



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
2013
No. 38

Friends Newsletter



Chairman's Letter

Dear Friends,

Cometh the Spring; cometh a new tractor!

The Friends of the Hurtwood have invested in a new tractor for our ranger, Mark Beaumont. Our old tractor, purchased only five years ago but 16 years old, had become a complete maintenance liability. It was also causing a significant overhead in time for Mark every time it broke down. Imagine being in the deepest reaches of the Hurtwood, knee deep in mud with a broken-down tractor! On several occasions recently, Mark has been seen walking back to base, tractor-less, either to call out the maintenance mechanic or to organise to have the tractor towed back for repairs. Since its purchase the tractor has cost on average nearly £4000 a year on repairs! It was also becoming a health and safety liability.

We trawled tractor companies; at first seeking another second-hand but newer tractor, soon to realise that there were no bargains to be had. Second-hand values are high and low-use tractors very rare. Mark and a couple of our wise trustees encouraged us to look at a new tractor as manufacturers - desperate to keep production lines moving - were apparently giving really deep discounts. After more diligent searching by Mark, he located a dealer willing to give a massive discount and also an excellent price for our (broken) old tractor. The annual operating cost, taking account of the likely high residual value resulting from our low usage, will be little more than the cost of our 16 year-old tractor. With the full support of the trustees we ordered this tractor which was delivered in late February.



So if you see a shiny new blue New Holland tractor around the Hurtwood please wave or toot - it will make Mark's day!

Peter Copping chairman@friendsofthehurtwood.co.uk

WATER, WATER, EVERYWHERE

Would you believe it? January and February rainfall figures are well below the long term average for the last 30 years!

Walking bottom Dragon Pond lapping the over flow channel.



But the rainfall that we did have fell on ground that was already pretty saturated, so the visible effects were still quite dramatic - flooded streams, flooded roads and footpaths and bridleways turned into fast flowing brooks. Fields are still soggy.

So exactly what has been happening over the last year in the Hurtwood? Here are a few surprising statistics; starting with data from the Environment Agency, which is responsible for the abstraction of water from the hills, that show that things are not nearly as watery as they were in 2011.

"The Greensand Hills are on the Lower Greensand aquifer, and the water levels from the nearby boreholes show a steady level which are not as high as we've seen in 2010 and 2011," said spokesman Ash Dobson. "The latest reading shows the level at 80.7 metres above ordnance datum. (OD is usually

mean sea level. For comparison purposes Leith Hill is 294 metres above sea level) Lower Greensand levels are rising but are not currently as high as in previous winters."

So although everyone thinks the land is saturated, it is probably only the surface. Given that it takes months for rain to sink down to the aquifer— it takes three months at least for water to charge the Silent Pool's springs in order to fill it after a drought – it could be weeks before the heavy December rainfall reaches the aquifer. The full ponds on the Hurtwood are a bit deceptive as some of them have clay linings, holding the rainwater. And the reservoir on Holmbury Hill is not there to capture rain at all. Clean water is pumped up to it from Gomshall pumping station and from Holmbury Hill it goes to feed the water mains. Here are some statistics provided by the Met Office. They certainly show how dramatic the rainfall was at times last year, with April and June breaking national records dating back to 1910, and no-one will be impressed if there is a hosepipe ban this summer!

Month	Rainfall amounts (mm)		
	2012	2013	1981-2010 average
January	44.6	64.7	75.8
February	18.4	30.5	52.3
March	20.6		53.2
April	137.1		53
May	37.4		54.1
June	132.9		48.1
July	99.1		50.7
August	44.4		56.2
September	59.1		61.1
October	114		87.6
November	84.7		80.4
December	128.8		77.1

¹ 1st-15th Feb 2013

AFTER A WINTER OF MUD, WALKING BOTTOM IS DESPERATE FOR SOME DRY WEATHER AND TLC

When foresters talk of horrific weather and the worst ground conditions they have ever known, you know things are bad, even if you have not seen Walking Bottom with your own eyes.

But there is hope on the horizon. At least the Hurtwood is not Wealden Clay and according to Alex Wilks, the Woodlands Manager for Shere Manor Estate, everyone - contractors, walkers, bikers and horse-riders alike - all need to be patient and wait for some dry weather - and the arrival of a Forestry Commission grant for the repair of car parks and forestry tracks.



