



Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common **FOLKtalk**

Free to members; non-members 25p

Issue 52 autumn 2016

Welcome to the 2016 Autumn FOLK newsletter. In this issue:

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Autumn time FOLK AGM time

Hopefully we have all enjoyed the late summer sunshine in September and October. Visitors to the Hill and Common will have seen the signs of the approaching autumn: there are lots of berries on the hawthorn, still signs of



Autumn colour on the Hill Fort

wildflowers and the expectant cows are grazing in the arable reversion field near to the Hill Fort waiting for their calves to be born. Soon you will be receiving formal notification of the 2016 AGM, which will be held at Leckhampton Junior School on November 9th. This year we have important changes on your Committee as some hard working and long serving

members step down. We need to recruit new members to the Committee to keep up the excellent work that has been done in the last few years. In particular we need a new Treasurer. We are assured that this role is not too demanding. So please come along to the AGM and consider helping out. FOLK needs you!

Introducing Geoff Holt, Work Party boss

For those members who are regular volunteers on work parties on the Hill and Common, Geoff Holt will need no introduction but for our other members it is a pleasure to put Geoff under the FOLKtalk spotlight this month. Geoff was brought up in rural Cheshire and has a love of the countryside and getting out into the fresh air. Engineering is Geoff's chosen field and his job in the nuclear power industry brought him to Gloucestershire in the 70's. With a brief sojourn in the South East he and his family have been in and around Cheltenham for many years. Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common have been Geoff's countryside on the doorstep.

When did you join FOLK? I retired in 2001 and decided to get involved in FOLK by joining work parties. The first work party I was planning to attend was sadly on the very day Allan Wood (a long serving work party leader) passed away but since then I have become fully involved in the work of FOLK on the Hill. I also joined the Executive Committee following the AGM in 2011.

How do you (and your family) enjoy the Hill? When we first lived in Cheltenham I started to walk on the Hill and this was a favourite remedy when I had long spells deskbound in the office. The Hill and Common gave the opportunity of getting some exercise in the fresh air and beautiful Cotswold countryside. When we have visitors it is good to be able to take them strolling on the Hill.



Geoff Holt FOLK work party leader – a new project?

What are your earliest memories of the Hill? Our first house in Cheltenham was on the other side of town and Cleeve Hill was very visible and inviting. However I did make occasional visits to the Hill in the early 70's. When we moved back to Cheltenham in 1982 I

started to walk on the Hill and have been a regular visitor there ever since.

What changes have you noticed over the years? There has been a gradual and subtle change in the look of the Hill as scrub and trees have covered more of the grassland. It is difficult to spot this change from year to year. From our house in Leckhampton we could see the Devil's Chimney from our windows but tree growth has now hidden it.

What is your favourite view of or from the Hill? I love the view from the top of the Hill at the corner by the topograph. Looking north you can see the Malverns and looking south is the River Severn, the Forest of Dean and beyond to Wales. I can also see my house from that spot looking over Cheltenham. I also particularly like the path we call the Woodland Walk from the Lime Kilns along the base of the escarpment to Hartley Lane. There is an imposing view looking up to the Devil's Chimney.



Evening view towards the Malverns

What is your favourite time of year on the Hill? The Hill and Common have attractions in all seasons. Spring and autumn have the wonderful colours; looking up through the fresh green of the trees in spring and kicking through the browns and golds of the autumn leaves are great pleasures. It is also wonderful to see the

increasingly unusual sight of the Hill with snow and hoar frost covering the trees.

What aspect of the natural history, archaeology or geology of the Hill do you find most interesting? I have a recently been appreciating the Industrial Archaeology more and more. I enjoyed the recent talk by Ray Wilson on the subject. Following on from that, FOLK and Cheltenham Borough will be working with the Cotswold Wardens to improve some of the tracks and tramways associated with the quarries and lime kilns. Together with the information boards we hope to let people know what is on the Hill.

