



Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

NEWSLETTER

www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk

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SUMMER 2004

As part of a pilot project to halt the use of the scarp slope by downhill mountain bikers, the following leaflet has been distributed to the main cycle shops in Cheltenham and will be left on windscreens of cars parked in the area that appear to be owned by cyclists. In order for the message to reach those not using the shops or cars, a shorter version has been displayed on all FOLK notice boards. The aim is to arrest the unacceptable erosion caused by the creation of new tracks by cyclists, and to stop this activity on the grassland in its entirety. An out and out ban of mountain biking on the hill and common is not an option but the initial reports are showing favourable results for this policy of appealing to the bikers' environmental conscience. If this success



continues the leaflets will be reformatted, professionally produced and distributed more widely, in the meantime however, any comments would be more than welcome. Please contact Cheltenham Borough Council on 01242 250019. Thank you.

James Blockley, CBC.

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

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Mountain Biking & Down-Hilling on Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

Site of Special Scientific Interest

The above site has been designated as a SSSI for its nationally significant limestone grassland.

Cheltenham Borough Council & FOLK are engaged in a comprehensive programme to preserve & restore the grassland, including scrub clearance, grazing & mowing.

Due to the environmentally sensitive nature of the grassland, down-hilling & mountain bike use threatens the success of this important conservation work.

Cycling of any kind is not permitted on the grassland, except on long established tracks.

New tracks, which threaten to cause erosion of any of the grassland, may be obstructed.



Disregard of this notice by a small minority of cyclists may result in further restrictions on mountain biking on the site.

In the interests of conservation & mountain biking, please avoid riding on the grassland.



**For further information, please contact
Cheltenham Borough Council on 01242 250019**

Paragliding From Leckhampton Hill

Robert Davis of the Malvern Hang Gliding Club.

Take two large elliptical pieces of cloth  (28 square metres) and stitch the sides and back together. Leave the front open. Shape some separators like slices through an aircraft wing . Sew these vertically between the top and the bottom surfaces, at 20 - 40 cm. intervals. Put lots of lines from the bottom surface to suspend a weight (the pilot). Put brake lines from the right and left trailing edge. Hey presto! You have a paraglider.

Face the front into the wind and the air will flow in through the open vents. Because the air cannot escape, it will pressurise the sewn cloth into a wing shape. Attach yourself to the strings, by means of a harness and raise the wing above your head. It will generate lift and you are off. Pull on the right brake line and you turn right, the left to turn left, and both to slow down! This is the essence of paragliding

When wind hits a slope, it will flow up the slope and over the top.  There is a vertical component to the wind flow and if you put a wing in this flow, it will go up. This is called dynamic lift. If the slope is slightly cup shaped  (horizontally) it will funnel more wind into the slope; the steeper the slope, the greater the lift. The main face of Charlton Kings Common is shaped just like this - It is a perfect soaring slope, when the wind is blowing from the North.

A thermal is a parcel of hot air that has been heated by the sun and then breaks away from the ground and rises up to the clouds. Thermals are often shaped like a column. Raptors use thermals to climb high in the sky with minimum effort. You can watch them circling round and round in the rising air. Paragliders can also use thermals to gain height. On a good day in the UK the thermals will climb at the rate of 1000 feet per minute and can reach heights of 5,000 ft. or more. Hitch into one of these on a paraglider and you get the ride of your life.

Some areas generate thermals better than others. Towns, with lots of concrete and bricks tend to be good generators. It just so happens that Cheltenham sits at the foot of Leckhampton Hill and acts as an excellent thermal generator.



You are probably getting the message that Leckhampton is an excellent paragliding site because of the natural shape of the hill and the thermal activity. Absolutely right!

The goal of many paraglider pilots is to fly "cross country". Flights well in excess of 100km. have been made from Leckhampton. This is possible because (1) it is a good site to catch the first thermal (2) there is plenty of "open" airspace down wind (3) the coast is a long way away - you have to land before the sea! (4) The Cotswolds, with their shallow sub soil are good thermal generators, making the first 20 km. of any flight relatively easy and (5) there are lots of buzzards in the area "marking" thermals.

