



FOLKtalk

Issue 66
Summer 2021

Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

Conserving and improving the Hill for you



This rare sight of a rainbow right over the rock face of Dead Man's Quarry could just be a sign of better things to come after COVID brought a tough time for us all.

FOLK has continued to make good progress with many projects despite the limitations which we have all endured. Nature continues to thrive after the very unusual Spring weather – though rather too many species need help to recover their numbers.

Most of all, the coming of summer gives us all a chance to take pleasure from seeing and visiting Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common, as well as enjoying our own favourite green spaces.

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COMMON NAMES

Local Names on The Hill and Common

If you take the shady footpath up from Hartley Lane towards the Lime Kilns, did you know you would be in “Woodland Walk”? Or that when you stroll along the broad track at the foot of the steep grassy slope looking east towards Cleeve Hill you are on “The Gallops”?

The origin of many of these commonly-used names may be lost in history, but after a year or more of tireless and detailed work, FOLK volunteer Ken Brennan has plotted each of these known names on a map of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common.

This project has only been made possible because of information from the FOLK committee and our members, and we are grateful to everyone who has contacted us to let us know about these intriguing common names.

The finished map is too detailed for inclusion in this newsletter article.

- So if you receive FOLKtalk by email you will find it by clicking on the link in the accompanying Mailchimp email.
- If you receive your newsletter by post/hand-delivery an A4 printed version will be included.

COMMITTEE WALKABOUT MEETING

Each summer, the committee holds one of its meetings up on the Hill to see at first hand the challenges we face, the work which has been already been undertaken and the places where future efforts need to be focused. So in the early evening on 9th June eleven members of the committee met Wayne Sedgwick (Senior Ranger, Cheltenham Borough Council) in Brownstones car park for this year's "walkabout", the meeting being greeted by a skylark singing beautifully above our heads.



Over the course of well over two hours, the committee was able to see for themselves a wide range of projects. These include the work to protect the Cotswold drystone wall leading to Windass Hill, the planned improvements to badly eroded stretches of the Cotswold Way (pictured left), and the perennial battle with gorse.

The meeting also took the opportunity to hear more about the progress which has already been made on modifying some of the Hill's many mountain bike trails. (See p.10)

Towards the end of the meeting, as the committee gathered on the edge of the escarpment, the discussion turned to the advance of ash dieback. There are around ten thousand ash trees of various ages across the Hill and Common and the latest estimate is that approximately one thousand are diseased or already dead. In some areas large numbers of ash grow together, while in other places individual ash trees are found scattered among other species.

From their lofty viewpoint the committee could look down on small pockets of mixed woodland punctuated by individual dead and dying ash trees. The other tree species are thriving as usual, but the soft grey, leafless shapes of trees struck by ash dieback were very conspicuous. In many cases diseased ash trees pose a relatively low risk, but especially where they are close to footpaths, bridleways, roads and tracks it is almost certain that some trees will have to be felled.



The grey skeletons of dead ash stand out among healthy woodland.

Throughout the walkabout there was plenty of lively and well-informed discussion. By the time everyone headed for home we had all learned a great deal about the work which FOLK and the Borough Council's other partners do to help preserve and improve this marvellous piece of rare English landscape.

IN THE NEWS

Buglife's B-Line Map

FOLK has been creating "Butterfly Motorways" to help link up isolated patches of habitat which support particular species. Now it has been announced that the national insect charity Buglife has mapped what it is calling "B-Lines": small connected strips of land rich in pollinator-friendly plants along which bees can more freely travel. By creating a map of the fragmented habitats currently in existence, it is hoped to support conversations with landowners about linking them up into a continuous ribbon of bee-friendly land. Already 1500 hectares have been committed and charities and voluntary groups are busy creating the new B-Lines.

FOLK WORK PARTY REPORT

Following the relaxation of Covid-19 restrictions on 29th March we were able to re-start the work parties (again!), with the first one being on Thursday 9th April. Our first tasks were to tidy up from previous work parties, and from some solo cutting that had been done by a small number of volunteers during the lockdown.

Firstly we burnt the gorse cuttings that had resulted from cutting a butterfly flying



route or “motorway”. This is primarily for the Duke of Burgundy butterflies, which are an endangered species.

The route passes through stands of gorse to join up Cowslip Meadow to a more open area of the Common.

Burning the gorse cuttings

We also burnt the gorse cuttings that had been generated by opening up another fire break in the large stand of gorse on the top of the Common just above the Cotswold Way.





