

Mendip



From the Chair

I was enlightened that the last couple of walks lead by our members have been well attended, but on the other hand it's disappointing to have had to cancel two recent events though lack of interest, not to say how extremely disheartening for the person who has put so much effort into organising the event in the first place.

The Mendip Society is trying to move forward looking at different way to engage with our members and opening them up to the wider public. A sub-group of the Committee is being set up to organise these events, if you feel you would also like to have some good ideas, or input, and would like to get involved please let me know.

There has been several new Small Grant Applications received most have been approved, and a few more are in the pipeline, you will read about some in this edition and in the following Newsletters.

If you haven't been to the Mendip Society's two Nature Reserves at Slader's Leigh, Winscombe, or, Tania's Wood, Ubley recently please pay them a visit, both have recently seen activities and there is always so much change throughout the seasons.

Best Wishes

Tina



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Cover Photo. - by Mike McLennan.

A woodcutters shed above Burrington on the northern slope of Mendip.
Very atmospheric Mike.

And from the Editor

Change is inevitable. We must all evolve or become extinct - ask any dinosaur! But it is also true that change can be unsettling. We all fear the unknown, the uncertain - progress itself sometimes. But, as a society, change we must, if we are not to pass into history and cease to be relevant. Our survey highlighted that over 80% of our membership is over 60 - Well over I'm guessing, but we felt it to be too rude to ask!

Nothing wrong with catering for us older folks of course, "The Elders" as the societies president Les Davies calls us, can offer much in knowledge, experience and wisdom - and often are the ones that have the time to actually plan and run events for the greater membership. However, if the Mendip Society is to continue its legacy, work and activities long term, we must attract a younger element to our ranks, if only to take over from us all as we get to old and frail to run things for ourselves. What's more we must embrace new ideas, methods and technologies, not by discarding everything old, but by blending the best of what we currently have and value with the best of all that is new and innovative.

With all of the above in mind I am pleased to include an article (pages 8&9) about Roger White's Batch Farm project, which is aimed at connecting young people with the countryside. To be launching our under 18's photographic competition (pages 3 & 19), and to have new blood getting involved with our management, in the forms of Kate and Abi. (see page 18).

Finally - and just as a tease. I often use a little AI when editing pictures for the newsletter - but this time I have also used AI to help write one of the articles - can you spot where?

Cheers, Mike.

themendipsociety.photos@gmail.com



The results of our survey draw - and a new competition

In the last edition of this newsletter we launched a survey of members, and included the opportunity to win a prize, which took the form of **National Parks of the United Kingdom**. A beautiful book full of stunning pictures. A celebration of the nation's most beautiful places, commemorating the 75th anniversary of the creation of the national parks.

We (unsurprisingly) had a good response with a good number of our members - plus some non-members, who were equally welcome to offer their opinions, filling in the online questionnaire and, in many cases opting in to the competition. You can read the results and conclusions drawn on the next two pages, but here we want to offer our congratulations to society member Sandra Marsh, whose name was picked at random by our president Les Davies as the winner.



Sandra, Les and I met up recently in a suitable Mendip location (where else?) where Les presented the prize to Sandra - who had brought her dog along to witness the event...

Our thanks to everyone who entered and congratulations to Sandra, who we hope enjoys her prize.



Society President, Les Davies MBE presented the prize
Photo: Mike Harvey.

Introducing Emma Jacobs. an award-winning professional photographer based in North Somerset who is also the Senior Photographer for the RSPCA.

www.emmajacobsphotography.com

Emma is passionate about visual communication and is driven to explore new ways in which the photographic medium can be used positively as a tool to visually convey and communicate creative concepts, and educate others. She thrives on creating and sharing images that provoke empathy - reminding people what a beautiful planet we live on, hoping that it inspires them to take better care of it and treat all its inhabitants with equal kindness, compassion, and respect.

So why are we featuring Emma in our newsletter?... We are delighted that she has agreed to act as judge for our upcoming photographic competition, aimed at the younger photographer.

In Emma's own words:

"I am excited by photographers who push themselves to approach their photography in creative and well-considered ways; this might be achieved in their choice of lighting and composition, how they capture a moment in time or their use of photographic storytelling. I am always looking for an image that evokes an emotional reaction in me."

Obviously we are excited to have her involved in our competition and cannot wait to see the entries submitted for her to judge. You will find full details of how to enter, the prize on offer, and full terms and conditions on page 19 of this newsletter.



Emma Jacobs, our expert judge
Photo: Emma Jacobs.

The future of The Mendip Society - Results and Conclusions

In our last edition we launched our members survey and asked you all to let us know, via an online form, what you liked, what you wanted more of, and what you could do to help the society grow and achieve its aims. We even offered a prize draw as an incentive. So what did we find out?...

MEMBERS Your Society

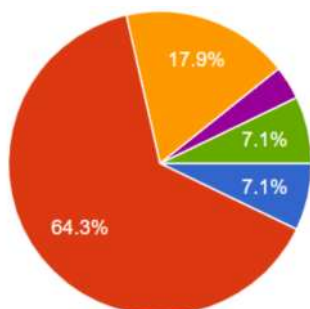


To get more involved.

"Ask not what your society can do for you,
ask what can you do for your society".

No not Lord Kitchener - or John F. Kennedy - Lee Davies MBE, 2024

1. That we need to employ old school methods to engage people. Our initial QR code in the newsletter only raised a few responses – but then we dropped a link onto the website and got a few more, then an e-mail to members was circulated – and the responses stepped up. Finally, a link went onto the Facebook page, which allowed a few non-members to get involved. But certainly, conclusion one has to be that an e-mail into your inboxes seems to be the most effective way of getting our members to respond. We will of course continue to try several routes to reach you all, but that alone is a useful finding.



