



BERKSHIRE CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS



Newsletter no. 186

November / December 2006

Task Reports

**25th – 28th August – Langton Herring, Dorset – Neil Frankum
(Additional Photos – Maurice Budden & Richard Coles)**

We spent a very nice bank holiday weekend down on the Dorset coast doing some dry stone walling. This was the group's ninth visit to Langton Herring. We were working for the Dorset County Council Heritage Coast Service, who look after the coast path, which runs through the bottom of the field in which we were working.

After an uneventful journey down, we even had time for a quick pint in the pub across the road from the village hall where we were staying.

On Saturday, after breakfast we did the ten minute walk to the worksite to meet Jenny, the council ranger who



showed us the task for the weekend. This was to tackle a section of wall that had started to collapse. We quickly set to work demolishing what was left.

Unfortunately we had to demolish slightly more than we would have liked, in order to tie in neatly to another section of recently rebuilt wall.

This gave us quite a target to aim for. Taking the wall down, it quickly became apparent why it had collapsed – there was no foundations! There were also some tree roots in the way too. As a result we ended up going



Top – starting to dismantle the wall.
Above – Maurice, Nigel, Neil & Peter M digging out tree roots.
Left – Neil mattocking out a root.
Below left – Neil, Richard & John



down to bare earth, and had to mattock out the roots. Some of the larger stones from the wall, together with some new stone were used to give a new sturdy foundation. We then began the long process of trying to assemble the three dimensional jigsaw puzzle from the huge pile of random pieces that we had nicely stacked to the side as we demolished the old wall.

By the end of the day we were just above ground level. As there were sheep in the field one side, we had to use wooden pallets & wire mesh fencing to make the wall stock proof over night. The evening entertainment on Saturday consisted of a trip to Weymouth. Whilst Richard,

David & Peter went for a dip in the sea, Nigel and I were taken on a guided walk by Mark, around the adjacent RSPB nature reserve. Back at the village hall, Richard's cooking and homebrew wine finished the evening off nicely!

On Sunday morning we were a bit sluggish to get going (I blame the wine). Maurice & John had already arrived, taken down the temporary fencing and got stuck in.

Today was all about stacking stones as we slowly increased the height of the wall. Quite hard mental work as you went through phases of inspiration where everything fits, and times of total despair when you simply can't find anywhere to put that stone, or any



stone to fit that gap. Good progress was made during the day, and the stockproof fence re-erected to keep the sheep in. That evening we firstly went to West Bay, where Richard and Peter again went for a swim in the sea, whilst Mark, Nigel & I went off for a walk round the harbour in search of ice cream. After killing a suitable amount of time, we headed into Bridport to visit Maurice, who had laid on a barbeque for the evening.

On Monday, we realised reasonably early on that we wouldn't get everything finished, so we concentrated on the downhill half of the wall, and got this up to full height, and got the coping stones on. Jenny said that another group were coming down a couple of weeks later and she would probably get them to finish off the other half. After cleaning up

Top – John, Peter, Richard, David & Nigel. Above – The wall at the end of day one. Above left & right – building the wall. Left – More wall building.



Above left – gaining height. Above middle – the cliffs at West Bay. Above right – Peter working on the wall.
Below – Peter, Mark, David, John & Nigel.



the village hall, we headed home, suitably knackered, but knowing that we had got a good job done.



Above – the start of day 2.



Above left – enjoying a well earned rest! Above middle – Maurice putting on a coping stone. Above right – the team in front of the finished wall.



Above left – The wall at the end of the day. Above right – Richard at Clayfield Copse.

The bit of wall I helped to build on my first task down here seven years ago is still standing, so there's a good likelihood that our handiwork will still be standing well into the 22nd century!

3rd September – Clayfield Copse – David Fiddes



We had a small contingent clearing sycamore from along the back path in Clayfield Copse. The Friends of Group were out in force, but had their own job scything a corner of the football pitches area that is set aside as a small wild flower meadow. It is a small meadow and they had a good turn out so having made short work of this some of them joined us to fell some trees later in the morning. Apart from tumbling trees, the peace was only disturbed by the football matches in the morning, and Richard and the chainsaw in the afternoon.



Left – Sarah. Right – William. Below left – Speckled Wood Butterfly. Below right - Jason pulling birch trees at Snelsmore.



13th August – Snelsmore Common – Neil Frankum

Toady was a day with a lot of standing around waiting for the next load of hogging to be brought across the site by a mini dump truck. When it arrived we got to rake it out and then compact it into a nice firm surface for the path.



20th August – Pound Copse – Neil Frankum

This was the annual summer bramble control task. I got a bit bored and jumped into the dried up pond and successfully dug for water. Hopefully the wildlife will appreciate a drink!

8th October – Task Cancelled

As our task leaders were scattered to the four corners of the planet this week, this task was cancelled as a BeC task as there was no-one to drive the van or sort out the tools. Alisdair did turn up and became an honorary member of Keith's local group at Snelsmore for the day.