Whilst working in this area we noticed that there were now healthy crops of violets growing in the fire breaks we had cut over a year ago. It was nice to see a regeneration of wild flowers in areas previously covered in gorse which shows our work has real benefits.

Violets found growing in last year's fire breaks

The final tidying up task was to burn a large quantity of hawthorn cuttings in an area above Daisybank Road near the 'Turning Circle' where hawthorn had been threatening to take over from the grassland. Unfortunately I forgot to take any photos of this work (I was out of practice.) so you will have to use your imagination!

The first major new job, which we started in May and will continue into June, has been to clear the growth that has been slowly covering and hiding the main Cotswold stone wall on the top of the Common. We have been mainly working on the farmer's side clearing a strip along the wall of the likes of 'Old Man's Beard' clematis, bramble and gorse.



Clearing unwanted growth from the Cotswold Stone Wall

One rather disappointing thing we came across during this work was the amount of rubbish, particularly dog poo bags, which had been thrown over the wall from the Charlton Kings Common side. “Out of sight out of mind presumably!” It is most unpleasant having to work around such mess and I wish the inconsiderate perpetrators wouldn’t do this.

We always have plenty to do on work parties so if you, or anyone else you know, would like to help, please do join 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, normally 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 we ask you to wear stout footwear and bring tough gardening gloves.

The planned dates for work parties for the next few months are:

June 2021	Thursday 10 th	Tuesday 15 th	Sunday 27 th
July 2021	Thursday 8 th	Tuesday 20 th	Sunday 25 th
August 2021	Thursday 12 th	Tuesday 17 th	Sunday 22 nd
September 2021	Thursday 9 th	Tuesday 21 st	Sunday 26 th

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.

SIGNS OF SUMMER - Our long distance visitors

The call of the cuckoo, the cooing of the turtle dove and the sight of Swifts, Swallows and House Martins wheeling across our skies are sure signs that summer is on its way. Arriving in April and May, they are joined by other familiar species like Chiffchaffs, various Warblers, Nightingales, Yellow Wagtails and, of course, Cuckoos. And that's on top of the thousands upon thousands of seabirds who fly to our shores for the summer.



Swallow

What is easy to overlook is the fact that, for the birds which make their summer home in our countryside and gardens, the fact that they are here at all is a triumph in itself.

For a start, most of these birds are so very small. Swallows and House Martins, for example, generally weigh under 20 grammes - in other words less than a single AA battery. So the fact that such potentially fragile birds can survive their epic journeys is indeed a true miracle of nature.

On top of the challenge of their diminutive size, there is the sheer scale of the journeys these birds undertake. The majority of our summer visitors have wintering grounds in Africa. Swifts, Swallows and House Martins, for example, all spend winter in regions of sub-Saharan Africa, meaning a journey of at least 3,500 miles to get back to the UK. Swallows outdo even this epic journey as they are known to travel as much as 8,000 miles from feeding grounds in eastern South Africa. However, as yet, we do not have reliable information on the precise African destinations preferred by all of our migratory species.

So why do they come here when their migration is so arduous?

To embark on such a monumental migration, these birds are clearly driven by habits and benefits which have developed over thousands of years. These advantages easily outweigh the very real risks which they face on the way. In

short, spending their summers in Europe offers our visiting birds four key factors which help to make for a successful breeding season.

- Firstly, there is a plentiful supply of food. Here, insect numbers and plant growth burgeon in Northern Europe's summers - which are warm, rather than extremely hot, and are also wetter than the African wintering grounds.
- Secondly, there is the need to reduce competition for food. While the wintering grounds in Africa offer plenty of food for large numbers of adult birds, the concentration of populations there could not be supported once hundreds of thousands begin breeding. Feeding growing chicks and securing enough energy supplies for their own parental workload drives breeding adults to spread out and seek a plentiful supply of food which is not overstretched by vast dense populations.
- Thirdly, our summer days are longer than those in Africa. This means that there are more hours in each day for the birds to exploit the feeding opportunities which they have travelled so far to reach.
- Finally, their African wintering grounds have far higher populations of predatory birds which hungrily feed on both young birds and their generally exhausted parents.



House Martin

So each summer we find the migratory birds re-appearing. We may like to think of these migratory birds as “British” species which just have the sense to spend winter somewhere better, but in reality many spend by far the greater part of their year in Africa; they just have the sense to come here to breed.

