

# Mendip

the  
**mendip**  
society

*Caring for the Mendip Hills*

The Newsletter of The Mendip Society

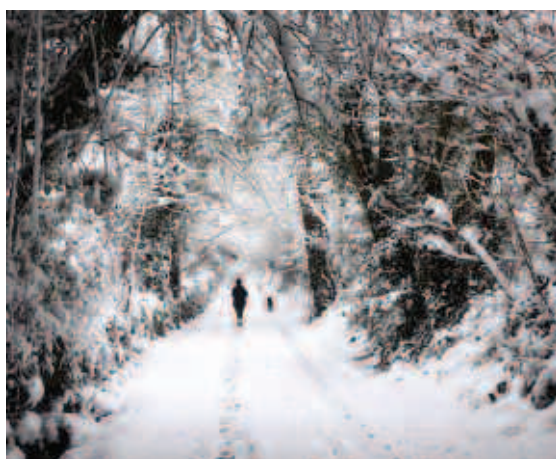
Issue No. 155 • March 2019



## *In this issue*

**Read all about holistic sheep, restored fingerposts, litter picked up and grants awarded, ecobricks and a personal view of planning.**

**What's happening in the Society's Reserves? See what the Society can offer you – and also what you could do for the Society.**

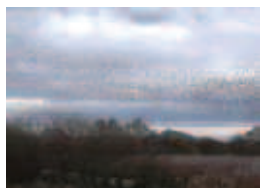


## **THE MENDIP SOCIETY** **Annual General Meeting 2019**

This years AGM will be held on Friday 29th March at 7pm. The venue is at Wookey Hole Resort in the village of Wookey Hole. All the paper work is inside this newsletter, just pull out the centre fold and bring it along to the meeting. All welcome.

**MONDAY 3<sup>RD</sup> DECEMBER****SPECIAL INTEREST VISIT – A GUIDED WINTER WALK TO RSPB HAM WALL RESERVE**

arranged by Judy Newberry, who writes:



We had a fully booked outing, with excellent RSPB guides, who explained the growth and national importance of Ham Wall and really helped us with ID; a wide variety of winter birds were seen. The number of starlings was not as high as they can be later in the season but nevertheless an impressive 100,000 or so. The starlings were restless, settling and then rising again moving over the reserve in a black swarm. It was very impressive especially for those who hadn't seen the murmuration before. It was well worth it.

**TUESDAY 11<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER****“A FEAST OF FEATHERS” – by Terry Gifford and Stephen Moss**

Members enjoyed the completely different format for our meeting with readings by both authors from their books. REMEMBER – Terry offers his book through our Newsletter for the discounted price of £8.50 (including p&p) of which £2.00 from each sale goes to Somerset Air Ambulance. Just send a cheque, with your name and address, to Terry Gifford, Ben Knowle Farmhouse, Castle Lane, Wookey, BA5 1NL.

**SATURDAY 5<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2019****THE SOCIETY WASSAIL AT THE VILLAGE OF WORTH**

After organising the Wassail last year Terry Gifford had an abundant crop of apples, so it is little wonder that this January he again wanted the Mendip Society to exorcise the evil spirits and witches from his apple trees.

On the cold but clear 12th night we gathered in the car park at the Pheasant Inn in Worth. Our Chairman Richard Frost, decorated with flashing lights, acted as traffic and parking officer whilst the Barley Rye Choir and the Somerset Morris dancers gathered themselves and tried to keep warm. After President Les Davies introduced the activities of the evening, pieces of Judith Tranter's apple cake were passed around to find the lucky person who had a bean in their cake as they were to be crowned the Wassail Queen. At this stage things faltered for a while as nobody appeared to have found the bean. Last year the bean was dark and hard, but as this years was white and soft it was not surprising that Vanessa Pateman had swallowed it. She was however crowned Queen. The Choir and Morris Dancers entertained and persuaded the watching group to sing and finally to leap around to music whilst brandishing and banging together dangerous, intimidating sticks.



Everybody survived and proceeded to the apple trees for the Wassail. A piece of toast soaked in cider was hung on the tree to give thanksgiving for the previous harvest. Cider was poured around the base to toast the tree whilst a three handled mug of cider was passed around. It was an excellent brew made from the previous years apples from these very trees. At this point everybody made as much noise as possible to scare away the evil spirits. This cacophony culminated in Richard discharging his gun to disperse any lingering witches.

Leaving the trees to be fruitful we returned to the Inn for the Mummers play and supper. With some negotiation actors were selected for the play and the action culminated in the death of St George. It is at this point that a doctor usually appears and restores him to life. This year however there was no doctor in the house so the position was ably filled by a member of the clergy, the Rev. Karen Spray, who skilfully resurrected the deceased St George.

At the end of these festivities a vote of thanks was given and a buffet supper followed. Returning to our homes we had the impression of a well run event that seemed much smoother than last year. **Well done and thank you Terry.** written by Roger and Lynn Penniceard

**AND NOW, TO LOOK FORWARD TO –****WEDNESDAY 27<sup>TH</sup> MARCH****SURVIVING THE LAST ICE AGE – A MENDIP PERSPECTIVE****A TALK IN HENTON CHURCH, NR. WELLS 7PM for 7.30PM**

Professor Danielle Shreve, of Royal Holloway University of London, will present the latest evidence from a new cave sequence in Ebbor Gorge which is shedding new light on how different species responded to abrupt climate change. Parking in the road outside; wine and soft drinks. tickets £5 on the door, contact [jennycrossley@mbzonline.net](mailto:jennycrossley@mbzonline.net).

Christchurch, Henton is planning to turn itself into more of a multi use space, it will cost £200,000 to do so, so the proceeds of this evening will start the ball rolling by going to the re-ordering fund. For ffi ring Terry on 01749 679128.

**THE TALK –** During the last Ice Age, exceptional rapid climatic and environmental changes led to a major reorganisation of the fauna and people of northwestern Europe, including range shifts, new adaptations and extinctions. Danielle Schreve, Professor of Quaternary Science at Royal Holloway University of London, will present the latest evidence from a new cave sequence in Ebbor Gorge, which is shedding significant new light on how different species responded to abrupt climate change and the implications for early human occupation.



**FRIDAY 29<sup>TH</sup> MARCH****THE SOCIETY AGM – 7PM**

The venue is the Wookey Hole Community Centre, parking in the main car park of the Wookey Hole Caves Resort. All the papers you need for the meeting are on the centre 4 pages of this newsletter – just pull them out and bring them with you.

**SATURDAY 30<sup>TH</sup> MARCH****SOMERSET ARCHAEOLOGICAL & NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY –****The 2019 ANNUAL ARCHAEOLOGY DAY****Bite Club: Reconstructing palaeo-diets in Ice Age carnivores**

At Wells and Mendip Museum **10am start with coffee – 4pm**

The morning will feature a panel of speakers on topical subjects and recent discoveries in the county, After lunch the keynote speaker, Prof **Danielle Schreve, Professor of Quaternary Science and Director of the Centre for Quaternary Research Royal Holloway University of London** will talk about her research on changing carnivore palaeodiets and hunting behaviour, including material from the Mendip Hills in the SANHS collections.