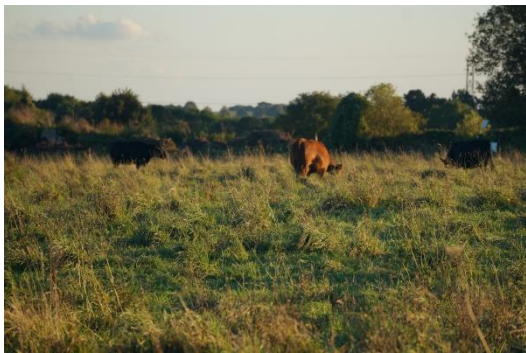
What does membership of FOLK mean to you? It is important for the people of Cheltenham and visitors from elsewhere to keep the Hill and Common open and in a good state for their enjoyment. I believe FOLK has an important part to play in that process. FOLK also acts as a voice for all the various users in discussions with the Borough and others about the management of the Hill and Common.

What would you hope that FOLK would have achieved on the Hill by its 25th anniversary in 2025? I don't have any specific ambitions for the Hill apart from hoping that the Hill and Common will still be used and enjoyed by lots of different people and it will be a resource for outside visitors. It would be good if FOLK could encourage the younger generation to become involved in its work.

The Word from Wayne

Wayne Sedgwick Senior Ranger. Cheltenham Borough Council

Work to fence the so called Hopkins land at the eastern edge of Charlton Kings Common bordering the golf course and Cirencester Road has started with the contractor removing some trees. A digger will be used to remove the stumps. When this land becomes available for the cattle the **grazing**



Grazing the arable reversion field

scheme for the whole site will need to be revised to take full advantage of the extra pasture. The pregnant cows have now been moved to the arable reversion in preparation for birthing over the next 2 or 3 months. The young stock are in Daisybank and the others are on the main site. The herd size may grow again over the next few months. The experiment

involving fencing off part of the Common to investigate the effect of grazing has shown that the cows do remove wildflowers but the experiment is to be carried on in 2017 to see if there is evidence that butterflies, moths and other invertebrates are affected by the reduction in wildflowers.

At the moment we have draft plans for managing various aspects of the Hill and Common's management, including the Site of Special Scientific Interest. This is required by Natural England. The plans need to be agreed and finalised and they will be used to produce work schedules for the regular tasks on the site and projects that the Council and FOLK may decide to do. The work to fence the Hopkins land is an example of a project to make better use of the land available.

The Borough Council's Enforcement team are currently consulting on a proposed Public Protection order which is aimed to control **drinking in public places** in town and regulate aspects of **dog walking**. This order may affect the part of the site, which is within the Cheltenham Borough's area.

Chris Chevasse the Council's Trees Officer has been asked to produce a report for the Council Cabinet on how to deal proactively with the likely effects of **Ash Dieback on the Hill**. Progress on this will be notified in future newsletters.

Wayne Sedgwick has been interviewed by representatives of the National Lottery to provide feedback on how the **Magnificent Meadows** project performed. There is a possibility that funding for the project may be extended and this will provide an opportunity for further work on the Hill and Common.



Out for a spin on the Hill.

Growth of wildflowers on cleared and seeded ground in area 16 above the Bridge car park has been rather disappointing. The exercise may be repeated.

Work has been carried out by young bikers supported by FOLK on the bike jumps in the Daisybank fields. More work needs to be done when the ground

is softer in the autumn. Hopefully this link with young bikers may lead to greater engagement with the site by bikers.

The Leckhampton Cub group are hoping to join in a FOLK Sunday work party in October or November.

Butterfly monitoring: what we saw in 2016

Have you seen this butterfly?

Worryingly, the Wall Brown has not been seen by the regular surveyors on Leckhampton Hill or Charlton Kings Common either this summer or during the previous season. This may have been just down to bad luck in the timing of surveys, or of more concern, it may no longer be present as a breeding butterfly. So, is there anyone out there who has been fortunate enough to see this species anywhere on the hill? If so please get in touch to let me know where and when you saw it.



