

BEYOND THE MUD



This time last year the drought started, now it never seems to stop raining. The paths are now in such poor condition, a lot of people have stopped visiting the hill.

In this edition we look at ways we can improve this muddy mess.

A trail of success

Apparently the treasurer now tells me that she embarked on the mission to raise the money for the play trail with a little trepidation. Unlike me she was not naive about the difficulties of fund raising. We did look upon this as a long term project and are delighted that five pieces of play equipment have already been installed.

Thankfully children don't mind getting muddy, which is a blessing. Those who share the Facebook page will already know that I was stopped on two occasions by ladies of my own age, who said the play trail was amazing and they had already tried the equipment out.

Our aim for the play trail was for the nines and under, to encourage them into the big outdoor world and away

from computer games, TV and mobile phones. But if it keeps the older generation fit as well, it is an added bonus.

At least while the adults are playing on that, the children may get a look in on the rope swing. We hope to use the rest of the money raised to provide a see-saw as Toby who helped raised the money would like one.



INSTALLATION OF PLAY EQUIPMENT



WOBBLY BRIDGE



CARGO NET BRIDGE

Blackthorn area revisited.

Many are concerned about the area that we cleared back in 2011, as much of the blackthorn has regrown.

On closer inspection, a lot of the old stumps due to the very wet weather are rotting away. I cleared a large area of regrowth in a very short time and it also looks as if the deer like the tender new shoots, which also helps keep it under control.

PLANTING OUT THE SAPLINGS THAT WE HEELED IN LAST YEAR WILL BE NO EASY TASK.

Making a clearing

The beauty of this time of year is that when everything dies down you can clearly see the job in hand.

I recently walked down from the top of the hill, along what looked like a badger track. It ambled downwards gently zig zagging down until it reach the area behind the heeled in saplings.

Once you embark on this walk it makes you aware of how much empty space is taken up with bracken growth and very dead elder. So dead in fact it falls to pieces as soon as you touch it. Great news for making way for the new trees.

Creating a new habitat

This is a wonderful opportunity to create a new habitat. Trees will eventually block out light which bracken needs to thrive. In the meantime we will need to control the bracken growth and continue to manage the area.

With trees such as willow and dog wood which are hungry for water, it will help reduce the amount of run off from the hill.

The front area should also remain open. This has in general helped to keep this part of the path clear of mud.

Within a few years the area will cease to need our intervention and as Coopers Wood will be pleasant to walk through



CELANDINE

IN OUR OWN GARDENS WE TREAT THIS AS A WEED, AS THEY SELF SEED AT AN ALARMING RATE. IN THE WILD THEY ARE THE FIRST SIGNS OF SPRING. I TOOK THIS PHOTO ON THE 9TH OF FEB. OVER THE NEXT FEW WEEKS THE GROUND BENEATH THE TREES WILL BECOME A CARPET OF YELLOW.



SNOWDROP

ON ONE OF MY MANY PLANT SURVEYS I CAME ACROSS A SMALL PATCH OF SNOW DROPS GROWING WILD ON THE HILL. MOSTLY COVERED BY BRAMBLE AND IVY YOU WOULD HARDLY NOTICE THEM. LAST YEAR SEVERAL SMALL CLUMPS WERE SPLIT TO SPREAD THE FLOWER TO OTHER AREAS ON THE HILL. SEE IF YOU CAN FIND THEM.



VIOLET

THE HUMBLE VIOLET. NOT SO RARE ON THE HILL, BUT OFTEN OVERLOOKED. THIS IS THE EARLIEST I HAVE SEEM THEM IN FLOWER ON THE HILL. A VERY WELCOME SIGHT. THEY LOVE THE DAMP CONDITIONS, SO PERHAPS THAT IS WHY THEY ARE FLOURISHING AT THE MOMENT.

ASH DIE BACK

Only time will tell how Ash die back will effect the hill. During the winter months it has been impossible to tell how far the disease has spread.

