

# Task Reports for Year 2000 Tasks

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## 31st December - Bartley Heath



## 17th December - Blundells Copse



## 10th December - Wildmoor

It looks like everyone was out doing their Christmas shopping today, as only four of us made it to David's first task as leader. I don't think the heavy rain as we left Reading helped. Yet again it was a day spent clearing young pine and birch trees as part of the site's heathland restoration plan. This was in an area between where we have worked on our last two visits to the site. We were supposed to burn what we cut (it was too far from the road to drag out for chipping), but today was one of those days when it was just not meant to happen. We all took it in turns trying to light the fire, but by lunchtime we abandoned it, as the flames had never got more than a few inches high and went out as soon as you looked away. As a result of this we just stacked the cut trees ready to be burnt at a later date. A few of the better 4 - 5 foot high trees were put to one side and were taken back to Caversham Court for the tree sales. Many thanks to Bracknell Forest Borough Council for letting us take these. Unfortunately David's first task as leader came to an early end as he poked himself in the eye with a branch of pine needles, and had to retire hurt as he couldn't see what he was doing. Hopefully this doesn't put him off leading another task in the future!



## 9th December - Christmas Tree selling at Caversham Court

Amazingly, despite the rain showers business was fairly brisk. On the day we took £540, and in total over £2000 was raised for conservation groups in Reading. The money will be split between, BeC, CROW, Reading Urban Wildlife Group, and the various Friends Of groups.

## 3rd December - Wishmoor Bottom

The annual Christmas tree task also attracted a large turnout, including several of our new members (This goes to show that bribery (in the form of a free Xmas tree) does work!). I didn't get to do much cutting as I was in charge of driving the van loads of trees back to Caversham Court. Dodging all the Christmas shoppers in Reading and Sandhurst made this an interesting task. Many thanks to Niamh for being my able bodied assistant when we got to unloading at Caversham Court. It was also nice to see Richard T out on his third task of the year (it now appears that we are only likely to see him up to his knees in Ecchinswell village pond, and cutting Christmas trees at Wishmoor Bottom).



### 26th November - Pearman's Copse - Neil Frankum

A chance for a lie in today at our first task at this small woodland in Lower Earley as it is only about 200m from my front door! This was going to be one of the largest turnouts of the year with 19 volunteers. The task involved coppicing the hazel understory, and removing a few of the standard Ash trees. We finished off by building a dead hedge around the cleared area to prevent the regrowth being trampled. Fortunately we didn't get to meet the irate, shotgun toting local who had greeted the council rangers on previous coppicing tasks at the site! The after task entertainment involved most of the regulars adjourning to my house to sample some of Richard's delicious homebrew wine, and to help me tip my 'wine' collection down the sink (Unfortunately I work on the last in, first out principle, and this meant that some of the bottles at the back of the cupboard had been there rather too long, and cheap plonk doesn't age well!!!!). A word of warning to future hosts - If Mark asks if he can cook his tea in your kitchen, make sure it doesn't involve Tuna. Unless you really like the smell, you will be regretting it for days!

### Mapledurham Playing Fields - 12th November



### Hyperdaemic Nerdles (Otherwise known as 5th November - Bartley Heath) - Richard Coles

This was the soggiest task of the year so far. Not so wet as Ecchinswell Pond, but we were felling trees at Bartley Heath. We should have been warned because the weather map on the front page of my Sunday paper showed a big yellow swirly thing approaching from the southwest. Keith succeeded in lighting a magnificent fire without using all the matches, dry kindling and old bat leaflets from the van like we usually do. There was a gale blowing which helped. We had quite a bit turnout too, so quite a few trees got felled. None of them hung up either (not even the ones Neil did!!! - *that's because I didn't actually fell any trees - Ed*). The rain struck after a late lunch, so everybody else tidied up whilst I plodded around chainsawing the stumps. We then stood around munching the baked potatoes, parsnips, and chestnuts (collected on last week's task) that had been cooking on the fire. We also toasted marshmallows on the by now roaring blaze. Some of us stopped off at the pub on the way home (like we did last week. Is this going to be a habit?), which is where the title comes in, as Mark's tongue fell over itself whilst he tried to tell a joke. Luckily we survived!