2. At least 80% of our respondents, would seem to be over 60. While only a percentage of the total membership took part, if we assume that it was a more or less typical cross section then it seems very clear that our appeal is, currently, mainly to the older generation. I guess a quick scan around our AGM or any other gathering of members would tend to confirm this.



Nothing wrong with appealing to the over 60's of course, but we do need to also bring in some new blood if the society is to thrive long term. Personally, I feel we need to actively strive to run more "family friendly" events that are:

a. Run at times when younger (working) people can make it – weekends, evenings, school holidays and so on and,



b. Have activities aimed at engaging children and teenagers. We do already have badge making, pond dipping and similar offerings at many events, but all who have brought up families remember the constant search for things to interest and occupy our children – maybe we can redouble our efforts to offer and publicise activities aimed at a younger audience.

Then we moved on to asking if people would be willing to lend a hand. The responses here were quite encouraging.

Over 55% would like to contribute more to the society in some way. Around half of these are not sure what they can do or feel they would need some sort of specialist training, but it is very encouraging to know that our members are willing, if we can support and encourage them, to get stuck in – even if they have limitations on time or physical fitness. Thank you all, we will try to find ways to offer suitable training and support to enable you to play a role.



With physical work we saw a keen interest in hedging and dry-stone walling. Interestingly, tree surgery was also of interest to several, though some training is obviously required for this. We already do run courses in walling, hedging and scything of course, but it is good to know there are more people out there who would like to learn, as this points the way for future courses.



The future of The Mendip Society - Results and Conclusions

Around 25% of respondents seem willing to lead walks and activities. This is great news as we are always on the look out for people willing to take on a bit of responsibility. It also fits well with one of the later questions about what people enjoy and would like more of, walks, talks and visits all featured highly here.



Of the less arduous activities, many seem willing to help out staffing our stand, helping to distribute leaflets and with serving up tea and coffee at events. Great to know, if you ticked one of these then rest assured, your contact details have been made available to our current organisers of such things and I feel sure they will be in touch. As for those who want to get involved in writing articles for the newsletter or website. If you have not heard directly from me yet, then you soon will!



As for administration – as we all know, there is a vacancy for the society secretary at the moment. Big boots to fill, and not surprisingly, although several offered to help, nobody felt able to take on the whole role single-handed. In our last edition we introduced Kate, and on page 18 you can meet Abi, both of whom have stepped up to take on parts of the societies administration, but many hands make light work, and we are still in need of others to join them. Please consider the request on page 6 for instance.

Finally, we asked about your likes and dislikes. No big surprise to know that walks, talks and visits are popular – and that most people who responded would like more! A bit of an odd discrepancy when balanced against the actual attendance at some recent society events however. Several walks and visits have had to be cancelled due to the apparent interest levels being too low to make them viable... Is it that the subjects are not of interest, or that the timings are wrong? Personally, I think it likely that we need to publicise and remind people more – possibly spreading the word beyond our membership to the wider population, I am already stepping up our social media presence but if anyone has alternative theories or ideas then please do share them.



We also asked for comments in addition to our fixed list of tick box questions as we really didn't want to limit responses to our ideas. Some great stuff got included here – and I promise we will consider everything. Amongst a long list of these:

That we have members who could help with translation for foreign visitors – and a couple of sign language interpreters.

Several who could potentially supply cake for events – including gluten-free options.

Requests for more events in the Eastern part of Mendip. (noted)

More information on planning concerns for the area (see page 18)

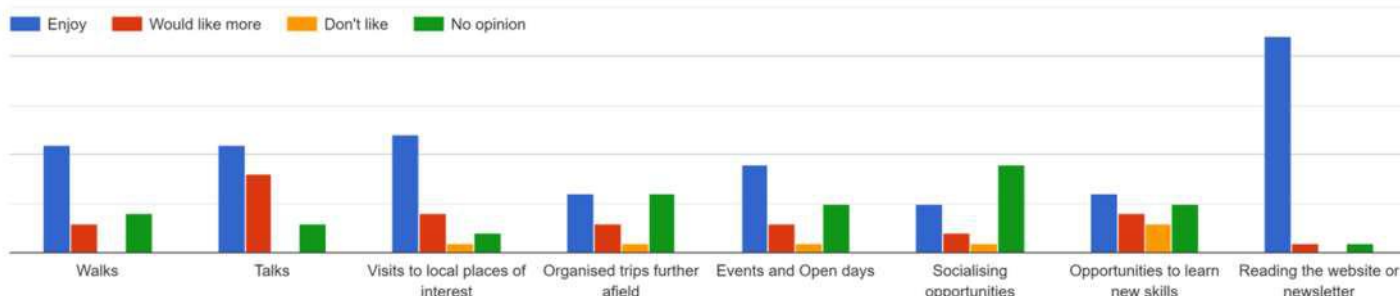
And many nice comments about what the society is already doing.

I can't close without mentioning one big peak in the graph of likes. The biggest number of likes by far was for the website and newsletter!... On behalf of Peter (webmaster) and myself, plus others (newsletter) thank you all very much. It is good to know you appreciate what we do.

The survey form is still available if you feel you would like to join in. No more prizes available, but a warm glow from feeling you have helped to shape the future of your society is surely a big enough reward. in itself.

Scan the QR code or enter this text into your browser.

https://bit.ly/M_S_2024



Notices.

