



Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

NEWSLETTER

Issue 33 Free to members, non members 25p

WINTER 2009

Thank you, Annette

For many years, Annette North has quietly, professionally and efficiently been producing the FOLK newsletter 3 or 4 times a year. In recent times, she has hoped against hope that someone would volunteer to take on this job, but unfortunately no one has come forward. Reluctantly, she has now decided to vacate the post and hopes someone will step into the breach. So for this issue (and this issue only), a very temporary editor has taken over. If you are willing and able to take over this vital part of FOLK's communications with its members, please contact any committee member to register your interest.

I am sure that the whole of the membership would like to join me in thanking Annette for her sterling work in time and effort in preparing and circulating the majority of the previous 32 issues. She will of course still be involved with the management of the hill through her (and her family's) continuing commitment to the grazing regime.

Cheltenham in Bloom Garden Competition Awards Evening held on 30th September at The Victory Club

Representatives from Folk were invited to come along to Cheltenham In Bloom's Annual Commercial Awards Evening to celebrate with the many businesses from across the town, who not only florally enhance their premises but often encourage others along with their own staff to make Cheltenham a better place environmentally to work and relax. To Alan and Mike's surprise they were invited up to the stage to be presented by the President of Cheltenham In Bloom, Mr Mayor Cllr Lloyd Surgenor with the CIB 'Outstanding Community Involvement' Trophy. Cheltenham in Bloom committee recognises the tremendous work and commitment that FOLK gives voluntarily when helping to manage Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common in partnership with Cheltenham Borough Council. Cheltenham In Bloom appreciate the fantastic work from all who give their time to ensure that the Hill is a safe and pleasurable environment to visit. Thank you.



Chris Ryder
Chair of Cheltenham In Bloom

Contents:

FRONT PAGE – Thanks and Cheltenham in Bloom Report **PAGE 2** – AGM Chair's Report
PAGE 3 – Funding **PAGE 5** – Work Party Report **PAGE 6** – Daisybank Field Dirt Jump Site
PAGE 8 – Newsletter Sponsorship, Can you help and Contacts

FOLK Tenth Annual General Meeting

Chairman's report

Unfortunately FOLK's Chairman, Judith Frazer-Holland was unable to attend the AGM due to family circumstances beyond her control, so her annual report was given to the AGM on her behalf by the former Chairman, Julius Marstrand. He started by passing on Judith's apologies to the meeting.

FOLK's Executive Committee was delighted earlier in the year when, after five months of consultation, Cheltenham Borough Council decided not to sell the historic Tramway Cottage. It was reported to the meeting that the Council has already started work to make the cottage more habitable. FOLK hopes that funds will be found for all the necessary repairs to bring the property up to the 'decent homes' standard and that, in the future, the grounds will become the site of an education/interpretation centre.

Following detailed consultation with cyclists and FOLK, CBC has published a good practice guide for mountain bikers using the Hill and this has been widely distributed to mountain bikers using the Hill and through cycle shops and other outlets in Cheltenham.

A notice based on the mountain bike leaflet was planned, to highlight health and safety issues associated with mountain biking, for cyclists and other Hill users, but the scope of the notice was broadened to raise awareness of more health and safety issues. This decision was vindicated by a number of unfortunate incidents on the Hill. Awareness notice boards have now been put up in the car parks to alert visitors to some of the possible hazards that they could encounter on the site.

Following the retirement of Peter Jenner from Hill Farm, eight hectares of land have been taken into arable reversion. This has been fenced and planted with grass and local wild flower seed to provide extra winter grazing for the cattle. CBC contributed a quarter of the cost of this, which then enabled them to secure the bulk of the funding under the Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) scheme. The wildflowers are already looking wonderful, but the grass and flora still have to get established so that they are robust enough to be grazed. When they are this will help to ensure the Common is not overgrazed. Natural England has now offered a further grant to install a water supply to these fields for the cattle.

The Council currently receives a small amount of funding under the ESA scheme and a Single Farm Payment (SFP), which it shares with the grazier. CBC is now in the process of making an application to DEFRA for a Higher Level Stewardship Scheme to obtain increased grant funding. FOLK was involved in carrying out detailed surveys of the habitat and boundaries that were required for the preparation of a detailed Farm Environment Plan (FEP). FOLK would again like to thank Jenny Phelps for the amount of effort that she has put into this application. Jenny has also been instrumental in identifying European grants which may be used for the repair of the historic southern dry stone boundary wall of Charlton Kings Common, subject to the agreement of CBC's Cabinet on 8th December.

Andrew Armstrong – Gloucestershire Rural Archaeologist is also putting in an application for Heritage & Archaeological Project (HAP) funding to maintain the remains of the lime kiln bases and electrical plant house in their current state and prevent further deterioration.

