

Forest Update



Issue 35

The Wychwood Project Newsletter

Spring 2011



Joan Holbrooke and the Bicker family planting trees dedicated to Joan's brother Geoffrey at Foxburrow Wood



**Tree planting
2010-11**

Foxburrow Wood,
Lower Windrush Valley,
Woodstock 900,
Fulbrook.

Over 2000 trees planted
More than 100 volunteers



Project Update

Nick Mottram, Project Director

Foxburrow Wood

As ever the winter season has been a busy period for site work. Foxburrow Wood is starting to take shape. We have not yet got together all the funding that we need so have started on a small scale. I can remember sitting round a table several years ago discussing how to acquire some land to create our own Wychwood Project woodland. It was therefore a real treat to watch current and former chairmen of the Friends of Wychwood, Michael Drew and Ken Betteridge, turn that vision into reality by planting the first tree, and then to help a range of local people and community groups plant the first four copses and 650m of hedgerow. There are some 10,000 trees to be planted in all, so for those who weren't able to take part this season 'don't worry' – there are plenty more trees to plant over the coming years.



Ken Betteridge and Michael Drew starting off the planting at Foxburrow Wood



Grimes Mead and Little Grimes right in the heart of Witney

Witney Meadows

In the last issue of Forest Update we introduced Grimes Mead and Little Grimes – two meadows in the heart of Witney alongside the River Windrush. I am pleased to say that thanks to the support of the Patsy Wood Trust the Friends of Wychwood now owns these two meadows with the intention of managing them to conserve and improve their wildlife and landscape value. The meadows are not currently open to the public and the intention is not to encourage public access other than under controlled conditions such as occasional guided visits or habitat management work parties.

Wychwood v: End of phase one

It hardly seems possible that three years have passed by so quickly but the funding from vinspired ended in March 2011. When we started in 2008 it was rare to see any young people involved in our activities but now it is a regular question to Jane, 'Could the v volunteers help with this?' They have planted trees, dug ditches, and played jazz for us at the Forest Fair all with equal enthusiasm and smiling faces. Sometimes it is even hard to find a computer to work on in the office as they are beavering away on something or other for us. We already have some funding from the Ernest Cook Trust and the Oxfordshire Stronger Communities Fund to continue the scheme, and the Friends of Wychwood will be making a contribution to keep a strong focus on recruiting young people to the Wychwood Project. You will get a copy of the final report with this issue of Forest Update but if you know of anyone who might be interested in further support for this very worthwhile element of the Project and you would like more copies please contact Jane Bowley in the Project Office: Tel 01865 815422 or email: jane.bowley@oxfordshire.gov.uk



FOREST FAIR 2011

DIARY DATE: Sunday 4th September 2011

Lower Windrush Valley Project Update



Alison Hopewell

When the LWVP first published a leaflet promoting the Standlake to Newbridge section of the Windrush Path we felt obliged to include a cautionary note that "the path can be muddy in winter". Unfortunately, this gentle warning really didn't prepare walkers for the conditions in one particular spot where the mud just seemed to become deeper each year! We have been desperate to find a way to improve this part of the path ever since and last November, we achieved our goal when we installed an impressive new 200m boardwalk across this low lying piece of ground.

Oxfordshire County Council's Countryside Service Task Team built the boardwalk in sections in their new workshop at Signal Court, involving construction of 42 frames to support the boardwalk decks, re-sizing 1300 deck boards and pre-drilling of an amazing 6500 holes to fix the decks in place. Once the individual sections were complete, the boardwalk was then installed on site by local contractors. The boardwalk has been constructed using recycled plastic, which not only benefits the environment by reducing waste going to landfill but also produces an excellent non slip surface that requires little maintenance and will not rot in the wet conditions.

Antony Colliou who lives in Standlake said "It is a great improvement to this attractive walk which is much used both by locals and visitors. Both visually attractive and practical, it will be a pleasure to be able to recommend this route without reservation to those who don't know the area.



A local family trying out the new boardwalk

Apple News

The Friends of Wychwood Traditional Orchard Group



A pruning workshop in November in an orchard in the Wychwoods

In January we renewed the old tradition of wassailing in a Ramsden orchard and drank cider made with local apples by Christine Elliott (both events by kind permission of the owners). The Finstock mummers performed a play and we sang a wassail song and performed the old ritual of dipping toast in cider and throwing it up in the trees for robins, their guardian spirits.

