



Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

NEWSLETTER

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SUMMER 2005

FOLK – the first five years

Daunting Prospect

When FOLK was formed we faced a daunting prospect. There had been a Site Management Plan produced nearly ten years before, but virtually none of it had been implemented. Some routine maintenance had been carried out by officers of CBC and Cotswold Volunteer Warden working parties had done a lot of work on the Site; but the resources available had not even been keeping up with the loss of the 'unimproved limestone grassland', or the overgrowth on the geological exposures that were the two main bases for the Site's designation as a SSSI. The Council was falling short of its statutory responsibility for maintaining the SSSI.

With over one hundred people attending each of the public meetings that led to the formation of FOLK it was obvious that there was considerable local support for something to be done about the deterioration of the Site, but there were also differences about what should be done:

- ❖ There were those who favoured creating an 'environmental sanctuary' and trying to minimise the impact of recreational activities.
- ❖ There were those who were determined to continue using the Site for various recreational activities.
- ❖ There were those who wanted to let 'nature take its course'.
- ❖ And there were those who recognised that the natural habitat needs managing if it is not to degenerate into low-grade scrub.

What they all shared was a love of the Site – for whatever reason. As a result FOLK very quickly became one of the largest voluntary community groups in Cheltenham, with over 250 members.

New Site Management Plan

The Council had already decided to invest around £14,000 in having a new Site Management Plan drawn up. At the time, many members of FOLK would probably have preferred to have seen this amount of money invested in actual work on the ground, but the money could not be diverted for this purpose. So, instead we worked to ensure that the new Site Management Plan represented what was both practically possible and what most users of the Site wanted to see.

Environmental consultants working closely with the Council and FOLK, carried out a massive process of consultation, with two more large public meetings. This process had to reconcile the needs of the SSSI with the demands of the majority of users. The new Site Management Plan, published in August 2002, which ran to 299 pages, did this.

Conservation work by FOLK, started based on the original Site Management Plan back in 2000, was only just beginning to have a noticeable impact by the time the new Site Management Plan was published. The new Plan gave it new impetus and support from English Nature and Cotswold AONB. Support that has proved invaluable in securing grants and other support worth well in excess of the original cost of the new Site Management Plan.

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Rewarding

What is most rewarding is to look back now and see how much has been achieved, mostly by a relatively small group of members who have formed the backbone of FOLK's conservation working parties, supported from time to time by other members and other groups, from Cheltenham cyclists to Belmont Special School. We all owe an enormous debt of gratitude to those volunteers and the others who have supported them.

But they aren't looking for gratitude, what they would like more than anything is more support – more lovers of the Site to turn up on the second Thursday or fourth Sunday of every month. If nothing else, getting stuck into conservation work gives a great deal of satisfaction when you can see the impact of your work.

We appreciate that not everyone who is a member of FOLK is physically capable of joining the working parties and we still welcome their support. We also understand that many people have so many other commitments, but it would be great if some of those, who are physically capable of doing so, would consider turning out just two or three times a year. With that level of support for the regular volunteers, we could accelerate the rate of progress that we have been making.

Julius Marstrand - Chairman, FOLK

F.O.L.K. BIRD WALK – 23 April 2005

Tony and Frances Meredith, members of F.O.L.K. and Cheltenham Bird Society, led eight members of the public on this year's, now annual, Guided Bird Walk. Starting from the end of Highland Road, the walk went up through Daisybank Fields, along Daisybank Road, at the foot of the Northern escarpment to Windass Hill and the base of the Eastern escarpment, before retracing the outward route.

At least 29 species of birds were seen and/or heard [see list below], slightly fewer than in the previous two years [37 in 2004; 34 in 2003], but this year's walk was a couple of weeks earlier. There were particularly good views of Linnets, in Daisybank (East) Field, now part of the designated Local Nature Reserve and a male Tree Pipit performing his soaring and descending song-flight, on the Northern escarpment.

Warblers – Chiffchaff; **Willow Warbler**; Blackcap; **Goldcrest**

Finches – **LINNET**; Chaffinch; **BULLFINCH**; Greenfinch

Buntings – **YELLOW HAMMER**

Thrushes – **Mistle Thrush**; **SONG THRUSH**; Blackbird; Robin

Tits – Blue Tit; Great Tit; Coal Tit

Corvids – Crow; Rook; Magpie; Jay; Jackdaw

Pipits – **Tree Pipit**

Other Species – Swallow; **Dunnock**; Wren; **Green Woodpecker**; Buzzard; Wood Pigeon; Pheasant

The four birds highlighted in **BOLD CAPITALS** are '**RED LISTED**' as being of '**HIGH CONCERN**'. The seven birds highlighted in **bold lower case** are '**Amber Listed**' as being of '**Medium Concern**'.