Subscription Renewal 2025

Dear Member,

Subscriptions for 2025 are due shortly. We hope you will want to continue as a member of the Mendip Society. Subscriptions have increased for the first time since 2016 and are now:

Under 60 single	£20
60+ single	£17
Joint / family (at the same address)	£27

Payment may be made either by sending a cheque payable to:

The Mendip Society, to the Membership Secretary, c/o The Cottage Harptree Hill, West Harptree, BS40 6EJ.

Or by BACS transfer to the Society's account: **Mendip Society**. Sort code **30-91-84**. Account number **00596344** at

Lloyds Bank. If a cheque is not drawn on the member's account please write the member's name on the back. If paying by BACS please give your name and initials as the reference and notify the membership secretary of your renewal by email: **membership@themendipsociety.org.uk**, or telephone **01761 221995**.

If you have a standing order please amend it to the new rate.

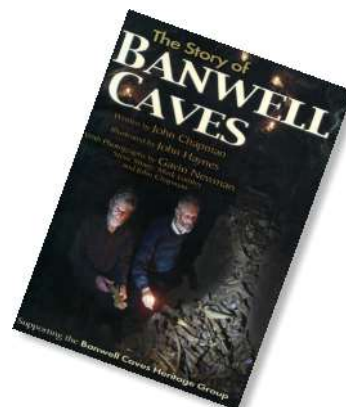
Thanks, Peter Janes. Membership Secretary

An Apology.

It has been brought to my attention by a couple of readers that John Hayes, owner of the Banwell Bone Caves, who I mentioned in the book corner review of our last newsletter, had, unbeknown to me, recently died, and that the property is currently closed and up for sale.

My thanks to those who pointed this out and my condolences to his friends and family with apologies for any distress caused.

John Page, of the Banwell Caves Heritage Group, who was one of those that wrote to correct my error, currently holds the remaining stock of the book in question, but feels he cannot take payment for copies whilst the future of the property is uncertain. I will keep in contact with him and update our readers of any developments.



And a request.

Many members will know Pat Fraser, who has acted as our minute taker at management meetings and the AGM for quite a time now. You may also know that Pat suffered a nasty fracture in an accident a while back, and although this has now healed, she no longer feels able to record the minutes for us.

Firstly, the whole committee want to publicly thank Pat for all she has done to ensure the smooth running of the society - and of course to wish her well for the future. But secondly, we need to ask our greater membership if anyone would be willing to step up and fill her shoes. As with all voluntary roles within the society, the exact role is up for discussion and negotiation, but it is not one currently covered and so we have quite an urgent requirement if we are to move our plans forward as we would like.

If you feel you may be able to help, please contact

Tina Bath on: **07880 664207** or by e-mail at: **tina.bath@btinternet.com**



Somerset V Hitler - WW2 History Walk



Taking a breather at the trig point.
Photo: Iain Reid.



Group picture at West Bunker.
Photo: Richard Frost.

I feel very fortunate to have had two years of glorious weather on the days selected for this walk. This year, with the changeable conditions we have had throughout the summer, doubly so! One week either way and we could all have gotten a soaking, but as it was the conditions were perfect.

Apologies for the wrong length of this walk being published in Mendip Times, I fear the six-mile cross-country trek with a steep climb to start came as a surprise to a few.

I was honoured that our group this year included Nicola Brown, the daughter of author Donald Brown, whose book **Somerset V Hitler** is, of course, the inspiration for and source of most of the material that I refer to during the walk. Indeed, Donald Brown originally led a very similar walk himself years ago - In a very real sense, I am walking in his footsteps.

My thanks to everyone who offered up pictures taken during the walk, some of which I have included here. Thanks also to Jo Bradshaw, who wrote this review of the day for me.

It was fascinating to learn how the Mendip landscape still reflects the decisions that were made in the face of threats to our way of life more than eighty years ago.

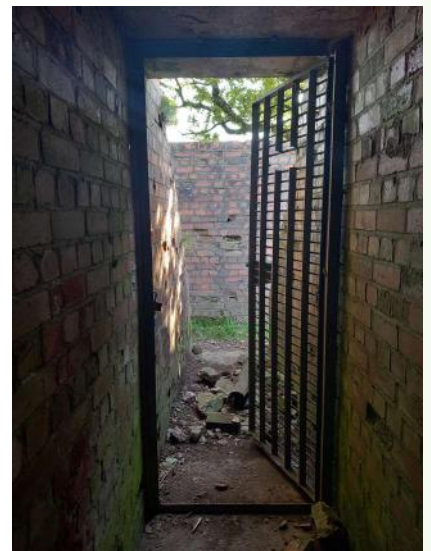
Mike brought to life how this would have been lived by the people of this special part of Somerset with some personal details of the impact on his family.

It was really rewarding to have a new perspective of a familiar and loved place. There was a rare opportunity to see the inside of the bunker that housed the generators. It was an incredible delve into past times that highlighted collaborative effort in a tumultuous world.

In response to requests from a few individuals and groups, I am in the final stages of putting together a slide show, indoor version of this story. I intend to run an event for our society shortly and will also make it available to other interested groups in due course. This will include many more pictures, a short film I have recently discovered - and of course, will not be dependant on fine weather or fitness levels!



The remains of anti-landing tumps.
Photo: Mark Demmen.



Inside the bunker looking out.
Photo: Mark Demmen.

Social Media - Follow us, like us, talk to us and hear more from us.



Did you know? That we have a website? Well yes, I guess most people did know that, but did you also know we have a page on Facebook - and have had for some time? In fact, at the time of writing our Facebook page has 1,135 followers and is regularly seen by over 1,700 people!

