
BeC Task Reports 2002 (April – June)

14th April – Broadmoor Bottom – Richard Wilson

The local Wildlife Trust manages this nature reserve that is located at the extreme southern edge of Berkshire and is characteristic of much of the lowland dry and wet heath (mire) to be found in these parts. Open areas are dominated by Heather or Ling in the drier areas and Cross-leaved Heather in the damper areas. A particular feature of this reserve is the abundance of Bog Myrtle, which at the time of the visit was in flower, the male catkins prominent on the still naked branches. This plant emits a pleasant resinous fragrance especially if crushed. Another component of the heath flora is the tussocky Purple-moor grass (so called because the flowers normally have a purple tinge) which if left unchecked can become invasive, hence the purpose of BeC's visit.

The task was to construct a stock-proof fence along the eastern boundary of this area of heath in order that Highland Cattle can graze the grass. Given the previous weeks weather, the forecast for the day was good and as such, for the first time in several weekends, turnout reached double figures. We were met at the site by Richard, BBOWT's Berkshire Reserves Officer, who took us to the area where we were going to work and indicate the line that the fence would take. Essentially, the line followed a wet ditch for a short while, necessitating some removal of Gorse bushes and then dog-legged westwards up the slight incline towards the public footpath that forms the northern boundary of this compartment. Perhaps the hardest initial task was carrying the straining posts from the trailer to the site (a distance of c.200m), not that easy when negotiating the tussocky grassland with wet areas in between!

The first task as always is the construction of the straining posts and these need a good foundation to prevent them from being pulled up when straining the wire at the end of the task (as we experienced at Greywell Fen in August of last year). For the straining posts in the drier habitats, this was not a significant problem but as Nigel and Neil found out, the central posts were located unfortunately in a wet area. As a result, the substrate liquefied when the straining posts were tampered in. Engineering works ensued to combat this hydrological predicament, resulting in stones from the nearby ditch being used to reinforce the foundations; which after several hardhat loads (due to lack of a bucket) did the trick.

The other two pairs of straining posts went in without too much hassle, Keith & myself working on the top one, Richard C & James on the lower one while June, David, Milada and others removed gorse and other vegetative obstructions.

This task was one of two halves so it was not necessary to complete the task in one day (we returned two weeks later). By the end of the morning however, considerable progress had been made. The afternoon continued with the straining posts and attaching the cross bars to the uprights and by about 4pm, the majority of those present were enthusiastically looking forward to the pub and a pint of beer.

The most important discussion of the day resulted in the decision that we would go to the Swan (at Arborfield) for a pint and as it happened a meal.

21st April – Lousehill Copse – Neil Frankum

A nice sunny day greeted us for this task at one of the woods in Tilehurst. Luckily I had been reminded that today was Reading Half Marathon day, so the tools had been picked up on Saturday, and the station pickup was cancelled, so that we didn't get stuck in the extensive road closures around the town centre. The task was to clear up after the police, who had trashed one edge of the wood whilst doing a search for evidence for a crime. The main objective was to drag all the brashings left by the police to the top of the slope, where it was made into a dead hedge. We were joined by a number of volunteers from the GO Reading group, who we will probably be seeing again on future joint tasks.

28th April – Broadmoor Bottom – Neil Frankum

The second task at this reserve in two weeks saw us knocking in intermediate fenceposts between the strainers we had previously put in. The nice soft ground made this relatively easy work. We moved on to putting up the wire, but had to abandon things as the wire netting ran out about 10 foot short!! I'm sure that Richard (the warden) will be back soon with more wire to finish the fence off, as he wants to get some highland cattle back onto the reserve to graze the site. Last year they were unable to move cattle to the site due to foot and mouth, so the purple moor grass has done rather well, and needs to be put back in its place.

5th May – Lavell's Lake – David Fiddes

This task was to have been constructing and launching a floating island and some dead hedging; however, due to a lack of materials and the boat being stuck behind a car which was temporarily without keys, this changed to doing various odd jobs.

Neil, Phil and Richard erected two garden fence panels along side a bird hide on the shore of the lake. We also nailed up the existing fence to make it more wind and vandal proof. The fence allows bird watchers to enter & leave the hide without the birds on the lake seeing them.

Trees and scrub had been felled behind the hide and we moved the logs so that they could be taken away by the pickup (as soon as they could find that key!). Alisdair took great delight in building a bonfire for the scrub.

The reserve has a herd of cattle who live in two fields either side of a stream.

Cows being cows don't always go where you want them to and when they're being herded between the two fields have a tendency to wander along the stream either towards the road or the Loddon. Phil donned waders and helped put in some fence posts for the fence that had been constructed to give the cows direction.

And finally we cleared a lot of rubbish and wood from the stream. Although the day didn't bear any resemblance to what we initially thought we would be doing it eventually turned out to be an enjoyable and successful one.



Top right – Mark in a usual relaxed pose, whilst Phil and Dave do all the work

Right – another view of Phil and Dave in the stream
Above – new volunteer Simon clearing out the stream.