From Eynsham

'Eynsham as Orchard' is a vision to recreate the village as a fruit growing area making better use of existing fruit and berries and planting apple and other fruit trees on land within the village for local people to use and enjoy. We hope the orchards will demonstrate the benefits of eating locally grown seasonal fruit and encourage the sharing of surplus crops. We are identifying sites in the village to plant some of Eynsham's old apple varieties, celebrating our past as a successful apple growing area. Nearly 400 people came to our Apple Festival in October to enjoy demonstrations of pruning, grafting, preserving, tasting, apple identification, games . . . and more.

From Charlbury and Leafield

Apple pressings were very popular and some people brought their own apples for juicing. The general verdict was 'delicious'— much better than the supermarket stuff. This is a great way of making sure we use our own local bounty. Nothing was wasted as the residue went to local pig farms.

New orchards have been created in Chipping Norton, with the help of the Green Gym and also in Shipton-under-Wychwood (by kind permission of the Parish Council)



Apples collected for juicing

For more information about the Friends of Wychwood Orchard Group and local apple news contact Gwen McConnachie on 01993 832253

Walks around Wychwood

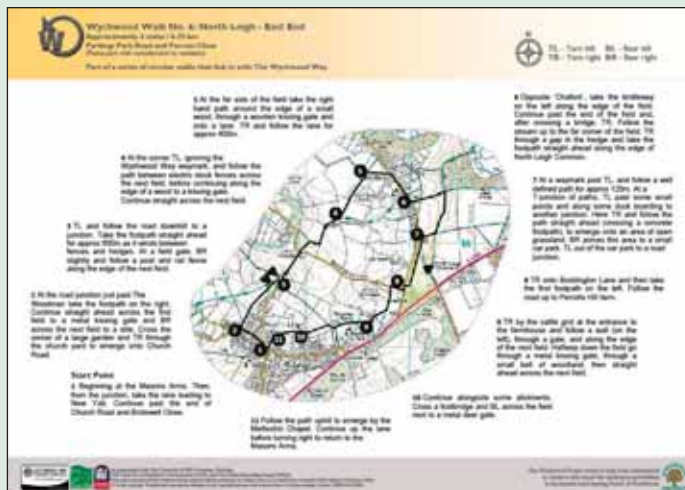
Nick Mottram

I hope you are already aware of the Wychwood Way – the 37 mile route that circles around the heart of the old former hunting Forest of Wychwood – and the accompanying guidebook produced for the Wychwood Project in 2000 and now on its Second Edition. The Way and the book pull together many elements that are fundamental to what the Project seeks to achieve – promoting the **identity** of the Wychwood area, giving people a chance to develop a sense of **belonging** to the place as they explore and promoting the wise **stewardship** of the land.

The only problem is that 37 miles is a long way and not many people fancy walking the whole route in one go. To help with this the Project, working closely with the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens and the County Council Rights of Way Team, has identified a number of shorter circular routes that can be covered easily in a day and give walkers the chance to enjoy sections of the Wychwood Way at a more leisurely pace. Nine routes have been identified, all following existing public rights of way.



Stunning view from the new gate along a Wychwood Way circular route near North Leigh



Wychwood walk No 6 North Leigh to East End

Over the last few months the Project Office and a handful of volunteers have sketched out maps and field-tested four route descriptions. These routes, together with other walks that are promoted by the County Council's Countryside Service, can be found online at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/wychwoodcircularwalks

To complement these routes the Project and our partners were successful in applying for a grant from the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment and Waste Recycling Group (WRG) to replace awkward stiles with kissing gates where landowners were willing. In total seven stiles have been replaced during 2010.

Each route has a basic map, a route description and notes on some of the landscape and wildlife features of interest that can be seen along the way. Particular thanks are due to volunteers Dave Scott, Alan Spicer and Charles Keighley for developing and testing the routes and James Green for preparing the web-pages.

- NEWSBOARD -

Get Lucky with the Friends of Wychwood Lottery!

Winners have already been receiving their their cheques. Half of the funds each month are distributed in prizes, the other half going to support Project activities. You can take part for as little as £2. Contact Sally Jeffery in the Project Office to find out how . Tel: 01865 815423.