We also now have an Instagram account. Why? Many reasons, but in part because Instagram tends to appeal to a younger audience, can be easier to interact with and often has content that is not found on Facebook - Danielle Schreve for instance, who as many will know, leads the Gully cave dig that we support, posts a lot of interesting content on Instagram. So please do consider following us (and her), clicking the "like" buttons, commenting and joining in the online conversation.

Facebook: www.facebook.com/themendipsociety Instagram: www.instagram.com/mendip_society
And of course. our website: www.themendipsociety.org.uk



Batch Farm - Open Morning.

It was such a pleasure to host the Society open morning at Batch Farm on Saturday 19th October. Our own enjoyment was enhanced by listening to Tina Bath, Chair of Mendip Society, explain the history and purpose of dew ponds – harking back to the land enclosure era of 200 years ago, before piped water reached Mendip, when having a hill pool was a precious resource. Pete Lane, from the Faculty of Inclusive Practice at Weston College, added a moving testimony about the value to his students of involvement in projects like pond restorations, creating positive memories to strengthen their sense of well-being.



Roger welcomes the group to Batch Farm
Photo: Mike Harvey.



Tina gives us a brief history of Dew Ponds.
Photo: Mike Harvey.



Pete Lane of Weston College.
Photo: Mike Harvey.

We have been developing Batch Farm as an outdoor learning resource ever since we first met in 1979, when we were working together at an educational centre in Bristol for young people who had given up on ordinary school, or whom the school had excluded. One of the activities that successfully motivated the 15-year-olds we were working with was horse-riding at Lyncombe Lodge, then owned by John Lee. Interested in what we were trying to do, John offered to sell us a one-acre patch of land, which we could use for activities with our groups. The ensuing challenge of keeping the grass under control led to our first date - to buy a flock of 7 sheep one damp December evening!

Our young city dwellers loved “the field” and, over the years, we extended the smallholding and the range of projects to include sheep, bees, new woodland and hedges, and areas for young people to better understand and enjoy the countryside. When our own children started to arrive and we were no longer working at the educational centre, we continued to support overnight camps through the Forest School movement.

More recently we have been looking at ways to broaden the activities at Batch Farm. Post-covid we have been working with Pete Lane and Nick Chadwick from Weston College to engage their students in outdoor learning. A very helpful grant from the Mendip Society enabled us to acquire and instal a composting toilet, which was an essential health and safety requirement from the College.



The first of two restored Dew Ponds at Batch Farm.
Photo: Mike Harvey.



Roger answers questions about the project - in an idyllic setting.
Photo: Mike Harvey.

Christine Gray and Roger White

Alongside this, we received support from Mendip National Landscapes (formerly AONB), through their Nature Recovery programme. This enabled us to restore the previously derelict dew ponds (thanks to Tina's expertise) and plant more woodland and hedges around newly seeded wildflower meadows and designated areas for outdoor learning. Staff and students from Weston College have been helping with all these activities during day and overnight camps, which have been fun to host and much enjoyed by the young people.



Walking down through the wild flower meadow.
Photo: Mike Harvey.



Reintroducing water snails to the first pond.
Photo: Mike Harvey.



One of several educational information boards.
Photo: Mike Harvey.

Part of the funding for this has come through Defra's Farming in Protected Landscapes budget, with the shortfall covered by income from our own farming enterprises (sales of lamb through Brockley Stores, small bale hay to local horse-owners, logs from harvested trees like ash affected by dieback, and cider from our own orchard and local suppliers). We would be interested to hear from other groups and organisations who may want to make use of our facilities for outdoor learning opportunities.

Christine Gray and Roger White

Email: rogerwhite49@hotmail.co.uk Tel: 07771 562264



A few snails for the second pond.
Photo: Mike Harvey.



A fire pit in the woods - great for a bit of bonding.
Photo: Mike Harvey.

Editors note.

As you may know, this project has been close to my heart throughout - until recently I was a near neighbour of Roger and Christine at Batch Farm, and was initially asked by the committee to visit and assess their small grant request for the composting toilet. Needless to say I am delighted with the outcome and continue to work with them as they turn their vision into reality. Expect more on this subject in the future!

Mike H.

A special report on finds and progress.

The Gully Cave at Ebbor Gorge continues to reveal a rich range of finds, dating back at least 50,000 years. About a dozen members of The Mendip Society were joined by a similar number from the Westbury Society for their annual visit to the cave, led in July by Andrew Buchanan.



Meeting up in Ebbor Gorge Car Park.
Photo: Annie Egginton



Steps down the path along the edge of the gorge.
Photo: Annie Egginton

Gully Cave was found in 2005 when a hole was spotted in a scree slope below a popular viewpoint at the top of Ebbor Gorge. Professor Danielle Schreve, who has been excavating there almost every summer since 2006 says that 2024 has revealed their largest number of finds to date.



Our first view of the dig site.
Photo: Annie Egginton.



Current and past students, Mollie Mills and Beth Verge
Photo: Annie Egginton.

Professor Schreve, with current students, past students and other volunteers, have moved 300 tons of material so far and are finding more and more animal bones the deeper they dig down into the past. These have included aurochs, spotted hyena, reindeer, brown bears, bison, arctic foxes, wild cat and the tiny remains of many smaller creatures – all of which suggest that Gully cave was used by generations of mainly carnivores over tens of thousands of years.

Many of the known caves in the Mendip Hills were first found and excavated in Victorian times, so the opportunity to scientifically analyse this newly discovered site using modern techniques has been extremely valuable. The bones are particularly well preserved in the lime-rich soil and rock of Mendip.

