
Task Reports 2002 November - December

3 November – Decoy Heath – Richard Coles / Philip Allen

This was our first visit to this BBONT reserve just across the road from AWE Aldermaston. It is a former gravel extraction site which has since been used for landfill. This has resulted in a good infertile soil, mostly gravel on the east side, with heathland, bordered by woodland. Our work was to remove the birch, pine and willow seedlings and regrowth from among the heather. Most of the birch could be pulled up, which we did whenever possible. BBOWT's new Berkshire Assistant Reserves Officer, Kate, was with us, and painted herbicide on any stumps she could find.

In Alisdair's absence, James acquitted himself well as official pyromaniac, and created enough ash to cook the baked potatoes for lunch.

10 November – Clayfield Copse – Neil Frankum

A day of Richard felling BIG sycamore trees with the chainsaw, with the rest of us clearing up afterwards, chopping up the brushings and stacking it in a pile out of the way. Most of the trunks were left in one piece, as they are going to be dragged out of the wood by some shire horses at the annual open day here in the spring. One tree was chopped into shorter lengths ready to be converted into large waymarking posts.

17 November – Beale Wildlife Park

Can't say much about this as I wasn't there, but I have heard stories about a trip on the miniature railway around the park at lunchtime.

24 November – Clayfield Copse – Richard Coles

A period of heavy rain had left Clayfield Copse a sea of mud as we continued our war on sycamore trees. This time I had to take a chainsaw to the trees we had left last time for being too awkward to do late in the day – and two of them hung up of course. Some sterling effort by Neil on the winch freed them fortunately. The second one dug a record breaking furrow of 30 feet before it succumbed and fell.

Every Sunday during the rainy spell I have had to take the gloves home to dry out, but this time I had to take home most of the winch gear and clean the mud off 25m of cable. Maybe we need to ask Tina to cover the whole of the copse with woodchip so that we can work in the dry!

1 December – Cashcar Wood – Philip Allen

Drove to Camberley, via Bracknell in heavy rain, after loading up with tools & 6 Volunteers to meet the MOD Ranger to collect keys for the gates. It stopped raining 10 minutes later when we started restoring a section of heathland by cutting all the pine & birch from the area piling the rubbish along side the track so it could be chipped up at some future date. When Richard found us, after missing the turn as the arrow had been knocked down by one of the horse-boxes arriving to collect the horses from the drag hunt that was also using the site on that day, I drove him to fetch his car from by another entrance (that was not as close as we thought) so that we had a vehicle on site while I drove back to Prospect Park at lunch time with the first load in the van with larger trees (ordered for schools & churches) on the roof. I had to stop on the track out of the site when a lone dog came flying out of the trees in front of me. Steve came with me to help unload into the container that Crow had previously emptied of ladders & timber. The sun came out briefly before setting on our return to Camberley where we loaded trees into the van & people into Richard's car. In my absence loads more trees had been felled & stacked - but mostly for chipping and several coffees brewed in our Cumbrian Kettle (known as the Volcano in Basingstoke).

8 December – Cashcar Wood – Philip Allen

More Xmas tree felling at Camberley. What more can be said except 16 people braved the rain and Amanda drove the van for the first time and coped well with its sluggish behaviour when loaded with trees. I was driving the council's pickup & trailer so we could collect more trees with just one trip so we could leave site in the light.

15 December – High Wood – Richard Coles

After two tasks of gathering Christmas trees we turned our hands to a spell of rhododendron removal. This was a task that had had to be postponed on our previous visit to this site because of high winds. As usual this was a popular task and attracted a good turnout, and a big area of rhody was cleared. We were helped in the morning by the Junior Rangers from Dinton Pastures. Alisdair was on pyromaniacal form, and a large fire consumed all the rhody cuttings by the end of the day, as we roasted potatoes in the embers.

22 December – Hook Common – Neil Frankum

This was our first ever task on this relatively new HWT reserve near Hook in north Hampshire (a previous attempt last year had been diverted to the neighbouring Bartley Heath). The site is a heathland that has been unmanaged for a number of

years. As a result a large area has reverted to birch woodland. Our task was to start the long process of reversing this trend. We couldn't find the previous fire site, so I chose a suitably bare patch of ground and set about lighting a fire, whilst the others started felling birch trees. For most of the morning it was a struggle to get the fire going as anything more than a few small flames. This was probably because most of the wood was somewhat damp, as was the ground, which was very wet. Indeed I later found the old fire site when I realised that the 'pond' 15 feet away actually had a charcoal bottom. Mind you lighting a fire here would have been a real challenge with a built in fire extinguisher! Despite a dull start, the sun did come out, and by lunchtime we had a nice big conflagration that consumed all that we threw at it. We finished the day off with some perfect baked potatoes done in the fire.

29 December – McIlroy Park

Wet and windy!

5 January – Warburg – Laurence Herniman

A frosty cold (-9°C at the reserve) day on the first task of the new year meant that the van had to be scraped and jump started, but Peter to his credit waited at the station until a rather late lift arrived. At least we were unaffected by the floods. Nine of us in all turned up to meet the Bix warden Giles, who led us up the hill to a sycamore coppice. Alisdair finally had the bonfire established just before lunch. This was fed with the thin stuff, with the rest being stacked. We were forced to leave before the light failed as this is one of the quiet sites far from traffic. We will be happy to return here on March 2nd.