Scrub reduction by FOLK and Contractors this winter is being funded by Natural England. Some of the results of this can already be seen in the opening up of views of the 'Devil's Chimney' from the footpath along the backs of the houses on Leckhampton Hill. This has long been one of FOLK's objectives and was included in the 2002 Management Plan.

Survey of Birds – a comprehensive survey of the birds of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common has recently been published. A copy has been lodged with the County Bird Recorder and copies distributed to CBC, Cheltenham Bird Club, Natural England and the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group.

Working Parties have been held three times a month. A total of 1,361 volunteer hours have been worked in the last twelve months, making a total of 10,018 for the last nine years. A rose bowl and certificate was awarded to FOLK by the committee of Cheltenham in Bloom in recognition of our 'Outstanding Community Involvement'. FOLK is extremely grateful to all of those who have participated in the Working Parties. There is a great deal of satisfaction that comes from contributing to maintaining the site and FOLK hopes that new people will join the Working Parties.

Judith wanted to thank everyone for their hard work on behalf of the Hill, especially:

Officers – Secretary: James Blockley; Treasurer: Serena Meredith

Executive Committee members – particularly retiring members: Tony Meredith and James Blockley

Site-management Sub-committee members

Members attending work parties

The Graziers

Newsletter production – Annette North

Wayne Sedgewick – the Community Park Ranger responsible for the Site

Jenny Phelps, of Gloucestershire's Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group

Julius added thanks on behalf of the whole Executive Committee for Judith's contribution as Chairman of FOLK for the last four years and as a regular member of the Working Parties. We are pleased that Judith is going to continue as a member of the Executive Committee and attending Working Parties.

Funding – the *not so boring* bits...

Water mains

Last year, with the help of Jenny Phelps of the Farming and Wildlife Action Group (FWAG), over £50,000 was secured to pay for the installation of mains water along the foot of the East and North slopes of Charlton Kings Common. This was important for the sustainability of grazing on the Common, because of the difficulty of using a bowser to supply water to the cattle-troughs on the site, particularly during the winter when access was sometimes difficult.

Environmentally Sensitive Area Payments

The Hill is currently managed under Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) funding. This gives us a certain, fairly low level of funding that offsets some of the costs of managing the site, particularly costs associated with the grazing and some scrub clearance.

The ESA funding and Single Farm Payment (SFP) has covered the capital cost of the grazing regime that has enabled us to graze most of Charlton Kings Common. The ESA payments, which amount to a little over £2000 per annum, are retained by CBC to cover the cost of some of the work that it pays for on the site. Half of the SFP is paid directly to the grazier, although this doesn't cover the whole cost of the grazing and the other half is used by CBC towards the cost of other work on the site. Properly managed grazing is the most effective way of managing limestone grassland, to ensure the survival of the delicate limestone flora and prevent it from being choked by coarse grasses. Whilst grazing has not yet restored the grassland to 'favourable' condition – a technical definition used for lowland grassland – it is improving the condition of the site and this year was one of the best for wild flowers since the foot-and-mouth outbreak closed the site.

The ESA also covered the bulk of the cost of both the fencing and the re-seeding with mixed grass and wild flowers for the 'arable reversion' of two fields at Hartley Farm. To release this money CBC also made a significant contribution to the cost. These fields still need at least another year to get well enough established to withstand grazing, but the display of wild flowers this summer was already spectacular. When fully

established these fields will offer winter grazing for the cattle, to give the slopes of Charlton Kings Common a rest during the wettest times of the year.

Higher Level Stewardship

Again with Jenny's help, the Council and FOLK are in the process of applying for the management to be changed to a Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) scheme. This will release substantially more grant funding and enable us to do much more to conserve the character and biodiversity of the site.

The ESA scheme required us to have a Conservation Action Plan for the site, but this was fairly flexible and this is what has been worked to over the last few years.

The HLS scheme is far more prescriptive than the ESA scheme, so it is a big commitment on the part of the Council and FOLK. The first stage was to prepare a comprehensive Farm Environment Plan (FEP), including comprehensive surveys of the historic boundaries of the Commons and the biological habitat areas. The results of these surveys are then used to produce a comprehensive management plan for the site.

Controversial

The most controversial aspect of the HLS application is the grazing regime that will be used to meet the requirements of the scheme. The current grazing regime, using temporary paddocks with electric fencing, is very flexible and causes the least inconvenience to users of the Common. However, it is very labour-intensive and not really sustainable in the long term. It involves very hard work on the part of the grazier with a huge amount of support from FOLK Working Parties. Whilst FOLK has been happy to do this, it does detract from FOLK's other conservation work, particularly scrub management.