Professor Schreve said: "This is the most important site of its kind in Britain and one of the most important in Western Europe. It is a unique record of how animals adapted to changes in climate, including ice ages, so it is uniquely relevant to the climate changes we see now."

Words and pictures - Steve and Annie Egginton

Professor Schreve, who has for several years worked at the Royal Holloway, University of London, told us that she's recently been appointed to a new chair in Environmental Change at the University of Bristol.



Long bone in situ
Photo: Annie Egginton.



Femur in situ
Photo: Annie Egginton.



Professor Schreve discussing some of the finds
Photo: Annie Egginton.



Some of the visitors
Photo: Annie Egginton.



Left: Digging outside the cave entrance.
Photos: Annie Egginton.



Right: At the finds table.

Editors note.

My thanks to Steve and Annie for an excellent update on the Gully Cave dig. For any new readers, I just wanted to add the reason why we feature this site pretty much every year.

Not only is Professor Schreve a friend, and member of The Mendip Society, As a society, we have been long term supporters of the important work being done, both on site in Ebbor Gorge and the academic follow-up.

For many years now, Mendip Society members have layed on evening meals and social activities for the digging students as thanks for all their hard work, alongside providing financial support for the dig itself.

Mike H.

Tania's Wood in the autumn - Judith Tranter

What a year it has been with such changeable weather, most of it seemingly the lovely growing sort; if I was a plant of any sort in the wood I would be exhausted! Our work parties have been really stretched to keep the pathways passable and the trees free of suffocating vegetation to the exclusion of all else they would normally be doing.



Left to Right. Julian Butter, Richard Ellis, Beth Yates & David Tucker
Photo: John Steers / Judith Tranter / Mike Harvey.

So we have been extremely glad that Tina had arranged for four of our volunteers, who wanted and felt able to handle a machine tool, to take a days' training course in the use of brush cutters and strimmers. There was no shortage of hedges, bramble bushes, overhanging trees, and long thick grassy-nettley areas on which to practice – and then to take the final assessment. We are very proud of the four, who all passed with flying colours.

And still it grew. You can imagine the huge amounts of cut material which accumulated in piles everywhere. However, it is no longer our policy to automatically burn up all this brash in the huge bonfires we used to have, with their resulting billows of smoke (the carbon escaping into the atmosphere), and the ash glowing for days afterwards, being somewhat of a fire risk.

No, we had decided to clear the wood of the brash using the now much praised method of making biochar. We have reported on this in previous newsletters and had booked Mike Reed, a woodsman with the specialized kiln and wherewithal to create our own first biochar. It was a lovely day, although in a rainy weather period, which meant that the brash was a little bit wet, but by time the huge kiln had been cheerily burning it up, it didn't matter a bit and every scrap fed into it was soon reduced to a sort of honey-combed ash.

Then it was shoveled into huge drums, by Mike wearing asbestos gloves, the lids were tightened down to make it airtight and were left for a day or two until completely cold. Then it could be mixed with any sort of compost material in a ratio of 1 (biochar) to 9 (compost), or if wanted simply dug into the garden soil or into the floor of our own wood – to be trapped there for a very long, even indefinite time.

The heat of the drums just filled with the ash, was sufficient for Tina to fry a pan of sausages on top, which, put into rolls was eagerly eaten by the gang.



The group around the kiln - Before it was filled with brash.
Photo: Edmund Gabriel.



Left: It needs a lot of brash to keep the fire burning hot.



Centre: Carefully adding to the burn.
Photos: Judith Tranter.



Right: sausage in a roll anyone?
Made by Tina.

It was generally decided that making biochar ourselves could be a viable proposition, on a much smaller scale of course, and with the requisite safety tools, but we do have the volunteers who now have been shown how it is done. What we do with it, once made is open to debate. But the best option we think will be to improve the fertility of our own nature reserve by burying it where it belongs.

Judith Tranter.

Biochar - What's it all about then?

I was curious to know how bio-char differs from charcoal - or, for that matter, ash... So I took myself off to the website of BIOCHAR WALES, makers of the "Kon-Tiki" kiln featured on the previous page. Their opening page proudly proclaimed;

"This ingenious invention allows farmers, wildlife trusts, estates and gardeners to produce high quality biochar from surplus biomass materials. With basic training an operator can produce a cubic metre of biochar in a few hours."

OK, enough of the sales pitch - what's actually happening inside said kiln? In a word - Pyrolysis. Which the dictionary describes as *"The heating of an organic material, such as biomass, in the absence of oxygen, usually conducted at or above 500 °C, providing enough heat to deconstruct the strong bio-polymers."* Which sounds very much like what I have done to a forgotten tray of roast potatoes or Yorkshire puddings on occasion. The clever bit of course, is controlling the process, which in the case of the kiln we used is done using something called a flame curtain.

The process starts by building an open stacked square chimney of dry wood in the middle of the kiln and igniting it at the top. This creates a draft that pulls air down the sidewalls of the kiln and back up through the middle, igniting the base and forming a hot bed of embers. Once a strong ember bed is established, biomass is added in layers. The top layer of the biomass is ignited, and as it burns, it heats the layer below, causing it to outgas. The gases rise through the flame and burn, creating a clean, smokeless fire.

Meanwhile, under the flame, the biomass undergoes pyrolysis, where it is heated in the absence of oxygen. This process carbonises the biomass, turning it into biochar while the gases are burned off. Fresh biomass is added every 5-10 minutes to maintain the flame and ensure the pyrolysis process is complete. Once the kiln is full, the biochar is quenched to stop this pyrolysis process. This can be done by adding water from the bottom, which creates steam that rises through the char bed, or by dousing from the top. Quenching from the bottom also partially activates the biochar by cleaning it and increasing its pore volume. The result is a high-quality biochar, which can be used for various applications such as soil enhancement, water filtration, and as an additive in animal feed.



