



Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

NEWSLETTER

Free to members; non-members 25p

Issue 42 Summer
2013

Welcome to the 2013 Summer FOLK newsletter.

In this issue:

Front page – Chairman’s view on progress with grazing;
page 3 – Summer cycling on the Hill; Butterfly monitoring on the Hill. page 4 - Update from Cheltenham Borough Council; FOLK work party report. page 6 - FOLKtalk, short items.

Big Changes in Management Regime

2012-13 saw some big changes in the management of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common. In April 2012 there was a switch from ‘intensive’ (temporary paddock) grazing, to ‘extensive’ grazing, in which cattle are allowed to roam freely over most of Charlton Kings Common.

On 8th May a party of 15 representatives from Natural England, CBC, FOLK, graziers and an agricultural advisor inspected the effect of the first year of the new grazing regime on the condition of the grassland. Grazing is the recommended method for improving limestone grassland and Charlton Kings Common has been grazed since 2004. This was helping to improve the condition of the grassland, but the rate of improvement was slow and the size of herd which could be managed was limited.

Improvements seen

Last year was exceptionally wet but the general consensus was that ‘extensive’ grazing was already beginning to deliver the desired improvements. Some of the results of these changes may not be immediately apparent to the ‘untrained eye’, but

over time they should have a significant impact on the condition of the grassland. The site is one of the top twenty sites of ‘unimproved grassland’ in the whole Cotswolds, but the thatch of coarse grass, which existed before grazing started, was choking some of the more delicate limestone flowers.



Site meeting to inspect results of extensive grazing

A major fire, which destroyed 40 acres of grassland in 2004, removed a lot of the dried thatch. Unfortunately it also killed wildlife including Roman snails, newts and ground-nesting birds’ eggs.

The intention is not to produce a uniform sward height over the whole site, but to create a mosaic of different sward heights, with 'islands' of scrub and long 'fringes' (edges between scrub and grass). The reason for this is because different species such as butterflies, other invertebrates and ground-nesting birds, require different lengths of grass.

Paddock grazing has reduced the length of the sward, but erecting and dismantling temporary paddocks was very labour intensive. It was also difficult using paddocks to increase the size of the herd to the optimum level for improving the condition of the grassland.

Higher Level Stewardship

Management of the site was raised from Entry to Higher Level Stewardship (ELS to HLS) in 2011. HLS requires a more sustainable management regime and sets more prescriptive targets for improvement of the grassland. This necessitated the switch to 'extensive' grazing and an increase in the number of cattle.



What we are aiming for?

Charlton Kings Common may not support the *normal* number of Dexter cattle because of its predominantly Northerly aspect and the steepness of the site. The size of herd is being increased, until the optimum level for this site is achieved. This may vary from year to year depending on weather and growing conditions.

Last year, although the herd was larger, there was an average of eight cows on the Common, because the cows have to be taken off the for testing, medication, insemination and calving. This year, the herd has been increased to eighteen. Seventeen of these are currently on the site, but the average number over the whole year should be closer to fourteen – still a significant increase on last year.

Adverse effects

Not all the initial effects have been positive. The increased number of cows, particularly during an exceptionally wet year, has led to excessive 'poaching' (where the cattle's footprints disturb the ground) in some areas, particularly around the pond that had formed at the foot of Charlton Kings Common adjacent to Daisybank Road. There has been over-grazing in nearby Daisybank Quarry, which is an important area for Chalk Hill Blue butterflies.

The pond has now been drained, to encourage the cattle to use the water-trough elsewhere on the Common. Water-troughs can be moved around to reduce the pressure on any one area. Further measures may be implemented to protect other sensitive areas, for example temporary fencing at critical times of the year.

A more systematic monitoring system is being established, so the effects of grazing and other management methods can be recorded and the management regimes adjusted accordingly.

Resources

The previous 'intensive' grazing regime, involved a lot of work for the Grazier and also occupied around half the time of FOLK's three Working Parties a month! The 'extensive' grazing regime requires relatively little volunteer time. This has released more time for other conservation activities, from scrub clearance to footpath maintenance.

This has had an impact on the amount of scrub clearance done. This in turn helps to restore more

scrubland to grassland. Ash saplings and old gorse are particular problems, as is Hemp Agrimony.

Future Management

Alternative methods of improving management of the site are always being considered. One is the possibility of using native ponies to graze the hill, not instead of the cattle, but to complement the cattle grazing. Ponies eat much the same things as cattle, but some breeds, particularly Exmoors, tend to eat a wider variety of scrub. Let us know if you would like to see ponies on the Common, or if not, why not?

As we have only had one year of the 'extensive' grazing and that was a wetter year than normal, more time is being allowed to monitor the results of the current cattle grazing regime, with the enlarged herd. The outcome will be reviewed again in the autumn.

