



REED ALL ABOUT IT

Newsletter for Forest Volunteers

Volunteers Autumn Walk

Joan Ferguson had arranged a guided walk for us at the National Trust's Ashridge Estate. So 17 of us (plus Rowan in her baby buggy) met up at the Visitors Centre, next to the monument at 10:45 for an 11:00 start on Tuesday 1st November 2011. The Visitors Centre has refreshments, toilet facilities and information about the Estate, which covers 2000 hectares of open countryside, including chalk downland and woodland. So we were not going to cover it all in our 2 hour walk! The day was bright and sunny and the leaves on the trees were resplendent in their autumn colours.



The history of the Estate dates back over 700 years, when it was first a monastery. Elizabeth I lived there before her arrest in 1554 and there had been a hospital on the site during the second world war.

The Head Ranger on the estate, Don Otter, led our walk. As we walked through the woodland he explained how they were trying different methods to protect new tree saplings from the deer population in the woodland. Large scale fencing off of areas limits open access



to the public, needs to be over 6 feet high and is difficult and costly to maintain. So, instead, small, wood fenced, compact areas have been built, in which the new woodland trees can be grown. A canopy of dead branches is put over the saplings to stop the deer from jumping into the fenced area and devouring them. All of the wood for fencing, etc. is sourced from the estate, and coppicing it is done in age old tradition. We saw quite a few fallow deer in the distance, but none close enough to get a decent picture.



It was wonderful walking down the wide open paths with the overhead canopy of sunlit autumn leaves. As

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we walked around Don answered a whole variety questions from the party about the estate. He led us to a tree, which had been inscribed with dates (1944), initials and US State abbreviations (e.g. VA for Virginia), carved by US personnel who had been at the hospital.

At the end of the walk we thanked Don and drove down to the Bridgewater Arms in Little Gaddesden for lunch. Joan had already pre-booked the majority of lunches, so the food didn't take long to arrive. The food and service were excellent and we had a great meal.

Thank you Joan for arranging it.
Graham White

National Trust Walking Day

On Sunday 23 October The National Trust celebrated Walking Day and the local NT facility is the Dovecote at Willington, which stands at the edge of the Forest's Grange Estate. Mervyn Askew, apart from being our man in Willington, is also custodian of the Dovecote. So the Walking Day celebration involved a walk around the Grange led jointly by Mervyn and Darren Woodward, project officer responsible for the Estate.

Although, like many Forest Volunteers, I'm familiar with the Grange Estate, it was still very interesting to hear about the work that is being done and to be able to see it on the ground. And Mervyn's description of the starlings roosting, known as a "murmuration", made me think that a dusk visit to the area was a must. Like most people I've only ever seen the phenomenon on TV – I'd really love to see it for real!

Andy Brocklebank

Reed All About It is produced for Volunteers by Volunteers

Forest Volunteers work to further the aims of Marston Vale Trust (Registered charity No. 1069229), by freely offering their skills, time and enthusiasm
For more information contact 01234 762608 Or email volunteers@marstonvale.org

Welcome to the new Chief Executive & Managing Director

Nick Webb has been appointed the next Chief Executive of Marston Vale Trust and Managing Director of our operating company (Marston Vale Services Ltd). He will be taking up his new appointment on 1st January 2012.



Nick has outstanding experience in both the commercial and charity sectors – he has started up his own company which he grew and ran for ten years before selling the business, by which time it was achieving a £2.4m annual turnover. In 2008 Nick set up a new charity working with young people (Pro-Action Hertfordshire). This now employs nine full-time staff and seven part time staff and has a turnover of just under a £1M. Nick is particularly excited by our social enterprise approach as a means of creating the Forest of Marston Vale.

Nick and his wife, together with their three children, live in Redbourn.

Congratulations...

...to Kirsty Edwards, one of our fellow volunteers. She has just been voted "People's Choice" in the Times & Citizen's Pride of Bedford Awards.