The Kon-Tiki kiln well alight.
Photo: Edmund Gabriel.



The stages of producing Biochar. 1. Gathering brush. 2. Loading the kiln. 3. Packing the still burning materials into barrels. 4. The end result.
Photos: 1&2. Edmund Gabriel. 3. Judith Tranter. 4. Biochar Wales

This is apparently a 2,000 year-old practice which converts biomass materials (brush etc.) into a soil enhancer that can store carbon for hundreds of years, and increases soil biodiversity. Critically, biochar is a negative emission technology which it helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions and slow down climate change. Proponents of biochar claim that it:

- Improves plant growth and yield. ● Offers greater water retention, less watering. ● Creates a better root environment.
- Increases the PH, Nitrogen, Phosphorous and Potash of the treated soil.
- Helps fight climate change by locking carbon in the ground. ● Increases the amount of organic matter in the soil.

So now I (and hopefully you) know - or at least are a little more aware of what all the fuss is about. Using pyrolysis to help capture carbon emissions is, of course, only a small part of the overall answer to our warming planet, but it does sound like an important piece of the jigsaw.

Slader's Leigh - Autumn time

This summer the weather conditions accelerated the growth of all the vegetation – both welcome flowers and all the aggressive invasive species such as the meadowsweet and bracken. We usually cut the meadow in late August when all the seeds have dropped but this was a very wet time this year, so we postponed it until 11th September, when we were lucky to strike a sunny week. The bottom section of the field was left uncut to provide a practice area for those wanting to learn or try out their scything skills during the next stage of the process. A week later a work party raked it all up and piled it in hidden places at the edges of the meadow to rot down, and the part left standing was hand cut (with long handled scythes as in the past); All achieved with the skill and effort of our great group of volunteers, two of whom brought their own cutting machines, which worked their way through the mass of vegetation.



The meadow, with the bottom section left for the scything class.

Photo: Judith Tranter



John clearing the pond of the invasive weed. New Zealand Pigmyweed or Australian Swamp Crop.

Photo: Judith Tranter



All hands to the raking, clearing the way in front of the next cutting run.

Photo: Judith Tranter



Tackling the side areas which are very tangled

Photo: Judith Tranter

Words and pictures - Judith Tranter.



Beth brush cutting the edges and Richard Carrying away the huge piles of brambles .

Photo: Judith Tranter



Richard helping Julian load his trusty old Allen scythe onto its trailer, home after a hard day's work.

Photo: Judith Tranter



Nick Raymond shows the scythes the correct position to stand and hold the scythe.

Photo: Judith Tranter



Nick Raymond 'peening' the scythe blades ready for the scything tuition.

Photo: Judith Tranter

Walks, talks and events, organised by The Mendip Society

Saturday 16th November 2024 **An Introduction to Fungi in their Environment.** On Burrington Ham. 10am – 1pm.

A walk led by Nathan Orr, the Nature Recovery Ranger of the Mendip Hills National Landscape (MHNL) Good footwear and protective clothing is necessary, as only a Met Office weather warning will deter. A walking pole could also be useful as there are one or two slippery places. There is no charge for this event, but **booking is essential**.

Please note – this walk is for fungi identification only – it is **NOT**- a food collecting forage.

Meet in the top car park of Burrington Combe for a 10am start.

NGR: ST 489 581. What three words ref: ///large.bends.quintet

To book please contact Judith on: **01275 874284** or by email at: **judith.tranter1@btinternet.com**

Contact on the morning of the walk will be: **07811 310219**

Saturday 25th January 2025 **Beginners Hedge Laying Training Day.** At Tania's Wood Nature Reserve.

All tools provided, Meet at 9.30 for 10am start, ending around 3pm.

Joining instructions, directions and other information will be sent to participants nearer the date.

Open to all. Members free, non-members £10 Places will be limited and **must be booked in advance**.

To book please contact Judith on: **01275 874284** or by email at: **judith.tranter1@btinternet.com**

Saturday 1st February 2025 **The Mendip Society Wassail** With Master of Ceremonies, Mr. Les Davies MBE

To be held this year in the Fry's Lane Orchard courtesy of David and Sophie Stead of Church Farm Burrington Village.

Park in the Square **NGR: ST 479 593. What three words ref: ///morphing.nerd.fumes. Area postcode BS40 7AD***

Meeting in Burrington Village Hall in the Square from 6.30pm onwards to choose the Wassail Queen.

At 7pm we process across the Square to the orchard where a venerable tree is chosen to receive our blessing and libations. Evil spirits will be dispersed with our loud curses, chants and banging of pots & pans. Then it's back to the hall for more songs, with warming liquors, cake and cheeses etc. Warm clothing, (hats are good) and good boots or shoes are a must for the rough ground, a tin plate or can and a spoon to bang are ideal for noise and a torch might be useful as Burrington is a 'no-lights' village.

As for last year, there will be a small charge of £5 for supper, (children free). Everyone is invited, if you can let us know you are coming, it will help us prepare enough refreshments and know how many bottles to mull!

Please contact Peter Janes on: **01761 221995** (leave a message if necessary)

or email: **membership@themendipsociety.org.uk**

Date and location TBA. Somerset V Hitler - the indoor version Mike Harvey's reworking of Donald Brown's original.

As many readers will know, the annual WW2 walk over Blackdown to look at the remnants of the decoy city is a longish hike with a steep uphill climb at the start. In response to several requests it has now been reworked as a talk and slide show, enabling those who might find the challenge of a six-mile hike a bit too much to get involved - what's more, we will not be at the mercy of the wind and weather.