Julius Marstrand
FOLK Chairman

Bring on the summer 'Air Time'

That good old English topic of everyday conversation, our weather, is never far away. Last year's summer was awful, we all know, will it be any better this year? For the cycling community the wet weather is often more of an inconvenience than a real show stopper. We get muddy and end up spending more time cleaning our kit than riding the trails. An inconvenience, yes, but the hardy aren't usually too put off.

Dirt jumps then. Made of dirt so what harm will wet weather do the excellent facility in Daisybank Fields? Well, get them wet and it's rain stops jump, that's what!! OK for a bit of maintenance but you just cannot ride them as they go all soft and the bikes cannot transfer the required momentum into them to jump. So it's energy drinks in the pavilion until about 3 to 5 days after the downpours end before we can even think of venturing out for a play. Hence last year there were so few days of good riding in Daisybank.

2013. To date it's been much better. Thank goodness. Not perfect by any means but no English spring and summer ever is. A dedicated crew have made a few alterations to the site with the aim of making the jump experience better for us all. As agreed with Cheltenham Borough Council, there continues to be a variety of options for riders, from the inexperienced "have a go" learner to the top class dirt jump guru.



Identified flying object!

One aspect of the site that is working better for sure is drainage. A common problem for all jump sites is the settling of rain water, especially between the jumps where the ground is often low. By applying a bit of simple physics to our site we have managed to put in some strategically positioned drainage trenches. As the site sits on clay, any rainwater does not readily absorb into the ground so we have to channel it into trenches where it then sits and naturally evaporates. We have been able to use some of this water to help maintain the upslope of the jumps as they start to deteriorate through general use, so it all works quite well.

However, what we crave for are sessions lasting several hours with friends at the jumps enjoying the flow of the lines, seeing the vortices as riders launch through the dust kicked up by the bike in front and the light hearted banter between us all. We don't deny that having this site to use is a real privilege and not something we "expect the

Council to give us". We put the work in mind you, and we get the fun back out. At a typical session, the camera often comes out to capture the essence of our enjoyment....



Apres the Daisybank bike jumps

Roger Smith Cheltenham & County CC.

corrective@blueyonder.co.uk

The Word from Wayne, Wayne Sedgwick Senior Community Ranger, Cheltenham Borough Council.

At the **grazing site meeting** on May 8th, Paul Hackman, from Natural England, expressed his general satisfaction with the progress made in the introduction of extensive grazing to Charlton Kings Common. He explained that there was scope for more improvement in parts of the SSSI. There is a role for scrub, trees and other types of habitat in increasing the wildlife diversity of the Hill and Common. He supported the trial use of animals other than cattle, for example ponies to complement the work of the Dexters. He also welcomed the regular review of the effects of extensive grazing.

Funding from the Cotswold Wardens and the Cheltenham Community Pride project has been secured and we can now go ahead with the installation of **two interpretation boards** for the Iron Age Fort. These will probably be sited on the Cotswold Way at the entrances to the earthworks and will have factual information and pictures

which will be aimed at increasing appreciation of the history of the site.

Interest in the **archaeology of the Hill** continues and Natural England has provided funding for a detailed structural survey of the Lime Kilns and the adjacent geological features which could threaten the long term preservation of this important bit of Cheltenham's industrial heritage. This work is essential but costly and will allow us to make detailed plans for work to be done on the Lime Kilns. Watch this space.

Requests to sponsor **commemorative benches** are received periodically from the families of deceased users of the Hill and Common. Whilst the Council understands these requests, it is keen to preserve the natural feel of the Hill and Common and so feels it has to restrict the number of benches being installed. An audit of the existing benches counted 23. Policy on accommodating more benches is being reviewed. Do you have a view; if so let Wayne Sedgwick know how you feel about more benches.

There are several, sometimes **competing uses of the Hill and Common**. A recent application to stage the Devil's Chimney Chase, a running race highlights the need to balance use with effects. Wayne negotiates with users for example Mountain Bike clubs, to reduce the effect of events on the environmentally fragile parts of the Hill.

A **tree walk** has been arranged for the 7th of August, starting at Tramway Cottage at 19.30. This will be led by the Cheltenham Tree officer and will be an excellent opportunity to learn more about the beautiful trees we have on site and the challenge of managing them.

Work Party Report, Summer 2013

We have had a busy spring and with a good turnout of members have continued to clear scrub, ash and hawthorn from areas of overgrown grass. We are still attracting new members to the work parties I think a bonfire on a cold day helps.

Despite the poor weather only one work party was cancelled because of snow.

Wayne Sedgwick, CBC Senior Ranger, has helped us by cutting down larger ash trees with a chain saw. There are still some tree stumps to cut to ground level and some tidying up to do in some areas. The cold weather has meant that the growth of grass etc appears to have been a month behind and this has made it difficult to plan work.

The work by the contractor to clear scrub and ash growth on the escarpment adjacent to Hartley Lane, has been completed and has restored a large area of grassland. Work has started on cutting grass and clearing scrub on the grassland above Salterly Quarry, the larger areas of grass will be cut later in the year. This area will be cut on a three year rotation giving grass areas of three different heights and habitats.