Wall Brown butterfly image from the internet

Generally, 2016 was yet another disappointing and discouraging year in the pursuit of butterflies on Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common. The variable weather conditions played a large part, swinging from windy, cool and cloudy to hot and sunny followed by tremendous thunderstorms. These have a decimating and devastating effect on insect populations in general, and that was all too apparent in the numbers of butterflies recorded. Luckily for the Duke of Burgundy which is on the wing in May and June, it escaped the worst and was seen in its usual haunt on the eastern side of Charlton Kings Common, as well as venturing further west. The high summer flyers of Meadow Brown, Ringlet and Marbled White usually seen in quantities of 30 – 40 per grassland section with rare exceptions barely reached the 20s and Common Blues didn't live up to their name either. The flight periods of most species also seem to have been curtailed, so for example very few Meadow Browns were recorded beyond mid-August whereas previously they have been seen well into September and occasionally as late as October! Both the

large fritillaries – Dark green and Silver-washed – were recorded, and by August and into September Red Admirals were a fairly regular sighting along with Speckled Wood, but not much else. Following the warm start to September, a single Clouded Yellow was seen close to the square barrow just outside the hill fort, but as the area had already been cut for hay, it did not hang around due to the lack of nectar plants.

As soon as all the survey records are received, input and analysed, a full report will be posted on the website.

Bumblebees on Leckhampton Hill

2016 was the first year of a bumblebee survey being undertaken on Leckhampton Hill between Salterley and Brownstones Quarries. A fixed route was walked once a month and the species, number and if possible the sex of the bumblebees seen were recorded. So far, 7 species have been positively identified, with one cuckoo bumblebee awaiting confirmation of the ID. This is an ongoing project and will be repeated in order to gauge how bumblebee populations change through time, and will allow detection of the early warning signs of population declines. All data collected will contribute to important long-term monitoring of bumblebee population changes in response to changes in land-use and climate change and, ultimately, to informing



Cuckoo bumblebee image from the internet

How the countryside is managed.

Serena Meredith FOLK

Butterfly Survey Co-ordinator

Contact details: Phone 01242 524138, email gmeredith308@btinternet.com with FOLK butterfly as the subject please.

LECKHAMPTON HILL AND CHARLTON KINGS COMMON SSSI: REVIEW OF GRAZING MANAGEMENT (21 APRIL 2016)

The extensive grazing of Charlton Kings Common seems to be working very well. The impact of the steady increase in Dexter cattle over recent years along with the cumulative effect of annual grazing has greatly reduced the dead grass (thatch) and the Hill looks very well grazed for the start of the current growing season. Consequently, it is suggested that the cattle are not put back out onto the Hill until there is a bit more evidence of grass growth. This will probably be in a couple of weeks (early May) when the current green shoots have developed into something more palatable for the livestock.



Fenced area early in the season

It had been noted by some that there seemed to be fewer flowering plants in the spring/ summer months and that this may be a result of the larger number of stock now out on the Hill during this time. Hence, a cattle exclusion fence has now been erected over an area of

approximately 1 acre of “typical” grassland habitat to provide a control area to see the impact of no spring/summer grazing compared with spring summer grazing. Surveys of plants and insects will be taken within the fenced area and a similar sized area adjacent to the exclusion area will be monitored in the same way. This will be repeated for two more seasons to compare the cumulative effects of such management. This is an excellent initiative and will go a long way to provide evidence on which to base future grazing management decisions.

Scrub clearance, especially gorse, has continued over the winter as agreed with the aim of opening up further areas of grassland and encouraging the

livestock to roam more extensively. The results are impressive and it is envisaged that the livestock will spend more time grazing in these recently cleared areas. However, some areas may also require on-going maintenance work through the cutting of ruderal weed species. In fact, the clearance of scrub over recent years has been so successful that further clearance areas will have to be carefully chosen to ensure that sufficient scrub remains in the right areas, for species such as nesting birds, adders and some invertebrates.

The clearance of mature ash trees has been a beneficial task, not least to remove the constant seeding of young ash trees across the Hill. However, there are reasons for keeping some to provide nesting opportunities, habitat for invertebrates and other species such as bats. Hence it was suggested that some of the smaller trees are pollarded to protect their growth from grazing animals but to encourage future habitat. This will also reduce their seeding capacity, at least in the short term.

Finally, the preparation of additional land for grazing was discussed to provide greater flexibility for the grazing herd throughout the year. This will be discussed further to determine the suitability of the land coming into the current HLS scheme.

Paul Hackman, Natural England

FOLK Work Party Report Autumn 2016



The Barrow

Since the last newsletter we moved onto our routine summer jobs. In July we spent time mowing and clearing the grass around the ancient Barrow on top of Leckhampton Hill. As can be seen from the photos overleaf, the long grass tends to hide the Barrow but after a short back and sides from our all-terrain mower it is much more distinctive and visible to passers-by.



