



Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

NEWSLETTER

Free to members; non members 25p

Issue 38 Spring 2012

Welcome to the 2012 Spring FOLK newsletter.

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A 'Leckhampton Stalwart'

Julius Marstrand FOLK Chairman

Judith Frazer-Holland was a founder member of FOLK, a member of its Executive Committee from its inception until the year before her death, in November 2011 and its Chairman for four years from 2005 to 2009. However, Judith would probably regard her work on FOLK's conservation working parties as her greatest contribution to Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common. Judith was one of the most regular members of the Working Parties, turning out in all weathers and working as hard as anyone.

Often, when Allan Wood, the usual Working Party Co-ordinator, was away, Judith took responsibility for organising the Working Parties. The leaders of the campaign for rights of public access to Leckhampton Hill from 1897 to 1906, who led the riots in 1902 and 1906, were known as 'The Leckhampton Stalwarts' and Judith well deserves the title for the contribution she has made to conserving the hill, whilst maintaining the greatest possible public access.

Animals and Veterinary Practice

Judith was born in Oxford in 1948. She had a lifelong interest in animals and, despite guidance from her teachers, was determined to become a

vet. She was one of only five women out of one hundred students at the Royal Veterinary College in London. It was there, with a friend Linda, that she developed a lifelong love of horses, but when she started work, at a veterinary practice in Cheltenham, she chose to specialise in small animals.

The Bluebell Wood (slightly adapted) by Felix Dennis

"We walked within an ancient wood
Beside the path of the Cotswold Way
Where oak and beech and hazel stood
Their leaves the pale shades of May

By bole and bough, still black with rain,
The sunlight filtered where it would
Across a glowing, radiant stain
We stood within a bluebell wood!

And stood and stood, both lost for words,
As all around the woodland rang
And echoed with the cries of birds
Who sang and sang.. and sang and
sang...

My mind has marked that afternoon
To hoard against life's stone and sling:
Should I go late, or 'I' go soon,
The blue bells glowthe birds still sing.

Leckhampton Hill

Judith's own horses were kept in fields behind Leckhampton Hill, so she developed her love of the Hill riding round it. When the future of the Hill was uncertain she stepped in to help protect it. She was very determined to preserve the 'wilderness' feel of the site and prevent it either being turned into an 'over-manicured' country park, or being allowed to deteriorate to rough scrub, or be entirely taken over by woodland.

Despite misgivings, Judith eventually accepted that extensive grazing was the only sustainable way to manage the site and that this would involve fencing the remainder of the perimeter of Charlton Kings Common that had not already been enclosed by the dry stone wall. Once she was convinced of this, she became one of its strongest advocates, but was very determined to maintain the best possible access to the Common, despite the perimeter fencing.

Recognition

Judith's contribution to the conservation of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common was eventually recognised in 2010, when she was awarded the 'Environmental Hero' award at the Pride of Gloucestershire Awards. Sadly, by that time, she was too ill to attend the ceremony and the award was collected on her behalf by Mike Donnelly, another member of FOLK. In fact Judith was never a great one for fancy ceremonies, or personal recognition, she was far too modest for that – she was happiest out in the country with her animals, her beloved terriers and her horses.

Judith was a strong opponent of too many signs on the site and commemorative benches. She was also very opposed to planting on the S.S.S.I. Nevertheless several people felt that there should be a permanent memorial to Judith and her work on the site. In 1992, long before FOLK was founded, Judith had successfully campaigned for the footpath from Brownstone Quarry to the top of Charlton Kings Common (ZCK 44) to become a 'Permissive Bridleway'. Colloquially known as 'The Motorway' by horse riders and 'Proflex Alley' by

mountain bikers, it has been agreed to rename this 'Judith's Ride' – a much more fitting tribute to the contribution Judith had made to the site and one that we hope she would have approved.

Progress on the Fencing project

Wayne Sedgwick Cheltenham Borough Council Senior Ranger

I have been asked by the Friends of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common (FOLK) to write a small piece regarding the proposal or rather the reality that is happening on and around the precious parcel of land known as Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common and give the reasoning behind it. I am the Ranger who manages the land and I am employed by Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC). CBC has owned the site since 1927 and from many conversations that I have had over the past few years, regarding the area, it sounds like there has nearly always been a ranger / warden managing the site.



