



Friends of the Hurtwood

Administrators to the public rights of access to some 3000 acres of land in the parishes of Albury, Cranleigh, Ewhurst and Shere.

Registered Charity 200053

Spring
2011
No. 34

Friends Newsletter



Chairman's Letter

Dear Friends,

As I write preparations are underway for the Annual Meeting of the Friends to be held at the Duke of Kent School. Please put this date in your diary - Tuesday 12th April. Doors open at 7pm - when you can join us for a drink and nibbles before proceedings begin at 7.30pm. Formal notification will follow soon, by email if we have your email address or by post.

This year our speaker is Rob Fairbanks, Surrey Hills AONB Director and a member of our Trustee board. The title of Rob's talk is "*Pressures on our landscape and the role of the Surrey Hills Board in conserving and enhancing the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty*". Rob has kindly agreed that this part of our meeting should be open to members of the local community as well as Friends of the Hurtwood since he will be covering a number of matters of significant local interest. There will be time for questions after his talk, which will last about 30 minutes. Please invite your friends and neighbours to this part of the meeting. At about 8.30pm there will be a short break allowing guests to depart and the Friends to reassemble for their Annual Meeting; which should not last more than an hour.

With more visitors each year, the pressure on the Hurtwood is increasing. Not only does this make our task ever more challenging, it invariably means our expenses will continue to rise. Our financial future is made even more challenging now that we have received formal notice that our Local Authority grants will be withdrawn over the next two or three years. These grants currently cover about 20% of our costs. We are in the process of putting together a five year financial plan and it is already clear that unless we find new sources of income our reserves will deplete very quickly. The combination of fast depleting reserves and very low interest rates means we will also lose another source of regular income – the interest on our deposits.

So we will be ever more reliant on the generosity of local people and our Landowners if we are to properly maintain 12 car parks, keep the 60 miles or so of paths clear of vegetation and continue to improve the environment of the Hurtwood in the years to come. We will also be examining ways of generating other income, especially from occasional visitors and Events.

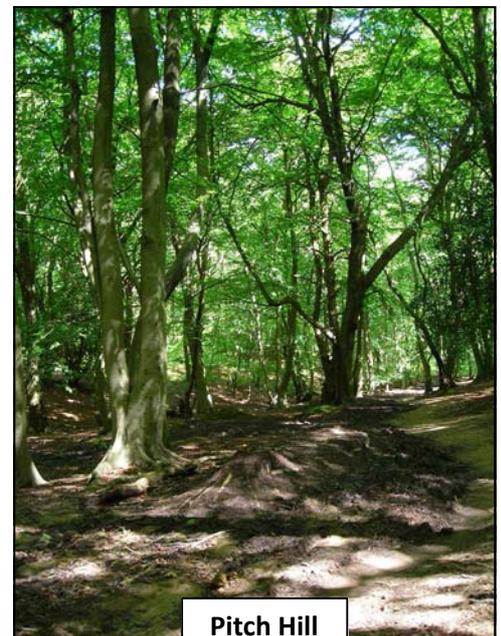
Right now we need your support in two ways; first, if you can afford to increase your donation, even by a small amount; that would help us. Also, if you continue to donate by standing order please consider switching to a direct debit as it saves us money and simplifies our administration. Second, we ask that you encourage your friends and neighbours to become Friends – at present less than 6% of households local to the Hurtwood are Friends of the Hurtwood. We think we should be able to do better than that!

Finally, if anyone would like to volunteer to help our cause there are a number of opportunities either as a Trustee or as a member of the group which organises Friends Events. Please feel free to contact either myself if the role of a Trustee is of interest or Robin Gates should you be interested in helping plan and organise Friends events.

Thank you for your continued support.

Peter Copping

chairman@friendsofthehurtwood.co.uk



Pitch Hill

Friends of the Hurtwood Annual Meeting

Will be held on

Tuesday, 12th April

At the

Duke of Kent School, Peaslake Road, Ewhurst

Mrs Handa Bray and Mr Peter Copping would be delighted if you would join them

for a glass of wine from **7:00 pm onwards**

Followed by

7:30 MR ROB FAIRBANKS, Surrey Hills AONB Director

Speaking on *"Pressures on our landscape and the role of the Surrey Hills Board in conserving and enhancing the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty"*

8:30 FORMAL MEETING

The public is invited to join us for Rob Fairbank's talk and will be encouraged to become Friends...