*We also had the excitement of the police and ambulance being there for most of the evening. When we were the last ones in the pub we ended up having a half hour chat with the landlord, and he explained the police presence. It appears that a couple who had been in the pub had had a problem with one of their cars in the car park. Whilst trying to start it the man said that "the accelerator jammed" (honest guv). He then proceeded to accelerate down the car park, knocking over his wife, writing off his own car, two other cars, and causing less serious damage to two more!! This was the point I was really glad I had*

*decided to park the car at home and walk back to the pub after dropping Mark and Niamh off, as all the damaged cars had been parked where I had pulled in. - Ed*

**29th October - Caesar's Camp - Phil Allen / Neil Frankum**



Cutting pine and rhododendron from the centre of Iron Age fort. After cycling down to the tool store sorted out the tools before Neil finally arrived with the van at 9-00 as I forgot to put the clocks back! Fortunately it was dry and sunny instead of the torrential rain and wind of yesterday. After picking up David at the station and Mark and Niamh at the 3 Tuns, we met Des the ranger at The Lookout. We then drove down the tracks to the site. We didn't put arrows out as the ranger had left instructions in the Lookout, but Rodney did not look in there, so he did not arrive until lunchtime. After lunch we walked around the ramparts removing pine and rhododendron, leaving them in piles at the bottom of the dikes and on top of the sweet chestnut stumps. We went home via The George at Iddon bridge. Unfortunately due to the torrential rain arriving, the 'quick half' turned into four or five, and a meal as well. We finally got away at 9-30pm! However it proved a very useful evening, as I got three task reports written for me. We also got a new task leader (David), and we almost talked Niamh into being our new social sec (subject to the offer of a permanent job in Reading)(Her first effort - tonight's pub trip was a great success). Very many thanks to them both for 'volunteering'.



**22nd October - Warren Wood - Neil Frankum**

A dull and wet day greeted the largest turnout of the year (so far) at our first task at this WDC site. In the 1920's the site was a chicken farm, but has turned into woodland since the chicken farm closed. In parts the wood is being invaded by rhododendron, and our job was to cut it and burn it. Unfortunately we were all slightly pyrotechnically challenged during the morning, and struggled to keep the fire lit. However, by the afternoon we had a towering inferno going and most of the cut rhody disappeared. Before we left the site a few of us went for a wander to see the rest of the site. There's plenty of rhody for the future! We also saw lots of mushrooms, including one gigantic one in the field on the south side of the wood.

**15th October - West Green Common - Mark Clay**

We came, we saw, we chopped! (And Niamh chopped the ivy!!)

Niamh didn't want the photo below printing. Her exact words (in writing no less!) were: 'NOT PERMITTED UNDER THREAT OF VERY PAINFUL EXECUTION'. Unfortunately for her I believe strongly in the 'freedom of the press', and took this as a bit of a challenge so here it is. NB If newsletter 152 doesn't drop through your letterbox at the end on January, you'll know I made the wrong decision!



### **8th October - Ancells Farm Eelmoor Flashes - Mark Clay**

John has always been a bit difficult to get hold of, but he really outdid himself this time - he was on holiday! So we ended up at Eelmoor Flashes (we had thought we were going to be working at Ancell' s Farm - Ed). We were cutting alder around the edge of the site, which was a bit precipitous, but dry. Phil had to build something, so he built bridges and a dead hedge. We didn' t get wet as noone fancied jumping in, even Richard, who thankfully didn' t get his wetsuit out.

### **1st October - Clayfield Copse - Neil Frankum**

This was my easiest task of the year. I turned up at lunchtime to be told that all the work had already been completed! So after a leisurely lunch, we made up some easy work, pulling up some of the bramble plants that might swamp the newly planted trees.