The site is situated on the scarp slope of the Cotswold Hills, within the Cotswold AONB and immediately adjacent to Cheltenham. It was designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in 1954 for its 'unimproved limestone grassland' and 'nationally significant' (Jurassic) limestone.

A while before I came into post and I believe at the behest of the council (more than 10 years

ago) FOLK was formed, mainly due to limited council resources and continued pressure from English Nature to start a full restoration of the grassland. A management plan was commissioned, written and adopted. Using this as a guide, work began in earnest to restore the grassland, the main aim to achieve “favourable condition” for the site, this being a statutory requirement for all landowners under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, the Countryside and Rights of Way Act and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act.

The whole site has been under an Environmentally Sensitive Area Agreement (ESA) through DEFRA and administered by Natural England (NE) for the past 8 years.

As part of the recommended management, we were advised to graze the land. This is a sustainable way to attain “favourable condition”. Grazing is Natural England’s recommended management for the restoration and maintenance of species rich limestone grassland.

Our particular site posed some challenges. It has a steep topography and open public access and this meant selecting a certain type of animal. For this reason Dexter cattle were chosen. It was decided that, due to the many dog walkers, it would be inappropriate for sheep to graze the slopes.

The management as set within the current agreement, including having to graze within temporary electric paddocks, was no longer a sustainable option for the site. Moving the paddocks was very labour intensive and detracted from other conservation work that FOLK working parties could focus on, such as scrub clearance and species monitoring. Electric fencing also meant enclosing up to 8 acres of the site at a time and excluding people

from these areas. This was not a sustainable regime, especially as CBC had to rely on the good-will of FOLK to move the paddocks every 6 weeks, which would take up to 2 days with over 3000m of electric wire and posts to be moved along a very steep North facing scarp slope. It was also apparent that to achieve “favourable condition” the current management/ scrub plan would need to be updated.



Therefore after extensive consultation with NE, FOLK, CBC and other public bodies, a decision was achieved and an application was made to NE to enter the site into the Higher Level Stewardship scheme (HLS), to be regulated by NE. Fortunately, we were accepted into the scheme and it commenced on 1st April 2011. Moving into this type of stewardship presented a number of hurdles. A stricter management regime would be required. Surveying and monitoring of the site would need to be intensified and Charlton Kings Common would have to be extensively grazed, requiring erection of a 2.5km fence along the North, East and West sides of the common, an area of 34.6 Ha. This would replace the historic dilapidated wall of the common. CBC had recently completed the restoration of 1.3km of the southern boundary with a newly built dry stone wall (along the line of the Cotswold Way National Trail). The eventual aim was to replace the majority of

the fencing by restoring the dry stone wall boundary.

Work on the fencing commenced in January this year and will be complete by April when we propose to release the cattle to free range over the common. This will be an interesting time as this type of grazing has never been recently attempted on the site.



The fence line will incorporate 19 access points, 10 of which are public rights of way (PROW) with 9 “desire” points. Each point has been thought through carefully as to the type of gate or stile that is to be installed due to the need for vehicular, horse or pedestrian access. There are 11 Bridle gates, 2 pedestrian gates, 5 field gates and 5 stiles (dog access included). A number of the access points will have 2 gates - such as each field gate, which will have either a bridle gate or stile adjacent. All gates are self-closing.



I hope that I have explained our reasoning regarding the HLS and the extensive grazing and also hope that people will respect the new regime that we are attempting to install on the site. It is important that people understand the necessity of the grazing and that if and when the gates are used to access the site that they are allowed to close and not give the cattle chance to escape.

Any questions please do not hesitate to contact me on: 07733014743

Measuring Change in our Species-rich Grassland

John Henry committee member

A New and Different Role for Volunteers

Patients in hospital have a very clear idea of the desired outcome of their treatment, whether their problem is the repair of a body part or an improvement in one’s general state of health. During that stay we expect doctors and nurses to regularly monitor recovery by measuring blood pressure, temperature and the like. If progress is less good than anticipated, then we expect medication or treatment to be changed. What has a hospital visit to do with FOLK? I argue below that having both a desired outcome and monitoring whether or not it is being achieved are as important to the management of wildlife as they are to human health. The underlying aims of this article are to suggest that FOLK should support monitoring on our site and to persuade some of you to become involved in that activity.