For all that, the simple truth is that their presence in our summer skies lifts our spirits. It also encourages many of us to put out food all year round. Apart from doing good for the birds – this also brings us so much personal pleasure as, for these all-too-short months, our summer visitors share with us their time, their songs, and the trials and tribulations of parenthood.

MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAILS AND WALKING ROUTES

After months of detailed surveys - and very positive discussions between a wide range of stakeholders - plans have been agreed to make Leckhampton Hill safer and more enjoyable for both walkers and those who ride mountain bikes.

As we reported in February's FOLKtalk, this initiative was prompted by very real concerns about safety, particularly where walking routes and mountain bike trails cross.

When we say "walkers", of course, we mean anyone from those just taking the occasional casual stroll to people backpacking day after day to complete the Cotswold Way.

Mountain biking is no different, with trails varying from "easy" to "advanced", and riders ranging from those happy to have a good weekend ride to those who race at international level. To find out more about local mountain biking follow this link <https://www.cheltenhamandcounty.cc/mtb/>

Thanks to the expertise of people like Clive Lewis, Mountain Bike Captain for Cheltenham & County Cycling Club, the stakeholder meetings had plenty of experience on which to draw. The sterling work by FOLK's Work Party Co-ordinator, Geoff Holt, to map the dozens of walking routes and mountain bike trails on the Hill provided the starting point for these detailed discussions.

Thanks to ingenuity and mutual respect shown by all parties, a complex scheme to rationalise and improve facilities for both walkers and mountain bikers can now be put in place.

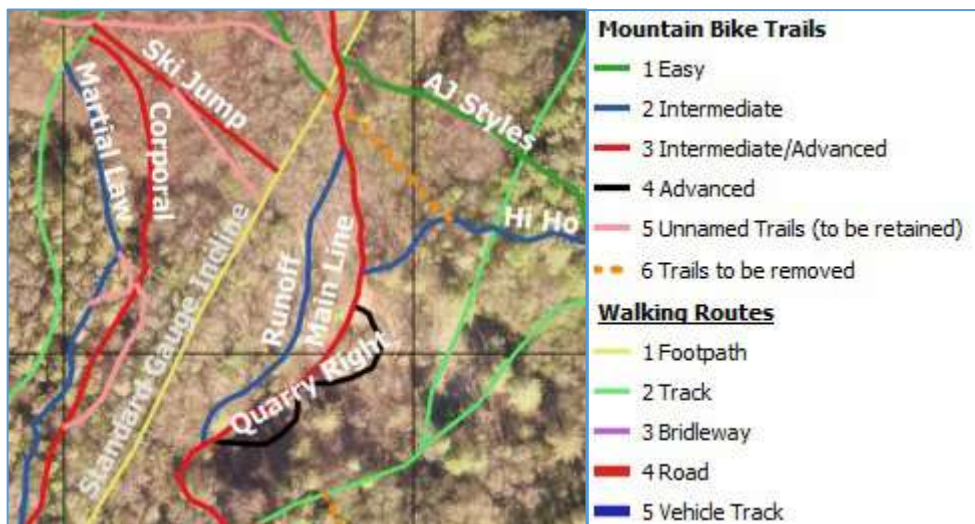
Cheltenham Borough Councillor Victoria Atherstone, member for Culture, Wellbeing & Business, has commented: "It is easy to see why Leckhampton Hill is so attractive to visitors, walkers, runners and trail bikers, as we all know the benefits of outdoor pursuits, though we do all need to work together not only to preserve the landscape but also to keep each other safe."

So what changes will we see?

There are two main strands to the work which will be done:

- rationalising and, in some cases, remodelling the existing network of mountain bike trails
- putting up some new signage to keep walkers and mountain bikers safe

The image below shows a tiny section of the entire map which has been created showing all the established walking paths, and the route and name of each mountain bike trail. This illustration includes one of the short lengths of mountain bike trail which are now closed (shown in orange).



Changing Mountain Bike trails

Work is already under way to change to a few of the Hill's mountain bike trails. So as the project develops, mountain bikers will find some of their existing trails

closed and some diverted or otherwise modified. This will only take place where it has not been possible to find a way safely to modify the potentially dangerous intersections with walking paths.



Mountain biker volunteers working to divert or block off existing mountain bike trails



Where trails have been closed or diverted, this has been achieved by mountain bikers working with Wayne Sedgwick (Senior Ranger, Cheltenham Borough Council) and, wherever possible, using previously felled or fallen trees.

