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WORKING PARTIES BACK IN FULL SWING

FOLK assist in Cheltenham Borough Council's award as a Beacon Council 2001 – 2002

Maintaining a Quality Environment

CBC has been awarded the status of Beacon Council in recognition of its work with the environment. Julius Marstrand and Andy Gilbert have put a presentation of the work that FOLK have done to date. This will be held on 28th September and attended by Councillors and council workers from many parts of the country. It is hoped to run the presentation at the FOLK AGM in October.

*The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the Executive Committee of FOLK. News, views and general comments are always welcomed and should be addressed to:
The Hon. Secretary, Mr Jack Shepherd, Rainbow Cottage, Leckhampton Hill, Cheltenham, GL53 9QJ*

After the closure of the hill at the start of the year, it is great to see how quickly the working party programme has been restarted. The picture (top left) shows the clearance work at the top of Charlton Kings Common that was completed over the August bank holiday weekend. A big thank you goes out to all members who were involved in this work and a particular mention for John Paul North, and the North family in general, for their efforts and support with both labour and equipment. Inside you can find out more about how you can help and what is planned for the future

WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO DATE?

- Successful working parties
- Continuation of Site Management Sub-Committee
- A number of meetings with both Cheltenham Borough Council to agree the next stage of the Site Management Plan
- FOLK presentation at the CBC Beacon day

WHAT IS PLANNED FOR THE FUTURE?

- Working Parties meet at Tramway Cottage car park at 9:30am and 2:00 pm (Sundays only). October 11th & 28th. November 8th & 25th. December 13th.
- FOLK AGM – 22nd October 2001 @ 7:30pm in the main hall of Leckhampton Primary School, Hall Road. It is hoped that Mary King from the RoW office will be giving a talk and the CBC Beacon presentation will also be shown.

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Committee News

As we develop as an organisation, it is important that all interest groups are represented, particularly on the Executive Committee. New blood is also important, and we will be looking for volunteers or nominations to stand for the Executive Committee at the FOLK AGM in October.

Sheila Chaplin stood down from the committee earlier this year and three others will follow at the AGM. So we would like to take this opportunity of thanking Maureen Peirce and Diane James for their help and support over the last year. I have also decided that it is time for me to make way for someone else to continue with the Newsletter and general publicity and I too will be standing down at the AGM. I have produced the first 5 Newsletters and set up the FOLK web site. I feel that my original goal has been achieved and we are therefore looking for someone to carry on with this publication. The next edition is due out in time for Christmas, so if you are interested, please contact the Hon. Secretary, Mr Jack Shepherd.

As a regular user of the hill, I will be continuing to act as a 'guardian' and will actively get involved again should there be any changes that are not in line with the stated objectives. I shall remain a keen supporter of recreational activities on the hill and will also continue with the web site, which has been a little neglected over the summer months.

Andy Gilbert

Recreation

Committee Contacts

Julius Marstrand has now seen the light and moved from Blockley to Charlton Kings
The Executive Committee members are all listed below, and waiting for your feedback:

Julius Marstrand (Chair)

Julius@marstrand.co.uk

Jack Shepherd (Secretary)

jack.shepherd@btinternet.com

Anne North (Treasurer)

anorth@leckhampton.fsnet.co.uk

Judy Frazer-Holland

Shelagh Hallaway

Tony Meredith

Allan Wood

If you wish to add your name to this list, please contact Jack Shepherd on 01242 515902

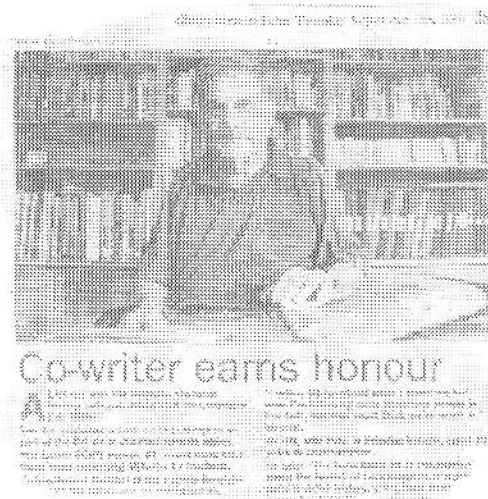
As Cheltenham Borough Council continue to work with FOLK in the preparation of the Site Management Plan, it is important to recognise the current and possible future recreational uses of the hill and common. The consultant brief has been prepared and makes specific reference to the following recreational activities:

Walking, rambling
Mountain biking
Overnight camping
Hang-gliding and parascending
Flying of model aircraft
Horse riding
Tobogganing & skiing
Guided walks.