A Bird Survey was conducted in Spring/Summer 2004 and has been published recently and copies lodged with the Country Data Recorders Unit, Cheltenham Borough Council, Cheltenham Bird Society, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Cotswolds AONB and F.O.L.K. Electronic copies of this can be obtained by e-mailing folkbirds@marstrand.co.uk.

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

FOLK Work Party Report, Spring 2005

We completed our winter programme of scrub clearance in early March and collected and burnt the residue in April. This has enabled grazing to be introduced for the first time on the slopes of Charlton King's Common above the eastern end of Daisybank Road. In May we were again invited to take part in Green Action Day, organised by BBC Radio Gloucestershire, in partnership with The Citizen and Echo newspapers. As our project for this event we decided to re-surface the area around the access points at the bottom of the standard gauge incline in Daisybank Road. This involved transporting many loads of loose scree from Salterley Quarry to fill the potholes and wet areas. Several interviews took place on the hill, which were broadcast later by Radio Gloucestershire. As a result of our involvement we should receive a small grant that will enable us to hire a roller to compact the area and hopefully solve the problem of winter flooding.

Walkers on the Cotswold Way footpath across the top of the hill will, no doubt, have noticed new waymark posts. These are part of the programme of improvements to the Cotswold Way resulting from its recent designation as a National Trail. Representations have been made to the Cotswold Way National Trail Team to limit unnecessary signage through the site and we will monitor this as work progresses.

Finally, my usual plea for additional work party members. We have a core of six to eight regular supporters but would be delighted to see some new faces. If you would like any further information please phone me on 01242 233116.

Dates of future Work Parties

Midweek Work Parties

Thursday 11 August 2005
Thursday 8 September 2005
Thursday 13 October 2005

Weekend Work Parties

Sunday 28 August 2005
Sunday 25 September 2005
Sunday 23 October 2005

Meet at Tramway Cottage car park, Daisybank Road at 9.30am. We provide the tools but wear stout footwear and bring your own gloves.

Allan Wood

Your Executive Committee Members are:-

CHAIRMAN - Julius Marstrand (01242 518846)
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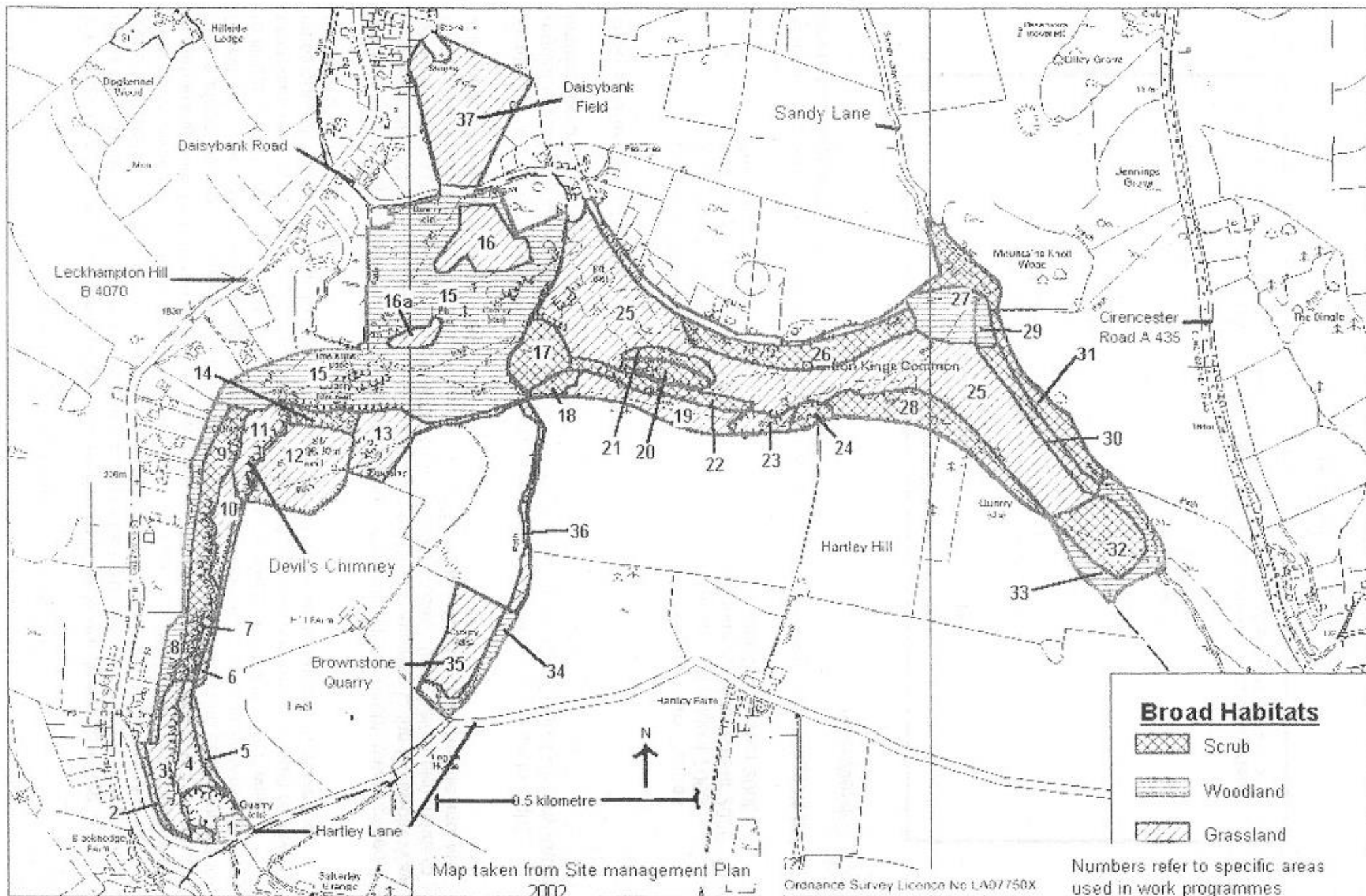
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Judy Frazer-Holland	John North
Christine Ryder	Jack Shepherd
Wendy Twist	Allan Wood

