

Issue 8

March/April 2012



NEWSLETTER

# Allington Hillbillies

## Hidden talent



It amazes me the amount of hidden talent we have within our volunteers. One of the projects is to name the main pathways on the hill. In presenting Stan with a plank of wood, he has turned it into this beautiful name plaque. Now, how am I going to tell him that we would love him to do about another 20 of them? There is no stopping some of our volunteers. Everyone is talking about the coloured flags on the hill. Chris made over 100 for the Jubilee tree planting and then wanted to make even more to mark the paths through Coopers Wood. Children love following the different coloured flags and it is a joy to see so many people walking through the newly cut paths.

We also have a keen artist in young Jade who hand painted all the bags for the Jubilee tree planting. To ensure that all the Jubilee trees remained numbered Jon engraved over 100 numbered tags.



## More trees

We had a very generous offer that we could not refuse. A company that grows trees wanted to clear their stock beds ready for the next season.

This included Alder, Dogwood and Goat Willow. A total of 200 3yr old saplings for a token price of about 50p each.

We have bedded them in as the weather has been so dry. This is so we can keep a close eye on them and water them if the drought continues. Amazingly the jubilee trees already planted are doing well, the ground is still quite moist a few inches down. But we do need a lot of rain very soon. ( This was written before the monsoon!)

# The Grandfather tree



On Wednesday 25th of April the tree affectionately known as the Grandfather tree was toppled during strong winds and rain. The centre of the lime tree had completely rotted out and the tree had effectively split into three trunks. Two are still attached and the third has completely broken away. There is growth at the base of the tree and hopefully a main trunk will form again. A sad loss of possibly the oldest tree on the hill.



## Jonathan says.....( Woodland Trust manager )

*I was so pleased to see so many of you out planting trees in March despite the hail. It has been noted that I always bring awful weather with me whenever I visit, so bring your umbrellas for the beacon lighting in June when I will be with you again! These trees counted towards a massive countryside effort that the Woodland Trust is coordinating to plant 6 million new native trees this year, to help the nation celebrate with a lasting, growing memorial to the Queen. That sounds like a big enough challenge already but then you have to consider that it is only really possible to plant trees for six months of the year so that means a million trees in each of those months, but well done to the Hillbillies. You have done your share.*



*Across the area that I cover the bluebells have yet again been causing a stir. The weather is so strongly affecting the timing of their appearance. A late cold snap in January had slowed the first appearance of the tips of the leaves, but a lovely warm March brought their development rapidly forward. The big question for us is what will be the average flowering date over the country – and therefore what will be the official date that spring starts? Last year it was very early on the 15<sup>th</sup> April, but my feeling is that this year it will be even earlier. To help us track spring arrive across the country we ask that people record what they see on our website: Nature's Calendar, on here you can record most things you see from the budburst of the oaks and ash to the arrival of the first swallow – and of course the first bluebell! Your record can then be viewed alongside everyone else's in a fascinating annual record. So get out on the hill and get spotting.. [naturescalendar.org.uk](http://naturescalendar.org.uk)*

I have the bluebell answer. Someone told me they had seen a bluebell in flower on the hill. Two days later I went looking for myself and took a photo. That was on the 6th of April. Budburst is a difficult one. Mainly the south side of the hill can be anything up to 2 weeks earlier than on the north side. Perhaps we can do our own mini natures calendar next year, recording the north, south divide. In the mean time visit the web and look at the calendar and see how easy it is to add an entry. [naturescalendar.org.uk](http://naturescalendar.org.uk)

# The Queen's Jubilee



A wonderful excuse to have a community party. How often do we spend time with our friends, family and neighbours. The big lunch is actually an annual national event, started a few years ago to bring communities together. They have tied in the event this year with the Jubilee celebrations.

All you need to do is bring a picnic and something to sit on. Then just join in the festivities from midday.

**Children's fancy dress competition**

**Children's entertainment**

**Treasure Hunt**

**Sports day, old fashioned sack race etc**

**Sing-a-long**

**Lots of flag waving and balloons**

**FREE ENTRY**

Facilities will include port-a-loo, refreshment stalls, Marquee, first aid point.