The main concern has been where saplings imported from abroad have been planted in the countryside. We have no way of knowing if any have been planted in the local area on private land. The good news is that the trees introduced to the hill last year where grown from English stock and not imported from abroad. There were also no Ash trees amongst these.

ANY TREE PLANTED WITHOUT PERMISSION BY THE WOODLAND TRUST WILL BE REMOVED.

There is though cause for concern. It has been noted that over the last three years, someone has been planting native and non native trees on the hill. We have dubbed them the “phantom tree planter”. They mostly seem to be planted in the same area.

We have no way of telling if they are trees imported into this country. The latest tree planted last year was an Ash

tree. In future any such trees that have not been sourced through the Woodland Trust will be removed, to protect the other trees from unknown viruses. It is not only the tree that could be harboring disease, but also the soil that it is grown in.

In the next few months we will be working closely with Jonathan to monitor the situation. If you are concerned about an ash tree on the hill, if possible mark it in some way, i.e. a piece of string or small label. Take a photo if you have a camera with you. Email details of where you have seen the tree, why you think it has ash die back and attach a photo if possible. One of the local volunteers will access the tree.

Please do not take it upon yourself to destroy the tree. Ash suffer from canker and many harmless fungi and lichens also grow on their bark. Sea salt burning leaves is also common on the hill and causes damage similar to the leaf damage seen with ash die back. The beech trees suffered badly last year after a south west gale.

Every report will be taken seriously but in the first instance with caution.



MORE INFO



CANKER ON ASH TREES ON THE HILL IS QUITE COMMON



THIS LEAF IS SHOWING SIGNS OF ASH DIE BACK. MANY LEAVES ON THE HILL LOOK THE SAME. THIS IS OFTEN SALT DAMAGE AFTER A SOUTH WEST GALE.

ALSO LOOK AT.....

WEBSITES

WOODLAND TRUST

FORESTRY COMMISSION

DEFRA

APPS

ASHTAG

DID YOU SEE?



All in an hour's walk

SATURDAY 9TH FEB

1. VIOLETS
2. SNOWDROPS
3. CELANDINE
4. GORSE FLOWER
5. SNOWDROPS COOPERS WOOD, FIRST TIME.
6. VIBRANT GREEN DOGWOOD
7. MOLE HILLS BY OAK TREE CROSS
8. THE SOUND OF A WOODPECKER
9. CATKINS ON HAZEL
10. FUNGI

My passion as you all know by now is to encourage you all not only to look at the view, but to look at what is right in front of you. What did you last see on your walk on the hill?

Ok, you are not going to see a Harris Hawk every time you go over there, just sitting in a tree looking at you. But it did happen. So how much more unusual wildlife is hiding amongst the trees?

Do you know where there is a large group of snow drops for example?

The violets are in flower but where? Have you stopped and bent down to have a closer look.?

My last walk on the hill yesterday I can clearly remember seeing or hearing all the things on my list to the left.

All these were instantly recognizable except for the fungi. The picture above was taken on my walk. I instantly wondered where seamstress's got the idea for frills from?

I enjoy learning about nature and dived into my reference books. I also use good old google. Perhaps some one out there can confirm for me is it a Sulphur Polypore?

It will take me years to build up an in depth record of the wildlife on the hill. I have to say it gives me much more enjoyment than just looking at the view.

If you are walking with children why not ask them to look for ten things they have never seen before. It will make you look too.

BRACKEN



MY FAVORITE SUBJECT! WE ARE IN THE PROCESS OF DOING SOME RESEARCH INTO USING SOME FORM OF MECHANICAL BRACKEN BASHER TO TRY AND CONTROL IT'S STRONGHOLD ON THE HILL. THIS WOULD NOT BE CHEAP, BUT WE JUST DO NOT HAVE ENOUGH FEET TO CONTINUALLY STAMP ON IT. IT WAS AN UP HILL STRUGGLE LAST YEAR TO CONTROL THE SMALL AREA OF JUBILEE WOOD, LET ALONE THE REST OF THE HILL. IN AN IDEAL WORLD WE WOULD LOVE TO HAVE TWO SHIRE HORSES DOING THE WORK FOR US. BY THE TIME WE ALLOW FOR TWO NIGHTS STABLING COSTS AND A £1 A MILE TRAVELING EXPENSES LET ALONE THE WORK ITSELF, I FEAR IT IS A DREAM THAT WILL NOT COME TRUE. A QUAD BIKE SEEMS TO BE THE ANSWER.

