

Mendip

the
mendip
society

Caring for the Mendip Hills

The Newsletter of The Mendip Society

Issue No. 159 • August 2020



An Infamous occasion – Charles Stuart hiding in an oak tree during his flight to safety – told in “Escape Across the Mendips”, by John Price on 6th August.

IMPORTANT

Before you do anything else when you receive this newsletter, please turn to page 3 and then page 8 to read about our first TALK since February 25th this year. As it is on **THURSDAY 6TH AUGUST** it is very soon now.

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THINGS SEEN DURING LOCKDOWN ARE MANY & VARIED

Below left – “May The gods be Ever in Your Favour”

You have to be a certain kind of film buff to appreciate this sign outside Coleford (Janet Sherwin). Right – Patriotic Bears in Stoke St. Michael (Steve Eggington).



Seeking shade on a very hot day. Far left – our pet dinosaur to be found in Tania’s Wood; Left – a very neighbourly young delivery man.

From the Chair

By Richard Frost

My notes as Chairman are usually full of our programme projects and events and also to hand out praise to individuals. Some of you may be under the impression that your Committee has been marking time during the Covid-19 crisis and waiting for things to get back to normal.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Planning for events and projects whilst waiting in the dark and with one hand tied behind your back is harder than doing it in the first place!

Our Planning Officers continue to do sterling work fighting against what seems an impossible tide of applications flooding in with Local Authorities seemingly powerless to stem pressures from above to drive through applications; but still the Society and the AONB and CPRE continue to stand firm and fighting back.

As most of you will know we have made six high quality videos which have been launched on our own You Tube Channel. I cannot thank Les Davies MBE and Graham Keating of Wavelength Consultancy enough for their skill and efforts in bringing this project through its first phase. All six are also on our website. Now - this is only the beginning; we also hope that you, our members, will feature as part of the project. Just send us a short video of up to about two minutes long, of you or your family or friends enjoying the Mendip hills, maybe in a place special to you, or involved in a project or an event run by the society. If it comes over well we'll upload it for you. If you have not seen the first six yet, then please have a look and let me have your comments and ideas.

www.youtube.com and in the search box put **'the Mendip society'**. (See the article on pages 10, 11 & 12)

The virus has also stopped us from holding our AGM this year, but until we can hire a venue which is lawful and willing, then we have to use the Internet and the post to keep you informed. You will have seen all the other reports for the AGM in the March newsletter but if you would like a copy of the yearly accounts please contact Peter Janes on 01761 221995 or **prj1099@gmail.com**

At the time of writing this, we are on the verge of producing a new Walks programme, and to avoid the massive printing and postal costs of sending it out separately from the newsletter, I urge you to keep an eye on our website and Facebook page and check for news via emails from us. I often hear that people complain there is nothing on our website, and it occurs to me that you may well be on the wrong one! Make sure you click on **www.themendipsociety.org.uk** and not just "mendip society" The latter is a website which is still on the internet and being run for reasons beyond our control and understanding! Just as soon as we can release details and information of events and talks that we have had to put on hold, then we will do so. Your frustration is shared by us all.

Finally, I must advise the membership that at the end of this year I will be standing down as Chairman and Talks organiser. I have been in this position for the last four years and am now facing a future of uncertain health and with advancing years feel that this is the time to hand on to someone with fresh ideas, energy and methods. I wish to thank all my Committee colleagues who have served you all with unstinting dedication in their allotted tasks, yet again proving the real worth of true volunteers.



HOW A GRANT FROM THE SOCIETY MADE THE LOCKDOWN BETTER FOR MANY PEOPLE



Last year the society donated, as a grant from our Heritage fund, the final piece in the jigsaw transformation of an area from a derelict disused Mendip Quarry into a tranquil garden area with a place for elderly residents to meet and sit, and pre-schoolers to play and be taught safely, in all weathers. The old quarry behind the village hall in Stoke St. Michael, once cleared and planted and spruced up by village work parties, provided just the place for a simple summerhouse as nearly all-year round shelter. Teresa Taylor-Wolff, the project



leader, (right) told us that during the lockdown months, "As it is sort of remote but still accessible we are using it for all our residents as a drop-off and collection point for material and pre-cut items for the sewing and knitting projects we are doing in the village and for a books and puzzles collection, without the summerhouse we could not offer any of the above to our isolated, especially elderly residents in a safe way".

FROM THE EDITOR

Since our last newsletter great deal has changed, indeed much more may be different between my writing this now and you reading it! You don't need telling that we are in 'out of the usual' times – so it only fitting that there should be an 'out of the usual' newsletter; so a few items will be familiarly expected, others not so much. It may well become a bit of a serendipity issue. This publication of ours usually tries to contain something for every member but also to be mostly contributed to, by the members; this time we may have achieved the closest we have ever got to that aim. So I am recording my sincere thanks to those who responded to my call for contributions, many especially relevant during our lock down period.