## The Big Picnic lunch

Sunday 3rd June from midday  
main entrance hospital lane

## The Beacon

Monday 4th 9pm – 11.30pm

The official Jubilee Beacon  
joining the nation together  
at the top of Allington Hill.

# The Bluebell

In the last newsletter I looked at the changing face of the hill and the fact that until recent years it was not a wood at all but farm land. Bluebells are associated with ancient woodland, so why do we have blue bells on the hill? Chris our historian has traced back the history of the hill to the 13th century. So let's use our imagination and piece a few facts together and see why the hill was so important to the community back then. We will imagine that at the time it was mostly woodland, with a small quarry on top.



We know that small cargo boats used to be able to sail up the river Brit to the port ( became known as Bridport ) which was approximately in the area where Morrison's is today. This means that in fact Allington hill was much closer to a harbour then, than it is now. Many sea farers would have crossed the channel from Europe carrying many diseases such as leprosy. It is thought that the leprosy hospital built at the foot of Allington hill was possibly one of the earliest of it's kind. Why was it built there?

Firstly it would have been close to the harbour but away from the main community. Secondly bluebells were used to treat leprosy. They are highly poisonous, but they contain molecules that can affect mycobacterial cell growth. Leprosy and TB are caused by mycobacteria. As we have a healthy Badger population on the hill are they self medicating for bovine TB? They are the only mammals known to eat bluebells. With the large proportion of Eype down also covered in bluebells the hospital would have been well placed with a plentiful supply. The hospital was reported to be made from Allington hill stone. It is a poor quality stone of little value, but good enough to use for such a building. Labour costs would also have been low, building it at the foot of the hill.



## The facts

71% of bluebells are found in the United Kingdom within broadleaf woodland.

We also have possibly half the world's population of bluebells in this country.

The English bluebell is under threat from its Spanish cousin, imported for sale, to plant in your garden. It is a more upright paler blue flower and is also larger in size.

**The Woodland Trust** are promoting bluebell walks this spring. Allington Hill has one of the best displays of bluebells in their woods, within the west country. They would like to promote this by providing a bluebell trail around the wood. We hope to put something in place this spring. We have one slight problem in that the one stretch of path we have not been able to treat is right in front of the main bluebell wood. With the recent rains it is thick in mud and very slippery. Please do go and see the bluebells they look beautiful, but take care. If the weather dries up we will put a trail in place. A nice little project we can work on for next year too.

Please do not be tempted to pick the bluebells, we need the seed to reseed other areas on the hill.

Thank you.

# New Pathways revisited....

In the last issue I mentioned that we had marked two new pathways through Coopers Wood. Many people commented on the flags in Jubilee wood as being a strong focal point. Chris got her sewing machine out and made up some more flags. She has placed them in Coopers Wood along the new pathways. They are much more noticeable and hopefully people will be more inclined to walk through the wood, rather than the "Go-cart track"! around the outside. Paul has done a great job in cutting the grass on the new pathways as well, so there is no excuse not to have a wander through.

Over the coming weeks we are making an effort to raise the canopy in Coopers Wood. This will help open up the wood slightly and help us decide if we need to thin any of the trees out. So many of you say it is too thickly planted and puts you off wanting to walk through it.

We need to walk these paths on a regular basis to keep them open. So be brave and get off the Go-cart track and explore.

The marked way routes on the hill are still in the planning stage, but getting nearer to being completed. Hopefully we may have them in place for the Jubilee celebrations.

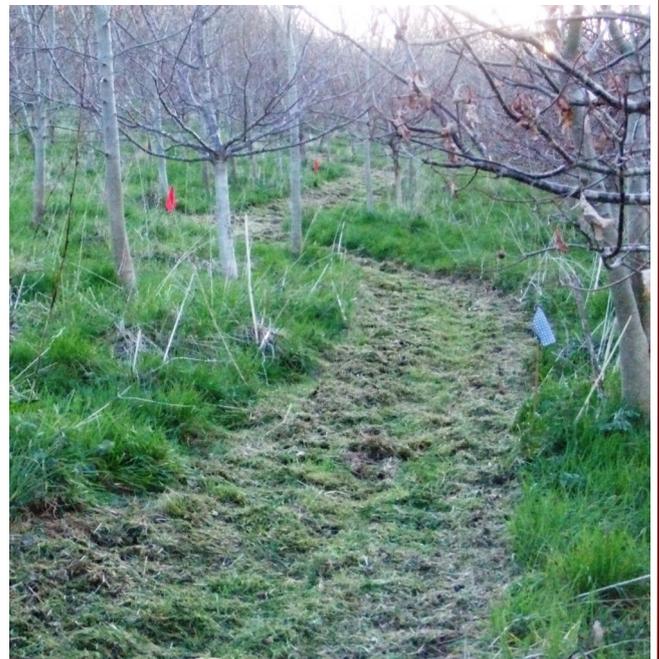
Many people tell me they do not have time to volunteer. By walking the new pathways and keeping them open you are doing your bit to improve Allington Hill. So you are volunteering. It's that easy.