There have also been some discussions lately over the use of motorised vehicles on parts of the hill and common. Whilst this is not something that FOLK would actively support, it must be remembered that there are certain parts of the hill that do have some rights of way for motorised vehicles. We are trying to get clarity on these issues as it is not in line with our stated objective to promote such use.

With winter approaching, and hopefully a bit of snow, it is good to report that Cheltenham Borough Council are planning to make a new access route into the top of Daisy Bank field to allow cutting equipment in to control the rapid growth of scrub and bushes that limit the tobogganing runs. Let's hope this happens before the first fall of snow. This will also assist in providing improved segregation between walkers and mountain bikers who currently are forced into using the same paths.

Andy Gilbert



Alan Gill (above), FOLK member and regular contributor to the history section of this Newsletter, has been recognised for his work, along with his colleague Eric Miller, by the Cheltenham Arts Council. The award was for the excellent book on LECKHAMPTON as part of the Britain in Old Photographs series. The presentation took place in the Pillar Room at Cheltenham Town Hall and was hosted by Tim Brooke-Taylor of The Goodies fame. The picture above is from the Gloucestershire Echo.

Alan and Eric and both members of the Leckhampton Local History Society who have just released a new publication Research Bulletin No 2 Autumn 2001 priced at £4. This publication along with many others are available in local bookshops or from LLHS on 01242 522566.

Work Party Review

It is now a year since our first work party in September 2000 and, despite the restrictions due to Foot and Mouth, which kept us off the hill for around 16 weeks, we have managed 7 Sunday work parties with an average of 12 members taking part. An additional 6 working parties, in late August, cut back and cleared the grassland on the hill top overlooking the eastern end of Daisybank Road. This involved a further 18 man days. Our thanks go to the North family who provided the machinery and a large part of the labour to complete the task. Our early work parties mainly involved the removal of scrub from grassland on the lower slopes of the hill above Daisybank Road and the clearance of footpaths leading towards Sandy Lane. Other work has included clearing encroaching scrub along the Cotswold Way above Charlton Kings Common and the installation of 4 notice boards in the various car parks, which were also cleared of litter. We were supported in our clearance work by 2 Cotswold Warden work parties in December last year. We will be welcoming them back in the next few months to continue the task.

In the coming few months we will be concentrating on further scrub clearance and footpaths. These efforts will be supported by work to be carried out in October by contractors, which was previously postponed due to Foot and Mouth restrictions.

A full list of the work parties for the coming months is shown below. We have now introduced a monthly midweek work party on a Thursday morning which could be extended into the afternoon if there is sufficient support. The Sunday work parties will continue to be split into morning and afternoon sessions, meeting at Tramway cottage car park (see below for times).

Finally, we have now purchased a small selection of tools to supplement individual members tools and further purchases will be made as funds become available.

Midweek Work Parties

Thursday 11th October
Thursday 8th November
Thursday 13th December
Thursday 10th January
Thursday 14th February
Thursday 14th March

Weekend Work Parties

Sunday 28th October
Sunday 25th November
Sunday 27th January
Sunday 24th February
Sunday 24th March

Please note revised meeting times for all morning work parties is 9:30 am. Sunday afternoon work parties met at 2:00 pm. Please meet at Tramway Cottage car park.

Allan Wood

Keeping The Hill Open For People & Wildlife

I was delighted to join the committee members of FOLK for a walk on Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common recently. I was struck by the knowledge and enthusiasm of the group and the broad range of interests it represents. The growth of FOLK since the initial public meeting back in September 1999 has been impressive, with more than 240 members to date, regular workdays, a newsletter and even a web site! This to me highlights the local importance of the Hill, for many reasons, to the people of Leckhampton, Cheltenham and the surrounding area.

The site is also important nationally for its rich and varied wildlife and as such has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) by English Nature under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common was originally designated an SSSI in 1954 on account of its extensive unimproved limestone grassland and associated features, including scrub, woodland and geological interest.