Please help by inviting your friends and neighbours who are not currently Friends of the Hurtwood.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU THERE!

Thank you!

I want to take this opportunity of thanking those Friends of the Hurtwood who generously contributed to a leaving gift for me following my retirement at the last Annual Meeting in 2010.

For those of you who attended our last Meeting, you will know that Handa Bray presented me with a lovely picture of an owl painted by our good friend Chris Howkins. That picture has pride of place in our drawing room.

In addition, I was given an amount of cash which Robin Gates had very kindly raised from a number of the Friends and for which I have not as yet had an opportunity to express my thanks.

I used that generous gift towards buying a quite stunning oak bench which has pride of place in our garden.

Mark Beaumont has kindly photographed the bench and the inscription which you can see.

It is a lovely piece of furniture made locally in Hampshire by a very talented firm and Diana and I are thrilled with it and so very grateful to the Friends who contributed.

Jeremy Raisman



Jeremy and his new bench



South Down and Dirty

100 miles of blood, sweat and gears

An epic ride along the South Downs Way in one day

24th April 2011

Two distances:

South Down and Dirty: 100 miles off-road - around 12 hours of non-stop riding

South Down and Grubby: 54 miles off-road - around 6 hours of non-stop riding

To raise money for:

Holmbury St Mary Church Roof

Friends of the Hurtwood

For more information, to take part or to donate:

www.southdownanddirty.org.uk

(or contact Paul on 07801 769039 paul_ward1@mac.com)

The Hurtwood needs Friends now, more than ever before. If the Big Society is to work at all – it has to succeed here.

The national row over the proposal to sell Forestry Commission woodlands has given the Hurtwood a window of opportunity to secure its future.

But the momentum of public awareness and concern needs to be harnessed urgently if the Friends of the Hurtwood are to continue to deliver high quality access for walkers, horse riders and cyclists beyond 2012, when we expect Government cutbacks will cause our Local Authority grants to disappear.

The Hurtwood’s private landowners and the charity, the Friends of the Hurtwood, have so far managed to preserve all that the woodlands campaigners hold dear: recreational access, biodiversity, and careful forestry / woodland management. But according to the Trustees, this visionary partnership of landowner and woodland lover is now under severe strain because of rising costs and shrinking grants.

If the Hurtwood is to continue trying to meet ever-increasing public demand, the Friends need to increase the income stream substantially. The National Trust rejected the idea that it should take over more of the nation’s forests because access management is so expensive, so the Hurtwood needs Friends more than ever before.

“The Hurtwood plays a vital part in local people’s lives,” said Trustee Jennifer Ullman. “It’s one of the main reasons why people live here – to have access to protected woodland - and I am very pleased that the public as a whole has risen up and expressed that view.”



View South from Pitch Hill

“But now it is critical we harness that enthusiasm to protect the future of the Hurtwood. The Friends provide the management of the access, car parks, paths and view points. When people visit the Hurtwood, the pleasure they gain from the experience has been facilitated by the Friends. The beauty of Pitch and Holmbury Hills – clear access

and stunning views – cannot be taken for granted. The access has to be managed or the views will be obliterated by scrub and the paths eroded. Car parks and clearings would disappear under literally tons and tons of fly tipping.”

“At the moment, the Friends are punching above their weight – the current income will not sustain this level of management. We rely on Mark Beaumont the Ranger and the goodwill of volunteers and financially, after 2012, we will be completely reliant on the public’s and the landowners’ generosity.”

“The Friends have eaten into reserves in the past few years to



Typical month’s worth of fly-tipping removed by the Ranger

keep the Hurtwood going, but costs have risen significantly for things like statutory vehicle and equipment health and safety maintenance and council cuts mean our grants are going down and will probably cease altogether

beyond 2012. Historically having the community run its own public access was absolutely visionary but this financial situation is simply not sustainable and the Hurtwood needs to establish further sources of income.”