Admission: £15.00 (including tea and coffee). Tickets available on the door or in advance from SANHS online shop [www.sanhs.org.uk](http://www.sanhs.org.uk). ffi email [office@sanhs.org](mailto:office@sanhs.org) Tel: 01823 272429. (Please note, you are welcome to attend just the afternoon session only, but the price remains the same.)

**FRIDAY 5<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2019****“MENDIPITY” – THE PRESIDENT’S QUIZ – 7.00PM**

at the Burrington Inn. We’ve had The Presidents’ Dinner & the Presidents’ Walk previously, now in 2019 Les will be Quizmaster of ‘Mendipity’ – a test of your knowledge of this lovely area of ours, the serious, unusual, funny, downright odd and ‘warts & all’ things in life on Mendip. . Jason at the Inn will provide a tasty ‘ploughman’s supper’ at half time; teams of 4 or 6 pre-entered, or join one on the day. £10pp incl. ploughman’s; puds & drinks at the bar. Just come for the fun of it. We need to know numbers for the Burrington to arrange everything so please book on 01275 874284 / email [judith.tranter1@btinternet.com](mailto:judith.tranter1@btinternet.com)

**SATURDAY 13<sup>TH</sup> APRIL****A CHARCOALMAKING AND DRAWING DAY IN TANIA’S WOOD NATURE RESERVE, UBLEY –****10am – 2pm , later if you get very involved.**

PART 1 - With our charcoal maker, Chris Claxton, we will explore the leisurely process of producing charcoal in a small wood like ours, as part of its sustainable management system, from the loading and firing of a kiln to the bagging up of the end product to take home with you. One type of charcoal produced will be made from willow sticks and will be used in PART 2 of the day. Interwoven with the above will be a master-class in drawing with charcoal. With talented artist and tutor, Dr. John Steers to help we can freely experiment with drawing what we see around us, with the charcoal produced in our kiln. No need to say “but I can’t draw”, John will advise and encourage and we will be successful.

Tania’s Wood, Woodbridge Farm, Bickfield Lane , Ubley. BS40 6PX. Open to all, max. of 15 places, which need to be booked. Shelter, parking and toilet facilities on site; hot soup and rolls for lunch and drinks, and all materials will be provided in the cost of £10pp. A small collapsible camping type chair would be most useful. We can run with April showers but not deluges – directions, times and other details will be sent on booking by ringing 01275 874284 or email [judith.tranter1@btinternet.com](mailto:judith.tranter1@btinternet.com)

**SUNDAY 26<sup>TH</sup> MAY****FAMILY WILD DAY OUT AND PICNIC IN SLADER’S LEIGH NATURE RESERVE**

Join us for a free event for the family in our Local Nature Reserve, Slader’s Leigh, a day filled with bug and reptile spotting, land art, den building, badge & mask making and more. There will be guided trips through the Shute Shelve Tunnel, rock displays and – the orchids will be out in all their glory. Slader’s Leigh is the perfect spot for a picnic where the little ones can enjoy some freedom to play & climb a tree. Refreshments, shelter from the sun, should we be so lucky, and toilet facilities will all be available. All activities are free, but donations will be welcomed.



This event will be run by the Mendip Hills AONB staff, volunteers and Young Rangers, by kind permission of The Mendip Society. **Time 11am -3pm. Weather permitting.** Contact 01275 874284 / 01761 462338, or visit our website:

This event is free but booking is essential on [www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/events](http://www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/events) .

**SATURDAY 15<sup>TH</sup> JUNE****A SOCIETY OPEN DAY IN WESTBURY QUARRY**

OPEN TO ALL 10am -4pm

By kind permission of the quarry owner and with the help of society member Nigel Taylor, we have a Society 'Family Open Day' in Westbury Quarry, which is not normally open to the public. The quarry is a protected wildlife site, with areas of rocks and wild flower meadows, dry stone walls and a huge pond, all teeming with wildlife; come and explore with the help of people who know the area well. Lots of things for the children to make and do, refreshments available. The paths around the quarry are accessible for wheelchairs. **NEW this year** – our dry stone walling group will be working in the meadow



above the quarry, Nigel will lead groups to see the prolific orchid displays, & for those interested, to see how walling is done (and maybe even try your hand at this skill so important in our area?).

Parking in car park on site, off Stancombe Lane, above the village of Westbury Sub Mendip, BA5 1HT.

**THURSDAY 20<sup>TH</sup> JUNE****A VISIT TO GULLY CAVE, EBBOR GORGE – 10.30AM**

We are invited to re-visit the cave on the hillside above Ebbor Gorge where the team from the Royal Holloway, University of London, is conducting the summer dig. On our last visit we were shown the piece of jaw bone, with teeth in situ, of the baby woolly rhino which had just been found. Maybe this year- traces of its mother?

Professor Danielle Schreve sent a photo of the find, once cleaned up, with this explanation for the holes (which your editor thought might have given it toothache!).

*"The holes in the teeth are entirely normal and in fact, give the woolly rhino its Latin name, Coelodonta: coelo= hollow, donta= tooth. What the species has done is to evolve a way of combating the effects of eating abrasive grasses (which contain a lot of silica) on their teeth, by increasing the amount of resistant enamel present. Mammoths do a similar thing over time, by increasing the number of enamel 'plates' or strips in their molars. In the case of woolly rhinos, they evolved small holes edged with enamel, a different way of solving the same problem. It's all down to adaptation to colder climates with open vegetation. Our rhino from Gully Cave is only a baby (less than two years and still suckling) but the milk teeth closely resemble those of the adults, just as ours do"*



Meet in the N.T. car park for Ebbor Gorge at grid ref. 521 485 (Expl.map 141) at 10.30am to walk up to the cave; the path is quite steep, but the steps and the end bit to the cave have been improved. (Anyone who wants to take part but is worried about holding up the group, can walk up with me (I'm slow!), the others will have a competent leader in charge.) Max no. 20, Book by ringing Judith 01275 874284/ e-mail [judith.tranter1@btinternet.com](mailto:judith.tranter1@btinternet.com)

**FRIDAY 26<sup>TH</sup> JULY****A SPECIAL INTEREST GUIDED WALK IN STOCKHILL WOODS & THE MINERIES TO SEE/HEAR NIGHT JARS ON MENDIP – 8.30PM-LATE**

*A beautifully camouflaged night jar.*

This evening walk will be lead by our local naturalist Chris Sperring to hear and hopefully see these elusive birds that nest on the Mendips in Summer.

MEET STOCKHILL WOOD car park 8.30pm- (until possibly 10.30pm) GRID REF ST 554514 BA5 3AS (nearest postcode)

Be prepared to walk through the woods and the Mineries. Insect repellent and suitable clothing/footwear essential – nothing squeaky or rustling. Numbers limited so please book online using the RESERVE BUTTON. Please leave a contact number in case of bad weather; cost £4pp. No dogs please. Judy 01749 672196 (mobile on the day only 07443639048)





## HOLISTIC PLANNED GRAZING

### Managing Sheep on Burrington Ham –

By Jen Hunter and Andy Wear of Fernhill Farm

As many of the regular walkers may remember, autumn 2018 saw the first appearance of sheep on the top of Burrington Hams. These are Andrew Wear's flock of Romney X Shetland lambs that are considered a multipurpose type of sheep growing fine colourful fleeces, nutrient dense meat products and efficient land management tools. This land is limestone grassland that has not seen sheep for a great many years and with scrub encroachment at peak levels, sheep have been assigned the task of reducing the growth levels of this scrub, particularly the Bracken and Ragwort that are gaining in dominance.