FOLK and the Borough Council have a raft of objectives for the future state of the Hill and the Common, for example relating to access, archaeology and wildlife. Some objectives have been proposed by Natural England. when agreeing that the SSSI should receive Higher Level Stewardship. Natural England specified that the limestone grassland should meet certain criteria in terms of its extent, what plant species are present, how abundant these species are, and how high the

grass is at certain times of year. The present state of the grassland is far from what Natural England hope for. The treatments suggested to deliver the desired state were: the fencing of the Common and through the year grazing by an appropriate number of cattle. These steps will be implemented in 2012.

But how will we know whether or not the new management regime is delivering what we want? We could wait until Natural England makes one of its periodic inspections, but this may not be for five or more years. Waiting this long would be acceptable if the extensive grazing results in the quality of the grassland moving towards that which we want, but it may not. For example, it might be that we have too few or too many cattle and that this error results in no movement towards our target, or worse, that some desirable plant species disappear. FOLK and the Council cannot afford to wait to find out what is happening. Like doctors and nurses we need to be constantly aware of how the patient is doing so that we can modify treatment, in our case management, to deliver the hoped for outcome. This suggests that we need to follow the medical example and regularly monitor what is happening to our grassland.

Monitoring is one of those things that nature conservationists always say is a good thing, but which they rarely carry out. Why is this? There may be several reasons. These include that monitoring: is too complicated; it requires specialist knowledge, for example in being able to identify plant species; it involves a lot of effort to collect enough information to be able make a reliable judgement; it needs several years before results emerge; and that too few people are available to collect data. Some of these problems, such as the need to make observations regularly over several years, are real, but careful design of a monitoring programme, plus the use of modern technology, can overcome most of the hurdles.

Two key elements of a good monitoring programme are that those taking part are very clear about what they need to do and that there is as little scope as possible for the results being

skewed by different observers doing different things. These criteria can be met by collecting simple yes / no information, such as whether or not a particular species is present in a particular, defined, area.

So what is planned for the monitoring of the grassland of Charlton Kings Common? In technical terms it is hoped to collect reliable information of the "frequency" of a small number of plant species over a number of years. "Frequency" in this context is the percentage of sites examined in which a particular species is present. If enough sites are examined and if each site is small, say a square with sides of 10 centimetres, then "frequency" is a very good measure of how abundant a species is. Hopefully over time, desirable species, such as orchids, will increase in abundance and undesirable ones, such as Ragwort, will decrease.

How will this be done? The present plans are as follows.

- A number of areas will be selected from which samples will be taken and their location will be mapped by GPS, which is an electronic device using information from satellites circulating round the earth to give an accurate position on the earth for the device. Using GPS, will allow the areas to be easily found again later.
- Within each area a frame with a grid of small squares will be laid out. There might be 25 of these squares (technically called "quadrats"), each perhaps 10 or 15 cm square.
- Each quadrat will be examined to see whether or not it contains plants from a short list of species (perhaps 15 – 20 easily identified ones).
- If a species is present, then that fact will be recorded by putting a cross in the appropriate square of a table, in the diagrammatic sense, on a small hand-held computer. The record will automatically be immediately transferred to a data base in the Council Offices.

- To collect a large enough number of records to provide a reliable estimate of frequency, the sampling frame will need be moved to three other locations in the area and the resulting quadrats also examined and scored.
- At the end of each summer the accumulated records for the year will be analysed to get estimates of frequency for each species.
- After the first year, each new set of measures of frequency will be compared to earlier years to assess whether or not we have moved towards, or reached, the desired target.

If we are not moving forward, then we will need to review how we are managing the grazing.

This scheme will only be possible if there are enough volunteers prepared to go out on to the Common to collect the necessary data. What will be expected of volunteers? The key requirements are as below.