As with most sites the Hill needs management, which is no mean feat on a site of more than 50 hectares. In this respect, the emergence of FOLK is timely and English Nature is looking to work closely with FOLK and Cheltenham Borough Council to ensure that management takes both the wildlife interest and the interests of local users into account. A vital part of this will be the production of a new Management Plan soon to be commissioned by the Borough Council. Although the new Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 is perhaps best known for the heated discussions concerning "the right to roam", it has also provided some long awaited strengthening of the protection given to SSSIs. There is now a provision for prosecuting third party damage to a site and the Act places a much greater responsibility on owners to manage sites appropriately for wildlife. As part of this, the government has set an ambitious target to achieve "favourable condition" on 95% of SSSIs by 2010. In the case of Cotswold Grassland sites such as Leckhampton Hill, favourable condition can only be achieved by livestock grazing. It is grazing that has given us the unique range of plants and animals that we see on the Hill today and grazing that will ensure their long term survival.

Since the cessation of grazing on the Hill, there has been a steady increase in coarse grass, scrub and woodland. Aerial photographs show a much more open Common in the past and historical viewpoints have been lost to trees. Of course English Nature has nothing against trees and scrub and indeed some of the species that make the hill important, such as grasshopper warblers and white helleborine, rely on scrub and woodland. However, this must not be at the expense of open species-rich grassland and associated species such as musk orchid, frog orchid and the chalk-hill blue butterfly. Records show that all these species have declined on the Hill and others may have been lost altogether.

Much has changed since the days when sheep and cattle were a regular sight on the Hill and any re-introduction of grazing would need to be very carefully managed. Appropriate livestock, suitable gateways and carefully sited fencing are just some of the considerations. However, there are some good examples of sites in the Cotswolds where grazing animals have been successfully re-introduced, including sites with established recreational use. English Nature is confident that public access can be successfully combined with appropriate management for wildlife and looks forward to working closely with FOLK to enable this happen.

Paul Hackman is the Conservation Officer for the Cotswolds in Gloucestershire. English Nature is the government agency that champions the conservation of wildlife and natural features throughout England. Because of its statutory protection, works on the Common require the consent of English Nature before they can take place.

HISTORY

Leckhampton Hill Riots an article by Andy Gilbert

In 1894, when Henry Dale acquired the hill from the Trye family, access to the hill, which had for so long been taken for granted, was severely tested, when Dale wrote to the Rural District Council refusing to admit to any rights of way. This affected not only the general visitors to the hill but also a number of prominent people whose property backed onto the hill. After much legal debate, little more happened until Dale built a house, Tramway Cottage, for his quarry foreman, William Cratchley, on an open space at the foot of the Middle Incline of the tramway. However, this spot was an old gravel pit that was regularly used for all manner of recreational purposes. At holiday times you could find coconut shies, skittles and all manner of stalls. The location of the new Tramway Cottage destroyed the site and virtually blocked the main footpath to the hill.

By 1899 Dale had also fenced off the northern slopes of the hill, down to Daisybank Road. When, in 1901, there had still been very little action from the Rural District Council, Dale began obstructing other footpaths and still there was no response from the RDC. Action only began when Dorothea Beale, the headmistress of Cheltenham Ladies College, angered by the reduced access to the hill for her girls, instructed Dale to remove the numerous pianos hired from his company. She also wrote to the Town Clerk, prompting the first of many sub-committees to look into the situation. The public however, found the lack of progress rather too much and gathered on the hill in 1902, partially destroying some of the fences. In July of the same year a similar crowd gathered and tore down the fences around Tramway Cottage. This time the police were involved and four ringleaders found themselves in court charged with obstruction. Rather surprisingly all were acquitted and they, along with others, became known as the "Leckhampton Stalwarts".

On 15th July 1902 a large crowd gathered which grew as it approached the hill. After stopping at the Malvern Inn in Leckhampton Road (now a private house) where a Mr Mourton, using a cart as a platform, roused the crowd into greater excitement after which they moved on to Tramway Cottage in Daisybank Road. The occupants were ejected, as was the furniture, which was set alight together with the house. The house was later razed to the ground with no stone left standing. There was a police presence, but they felt powerless to act against such a large mob and no prosecutions followed this quite considerable incident.

