



FOLKtalk

Issue 57
Summer 2018

Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

Conserving and improving the Hill for you

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FAYRE AND FIESTA



The Charlton Kings Summer Fayre and the Midsummer Fiesta in Montpellier Gardens offered a great opportunity for FOLK to promote its work and to swell its membership. These two events were a roaring success on both counts. On two swelteringly hot afternoons

FOLK had a strong presence. A large display board and a range of handouts described key aspects of our work, and an enthusiastic team of volunteers took time to chat with people about The Hill and how the landscape is looked after and enjoyed. They were obviously very effective because, over the two afternoons, we were delighted to enlist 85 new members. None of this would have been possible without good organisation and an attractive stand – all of which take time, energy and imagination. The committee is grateful to all who volunteered to help, but would particularly wish to congratulate Peter Niblett, Alistair Mckenzie and Mike Donnelly for the huge amount of work they put into making our appearance at these events so successful.

FOLK Work Party Report

Although we should theoretically stop cutting scrub at the end of February, to ensure no disturbance of nesting birds, we did manage to continue with some



Clearing ash saplings

removal work into March. We visited the area above Bridge Car Park that we are trying to keep open and cut down an area being overrun by ash saplings. We did check the area beforehand for any sign of nesting but, with no leaves on the trees at that time, it was easy to see that it was clear. We have visited this area before to clear ash saplings but, as we didn't chemically treat the stumps then, they had regrown. This time we applied chemicals so hopefully we won't need to revisit these again.

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One other task we did in this area was to try to remove and treat bramble ground-runners that were trying to take over a small open patch that had previously been cleared of trees.

While we were working here we also cut down some branches from an old oak tree that had been damaged by the snow. It's now looking much healthier.

In April we spent time burning the gorse we had cut earlier in the year and which we had stacked up. This cut gorse had dried out nicely and cutting bramble runners resulted in



Cutting bramble runners

some quite impressive flames! We had to be very careful how fast we loaded the fire to ensure the fire didn't spread onto the dried grass nearby.

Burning gorse cuttings

In May we spent a couple of work parties doing some grass restoration work on the less steep parts of the banks above Hartley Lane and nearby Salterley



Quarry. This involved brush cutting the old rank grass, and clearing some patches of gorse, and raking up the cuttings. This area has not been cut for years due to the difficulty of getting machinery onto the steep slopes and, by clearing the long old grass away, it is hoped that it will encourage the smaller more delicate plants to reappear.

(Although we did this work in the period when we are normally

Burning gorse cuttings

required to avoid cutting anything because of nesting birds we had been given special dispensation by Natural England to do it as it was classified as restoration work.)

On the final Sunday in May the weather was not looking promising so we did a job near to our meeting point at Tramway Cottage Car Park just in case we needed to make a dash for it if the promised rains came. We worked on cutting away a number of overhanging and damaged branches along the Standard Incline which goes up from Bridge Car Park. Some were in danger of falling down. Even though we did end up finishing early due to the rain we still managed to get quite a bit done.



Grass restoration work

Finally, in June, we spent our time on one of our routine summer jobs: pulling Hemp Agrimony on the slopes above the Gallops at the East end of the site.



Pulling hemp agrimony

This plant can form dense patches that damage the grassland if we don't try and keep it under control. It's not the most favourite job of the volunteers but is a necessary one. Although we will never eradicate it (we shouldn't, for example, as some butterflies like it) this work enables us to keep it under some degree of control.

To break the monotony of pulling Hemp we did spend a little time doing some grass restoration work in this area as well (also agreed with Natural England). There is a patch, where we had cleared some large gorse bushes earlier in the year, which was also full of rank grass and small hawthorn and bramble bushes which was not being grazed by the cattle (they don't like the prickly stuff on their delicate noses!). We brush cut and cleared a couple of small areas here (we didn't clear the whole area as it is favoured by the Duke of Burgundy butterflies which we didn't want to disturb too much).

Now that the summer is well and truly with us, and the restriction on cutting due to bird nesting is over, our next tasks will be to go round doing our annual cuts in various areas on Leckhampton Hill that are not grazed. This will include mowing around the ancient barrow on top of the Hill so that it can be clearly seen.

As always you are welcome to join us on any of our FOLK work parties. We are a friendly, mixed group of male and female volunteers. You can work at your own pace and take a break as and when you wish. We meet at 9.30am at Tramway Cottage Car Park, Daisybank Road, and are on the hill for approximately 3 hours. Tools are provided by FOLK. For your own safety we ask you to wear stout footwear and bring tough gardening gloves. We have

three FOLK work parties a month. Dates for the next 6 months are printed below.