Dedicate a tree for Foxburrow Wood is proving to be a very popular way to celebrate loved ones, happy memories or special events. Add your trees to the 500 already dedicated to help us create this outstanding new community wood. For more information visit the website www.wychwoodproject.org or call Sally Jeffery on 01865 815423

Tree planting in Fulbrook

Fulbrook village has been a hive of activity recently with the Wychwood Project supporting various local landscape and wildlife enhancement schemes. New hedgerows and hedgerow trees have been the main focus. Wychwood v volunteers, Cotswold Wardens and some funding from the Friends of Wychwood have added to contributions from many local people and the Parish Council.

Biodiversity Boost for Green Garnes Lane

A green lane, central to the village, was surveyed and planted with extra indigenous plant species.

'I hear you're wanting compost. Some of it's as good as you'd buy in bags. You need grass cuttings sandwiched in layers to make a compost heap. Keep air in it. The best way is to spray urea on it. Alright, I'll sieve the sticks out. Well-rotted manure. I'm afraid there's a dead pigeon in it. It happened as there was parking for a funeral and I didn't know where else to put it. Big plastic sacks. Fifty. Don't overfill. That dark is topsoil from the old kitchen garden. Take as much as you want. Careful of the swinging digger bucket. If it touches you it'll kill you. I'll lift the bags'.

'Friends have planted a forest and have hundreds of tree guards just lying about. We'll fetch them. Strimming the undergrowth starts. Areas are marked out with rotten old logs and sunken orange tentpegs. So sorry, but our dog has brought home a log with Hollies written on it'.

Eight families with children excavated sixteen holes. All were difficult, crowbars and pickaxes hauled out stone, builders' fly-tipped masonry and bricks. One family became archaeologists gleefully discussing pottery finds and metal bedsprings, imagining the old Stow Road, as they prised out the slabs of former surface rock from over half a metre depth. Another worked skilfully with a massive crowbar to excavate a hole big enough for a tree which could reach 25 metres in height one day. They whacked in four sturdy posts for protection and fixed up a hose-pipe underground watering system for its roots. One son was building a mixed dry-stone wall, another son was levelling trip-stones in the trodden-earth footpath, and the terrier up-ended as he frantically dug ever deeper. Younger children wallowed in the piles of sifted compost, finding and tormenting worms, eating blackberries. Whilst a Dad concentrated on excavating yet another boulder, his sons waged war with pickaxe and tree stake. Great satisfaction was felt as each hole was filled with our marvellous mixtures, stakes and treeguards were fixed and the plants settled in for their first Fulbrook winter.

(This is a shortened version of an article by Joan ML on the Fulbrook Website www.fulbrookvillage.net)



Wychwood v planting a long line of oaks along the Capps Lodge footpath starting at the Millennium Steps.



A wild service tree with Richard, Sue and Joseph Newport, one of eight families busy planting trees along Garnes Lane



Students and staff from Abingdon and Witney College continuing the planting of a hedge started by the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens

Wychwood Amateur Hedgelaying Competition November 2010

Andrew Deller, Wychwood Hedgelaying and Coppicing Group



Constructing the hedge

Our second competition was held on 28 November 2010 at Breach Wood, Hailey, organised by the Wychwood Project office and members of the Hedgelaying and Coppicing Group. In complete contrast to last year, the day was dry and cold which much improved working conditions. We had nine competitors, including two new to the group.



Hedgelaying competition winners from left to right Dave Lee, Richard Lane, Martin Rowland, Andrew Deller and Meg

The judges for the day were Julia Thomas and Tom van den Berg, both professional hedgelayers, and Derek McNamara was on hand with his chainsaw to help with any larger stems. Work progressed steadily throughout the day with the judges taking notes and marking points for cutting, staking and binding and general appearance of the hedge. Last year's competition hedge was also marked for the best regrowth. There was a steady flow of onlookers, including Robin Dale, chairman of the NHLs, who offered support and advice (always welcome!). Stuart Watts, a keen amateur film maker from Chipping Norton, filmed the day's events which will be produced as a DVD. Michael Drew, Chairman of FOW and a Hailey Woodland trustee, was in attendance and we thank Janet Bridge for tea and coffee and Janet Moore for running a raffle, (which raised £104.50, half of which was donated to the Radio Oxford, St John's Ambulance appeal for a new 4 x 4 ambulance). We were very lucky to have some very generous sponsors for the raffle.

Judging drew to a close as daylight faded and the competitors finished their work. Approximately eighty metres of hedge were laid in the Midlands style. If anyone thinks they have a suitable hedge for next year's competition, of one hundred to one hundred and fifty metres in length and nine to ten years old, please contact the Project Office.