Mountain bikers who came across the work parties have been very supportive. Unfortunately, some early work was removed the following night – presumably by riders not yet engaged with the project. The works have been repeated with more solid solutions and, hopefully, this kind of disruption will tail off as more people become aware of the benefits of the whole scheme.

Installing signage

We will also start to see some new signs appearing where there is a heightened risk of accidents at a few places where walking routes and mountain bike trails cross.

There will be two main sorts of signs, using familiar Highway Code formats.

<p>There are square “guidance” signs - which “steer” walkers and mountain bikers to their own routes.</p>	<p>There are also the triangular “warning” signs which tell walkers that they are crossing a mountain bike trail and vice versa.</p>
	

Read More and Spread the News

Thousands of people go on the Hill and it’s important that as many as possible hear about the project and understand why the changes are happening.

To found out a little more about the project, follow this link to Cheltenham Borough Council’s announcement.

https://www.cheltenham.gov.uk/news/article/2554/leckhampton_hill_beauty_pot_to_have_minor_bike_tracks_re-modelled?fbclid=IwAR0hfkx24l-3gYuWR3db79PgqWPPJeKEEqHTiNC99d2OeVNBwv9eM7PnRe8

GLOUCESTERSHIRE'S STONE STILES

THE PROJECT MOVES ON

You may recall an article in last November's edition of FOLKtalk publicising a new survey being organised by Peter Wilson from Woodchester. Its aim is to build a record of all of Gloucestershire's stone stiles, some of which are well over 200 years old.

When Peter launched the Stone Stile Project in 2020 he had one goal in mind . . . to record as many of the stone stiles in Gloucestershire as could be found. Little did he expect the response which this would generate. As a result we are pleased to announce that the sites of over 600 stone stiles have now been recorded across the county. Thanks to more than 200 contributors, each stile has been photographed including some 'abandoned' ones which have been re-discovered.



Step Stile [photo by Fay Britton]

The success of the project wouldn't have happened without the support of CPRE¹, the Countryside Charity, the Cotteswold Naturalists Field Club and more recently English Heritage. But the individual contributions have very largely come from keen walkers who have been inspired by the project.

As well as recording stone stiles, Peter is also receiving sightings of other historical agricultural artefacts including stone sheep dips, horse troughs fed by natural springs, ancient village pumps, ornate Victorian iron stiles and even old insurance plaques, to name just a few. So please do keep a look out for any such items which evidence past agricultural practices whilst of course keeping to the Countryside Code.

With the success of the Project, Phase Two has just begun with the aim to record the details of each stile, known history, description of location etc. It's a huge task

and Peter is looking for volunteers to help. The record is to be divided by parishes. Ultimately an interactive App will be produced which will benefit everyone who enjoys walking in our beautiful Gloucestershire countryside.

If you'd like to help Peter to form a record of all Gloucestershire's stone stiles - or indeed other items from our county's agricultural history - there's even a special form to use. You can get this from Peter Wilson, using the email address below, or simply enter [CPRE Stone stiles](#) in your search engine and download it from there. All you need to do is:

- Photograph the stile
- Make a note of its location (a description and a map reference)
- Jot down anything else which might be of interest, such as the name of the nearest village, where you were walking to and from, name of path if known (e.g., Cotswold Way)
- Complete the form and email it to Peter.Wilson@woodchestervalleyvillage.co.uk

The project is moving strongly into stage two

So more help will be very much appreciated:

- **Firstly reviewing the stiles** is giving rise to occasional queries and it would be help to have a local volunteer in each area to whom these can be referred – if you feel you may be able to help ***please email Peter Wilson with the name of the parish in which you live.***
- **Secondly collecting the data for the App(s) is being piloted.** The data research and write ups are best done by local groups. So Peter would be very pleased to hear from ***local history groups and others willing to assist.***

Peter Wilson tel. 01453 834486 or email Peter.Wilson@woodchestervalleyvillage.co.uk

¹ CPRE is the charity formerly known as the Campaign to Protect Rural England.

ADDERS

Adders like to bask in the sunshine - like all land-based reptiles – though not everyone welcomes the sight of Britain's only venomous snake. But should we be fearful of Adders, and what should we do when we come across them?



Adders are basically secretive creatures which always try to avoid human contact if at all possible. So sightings of adders out in the open are actually very rare.