Holistic Planned Grazing is a systematic procedure that is designed to mimic the natural grazing patterns of herbivores where large numbers would graze in density for safety over a short period of time before moving onto the next clean green pasture. We can recreate this animal impact by the use of electric fences and large sheep flocks, working sheep dogs and a quad bike with a shepherd.

Rest and recovery are considered more essential than grazing periods as grass species benefit from having their foliage removed by a grazing animal, being trampled to expose their younger shoots and having their seeds dispersed and pushed



into the soil with hooves. It is important to remember that plants can only give as much as they receive in terms of nutrients and need time to allow young seeds to produce re-growth. Anything less than this is not a regenerative system and slowly the pastures change, and single species dominance or desertification can occur.

This is an entirely different concept to set-stocking under which the cows are currently managed and the effects of the introduction of sheep and a controlled grazing pattern will be closely monitored. If you wish to get involved, Holistic Management requires the regular ecological monitoring of the land and we welcome volunteers to help us gather information about species of plant, animal and insect, ground cover, water and mineral cycles. Please contact Andy or Jen for more details [jen@fernhill-farm.co.uk](mailto:jen@fernhill-farm.co.uk)

Andy and Jen retrained in Holistic Management with the Alan Savory Institute in 2017 under the UK organisation 3LM after discovering Holistic Planned Grazing in South America. The Multipurpose Merino in

Patagonia is a meat producing wool sheep and together with the effects of compounded fertiliser, moisture, hooves on the land and regular rest, they are bringing the soil and natures' seed bed back to life.

"Farmers were actively returning desert into lush green pastures with the use of large flocks of sheep and fences whilst growing meat and wool, and I recognized that we are doing the same here in the UK", says Jen Hunter. Andy is committed to helping our soils sequester more carbon when producing grass fed meats that will in turn enable us to rethink meat as nutritional food medicine. The Savory Institute 'Land to Market' concept has already started with our 'Bristol Cloth' using fleeces which are holistically grazed all around the Mendip Hills. We confidently aspire to all those who visit and regularly walk the Mendips to support us with their cooperation for the safety of the grazing sheep from uncontrolled dog behaviours, thus helping build evidence that healthy soil is the future".

**ED: This is such an exciting development on the Mendip Hills I will be exploring it further for the next newsletter; if like me, you wanted to delve into the background references Jen makes in the article, here are the websites to use. And it's all going on in our midst! [www.savory.global/](http://www.savory.global/) ; [www.bristoltextilequarter.co.uk](http://www.bristoltextilequarter.co.uk); [www.botanicalinks.com](http://www.botanicalinks.com) [www.bristolweavingmill.co.uk](http://www.bristolweavingmill.co.uk) ; [www.fernhillfibre.co.uk](http://www.fernhillfibre.co.uk) If any members would like to help with the monitoring of the process perhaps a regular group/walk could be arranged – do contact us.**

## 'A ROAD IS A LINEAR STRIP OF LAND THAT ATTRACTS LITTER'\* THE PROBLEM OF LITTER – AND ONE SOLUTION

In his article in last year's March newsletter, Peter Janes wrote a fierce attack on people who deliberately litter the countryside because they can't be bothered to dispose of it in the normal manner, (also putting forward some solutions to the epidemic). He ended with this paragraph: -

*"In the meantime people who care can help by reporting fly tipped rubbish to the appropriate council (they all have provision on their web sites) and by picking up litter around their own locality or when out walking. Many individuals already do this but if any members would like to take part in a Mendip Society litter picking group (there used to be one) please contact the Membership Secretary".*

Well, we have to tell you that the Committee has tried several times to plan a big litter pick along the lines of the very efficient one on the Strawberry Line several years ago, but without success, the reason being that groups of people are no longer considered safe on the roads, even on the relative emptiness of the Mendips and are very strongly discouraged from trying to do so. We doubt very much whether our normal, comprehensive volunteer insurance cover would do just that for us in this scenario.

SO – what to do?

As the picture shows this is what Peter is doing. At the time I asked him for a picture, the snow had covered up most of the litter; he sent me one of him returned from a dog walk one morning with a bag of rubbish he collected along the way. He said it must have been deposited recently as it was in one heap on top of the snow (it looked as if someone had cleared their car of crisp bags and plastic bottles). He thinks it's not an exciting picture but the message is clear. "You don't need



to go out especially to pick litter, just take a bag and some old gloves when out for a walk, with or without dog, and be sensible about what you pick up and where.

At the Society Wassail in Worth I asked people what they thought about how to deal with litter around us, and exactly the same solution was suggested by Richard Ivens, that well known walks leader from Backwell. He told me

*"I do about half a mile in either direction from the house, along Backwell Common and Backwell Bow. I go every few weeks, when it is starting to be noticeably bad; as my road is also a Sustrans cycleway and popular quiet road for walking, it attracts a lot of litter, especially cans. I put the bag in my black bin. I wish more people would take responsibility for litter in their own neighbourhoods. With*

*Local Authority budgets stretched as they are at the moment, nobody else is going to get this job done if we don't do it ourselves."*

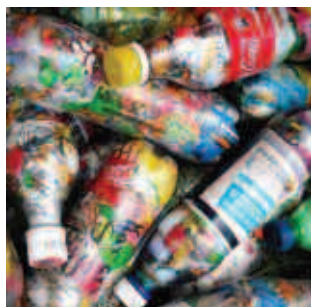


The general consensus was that most people thought it something they could, or would do, around their own village, **SO** – start a trend, a tradition, a flood eventually, of individuals (or go in pairs) choosing a route near, or in, your village, nearby wood, field or hill and walk it as often as you can or is necessary, with or without a dog (borrow one if you really need an excuse) carry a bag, gloves and a litter pick if you have one like Richard above. Get someone to take a picture of you litter picking and email it into me and I will shout it from the rooftops – this is what our society members are doing for their countryside – why not join them?

**Result? – Others join in!**

**JUST FOR INTEREST** – there is concern about what to do with mounting unrecyclable materials, for example single use plastic bottles and packaging (the crisp packets and bottles Peter picked up). BUT now – here's an idea which is growing. 'Take a two-litre plastic drinks bottle, a heap of plastic bags, crisp packets and other non-biodegradable waste (roughly one week's worth of plastic waste), and a stick. Pack the bottle full of the waste materials, packing it as tightly as you can, using the stick.

That's it. You have an **EcoBrick**.



DEF. An ecobrick is a **plastic bottle** packed with **plastic** to a set density to create a reusable building block. Ecobricks are used to make modular furniture, garden spaces and full-scale buildings such as schools and **houses**. There are groups making and collecting, and using eco bricks, all over the world – including in Weston-s-Mare and Bristol. Just put 'eco bricks into

Google, you will be amazed to see what is being done.

