

THE WORK HAS JUST BEGUN

I received a lovely comment during the summer as a lady stood at the top of the hill telling me the wonders of the surrounding wildlife. I said I was one of the Hillbillies that helped maintain the area. She actually jumped up and squealed in delight. "I have met one of you at last. I have always in my mind compared you all to Banksy. You are never seen, yet you can tell that you have tended an area with such care, almost like magic you appear from nowhere and then disappear back into the woods."

At the same time a gentleman walked past who also could not believe the vast array of wildlife. He was a volunteer with a community group within Somerset and was bemoaning that their funding had been pulled from underneath their feet and volunteers were hard to come by.

Both people got me thinking, we really do not inform people enough on how or why certain projects are done, or advertise the working parties further afield. Also how lucky we are that we have a very supportive network of businesses, local councils and other wildlife protection groups supporting us as well as the local community who help us raise the funds to make it all possible.

We are going to look in depth at the way everything works and the fact that most of the work is done behind the scenes.



This photo was recently given to Keith Alner who kindly shared it with us. You can see Cooper's Field and the cottage up Allington Hill Lane clearly behind the workmen. We are tempted to try and recreate this photo in the field next year.



Left: Sarah cutting back the Buddleia

Above: Preparing the flower meadow

Right: Joe Middleton W.T manager

Management of the Hill

The Woodland Trust own Allington Hill. The cost of keeping the hill open access for everyone to enjoy is very expensive. The Trust being a charity receives most of its funding through donations. A much more cost effective way is for people to donate their time especially for the smaller jobs that need no specialist equipment or specialist skills. By using volunteers to help keep clear pathways, remove fallen branches and clear back unwanted scrub, whilst monitoring the wildlife in the area, benefits everyone.

Of course specialist, highly trained contractors do not come cheap. For example these ash trees had reached the end of their life. The concern that they had ash die back seems to be unfounded although it is inevitable that we will get it at some stage. The Trust allocates approximately a £4000 budget annually to the hill to ensure that the area is open for public use so people can enjoy the site safely.



Photo supplied by Keith Alner: Specialist contractors were called in to cut down three ash trees.

Fund raising by the group

The question has been asked recently why do the group raise funds and where does the money go? We have in the past received a lot of funding for specific projects. The WWI bench, improved access to the area, wildflower meadow and the picnic table, which is yet to be installed. When applying for such funds we have to either match fund or prove that we have a certain amount of funds towards the projects which we have raised ourselves.

The remainder of the money is spent on promoting such events, stationary, such as printer ink, stamps etc. We also do thank our volunteers for their hard work with a few mars bars and other goodies. We also need money in the kitty to help pay for festivals expense up front, such as bouncy castle insurance. To raise money by selling calendars we have to be able to purchase them in the first place. We value all the donations we receive however small and any expenditure is agreed by the committee. Last year's accounts can be viewed on our Facebook page.

Management of Cooper's Field and Wood

This area is leased by Allington Parish Council from the Woodland Trust for the benefit of the community. Over the last two years the boundaries to the field along the top of the field and the western edge have been cleared of scrub which was taking over. The project to turn the grass areas into a flower meadow have been extended and the access at the main entrance improved.

The parish council give the volunteer group a grant each year to ensure that the area is well looked after to encourage it's use by the community. Children can safely learn to ride their bikes, play games and a small group of children and parents used the football pitch once a week for training during the summer. Bridport running club have also used the field for training. The play trail is still very popular with families and we hope to get rid of the stereo type the field has acquired "a place which people exercise their dogs."

We have also been working with A.O.N.B on a management plan for Cooper's Wood. The wood has reached the stage where some thinning is required. The management will be based on it being a community project. The A.O.N.B through a grant from the National Lottery are equipping the volunteer group with £600 of equipment. They also provide funding to help us hold a family event based on woodland activities.