Photo: Martin Wood



Photo: Martin Wood

Before and after mowing at the Barrow

We also did some mowing and brush-cutting in a nearby area we call the 'butterfly motorway'. This is a flattish ledge area to the North side and below the topograph where the scrub tends to grow prolifically. It was cleared by the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens a year or so ago but was starting to grow back. Our plan is to try and find time to trim this area each year so as to keep it under control. The photo below shows the area as we were finishing the cutting work.



Photo: Martin Wood

Work party clearing the butterfly motorway

Another of our regular summer jobs is to try and control the growth and spread of ragwort and hemp agrimony. These are mainly to be found on Charlton Kings Common where the cattle are free to roam and graze. Ragwort can be poisonous if eaten by the cattle and so we aim to pull up and remove the whole plants from the Hill. Hemp Agrimony is an invasive weed and, ideally, we try to pull up the plants before they flower so that we can then just drop them on the ground. Quite often the cattle will eat the pulled up Hemp Agrimony plants which does them no harm at all. This year we were a bit late in pulling up Hemp Agrimony and they had started flowering so we took off the flower heads and removed these from the Hill to stop them seeding, but left the rest of the plant on the Hill.



Ragwort and Hemp Agrimony on Charlton Kings Common

Warning: It has been noticed that some visitors to the Hill have been pulling up Ragwort plants and leaving them on the ground where they can be accessed and potentially eaten by the cattle. This is not good. When the plants are alive, growing and flowering, Ragwort is apparently bitter tasting to cattle and other animals and they will not eat it. However, when the plant is dead, e.g. after being pulled up, it becomes much less bitter and is a temptation to cattle. Ragwort, if eaten, can affect the livers of cattle and in extreme cases can kill them. **So, please do not pull up growing Ragwort and do not then leave it on the ground where cattle can potentially eat it.**

Other jobs we have done in the period include: putting up a temporary paddock in Daisybank Field to hold the new calves; helping the cyclists to clear scrub and excess growth on and around the bike jumps below Daisybank Road; removing the temporary enclosure on the side of Charlton Kings Common which was erected as an experiment to see the impact of grazing on flowers and invertebrates (see elsewhere in this newsletter for more on this); trimming the grass and other growth in the open area above Bridge Car Park on Daisybank Road; and, raking up the grass cuttings on the top of the East side of Leckhampton Hill after it was cut by a contractor (removal stops the dead, cut grass from suffocating the live plants below).

Now that the nights are drawing in and the growing season is ending, we will be moving away from our regular summer work and onto our winter work programme in future work parties. This tends to be of a 'slash-and-burn'

nature! That is trying to control the spread of scrub, such as gorse and bramble, and saplings, particularly ash.

Plea for Support: We are very lucky that we have a very good turnout of volunteers for our Thursday and Tuesday work parties (normally more than 10) for which we are very grateful. However, the Sunday work parties have tended recently to be less fortunate with typically only 4 volunteers attending. It would be nice if we could boost numbers attending on the Sundays, so, if you can, why not try and join us. See dates and joining details below. Thanks.

As well as our regular FOLK volunteers we are lucky that a number of local companies allow their staff to donate some of their time to good causes such as FOLK. This summer we again had 4 people from Kohler Mira who donated a day and wandered all over Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common picking up litter. We are very grateful for this support (and to those of you who regularly pick up litter on your visits to the Hill). The photo below shows this group looking fresh and raring to go at the start of the day.



Willing volunteers from Kohler Mira

As always you are welcome to join us on any of our work parties. We are a friendly, mixed group of male and female volunteers. You can work at your own pace and take a break as and when you wish. We meet at 9.30am at Tramway Cottage Car Park, Daisybank Road, and are on the hill for approximately 3 hours.

Tools are provided by

FOLK. For your own safety we ask you to wear stout footwear and bring tough gardening gloves. We have three FOLK work parties a month. Dates for the next 6 months are printed below.

For further information you can contact Geoff on 01242 244165 or Mike on 01242 238790, or you can look at the 'Work Party' page on our website (www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk) or send an email to folk.workparty@gmail.com.