*\*Definition of 'A Road' by Richard Ivens.*



# A.G.M. MARCH 29TH 2019

## WOOKEY HOLE COMMUNITY HALL

To be held at 7.00pm prompt

### AGENDA – Welcome by Les Davies MBE Mendip Society President

1. Apologies received. Minutes of the previous meeting on March 30<sup>th</sup> 2018, adoption of Minutes. Matters arising.
2. Chairman's welcome and report.
3. Annual report and adoption. (not in the newsletter).
4. Reports – Reserves; Membership, Rights of Way, Walks Organiser, Webmaster, (all in the newsletter)
5. Presentation and adoption of the accounts for 2018 (copies available)
6. Election of Officers – President takes the Chair.  
Nomination and election of the Prime Officers; Election of other members of the Committee, including any new nominations or ratifications, (note all but one existing members of the committee are willing to stand again for election).
7. A.O.B. from the Chair or from the floor.
8. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

TEA AND CAKE – donations welcomed.

**And to follow –  
a talk by our guest  
speaker, Mr. Gerry  
Cottle, owner of the  
Wookey Hole  
Resort, who will tell  
us about all things  
'circus and caves'.**



The Bristol Naturalists' Society is very kindly offering us **free** copies of their special edition publication of "The Mendip Hills". Richard Ashley, a member of both societies, will bring them to the AGM, for any member who would like one – **so come and get your free copy on March 29th 2019**

If any member wishes to stand for election to the Committee in any capacity including that of Chair, Secretary or Treasurer, then a written proposal must be received by me before the start of the meeting. This must state the name of the proposer and the nominee and be signed by both, the nominee also stating that he or she is willing to stand. It can be previously sent by an email [judith.tranter1@btinternet.com](mailto:judith.tranter1@btinternet.com) or by post (address on page 16) but an original copy must also be available for the records on the night.

**Note:** Because the Committee is quite small in number, it means that most of us fill more than one position; it would greatly help us to have a volunteer to take the minutes at our meetings, which only number a maximum of 6 per year. Please talk to Judith at tea & cake time if you think you might be able to help us, we really don't bite.

*Judith Tranter: Secretary of the Society.*

## MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE MENDIP SOCIETY ON FRIDAY 23RD MARCH 2018 IN DRAYCOTT HALL 6.30PM. (slightly abbreviated because of lack of space)

WELCOME by the President Les Davies MBE

**Apologies** received: - Sue Pritchard; Tim Raines; David Shears; Richard & Gill Dyson; Danielle Schreve; Gill Davies; John Moore; Pat Hicks; Judith Van der Meulin; Janet & Pete Hellier.

**Minutes** of the AGM held on March 31st 2017. As no comments were raised they were taken as read and adopted as accurate, proposer Clive Constance, seconded Peter Burchill.

**Chairman's Welcome and Report** Richard Frost welcomed society members, the number of which had risen, albeit by only a couple, thanks to increased media coverage especially from the Mendip Times, with thanks to Steve Eggington.

- The winter talks programme started well with a capacity audience for 'Steep Holm' and two major companies were now Corporate Members.
- A big problem is the success of our walks with increased numbers causing distress to some walks leaders & difficulty parking; possible solutions - a booking system with limited nos., members only, more leaders, varied venues, and days eg. Sundays, week days, and not always afternoons.
- Congratulations given to member Nigel Taylor, now Councillor Taylor who was elected as Chairman of the AONB Strategic Partnership at their meeting last month
- Summary of the 'big events' with which the Society has been involved
- The increased importance of the planning process in our area close to the AONB, working with a united front with the AONB, the CPRE etc, + introducing newest planning scrutiniser Katie Lewis.
- Litter is also a big problem, to be tackled with partners like the AONB, CPRE, N.T. and SWT.
- Thanks to his 'team' for their work over the past year and recommended his report to members.

**Annual Report of the Secretary** A shortened version read by Judith Tranter, -. Points covered:-

- Society had a good year, although the committee is still small and seeking more members.
- The new Data Protection laws are being put in place by Peter Janes our Data Officer.
- We are working within Partnerships with other groups to achieve more than we could on our own – the AONB, Nat. Trust, Somerset Wildlife, The Som. Earth Science Centre, Blagdon Primary School.
- Tania's Wood Reserve has opened its doors to the Forest School Organisation.
- The Heritage Grant Scheme is now open for applications from Mendip groups.
- Feedback from members is welcome from events on the talks and visits programme.
- The social side of the programme went well with a New Year gathering, an energetic Wassail, and a convivial summer evening at Charterhouse, with friends Barley Rye.
- The two Nature Reserves are being well looked after with the help of the AONB Volunteers, Slader's Leigh is doing a grand job of being a 'tunnel by-pass' for the Strawberry Line,
- We do appeal for any member with time & the urge, to see how they can help the Society do its work.

**Treasurer's Report.** The Treasurer presented the Income & Expenditure A/c for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> Dec. 2017 and the Balance Sheet as of that date. The Society has covered all its cost this year, a higher postage bill, offset by lower website costs. One question re the Heritage fund accumulated amount was asked, the treasurer said that this a/c was set up in the past only be used for certain applications; we are actively open for grant applications, there are 2 current ones, we hope to reduce the total capital fund somewhat this year.

**The adoption of the accounts** proposed by Clive Constance, seconded by Martin Fewing.

**Appointment of Auditor** The Treasurer was sorry to report the death, reported in the August 2017 newsletter, of our auditor of many years, Don Walter; we record here our grateful thanks for his long association and service with the Society in so many ways. She recommended the appointment of David Woodliffe, a qualified Independent Examiner. This was carried unanimously by a show of hands.

**Election of Officers** The President took the Chair for this part of the meeting.

1. Election of Prime Officers – The Chairman, Treasurer and the Secretary. There were no other nominations and all were willing to stand again, all three were proposed by Nigel Taylor and seconded by Annie Eggington and duly re-elected.
2. The election of the other members of the Committee. No other nominations had been received, all serving committee members were willing to stand and the Chair offered an en-mass election. (Clive Constance, Pat Farrant, Peter Janes, John Moore), proposed by Denise Poole, seconded by Richard Ivens; all were re-elected. Richard Frost then resumed the Chair.

**The Walks Programme** by Peter Janes (himself a leader and a Walks organiser). The Chairman had touched on the problem of large numbers of walkers but Peter wanted to clarify why this is a problem for the leaders, and here he thanked John Moore and the walks leaders for their voluntary work.

He first set out the reasons why the society offers walks –its aims to encourage people to enjoy and learn about the Mendip Hills & to publicise the Society and encourage others to join. Large numbers slow down the pace by the time taken to go through gates or climb stiles, the back never catches up with the front, people cannot hear any information the leader gives out en route, and parking at the start area is often difficult.

The suggestions of pre-booking, who would do this; do non- restrict to members – do visitors really make much difference? Splitting into 2 groups on one walk or having different days, all have disadvantages but something must be done. The President closed this discussion with the suggestion that a small group of involved people should meet to decide on the best solution and would work with the leaders to implement it.