Why should people support the Hurtwood? Handa Bray, Landowner and Trustee, said The Woodland Trust website sums it up beautifully:

Woods are essential to life. They have a myriad of different benefits for both wildlife and people. They stabilise the soil, generate oxygen, store carbon, play host to a spectacular variety of wildlife, provide us with raw materials and shelter, inspire our imaginations and our creativity. The almost magical, mystical quality of woods makes them a great place for relaxation and recreation. A walk in the woods can give anyone a feeling of peace and tranquillity. A world without trees and woods would be barren and bare.

If you know people who supported the national woodlands campaign, urge them to focus their interest on this particular wooded landscape by joining the Friends of the Hurtwood. Cherish the car parks, the paths, the open summits and the views and make your contribution.

The mysterious case of the dead fish and the underwear tree

Piles of Roman armour, a glimpse of Dark Ages hill folk, small pyramids of flour or sawdust – these surprise encounters on the Hurtwood can usually be traced to events that are known about – filming, historical re-enactments or public events.

But total mystery surrounds two recent bizarre discoveries deep in the woods - 20 or more substantial Koi Carp floating dead on the surface of the pond below Hammond's Pond at the north end of the main gallops, and a small oak tree buried among rhododendron bushes, carefully festooned with black underwear.

The white corpses on the pond shocked a member of the public who reported them to DEFRA, and a Fish Inspector from the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science immediately contacted Hurtwood ranger Mark Beaumont.

“I was amazed,” said Mark. “I never knew there were fish in the pond. No-one did. I couldn't believe they were there!”

The pond is the newest on the Hurtwood. It was dug in 2002 and is the only one to have had topsoil bedded on top of the clay lining to enable the water to stay green and fairly clear. The other Hurtwood ponds are very brown and cloudy because of suspended clay particles.



The fish were discovered at the end of the very cold weather and inspector John Holland was confident that their death was not a sinister case of mass murder, but connected to the winter freeze.

“You get mortality in carp when there is no oxygen exchange in the water,” he said, “And rotting leaves are toxic for fish. They probably died some while before they floated to the surface. The cold water in the winter when the pond froze over for weeks would have preserved them and then when the ice melted they would have come up to the surface.”

That explains their death, but where these large fish came from and how they got into the Hurtwood pond remains a mystery. Mark takes schoolchildren pond dipping in that pond regularly and no-one has ever seen a fish, especially not a shoal of white 14 inch Koi Carp.

The mysterious case of the knickers in the tree was revealed when contractors were tasked with cutting back the ‘Surrey weed’, rhododendron, which was choking the forest floor at the back of the Millennium Pinetum. It was a surreal sight. Someone had carefully hung black underwear from the branches and wound items

tightly round its trunk. Was it a prank or a black magic ritual? Who knows?

“I have often seen trees that have been ‘dressed’,” said Mark, “This usually involves natural fibres or feathers, ribbons, bits of stone – usually natural things. Black nylon underwear and tights was going too far. So I cut the tree down and burnt the lot.”

SPRING EVENT**VETERINERY SURGERY, ANCIENT & MODERN****By ALASTAIR MACVICAR, BVM&S MRCVS****Monday 16th May 7:30 for 8:00pm - Holmbury St Mary Village Hall**

Light refreshments included in the ticket price

Tickets: Friends £5.00 Non-Friends £7.00

available from Trasná Palmer

22 The Glebe, Ewhurst, GU6 7PZ**01483 277589 or email: events@friendsofthehurtwood.co.uk****Please make cheques payable to 'Friends of the Hurtwood' and enclose a stamped addressed envelope****Ranger's News**

Since my last report we've finished the work to dredge two of the ponds on Holmbury Hill. For once the weather was on our side, as within a week of finishing we had some periods of very heavy rain, which promptly filled them up again. The top pond seems to be holding water very well, but as I suspected the bottom Hammond's pond may need re-lining again at some point. Whilst we had the machine we also re-graded a Bridleway that runs on our northern boundary from Spurfold to the bottom ponds. Over the years it had suffered some serious erosion problems, resulting in a deep gully forming in the middle. We've slightly widened it and added in some drainage gullies. The



Re-graded Bridleway



Hammond's Pond

surface to the car park at Felbury House has now been completely re-graded and given a new directional slope to aid water run-off and try to prevent future erosion. In order to do this we had to bring in sandstone, similar to the type already in the car park, from West Sussex. The entrance to the Pitch Hill car park has been cleared to aid with sight lines as cars exit and also to lift up some of the surrounding trees to enable the digger to get in when we need to do any car park repairs.