"It's a terrible mess at the moment but this torrential rain has made everything in the countryside wet. With a stretch of dry weather, in my experience most of the rides and paths will heal themselves," he said, "Nature does it herself."

But luckily he is not just relying on the healing powers of nature. He has just received confirmation of the grant to Shere Manor Estate from the Forestry Commission.

"We will be working with the Friends of the Hurtwood," Alex said. "Ranger Mark Beaumont will be able to say where they want the grant money spent. It is not just the Walking Bottom car parks - a lot of them are getting fairly bad."

The contractors have been working in Walking Bottom because the soil is deeper in the valley and grows good quality timber. Unfortunately deep soil, heavy rain and massive machinery results in a quagmire.

"We have been thinning there. There are some really beautiful trees growing there that need light – some lovely oak and beech which we don't get anywhere else in the Hurtwood," he explained. "We want the best ones to have room to grow and develop. We will then be thinning by hand. The main forestry will be finishing in Walking Bottom any day now. It is the end of a major tranche of work.

"We are working on a sustainable forestry programme to create a variety of habitats and a range of trees to provide some income every year. All the woods were planted after the war so they had reached a similar age. About eight years ago we started restructuring the age range of the woodlands. We have only clear felled around 10% of the forest."

Understandably, people have been alarmed by the damage to paths and the scene of devastation after the machines move in. Answering their concerns, Alex Wilks explained that brash on the forest floor after thinning was left to rot down as it was too expensive to remove. On the positive side, it provided habitat for wildlife, protection for naturally germinating tree seedlings and made unofficial mountain bike trails unusable. "It's a way of checking the spread of unofficial trails and it doesn't cost money. The contractors have maps showing all the official paths and these are kept clear."

Natural regeneration of the woodland with Scots pine is the preferred option but hardwoods were planted by the Ewhurst windmill and Douglas Fir at Bentley. It takes four or five years to get them going and then the pines grow very well.

The great log piles on the sand gallop above Holmbury St Mary are being sold for firewood. Disappointingly, the brash that had been collected in heaps there is too sandy to be chipped as planned by LC Energy. *Fuel for Holmbury bonfire?*

There won't be too much forestry activity this year, just a bit at Ewhurst windmill and behind the cemetery on Pitch Hill. "There is good demand for timber so clear felling provides an income," he explained. "Thinning however just breaks even, but it means the estate can manage the woodland."

THE HURTLBERRY DUATHLON

The Hurtleberry - a new event to raise funds for the Hurtwood, kicks off at 8.30am on April 13, at Holmbury St Mary football pitch .

The event includes a 10km trail run and full Duathlon – 10km run – 19.5km mountain bike - 4.5km run. It is designed to appeal to both runners and cyclists who enjoy an uphill downdale challenge, and if successful, it could become an annual event providing much needed income to offset the loss of council grants.



It needs the support of the Friends in several ways:

- To get the message out – So far 115 people have signed up for the Hurtleberry and that should grow to 200 by the 13th, but we can cope with several times that number. Tell your friends, use facebook, twitter, anything to spread the word!
- To dust off those running shoes, service the bike and take part yourself.
- To help out with stewarding on April 13 as there could be a last minute rush of on-the-day entries. We need approximately 40 volunteers to help set up and marshal the event. Set up will begin at 6am and everything should be finished, including clean up, by 1pm. We are asking volunteers to sign up for either the early 6am shift or the later 9am shift. Each shift is around 4 hours, food and drink will be provided. Adults and responsible teenagers are welcome; all will be given instructions on what to do and where to be along the course.

The Hurtleberry is being run by The Friends of the Hurtwood in partnership with local event organisers **All About Triathlons**. The

A special Thank You must go to Jane Garrett for the special interest articles and pictures included in this issue of the Newsletter!

routes will be a mix of technical and endurance and take in the glorious single tracks and trails on Holmbury Hill. The Chairman of The Friends of the Hurtwood, Peter Copping, said: "Join us for the inaugural Hurtleberry – you'll have a fantastic time whilst helping us to secure the future of the Friends of the Hurtwood which will allow everyone to continue to enjoy this unique and beautiful area of forest and heathland in the heart of the Surrey Hills."