**A.O.B.** The Chairman asked if there was any other business.

- He was asked if there had been any outcome from the proposal from the floor at the last AGM and any progress made with the taking down of the previous website. Richard said that we had made a lot of progress up the Google list of sites & it would help if everyone logged in once a day, we would soon be at the top of the list. To get it taken down is a lengthy, legal and expensive process and the Committee had decided to let it run itself out of business and had not wanted to air our 'dirty linen' in public and besmirch the Society name, it would solve itself in the end.
- Anne Bodley said many members thought that a 6.30pm start had been too early; she was assured that it had been already realised and that next year the meeting would start somewhat later.

**Date of the next Annual General Meeting:** The Chairman proposed the date of Friday 29<sup>th</sup> March 2019 – he was informed by several from the floor that this was also the date of 'Brexit', although no-one could say whether it would make any difference to our A.G.M.!

**Refreshments** were then served; thanks to Sue Ivens for delicious donated cake and biscuits, and to all those serving & washing up after. Steve Eggington then gave a most interesting and humorous talk on his life in journalism and on the decision to start a Country Magazine with his colleague Mark Adler ten years ago. We just didn't know who we had in our midst editing 'The Mendip Times' – but we do now! He was thanked by President Les Davies and Richard Frost closed the meeting at 9pm.

## REPORTS FOR THE MEETING ON 29th MARCH 2019

### From the Chairman

A satisfactory year full of the usual selection of walks, talks and activities in both Reserves, all of which continue to be popular with both members and visitors.

Thanks to all those who have worked hard behind the scenes to ensure all this takes place without any apparent effort! Our involvement in the Community continues with our continued support of the Mendip Rocks Festival and the Outdoor Festival which ensures that a large number of people, especially the young appreciate the unique surroundings in which we live and work.

We continue to play an important role within the A.O.N.B. Partnership, which has grown in stature under the new leadership of Nigel Taylor and Jim Hardcastle.

A proposed change of name for all AONBs to that of 'National Landscapes' could be on the agenda for next year meaning our area is well on the way to becoming a National Treasure- something we have all known for some time. Such a move can only inspire further natural development and help drive the rural economy to the benefit of all who live and work on, and visit the Hills. The development in Burrington Combe by Yeo Valley sounds exciting and I believe that their plans for the site will give much needed impetus to controlled growth bringing long term benefits to the Hills.

Our own plans for the future include a bold idea to improve access and knowledge of the area known as Decoy City on Blackdown. This whole site is slowly vanishing under spreading vegetation despite the fact that a great many people are interested in its history. Such a project can only improve our standing and raise our profile locally, and be of much interest to residents and visitors alike.

I thank both the Membership and the Committee for the continued support received. *Richard Frost.*

### Membership

The table shows memberships in February over recent years. As members are given until the end of March to renew, the totals include those whose renewals were / are outstanding (there will be a reminder inserted into your copy if you have not yet renewed for 2019).

	Feb 2015	Feb 2016	Feb 2017	Feb 2018	Feb 2019	Subscription cost
Single 60 +	204	205	189	210	222	£15
Joint / family	122	117	112	117	114	£25
Single under 60	38	41	47	45	31	£18
Life members	18	17	16	16	16	60+ £375 < 60 £500
Small business	2	2	1	0	0	£50
Large business	0	0	1	2	2	£100
<b>Total</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>385</b>	
Subscriptions paid						
as at 29 <sup>th</sup> Jan 2019	151	157	325	325	238	
Subscriptions unpaid	233	225	41	65	147	

A larger proportion of members have not yet renewed, so maybe putting the reminder in the last newsletter was less prominent than an inserted slip. However, it looks as if membership may fall slightly on last year. Word of mouth is the best ways of attracting new members so please encourage family and friends to join.

If you pay by standing order please ensure that it is for the correct amount (shown in the last column of the table).

Subscription rates were last increased in 2015 since when costs, particularly postage, have increased significantly. It is therefore likely that a further increase will be needed in 2020. To reduce postage costs we encourage you to receive the newsletter electronically which also means that you would receive it a few days earlier. So far 21 members have opted for electronic copies.

About 70% of members have signed up for gift aid. Gift aid allows the Society (as a charity) to claim an extra 20% of the value of your subscription from the Government. This is at no cost to you but you must pay sufficient UK income tax or capital gains tax in the current tax year to cover the sum reclaimed by the Society. A higher rate tax payer can claim tax relief (the difference between basic and higher rate) on sums given as gift aid, see [www.gov.uk/donating-to-charity/gift-aid](http://www.gov.uk/donating-to-charity/gift-aid). If you wish to complete a gift aid mandate or need to cancel one, please contact the Membership Secretary.

*Peter Janes – Feb 2019*

## The Mendip Society Website

The new website '[themendipsociety.org.uk](http://themendipsociety.org.uk)' has now been running for 2 years. It is aimed at our members and includes the future programme of events, talks and walks and a 'Gallery' of photos from recent events. It mostly replicates the paper programme distributed to all members. However, new events including walks have been added (and been well attended) and changes to events are put on the website, sometimes at short notice. So members are strongly advised to refer to the website regularly.

The website gets about 200 hits per month and has now risen to the top of 'Mendip Society' searches in several 'search engines'. The old website is unfortunately still available but its nuisance value is steadily diminishing.

John Moore 11th Feb 2019

## Rights of Way

During the past year, we have been consulted on nine proposed Orders for the Modification of the Definitive Map of Public Rights of Way. Minor footpath diversions in Baltonsborough, North Wootton, Pylle, St Cuthbert Out and Whately Parishes were supported, together with a minor bridleway diversion in Trudoxhill Parish.

### CHURCHILL PARISH

No objection was raised to the diversion of footpaths AX 14/24 & 14/26, crossing the Churchill School complex at Churchill Green.

The diversions were required to help ensure the safety of pupils and to enable public access over the school site to be better managed.

### CRANMORE & DOULTING PARISHES

A proposal to divert footpaths SM 7/90 and SM 18/21 (crossing the Parish boundary) at the extensive Moons Hill Quarry was supported. The diversion would result in a safer route for pedestrians away from the quarry works, as well as enabling the quarry operators to create three new overburden tips on their land (planning permission for these was granted in April, 2018).

### STREET PARISH

The proposed diversion of parts of footpaths WS 18/24 & WS 18/27, currently running through the built-up area of the Millfield School complex in Street, was supported. Although taking a longer route, the diversion would result in improved security and privacy for the School, whilst removing the possibility of conflict between path users and the school community.

### ISSUES ARISING FROM OUR REPORT TO THE 2018 A.G.M.

1. The major footpath diversions proposed within the Thatchers complex at Sandford have been confirmed by North Somerset Council.
2. The diversion of footpath AX 29/78 at Roman Road, Sandford remains on hold, the Local Authority still awaiting proof of ownership of the land concerned.