Leckhampton (Charlton Kings Common) is now one of the "prime" paragliding sites to fly from in a northerly wind in the South of the Country. On a good day a lot of national pilots will come to fly from here.

Who flies paragliders? Pilots come from all walks of life and a lot of time is spent "chatting" waiting for the right moment to launch. You can generally find an "expert" for any problem that needs solving, whatever it is. They are a friendly bunch and are generally sensitive to the needs of other users of any recreational facility.

Wildlife is not normally affected by paragliding. Buzzards are very happy sharing thermals with us. Skylarks are not disturbed by our activity. Cows are always very interested when we land and come to look and sheep are just disdainful. We are aware that horses do get "spooked" if we fly too close, so we try our best to keep away. I was even very excited to be flying with a pair of red kites on Saturday 22 May at 1145 on Leckhampton, the first time that I had seen them in this area.

So next time you see helmeted, besuited, sunglassed people with wings, strings and rucksacks, do stop for a chat or just watch. A paraglider might just be about to launch to float around the sky over Leckhampton Hill.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at robert@treborsivad.freeserve.co.uk

Robert Davis – 28/5/04

Footnote

With regard to disdainful sheep – Recently when a gentleman paraglider landed in our field full of sheep it was he who was somewhat bemused when the more he clapped his hands to discourage the oncoming sheep whilst he was attempting to pack up his "chute", the more the sheep advanced. We had to rescue him as our sheep have been taught "to come" to the clapping of hands – it's a good way of rounding them up.

Birds of Leckhampton Hill: Tree Pipits

This small brown bird's main claim to fame is its conspicuous song flight. The male's buff coloured breast has dark stripes, best seen when, characteristically, it perches on the top of a sapling, or tree shrub, to begin its song flight. It launches itself in a nearly vertical climb, singing as it rises and suddenly "parachutes" on uplifted wings, still singing as it descends and ending with a crescendo of "see-oo", "see-oo" calls. Quite often it returns to the same treetop or one very close to its original perch. This use of a high perch and the unique "see-oo" terminal calls are the best means of distinguishing a tree pipit from the otherwise similar meadow pipit. Both species are

known to nest on Leckhampton Hill and both have nationally suffered a moderate (25% to 49%) decline over the last 25 years, as a consequence of which they are currently on the AMBER list of conservation concern. They feed mainly on insects, beetles, flies and grasshoppers. There are just a few tree pipits on the escarpments at present and they clearly lost some of the scrub and long grass essential to their welfare following the extensive fire on the escarpments. It is essential, as ground-nesting birds, that some areas of tussocky grass and scrubby undergrowth are retained as part of a carefully maintained Management Plan.

Tony Meredith

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Articles for the newsletter can be sent to the Editor, Annette North, Shackleton, Daisybank Road, Charlton Kings Common, CHELTENHAM, GL53 9QQ or email anorth@leckhampton.fsnet.co.uk

FOLK Work Party Report

Spring 2004

The end of March and the mild early spring weather signalled the finish of our scrub clearance work on the hill. The efforts over the last few years show that we are now winning the battle with the encroaching scrub. The grass in the cleared areas is recovering and flowers and wildlife are returning.

Our summer grazing season continues and now includes parts of Daisybank Fields. Our thanks go to John North, his family, and all those who have helped with the task of re-siting the electric fence which has to be done at regular intervals. We do try to avoid crossing designated footpaths with the electric fence but sometimes it has to cross minor tracks. We hope you will accept this inconvenience for a few weeks as it is a small price to pay for the benefits of the grazing.

At the end of March we were contacted by the Environmental Protection and Development Group from The Gambia, which was founded following the Rio Conference of 1992 and the resulting Agenda 21. One of their members, who has been studying locally, joined a group of us on a conducted tour of the hill. Their aims and objectives in The Gambia are very wide-ranging and much more ambitious than ours and include community health, rural development and village cleaning. As a result of this visit we have an invitation for a return visit to The Gambia. Any sponsors for the air fair?

FOLK gained some useful publicity from our involvement in the Biodiversity Day on the hill. This included prior interviews for BBC Radio Gloucestershire with further coverage by them on the day. The Echo also covered our work party.