Co-opted Anne North
CBC Ex Officio

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



PROVISIONAL WORK PROGRAMME APRIL-SEPTEMBER 2005

	FOLK		CBC		Others	
	Administrative 1	Conservation 2	Administrative 3	Conservation 4	Administrative 5	Conservation 6
A	Discuss mountain bike slalom course	Put stone in potholes on Gallops.	Discuss mountain bike slalom course with FOLK		Seek funding for 1, 2, & 3 adjacent.	1. Carry out Baseline Archaeological Survey
B	Membership drive with a new leaflet delivered to local residents.	Investigate areas of hazel for coppicing next winter.		Cut hay July/August following discussion with FOLK & LHCG.		2. Carry out structural survey of Limekilns
C		Spray ragwort April/May Pull ragwort June/July.	Continue consultation & investigation over wheelchair access	Cut grass over ramparts and barrow to encourage complete grass cover.		3. Conduct Geophysical Survey of Iron Age Fort
D		Repair fence alongside Motorway ASH47. Erect fence round headland next to FP ASH 40. CBC to provide materials.	Apply for combined Modification Order for Rights of Way: a) As recommended in the SMP b) To provide Bridleway access from South West of Site c) Progress or combine application for re-classification of Sandy Lane & 'The Gallops' by means of a Path Creation Order [without necessarily seeking a Traffic Restriction Order on the old Turnpike Road]		JB to prepare plan for repairing eroded areas of ramparts and surface round Topograph. Plan to be discussed with FOLK, permission requested from Gloucestershire Archaeology & then added to DEFRA Conservation Plan.	
E	Establish what fees, if any, may be payable for agreed Modification Orders for Rights of Way-meet on site with GlosCC Highways Dept. and CBC.	Decide on positions for Fixed Point Photography for biodiversity monitoring.	Arrange for Fixed Point Photographic Survey of the Site covering: a) Vegetation; b) Geoconservation; c) Historical. Especially in grazed & mown areas.	Repair recent damage to transformer house at the kilns.	LHCG to look at flat grassland to see which areas to be cut for hay in July/August.	
F		Routine Path Clearance esp. scrub adjacent to FP ASH 35 where it has been repaired.		Take photos for Fixed Point Photographic Survey in July.		
G	Continue consultation over interpretation boards.	Mow & clear area 16 August/September.	Prepare Job Description for Project Officer & discuss possible sources of funding, in consultation with FOLK & LHCG. JB			
H	Discuss timing of hay cut for 2005.	Assist grazier with erection/dismantling of electric fence & maintain a monthly review of the grazing regime.		DB Fields - top before thistles seed (July/August) & area 28 if required.		
I	Keep records of where & when grassland is grazed.	Use hardcore/stone from Salterley Quarry to repair surface at bottom of standard gauge incline near Daisy Bank Bridge & surface at middle gate on ASH47 (the Motorway).		Repair large pot holes/puddles at Brownstone Quarry Car Park esp. at entrance.	Develop & publicise guidance on the collection of specimens of rock & fossils. LHCG & Geo cons.	
J	Discuss possibility of co-option of grazier on to FOLK Committee after AGM 2005.	Re-erect notice board Hartley Lane.	Contact local schools with a view to trying to get Duke of Edinburgh Award candidates to participate in conservation work. Send CD of SMP.	Continue repair of stone boundary walls as required under ESA agreement. Priority: 1. On rampart 2. Salterley to CKC 3. Others.	LHCG to review action plan. Develop revised 5 year plan & roll forward by 1 year	
K		Cut & treat or pull ash seedlings anywhere.				
L	Organise walks/talks for members & general public.	Litter picking	Discuss what to spend ESA acreage payments on with FOLK.			