### OTHER MATTERS DEALT WITH

1. AX 10/30 Burrington Lane/Rickford Lane. A Modification Order for the up-grading of this route to a Byway Open To All Traffic, originally submitted in January, 2005 by the Sedgemoor Byways & Bridleways Association has been resurrected. North Somerset has resolved not to make the Order and the applicant has appealed against this decision. A Public Inquiry is likely to be held in due course.
2. We objected to a planning application for the retention of a substantial surfaced access track utilising the line of footpath AX 29/30 and running between the A.38 at Hale and the Strawberry Line. The track, and modified access to the A.38, was granted temporary planning consent as part of the installation of a major supply pipeline by Bristol Water, subject to its removal and the re-instatement of the land at the end of the contract. Consent for the retention has now been refused.
3. We raised concerns over the obstruction and damage to footpath AX 29/26 as a result of works to fence off the ruins of Woodborough Mill and the inclusion of the site into the garden of Mill Pond Cottage. Following completion of the works, the footpath was made good and is in an acceptable state. – *Dave + Margaret Parker. Rights of Way Officers. 9th February, 2019.*

## The Mendip Society Walking Programme

Our walk leaders have supported a full and diverse programme of walks, which now include weekday & Sunday walks, throughout the year with a walk, or a special interest event including a walk virtually every week.

The walks have been well supported, and in all weathers too. The walk leaders are a huge asset to the Society and we should be very grateful for their dedication.

We have gained two new walk leaders in Rose Foote and Richard Sudworth and they are helping to maintain our walks programme, but we do need several more people to volunteer as leaders so that we can continue to put on a full programme so please give this some thought.

*Geoff Timms – Walks Coordinator*

## Financial Report for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018 (overview)

A brief overview of the Income and Expenditure account and the Balance Sheet for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018 - The Mendip Society achieved a Deficit of £466.47 (2017 £352.05 ) after payments from the heritage fund totalling £1,000 (2017 £1,575)

1. The reduction in profit was due to a ongoing legal dispute, actual costs to date and estimated future costs totalling £2,250

This was partially offset by

1. A reduction in grants from our Heritage fund due, to lack of requests

There are a couple of areas that show variations in income namely Talks/Events and Slader's Leigh / Tania's Wood but they also show corresponding changes in expenses. Marilyn Cattell - Treasurer



## RESERVES ROUNDUP FOR 2019

Newsletter space is again scarce so the report on Slader's Leigh and Tania's Wood Nature Reserves will be brief; however please ask any questions at the AGM, and see the photographs of both places displayed.

For both the wood and the flower meadow this past year has been a quiet time, focused mainly on basic maintenance, usually in preparation for an event to be held there, so they look their best. For our work days we are grateful for the help of the AONB volunteers, and the loan of various tools, however as a growing number are also Society members we can say we are an 'integrated group'. Slader's Leigh was prepared for the big event of the year in May, part of "Wellness Month" for the South West, through the SWT, and dozens of families enjoyed a real summer's day amongst the trees and flowers. In late August our President again kindly cut the meadow for us and a week later we had a raking and clearing up work day. This coming late summer we are planning to run a scything weekend to cut the meadow in the traditional way, before we lose the skill ourselves. Our first work day of 2019 will be on April 3<sup>rd</sup> when we will be planting a new hedge and we welcome all members who would like to join us, see the website for details.



Tania's Wood also saw its first work party in April when we cleared the debris of winter away in preparation for the start of Blagdon Primary Forest School beginning its first term there. The first years were chosen to be the first to try out our improvised shelter, storytelling circle with its tree trunk rounds for seats, composting loo, rope swings and lots of timber for making dens; at only 4-5 years old it was a great experience for them. They loved it and the school was extremely pleased with the result. With subsequent work days we also pleased our neighbours by clearing some huge ditches on our boundary so that water from land around flowed away once more. Several large trees, blown down in gales also had to be cleared and all this was extremely hard work

and our volunteers excelled themselves. The ground was also prepared for the two hedge laying training days run by Tina Bath and Chris Claxton in January this year, resulting in a long stretch of beautifully laid boundary line. It was note worthy this year that three of our beginners, all non-members were given their weekend training as Christmas presents! This has given me an idea for advertising both the hedge laying and our dry stone walling trainings, "encourage your friends and family to learn new countryside skills – and give them the means to do so as a present they can't refuse".

We don't have a single wall- dry stone or otherwise in either of our reserves so we had to borrow a venue for the walling weekend in August, and Chancellor's Farm did the job beautifully. It is part of our Society's aims to protect and enhance the characteristic features of the Mendip Hills and this we will be seeking to do by running teaching courses, which also benefit our own reserves as well.

The very hot dry summer months did a lot for our sunshine quota but some things were a casualty. In Tania's Wood, the whole place was so tinderbox dry we had to cancel a 'charcoal production day' for fear a stray spark would cause a catastrophe, and the holiday time Forest School couldn't do one of their favourite activities, lighting a camp fire with flints. The charcoal day has been re-scheduled for April. The flowers and trees in Slader's Leigh didn't seem to come to any harm but the pond completely dried out, (having no input source)- we just hope the newts, frogs and toads had all vacated it before this happened. The two ancient Small Leaved Limes revelled in the long heat wave, producing a few bunches of flowers setting seed. But the branches were too high up and far spread out to reach safely so we never knew if they were fertile; if subsequent years have several hot consecutive weeks then we will expect them to flower again. The path put down in the centre of the meadow, as part of the Bristol Water piping project tunnel by-pass, is slowly starting to re-colonise with clumps



of grass growing in from the edges, which are blurring nicely. It will be a boon in a really wet winter, preventing a slippery mud path spread over quite a large area.

Finally, as reported in the July '18 newsletter the Trustees signed the transfer deed for Tania' Wood and it became the legal property of the Mendip Society and we thank Glyn England's two daughters for carrying out his wishes through such a long process.

**Judith Tranter, Reserves Manager**

## A SIGN FOR THE TIMES – Mendip Fingerpost Restoration

by Mick Bush, AONB Mendip Hills work group volunteer (and of our Nature Reserves) and volunteer at the Wells & Mendip Museum

Over the past few years you may have noticed a quiet change in the lanes and byways of Mendip as you drive around. That rusty illegible finger post that you pass each day has been transformed into a pristine black and white signpost. Drive a bit further and the posts are rusty again. Drive on and the posts are freshly painted. What is going on?



*Rusty & dull & dirty Outside the Queen Vic, Priddy*



*Bright and clean, Nine Barrows Lane, Priddy*

The history of the finger post goes back to ancient wayside markers, crosses, standing stones and posts. With the growth of manufacturing in the eighteenth century and the need for better roads, turnpike trusts were established to upgrade the road network without using public funds. Turnpike trusts had to erect milestones and guideposts. Tall directional posts were in response to coachmen and wagon drivers' need to see the information without having to stop, get down and read the mile stones. These posts, unlike the stone and metal mile stones were of timber and none have survived.

As these turnpike trusts folded in the mid nineteenth century, the responsibility for maintaining roads fell to a succession of local authorities: Highway Boards, Rural and Urban District Councils and County Councils. With increased motor traffic and road speeds there was a need for new warning and direction signs. This led to a proliferation of signs from not only the council but also from cycling and motoring clubs, the A.A. and the R.A.C.