Many congratulations Kirsty from everyone at the Forest Centre! Keep up the good work, your efforts are much appreciated.

Synopsis of MVVCOG Meeting

The last meeting of MVVCOG was held on 18th October with Guy Lambourne in the chair.

Birdboxes are selling well, dream-catchers and scarecrows well received at WoodWorks. Thanks to everyone who had helped.

New tools had been bought and the purchase of a workmate was approved. Total spend just over £500. Tools will be checked regularly and repaired or replaced as required.

Design of new website on hold until the new Chief Executive Officer is in post.

Winter scrub bash and jacket potato lunch will be on Sunday, 15th January. Put the date in your diary NOW! The Trust will be paying for lunches as a "thank you".

Funds looking healthy. Funding secured for track construction in Rectory Wood and new website. Trust short-listed for the BIFFA Award. Online giving established. New partnership established with NFU Mutual. Volunteers - remember to tell people that WE ARE A CHARITY! Installation of Marston Mill commenced. Nigel Davis, our Trustee in waiting, will be appointed at the MVT AGM on 14th December. All welcome.

Other issues covered were damage to Route 51, Covanta approval and the Trust's neutrality, use of small mammal traps, infra-red pictures of badgers and otters, Health Walks to be included in Commentree and on the website, "Let's Go" leaflet to be re-

Apple Day

For the second time, Volunteers represented the Forest at Bromham Apple Day. This event has been running for several years now and is a well-established part of the local calendar. Apart from sellers of apples and cider, a large number of local groups have stalls there – RSPB, Community Tree Trust, the Ivel Bird Ringing Group and the Harrold Calvados Society, to name a few. And there were Bedfordshire Clangers!

As at last year's show, the weather was great for mid-October and I, Sue Livens, Terry Stevens and For-

drafted before Christmas, treeplanting event at Lidlington on 4th December.

Next MVVCOG Meeting Tuesday, 24th January commencing at 7.00 pm (note new time) at the Forest Centre.

Jean Sargeant

Making Birdfeeders

This was the half-term event for children, again expertly masterminded by Jane Lambourne. The task for the day was to make birdfeeders from recycled materials to help feed our feathered friends during the winter. Jane and her family had collected fir cones and we also used pint sized milk bottles.

The first task for the children was to mix up birdseed with softened lard in large mixing bowls. Most of the kids loved getting "down and dirty"! Then we tied string to the fir cones and stuffed the mixture into the crevices. Et voilà, home made fat balls!

I also did a "cookery demonstration" to show the children how easily they could make some appetising goodies for the birds using kitchen scraps – grated cheese, currants or sultanas, breadcrumbs, porridge oats, etc. stirred into melted lard. The mixture is then put into yoghurt pots.

The kids then made seed feeders from the milk bottles, cutting a neat slot and putting a twig through for the birds to use as a perch.

In all, nearly 100 children took part in the event in 4 sessions. They all had great fun (as did the volunteers!) and all took home some feeders for their gardens.

Jean Sargeant

est Team member Hannah Braithwaite had a constant stream of people enquiring about our activities - we sold a few ladybird houses to help our fundraising and, we hope, recruited a few volunteers to our December tree planting. And a large donation, over £300, was made from the unspent funds of a group opposed to the building of the western bypass.

Setting up our stall at events like this is very useful in terms of raising the profile of the Forest. If you would like to set up a stall at a similar event, please let me or Joan know.

Andy Brocklebank

Why volunteer?

- A 'Newbie' perspective!

During the late summer of 2011, I was seeking a place of peace and tranquillity somewhere I could read quietly outside and in pleasant surroundings. I had lived locally for some time but rarely visited the Forest Centre. I enjoyed my sojourns and lingered to read a variety of literature to be found in the reception area and then explored the website. Um... volunteering, what's that about?? I could visit on a regular basis with a purpose and give something back, I could not imagine that reading outside would continue to hold much appeal in the winter months!