As part of the Grassland Management Plan for the hill it is more than a year since we went over to intensive grazing of Charlton Kings common. To review the progress of the grassland condition a meeting and a walk over the common has taken place. As mentioned by Julius Marstrand, in his article, there are now more Dexter cattle on the common than last year and I know there is concern from some members that the cattle are eating wild flowers and disturbing the ground nesting birds. These issues were discussed and action will be taken next year to protect some areas.

There have been at least two incidents of burnt out cars on the hill this winter and of course damage is done to the hill and even when removed more clearing up is required to remove small debris and broken glass. It is often impossible to clear the area completely, please be careful when coming across these areas particularly with your dog,

In conjunction with Cheltenham Borough Council we have completed a photographic and location

survey of all the benches on the common. We are looking at the long term planning and maintenance of the seats. Most were installed in the late nineties and are at view points on the hill.

You are always welcome to join us on one of our work parties, we are a friendly mixed group of male and female members. You can work at your own pace and take a break if you wish. We meet at 9.30 at Tramway Cottage Car Park Daisy Bank Road and are on the hill for approximately 3 hours. Tools are provided by FOLK. For your own safety please wear stout footwear and tough gardening gloves. FOLK work parties are on the 2nd Thursday the 3rd Tuesday and the 4th Sunday of each month. Dates for the next 6 months are printed below

For further information Contact Mike 01242 238790 or Geoff 01242 24165

Mike Donnelly, FOLK Work Party Coordinator

Work parties for 2012/2013

July 2013	Thursday 11 th	Tuesday 16 th	Sunday 28 th
August 2013	Thursday 8 th	Tuesday 20 th	Sunday 25 th
September 2013	Thursday 12 th	Tuesday 17 th	Sunday 22 nd
October 2013	Thursday 10 th	Tuesday 15 th	Sunday 27 rd
November 2013	Thursday 14 th	Tuesday 19 th	Sunday 24 th
December 2013	Thursday 12 th	Tuesday 17 th	Sunday 22 th

FOLKtalk

Spotted on the Hill

A family walking on the Hill in April had a brief encounter with this handsome adder taking advantage of some spring sunshine.



Adder enjoying the spring sunshine

Survey of Readers

FOLK started in 2000 and since then a newsletter, to keep members up to date with activity on the Hill, has been produced regularly. Its format has changed little over that time and the Executive Committee feel it may be time to review and refresh the newsletter. As part of this exercise a simple survey of 18 readers has been carried out to gauge their views. The main findings of this survey are:

Most readers are happy with the number of pages although a few thought it may be too long.

Three times a year is about right for the number of issues with additional issues if material is available.

Fortunately almost all readers found the articles relevant and interesting and the newsletter should continue to keep people informed about what FOLK is doing and plans to do on the Hill and Common.

Most readers were happy with the format. "It does what it says on the tin", was heard several times. The layout and print size are satisfactory.

Pictures are felt to be very useful as long as the quality is acceptable. We have been thinking about introducing colour to the newsletter and a majority of readers would support that idea providing the costs are not too great.

The Committee felt that it would be helpful to give the newsletter a new and more interesting title but readers did not feel that was a major issue.

Readers were asked how we could attract a wider audience for the newsletter. Answers included suggestions about a children's section with children's features, a regular quiz or puzzles, activities for young people on the Hill, cycling topics, suggested walks, making contact with schools. There should be a link with a FOLK website. It was suggested we could consult a marketing person but it is doubtful that funds would cover that.

Suggestions for topics to be featured in the Newsletter include: more on wild life, including surveying flora and fauna, archaeology, local issues, places to visit, more maps giving the layout and features of the Hill, suggested walks, use of the Hill for recreation, information on cycling, a forward look to work parties, more on the management of the Hill including the agricultural use of fields, history including old photos of the Hill.

So to sum up, with a thank you to readers who gave their views, there is general satisfaction with the Newsletter, it keeps people informed about FOLK activities. It would benefit from the judicious use of colour and there is scope for widening its appeal. Suggestions are welcomed from FOLK members and we will be working on improving future issues of the Newsletter.

Early results for butterfly spotters

Surveying of the butterflies on the Hill has been going on for more than a month now but the cool and dull weather has meant that the appearance of different species has got off to a rather slow start.



Holly blue butterfly one of the species seen on the Hill

So far fewer than a dozen types of butterfly have been noted. Numbers were low and some sections of the survey areas no butterflies were seen. However now the temperatures are a bit higher and more food plants are flowering it is expected that a greater variety of insects will be seen. Fingers crossed. Species seen include: Green

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: whalley-p@o2.co.uk Articles of around 500 words plus a photo at any time but by mid-June at the latest, would be most welcome

Contact FOLK

Anne North, Membership and Grazier: 01242 522767 Mike Donnelly, Working Parties: 01242 238790
Julius Marstrand, Chairman: 07717 326610 folk@marstrand.co.uk Geoff Holt, Treasurer: 01242 244165
Find the Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common 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*