Below is the text of a press release issued by Reading Borough Council about the task on 1st October.:

PRESS RELEASE: 25th September 2000

### **THIS WINTER'S TREE PLANTING STARTS AT CLAYFIELD COPSE**

#### **SUNDAY 1ST OCTOBER 2000**

The Friends of Clayfield Copse (FOCC) will be joined by volunteers from Berkshire Conservation Volunteers (BeC) this weekend when they will plant up a new area of woodland at the edge of the existing ancient woodland. Members of the public are invited to join them and plant a tree in memory of a loved one. Saplings, tools, instruction and refreshments will be provided. You are welcome to join in for as long as as short as you wish: if arriving after 10 am, follow the arrows to the planting area.

This is the first of the winter season of tree planting across the town as the part of the trees for our future project. Trees for our future is co-ordinated by Reading Urban Wildlife Group. The project aims to plant 6000 new trees of local stock in the Reading area during the year 2000. Over 4000 trees have already been planted and many planting events are planned for the next few months.

There will be lots happening this Sunday as the local Scout Group are also planning to improve some of the footpaths in Clayfield Copse and Berkshire and South Bucks Bat Group hope to repair the many bat boxes throughout both woods.

BeC are the longest running conservation group in the area; they have been carrying out conservation tasks every Sunday, come rain or shine (or snow!) for 25 years.

FOCC meet by the interpretation board in the car park at 10 am on the first Sunday of every month. The group carries out a wide range of conservation activities and help manage the woods and hedges of this Local Nature Reserve in partnership with Reading Borough Council. Having celebrated their work and the woods for the Millennium at their very successful ' Woodlands Day' . The group are now making plans for another major project in 2001. New members, of what ever age (under 16' s must bring a note of authorisation from their parents), are always welcome: contact Anne Latto tel. 0118 948 4454.

### **24th September - Ecchinswell Village Pond - Neil Frankum**



A great day was had by us and a few of the locals, standing up to our knees in the pond with the rain pouring down around us, hauling out pondweed. Luckily noone fell in, although Richard C jumped into his wetsuit and went splashing around in the deep bits. Despite all the rain the pond was remarkably low. A quick reconnoiter up the road soon led to a blocked ditch that was no longer funnelling run off into the pond. The councillor said he would arrange for it to be unblocked as soon as possible. What always makes this task interesting is the local involvement and the tea in bone china cups!

### **17th September - Bartley Heath**



### 3rd September - Dinton Pastures - Neil Frankum

Another hot sunny day spent standing around in Black Swan Lake at Dinton Pastures saw us extending the telegraph pole revetment that we started earlier in the year. Rather than backfilling with gravel, the council have decided to let the willow trees re-colonise the area protected by the revetment. To aid this process, numerous willow twigs were pushed into the wet ground, and will probably sprout and help bind the soil together. To cap things off we had a nice view of a kingfisher that flew past.

### 20th August - Pinewood - Neil Frankum

This rhody bashing task started out as a hunt the rhody task. However after wandering through the area we had cleared a few years ago and not finding any, it took a longer walk to find the remaining rhody. When we found it we split into two groups to tackle the invasive plants at either end of the wood. As it was a very dry site and there wasn't a supply of water easily accessible we decided not to have a fire to burn the rhody, but instead cut it and stacked it adjacent to one of the paths so that it will be easier to deal with at a later date. When the rhody had been cleared and the level crossing had been unlocked (there is a model railway on the site, & we had spent lunch with steam trains chuffing by) we went home.

### 13th August - Greywell Fen - Mark Clay

This was a true bit part task as we had four different jobs to do. Firstly we had to finish the Greywell Corral, and replace some busted fence posts that the lovely cows had 'leaned on'. Then some of us removed a barbed wire fence and finished the fence we started on the previous task here, whilst the rest of us hacked through the jungle that was the fen playing hunt the alder. Easier said than done, especially in the wet bits. The weather was nice and everyone had fun (so much so that new volunteer Daniel has been out on every task since! - Ed).

### 6th August - The Moors, Finchampstead - Neil Frankum



A nice sunny day greeted us for our first ever task at this Wokingham District Council Site. The site consists of a small area of woodland that is relatively free from disturbance as it is separated from the footpath along the edge by a ditch. The wood was given to the council as 'compensation' for the new housing estate next door. I had been told that we would be clearing invading rhododendron and laurel.