- Ready to spend a minimum of 2 days on the Common in May, June and July.
- Know, or willing to learn, how to identify the plant species of interest (training will be given and identification help will be available on the hand-held computer).
- Know, or willing to learn, how to use GPS and hand-held computer (training will be given).
- Prepared to spend several hours at a time on hands and knees searching through grass.
- Not averse to working in an area in which there are cows.

Pairs of volunteers would be particularly valuable, as having one person looking at the plants and another entering the records would speed up the process considerably, whilst alternating these tasks would ease knees and provide a rest. Such joint working would also provide support with things such as problems in species identification and

would address any concerns about being alone on the Common.

If you are interested in this project and would like to learn more, then please contact me on 01422 520053 or at henry.harvey1@btinternet.com. I look forward to hearing from you.

How a cycling ban in Cranham Woods would be bad news for Leckhampton Hill.....

Roger Smith.

Cheltenham & County Cycling Club.

The last five years has definitely seen a greater understanding between cyclists, FOLK and other Leckhampton Hill users. It is an ongoing process of education as some riders move away from the area and others come or take up this great leisure pursuit. However, a recent development in the Cranham Woods area may start to put unnecessary extra pressure on Leckhampton Hill from more cyclists.

In October 2011 Natural England erected signage within Buckholt and Rough Woods warning that mountain biking on any tracks other than marked bridleways was not allowed and advised observers to report such instances to the Police. This took the local mountain bike (MTB) community very much by surprise seeing as no such warnings had arisen since cycle specific tracks started appearing some 20 plus years ago. Much of the land is in private ownership, but some belongs to Natural England (NE).

There are footpaths in this area and limited Bridleway access. However there is quite a bit of permissive access for horses. Local riders have gradually established small number of cycle specific trails connecting Birdlip to the A46, near to the Royal William public house. These trails became popular with mountain bikers as they kept bikes away from other woodland users and they were more entertaining than wide, often churned

up tracks used by horses.



In the last 5 to 10 years the popularity of the area for cyclists has admittedly increased a lot. This has been facilitated by the internet, social networking like Facebook, as well as the sport of mountain biking generally becoming more popular. Two of the largest MTB clubs in the area were regular users of this woodland for example. However the most frustrating aspect of the signage put up by NE is that no one tried to liaise with local riders and find out the best way to go about managing this issue. Putting up signs telling riders they are banned would only cause a negative reaction from them. So what has happened since and where are we now?

Having had experience with liaising with Leckhampton Hill MTBers I decided to front a united group who would attempt to work with NE to find a workable, manageable solution to this. Many riders accept that they don't know the exact land ownership status of this woodland but having ridden there unhindered for many years they felt that as their activity had very little impact on the land it was not a significant problem.

Cheltenham & County CC and Bigfoot Mountain Bike Club joined forces to propose methods of

working with NE and local landowners. Past experience has told us that people can fear or react negatively to what they don't understand. By giving NE an insight into why we ride in the woodland, and exactly where we ride, it would help their understanding. At the same time we realised that riders needed to understand the significant importance of this wooded area. And we have done that. Through our now flourishing communication network of clubs, individual riders, cycling forums and local bike retailers we have spread the word that the Beech woodland of this area is of European significance and are National Nature Reserves.



A meeting has already been held between cycling club representatives and NE. The trail network has been mapped by GPS and shared with NE to help them understand the very limited extent of the trails used. In return for this negotiation we have spread the word to riders to stay away from the woodland over the winter while discussions are underway. Not only is this complying with NE's initial requests but also demonstrating that we, as a user group, can self manage. However we have made it known to NE that a ban on cycling on the established trail network is pretty much unenforceable and it will simply alienate cyclists and potentially create dangerous occurrences if people start vandalising the tracks by deliberately blocking them.

We have had some positive noises coming from NE although the details of future access and management are still unknown at this time. If a restriction to access is seriously attempted then

riders will ride in areas where they are allowed on a more frequent basis. Leckhampton Hill is one area as it is very close to Cranham. Leckhampton Hill is so small compared to the dispersed cycling that has occurred within Cranham Woods and so a small increase in use here would be very noticeable. Include the effects of the recent influx of visitors who would have used Crickley Hill before the parking charges came in, then we start to see real issues arising from increased use.



