

Coppett Hill Newsletter 2014



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Dear Friends - Welcome to our Spring Newsletter

First, let me give you some good news. With the Trust now going ahead with projects linked to the next period of Woodland and Countryside Grants, the Friends have been able to fund £1,500 of new projects on the Hill. In addition, one of these donations attracted an additional £500 of matched funding to the Trust from Natural England. (see page 2 for details)

The second piece of good news is that **we will be automatically renewing your membership for the year from April 2014-2015, but not be asking for a subscription.** Even after our recent donation to the Trust, the Friends have a substantial amount of money in the bank, as does the Trust. This was a necessary contingency when the Trust was uncertain about receiving new grant funding, but less so now. This is a situation we will review at the end of the year after the Trust discusses its plans for the future with its shareholders. As a charity we need to ensure that we hold appropriate funds for the level of works that we support.

And the third piece of good news - one of the objectives of the Friends is to 'encourage involvement with Coppett Hill within the wider community and provide an educational service'. To that end, we have been able to assist teachers at Goodrich Primary School, with their 'Forest School' projects and the Friends are funding two sessions on the Hill for their pupils with an expert wildlife trainer. This is a relationship that we hope will be maintained in the future

Less good news, I fear, for those that regularly attend our Garden Party for Friends and Trust members, is that we are for organisational reasons unable to hold it this year. We hope that normal business will be resumed in 2015. We are, however, running two nature linked events this summer for Friends and Trust members (see the enclosed form for full details).

We particularly hope some of you will be interested in the longer tour to Grafton Wood. West Midlands Butterfly Conservation have been good friends to the Trust, both in terms of giving

advice, sending down a work party to help us each year and giving a substantial grant for habitat improvement. We will be shown round their reserve by their Chairman, John Tilt. The second trip, round two Gwent Wildlife reserves, near Trellech, just outside Monmouth, will be led by David Leat. It is a return to see the spectacular display of orchids in their fields (close to the road), and then a walk to see their traditional coppiced woodland and charcoal making operation.

Finally, Mike Thompson, our Treasurer, is standing down this year. He is also the writer and designer of the Walk Books which have been one of our main sources of revenue and have brought pleasure to many of our visitors. We thank him very much for the major contribution he has made to both the Trust and the Friends.

Mike's departure leaves spaces for new Trustees and Committee members and we would welcome applications from those members of the Friends and the Trust who might be interested.

Many thanks for your support throughout the year
Lawrie Lowe Chairman, Friends of Coppett Hill

Donations in 2014 - Funding Conservation and Education

With the Trust now firmly on track with the new Woodland and Countryside Stewardship schemes, the Friends donated some £1,500 to the Trust to support new projects and to provide training for volunteers.

- £600 to provide the 50% funding not covered by a grant for electric fencing which will be used when grazing takes place on a limited area of the Hill in the summer.
- £70 for rakes for bracken management work parties
- £500 to fully fund the training of two new licensed dormouse handlers
- £350 to cover half the cost of refresher training for 4 chainsaw operators: this is necessary for insurance purposes to allow volunteers to use chain saws for path clearance and work parties

There are also funds reserved to help with a scheme to restore dew ponds on top of the Hill ; this project is currently under development and timing is uncertain.

In addition, we are funding the event for Goodrich School, referred to above. The school staff are enthusiastic about using the Hill as a learning resource and have already started using it for 'Forest School' sessions, lead by their own teachers.

Since 2005, the Friends have donated £7,800 to the Trust which, with matched funding from other sources, totals adds up to a total of over £10,000. Funds are available to support all activities of the Trust and to encourage others to get involved and enjoy what the Hill has to offer.

A (very) short History of the Friends and the Trust

We often get asked about how the Trust and Friends got started and the way things have developed since the Trust was formed in 1985 to purchase Coppett Hill.

This initial purchase involved the setting up of the Trust as a company and issuing £100 shares. The purchase price of £35,000 was raised by selling £15,000 pounds worth of shares to residents (the 'A' shareholders) and raising the remaining £20,000 from the Goodrich Parish Council and the Herefordshire Council. (The Parish Council raised the money through Council Tax).

Residents who made a contribution of less than £100 were given the title 'Friends'.

In exchange for their investment, the Council signed a management agreement with the Trust. The key point was that the Trust would manage the land 'in the interests of conservation, enhanced appearance and access for the enjoyment of the public, providing reasonable public access and maintenance of paths, whilst conserving natural beauty and wildlife and with the least disturbance to residents'.