It is also true to say that incidents of Adders biting humans are very few and far between, and serious illness or death is extremely rare, not least because the Adders' venom is not particularly powerful. No human has died from an Adder bite in the last twenty years. Animals, however, are far more likely to be bitten and to suffer more serious symptoms, in part because of their smaller body mass. Adders are not naturally aggressive, but they will attack if they are disturbed or feel threatened, either by humans or animals.

What to do if you see an Adder

- The first and most obvious thing to do is to keep your distance.
- Keep children and pets well away.

What to do if you are bitten by an Adder (NHS Advice)

- Do not touch or even go near the snake or try to harm it.
- Stay calm – most snake bites in the UK are not serious.
- Try to remember what the snake looked like. This will help medical staff treat the bite.
- Keep the part of the body which was bitten as still as possible.
- Use the recovery position if needed.
- You may take paracetamol to ease any pain, but not aspirin or ibuprofen as they can make bleeding worse. Near the bite, take off any jewellery and loosen any tight clothing in case swelling occurs.
- Seek medical help as soon as possible.
- If the person bitten loses consciousness call for an ambulance immediately.

THE WORD FROM WAYNE

Wayne Sedgwick, Senior Ranger, Cheltenham Borough Council

Car Parks

With increased visitor numbers to the Hill, it has been important to continue to improve facilities for at the two main car parks off Hartley Lane. This is not only to make the car parks themselves better for those arriving by car, but also to help avoid the damage and congestion caused when visitors park on the roadside.

Following the successful extension and re-surfacing of the car park at the top of Hartley Lane (“Brownstones”) more work is being done to improve the access lane there. The coffee business has also seen changes, with a new horse-box kiosk and the installation of a quieter generator to provide power. Run by professional barista, Vince Freeman, *Coffee Rocks* is already proving very popular. As well as a half-term activity for children, he has also introduced a scheme which rewards customers with a free coffee after returning a given number of recyclable cups. The reward scheme is clearly aimed at keeping litter to the minimum and early indications suggest that it is working.



Just up the track leading from Brownstones car park, Hill Farm (left) has had the big farmyard re-surfaced. This will make parking much easier for people attending the rural skills courses which are run there by the Cotswold Wardens.

Further down the Hill, the lower car park (“Salterley Quarry”) has been re-surfaced, the access lane has been improved and works have also been carried out to drain away the water which runs-off the car park.

The Cotswold Way

At the top of the Hill there are a number of places where it is hoped that the route of the Cotswold Way will soon benefit from improvement. The area being targeted is the popular stretch running eastwards between the toposcope and Windass Hill. The main focus will be those locations where the footpath has been badly eroded and walking is muddy, steep or slippery.

The ground surrounding both the toposcope and the trig point have been quite badly worn away by footfall, and both will be re-graded and reinforced.

Two existing stony slopes will also receive attention. These are the one near the trig point with the second being in the woodland near the gate by the start



New steps at Windass Hill

of the Cotswold drystone wall. Both will be replaced by ramps, which will be more resistant to erosion and will also add further to the routes which can be accessed by “trampers” (all-terrain mobility vehicles).

Another gateway further along towards Windass Hill which was similarly eroded, has already been repaired.

The exact scope and timing of these planned improvements is dependent on all the funding falling into place and there will be further updates on progress in future editions of FOLKtalk.

Erratic weather

On the Hill and Common, the wildly variable and unpredictable weather has had a conspicuous impact. March proved to be the usual mixed bag. April turned out to be one of the sunniest and warmest on record – but with rather a lot of late frost. Then May arrived and, with a few exceptions, sunshine and warmth was in very short supply, but rainfall was exceptional.

As walkers and gardeners will already have noticed, this has affected the natural world as much as our own human activity.

The flowering of the wild flower, Yellow Rattle, which carpets Area 16 was delayed, as was the growth of the grass on the slopes which are grazed by the Dexter cattle.



Old gorse turned brown by late frost

On the plus side, the early shoots of new gorse were severely nipped by late frost and some old gorse is still almost entirely brown. (See photo left.) Any re-growth will initially be patchy and significantly delayed. Although this gorse will eventually recover, its current condition will at least

give more breathing space for the precious grass which gorse invariably stifles.

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. ***There is currently no fee for membership.***

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

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If you have any comments on the Newsletter or would like to contribute an article to the next edition please contact **Martin Wood** on **01242 231230** or email to: martinwood360@gmail.com. Articles of around 500 words, plus a photo if you have one, would be most welcome at any time.

Contact FOLK

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Tony Duffin, Membership: 01242 529240

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

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