Unfortunately what I wasn't told was that it was BIG laurel, therefore it was only luck that I decided to put a couple of 24" bowsaws in the van. These two bowsaws saved the task. We were burning the cut laurel. Yet again it was the kind of vegetation that is difficult to get burning, and you have to nurse a small fire for a couple of hours until it is going well. Whilst nursing the flames Lucy and I had quite a lengthy conversation

about fires, and having the fire brigade called out on task. This obviously tempted fate, as about 30 minutes later the fire brigade arrived! Someone had obviously seen our smoke signals and decided to call the fire brigade. However, they must have seen our van, and the council pickup, and realised it was a false alarm, as they strolled up, in a most relaxed, unhurried, not prepared to fight a fire manner. As they had been called out the rules obviously stated that they had to give us the lecture on fire safety, but this done they wandered off and left us to it. Oh well I suppose it's one of the risks of being the first group to work on a new site, I had a similar incident on one of the first ever conservation tasks I ever did on a site in Leicester about 15 years ago when we were one of the first ever tasks on the site.

### 21st - 23rd July - Langton Herring, Dorset - Neil Frankum

This was our fourth summer weekend away to the village of Langton Herring in Dorset to do a bit of dry stone walling. This year we were working about 20m further up the same wall as last year



We didn't quite finish this section of wall (but there were fewer of us than last year, and we had a longer stretch of wall to do!). Saturday night saw Richard C's homebrew wine strike again we didn't make it the 20 yards to the pub! After several weeks of dull weather, we were blessed with another sunny weekend.

### 9th July - Waterloo Meadows - Mark Clay

This was a joint task with the Friends Of Waterloo Meadows which involved cutting around the trees and then throwing the cut grass around everywhere (*So it could easily be collected by the tractor that was due to cut the rest of the area - Ed*). We were outnumbered by the Friends. Everyone had a good laugh, and the rain held off for most of the day.

## 2nd July - Greywell Fen - Neil Frankum

Our task today was to replace a rather dilapidated section of post and barbed wire fence along the edge of the river. Unfortunately this was in the fen, so we spent most of the day working ankle deep in water. At least two of us found the rather deeper bit near the edge of the river! Due to the ground being exceedingly wet, some of the posts only took three or four hits to knock in. This meant that we had to be careful in the placement of the strainers, and had to put struts in to support the strainers so that when we strained up the wire we didn't pull the posts over. As the fence had to be stock proof before we left, and the highland cattle were in the field, it meant a somewhat later finish than normal, but at least the rain held off and the sun even managed to poke through the clouds occasionally.



## 2nd July - Greywell Fen - Rodney Chapple

I normally associate fencing with hammering posts into hard, dry ground, or lying flat on the ground with my head in a 3ft deep hole I have just dug trying to scoop earth from the bottom with a plastic cup! At Greywell Fen a few gentle thumps with the drivall and the fence posts sank effortlessly into the soft mud. The purpose of the fence was to keep the resident highland cattle on the fen, off the footpath and out of the river. In spite of the waterlogged ground, we were able to strain the barbed wire to a reasonable tension. The true test of the fence will come when half a ton of highland cow decides the grass is greener on the other side, or just to have a scratch. As the water table was at ground level, it was sometimes difficult to tell where the river bank was. I forgot to bring my wellies, but soon gave up walking on grass tussocks to try and keep my feet dry, and rediscovered the innocent enjoyment that can be had by sloshing about in 2ft deep puddles!

## 25th June - Dinton Pastures - Mark Clay

This task was not really what we expected as we were building steps to fishing bays on the River Loddon. We drove to the worksite, but the driver forgot to stop for arrows to be put out, so we collared a motorised ranger, but two people still went the long way round, by missing the arrows (*I knew they were there somewhere, because Richard's car was in the car park. Luckily it was a nice day for a long walk!* Ed). Some of the steps renewed were on very dodgy (steep!) slopes. Everyone got eaten alive by Dinton's super mosquitos, but it was still a different but nice day.