So, in September I signed up for my first task - clearing the vegetation along the footpaths bordering Stewartby Lake. I lasted until just after lunch but being unfit and not wishing to overdo it decided not to stay all day. Of course I had my leg pulled about youngsters having no stamina (though I wouldn't have put myself in that category!).

A call to Anna and I'd volunteered again for the October Island Clearance. I dusted off my old wellingtons, hoping they were still serviceable. On the day, Health and Safety briefing completed and team photograph taken, someone with wellies was required to stand in the lake shallows and load the boat with the tools and refreshments etc. My wellies had passed the 'waterprooficity' test!

A relay of boat trips transported all the volunteers to their respective islands to begin the clearance of the vegetation. Loppers and bow saws at the ready, everyone set to work breaking the trees and vegetation down to a manageable size to burn on the bonfire. I worked alongside another new volunteer, we made a great little team. Our top layers of clothing were quickly removed as the bonfire got going and our piles of trees got smaller. Ah but what's this, there's a boat coming in full of trees and cut down foliage from the other island. Change of tack, I set to help with

unloading the boat - hey our disappearing pile of trees was getting bigger!! Our discarded jumpers hung in the tree and although I noticed the floating bonfire embers it wasn't until lunchtime that I decided to put my fleece on again. Ah, it now resembled that famous Swiss cheese! Note to self: keep that fleece top for the next bonfire related activity.

A few hours later the island was all cleared. I thoroughly enjoyed the hard physical work and felt a great sense of satisfaction. That evening I felt physically exhausted but in 'a sense of achievement way' and considered my contribution worthwhile.

There is no pressure to do anything that you cannot, but there is an opportunity to learn new skills and to work at your own pace and physical capability. Along the way I have learnt about the work of the Marston Vale Trust, its volunteers, its history, contribution to the community and the environment.

Roll on the next conservation task, I'll be there.

Pam

Illegal Rave

On the 30 October a second illegal rave was held at the Grange Estate that yet again left a trail of damage, vandalism, litter and upset for local landholders. The rave started on Saturday evening and went through into Sunday, finally ending once police had served notice on the organisers. Once on site, the rave organisers headed for

the grass fields beneath the A421 over bridge and were quickly joined by hundreds of people on foot and in vehicles which were scattered along the verges of the cycleway and Lafarge's haul road. Arrests were made on site and equipment confiscated but as yet no convictions have been brought against the organisers.

The damage to landholder's property resulted in broken padlocks, gates, fencing and a massive amount of litter in the form of beer cans/bottles, balloons and human waste. Some vandalism was also carried out within Lafarge's plant site and a number of life buoys & signs were removed.

Mervyn Askew and I started the clear up operation by litter picking along the cycleway, collecting 6 bags of rubbish. Lafarge also arranged a litter pick and provided skips for the waste. The human waste located on The Grange was removed by the Borough Council's contractor at cost to the Trust.

Following a meeting with interested parties, every effort has been made to secure unused access routes and reinforce site access. The down side will be that the current access to the Grange Estate will be changed as a new lockable vehicle barrier will be installed to restrict access & prevent antisocial behaviour. Hopefully, the new gate will be installed shortly and a piece of artwork by a local artist is being designed to soften the look at the Church End entrance, an important access point to The Grange and Bedford River Valley park.

I would like to take this opportunity in thanking Mervyn and also Ian Bone for assisting with the clear up.

Darren Woodward

Foraging in the Forest

September - it begins, "Days of mist and mellow fruitfulness". How true. As a walk leader, I have become familiar with the easy places to forage. I have introduced my walkers to the small red, orange and yellow wild plums. They were very reluctant to eat these at first, but, with a little encouragement, they were happy to graze their way round the park, adding another dimension to the "walk4health" campaign.

Plums, blackberries and apples, both cooking and eating varieties, are all readily available. Sloes were also

very plentiful, as were mushrooms although you must be sure to identify them correctly before eating them.