10th September – Snelsmore Common – Neil Frankum

This was a joint task with the local group at Snelsmore Common. A good turnout of people pulling, digging, & chopping down the birch trees that are trying to take over the heathland area. The heather was making a good display, particularly in the adjacent area which had been cleared previously, to show us what the end product of our work would be.



17th September – Wildmoor – David Fiddes

We replaced three sections of boardwalk at the back of the Wildmoor site. This was a continuation of work we'd done on a previous visit. Last time all the piles needed replacing. This time only a couple of them were rotten, which meant that it was a fairly simple matter of replacing those and putting in new beams and boards. The section we were working on had a bend. Karl the ranger had prepared a few angled boards for the corner and Richard used the chainsaw to give us a couple more. The old boards were in relatively good condition and were kept as replacement boards for future repairs.

Left - Alisdair & Justin nailing the decking into place. Below left – Peter & Alisdair working on the bend. Below middle – Peacock butterfly. Below right – the finished boardwalk.



15th October – Greenham Common – Neil Frankum



This was the biggest turnout of the year so far. There were fourteen of us, and thirteen more from the Greenham and Crookham Conservation Volunteers (the local group). We were clearing birch scrub from one of the valleys on the south east side of the site. This is partly to allow the heathland flora to recover to it's previous healthy state (there was some heather just managing to survive under the birch scrub), but also hopefully to allow some of the rare plants that have previously been recorded here to re-colonise if they have managed to survive the encroachment of the birch scrub.



24th September – Snelsmore Common & 1st October – Padworth Common

Nobody wrote me a task report.

Socials

Film – Miami Vice

Whilst this film had had some good reviews, in our opinion it didn't live up to the hype. The story was a bit disjointed, and didn't really tie up enough of the loose ends. It didn't help that the projector was out of focus for the first five or ten minutes of the film!

Film – Children Of Men

This was quite a good film, with some fairly realistic looking scenes, making good use of special effects, but without the special effects being obvious. Worth seeing.

Film – Enron: The Smartest Guys in The Room

A semi-documentary style film, interposing news footage, interviews, and humorous interludes to paint a picture of how corporate America and big business was just a great big tower of cards waiting to collapse in the biggest corporate bankruptcy of all time. A good film.

Socials

Xmas Meal – Monday 4th December

At the Mansion House in Prospect Park. Let Nigel know if you want to come by 10th November. (socials@berkshire-conservation-volunteers.org.uk / 01252 835919). A deposit will be required. The menu can be seen at: http://www.brewersfayre.co.uk/campaign/christmas_06/feast-adult.pdf.

Guy Fawkes Night – Saturday 4th November

We're doing the usual visit to the fireworks display being put on at Laurel Park in Lower Earley. Meet at the entrance to the park at the north end of Marefield at 6-30pm. The fireworks start at 7-00pm. Not sure of the cost, but I think it was a fiver last year. We'll probably adjourn to the pub afterwards for a pint.

Pub – Sundays after task

If everyone feels up to it we sometimes adjourn to the pub after task. We'll usually decide where we are going on task, when we've found out what everyone wants to do.

Cinema Trips / Other socials etc

These get arranged on an ad hoc basis - turn up on task, contact one of us, or sign up for the Email mailing list to find out the details.

Thames Water Volunteer Awards

Every year, Thames Water run an awards scheme for members of staff, who in their spare time do voluntary work in the community. I had previously won an award in 2001, and thought that it would be a good idea to enter the work I do for BeC again this year. The decision was helped along by the fact that the special guest at the awards ceremony was going to be the TV presenter Kate Humble. As she is known for her work presenting wildlife programmes such as Springwatch, I thought that I probably had an advantage, as the awards selectors would almost certainly want at least one wildlife / conservation based prize winner! I wasn't too surprised then when I got invited to the awards ceremony held at London Zoo. I was one of ten members of staff who won awards for their volunteering work in the community. Each of us received a cheque for £1000 to go to the organisation we worked for, as well as a certificate presented by Kate & one of the Thames Water directors. A big thankyou goes to Thames Water for their donation to BeC!

Above right – the £1000 charity cheque. Right - Kate Humble presenting me with the award certificate (and yes, I can occasionally be seen wearing a tie!)



Task Details: 5th November – 31st December 2006

To book for task, please contact the task-leader listed below (If possible, by the Thursday before the task). Transport is available from the Tool Store at Edenham Crescent at 9:10am, and from the front of Reading Station (near the taxi rank) at 9:30am. Other pick-up points can sometimes be arranged – please contact the task-leader.

You are advised to wear old clothing, and stout boots or wellies (preferably with steel toecaps). Also bring waterproofs and a packed lunch, BeC will provide Tea/Coffee/Squash and Biscuits. As it is going into winter we could experience any type of weather, so wrap up warm / bring the sun cream?!!.