Event sponsors CycleSurgery and Runnersneed will be there for participant's technical needs, whilst Green Oil and PowerBar will support nutritional requirements!

For more information on the unique format of the day and to sign up, please go to: www.thehurtleberry.co.uk.

THE RETURN OF THE HEATHER

The future for heathland on the Hurtwood is looking positive this year with two major projects planned to restore areas of forest and scrub back to heather.

Lowland heath is a precious and rare environment that provides habitats for a range of ground nesting birds and wildlife including sand lizards. Heather flourishes in the Hurtwood but it needs managing to survive. When heather is neglected or has to compete with birch and pine saplings, open heath quickly turns into scrub.

Before the Second World War, the heathland was kept open by cottagers who let their goats graze back the scrub and Blackheath was still relatively open in the 1960s, but wild saplings proliferated, landowners began planting trees, and by the 1990s the whole landscape was dense woodland.



Two areas of the Hurtwood, one on the Albury Estate and the other on Winterfold Heath Estate, are now about to undergo restoration.

Mark Foster bought the 118 acres of forest and open heath of Winterfold Heath from Shere Manor Estate in 2010. "I was always keen to keep the heathland as a heath as it was one of my favourite parts of the piece of land," he said.

"The heathland was created through a programme started by Shere Estate in the early 2000s to create a heathland habitat in the midst of the forest and increase the biodiversity.

"It was cleared at the time and has been subject to some management over the years but this has fallen away and now there is a real danger that the forest will reclaim the heath.

"I have spent the past year or so working with English Nature to see if I qualify for an Enhanced Stewardship Scheme whereby I receive some

support for keeping the heathland as heath. This has now been approved and I have a ten year agreement in place to receive some financial support towards the clearing of the pine trees and the managing of the heather etc to keep the two parcels of land (one bigger one in the centre of the Estate and a smaller one near the Horseblock hollow car park) as heathland.

"There is a lot of work to do to finalise the clearing and maintenance plans and I am hoping to combine paid work funded in part by the grant, and voluntary effort - hopefully with local schools and eco-groups to do the work to keep the area under control.

"We are just catching this in time as the pine trees and other incursions are high and the heather needs clearing back in several areas - we can only work on this at certain times of the year too to avoid disturbing nesting birds etc.

"I hope to see the heath returned to a long term positive state and all the benefits of biodiversity in terms of birds, insects and plant life that the area can sustain."

The other part of the Hurtwood to be restored is on Blackheath, part of the Albury Estate. Manager Michael Baxter said: "We are just trying to finalise doing some more heathland clearance on Blackheath, going through the details with the Forestry Commission. We did the first bit in the mid 1990s on the border with Waverley and we are hoping to clear back towards Farley Heath. North of the main gallops we will be slowly clear felling about five hectares. A lot of it is birch scrub with some mature pine. Some of the scrub will go to LC Energy for chipping and the big pines will go as saw logs."

"The soil will be scraped and the heather seeds, which are viable for up to 80 years in the ground, should germinate naturally and colonise the site."

Friends of the Hurtwood Annual Meeting

Thursday 11 April

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 DANIAL WINCHESTER, AMPHIBIANS OFFICER—

SURREY AMPHIBIAN AND REPTILE GROUP (SARG)

Speaking on "Surrey's Reptiles and Amphibians"

SARG are supporters of the Friends of Hurtwood and have a regular reptile monitoring survey at Hurtwood. They record all the reptile species present, but particularly record photographs and other data from all smooth snakes found. The talk will cover all of Surrey's reptiles and amphibians and include some of the smooth snake monitoring data.