5.

Grasses on the Hill

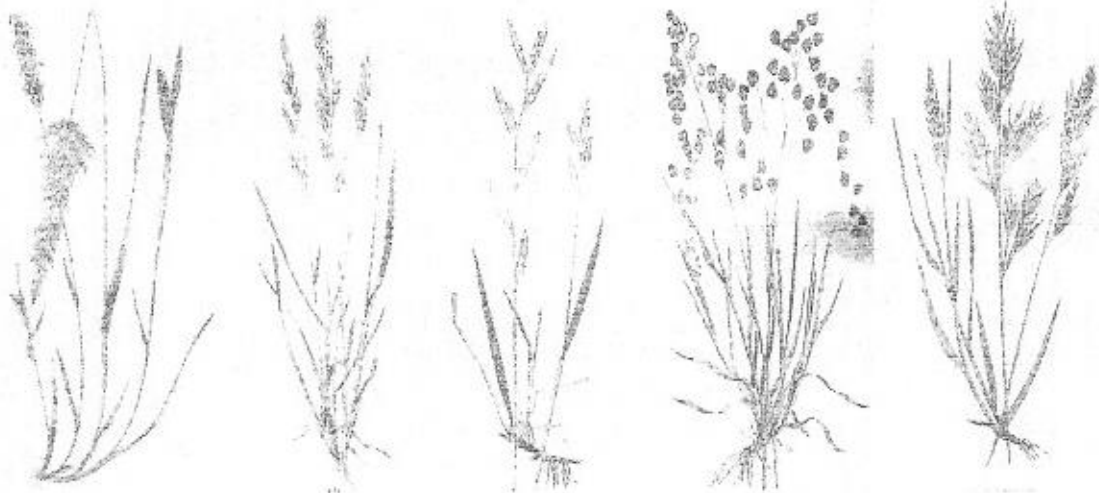
The main reason that much of the Hill is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest is to afford some protection for its rare calcareous grassland habitats. A range of grasses is found but we will look at five of the more significant species.

Grasses are notoriously difficult to identify from the leaves alone but during June and July it is much easier as most of them are in flower.

Grasses as a group make up one of the most successful plants found over much of the world where light and temperatures permit. This success can, in part, be attributed to the fact that they grow from their base. Continuous grazing by a wide range of herbivorous animals does not usually cause the removal of this growing point and the grass survives. Mowing and moderate trampling also do not necessarily destroy the active cells in the growing points. Some grasses grow from underground rhizomes.

All grasses are wind pollinated and large quantities of pollen are produced during certain weather conditions as most hay fever sufferers will confirm.

In case you would like to have a go at identifying five of the more significant grass species growing on the Hill some pictures have been reproduced from Lowe E J (1891) *Natural History of British Grasses*, John C Nimmo.



*Anthoxanthum
Odoratum*
Sweet vernal
Grass

*Avena
pratensis*
Meadow
oat-grass

*Brachypodium
pinnatum*
Tor-grass

Brizia media
Quaking grass

Bromus erectus
Upright brome

Sweet vernal grass gives the characteristic smell of newly mown hay. It starts growing early in the spring and is a true permanent pasture grass.

Meadow oat-grass survives well on short turf on limestone.

Tor-grass can become dominant in limestone areas and in the absence of grazing will form dense tussocks. It is these dense masses of grass which help to exclude the fine calcareous herbaceous plants.

Quaking grass is an attractive plant sometimes used in floral decorations. It survives well on poor land and offers little nutrition for grazing stock.

Upright brome is a large grass and when un-grazed will also form dense tussocks.

Jack Shepherd May 2005