



Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

NEWSLETTER

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AUTUMN 2005

FOLK – the first five years

The future of FOLK

When FOLK was formed, we were very determined that it did not become a self-perpetuating clique of enthusiasts who became increasingly detached from the users of the Site they were supposing to be representing. We also wanted to make it difficult for any one special interest group to take control of the organisation.

The Constitution was designed to prevent this by ensuring that the Officers had to stand for re-election every year and be limited in the length of time that they were able to remain in office. It also ensures that roughly one third of the Executive Committee comes up for re-election each year. This arrangement encourages new blood, but also ensures continuity, so that policy does not swing wildly backwards and forwards, which would be disastrous for an environmentally sensitive area like this Site.

I have been privileged to serve as FOLK's first Chairman, but my maximum five years in office is finally coming to an end. I will remain on the Committee for a year at least and may stand again for re-election to the Executive Committee after that – but someone else now needs to take on the Chairmanship.

Certainly the role is very different now. In the first few years we were establishing the organisation and how it worked. Now it is very much less time consuming. The Executive Committee is very supportive and, after the conservation volunteers, we also owe all of them a great deal for the time they have put in to FOLK over the years. I should certainly like to thank them for their support.

Finally, no organisation exists without its members – we have been delighted with the level of support that we have had over the years. Inevitably, over time some members lapse, some move away and some pass on, so it is necessary to be constantly recruiting new members.

Most importantly, this year the first 5 year memberships expire. If you are able to do nothing else to support FOLK, conservation working parties, attend meetings, stand for election, please do two things to ensure the well being of the organisation and the future of the Site we all hold in so much affection – please renew your own membership when it comes up for renewal and please persuade friends or relatives to join us.

Julius Marstrand Chairman, FOLK

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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**EVERYONE WITH AN INTEREST IN
LECKHAMPTON HILL AND CHARLTON KINGS
COMMON WILL BE MOST WELCOME AT
FOLK'S**

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

7 pm WEDNESDAY 2ND NOVEMBER

**LECKHAMPTON PRIMARY SCHOOL
Hall Road, Leckhampton**

**AGM followed by talk by
MELANIE SOLICK,
Gloucestershire's new**

Countryside Archaeological Advisor.

MOUNTAIN BOARDING AND LECKHAMPTON



Some of you may have seen us up Leckhampton riding down the hill on four wheeled contraptions known as mountain boards. I'd like to give you some information about the sport, why Leckhampton is such a uniquely important spot for us as riders, and what we are doing to try to ensure that it has a minimal effect on the environment and other hill users.

Our sport was started in the UK by a group of landlocked surfers, including myself, back in 1992. At a similar time other people in a variety of countries started along the same idea. Since then mountain boarding has become very popular, with around thirty different companies from all over the world producing boards and equipment. The UK is now the biggest market in the world for mountain boarding.

With the increase in popularity, we, as a community and as manufacturers, realised the important need for communication with various bodies to ensure that our sport has minimal impact on the environment and general public. In 1999 some of the riders along with the main manufacturers got together to form the ATBA (All Terrain Boarding Association). This organisation is now the central governing body for the sport. All members are given a code of conduct, which they have to adhere to. Apart from that, riders in each local area are also working with the Forestry Commission, Local Authorities and groups such as FOLK to tailor codes of conduct that are specific to the area. At present I am working with James Blockley on such a code for Leckhampton. We are very keen to make this work for everybody and are looking for feedback from the people who use the hill.

Leckhampton offers the riders something unique in this area. There are only a few who use the hill as it is a very technically difficult place to ride. This we hope will work to our advantage in spreading the code of conduct. Currently we use some of the trails and mountain bike tracks, along with what we call the 'Bomb Hole', down towards the first car park off Daisy Bank. When riding we always try to use a spotter system where riders will act as marshals making sure the trail is clear for the riders. Brakes are available on some mountain boards although many people do not like to use them, preferring to slow down by sliding – much like a snowboard. Leckhampton, due to the severe nature of the terrain, is the nearest riders in our area have to practice for riding in the mountains. To give an idea of how good it is, in the World Downhill Championships this year, the top four riders all came from Cheltenham or practice up on Leckhampton.

James Blockley and I will continue to promote the code of conduct, but if there is anything people feel needs to be addressed, then let FOLK know and we will try to accommodate everyone as best we can.

Pete Tatham
World Downhill Champion
noSno



FOLK Work Party Report, Summer 2005

Thanks to our regular stalwarts we have averaged six members on our Thursday and Sunday summer work parties. A considerable part of our time has been spent on ragwort pulling and it seems that our annual efforts over the past years have resulted in a decrease of this weed in many areas on the hill. Unfortunately we will not be able to eradicate it as seed will spread from inaccessible plants on quarry rock faces.

Litter has been a problem as usual in the summer, much of it resulting from barbeques and overnight camping. It is very difficult to police these activities but on several occasions both CBC rangers and FOLK members have approached campers and explained that camping and fires are not allowed on the hill. In the near future there will be notices to this effect in the main car parks and other points of access.

