider landscape and access issues as well as biodiversity issues.

I should also like to thank Wayne Sedgwick, the Community Park Ranger who has been most involved with the site. As with his predecessor, FOLK has built up an excellent working relationship with Wayne and his support has been invaluable, not least in the liaison with local bikers.

Finally I should like to thank members of FOLK's Executive Committee, Site Management Sub-Committee and all the other volunteers for the hard work that they have put in during the past year.

Judy Frazer-Holland

www.leckhamptonhill.org

Are there any members who would be prepared

to create a new website for FOLK?

If so please contact Julius Marstrand

Èmobile: 07717 326610

:e-mail: folk@marstrand.co.uk

Tour of Commons on the Cotswolds Scarp Slope

There are ninety-six significant limestone grassland sites across the Cotswolds, of which Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common is one of the top twenty. Some of these are in public ownership, some in private ownership, many are commons. Some of the sites have voluntary groups like FOLK involved in their management, others don't.

On 28th November fourteen members of FOLK's Executive Committee joined Jenny Phelps of Gloucestershire Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group, Nicki Jameson of Natural England and Wayne Sedgwick of CBC on a tour of local commons along the scarp slope of the Cotswolds.

One purpose of the visits was to see how different forms of 'local delivery' are being used to achieve the desired outcomes – but all involving local people in a 'bottom up', rather than 'top down' way.

Wistley Common

The best view of the East scarp slope of Charlton Kings Common is from Ravensgate Common across the valley. This Common is situated at the top of Wistley Hill, above Timbercombe Hill.

This is another escarpment with a sweeping curve of limestone grassland, similar to Charlton Kings Common. The Common has been occupied by the Chatcombe Estate for over sixty years and used to be grazed, but there are doubts over who owns it, which has caused complications over the management.

Unfortunately, this has meant that in recent years it has not been managed as well as it could have been and scrub is starting to develop. Left to nature, the limestone grassland and flora would disappear and be replaced by scrub and eventually woodland.

There is a Bridleway sign at the foot of Timbercombe Hill giving directions to Wistley Hill. Bridleways CK54 and CK55 go up Timbercombe Hill, but stop short of the Common and do not even join up with one another to form a circular route. Footpaths CK61 and CK68 connect with a Restricted Byway ACO39, but there is no 'joined up' route for bikes or horses. CK54, CK61 and ACO39 clearly form part of a very ancient roadway and irrespective of the designation of CK61 as a footpath this route has clearly been used continuously by horses and more recently mountain bikes, for many years.

With the assistance of FWAG and Natural England, Chatcombe Estate, two 'rights holders' and Charlton Kings Parish Council are now co-operating to manage the site. If anyone would like to help, please get in touch with Steve Harvey of the Parish Council's Environment Committee (01242 515174 /07917 163802 steveharveyck@btinternet.com). (See Uley Bury below for an example of another common where the local Parish Council is involved in site management.)

Cranham Common

Cranham Common is situated in the heart of Cranham village and is key to the character of the village. Unlike Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common it is dissected by two roads, which complicates grazing. This is the site where FOLK got the idea of using electric fences to create temporary grazing paddocks, rather than permanently fencing Charlton Kings Common.

The Common is owned by the Hicks Beech estate, but they recently put it on the market. They were proposing to break it up and sell parcels of land separately, which might have realised more than selling it as a whole, but this could have been catastrophic for the management of the site. However, they have agreed to sell it as a whole, with an asking price of £100,000.

Fortunately local people have clubbed together and between them have raised sufficient funds to purchase the whole site. This ensures the long term future of the Common and helps to maintain the character of Cranham village.

Painswick Beacon

Painswick Beacon is owned by members of the Blow family, but Painswick Conservation Group, an enthusiastic group of local volunteers, helps to manage it with minimal resources.

With the aid of the County Archaeology Service, Kimsbury Camp, the Iron Age Fort, which was being badly eroded by visitors, has been repaired and protected. With regular working parties the volunteers are helping to reduce the encroachment of scrub on the site and two local timber merchants have been granted permission to fell ash for sale as firewood.

Edge Common

Edge Common, or more correctly Rudge Hill, is a small, but important Common just South of Painswick Beacon. Five families still have Commoners' grazing rights and for many years some local residents have sensitively managed the site, preserving the delicate local flora.

The site is nationally significant and has been designated as a National Nature Reserve. This means that Natural England leases the site and has responsibility for its maintenance. Earlier this year, Natural England sent a contractor on to the site, to clear scrub, who was unfamiliar with it. Unfortunately, this meant that the delicate balance of habitats on the site was damaged, much to the distress of the Commoners and local volunteers.

This situation has now been resolved and the Commoners and other local people are being involved in the management of the site and restoration of the areas damaged by the contractor. The site is being grazed by a small mixed herd of Gloucestershire and Herefordshire cattle. The grazier, a local farmer and Commoner, joined us for an excellent lunch in the Butchers Arms in Sheepscombe, to tell us about his experiences on Edge Common.