Local opposition to permanent fencing on the Common is very strong and carries on the tradition of struggle against the enclosure of Leckhampton Hill in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In particular there is reluctance to see the site broken up into separate fields, by permanent fencing. This would undoubtedly detract from the 'wilderness feel' of the site that was so strongly supported during the public consultation on the Management Plan. People did not want the site to become like a 'country park', or farmland.

The problem is to find a sustainable management regime that does not detract from the character of the site. There was a threat that, in order to make the commitment to the HLS scheme, the Council might, with the support of Natural England, impose a solution on the Hill, regardless of the views of the users. This would have been disastrous – since the foundation of FOLK we have fought very strongly for management of the Hill to be agreed with the users, collectively represented by FOLK.

After protracted and, at times, very difficult discussions a compromise has been agreed in principle, that involves reinstating parts of the historic boundary wall, to a condition where it is stock-proof. It also involves restoring part of the historic boundary wall between Charlton Kings Common and Leckhampton Hill Common. (see below). It also involves a certain amount of permanent fencing around parts of the perimeter of Charlton Kings Common, with suitable gates to permit access to the Common in most of the places where people currently access it – 'desire-lines' – and not only on designated Public Rights of Way. The details of this are to be discussed during a site visit before this newsletter is published.

Historical and Archaeological Project

The HLS application has also highlighted an opportunity to carry out an '*historic and archaeological feature protection*' project (code: HAP) to be undertaken as a standalone capital works project within the forthcoming Higher Level Stewardship agreement to preserve some of what remains of the important industrial archaeology on Leckhampton Hill.

Following a site visit with FOLK and CBC in early November, a proposal has been drawn up by the County Archaeologist to seek support for the work from English Heritage. Some immediate work is required to

stabilise the existing remains and prevent further deterioration and further work over the next two years should see preservation of what remains.

'Modulation' funding

The European Union makes a levy on agriculture, some of which comes back in the form of grants for environmental projects. This year Natural England has not been able to identify enough suitable projects and has significantly under-spent on this money. It is public money, but if it is not spent on environmental projects, it is not available for other 'more deserving' public expenditure – it will simply be retained by the EU and may be spent elsewhere in Europe!

Consequently, Natural England is looking for suitable projects to fund. Once again, thanks to the work of Jenny Phelps, supported by FOLK and CBC, £600,000 of this money has already been agreed to pay for 80% of the cost of restoring around 1.3km of the historic dry stone boundary wall of Charlton Kings Common, mainly along the Cotswold Way. At the time of going to press, grants to cover the remaining 20% of the cost are currently being sought. An application for a grant under the Aggregates Levy is unlikely to proceed at this stage, but other grants from Gloucestershire Environmental Trust, the Summerfield Trust, the Prince's Trust, and the Cotswold Way, may make up the deficit.

If, as seems likely, the project goes ahead, it will not only enhance the Common along the Cotswold Way and provide work for the local Huntsman Quarry, but it will also support up to fifty jobs for up to six months. If the Prince's Trust gets involved this is likely to include twenty dry stone walling apprenticeships.

FOLK Working Parties will help to clear scrub along the line of the wall and their voluntary labour will contribute towards the balance of the total cost of the project.

Julius Marstrand – FOLK Chairman

Work Party Report Summer/Autumn 2009

In the final paragraph of my last report I commented on the long-range forecast of a promising summer. Much to the dismay of our work party members, during July and August we often suffered a good soaking. Fortunately our team are a hardy bunch; at least the wet ground made it easier to drive in the posts for the grazing paddocks and Tony Clifford's tea wagon was much appreciated.

The wet conditions resulted in a bumper crop of ragwort. Fortunately we were helped on several days ragwort pulling by two enthusiastic students recruited by CBC. FOLK work parties have cleared several small areas of grassland which are unsuitable for grazing, and cleared footpaths. On one work party we were joined by fifteen members of the Cotswold Voluntary Warden Service, when a start was made on clearing a very overgrown area below the Hill Fort.

In June we welcomed a group of students from Cheltenham College who wanted to learn more about Leckhampton Hill and FOLK's conservation work. They were split into three teams and each team in turn had a guided tour of the Hill and something of its history, a hands-on scrub clearance session, and an introduction to the flora and fauna of the Hill. The feedback from the staff was very positive, and it was an enjoyable experience for our members.

During the summer we took our display boards to an event in the garden of the Exmouth Arms in the Bath Road, and to Paws in the Park at Burrows Field. We signed up several new members at these events. We were invited to take our display to Hatherley Park, in support of the Cheltenham in Bloom entry for the Heart of England competition, where the judges were impressed by our contribution.

Finally thanks to all FOLK members who have supported our work during the year.