FOLK Work Party Winter Report 2011/12

Michael Donnelly FOLK work party co-ordinator

The FOLK work parties have been very well attended in the last three months with most having a minimum of ten volunteers. This has made it easier to achieve the completion of planned projects. The weather has also been kind to us with no snow so far and we have only had one work party on which we got rather wet moving the cattle paddock

We have as usual spent time this winter setting up paddocks to move the cattle across Charlton Kings Common. However with the good turn out of volunteers, we have also been able to do a large amount of shrub clearing to improve the grassland on the hill. This we hope will also improve the areas for wild flowers and Butterflies.

A large amount of work has been completed in clearing the boundary fence line ready to erect the fence. This work is being led by Wayne Sedgwick Senior Ranger for Cheltenham Borough Council and the Community Service Team. The FOLK Work party has also worked on this project with the Community Service Team to help complete the works on time so that the fence can be erected to programme by the contractor and Folk will no longer be required to move the temporary paddocks for the Dexter cattle

To plan work for future FOLK Work Parties and as part of achieving the standards required to conform to Higher Level Stewardship on the hill, a FOLK sub committee in September walked across Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common. The objective was to complete a survey to produce a new Grassland and Scrub Management Work Programme. For our records and to improve monitoring a series of fixed point photographs were taken as a record of the condition of the biodiversity before and after grazing. We also identified projects to be undertaken by FOLK Work Parties, Community Service Teams or Contractors to improve conditions and the grassland on the hill.

2012 looks to be an exciting year for the hill with the boundary fence being erected and finding out what Higher Level Stewardship means for management and conservation work parties on the hill. Why not be part of it and join our ever growing number of volunteers. For your own safety please wear stout footwear and tough gardening gloves. We are still meeting at Tramway Cottage Car Park Daisy Bank Road at 9.30am.

Dates for work parties are listed in the table overleaf. For further information Contact Mike (01242 238790) or Serena (01242 524138)

Work parties for 2012

April 2012	Thursday 12 th	Tuesday 17 th	Sunday 22 nd
May 2012	Thursday 10 th	Tuesday 15 th	Sunday 27 th
June 2012	Thursday 14 th	Tuesday 19 th	Sunday 24 th
July 2012	Thursday 12 th	Tuesday 17 th	Sunday 22 nd
August 2012	Thursday 9 th	Tuesday 21 st	4 th Sunday is Bank Holiday Move to Sunday 1 st September
September 2012	Thursday 13 th	Tuesday 18 th	Sunday 23 rd

(Please note the August Bank Holiday date change to 1st September)

Continued support from our local Parish Councils

Following applications to local Parish Councils, I am very pleased to announce that Charlton Kings and Shurdington Parish Councils are continuing to support the work of FOLK. Both have approved and sent grants that will help us fund some of the management and monitoring work to be done on the hill this season. Elsewhere in this newsletter, there is an appeal for volunteers to help with the monitoring - should any field identification guides or charts of the fauna and flora be needed in conjunction with this initiative, funding is now available to produce or purchase these. There will be no need for individuals to have their own guides so there is no excuse not to get involved – all it will cost is your time and shoe leather (and perhaps a pencil or two!). At the time of going to press, the application to the third Parish Council, Leckhampton with Warden Hill, was pending (to be considered at their February meeting).

Serena Meredith, Treasurer

And Finally

With signs of spring visible on the Hill, this is the time to get out and enjoy the glorious facilities on our doorsteps. Don't forget to check out your diaries and reserve some time to join the other regular members who do an invaluable job on the work parties. Why pay to go to a gym when you can get all the exercise you need whilst looking after our local environment.

January snow on the Hill



signs of spring



4 footed volunteers



If you have any comments on the Newsletter or would like to contribute an article to the next edition later in 2012 please contact Peter Whalley on 01242 517024 or email to: whalley-p@o2.co.uk

Contact FOLK

Membership and Grazier: 01242 522767 Working Parties: 01242 238790

Chairman: 07717 326610 folk@marstrand.co.uk Treasurer: 01242 524138

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