These crab apples found in Cooper's Wood did not stay on the tree



Management of Rights of Way

Last year a small group of the volunteers helped the Countryside Rangers clear the right of way path from Park rd to the entrance on the south side of the hill. It runs along the eastern boundary of the hill to Allington Hill lane. This area along the lane which leads down to Hospital Lane now needs attention and the Countryside Rangers have asked us to be involved in improving this area as it needs a lot of work. We are still waiting for the final detail, but they hope work will start in the next couple of months.

Flower Meadow project



For the first time this project has become self funding. We have been able to sell yellow rattle seed and with this money (£195) purchased wildflower seed for the third faze of the project. Our biggest sale of 2 kilos was to a national seed company Emorsgate seeds, who specialise in wildflower seed. This has allowed us to also purchase wild daffodil bulbs which have been a popular request by many.

We hope to sow the seed and plant bulbs the week of half term. Please look at our Allington Hillbillies Facebook page for more details:

Winter projects

Winter schedule of work for the Hill... (Woodland Trust)

1. Tidy and cut hazel to right hand side of dog holes/Allington Lane
2. Clear small trees blocking view of Bridport from seat (Roger Burton)
3. Plant replacement tree for old lime stool
4. Strim/ scythe grass and clear saplings from Devils bowl meadow
5. Strim/ scythe around trees in Jubilee Wood
6. Coppice ride edge back 2-3m along muddy sections of bluebell wood
7. Cut back blackthorn regrowth on Coopers Field north side of hill
8. Fill badger latrine with rocks and stone
9. Clear small fallen trees over tracks
10. Cut back any encroaching vegetation onto paths – site wide

For Cooper's Field... (Allington Parish Council)

1. Autumn preparation for flower meadow
2. Remove over hanging branches from hedge lines
3. Maintain and clear pathways

For Cooper's Wood... (A.O.N.B mangement plan)

1. Start work on management plan

Rights of way

1. Restore hedge line Allington Hill lane

(This work will mainly be carried out by the Countryside management team with some help from the volunteers.)

What skills do you need?

We have volunteers from all walks of life. We all have different skill sets and over the years have learnt a lot from each other.

Within the main group of volunteers we have shop assistants, retired police officer, secretaries, security guard, thatcher, electricity board worker, optical assistant, tool maker, draughtsman, civil servant, maths teacher, insurance manager and youth leader.

Their main hobbies and interests range from, paragliding, woodwork, needlework, family history, football, metalwork, helping on a small holding and dog rescue.

Only one of us had any previous experience in countryside management. We have had a lot of guidance from the organisations we have mentioned earlier. So no previous experience is needed.

We welcome anyone who wishes to help on any of our projects. You do not have to volunteer on a regular basis. Everyone from any background is welcome. We can supply tools and gloves if you do not have your own.

Some of the working parties are suitable for families, such as our flower meadow project.

You do not have to book to join in and if you join a working party and decide it's not for you then you are free to leave at any time. You can just do an hour or stay until the job is done.

The old lime stool!

We are trying to educate our new Woodland Trust manager Joe Middleton. Outsiders never really understand the deep connection locals have with the hill.

He is talking about the Grandparent tree. I can hear you all go, ahhh I know what he is talking about now.

Replacement tree! What! how can you replace the most loved tree on the hill. I'm not sure if he was brave or foolish when he said he didn't think it was going to make it. "We should let nature takes it course." Gulp!, there were many stoney faces.

There has been a request by a family who have connections with the hill to donate a oak tree. Joe felt this would be an appropriate place to plant it and hopefully in many years to come it will give as much joy as the grandparent tree.

Poor Joe then spent at least the next 20 minutes listening to us all going on at him about the hill as though it was a member of the family. Well it is, isn't it?

Allington Hill Lane

This is a right of way path. The hedge line is in such a bad state it needs bringing back to a point where a new hedge line can be reinstated. The initial work will be carried out this autumn/ winter and the volunteer group will maintain it from there on, under the guidance of the Countryside Management team.