All those who have helped to pull ragwort on the hill in past years will find this year's task less onerous. We have carried out a programme of spot spraying this weed which, if successful, should ease the task in the summer.

Future Work Parties

Midweek Work Parties

Thursday 8 July 2004
Thursday 12 August 2004
Thursday 9 September 2004
Thursday 14 October 2004

Weekend Work Parties

Sunday 25 July 2004
Sunday 22 August 2004
Sunday 26 September 2004
Sunday 24 October 2004

All work parties meet in Tramway Cottage car park, Daisybank Road at 9.30am. We provide the tools – all you need to do is supply the labour.

Allan Wood

Grazing on the Common



After three months at home, the cows resumed grazing on the common on March 29th. The first area to be grazed was at the extreme west end on the north face. The paddocks this time round will be larger than before – approximately 8 acres. We aim to

ensure that each area is grazed at a different time than in the previous year.

Then on May 8th the cows were moved to Daisybank Fields, as growth was much more advanced here than on the remainder of the Common, and we needed to ensure that the food supply was adequate to sustain them. We have been fortunate to have had the co-operation of Mrs Johnson who kindly agreed for the cows to utilise the “water hole” on her land and for this we are most appreciative. It is expected that the cows will remain here until the end of June, when they will return home briefly (we hope) for TB Testing

Anne North

Industrial Archaeology

"Answer to the question posed in the last issue

The pair of sleeper blocks mentioned in the article on the industrial archaeology of the hill can be seen on the track which is on the line of the tramroad running south (and on the level) from the old limekilns. They are at SO 94721855 which is just beyond a 'kink' in the track and adjacent to the first of the gardens you reach when you walk south from the old lime kilns."

Ray Wilson

DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

Friends of Leckhampton Hill
and
Charlton Kings Common

Annual General Meeting

to be held at Leckhampton School Hall
on Monday 25th October 2004 at 7pm

Vicious Killer spotted on Hill

A rare sight the other day reminded me of the importance of carnivorous animals in the wildlife on the Hill. A study of a food web will always show fewer carnivores in terms of biomass and population compared with the herbivorous animals on which, of course, they depend. The plant eaters such as rabbits and rodents will therefore always be more common and obvious even to the casual observer. Carnivores, because of their comparative rarity and mode of life, will be spotted less often. It was therefore a delight to see a mature male stoat bounding alongside a hedge recently.

Stoats (*Mustela erminea*) are members of the Mustelidae family which also includes pine martins, pole cats and the smaller weasels. The male stoat has a mass of about 300g and is about 40cms in length including the 10cms black tipped tail. The female is clearly smaller, about 200g and about 30cms in total length. This difference in size allows stoats to prey on a wider range of animals: the female is happy to take small birds, voles and mice, whereas the male will also tackle larger prey such as rabbits. The male home range may be up to 200 hectares although they remain in smaller hunting areas for a few days before moving on.



Their hunting style may be described as relentless, fearless and vicious, biting the neck of their prey and holding on until it is subdued. Rabbits are reported to freeze when presented with an attacking stoat. Like many carnivores stoats will often kill more than they immediately need.

Stoats produce their young in a den April – May having mated the previous summer; the fertilised egg having remained dormant inside the female throughout the autumn and winter. The young are able to hunt independently when they are about three months old. Young stoats are often playful. This provides them with opportunities to hone up their attack skills.

Stoats have not always been welcome by gamekeepers as they kill birds that have been specially reared for others to kill. Poultry farmers have to protect their stock against both foxes and stoats. However, on the merit side stoats kill unwanted animals such as rabbits and rats. They may also be instrumental in keeping vole populations in check thereby reducing the harm done to young trees. They have few natural enemies but there have been reports of stoats being taken by owls and hawks.

In northern Britain stoats may grow a white winter coat to afford them some camouflage advantage when stalking their prey in the snow. This white fur is called ermine and traditionally used to trim ceremonial dress of the nobility. Stoats occur in Ireland where they are called weasels! However what the British call weasels are not found in Ireland!

Jack Shepherd June 2004



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