## 18th June - Beale Wildlife Park - Neil Frankum

One of the hottest days of the year saw us down on the banks of the Thames at Beale Wildlife Park, watching the passing pleasure boats as we hacked down invading thistles, and pulled up ragwort. Alastair wants to graze the meadows by the river, but unfortunately ragwort is extremely poisonous to cattle, so we have to come along and remove as much of it as possible.

## 4th June - Dinton Pastures - Neil Frankum

Today's task at Dinton involved building a revetment to prevent erosion at the northern bank of Black Swan Lake. Unfortunately, the telegraph poles we were to use were at the southern side of the Lake, as the tractor couldn't drag the poles near enough to the worksite. The solution therefore was to drag the poles to the lake & drop them in. After tying them to a boat we were then able to float them across the lake to where we were working. Whilst Phil and Dave went back to get more telegraph poles (& as they told us later, to have lunch in the café!), the rest of us manouvered the poles into position and knocked in a series of stakes to hold them in place in a three high wall. The park rangers are going to come around later and back fill behind the revetment to replace the bank that has been lost over the last few years.



### 7th May - Greywell Fen - Neil Frankum

A gloriously sunny day greeted us as we arrived at the site. Lots of sun cream applied and we were off to find out what the task was from the warden. The work involved building a post and wire fence to create a pen near the main entrance to contain the herd of highland cattle that graze the site, when required. The warden had already installed the main straining posts, so our job was to knock in all the intermediate posts, and then put up four strands of barbed wire on the posts. With regular squash breaks the work was completed by just after 3pm. We then went on a short guided walk around the reserve. On the way back we stopped off to have a look at the fritillary meadow near Stratfield Saye. They were still in flower although were probably at their best a couple of weeks earlier.

### 9th April - Bartley Heath - Mark Clay

This task involved cutting a scallop on the side of the main grass heath by the car park. There were only four of us so it involved a mad effort by the four of us. But we managed to clear a 14 x 7m scallop of some very large birch trees. Richard felled these with the chainsaw, so it involved a lot of dragging. There were so few of us we couldn't even have a bonfire of the brushings, so we left a thousand and one heaps of brushings and logs around the site.

### 2nd April - California Country Park - Neil Frankum

A first visit to this nice Wokingham District Council site for a couple of years generated a lot of interest (five of us offered to lead the task, unfortunately Richard T as task co-ordinator got first choice). We got lots of volunteers, including newcomer Dasa all the way from the Czech Republic (our most far flung volunteer ever?). The task was to remove a large clump of invasive rhododendron, burning everything that we cut down. The cutting was easy, unfortunately the burning wasn't! I spent



most of the morning nursing a tiny flame that went out every time I looked away for more than a few seconds (even if the flames had been a few feet high only a few minutes earlier). I suppose the moral of this is don't try to start a fire in a marsh as you haven't got a built-in fire extinguisher. Eventually we decided to start a second fire, and lo and behold as soon as we did this the first fire burst into flames and started merrily devouring rhododendron branches. After we had finished cutting and had put everything on the fire, Lucy (the park ranger) took most of us on a guided walk around the site. This included walking on the long boardwalk through the fen, originally constructed on a series of BeC tasks in the late 1980's.



### 19th March - Clayfield Copse - Neil Frankum

A good turnout made this an enjoyable task. We welcomed two new Duke of Edinburgh volunteers, and said hello again to Laurence after a several year gap (after using the website to find out where we were!). The work was a varied mix of Richard chainsawing big sycamores, with the rest of us removing small sycamores and tidying up the trees we felled and the mess left behind when a number of large trees had been felled by someone else on a previous occasion. The overall aim was to widen the main ride so that its edge was 6m back from the path.

### 5th March - Lousehill Copse - Philip Allen

My favourite task has been the task at Lousehill Copse in Tilehurst on March 5th 2000. Lousehill is one of the sites that I can walk to enjoy the wood anemones, bluebells and other plants & animals associated with ancient woodland but that is not the main reason why I enjoyed this task so much.