The day to day running of the Trust was formally put in the hands of the three directors who were appointed by the 'A' shareholders – to manage the Hill in line with the agreements and plans formally agreed with the Council.

A management plan was agreed and this was updated and the management agreement with the Council re-signed in 2000 when Coppett Hill Common gained Local Nature Reserve (LNR) status. Coincidentally, at that time, there was a change in the law and Coppett Hill (as a registered common) became 'open access land' rather than a private common.

Over the Trust's first years the shareholders did an enormous amount of work, opening up and maintaining new paths, including the Ridge Path (as required by the agreement with the Council to allow public access). However, there was minimal income coming in and the Trust had also failed to get Charity status due to the way it had been set up. By 1994, there was less than £1000 in the bank and considerable annual expenditure.

In 1994, the Friends of Coppett Hill was set up, independently of the Trust, as a charity to support conservation on Coppett Hill. The main intention was to provide help with fund raising (which is best done by a charity) and to allow the involvement of those who did not live in the Parish, and therefore could not become shareholders.

Over the next 10 years, there were significant changes. The Trust got involved in more organised woodland management, under Woodland Grant Schemes, and managed open areas under Countryside Stewardship. This led to significant grant income in exchange for doing agreed work, much of which was done by volunteers. In 2005, the Trust's reserves had increased to a much healthier £10,000, while the Friends, having helped fund several projects, still had reserves of £2000.

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Rogers Wasiri - a Forestry Officer from Uganda. The previous day he was presented to Prince Charles in Cardiff, but on this day visited us on Coppett Hill to see how we are replacing trees.



Remember the rain and floods?

Down near Huntsham bridge - the river is behind the house and the flood in front.

Short history contd.

In reviewing the position in 2005, the Friends AGM identified that fund raising was no longer the most important activity. Communication and encouraging involvement were seen as being two major objectives.

The Friends then started an annual newsletter, which was also sent to all shareholders, set up a web-site and produced a walk book – which has subsequently generated considerable income. In addition the Friends organised annual walks for members and Trust shareholders and the annual fund raising garden party was continued. The Friends also worked to promote the Trust’s work and at the last count over 60 families were members – many from outside the Village.

There was concern in 2012/13 that the Trust might not be able to renew its grants due to the government cut backs and that the Friends’ reserves might be needed to keep the Trust going in future years. In fact the negotiations were very successful and the Trust and Friends between them, at the end of last year had over £35,000 in the bank.

This satisfactory financial position allows the Friends to prioritise the promotion of involvement in Coppett Hill alongside fund raising.

Trust shares can only be held by Goodrich and Welsh Bicknor landowners and residents and when a shareholder leaves the village, the shares are passed on to a new householder or friend. However, newcomers to Goodrich who are not gifted a share in this way are unlikely to pay the £100 to buy a share in the Trust, especially now that the Trust is so cash rich, while those not living in the Parish cannot become shareholders. Joining the Friends allows them and others outside the Village to be kept informed and, hopefully, involved in Coppett Hill.

As you can see, the nature of the partnership of the Friends and the Trust has evolved over time and this will doubtlessly be the case in the future

Lawrie Lowe

WHO’S WHO 2014

The Trust

Chairman	Martin Rowberry
Directors	John Edwards, Tracey Lafford, George Woodward (Parish Co. Director)
Secretary	Patrick Chatterton
Treasurer	Ian Binns

The Friends

Chairman	Lawrie Lowe
Trustees	Laurence Moss, Mary Rowberry, Keith Parnell, Mike Thompson

Contact the Friends friends@coppet-hill.org.uk

Join Us on Two Nature Walks

See the inserted form for full details

June 14th Orchids and Charcoal!

A gentle two hour walk, led by David Leat, to visit New Grove Meadows to see the orchids and then on to see the charcoal making site and woodland at Croes Robert Wood, two very different Gwent Wildlife Trust Reserves near Trellech.



July 5th Butterflies Visit to Grafton Wood near Worcester

We have the opportunity to visit one of West Midland Butterfly Conservation’s (WMBC’s) special reserves at Grafton Wood, near Worcester for a 2 hour guided tour round the reserve by their chairman John Tilt.

The visit includes tea and cakes, so booking is essential as we need to know numbers. There is a charge of £6, to be donated to WMBC, payable on the day



White Admiral



Brown Hairstreak

Full details of both these trips are on the inserted form including details of how to book for the Grafton Wood trip. We look forward to seeing you!