A summer cut of some of the grassland on the hill top has been taken to provide winter feed for the cattle that graze the lower slopes. The timing of this cut is always the subject of much prior discussion. We must allow sufficient time for the grassland flowers to set seed but still get a reasonable hay crop.

When the Cheltenham in Bloom judges came to the town we took them on a short tour along the lower slopes of the hill, including the grazing project. This was to show them how local groups, including FOLK, are involved in neighbourhood regeneration and conservation aspects of the competition, which includes more than just the town's floral displays.

In August we were asked to lead a walk over Leckhampton Hill for visitors from Gottingen, Cheltenham's twin town in Germany, who were on an exchange visit. The walk was very much enjoyed by the twenty visitors who joined us, and they were particularly pleased to have a close up view of the Devil's Chimney, which had featured on their postcards home.

We took our display boards to the "Paws in The Park" event held in Burrows Field. This was an opportunity to show the dog walkers what FOLK is all about, and to encourage some of those who enjoy walking their dogs on the hill to join us.

In the coming months we will concentrate our efforts on cutting some of the smaller pockets of grassland to avoid the build-up of rank grass, and to prevent the encroachment of scrub. We will also replace and repair old or vandalised notice boards, and install new litterbins. To help to achieve our objectives, I can only repeat our Chairman's request in his editorial in the spring newsletter and ask for your support, however limited, on our work parties. If you want any further information please telephone me on 01242 233116.

Dates of future Work Parties

Midweek Work Parties

Thursday 13 October 2005
Thursday 10 November 2005
Thursday 8 December 2005
Thursday 12 January 2006

Weekend Work Parties

Sunday 23 October 2005
Sunday 27 November 2005
No Sunday work party
Sunday 22 January 2006

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, August 2005

A LOOK AT COPPICING

In the next few issues of the FOLK Newsletter I thought it might be interesting to look at various forms of traditional rural crafts that have played an important role in shaping our countryside over the centuries. Most of these crafts have declined in the past 50 years but fortunately there has been a welcome revival in recent years due in some measure to conservation groups such as FOLK. The crafts I hope to cover will be coppicing, hedge laying and drystone walling. The latter has already been the subject of recent courses on the hill and there are opportunities to practice the other two.

We look at coppicing in this issue. This practice means that an area of woodland is cut periodically and the stumps allowed to regenerate to produce several shoots instead of one main stem. The result is a vigorous re-growth of the stool and a sustainable supply of timber. Coppicing can be repeated at intervals of six or more years depending on the re-growth of the species and what the timber is to be used for. If coppicing has not taken place in the woodland within the previous fifty years or so, then other methods of management would be more appropriate. A wide variety of trees can be coppiced including hazel, willow, ash, birch, sweet chestnut, small leaved lime, hornbeam and oak.

This form of woodland management probably dates from Neolithic times and evidence suggests it was widely used by the Romans to fuel their ironworks. Coppicing continued to be widespread in lowland areas of England and is referred to in the Domesday Book of 1086; it was an important part of woodland management into the 1900s. The most common uses for coppice products in the past were wattle fencing, hurdles, brooms, tool handles, and in the preparation of

charcoal. There were many other uses but most of those have either fallen into disuse or been replaced by modern products.

There are still good reasons for continuing coppicing today. One of these is that it prolongs the life of trees, some of which are over 1,000 years old. A fine example of this practice is Lineover Wood, to the south of Dowdeswell Reservoir, off the A40, where ancient lime trees are regenerating. Periodic cutting also creates a diverse habitat that supports a wide range of flora and fauna, whereas woods that have not been coppiced are more likely to have trees of the same age and structure, supporting fewer plant and animal species. Coppicing increases the amount of light reaching the woodland floor, creating better conditions for wild flowers, and in subsequent years the re-growth creates a better habitat for nesting birds, small mammals, and butterflies.

A recent innovation is energy production from coppiced woodland, which could become widespread if it proves successful. With the use of short term coppicing, crops of poplar and willow are grown which have a growth rate of 4 metres per annum. They are harvested mechanically on a three-year rotation, and the timber is chopped and used as fuel in a wood burning power station, which is less polluting than its coal-burning counterpart.

What scope is there to coppice any woodland on Leckhampton Hill? There are a few areas where some trees have been coppiced over the past ten years and we will look at other sites to assess their suitability and perhaps consider coppicing them in our next winter work programme.