Sitting in the relative comfort of a village hall we can offer many more photographs, illustrations - and even a short film, recently acquired from the Windrose Trust, showing the anti-landing cairns (tumps) being constructed up on Blackdown.

At the time of publication the final touches are being put to this show, which will be around an hour long, plus time for questions and hopefully a break for teas and coffees. Further details will be published on the website and social media feeds as soon as they are fixed. Watch this space!

NGR: TBA. What three words ref: ///TBA

***NB.** Postcodes in rural areas can cover large geographic areas, please use OS Grid Refs or W3W if possible.

Please note that The Mendip Society often organises other walks and events between newsletters that cannot, for obvious reasons, be included here. For the latest information and to be made aware of any late changes please visit **www.themendipsociety.org.uk**

Book Corner

Mendip from the Air A Changing Landscape *Hannah Firth.*

Once again I am featuring a book that is not easy to get hold of! However, through a long series of events I have recently acquired a copy of this 2007 publication, and can only hope you may be able to find a copy in a local library or online somewhere.

Based on a 2005 aerial survey of Mendip, but with many other photographs from a wide range of sources, **Mendip from the Air** is a treasure chest of fascinating information, mostly in the form of photographs, but also with maps, diagrams and short, informative passages by the author - or should that be collator?

Hanna Firth has assembled this fascinating book in conjunction with Somerset County Council, Mendip Hills AONB and English Heritage. It even has a foreword (and some pictures) by the late Mick Aston, a local resident and Time Team regular for many years.

There are short opening passages on the geology of Mendip, and on the aggregate industry, which obviously has had a major influence on the landscape. But then the book launches into an explanation of aerial photography methods, LIDAR (Light Detection And Ranging) and the value of images gathered to researchers, archeologists and similar.

We then get a series of chapters focussed on historical eras, from the prehistoric right through to the towns, villages and notable buildings we can still visit today. And every page is packed full of photographs, mostly taken from the air, that illustrate, fascinate and inform. It almost feels mean to dangle this book knowing that copies are so hard to find. do try to track one down, you will not regret it.

Strangest of all. On the back cover there is an inscription that states "THIS BOOK IS FREE AND MUST NOT BE SOLD". I have enquired, but the MHNL office no longer has copies to offer, so I guess you will just have to try the local library, or get lucky as I did.



Follow The Plough By Les Davies MBE. FRGS. The 'Westcountryman'

A book by our very own Les Davies. And for once in this column, a book you can purchase your own copy of!

Les, of course needs no introduction to our members, his rich West country accent can be heard at many events organised by the society and his thoughts are regularly featured on our back page - and even more regularly in the pages of the Mendip Times. **Follow The Plough** then, is a series of recollections, thoughts and reflections on everything that life has thrown at Les. The first four chapters tell of growing up, from a babe in arms, through school years to achieving a commission in the Territorial Army (TA) and on to becoming the Senior Warden of our Mendip AONB. Each of these chapters opens with a verse of a favourite poem, and other poetry is liberally sprinkled throughout the book, giving away the true nature of the man, world-wise and canny, but also with a keen appreciation for the arts.

The remaining chapters reflect on adult life, generally with a note of humour and a little wistful reflection. One in particular celebrates the way acronyms have become a part of everyday language - Les' language anyway.

I know (because he told me) that he feels a little "exposed" opening up his personal memory bank for all to see laid bare. However, I don't think he has any cause to worry. Les, we all know you by your words and actions already, this is just a nice way to let the reader know about some of the formative influences that went into making the man we know today.

And so, dear reader, although this is a blatant plug for a book by a friend, I do strongly suggest you join me in reading all about Les's personal history and thoughts on life. Personally I'm hoping for a sequel!



Follow The Plough is printed by Taylor Thorne Print Ltd. - who also print this newsletter for us. It is published by 'Westcountryman' RRP £6.99 www.westcountryman.co.uk

Preserving our National Landscape and Countryside - Mike Rolfe.

The Mendip Hills are one of England's most attractive National Landscapes. As a National Landscape they are therefore protected.

By the Environment Act and commitments made in the Environment Improvement Plan, previous governments have set goals to halt and reverse the decline of natural species by 2030. Moreover, constructing buildings within a National Landscape is effectively discouraged and, in any event, is severely restricted.

Against this background, the current Government has announced its commitment to build 1.5 million dwellings throughout the UK within the next 5 years. Previous governments announced similar aims but none managed to reach this level of construction, notwithstanding widespread housing developments across the country. For example, witness house building immediately next to the north and south slopes of the Mendip Hills both now and over the last 15 years. Looking outwards and inwards, it is apparent that the beauty of the Mendips has already been compromised. Considering the Government's determination to ratchet up housing and the necessary infrastructure to new higher levels, local governments will inevitably come under severe pressure to deliver. However, land identified as being suitable for development is limited, hence we can expect our countryside and even National Landscapes to be threatened.

So what can those of us who wish to preserve our National Landscapes, the countryside and natural flora and fauna do to ensure everything remains unspoiled for the future enjoyment of all. Be vigilant. First of all challenge changes to current Local Plans and similar official planning documents that seek to identify green field sites, within or close to the Mendip Hills, as potential sites for developments. Be aware that local governments provide, on a weekly basis, details of all new planning applications. All you need to do is go the planning website and subscribe, which is free, and you will receive up to date information. Challenge all potentially harmful developments.

Together, let us make sure that The Mendip Hills and the countryside immediately adjacent to them remain unspoiled by the hand of us humans.