Notes from the Trust Chairman

The past few months have been very trying for everybody including the Trust because of the incessant rain.

Work Parties

However much the weather tried to dampen our spirits, we managed to carry on with the annual work party season. This year we tried a different format with the pre-Christmas work parties moving them from a Friday to a Saturday. This proved a big success with a record turn out and very positive feedback. It also allowed younger members and families to attend.

Before Christmas we tackled the usual issues of invasive sycamore, clearing paths and strimming and raking the grassland at the Limekilns and by the Folly. As a new method of management, we are experimenting with pollarding (cutting back) hazels at above deer browsing height to see if regeneration can be improved.

February brought our annual butterfly habitat work party with Butterfly Conservation and Hereford Nature Trust returning to help us for a second time in the season. We continued with our rotation of coppicing bracken, now working to a 4 year cycle. The aim is to encourage violets for the rare Pearl Bordered Fritillaries.

Grant Schemes and Agreements

The Hill's funding comes from two main sources the Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS) and the new Higher Level Stewardship Scheme (HLS). These schemes are focused on enhancing flora and fauna, improving species habitat and increasing biodiversity of which the butterfly work party is a prime example.

These principles relate directly back to the original agreement when the Hill was set up nearly 30 years ago, one main aim being to "Conserve and enhance the natural beauty and amenity of the managed land as a valued landscape feature."

The **Woodland Grant** covers the wooded areas, some 2/3rds of the hill and the main aim is to maintain the broad leaf woodland, Grants are paid to reinstate native deciduous trees in place of the Douglas Fir and we also get help to manage the grassy areas in the woodland, in particular the lime kilns area for butterflies, reptiles, and other flora and fauna.

The **Higher Level Stewardship** scheme is new to the Trust and replaces the previous Countryside Stewardship Scheme. It covers the rest of the hill and again is targeted conservation work e.g. the work on butterfly habitat. We also hope to expand and improve the open area on the top of the hill to encourage wildflowers and grasses and provide a mosaic of habitats to help sustain birds, butterflies and reptiles. We hope to achieve much of this through grazing.

Grazing

If you have been up the hill in the last 6 months may have noticed some signs stating that the Trust is hoping to reintroduce controlled grazing as a special project to improve and enhance the biodiversity, to control the tufted and rank grasses and to encourage wildflowers and a wider range of grasses. Feedback about this so far has been positive.

Bats

One of the Trust's aims is "to develop a greater knowledge of habitats and species on the hill " and we did this with the Trust's Bat Talk in November.

This was a great success, with an attendance of 48 people on a cold winters' night in November! We learned a lot, it proved very interesting and we hope to do more of this kind of thing in the future.

This is a summary of Martin Rowberry's longer report

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY 2014

Events for Friends and Trust Members

June 14th Joint Event with Herefordshire Nature Trust. 'Orchids and Charcoal!'

A visit to two Gwent Wildlife Trust Reserves near Monmouth

Meet at the Village Hall at 2.00pm. **See enclosed flyer for details. No need to book**

July 5rd Visit to the Butterfly Conservation Reserve at Grafton Wood near Worcester.

Meet at the Village Hall at 1.15 pm. **See enclosed flyer for details.**

Booking essential as we need to know numbers Cost £6 per head

Trust Summer Working Parties

22nd May (Thursday) 10.00am Path clearance on Soldiers Path, and below Wyese and Chapel Cottage. **Meet at Triangle**

22th June (Sunday) 10.00.am. Bracken Bash Meet at the Folly

Other Events

20th June . Herefordshire Walking Festival 'Tumps, Tracks and Tramways' An 8 mile guided walk leaving Goodrich Castle at 10.00 am and following the old tramways from Bishopswood to Lydbrook and from there back over Coppett Hill.

Note: Herefordshire Walking Festival Events must be pre-booked through Visit Herefordshire on <http://www.walkingfestival.com/>

This Year's AGM

For the past few years, the Friends and Trust AGMs have been held on the same day, followed by a General Meeting to which members of the Friends were invited in a non-voting capacity.

This gave the one opportunity in the year for all those involved with Coppett Hill (shareholders, their partners and members of the Friends), to meet and participate in discussion about how Coppett Hill was being managed and its future.

This year, the Trust Directors have stated that they wish to discuss the future plans for the Hill privately with the shareholders, without outside involvement.

The Friends Trustees think this is unfortunate and, as we do not know what may be discussed, will need to wait to see what transpires before arranging our AGM.

We will send out papers well ahead of the meeting, but cannot give you a date for your diaries at this time.