Work party dates for Summer to Winter 2016

| | | | |
|---------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| October 2016 | Thursday 13 th | Tuesday 18 th | Sunday 23 rd |
| November 2016 | Thursday 10 th | Tuesday 15 th | Sunday 27 th |
| December 2016 | Thursday 8 th | Tuesday 20 th | Sunday 25th |
| January 2017 | Thursday 12 th | Tuesday 17 th | Sunday 22 nd |
| February 2017 | Thursday 9 th | Tuesday 21 st | Sunday 26 th |
| March 2017 | Thursday 9 th | Tuesday 21 st | Sunday 26 th |

SMOKE SIGNALS other news from the Hill and Common and the conservation scene.

Midsummer Fiesta July 2nd 2016 report



Mayor Chris Ryder and FOLK member at the Fiesta

We started setting up our stand before 10 o'clock with the first volunteers starting at 11 o'clock. Although the event did not start until 12 at eleven minutes past eleven we had signed up two new FOLK members for five years! The weather was quite kind with only

two light showers and some very welcome sunshine. We had good interest in the history of the Hill display on the stand, although visitor numbers to the stands were lower than last year. We also had a visit from the Cheltenham Mayor Chris Ryder a long term member of FOLK. At the end of the day we signed up 16 new members and 41 children entered our Countryside Code Quiz. A very successful day! We will be contacting the prize winners in due course

Regards and thank you to everybody for your support on Saturday

Mike Donnelly

Tree planting on Leckhampton Hill

Members walking along the woodland walk below the Devil's Chimney will now see that the saplings that had been planted on or over the boundary of the Hill have now been replanted and should no longer be a problem as they grow. We are grateful to the Council for its swift and decisive action on this issue and also grateful to the landowner for responding promptly to the Council.

Dry stone walling at the Hill Fort

2016 saw the completion of the section of wall on the eastern side of the Hill fort. The work was commissioned by Wayne Sedgwick and carried out in small sections, over a period of 10 years, by the Cotswold Conservation board, its contractors and volunteers, many of whom received training. The resulting wall has greatly improved the boundary of the Hill Fort.



The finished section of wall by the Hill Fort

Midlands Dexter Group meeting on Charlton Kings Common

Anne North hosted a visit to the hill by the Midlands Dexter Group. Anne reported that this went extremely well. Many appreciative comments received from the visitors, who were impressed with the terrain that the cows grazed and their role in conserving the environment of the Common. This is another tribute to the work done by Anne, Annette and John-Paul North in managing the Dexter herd.



FOLK is happy to report that we are starting to work with the Leckhampton Local History Society to promote our shared interests.

Leckhampton Local History Society Programme for 2016-2017

Meetings take place at Glebe Cottages, St Peter's Church
Church Road, Leckhampton on Wednesday evenings at 7:30pm.
Admission is FREE for members and £2 for visitors.

| | |
|----------------|--|
| 21st September | Fiona Mead: What can Victorian school logbooks tell us? |
| 19th October | Dr. Simon Draper: The Victoria County History of Glos & Writing a Parish History |
| 16th November | Alan Pilbeam: Old Gloucestershire Paths |
| 21st December | Members' Evening: Christmas Quiz, mulled wine and mince pies |
| 18th January | Dr. Steven Blake: Who was John the Muffin Man? |
| 15th February | Members' Evening |
| 15th March | Dr. Ray Wilson: Mills of the River Chelt |
| 19th April | John Peters: Trying to photograph listed buildings for English Heritage |
| 17th May | AGM and Angela Applegate A life of Gustav Holst |

Website: www.lhs.org.uk
Email: leckhamptonhistory@gmail.com
Tel: *Sue Marlow* 01242 581661
Facebook: www.facebook.com/Leckhamptonhistory

Contributions to the FOLK Website are always gratefully received. Contact:

webmaster.leckhamptonhill@gmail.com.