Allan Wood

	FOLK		CBC		Others	
	Administrative	Conservation	Administrative	Conservation	Administrative	Conservation
	1	2	3	4	5	6
A	Discuss mountain bike slalom course	Put stone in potholes on Gallops	Discuss mountain bike slalom course with FOLK	Erect warning/no fires/no motorbikes/no camping signs.	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.	Apply for grant from AONB for manufacture & erection of interpretation boards approx £15K for boards, stones & leaflets.	Cut hay July/August following discussion with FOLK & LHCG.		2. Carry out structural survey of Limekilns
C		Scrub reduction (as detailed in SMP) esp. areas 3, 5, 26, 31 & following cattle grazing elsewhere	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]	Position litter bins in Salterley & Brownstone car parks. Cotswold Warden Service may be able to help with this if required.	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.		
F		Routine Path Clearance esp. scrub adjacent to FP ASH 35 where it has been repaired.	Start to prepare new Grazing Agreement in November and complete it in December.	Take photos for Fixed Point Photographic Survey in July.		
G	Continue consultation over interpretation boards.	Mow & clear area 16 August/September + area 23 -after October (horse circle) + area 14 (butterfly motorway) + bank in Db fields. Rake up arisings area 19 (Sep 8)	Prepare Job Description for Project Officer & discuss possible sources of funding, in consultation with FOLK & LHCG. JB.	BTCV special unit or CSU cut, treat & remove ash from area 2.		
H		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 middle gate on ASH47 (the Motorway) and complete work at bottom of standard gauge incline.		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.	Contact Cotswold Way National Trail organisers and ask them to consult CBC & FOLK before replacing the 2 missing posts on CK Common.	Scrub reduction (as detailed in SMP) esp. area 6 also areas 2, 3, 5, 9, 25, 26 & 31. Prioritise area 26.		
L	Organise walks/talks for members & general public.	Litter picking	Discuss what to spend ESA acreage payments on with FOLK.	Top grass western end of area 19 as early as possible after August Bank Holiday (FOLK to clear it on Sept 8)		

GRAZING ON THE COMMON

This season, for the first time, has seen the introduction of sheep to the grazing regime, alongside the Dexter cattle. The sheep being used are rare breed Wiltshire Horn.

They are well suited to conservation grazing as they only have a short coat, which they shed naturally at least once a year. They like to browse as well as graze, and so will eat a diverse range of plants and trees (although their browsing tendencies are not as investigative as goats!). Because of their short wool, they rarely get “fly strike”, and are normally sound of foot, although they can be affected by hornfly occasionally.

They are a slow maturing breed; the meat is usually very lean and has a better flavour than that from quick reared lambs. (Let me know if you are interested.)

The cattle underwent their usual, now annual, TB tests and I am pleased to say were once again clear. Let's hope it stays that way! To date four calves have been born this year (one more to go), 3 bulls and a heifer.



Although the grazing season started much later this year, with more cattle and the added sheep, we have managed to graze Daisybank Fields (once again with the kind co-operation of Mrs. Johnson, who allows us to use her spring as a watering hole), and the whole of the north facing side of the Common – from Daisybank Road right up to the top of hill, from Windass Hill to the beech woods; as well as slotting in a paddock at the top of Sandy Lane. If the weather holds, we are hoping to continue grazing on the east side of the hill, overlooking Cirencester Road.

Anne North

Gorse – an attractive shrub - or a noxious ‘weed’?

Most people agree that a gorse shrub (*Ulex europaeus*) in full flower on a bright sunny day is a pleasant sight. It flowers early in the spring and for an extended part of the year. It provides a pleasant aroma on warm sunny days in summer when the pods can be heard popping open firing out their seeds several metres.

You would be a brave person if you try to get too near or push your way through the bush as the sharp spines are vicious and are liked by neither man nor beast. It was for this reason that gorse was traditionally used in some parts as a hedge plant. Unfortunately it is highly invasive and it will quickly overtake grassland flora.

It is native to central and west Europe but has been introduced to various parts of the world including Australia, New Zealand and USA where it is now considered to be a noxious plant. Control measures have included burning, cutting, herbicides and biological control by infecting plants with a weevil which attacks the seeds in their pods.

In this country gorse, or furze as it is sometimes called, survives well in sunny places on well-drained soil. Although it prefers slightly acid soils it can do quite well on the limestone areas such as Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common where it grows quickly to form dense thickets. It can not survive in shady areas produced by trees.

Botanically gorse is a member of the legume family which includes clover, peas and beans. The flowers are adapted for insect pollination. The roots contain bacteria which help the plant to absorb nitrogen which might be otherwise in low supply on poor soils. The spines which are modified leaves have a reduced surface area; this lowers the transpiration rate for survival in dry conditions. Underground stems can produce new vegetative growth and dispersal may be aided by ants which carry the oily seeds to new areas.

In this country gorse was traditionally controlled by burning. This was only partially successful as the active buds at ground level soon produced new growth. The same is unfortunately true with cutting. Grazing of the fresh new shoots with cattle, sheep or even goats after cutting is a more permanent way of controlling gorse.

Gorse has its merits. It forms a good shelter area for small mammals and birds such as yellowhammers and of course it attracts a range of insects. Traditionally the flowers have been used to extract a natural dye. The woody parts of gorse were also once used as fuel in ovens although collecting it must have been something of a trial!

As an invasive scrub plant we must keep gorse under control. However patches of gorse can be retained to provide a mosaic of habitats in carefully defined areas. This approach can maintain the overall biodiversity of the area whilst giving priority to the much rarer calcareous grassland habitat.

Jack Shepherd August 2005

FOLK congratulates Cheltenham in Bloom on winning a Gold Award in the Heart of England in Bloom Competition



**Cheltenham in Bloom
working in partnership with FOLK
in the year of the volunteer**