Whenever possible, please do let the task leader know you are planning to come on task. Occasionally task details change at short notice, and we can only let you know of changes if we know you are planning to attend the task. However we do always take enough tools and biscuits for a few extras, so if you get the urge on Sunday morning, but haven't booked, you will still be made welcome.

We often go to the pub after task, so remember to bring some money (and a change of clothes if it's likely to be a very muddy task) if you want to join us.

POUND COPSE, Arborfield

5th November 2006

Task: Hedge planting and bench building.

Leader: Richard Coles 0118 976 0580

Meet at: 10:00 at Grid Reference SU751673. Follow the Shinfield Road (A327) south out of Reading. Cross the M4, pass through Shinfield village, and bear left at the mini-roundabout past the ESSO petrol station. Half a mile after crossing the River Loddon turn right into Greensward lane opposite the signpost to Swallowfield. Pound Copse is 100m on the right.

Userbody: Arborfield Parish Council

HIGHWOOD, Woodley

12th November 2006

Task: Scrub bashing.

Leader: Neil Frankum 0118 975 1528

Meet at: 10-15am at the reserve on Kingfisher Drive, Woodley (Grid reference SU753725). Heading out of Reading on the Wokingham Road, turn left at the Three Tuns traffic lights. At the mini roundabout turn right into Woodlands Avenue, and then first right into Fairwater Drive. Kingfisher Drive is the first on the right.

Userbody: Wokingham District Council.

GREENHAM COMMON, Newbury

19th November 2006

Task: TBA.

Leader: Richard Coles 0118 976 0580 (daytime)

Meet at: 10:15 at the site. This is a LARGE site, so contact Richard for details if you are planning on making your own way to site.

Userbody: West Berkshire District Council.

PADWORTH COMMON

26th November 2006

Task: Birch clearance

Leader: TBA

Meet at: 10-15am at the car park (Grid reference SU619648). Head west along the A4 from Junction 12 of the M4 for approximately 3 miles. Just before you get to the roundabout at the junction of the A4 and A340 turn left into a minor road signposted towards Padworth. Follow this road for approximately 2 miles. The car park is on the right just before you reach the T junction with the Burghfield Common to Tadley Road.

Userbody: West Berkshire District Council.

DECOY HEATH, Aldermaston

3rd December 2006

Task: Scrub bashing.

Leader: TBA

Meet at: 10-15am at the reserve car park (Grid reference SU615635). Follow the directions above to Padworth Common. Instead of turning into the car park, turn right at the T junction towards Tadley. In about half a mile, at the roundabout, turn left towards Silchester. The reserve carpark

is on the right in about 200m.

Userbody: Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust.

SNELSMORE COMMON, Newbury

10th December 2006

Task: TBA.

Leader: David Fiddes 0780 191 7104.

Meet at: 10:15 at the site (Grid Ref SU463710). Snelsmore Common country park can be found north of Newbury and is located along the B4494 road from Donnington to Wantage. The entrance is sign posted from the road opposite the entrance to Mary Hare Grammar School.

Userbody: West Berkshire District Council.

HAYLEY GREEN WOOD, Bracknell

17th December 2006

Task: TBA

Leader: Neil Frankum 0118 975 1528

Meet at: 10:15am at the site (Grid Ref: SU886708). Park in the Car Park at Westmoreland Park at the north end of Westmoreland Drive in Bracknell. Hayley Green Wood is the woodland at the far side of the playing fields.

Userbody: Bracknell Forest District Council.

AT YOUR HOUSE

24th December 2006

Task: Enjoying the festive season. Relaxing and having a week off from conservation work. Drinking tea made without wood-smoke in it & eating an entire packet of your favourite biscuits without having to pass them round a group of people who would rather be munching fig rolls / hobnobs / bourbons etc, but as there are not any will have one of what is on offer and deprive you of it.

Leader: Yourself

Meet at: All morning, in bed with a pot of tea / coffee / squash, the Sunday papers and your favourite radio station. Or anywhere else you fancy really. You could even visit your favourite BeC site & wander round it without a Billhook or Bowsaw in hand & give the invasive species a day off.

Userbody: Yourself.

HAPPY CHRISTMAS!

REPEAT OF LAST WEEK

31st December 2006

Task: Preparing for the night's over indulgencies as you welcome in the New Year!

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Diary Dates

Sun 10th Dec. Newsletter copy date. Any items (task reports etc) for inclusion in the next newsletter should be Email to me on or preferably before this date.

TBA Please contact Richard Coles for dates of tools evenings.

BeC Contacts

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* Answerphone available

EMAIL: membership@berkshire-conservation-volunteers.org.uk

MOBILE: We have a mobile phone for task use – although primarily for use in emergencies, volunteers can also use it to contact us if they are having difficulties locating the worksite. The number is **07875 262129**. **NB:** this will only be switched on during tasks.

www.berkshire-conservation-volunteers.org.uk