Apples can be peeled, cored and partially cooked, then frozen, (same with the blackberries) ready to be made into delicious smelling pies to be eaten on cold winter days. A warning! Remember to stone the plums first, before making your jams and chutney. I know it is time consuming, but the setting properties and taste is fabulous.

All this is available for free in our fantastic forest.

Maggie Milne

Diary Dates

For more information call:

Stephen Gascoyne 01234 762610/07745 786307, Joan Ferguson 01234 360178,
Anna Charles 01234 762614, Darren Woodward 01234 762603, Andy Lingard 01234 762617

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| Sun 11 th Dec. | Conservation Task. | Scrub Clearance. Ring Anna or Stephen 01234 762610 |
| Wed.14 th Dec. | Marston Vale Trust AGM | 5.30pm for 6.00pm start. Ring Tony Talbot on 01234 762601 if you would like to attend. |
| Mon 19 th Dec. | Kids Event | Making festive wreaths. Need to book on 01234 767037. |
| Tue. 27 th Dec. | Bird Walk | Bank Holiday birds. Need to book on 01234 767037. |
| Sun. 1 st Jan. | New Year Story Walk | Meet at the Bedford Road entrance to the Park (map ref TL002427) for a 10.30am start. |
| Sun. 15 th Jan. | Volunteers Scrub Bash & Jacket Potato Lunch. | Details to follow. |
| Sat. 21 st Jan. | Conservation Task | Willow coppicing. Ring Anna or Stephen on 01234 762610. |
| Tue. 24 th Jan. | MVVOG | Details to follow. |
| Sat. 4 th Feb. | Feathers in the Freezer | Bird walk. 8am-11am. Please book in advance but pay the leader on the day. Call 01234 767037. |
| Sun. 5 th Feb. | Sunday Stroll in Millennium Country Park | Meet in Reception at 10.15 for 10.30 start. 1½-2 hours. £1.00 per person payable on the day. |
| Sun. 12 th Feb. | Treeplanting – Octagon Farm, Willington | Details to follow. |
| Mon. 13 th Feb. | Kids Event | Colourful creatures. Find out about some of nature's most colourful creatures then design and make your own in a messy craft session. Need to book on 01234 767037. |
| Fri. 17 th Feb. | Kids Event | Stripy faces. Learn about our stripy faced friend the badger and make a mask to wear home. Need to book on 01234 767037. |
| Sun. 26 th Feb. | Conservation Task | Opening up footpaths. Ring Anna or Stephen on 01234 762610 |
| Sat. 17 th Mar. | Conservation Task | Willow weaving. Ring Anna or Stephen on 01234 762610 |

Park Forum

On 17 November, several Volunteers, as well as members of the public, met in the Forest Centre for the first Millennium Country Park Forum. The meeting was chaired by Head Ranger Anna Charles with back-up from Forest Director James Russell and Park Ranger Stephen Gascoyne.

The meeting started with a very comprehensive presentation on the Park, covering activities over the last year and a look at plans for the future. This was followed by a question and answer session. Unfortunately, this became bogged down in accusations and recriminations about the Marston Vale Trust's involvement with Marston Mill and Covanta. James was put under severe pressure

from three or four members of the public but, true to form, he rebutted all the accusations calmly and professionally, answered questions directly and honestly and kept the temperature from boiling over. This ensured that other people were able to ask questions and make points that were of more direct help in establishing what people wanted from the Park.

The Forum, which was also attended by two PCSOs from Bedfordshire Police, was a useful two-way exchange of information and, if held at regular intervals, could be an extremely useful means of maintaining contact between the Park management and our customers.

Andy Brocklebank

Snippets

Stop Press

Over 300 people attended the tree planting event at Top Farm on the 4th December and, between them, planted around 3,000 trees. Watch this space for further details in the next edition.

RAAI Copy Deadline

Please note that the copy deadline for the next issue of Reed All About It is Monday 27th February 2012. Any notes, thoughts, articles, pictures welcome—to Joan Ferguson at the Forest Centre.