Clarity

I hope this information gives more clarity to why these jobs are undertaken by the volunteers, how we liaise with many organisations in the planning of the work to be done and that there is always a good reason for the projects that we work on.

We wish to dismiss the idea that we go out and destroy the environment, do what we please and no thought is put into the process. We hope that the information empowers people to explain to others why the work is being done.

Blackthorn regrowth

The old blackthorn area, which is along Old Orchard Avenue.(Not Cooper's Field) This was one of our first projects and we have had to do less clearance work each year. There is not much blackthorn regrowth and the trees planted two years ago have really taken off.

Joe has over 40 woods to look after, so getting to know them all on a personal level is going to take time.

Devil's Bowl

Or Devil's Pit, I think it is dependant on which generation you are from. Names tend to change over the years. This is the West facing quarry pit near the top of the hill.

This is one of the most diverse natural areas, with a wonderful mix of plants that are not found anywhere else on the hill.

To protect the existing wildlife and plant species we need to keep this area free of trees that would quickly shade out the sun loving plants. The grass area at the bottom of the bowl could be improved by trimming or scything the grass allowing a lot of the other plants to thrive.

A large bramble patch also is encroaching on this area and needs to be kept under control. This would take over the area with in a matter of years if it is not kept in check.

We do not wish to lose the colonies of skippers, marbled whites, and five spot burnets who depend on this area, nor the ladies bedstraw, hedge bedstraw, wild thyme and birdsfoot-trefoil amongst many more.

Hat Festival donation



For the first time we held a festival, not only to raise money for the volunteer group, but also the charities supporting Bridport Hat Festival.

Thank you to all those who helped with the festival. You raised £150 in total, Tim Smith and Defoe Smith were nominated to present the cheque to Brian Atkinson one of the main organisers of Bridport Hat Festival. Sadly Defoe was unable to attend so I went in his place.

Allington Hill book donation

The museum's local history centre spent many hours helping us with our research for the hill. We have donated a copy of the book to the centre. I think you can see the joy and relief that we have at last printed the book. When we went in the lady just looked at us and said "What photo are you after this time!"

Thank you so much Judith Cabble, Alison MacDermott and Jane Read.

The book is full colour and is available from The Book Shop, South St, T. Barnes, corner shop North Allington and Gillian Hulse shop at Symondsburry.



Car Boot donation



We are extremely grateful to the committee of the West Bay Car Boot fund for a donation of £250 towards the purchase of a specially designed picnic table. Paul and Sal attended a presentation and talked about our access for all policy.

We hope the table will be in place within the next few months.

DATES FOR THE DIARY

Half term
Weather permitting we will be holding working parties suitable for families in the wildflower meadow. For update information look at the Facebook page for dates and times.
26th Oct- 1st Nov

Working Party
Sunday 1st of November.
First working party of the season. New volunteers welcome. Meet at the main gate 10am. No skills or tools needed, guidance given to new recruits.
Sunday Nov 1st 10am

WWI dedication
Bridport Mayor Sandra Brown, The Royal British Legion and other guests will officially dedicate the WWI bench at 11am in Cooper's Field. All are welcome to attend.
Wed, Nov 11th at 10.45am

2016 Calendars
The Hillbillie calendar is already in stock. £7.50 each and the profit goes towards looking after the hill. You can order them direct from us email allingtonhill@gmail.com

ON SALE NOW

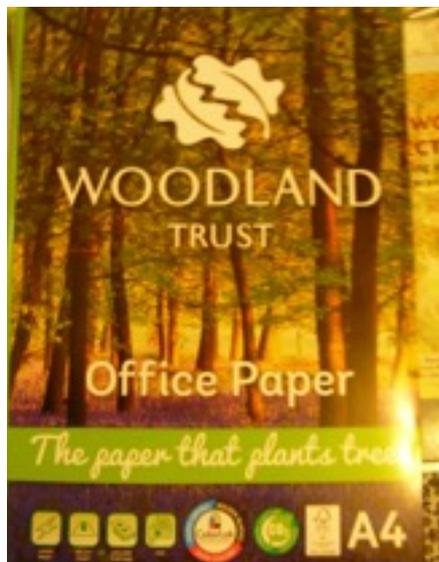
Christmas Tree Festival
We will have a tree again this year at the festival in the Bridport United Church. We have set ourselves a challenge this year with the theme. "Food for Free"
Wed 9th -Sun 20th Dec

What type of rain!