For further information you can contact Geoff on 01242 244165 or you can look at the 'Work Party' page on our website (www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk) or send an email to folk.workparty@gmail.com.

Work party dates for Summer 2018 to Winter 2018

July 2018	Thursday 12 th	Tuesday 17 th	Sunday 22 nd
August 2018	Thursday 9 th	Tuesday 21 st	Sunday 26 th
September 2018	Thursday 13 th	Tuesday 18 th	Sunday 23 rd
October 2018	Thursday 11 th	Tuesday 16 th	Sunday 28 th
November 2018	Thursday 8 th	Tuesday 20 th	Sunday 25 th
December 2018	Thursday 13 th	Tuesday 18 th	Sunday 23 rd

THE WORD FROM WAYNE

Wayne Sedgwick Senior Ranger. Cheltenham Borough Council

The Dexters are thriving, with 33 adult cows in the herd. Fourteen of these are currently in calf with last year's calves just removed for weaning and halter training. The mothers are kept a good distance from the calves as their maternal instinct is high at the point of removal, so they are being grazed in more secluded fields. Halter training is important as this makes the work of moving them around more straightforward. Once a few have learned to be led by the halter, the rest of the calves will follow.

The use of the Dexters to graze the hill is constantly being reviewed and refined. 2 years ago, a trial “exclusion zone” was set up to see whether keeping the cattle away from the hill during high summer would lead to a greater profusion of wild flowers. This indeed was the case. So during early summer the herd is split to let the flowers grow. Once the flowers have



The Dexters enjoying a small patch of shade for as long as the hill can sustain them, then at this point they are all moved to the reversion fields by Hill Farm.

seeded the whole herd is re-assembled (around the beginning/ middle August) on the main site to graze it hard before the mothers are removed in late September for birthing. There is always a core group of around 10 animals left on the site

We are entering an exciting period of development for the hill thanks to our highly-valued partnership with the Cotswold Wardens who are celebrating their 50th year with a range of golden anniversary projects. The major work to be undertaken here is the construction of a new drystone wall all the way from Hartley Lane up to the hill fort – a total of some 500-600m. This will replace existing fencing and will much improve the boundary between that stretch of the Cotswold Way and the neighbouring farmland. It will be a demanding build over steep and difficult terrain. So the initial plan is to schedule the work over a period of up to ten years, with 50-60m of wall being completed each year.

The Cotswold Wardens will also be widening some existing gateways in order to make the paths accessible to the “trampers” (accessible wheelchairs) which are increasingly being used to improve accessibility for all those who

wish to spend time on the hill. All this development work will take place alongside the Wardens' routine support, including grass-cutting in both Area 16 and the ramparts. All in all, then, this continues to be an extremely fruitful partnership.

Last year we experienced a long bad winter, but now the grass is growing well and hay-cutting began in late May. This was a little earlier than normal, but was timed to ensure the maximum yield. Cheltenham Borough Council's monitoring shows that the current work plan is on track to achieve its agreed goals by the end of the year. Over the summer the priorities will continue to be hay-cutting, path-clearance and the removal of both hemp agrimony and ragwort, as well as raking and clearing the grass-cuttings from Area 16 and the Barrow.

The widespread concerns over ash dieback and the state of our nation's woodlands and "trees outside woods" have prompted a significant project being organised by the Woodland Trust. From more than one hundred applications, a consortium of partners from across Gloucestershire including FOLK and Cheltenham Borough Council have made it to the final eight successful bidders who hope to be part of a nationwide scheme to increase the numbers of trees.

The Woodland Trust has become increasingly concerned that, while well-managed plans help preserve our major ancient woodland, the picture elsewhere is bleaker, with hedgerows and small scatterings of tree routinely being stripped out to make life easier for farmers, builders, urban planners etc. So the Woodland Trust is preparing a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) which will help to redress the balance and boost the numbers of trees – crucially not just any trees anywhere, but the right trees in the right places. At present the Trust is undertaking the long and complex process of ensuring that each of the eight participating groups has a robust, credible and viable plan which will satisfy the HLF's scrutiny. More news of this project will follow.

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 in Summer 2018 please contact Martin Wood on 01242 231230 or email to: martinwood360@gmail.com Articles of around 500 words plus a photo at any time would be most welcome.

Why not have a look at what is new on the FOLK website <http://www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk/> and look us up on Facebook Friends of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common.

Contributions to the FOLK Website are always gratefully received.

Contact: webmaster.leckhamptonhill@gmail.com

Contact FOLK

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Find the Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common on
www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk and 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.