## .....and the old

During the summer months we hope to do more improvement work on the pathways and steps.

The steps inside the entrance from Park road have become dangerous and they will be our first priority. We hope to cut extra steps in, making them shallower for us people with short legs.

Other steps on the hill will be cut back in, repaired or replaced. There will be times when we may have to close a path off to do this. There are many other routes on the hill and sometimes it's nice just to see Allington Hill from a different view point.



## Woodland Trust

There are many woodlands in the south west managed by the Woodland Trust. The next time you are wondering where to go for a day out, why not look at their web site and go and visit one of them. You may be inspired by what you see and bring back some ideas that you feel would be suitable for the hill. Why not visit the web page for Allington Hill. The photos show how the hill use to look like when the trust took it over and I hope to upload some new photos to bring the page up to date in the near future. If you would like to receive more information about the trust, please let me know and I will pass your email on.

# Natures Diary



February and March were such a treat when it came to watching nature. I did not get many opportunities to visit the hill in the last few months just for a walk. I was blessed by some amazing finds while volunteering on the hill. Toby our youngest volunteer is fascinated by all creepy crawlies. How he spotted this slow worm I'm not sure. It was a great find so early in the year, Feb 27th.

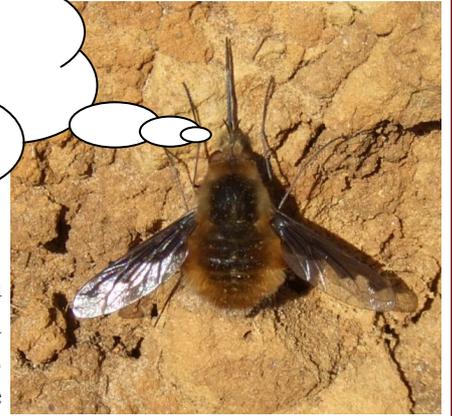


Due to the dry weather there has been a lack of fungi on the hill throughout the autumn and winter. I was pleased to find a solitary common ink cap in the area that we cleared for the Jubilee trees.

While working in this area we also saw a Peregrine Falcon fly over. They nest on the cliffs below Thorncombe Beacon.



Who said flies can't be cute!  
I'm a Bee-fly. I'm not a bee at all, although as larvae I live in the nest of solitary bees. I dart around feeding on nectar



The amount of butterflies on the hill has been amazing. speckled wood, comma, small tortoiseshell and wood white, all seen in one day. Also this caterpillar is a proof that Buff Ermine moths are living on the hill.

## Violet oil beetle



I now have a good library of books on insects, butterflies, birds, fungi and yet, I still had to resort to the internet to identify this little beastie. At first I thought it was a black oil beetle, which is rare in the UK. It has declined over the last ten years due to the loss of habitat. After some research, I now believe that this is a violet oil beetle. Even rarer and only found in a few strongholds in the south west. The habitat it relies on is heathland and

grass/ meadow land. It is reliant on the honey bee, which we have a colony of on the hill. The larvae crawl onto the back of feeding bees and are carried back to the nest, where they live off the honey.

This was found in the area where the blackthorn was cut down last year, as it was taking over the grassland. We are keeping this area as open grassland. Wow, I think we've got something right!



# Diamonds are for ever....

How can planting a few trees on a slope of a Dorset hill mean so much to so many? A tree it seems can bring back lovely memories of times past. It is almost like a memory bank of all those diamond moments, people and events that mean so much to us in our lives.

I have the privilege of receiving all the emails from you and you have kindly told me why you wished to plant a tree. I wish I could share them all with you. Here is my favorite in an edited version.