8:30 FORMAL MEETING

Ranger's News

We have certainly suffered with our fair share of rain this winter and I'm looking forward to some pleasant spring days around the corner, I hope. As I write this, we've actually had 10 days without any rain, and the ground is just starting to dry out nicely. I don't remember ever being in a situation on the Hurtwood where I've been digging holes and finding water at the bottom, even on high ground! Why have I been digging holes? Mostly due to some persistent four wheel drive vehicle that seems to be paying us a regular visit, though of course it may be more than one. I know one of the vehicles is a red Suzuki Jeep which apart from driving on the Hurtwood at speed also did considerable damage to the Football Pitch at Holmbury St Mary. On the whole we're lucky not to suffer too much with Four wheel drivers but they do tend to continually try and get onto Winterfold. Their most recent attempt involved moving some large logs into the ditch we'd dug to exclude them. This allowed them to get a very large wheeled vehicle onto the area, and apart from removing a post somewhere else little more damage seems to have been done.

Fly tip continues to be a problem, and particularly we're seeing more Tree Surgeons type waste, which fortunately we can burn. But it's still very time consuming. Peter has mentioned the new tractor, which within 24 hours of its arrival was making light work of some fly tip at The Roman Temple car park and on Winterfold. Talking of fly tip, we've just had the compound at the reservoir emptied, and I'll be moving it around into a slightly better position to make tipping with the trailer easier. We'll also be making it more secure to try and prevent foxes dragging it all over the place. Hopefully it'll look a little less unsightly too when it's finished.

The forestry work has been a strong talking point of late, and I feel a sense of déjà vu when I say the wet weather has not helped, but, the wet weather has not helped! Just to reiterate, all the work is being carried out by the land owners, Shere Manor Estate as part of a ten year plan which is approved by the Forestry Commission for England. I'm expecting the work on Pitch Hill to be finished by May and that should be that for a while on Pitch, though there is still some more work to do on Holmbury and Bentley Copse. Please keep an eye out on the website for more updated info.

We've carried out some clearance work on the view point from Holmbury Hill as the birch was starting to get to a height where it was getting in the way of the view, and by the time you've read this I should have done some similar work on Pitch Hill too. We don't have any significant projects planned for the coming year, and we'll mostly be concentrating on the usual maintenance work, though I'm hoping to get on and do some car park maintenance this year, pot holes seem to be popping up everywhere.

Currently I'm busy planning the Woodland Activity events for children, starting this Easter holidays with further events in

Woodland Activity Days

Located on the Hurtwood at Holmbury St Mary

For Children ages 4-11



Come and enjoy the big outdoors and discover how much fun you can have in the woods!

We cater for groups of no more than 15 children who will work with 4 qualified (min level 3) teaching staff, ensuring a high quality woodland experience.

Activities include:

**Den Building, Camouflage & Tracking
Basket making and other crafts
using natural resources**

**Woodland jewellery using nature's
treasures**

Games & Mud sculptures & Art



Easter Dates: April 2,3,4,5,8,9,11 & 12

Summer Dates: May 27,28,30 & 31

July 22,23,25,26,29 & 30 August 5 & 6

10am-4pm £25 per child per day

For more information & to book please go to

www.friendsofthehurtwood.co.uk

SPRING EVENT

THE CROP CIRCLE MYSTERY

by **Andy Thomas of Vital Signs Publishing**

THURSDAY 18 APRIL 7:30 FOR 8:00PM

SHERE VILLAGE HALL

Light refreshments included in the ticket price

**Tickets: Gold & Silver Friends Free, Bronze Friends £5.00,
Non-Friends £7.00**

Available from **Trasna Palmer**

22 The Glebe, Ewhurst, GU6 7PZ

Or Phone: **01483 277589**

email: friendsevents@friendsofthehurtwood.co.uk

Please make cheques payable to 'Friends of the Hurtwood' and enclose a SAE

the following half term and again in the summer holidays. We've just in fact done a test run for making artists charcoal from willow found on the Hurtwood, one of the many activities on offer. I'll take the opportunity to give it another plug, more information is on the website and above.

As always, please do keep your eyes out for anything untoward, I can't be everywhere so I do rely on your help. You can contact me on the usual numbers, though the mobile is always best.

*See you on the Hurtwood,
Mark*

Friends of the Hurtwood

Contact details:

Friends of the Hurtwood

St Mark's Church Yard

Peaslake GU5 9RR

Office: 01306 730100 (Answer phone)

Ranger Mobile: 07920 705070

www.friendsofthehurtwood.co.uk