This year has been the driest for many years in Bridport, or has it? I have never known the paths over the hill to stay so dry right through the season. When we compared the rain fall with last year over the last five months, with the exception of October, we have had more rain. We typically have had mostly light rain showers or days when we have had light rain or been very damp most of the day. We have had very few days where it has been lashing it down. This in fact makes a difference. Long spells of dry weather has also meant soil erosion in some places and grass growth has been a lot slower. We have cut the paths less often this year. We often think that heavy rain washes the goodness out of the soil. What we tend to forget is that rain also adds to the nutrients into the soil. Nitrogen is absorbed into the soil from rain and this aids strong growth, especially grass. A lot of media coverage recently is suggesting that this nitrogen in the soil is at record levels due to the large increase in diesel cars in the last two decades.

So why if we have had more rain over the last five months have the paths stayed so dry and the grass slow growing. Most of the rain has come in from the South/South West direct from the sea, so has not picked up the pollution from inland or even been carried over from Europe which can often happen. The winds have been warm and drying, helping to dry out the paths within hours of the rain showers we have received. A lot of the rain has evaporated before it has soaked into the soil.

June to Sept 2014 we had 199mm of rain. For the same period this year 317mm. Most of the wild plants on the hill prefer poor soil conditions. The weather has been a blessing and they have thrived. So lets hope this weather pattern holds for a little longer.



This paper can be bought locally at Footprints. It is only a little dearer than buying the supermarket version. Money (5p) per pack goes directly back to the W.T. It does seem good quality paper and it gives all sort of info on the packet about being carbon neutral etc. My one little niggle is that it does not say it is produced in the uk. Mmmmmm!



Food for free

Bucket loads of crab apples have been collected by local residents including myself to make a large range of wonder jellies, jams and juice. So far elderflower wine, sloe gin and other goodies such as blackberry and apple pie, garlic pesto. All these have been plentiful this year, but do remember not to pick more than a third. If someone has beaten you to it find somewhere else no one has foraged. Leave the rest to nature.

Chat from the hill

I was under the impression that the Woodland Trust did not allow camping on the hill, so why was there a tent on the hill for days?

We believe that they camped out overnight to watch the eclipse of the moon. Sadly they could not be bothered to clear up after themselves. Camping is not allowed.

I saw a dog chasing a deer on the hill the other day it was very distressing. How can owners be so irresponsible?

The dog in question is quite distinctive and the owner is known to us. The dog was out of sight of the owner who had no idea it was chasing a deer. We advise all dog owners for the safety of wildlife and other walkers they only let their dogs off the lead if they are able to control them from a distance.

I would like to collect some tree seeds to see if I could grow them from seed. Am I allowed to do this?

Yes of course you can, but you will not be allowed to replant them on the hill. Only trees supplied by the Woodland Trust can be planted on the hill. They all come from special nurseries that do not import foreign stock and soil conditions are monitored.

I very much appreciate the new all weather surface at the main gate. I did not know this was going to be done.

We had mentioned this several times in the past, in newsletters and on the Facebook Page. The access into the field was usually muddy and very slippery for those not so nibble on their feet. It also means that it is now a lot easier access for buggies and wheelchairs throughout the year. Money was raised from grants and fund raising.

Why do you not give more notice when contractors are working on the hill and paths will be closed?

They do give us notice that they will be working in the next few weeks, weather dependant and then usually two days before. But if work needs to be done urgently, we cannot expect them to be able to preplan this. The ash trees needed felling urgently. They were able to give me 2 hours notice and this was posted on to the Facebook page and shared on other sites.

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