In 1903 responsibility for warning signs was handed to County Councils, but no guidance was given for the design for directional signs. This remained a local concern. The variation in early twentieth century finger post designs reflects the numerous iron foundry and engineering workshops across the county. In our area two such workshops were Albert Day of Mark and Sheldons of Wells.

In 1921 the Government Committee on Traffic Signs introduced a standard format for directional signs, they were to be painted white and the name of the county embossed on the post. From 1930 the posts were to be painted in black and white stripes.

During World War II, with the threat of invasion, the Ministry of Transport ordered the removal of all directional signs. In the lead up to the Normandy landings and the mobilisation of thousands of troops unfamiliar with the area the signs had to be hastily reinstated. It's thought many were damaged or lost. After the war Somerset County Council began a programme of renewing the finger posts. It seems that most of these post war signs were produced at Sheldons Foundry in Wells.

In the 1960s the Government decided to modernise and standardise road signs and introduced the road signage we are familiar with today. Local authorities were encouraged to remove all their finger posts. Most counties removed their finger posts, Somerset, along with Dorset, Sussex and Cumberland did not. As a result it is estimated that in historic Somerset there are around 2,000 finger posts still standing. Somerset has the widest distribution of surviving finger posts in the country.

Although these finger posts have been unofficial signs since the 1960's, S.C.C. had been maintaining them until the financial crash in 2008. As central government funding to local authorities was slashed so S.C.C. ceased to maintain them. It now falls to Parish Councils and community groups to mobilise volunteers and bid for funding.





Fortunately when the demand for new signs to be cast ceased in the 1960's a group of engineers and enthusiasts in the Wells area saved the moulds for the cast iron signs. Many of these are now at Somerset Forge in Easton near Wells in the care of the owner Tich Masters. He is able to make new arms and repair old ones and is very enthusiastic about the whole subject. Picture shows a repaired or newly made arm for Buckland St. Mary on his workbench.

So how can Society Members become involved in this county wide restoration project? The S.C.C. website "Somerset Finger Post Restoration Project" indicates that generally work should be done through the relevant Parish Council where the sign is located. Further, the posts should be treated as if conserving an old building. Work should be as light a touch as possible. If all that is needed is removing dirt by washing or removing

algae with oxygen bleach, then just leave it at that. The website goes on to give advice on pressure washing, removal of paint by hand, shot blasting and so on. Really damaged signs, broken arms etc. are the province of contractors like Somerset Forge.

I hope I've whetted your interest in this fascinating subject. Somerset and Mendip in particular, is one of the few regions in the whole country where these iconic signs can be so widely enjoyed by visitors and residents alike, and although many parish councils are actively pursuing restoration projects, there are still many villages and parishes where they seem to be slow in saving the historic signs. **Mick Bush**

**ED:** Mick tells me that it was David Walker, curator of Wells Museum, who told him about the Somerset Fingerpost website & he then produced a map of the location of all signs in the Mendip AONB. What an opportunity for a few of our members to form a village group and restore their own local finger post, even if it only involves cleaning it with soapy water. If it does need a bit of TLC we have our Heritage Fund for small grants to make it possible. Get the go-ahead from your Parish Council and send an email to our Grants Officer. [clive.constance@btinternet.com](mailto:clive.constance@btinternet.com).



Go to: <http://www.somerset.gov.uk/policies-and-plans/schemes-and-initiatives/somerset-fingerpost-restoration-project/> If you want to ask Mick anything I'll pass on any requests. And finally – if you're wondering how to find Jen and Andy at Fernhill Farm, (page 5) here's the signpost at the top of their road to show you the way! Now I think that needs cleaning up a bit, don't you?

## A CUT ABOVE THE ORDINARY – and one that saves time and effort

The Strawberry Line East group recently received a small grant from the Mendip Hills Fund to kick-start community scything in the Wells area. For nearly four years, we have looked after the County-owned shared-use path between Wells and the village of Dulcote. Towards the Dulcote end, the path was surrounded by about two acres of scrubland. In late 2016, copious amounts of brambles and elders were removed, and replaced with a more bio-diverse collection of native shrubs and trees, including dogwood, spindle, wayfaring tree, guelder rose, chestnut, lime, oak, birch, bird cherry and rare wild service trees.



In the process, we created open areas as potential wildflower meadows for the benefit of butterflies and other nectar-loving invertebrates. The question always was how to cut the grass in a sustainable and sensitive way. Inspired by the success of the annual scything cut at Slader's Leigh, and after useful and supportive conversations with the Mendip Society, we decided to apply for the money to buy six scythes to maintain path verges throughout the year, and cut several wildflower meadows in the summer. The grant will help us build a new community of scythers that goes beyond the Dulcote path; other charities, such as the Friends of Mendip Hospital Cemetery, have already expressed an interest in using the scythes as well. Our hope is to share the scythes and spread scything enthusiasm and expertise throughout the Wells area. **Richard Jones SLE group**

What a bank on which to have your first try of a scythe, Richard! We'll be over in the summer to help, scythes at the ready.

## TIME RUNNING OUT TO SAVE LOST WALKS

Have you ever tried to find the footpath which you knew was definitely there some years ago, but now seems to be no longer 'on the map'? It literally seems to have disappeared. It may be one of the thousands of historic footpaths that campaigners are trying to save before a government deadline extinguishes them for ever. Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, members of the public (that's you and me) must make the case before 2026 for historic footpaths and bridleways that are not marked on official maps.

This deadline is impossible, local authorities are either overwhelmed or just ignoring requests and there are more than 5000 applications waiting to be processed across England and Wales, according to a freedom of information request. The nations boast a network of 140,000 miles of paths and bridleways, and government estimates suggest a further 10,000 miles or 20,000 paths are unrecorded. The scheme 'Discovering Lost Ways' to record old rights of way was scrapped in 2008 because of the cost. These forgotten paths often linked better known public rights of way which are the pride and envy of the world. It benefits everyone to know exactly where they are allowed to be, they should be recorded but it doesn't look like it will be remotely possible by 2026. The 'Ramblers' charity and others are urging the environment secretary of the present government to postpone, or abolish, the 2026 deadline.

In the last newsletter we reported on the successful re-instatement of the Right of Way, part of the West Mendip Way behind the Webbington Hotel; this was as a result of the painstaking collection of historical 'proof' of its previous existence by the Compton Bishop PC, local residents and concerned users. However, the process is sometimes a form of 'competitive history'; landowners may then try to use the same or even different document proof to show that there was never a right of way in the first place. And then the local authority, (in what sometimes seems like 'at their leisure'), decide whom is right! - by the ED: *Have any of our walkers had experiences of this situation? – Please share them with us.*

### BANWELL SOCIETY OF ARCHAEOLOGY.

**Tim Raines** shares the programme of another society of which he is a member, for our members' interest. Mar 8th - Brian Wright: Beating the Bounds. April 12th - John Smith: Roman life around Banwell. May 10th – AGM, Members Night: "Bring a thing". June 14th - Pat Hase: My family and Jack the Ripper.