Uley Bury, Cam Peak and Cam Long Down

The last site of the day, that we saw in freezing fog, was the impressive multivallate Iron Age Fort of Uley Bury, covering an area of 32 acres (13Ha). Part of it is owned by Stroud District Council, but much of it is in private hands, although the ramparts are open access land, managed by the enthusiastic Stroud, Uley and Dursley Woodland Management Group, led by Cllr Janet Wood, a Uley Parish and Stroud District Councillor. Janet gave us a tour of the site and showed us the beautiful view of Downham Hill, known locally as Smallpox Hill, through the mist in the setting sun and the magnificent views from the West scarp over the River Severn.

One problem the volunteers have had recently was that the County Archaeology Service brought in contractors to cut down scrub and trees on the ramparts, to reduce damage caused by the roots and the effects of tree roots tearing up the ramparts if trees are blown over. Unfortunately they failed to treat the stumps, so they didn't kill all the roots and left the cut timber all over the steep slopes - a mess for the volunteers to clear up!

The same conservation group, also manage the nearby Cam Peak and Cam Long Down and various other sites in Stroud District. Janet showed us Long Down, another 37 acre site that overlooks the River Severn, from Uley Bury.



Julius Marstrand – FOLK Executive Committee

On Enclosures

*The law doth punish Man or Woman
Who steals the goose from the common
But leaves the greater felon loose
Who steals the common from the goose*
Anon – 18th Century

*...The Poor are kept Poor still, and
The Common Freedom Of the Earth
Is Kept from Them*
Gerard Winstanley – 17th Century

FOLK Work Party Report, Autumn 2008

This report covers the period from mid August to mid November. During that time there have been twelve work parties on the hill with an average of nine members on each occasion, resulting in over 350 man-hours of conservation work. These figures do not include the grazier's time spent monitoring the cattle on a daily basis; nor do they include preparation and distribution of the newsletter and posters, monthly committee meetings, or site meetings. Inclusion of all these activities would result in a total of over 500 man-hours, which, at a nominal value of £5 per hour, would equate to over £2,500 of voluntary labour in three months.

As usual, the main occupation has been the repositioning of the grazing paddocks on Charlton Kings Common and an additional paddock in Daisybank fields, used for both cattle and sheep. The regular changeover of areas to be grazed helps to avoid overgrazing and minimises the puddling of the slopes. This situation will improve in due course as about 8 hectares of land on the hilltop adjoining the site have been sown with a grass and wildflower seed mix. When established, this will provide off-site grazing and a hay crop to supplement current resources, and hopefully a lovely wildflower meadow.

Our work party on Tuesday, 18th December involved us in a detailed survey of the boundaries and adjoining features of our site, which will support an application by Cheltenham Borough Council for the area to be included in the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme (HLS). The site is currently included in the Environmental Sensitive Areas Agreement (ESA). The change is discretionary and concentrates on the more complex type of site management where advice and support is needed. Inclusion in an HLS would be a ten-year agreement, which would be tailored to local circumstances, and could include financial benefits. Natural England have funded Jenny Phelps, who has been involved with the management and funding of the site for several years, to assist with the application. Our survey provided a detailed description of the type and condition of all the boundary features, a count of the more mature trees on and adjacent to the boundary, and the types of adjoining habitat. This information will be added to a master plan of the whole site, which will include descriptions of habitat, and archaeological and historic features within the area.

On our annual sweep to remove ragwort from Charlton Kings Common, it was disturbing to see that the field to the extreme south east of the SSSI, often called the cowslip field, was awash with flowering ragwort. This is poisonous to livestock, especially when dry, and landowners have a legal duty to control it. The resulting spread of seed from this field will no doubt affect our adjacent site, so even more willing hands will be needed on our work parties. Do come and join us. It's not all ragwort pulling and cattle ranching. We can offer you plenty of fresh air, exercise and splendid views, plus involuntary grass tobogganing down the slopes for the unwary.

Dates of Future Work Parties

Midweek Work Parties

Thursday 8th January 2009

Tuesday 20th January 2009

Thursday 12th February 2009

Tuesday 17th February 2009

Thursday 12th March 2009

Tuesday 17th March 2009

Thursday 9th April 2009

Tuesday 21st April 2009

Weekend Work Parties

Sunday 25th January 2009

Sunday 22nd February 2009

Sunday 22nd March 2009

Sunday 26th April 2009

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

Gloucestershire Invertebrate Group

Meeting at Leckhampton Hill SO 95-18- vc 33; 11 June 2008, evening of 11 June 2008.

This meeting was held on a dull evening and concentrated on a shallow disused limestone quarry, Site 35 on the FOLK map, and by side of the footpath to the edge of the hill. The quarry is floored by Gryphite Grit and otherwise appears to be in Upper Trigonía Grit. Part of the site has developing scrub, but a good deal of the floor is semi-exposed or exposed limestone with short herb rich turf, and the quarry edge has some exposed rock, and talus with rubble,

The rubble and stone habitats were good and typical for small lime loving snails such as the Large chrysalis snail, *Abida secale* and the Moss chrysalis snail, *Pupilla muscorum*. A third component of this limestone grassland fauna, the Heath snail, *Helicella itala* was only seen as shells. Another limestone species, the Wrinkled snail, *Candidula intersecta*, possibly a post-Mediaeval introduction from southern Europe, was found living.