The Leckhampton Stalwarts on the ruins of Tramway Cottage with Middle Jenny in the background. The picture was taken at 5am, before they went to work at 6. Left to Right: Lane, Townsend, Barrett, ———, Luce, Tom Field, Ballinger, Heaven, Price (seated), Sparrow, Burford, Mourton and George Richings.
Miss N. Moorman

The Leckhampton Stalwarts

And finally:

Another poem, telling the story of Leckhampton Hill, written by Angela France, Cheltenham Poet in Residence

Trails and Ways

I used to think the cottage should be mine
when I scrambled up the steep track
which climbed from the pit behind

through beeches whose roots widen cracks
in the stone beneath the hill's gaunt skin
where clumps of harts tongue lie like green rags.

I would have lived there, content within
its squat walls with a dog at my heel
and no sense then of how adults must live

between wage and want, and want and need.
I stand at the fence to see the cottage again,
my feet in the metallised litter of beech leaves

and my back to the hollow where trees and dense
scrub hide the remains of iron plates
that guided rumbling trams on a cabled ascent.

An old woman leans on the car-park gate,
wiry hair springing from under her waxed hat,
a grey-muzzled collie stands at her knee, another's laid

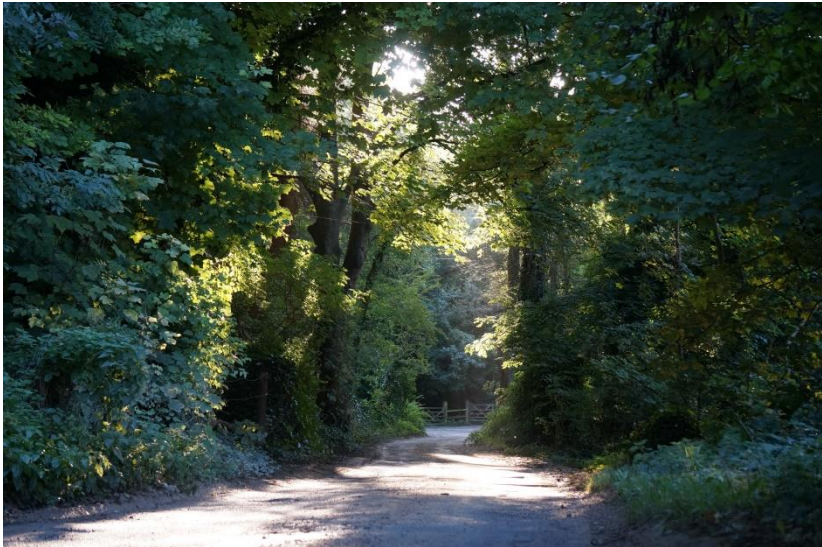
at her feet. She sees me looking and snaps
a wink at me; *they tore it down once,*
for being in the way, every stone and scrap.

She tells me her grandpa was one amongst
the men who marched from town
Up hill to down Dale, whose response

to fences and blocked paths was to pound
on walls, to harden hands and voices,
to lead hundreds of feet over disputed ground.

Many thanks to Angela for sharing this moving poem with FOLK members.

Thanks as ever to all our sponsoring organisations: Charlton Kings and Shurdington, Parish Councils from whom we have had financial support this year and the Leckhampton and Warden Hill Parish Councils who have promised to provide financial support. Cheltenham and County Cycling Club provide financial support, and Cotswold Conservation Board and a special thanks to Cheltenham Borough Council in the shape of Wayne Sedgwick who gives cheerful and enthusiastic and continuous support for which we are very grateful.



Dappled sunshine on Daisybank road

About FOLK

FOLK is an organisation set up to work with landowners, to promote the conservation and management of the ecology, geology and archaeology of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common. We support sustainable recreational and agricultural use of the land.

We welcome new members to support and help us in this important work. If you wish to join (either as an individual or as a family) please contact any of the people listed below. Annual membership is £6 per year for an individual or £9 for a family.

If you have any comments on the Newsletter or would like to contribute an article to the next edition later in 2013 please contact Peter Whalley on 01242 517024 or email to:

norwoodpw1@gmail.com articles of around 500 words plus a photo at any time would be most welcome

Why not have a look at what is new on the FOLK website and look us up on Facebook.

Contact FOLK

John Harvey, Chairman: 01242 520053

Geoff Holt Treasurer and Working Parties: 01242 244165

Mike Donnelly Working Parties 01242 238790

Anne North, Membership and Grazier: 01242 522767

Find the Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common on www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk and on Facebook

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