In August of the same year the RDC again tried to resolve the disputes over the rights of way on the hill. The public, however, were still frustrated by apparent lack of any progress or action again saw fit to remove a new barrier erected near the site of Tramway Cottage. This was a well behaved gathering and it was left to Walter Ballinger to cut down the obstruction. This prompted Dale to take further action via the High Court and writs were issued to five men including Ballinger. The trial was due to be in London, although every effort was made by the defence to move the trial to Gloucester. Eventually, action against four of the men was dropped leaving only Ballinger's as a test case. Dale's lawyer wanted to involve the RDC, who were concerned about the potential of costly legal battle, eventually the RDC's lawyers advised that unless they defended their case, they would be barred from claiming any public rights of way on the hill. A joint defence was then set up between the RDC and Ballinger where they agreed to concentrate on three footpaths and the "rights of recreation". The defence fund, particularly for Ballinger was beginning to cause some concern with various methods to raise additional money tried without great success. However towards the end of 1903, Ballinger and others found themselves in Gloucester Gaol following an earlier incident involving Tramway Cottage garden. Following an appeal in the Echo, £75 was raised to release the men and they were all out in December of the same year.

The long awaited trial *The Leckhampton Quarries Co. v. Ballinger and The Cheltenham Rural District Council* began in London on 29th April 1904. The trial lasted until 12th May with the RDC winning its case for the three footpaths, but Ballinger losing his routes. Dale got his enclosure but failed in preventing the RDC from making future claims. As the judge had not defined the three public footpaths, Dale rebuilt Tramway Cottage in its old position. On Good Friday 1906 an angry crowd of some two thousand gathered at the cottage. Charles Barrett addressed the crowd "Men of Leckhampton, we are here today to assert our rights. Our footpath is railed off, but we are going to wait until the proper time before we do any damage." When hearing this, Ballinger shouted "We are going to have the cottage down; now is the time." The crowd applauded and action followed quickly. The destruction of 1902 was about to be repeated. The police hurriedly called upon G B Witts, a local magistrate, who with mixed feelings began to read the Riot Act. Several arrests were made which resulted in eight men receiving prison sentences ranging from four to six months. Ballinger left prison on 24th October 1906 to no great welcome as it appeared that people were beginning to see the futility of further struggles. Hostilities slowly faded away and it was eventually other events, namely the collapse of the Leckhampton Quarries Co. that led to the hill being purchased by the Town Council and the reopening of the rights of way.

Letters

Dear Mr Shepherd

I am disturbed by a piece in the June issue of our FOLK Newsletter entitled "Site Management Plan". At paragraph two it states "neither the Plan nor the Statement were ever implemented." This comment disregards the efforts of volunteer groups, such as Cotswold voluntary Wardens, mid glos. Ramblers, the Leckhampton Court Ground Force Team and others who worked with Jeffrey Jenkins over a number of years towards implementation of the Management strategy. My records indicate that for several years the Cotswold Wardens were contributing over 1000 man hours per year on clearance and grassland conservation under the guidance of Jeffrey. The Hill would not look as it does today without these very significant efforts.

It would be true to say that those Plans were far from fully implemented, or implemented to the set time scales, but it is not true or fair to CBC, Jeffrey, or the groups concerned to imply that nothing was done. I think a correction is required for the honour of the people concerned, many of whom were locals.

Further, in later paragraphs the text seems to indicate that implementation of a new plan is the responsibility of CBC alone. Surely FOLK expects to have a major input towards the future conservation of the area, indeed it is our only sure hope for the future.

I would also like to comment on the proposed mechanisms for the preparation of the new Management Plan. The environmental, conservation requirements for a new Plan are already known, and have been well documented in the existing Plan and Statement. Nothing significant has changed since the earlier expert survey work was completed, and it would be wasteful of time and money to repeat this part of the work. What is needed is a full assessment of the social and community implications for a successful future, with costings, and a realistic overall plan which FOLK and the local people can readily embrace. I rather suspect that the money will run out long before completion of the exercise, if it is intended to start from scratch again.

John Millington

Reply from the Chairman

John is absolutely right to point out the enormous efforts that have been made over the years, by various voluntary groups, to carry out conservation work on the Hill & Common in accordance with the original Site Management Statement.

I apologise unreservedly to all those who have contributed to this work, if they felt that I was overlooking their efforts. They have made a tremendous contribution to preserving much of the existing habitats - for which we should all be grateful.

The point that I was trying to make was that the original Plan included a clear set of actions to be carried out over a period of time. The simple fact is that volunteer resources on their own could not fully implement the plan and, consequently large parts of the plan were never properly implemented.

Even the statutory obligations applying to the SSSI have not been fully met and the nationally significant area of unimproved limestone grassland has been reduced by encroaching scrub, despite the efforts of volunteer work parties, who have at least succeeded in saving some of it.

Julius Marstrand
F.O.L.K. Chairman