We were coppicing an area of Hazel to reduce the risk of the wind killing the hazels by causing the roots to shatter when the heavy trunks get blown over as well as allowing light to reach the spring flowers that were struggling to survive. I managed to lay the 50 year old stems to form a living hedge alongside the path by cutting 2/3 through the stems that were leaning into the clearing then cutting some of the upper

braches (that could only be reached once the stem was on the ground) to reduce the weight before twisting the stems back to the edge of the clearing. The branches cut off were used to stake the stems in place and to create dams to increase the capacity of the site to absorb the run off from the houses above without flooding those houses below. Dams also provide wildlife a place to drink water from after other sources have dried up.

#### **13th February - Prospect Park - Mark Clay**

I arrived early at the site following the directions given in the newsletter but no sign of the minibus. After a number of phone calls I located them on the other side of the park. There were only four of us, and we had a lot of trees to plant. We were planting them down the side of Honey End Lane which was rather wet and muddy. The strip of woodland contained a lot of dead elm and we planted a number of trees in the gaps in this wood. For some strange reason we had to record every tree planted, but this was extremely hurriedly done, as we didn't even have an afternoon tea break, but we planted every tree we brought in the van.

#### **4th - 6th February - Royden Woods, Hampshire - Neil Frankum**

Off to Hampshire for our second winter residential task at Royden Woods nature reserve on the edge of the New Forest. The task involved laying the last stretch of the hedge along the edge of a field forming the boundary of the reserve. The stretch of hedge we laid last year had re-grown quite vigorously and was looking a lot nicer than the rather ragged hedge that we were about to start on. The nice weather on Saturday got us off to a good start, although I am told that the weather wasn't as good on Sunday (I had to leave early to go and help out on the finish of an orienteering event, so only did one day's work). Good progress was made however, and we will be needing a new task for next year's resi. On the social side of things we made it to the pub opposite the railway station on Friday. On Saturday we had the delights of devouring copious quantities of Alex's really tasty cooking and sampling Richard and Phil's home brew wine. This varied from the 'straight down the sink' variety to the very nice and rather potent variety. Despite consuming a rather large number of bottles of this wine we were still able to make the 10 minute walk to the pub on the main road. Unsurprisingly, for the second year in a row we went the 'scenic' route to the pub, although not quite as 'scenic' a route as last year.

#### **23rd January - Pamber Forest - Neil Frankum**

This task got off to a bad start when I forgot to pick up one of my volunteers in the morning. Luckily the volunteer (A certain Mr Clay) was an old hand, so he just took the p\*\*s all day, and extracted a free pint at the newsletter stuffing. (The moral of this story is that it is always a good idea to phone me a day or two before the task to confirm that you want to be picked up somewhere other than the tool store or station!) This task on a very sunny January day was a return to a site we have not worked on for a few years. The task was to fell invasive pine and birch trees on the small areas of heathland in the middle of this large woodland nature reserve. We managed to clear about a third of the area that is to be restored to heathland. All the brash was piled onto a large bonfire that provided the heat source for cooking the baked spuds that rounded off this nice task.

#### **Felling Big Ones - Richard C**

Down to Wiltshire, almost to Calne, for my 3-yearly chainsaw assessment. Middle of nowhere, nothing but chalk downs and tiny hamlets. Meet the Assessor, and off we go to an exposed ridge, where a wind-blown tree awaits us. Big one, 30 inch diameter Beech, with its root plate torn up, leaning into the crown of another tree. On a well-used bridle path too, so put the signs out and keep a lookout. Spend a while considering how to clear it, then attach the winch and start cutting. Hairy business, but OK and fun with an expert at hand. Near the end, cut very carefully because several tons of tree is attached by not very much wood. Finally, step back, call for tension on the winch, and it falls in a shower of big dead branches. The second tree is light relief: a big dead one up on a high bank, straightforward felling this time. We have some spectators too, which makes the results more amusing. The tree falls with an almighty crash: all the branches break off and shatter into a compact heap, the bare trunk snaps in two, and the two halves roll gently downhill to rest tidily against the trunk of the previous tree. We joke about self-clearing trees, and go back to fill in the paperwork.

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