You may be aware that quite a few organisations are running events over parts of the Hurtwood. During the past year, we've started to make contact with as many of the event organisers as possible to ensure that their events don't clash, that they've adequate insurance and also to remind them that we are a charity relying on goodwill donations. These events include Trailquest, a mountain bike orienteering event organised to raise funds for Peaslake Village School, the various running and orienteering organisations, and of course, The Holmbury Bonfire. The good news is they are working with us to minimise conflict with other users and are willing to contribute some of their event income to the Friends.



Entrance to Pitch Hill Car park

Friends of the Hurtwood

Contact details:

Friends of the Hurtwood
 St Mark's Church Yard
 Peaslake GU5 9RR
 Office 01306 730100 (Answer phone)
 Ranger 01483 267267
 Ranger mobile 07920 705070
 Email mark@friendsofthehurtwood.co.uk

School visits over the winter months do tend to reduce, but this year we seem to have even less than normal. One school that usually visits in January said they were cutting back as a money saving exercise. So, I suspect this is similar for other schools too. However, I have had confirmation that The Country Trust will be bringing their usual party of Inner London children down to see us in May, which is always great fun.

The heavy snow in December didn't cause as many problems with falling limbs as the snow in February 2010 did, however, the towing facilities of my four wheel drive came in to good use for several stuck visitors.

We've nearly finished the work on the sections of The Greensand Way that passes through The Hurtwood. It's mostly just been a case of cutting back several years of growth, but we've also cleared a nice little viewpoint on Winterfold that looks out towards Hascombe Hill and Blackdown.

On Pitch Hill the small triangle of Heathland that was created by a fire many years ago, had become over choked with Birch and Gorse. Fortunately Sayers Croft had some students doing their Duke of Edinburgh awards in need of a little project. This has now been completed and they'll be working on Winterfold this February, clearing Birch again.

You may remember that last year we officially finished the new ending to the bike trail known as BKB. We've had to add some post and rail fencing to the very end bit in order to make sure that the bikers are going very slowly when they get to the official bridleway. This has been done in order to mitigate any risk of conflict with other users of the bridleway. We were also made aware of an issue with mountain bike riders exiting onto the Ewhurst Road at various exit points other than the official bridleway. So we've put in some barriers and blocked off all the smaller exit points. This still allows walkers to use the footpath to and from Peaslake, and will hopefully reduce the number of bikes using the footpath and encourage them to go on the road.

Unfortunately, over the past few months, renegade mountain bikers have been cutting new trails into the hill sides. We maintain the view that we will not allow any more trail building and that we will be concentrating on making the existing network as sustainable and safe possible. Much like any sector in society, there will be a minority who will end up spoiling things for the majority. I have been working to block these new trails as quickly as I find them.



New Barriers



New ending to BKB

Over the winter, using GPS, I've mapped out the exit points of all the trails and identified which ones need some work done to make them safer and to reduce conflict with other users. Most of this work will only be some small scale clearance work to improve sight lines. Obviously I can't do them all at once, and have set out a plan of order and allocated a budget, for this year and next. Some of this work, particularly on Pitch Hill, will involve building new sections of trail to take traffic away from the conflict points. This will only be done when there's no other option. All of this sort of work will be carried out by mountain biker volunteers.

Due to various restrictions in other areas, we're now suffering more illegal motor cycles using the paths and bridleways. Unfortunately this is a classic case of moving the problem from one place to the next. It seemed to coincide with the new fencing around the old quarry at Farley Heath, an area that was popular with motocross riders. We do not allow any motorcycle use on The Hurtwood what so ever. If you see anything please let me know, especially any vehicles used to transport them.

Forestry work is continuing, particularly on Holmbury Hill, where contractors will be working to clear areas of Rhododendron, as well as some clearing of brash from the earlier felling operations. I do hope you all understand the need for good forestry management, and I do appreciate that it can look a little harsh at first, but it soon recovers. As I've said before, it's great to see some long lost views appearing again.

See you soon on the Hurtwood...Mark