JUBILEE WOOD

WHEN THE WEATHER IMPROVES (HOPEFULLY SOMETIME THIS YEAR) I WILL COMPLETE THE SURVEY OF TREES JUST TO MAKE SURE THEY ARE OK. SOME OF THE CHERRY TREES GREW TO A STAGGERING 5FT 6" IN THE FIRST YEAR. OTHERS DID LESS WELL, BUT HAD ALL SURVIVED. I AM A LITTLE WORRIED THAT THOSE THAT WERE STRUGGLING MAY HAVE NOT ENJOYED THE WET WEATHER, BUT TIME WILL TELL. MANY WILD FLOWER SEEDS WERE SOWN IN THIS AREA FOR HARVESTING SEED IN THE COMING AUTUMN. SOME WORK WILL NEED TO BE DONE JUST TO CONTROL THE BRAMBLE AND THE BRACKEN. IN YEARS TO COME THESE WILL NATURALLY DIE OUT WHEN THE TREES TAKE OVER.



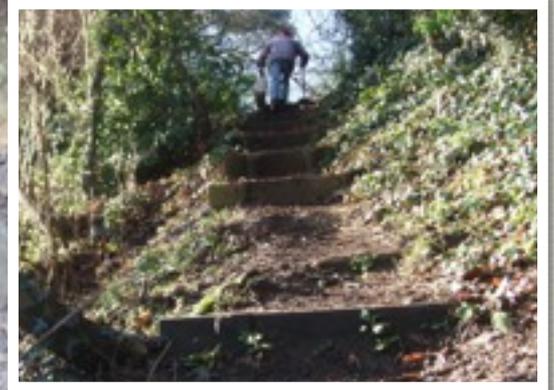
MORE TREES TO PLANT



Alder

OUR ON GOING PROJECT FROM THE FIRST YEAR, WAS TO REJUVENATE THE PART OF THE HILL WHICH HAD BECOME OVERGROWN WITH BLACKTHORN. WE HAVE NEARLY 100 SAPLINGS BEDDED IN, READY TO PLANT OUT. THIS IS ONE OF THE JOBS THAT NEEDS DOING ON MARCH 17TH WHEN WE RELAUNCH OUR VOLUNTEER DAYS. THE TREES ARE GOAT WILLOW, RED AND GREEN DOG WOOD, ALSO ALDER. ALL THESE ENJOY DAMP CONDITIONS AND ARE IDEAL TO PLANT ON THE NORTH SIDE OF THE HILL. THE SLOPES ON THE NORTH SIDE ARE COVERED IN DEAD ELDER AND ONCE CLEARED THESE TREES WILL BE MUCH MORE SUITABLE FOR THE AREA. ALONG THE PATH EDGE WILL BE KEPT OPEN TO ENCOURAGE WOODLAND FLOWERS AND NOT TO SHADE THE PATH.

This year's fundraising project



TOO DEEP, UNEVEN TREAD AND SOME IN NEED OF A HAND RAIL. BETTER DRAINAGE ON THE STEPS IS BADLY NEEDED. THIS MUDDY MESS IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH.

Steps fit for purpose

The Woodland Trust is a charity and has to share the funding out between all the woods that it owns. We can ensure that funding reaches Allington Hill, by applying for grants locally.

By also raising funds ourselves, we can raise enough money to pay for the best quality materials and improve the access to the hill, for those who find

the steepness of the steps and the hill a barrier to their enjoyment.