The Fugitive King & The Monarch's Way.

Following on from a successful "Zoom" event some time ago, we were offered an the chance for a member of the Monarch's Way Association to give us a comprehensive talk about this entire and interesting episode in our nation's Royal History. This journey is the backbone of this famous long distance walk which became The Monarch Way we know today.

So, Mr. John Price was only to pleased to adress a group of 36 members and guests and give us a step by step description and detailed description of the route using Google Maps from Worcester to Shoreham Beach in Sussex. John described his walk which included the many features and facts that surrounded this journey of 625 miles, which was full of many dangerous episodes that abounded during those turbulent years.

Richard Frost.

Editors note: A website is available at: <http://www.monarchsway.50megs.com/index.html> However, the site seems to be in poor repair, has several dubious links within it and is generally not secure - Sadly my advice has to be **NOT** to visit this site until it has been made secure, or at least to proceed with great caution if you do. Mike H.



Meet Abigail.

We are delighted to welcome Abi. to our ranks. As you will be able to read from her bio below, Abi. has some great qualities and experience to offer - and has agreed to cover a range of administration areas for us. In particular, to oversee our PR and to take forward new projects and ideas that promote the Societies values to young people and the general public in order attract new membership.

"Abigail David is an international development management consultant with over 20 years experience worldwide, including the UN. With a passion for working with organisations to develop their full potential, Abigail seeks to work with opportunities that engage and inspire. In her free time, she enjoys exploring the Mendips and surrounding areas with her dogs, gardening, crocheting and creating flower essences."

Terms and Conditions.



Earlier in this edition, we met our judge, Emma Jacobs. Here we tell you how to enter, what to photograph - and importantly, what the prize is. We want to keep rules to a minimum and encourage as many entries as possible, but obviously there have to be a few guidelines so that everyone understands what to do and how to do it.

- The subject for the competition is **Mendip Nature**. This is deliberately a wide brief to allow everyone scope to experiment and take pictures of the things they like the most. Wildlife, plants, trees, geology, weather... If nature is the subject then it qualifies.
- There is no limit on the number of pictures that can be submitted. The only proviso is that the photographer must be under 18 when they took the picture. Children and grandchildren of members and non-members alike are all welcome to enter, all we ask for is a declaration by a responsible adult that the picture is entirely the work of an under 18 photographer.
- All types of camera are allowed. From smart phones and compact cameras to high end equipment. All modern devices are capable of taking great pictures, and it is the creative process that counts, not the method of capture.
- All images must be actual photographs - some editing and post processing is fine, but AI images and elements are not allowed. Equally, if preferred then it is absolutely fine to submit pictures exactly as they are taken. Emma is looking for images that evoke an emotional reaction, not necessarily those that demonstrate advanced technical skills.
- The competition will run throughout the winter with the winner being announced in our next newsletter. This will effectively be from around Mid November till the end of February 2025.
- Please do not submit entries via Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp or other social media. These can affect and reduce image quality and we want to ensure we get the best possible version of your pictures. Links in the panel to the left will lead you to the correct submission routes. We will also share these on our website and social media feeds so you can click online links if you prefer.
- The winner will receive a print of their winning entry on a framed canvas, up to 60 X 80 cm (24" X 32" approx.) in size. Actual size and proportions will depend on the size of image submitted, so please do send the biggest version you can. Please note that no alternative prize will be offered.
- The Mendip Society will publish the winning photograph in this newsletter and also on social media, website etc. We may also use other entries in a similar way. We would like to publish a photograph of the winner receiving their prize, but as they are very likely to be under 18, we will seek approval of their parent or guardian to do so.

To fill in an entry form, and to read the full terms and conditions. Type the bold text below into your preferred search engine:

<https://bit.ly/MSPics>

Or, scan this QR code with your phone.



A Presidents' View.



'Somewhat wet' is the phase that comes to mind at the moment! There seems no end to the amount of water coming from the sky and the consequence is more water on the land. I recently looked out from deer leap at water levels I would normally expect to see in January. There will be more for the moors when the Mendip Hills releases that estimated daily flow of 324 million litres of water from its underground sources. I would expect that 324 million litres is a very conservative estimate at the moment.

So onto all things Mendip Society and I hope some events and talks to bring a little cheer. Please support these events when ever you can, but life is a busy place and I know only too well the demands it brings. Following the survey concerning what the society members would like to see , I was delighted to meet up with Sandra Marsh from Chewton Mendip. Sandra's name was pulled from the hat following our survey, but I will let Mike explain things a little further, as I have a habit of going on a little too long and leaving nothing for others to say.

As this will be the run up to Christmas, I have been looking through my photo archive to find some thing suitable. Many of you will remember the Giles Cartoons and the book that was such a Christmas staple for many of us,(it wasn't Christmas without the Giles book). So it is from here that I have drawn some inspiration. Christmas in 'Giles land' was always white. There was always an amazing meal laid out for the extended family whilst Mother and two daughters slaved in the kitchen. Emaciated Vera took her pills in the corner and the boys fired off all sorts of weaponry whilst the Bruce the dog hid. Well no picture of the meal, but a Christmassy winter scene none the less as my card to you all.

So with that in mind can I wish you and your families a special time and hope that Christmas and the New Year bring you bring you happiness and joy. Thank you for all your support this year and please keep it coming for the next.

Les



THE MENDIP SOCIETY Registered Charity Number 262867 www.themendipsociety.org.uk

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For membership write to, 'The Cottage, Harptree Hill, West Harptree, BS40 6EJ'.

For newsletter content and pictures, e-mail: themendipsociety.photos@gmail.com