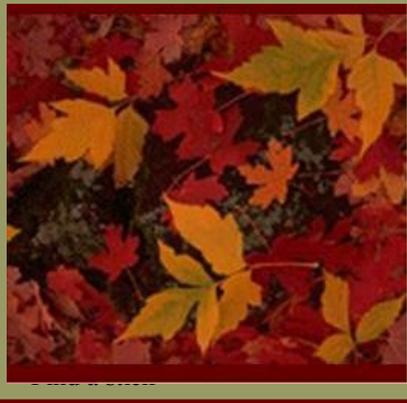
“I wish to plant a tree on the slope where you are planting the jubilee trees. This is a very special place as my father proposed to my mother on this very spot”. How romantic is that?

Chris who is writing a book about the hill, thought she had exhausted her source of material for the history of the hill. Personal memories such as these are just as important. Thankfully it also seems that rabbits can run faster than boys with bows and arrows. They gave up trying and made a guy and shot that instead!



Nearly 120 trees planted by over 70 people on a day of hail, rain and glorious sunshine. The Royal Oak was planted by Paul Bowditch and Jane Dibden. Rev Peter Edwards blessed the trees and The Mayor and Mayoress of Bridport came along to give their support. A big thank you to all the volunteers who made this possible.

For the followers of Pixie George. He was sneaky and planted a hazel tree before the rest of us for future generations of pixies. Their hazel tree is now very old. They hope it will produce some diamonds in the near future!



**HILLBILLIES  
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Mobile  
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*Facebook  
Allington Hillbillies*

# Your News and Views

## *Why are the Hillbillies celebrating the Jubilee?*

Firstly the Woodland Trust aim to plant 6 million trees to help celebrate the Jubilee and we had the opportunity to take part in this project. The Trust is also keen for the hill to be used as a community space. We were able to apply for funding through Allington Parish council on behalf of the community. It is a large venue accessible to all.

## *Why are you introducing wild flowers?*

As the Jubilee wood project has shown, that bank use to be a mass of bluebells and other wild flowers before it became overgrown. The foxgloves have almost been wiped out by the invasive bracken and the primrose bank is being covered by bramble, which does not flower until later in the year. All these early flowering plants are so important for the wildlife. We are increasing the stock of plants and protecting their habitat.

## *Can anyone use the hill?*

Schools, youth clubs and walking groups are always welcome to use the hill as part of outdoor activities and any individual for their own leisure. The hillbillies work closely with the Trust when putting on any events and it must be for the benefit of Allington Hill and the community. The Trust does not allow camping or fires on the hill except under strict control as part of a working party or the Jubilee beacon for example.

# The Weather

The spring of two halves. We had weeks and weeks of warm sunny weather ( except the two hours of tree planting on the hill, but that was my fault for inviting Jonathan along. ) Everyone was worried that the Jubilee trees would shrivel and die in the drought conditions. March was a very quiet month. April has lived up to its reputation with strong winds, hail and rain. With less warm sun and colder night time temperatures, things have slowed down and everything seems to be taking its time to come into full leaf.

The most rain we have had in a 24 hour period is 38mm , the night we lost the Grandfather tree. Sadly we do not have a wind gauge, so I can't give that statistic.

# Dates for your Diary

**MAY**

**SUNDAY 20TH**

Working Party

10.00am

**EVENING**

and

**SATURDAY WORKING**

**PARTIES**

**Text 07789705345**

**for more details**

**JUNE SUNDAY 3RD,**

**MONDAY 4TH**

***PARTY TIME!***

## Did you know

You do not have to get muddy when you do volunteer work for the hill. I did not have space for the volunteer profile this month but it will return, as I had a lot of positive feed back from that article. I hope the front page of this issue may inspire some of you to put your talents to use, or even teach others a useful skill that we could use on the hill. There is one group of ladies working on a secret project!

## PRIZES

Please, Please, Please can we have any gifts that would be suitable for our prize draw on the day of the Big Picnic, Sunday 3rd June.

We do not have many opportunities to raise money for the hillbillies. It goes towards those little extras that the Trust just can't fund.

Please either bring along on the day or email [allingtonhill@gmail.com](mailto:allingtonhill@gmail.com) to arrange collection. Thank you