2010 results

1st place Martin Rowland
2nd place David Lee
3rd place Richard lane

Regrowth from 2009

1st place Gordon Mums
2nd place Andrew Deller
3rd place Martin Rowland

Rural Crafts in Action

COPPICING IN PINSLEY WOOD

The Wychwood Project and the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens have completed what we hope will be the first stage of an ongoing programme of coppicing at Pinsley Wood. Pinsley is an ancient woodland that lies to the south of Long Hanborough and is part of the Blenheim Estate. The Project was fortunate to receive a small grant from the Tree Council's 'Bluebell Woods fund' to help cover the costs of supporting volunteers to undertake the coppicing. By the end of the allotted three days some fifteen people had taken part,



Hetherings and stakes for hedgelaying

approximately 0.25ha of hazel had been coppiced and a good few bundles of stakes and hetherings for hedgelaying had been harvested. Many more onlookers stopped to see what was going on and learn how a traditional coppicing system works. Pinsley Wood is well known for its bluebells and the low-impact coppicing we promote will help to maintain the diversity of light levels that support a good display of bluebells in the future.

DRY STONE WALLING AT WIDFORD



James and Charlotte figuring out where to put the next stone

Thanks to the expert supervision of Trevor Townsend the walling group completed another fascinating walling project. This time it was restoring a section of old deer park wall beside the River Windrush at Widford, a great challenge for the group due to the unusual height and width of the wall. A very

popular footpath passes nearby and many walkers stopped to admire the work and complement the volunteers who were mainly young members of Wychwood v. The novice wallers soon became familiar with the struggle to find just the right stone for that tricky gap and really enjoyed the mental as well as the physical demands of this rural craft. They are all hoping that the wall will stand strong for years to come so they can walk by and enjoy saying, 'See that wall? I built that'.



The walling gang take a welcome break in the sun and show off the results of their work

Bounding into Spring

with The Brown Hare (*Lepus europaeus*)

Ian Anderson

Brown Hares were probably introduced to the British Isles by the Romans about 2000 years ago. They are now one of the best-known British farmland mammals, although not particularly easy to spot. This is because, although they live above ground, they are mainly nocturnal in their feeding habits. Their diet includes grasses, cereals, herbs, buds, twigs and tree bark. During the day they generally lie very still and tight in shallow depressions (known as forms) in vegetation or ploughed fields or perhaps in woodland during periods of particular farming activity, e.g. autumn.

Behaviour

Mating and breeding usually take place between February and September. The familiar buck and doe 'boxing and chasing' occur throughout that period, but are most easily seen during the springtime. A doe can produce 2-3 litters (av. 2-4 offspring) a year, all above ground. The young, known as leverets, are born above ground, fully-furred, eyes open and active. A few hours after birth the doe moves away from her brood, leaving them alone, returning each evening to suckle them. By 12 days old they will start eating grass and at 30 days will be fully weaned and left to fend for themselves. The average life expectancy of a hare is about 3 years. They are subject to a range of diseases and parasites (although not myxomatosis) and predators such as birds of prey and, particularly, foxes.

Hare or Rabbit?

It is relatively easy to distinguish between the two. Hares generally lead solitary lives apart from during the mating season, are golden brown in colour, have much longer hind legs and are fast runners with a distinctive loping gait. Rabbits generally live in groups, are greyer and scurry to the nearest burrow when disturbed. Hares have distinctly long black-tipped ears.



Photo by Celia Haddon

New Flights for Bird Aid

STOP PRESS from Louise Spicer

Bird Aid is delighted to tell of dramatic success of the tree sparrow feeding programme at Walk Farm, Chipping Norton where the numbers of birds has risen to a staggering 1,000 since feeding started.



Photo by Mike Kettlewell at Walk Farm

Can you tell a tree sparrow from a hedge sparrow?

Look out for the distinctive patches on the cheeks of the male 'cheeky' tree sparrow



The Wychwood Project works within the area that was once the Royal Hunting Forest of Wychwood.

Our Goals:

The Wychwood Project aims to raise awareness of the history and heritage of the Royal Hunting Forest of Wychwood, and to encourage local people to take part in and benefit from restoration, conservation and enhancement of the rich mosaic of landscapes and habitats within the Forest boundaries.

Contact us:

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