Dates of Future Work Parties

Midweek Work Parties

Thursday 10th December 2009

Tuesday 15th December 2009

Thursday 14th January 2010

Tuesday 19th January 2010

Thursday 11th February 2010

Tuesday 16th February

Thursday 11th March 2010

Tuesday 16th March 2010

Thursday 8th April 2010

Tuesday 20th April 2010

Weekend Work Parties

Sunday 20th December 2009*

(*please note amended date)

Sunday 24th January 2010

Sunday 28th February 2010

Sunday 28th March 2010

Sunday 25th April 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'll look forward to seeing you there.

Allan Wood

Since providing this report, Allan has not been well and has been unable to attend recent work parties. After his fall in February when he managed to break his hip, this latest problem means it has not been the best of years for him. We wish him a full and speedy recovery. Editor.

Daisybank Fields Dirt Jump Site

The small mountain biking oasis that is Daisybank Jumps has undergone a resurgence of interest of late.

After its initial construction a number of years ago the group of riders that helped with its original development eventually moved on. Most were teenagers and I guess schooling, university and other distractions drew them away from it. So the jumps lay dormant for a few years, until 2008. Fellow rider Alex Hazle had recently moved to Cheltenham and was excited to see the remains of the jumps and set about organising their rebirth....





At this point Cheltenham Borough Council stepped in and rightly insisted that any new jumps were properly planned and the existing remains flattened. After the old ones were demolished, a dedicated band of builders (riders) got to work on the new jumps that had been approved by CBC. For safety reasons we had to incorporate small dirt mounds that inexperienced riders could roll over. We didn't want novice jumpers going at full tilt over some huge gap and injuring themselves! So we built the beginner line of four mounds that ended in a 180 degree right hand corner at the bottom of the site. Next to this was then an "intermediate" skill level line, called table-tops. These are essentially a take off, a landing and a flat area connecting them. It enables the rider to land their bike on the top safely if they are not committed to clearing the jump. These comprised of four tables, and ending in a 180 degree left hand corner at the end, going behind the beginner level corner. To date this is where the progression of the site has got to, however we intend to put in one more "experienced" level line, and with any luck we can achieve this in 2010.

So, what has been the up take in usage of the Dirt Jumps? Well in 2009 the jumps were getting plenty of riders on (above) them. This year I ventured into the world of Dirt Jumping, something I had longed to do for a while but was nervous about trying it. However, once I found my feet (wings) there was no turning back. To the casual observer, it is hard to appreciate the buzz a rider gets out of doing repetitive runs going over mounds of earth. I now fully understand what the game is all about and it does make you feel good, no doubt. I'm only just starting out and learning the basics, but I want to keep at it and be able to do ride bigger jumps and give it some style. Riding regularly at the jump site this summer I have met riders who I haven't spoken to before and seen the younger element giving it a go. I've even been able to watch my eldest son (aged 8) progress from nervously rolling the novice set to virtually clearing them and riding fast at the same time. A great confidence booster for the kids. I have to say that riding the jumps on a warm summers evening with the sun about to go down, dust kicking up on each landing – is magic.



I have to say a big thank you to a majority of riders that use the site for keeping it generally tidy and not incorporating their own digging plans there. The regular riders are aware that we have to manage this site properly and work together to get things done. Also a big thanks to CBC for arranging the contractor who helped place the large amounts of earth in the right places after the old jumps were removed. Moving this soil by spade alone would have been a nightmare!!

Roger Smith.

Pictures courtesy of Roger Smith and Graham Haller.

Newsletter Sponsorship

We are indebted to the Parish Councils of Leckhampton with Warden Hill as well as Shurdington for their generous contributions towards the production and distribution postage costs of this year's newsletters to our members. I would like to apologise to both Parish Councils for the failure to acknowledge their donations in the previous newsletter due to unsuccessful electronic communications – in other words the emailed "copy" did not reach the editor.

Can you help?

The Executive Committee would welcome some "new blood" and is actively seeking volunteers to be co-opted to help with the running of FOLK. We would be particularly interested in hearing from anyone who has a sound knowledge of birds, (especially in respect of those living on the Hill and their habitat requirements) in order to champion their cause, a job which up to now has been done so ably by Tony Meredith. This requires a commitment to attend one meeting a month (duration of about 2 hours).

If you would be interested in editing this newsletter, it would be helpful if you have access to a computer and email, as this greatly simplifies the whole process. There are normally 3 or 4 issues a year. This is not a committee post as such, so regular attendance at Executive meetings is not necessary, but you would be more than welcome to become a co-opted member if you so wish!

Finally, if you have time to write an article for publication in the next issue on a subject relating in some way to the Hill, please get in touch with the temporary editor for details as to how and to whom it should be sent.

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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Co-opted Anne North, Judith Frazer-Holland
CBC Ex Officio

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