12th May – Mcllroy Park Pound Copse – Richard Coles

This task was re-arranged at short notice, because our insurance had not been organised after BTCV' s normal insurers pulled out. We could only work for Userbodies who could cover our tasks under their own insurance. Apologies to anyone who could not find the task. We spent a happy day at Pound Copse, Arborfield, wood-chipping the path. For once, we were working there while the bluebells were at their best, to show some of the effects of our past work there. And Philip was leading, so I could be Userbody for once!



A ¼ mile path means a lot of walking with barrows, though we used the van a bit for carrying woodchip up

the site. At the end of the day, the path was finished, and two big piles of woodchip had nearly disappeared, so we filled James' mum' s car with some bags of it and left the rest as a Community Woodchip Resource. (Real "Friends Of" stuff, this - we shall have to fell some trees soon to restore our rural cred.)

19 May – Mcllroy Park – Philip Allen

These tasks were step improvement to the Pottery Road Steps (Created 1995), which become ankle deep in mud in winter, but became rock hard in summer as the slope is clay. The first task on 19th (postponed from the 12th due to the problems with insurance) saw a select band ignore the rain to wield mattocks & spades to dig a drainage channel across the wettest section. This was back filled with the bags of stones from Philip' s pond area together with all the other large stones we could find then finished off with woodchips.

Right – The finished steps at Mcllroy Park



26 May - Mcllroy Park – Richard Coles & Philip Allen

This was our second task on a boggy bit of pathway. The previous time, we had to scrape around for hardcore to put in the drains, so this time I

called at Alex's on the way and filled my car up with the remains of his demolished garden wall. So we dug some more drains, and lined them with hardcore. Neil found that demolished garden wall can be broken up in such a way that you get tubes which can be lined up to make something like a proper drainpipe, so we did, covered it all with wood chip, and hoped it would work. Christine & Lindsey helped prepare the path surface and planted the hazel & bugle that Ken had donated, while Alistair & Philip felled some of the dead elms to use as path edging. Richard W. and the others did not feel like creating the extra steps that were needed so



just put some of the eroded soil back around the old Beech trees. This was a joint task with Friends of Mcllroy Park.

Left – The finished steps at Mcllroy Park

9 June – Mcllroy Park, Reading – Richard Coles

This was our final task of three on a much-used stretch of steep pathway. We had previously dug French drains on the boggy bit at the bottom, and began by filling the van from a nearby Community Woodchip Resource and spreading it on the boggy bit. In the afternoon, all the various trades worked

together on repairing the steps on the steep bit, and putting new ones in: James and I felled dead Elms, Philip made stakes and pointed them, Neil dug out steps, fitted risers and staked them, while Rodney barrowed in woodchip to complete the job. A massive ancient hand drill came in useful for drilling holes in the stakes for the nails.

James felled his first tree (and had his first hang-up, but that was my fault for selecting an intrinsically hung-up tree).

2 June – Pinewood – Richard Coles

This was a good opportunity to test the waders, pulling Reedmace from a heavily-infested pond. This is a site we have not worked on for a while. The whole pond was covered in the stuff, but we managed to clear a big area during the day. We'll be back.



Top left – Richard, Brian & Rodney In the pond at Pinewood. Top right – Laurence. Above – Rodney, Mark, June, Laurence, Richard & Brian.



Above – Mark, Laurence & Richard
 Right – The cleared pond at Pinwood after our second task here.



Below left – The locals came to say hello during our morning tea break!

16 June – Pinewood – Neil Frankum

Back again for the second time in a fortnight to clear a bit more reed-mace from the pond. By the time we had finished we had double the area of open water from where we had left it at the end of the previous task. Fortunately the overcast start to the day turned into a reasonably sunny afternoon, although not quite as nice as the previous task here.

23 June - Balmore Walk - Philip Allen

Fencing to deter motorbike access & dumping at Rotherfield Road entrance. With rails on the van roof & posts inside the van, which had to be collected from Prospect Park the day before, I met Janet in the doctors car park and drove round to the site. As Janet had not known of the site beforehand we had a walk around the site. We went past the dead hedge we had put in in January, which was still substantial although some of the material had been removed, but not the total removal that had befallen the Friends' dead hedge within 2 weeks! We admired the view while we waited for Nigel & Rodney to arrive. We cut back the brambles from the steps and installed the fence using a hand auger (giant cork screw) & spades after avoiding the concrete edge to the path. Then used the tamper to firm them in so we could cut the rails to fit on to the posts.

30 June – Beale Wildlife Park, Lower Basildon – Richard Coles



We had a low turnout on this one, mainly because FIFA were inconsiderate enough to arrange a football match on the same day. David and I were the only ones to start with, and wondered whether we could start with less than 3 volunteers, but we agreed that accidents were unlikely with pulling up thistles. We were soon joined by Neil and James. This was one of those tasks which really challenge a leader – how do you keep a small number of volunteers happy pulling up thistles (which are prickly) in a vast field? Answer – take them to see the birdies! We had a long lunch break going round the bird cages at Child Beale (they

had a few mammals too, like Meerkats). James was suffering from hay fever in the field, so he went home afterwards. I bribed the other two into carrying on for a bit with the idea of finding a nice pub when we had finished, which we duly did.