David Haigh found 14 spider species. *Ozyptila atomaria* has the status of Nationally Local. It is widespread but has a scattered and patchy distribution. It is associated with mature heathland or limestone grassland. It is usually found under stones. The female sits on the egg sac during incubation. *Ozyptila* species are Crab Spiders and tend to be rarely seen as they occupy the ground layer, under stones, or among the litter zone, in a variety of habitats.

Tony Taylor found 3 species of Bumble bee, 6 ant species and a beetle, none noteworthy.

Colin Twissell found 3 species of beetle including Bloody-nosed beetles *Timarcha tenebricosa*.

Colin and Ingrid Twissell took note of Bird and Plant species for which records are requested for the Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common Biodiversity Action Plan.

With many thanks to all who attended and made records.

David Long

Finds are listed below. -

MOLLUSCS

Finder for Molluscs D C Long unless otherwise stated

Discus rotundatus 1 live found by Kathy Meakin under stone on quarry face SO 951182

Vertigo pygmaea one fresh shell in moss on NW slope of quarry SO 951181

Abida secale 4 live and 2 dead among moss and under stones on N slope of quarry SO 951182, D J Haigh and D C Long; 1 live found by Kathy Meakin under stone on quarry face SO 951182; 2 live under stones on quarry floor (finder D J Haigh) SO 951181

Pupilla muscorum 2 live under stones in quarry and 2 dead shells in dry moss SO 951180; 1 live in moss SO 951182

Vallonia excentrica fresh shell in moss by thistle SO 951180

Arion ater 7 on path soil in twilight SO 95-18-

Oxychilus cellarius old shell SO 952 184 among stones

Oxychilus cf draparnaudi very old shell in rubble at top of quarry slope SO 951182

Candidula intersecta 1 live on stone, quarry, SO 951180, juvenile under stone in quarry SO 951180; 1 recently dead in moss SO 951182; old shell on stony bank SO 952184

Helicella itala old shell at top of quarry slope SO 951182; 3 old shells on stony bank SO 952184

Trochulus striolatus old shell on stony bank SO 952184

Cepaea nemoralis very old shell in rubble at top of quarry slope SO 951182

Cepaea hortensis 1 swept off a rose by D J Haigh, edge of quarry SO 951180

Helix pomatia Leckhampton Hill numerous by path SO 952183 26.6.2008 P E Long

SPIDERS

The following 14 species were identified:

Theridion sisyphium

Enoplognatha ovata

Dismodiscus bifrons

Microlyniphia pusilla

Araniella cucurbitina

Arianella opisthographa

Pardosa pullata

Pisaura mirabilis

Dictyna lateens

Coelotes atropos

Philodromus aureolus

Philodromus cespitum

Misumea vatia

Ozyptila atomaria a female under a stone with an egg sac

Ozyptila atomaria has the status of Nationally Local. It is widespread but has a scattered and patchy distribution. It is associated with mature heathland or limestone grassland. It is usually found under stones. The female site on the egg sac during incubation. *Ozyptila* species are Crab Spiders and tend to be rarely seen as they occupy the ground layer, under stones, or among the litter zone, in a variety of habitats.

David Haigh

MOTHS

Glyphipterix simplicielia Cocksfoot Moth

Coleophora laricella Larch Case-bearer

Elachista biatomella

Bryotropha ferrella

Aphelia paleana Timothy Tortrix

Epiblema trimaculana

Crambus lathoniellus

Colostygia pectinataria Green Carpet

Perizoma albulata Grass Rivulet (a BAP Research category species)

Rivula sericealis Straw Dot

Found by Guy Meredith during the meeting and on a traverse afterwards to his home near Sandy Lane

Species

Social Aculeates

Bombus lucorum

Bombus pascuorum

Bombus terrestris

Myrmica ruginodis

Myrmica sabuleti

Myrmica scabrinodis

Lasius flavus

Lasius alienus

Formica fusca

Beetles

Cicindella campestris

All records by compiler Anthony Taylor unless initialled.

Beetles

Recorded by Colin Twissell

Timarcha tenebricosa Bloody-nosed beetles

Phyllopertha horticola Garden Chafer

Dascillus cervinus "Beetle"

BAP SPECIES being monitored by FOLK and noted during the GIG meeting

[Fly Orchid seen by Guy Meredith, locations 18 and 24 on map, but. not on 11 June]

Bail Thyme in location 35 (quarry)

Small Heath Butterfly in location 35 (quarry)

Yellowhammer in location 35 (quarry)

Song Thrush in location 35 (quarry)

Bullfinch in location 35 (quarry)

Brown Hare x 2 "location 4 - Ingrid Twissell"

Seen earlier in 2008 by Colin and Ingrid Twissell

Adders, Linnet, Dunnock Skylark

And finally... the committee would like to wish all
its members a very happy new year.