**We meet at Banwell Village Hall at 7.30pm – Visitors Welcome**

**Contact Maggie McCarthy on 01934 524628 / Margaret.mccarthy@aol.com**

### The Mendip Hills AONB and Adjacent Countryside is Under Attack – One Readers' View

Hardly a month goes by without submission of yet another Planning Application to construct still more urban housing developments.

Under Government pressure to build millions of houses nationwide, Sedgemoor District Council has produced a Local Plan, which will shortly be adopted. The Plan mirrors Government Policy and has Cheddar being expanded into a town. Encouraged by the Plan, developers have so far submitted planning applications for over 900 new urban dwellings in the countryside around Cheddar. Permission has been granted in respect of some of the developments; the remainder are pending. None have been refused.

The story is the same to the north of the Mendip Hills. The Local Authority proposes to build over 5000 urban style dwellings in Banwell, Winscombe, Sandford and Churchill. Plans are also afoot to double the size of Bristol Airport.

The impact on the Mendip Hills AONB will be significant and damaging. Apart from the obvious negative visual impact, such massive development will affect life around this area of Somerset in so many other ways. For example, there is damage to wildlife, light, noise and air pollution, an increase in heavy commercial traffic, a substantial increase in general traffic compounded by the inadequacy of the existing road system, and vehicles using quiet country lanes to avoid the inevitable congestion.

Meanwhile, the local population is advised by National and Local Government that such destructive development is necessary and unavoidable and for the greater good of all.

**In simple terms, housing and commercial development is more important than conservation of our 'protected' countryside.**



**YEO VALLEY EVENTS**  
**'A DAY IN OUR ORGANIC GARDEN'**  
 VARIETY OF DATES FROM MAY - SEPTEMBER, INCLUDING WEEKENDS (NEW FOR 2019)  
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*The summer ahead for our Corporate Member*



## News from the Hills

From Jim Hardcastle  
Manager of the Mendip Hills Unit

### Investing in the Volunteer Rangers

Twenty members of the community regularly give up their time as Mendip Volunteer Rangers. The AONB Unit has now started a programme to invest in the skills of these volunteers to help the community and visitors to the area. Each Volunteer Ranger now has the opportunity to get 4 core competencies each year; Outdoor First Aid, Dealing with Emergency Situations, Navigation and Leading a Guided Walk. Half the group successfully completed their Outdoor First Aid on 24-25 January.

Recruitment for the full time Mendip Hills AONB Ranger Volunteer Coordinator will have commenced in January and we hope to have someone in post by the time you're reading this. The growing demand for volunteering opportunities has led to the AONB Partnership committing to a full time permanent post. This expands on the current post shared with Quantock and Blackdown Hills AONBs.

AONB volunteers on practical tasks will be helping restore drystone walls on a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a separate Scheduled Monument; enhancing access on a very popular bridleway by coppicing woodland and, on a different site, installing gates to replace stiles on a Somerset Wildlife Trust reserve.



Celebrating the History of Adventure on the Mendip Hills The Top of the Gorge festival is happening between 14-16 June at Warren Farm, near Charterhouse. This National Trust event, supported by the Mendip hills AONB Partnership, celebrates the rich history of adventure on the Mendip Hills linked to the amazing geology. This family festival has lots of free activities for you to try and camp out in one of the most amazing locations. Find out more here <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/cheddar-gorge/features/top-of-the-gorge-festival>

## A President's View



Dear all,

This year is well and truly underway now and we have had some snow. Just enough to say that we have had some, but not enough to shut everything down for days. I thought it was very considerate to arrive on a Thursday night, in time to give many a long weekend and be gone by Monday!

Lots happening as always including the AGM that is this year being held at Wookey Hole Caves, one of our corporate members. I would encourage as many of you as possible to come along this year, we have an excellent speaker. Gerry Cottle has agreed to come along and talk to us. Having visited the caves very recently, I can thoroughly recommend a tour to you... Unfortunately it won't be at the AGM. – but keep an eye on the website, [www.themendipsociety.org.uk](http://www.themendipsociety.org.uk) and on our Facebook page, The Mendip Society

On the 5 April we will be holding the first Society quiz night at the Burrington Inn. It will be a bit of fun with lots of Mendip (and other) general knowledge. If you can make up a team of 6 with friends that would be good. If not we can put you into a group on the night. This promises to be a good evening, with supper provided, so please come along and take part. (see page 3 for all the details)

As always the pages of this newsletter are crammed with events and activities that all go to show how vibrant and active you all are when it comes to looking after Mendip.

See you all at the AGM!

Kind regards - **Les**



Beautiful day up at Chancellors Farm

## SOCIETY ROUNDUP

**Editor's Notes** – It's been another good year for the Society and once again we invite everyone to join us for a bit of Society business, have a cup of tea, a piece of cake, and meet friends, old and new. The AGM this year clashes with Brexit but forget that for a while and enjoy another great talk we have arranged for you. Because this year we are guests of Wookey Hole we have 'the One and Only- Gerry Cottle' telling us about all things 'circus and caves'. (The Chairman has been practicing his introduction for months!) Again this year, we have put all the papers you will need for the meeting into the centre fold of this Newsletter; PLEASE pull out the 2 pages (4 sides) and bring them along to the AGM. It makes things more interesting if you know what's going on!

**AONB VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR 2018** – and yet again it is a member of our Society – he is Richard Ellis. At the presentation of the award it was said "Richard has been volunteering for the AONB for over 8 years and has contributed a phenomenal amount of time to helping to preserve the AONB's special qualities and engage with local people living in the area. He is extremely hard working and a real asset to our team- it's a real pleasure to work with him"

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## A SAD OCCASION BUT

by Judith Tranter

Late last year I was contacted by the Godson of a friend I hadn't seen for a while as we both had moved house and were now doing different activities. Janet Maitland and I had previously attended a Tai chi Qigong class for several years, now I was saddened to hear that she had been ill and had recently passed away. James Richardson had written to tell me that Janet had left the Society a legacy in her will, along with four other charities with the same aims and aspirations as us – a very generous lady.

The Membership Secretary tells me that Janet Gwynne Maitland was a member in 1970, that's the earliest our records go back, so a supporter of the Society from the earliest days, when we were founded as The Mendip Preservation Society in 1965.

Do you remember what made you come to love the Mendips – was it the gorgeous views, the out-cropping rocks, the dry stone walls or the abundant wildlife? Everyone has their own stories about what they treasure about our area but we need to ensure that future generations have theirs too.

Including a gift or a legacy to the Mendip Society in your will, no matter what size, will help us to project the history and uniqueness of the Mendip Hills for generations to come. Such gifts are now more important than ever to provide us with the means and flexibility to continue with our aim of keeping this place of ours truly amazing. The Management committee would like to record their gratitude to Janet for her steadfastness and generosity of spirit, and to her Godson James for his help at this time, which can only be a sad one for him.

Judith T



Richard Ellis at work in Blackmoor Reserve - still with a smile, in spite of the weather! Well done Richard.

**THE MENDIP SOCIETY** Registered Charity Number 262867 [www.themendipsociety.org.uk](http://www.themendipsociety.org.uk)  
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