Evenly spaced steps of equal tread with hand rails where appropriate, will help the less able of us enjoy the hill. Better drainage will help keep the steps safe especially during wet periods such as now.

Many have concerns that we will spoil the natural feel of the hill. We aim to

ensure that the work will not leave a scar on the landscape.

Of course anything new sticks out a mile, but will quickly weather and blend in with the environment.. We aim to raise at least £10,000 to achieve this. It will take us a while and in the mean time the Trust will be repairing the steps where needed.

JOIN US FOR SOME
MID-SUMMER
MADNESS

SATURDAY JUNE
22ND

BY
POPULAR DEMAND

THE SPORTS EVENTS
WILL BE BACK!

SUMMER FESTIVAL

Last year many kind people donated money by paying direct into the Hillbillies bank account, by bacs payment. If you would like to donate money towards our new fund raising campaign, our bank details are below.

Please send an email to inform us the amount you are donating and what you would like the money to go towards. Receipts can be issued on request, once the money has been received. Allington Hill Volunteer Group
sort code 30-67-89
account number 19597660

DONATIONS

AFTERNOON FUN

THEN JUST AFTER SUNSET
GATHER AROUND
THE BONFIRE AND ENJOY THE
ATMOSPHERE

SEPTEMBER
SATURDAY 28TH

NOT TO BE MISSED

AUTUMN FESTIVAL

PIN BOARD

HOMEWORK
NAME TWO THINGS THAT LINK
ALFRED THE GREAT WITH
ALLINGTON HILL

CONTACT DETAILS
EMAIL
allingtonhill@gmail.com
FACEBOOK
<http://www.facebook.com/groups/allingtonhillbillies/>
PHONE
01308 423202

DATES FOR THE DIARY

1. 1ST MARCH ANNUAL MEETING, ST SWITHUN'S HALL 7.30PM
2. 17TH MARCH RELAUNCH OF WORKING PARTIES. STARTS AT 10AM.
3. AFTER THE CLOCKS CHANGE EVERY WEDNESDAY EVENING 6.30PM WORKING PARTIES.
4. JUNE 22ND MID SUMMER FESTIVAL.

Working Party
2hrs on the hill
17th March from 10am
take gloves and tools

Chat from the hill

"We think that you ought to put flood lighting in on the hill so that you can see where you are going in the dark."

My reply was polite, but too long to print here! (they were being serious.)

"It would be nice to be able to do green burials on the hill."

Unfortunately, the ground is not suitable for this.

"Who do I thank for all the wonderful play equipment on the hill, my grandchildren love it."

This is what you have all achieved. I'm not so sure that the parents were so keen on the muddy mess the children returned home in!

"The wishing arbor is such a simple but lovely way to share your feelings with others."

This has given much joy and hope to many. Stan has produced at least another sixty wooden tags for people to write their wishes on. I have received many personal emails about how much this has meant to people. Several very emotional. The Wishing Arbor will be enhanced and will stay a permanent fixture.

"Why have people started hanging dog poo bags in the trees?"

I have no idea. I presume it is new dog owners walking on the hill. Why don't they just get a stick and flick it? The only place we really like people picking up, is on the cut grass area along the front. Otherwise "Stick and Flick". The slugs love it, it's biodegradable and as long as it is not on the path, it is out of harms way. If it's in a bag swinging from a tree, it's not doing anyone any good.

The weather

It is a little bit like stating the obvious. We have had a lot of rain. Some plants will really enjoy these damp conditions, others will suffer. The violets seem to be flourishing. Nature does have a way of bouncing back.

Hopefully the butterflies will do a lot better this year and the beech trees will not get such bad salt burn and lose most of their leaf in August.

At the time of writing, we have now had six days of dry weather. Last year there were only four months when we had more than six days in a row.

There was 123mm of rain this January. In 2012 we only had 40mm.

The good news is that since the 1st of January we have gained 1 hour 49 minutes of day light. Which means I no longer have to walk home in the dark after work. I can't wait until the summer evenings to walk the hill again.