We are slowly being unlocked from lockdown of course as we go to print, so some of the articles and items may now seem a bit 'out of date', but they will serve to remind you how exactly it was at the time and what folk were feeling and doing then. We also have had fair share of the many unselfish acts of kindness and neighbourliness we have read and heard about in Mendip.

So - cross your fingers (well washed!) and do take care in everything- so that we don't have to go through it again.

BUT FIRST – SOMETHING TO LOOK FORWARD TO - “THE FUGITIVE KING”

In the absence of the real thing since the beginning of March, your Management committee took its first technological step and held a zoom meeting and then with a bit of confidence gained we gladly accepted the kind offer of our speaker for the last talk of the spring session, which obviously had been cancelled, to deliver his talk virtually by zoom. John Price will therefore be telling those society members, and members of the public, who wish to attend his talk, all about the escape of Charles Stuart after his escape from the battle of Worcester, over the route followed by the long distance footpath now known as the Monarch's Way. His article can be found elsewhere in this newsletter but here are the details of how to join with us for his zoom talk on **Thursday August 6th at 2.30pm** (the same time on the day of the week we would have had the talk in Winscombe St. James' Church Hall).

There is no need to download any software or participate in any way **if you don't want to**. If you click on the link below it will open automatically, follow the simple directions and then watch and listen. John will be able to show pictures and maps etc on your screen in the relevant places. If you wish to ask questions then you can turn on your audio facility (and your camera too if you want to) and he can answer them.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82791105049?pwd=cnBOUDg2aEVDYktNV0RncnRjdzRSUT09>

Meeting ID: 827 9110 5049; Password: **KC2mendips (if these are needed)**

ED – if you are reading this in a printed newsletter and don't want to copy the link into your browser, e-mail me and I will send you the 'clickable link'.

In his article he also gives the details of his website which also has his, as yet, partially completed journal of his own journey along the entire footpath, to view.

A Chairman's Visit

Just before meetings started being cancelled everywhere Richard Frost went to give a presentation to the Wrington Rotary Club. The society had collaborated with them at the family activity day at the Churchill Ski Centre last summer and the Rotary is keen to partner ourselves in other projects, and wanted to know more about us. Rotarian Bob Shaw wrote a few words after that evening.

“The visit from Richard Frost speaking about The Mendip Society certainly made members aware just how this local



charity is involved in local and community projects concerning the preservation and maintenance of the countryside. Members were aware of the existence of the Mendip Society but not of their participation in the numerous activities illustrated including working with disused quarries, caving, the Strawberry Line, The East and West Mendip Way, two nature reserves, caring for the Mendip Hills, maintaining countryside walks, volunteering at the Wells and Mendip Museum and working with the CPRE and AONB.

The Mendip Society was formed in 1965, the membership growing to over 900 but, over the last couple of decades, in common with many other organisations, unfortunately, it has fallen to the current position of just 400. With so many projects being undertaken for the benefit of the countryside, and our future generations, additional members will always be welcome. The vote of thanks was given by Rotarian Bob Preedy.”

SO WHAT HAVE OUR MEMBERS BEEN UP TO? –

Firstly – on my last point of the many acts of good neighbourliness there have been, member **Denise Poole** is greatly involved in the voluntary running of Winford local village shop/post office, which was on the point of closing last year; she couldn't work in the shop because she had to shield at home but hard organising, rota and operational work on her part ensured that the people of the village had a shop to use during the long weeks of lockdown. Regulations are still in force today of course and so it continues. She wrote for the May issue of the *Mendip Times*: -

"In the village of Winford the post office and village shop were going to close. As you might know the people living in Winford, Felton and Regil decided to get together and do their best to take it over as a community shop. This happened about a year ago and the shop and Post Office are being run by volunteers led by a steering group. The paid member of staff holds it all together and mainly works in the Post Office.

We have had problems getting enough volunteers to work in the shop which has meant leaning a bit too heavily on the people that we do have! When we realised the implications of Covid 19 we despaired of continuing to run the shop and post office, despite the importance of both to the community, with so many of our staff being over 70.

THEN the amazing people living in the area realised the problem and rallied round to support the shop. WhatsApp groups were set up to support the village plus the shop. We were inundated by offers from the young families in the villages, and returning students to help in the shop and also to do deliveries when that became necessary. We are now running with enough volunteers to serve in the shop and also to have someone on the door to keep it to 1 person in at a time, supervising the wearing of gloves using hand sanitizer whilst also keeping an eye on the queue.

The older generation moan a lot about people not helping etc but we are so proud of them all rallying round now when they are really needed". *Denise Poole*



Janet Sherwin writes at the start of June: - "I've been exploring all over Shepton and within a 5-mile

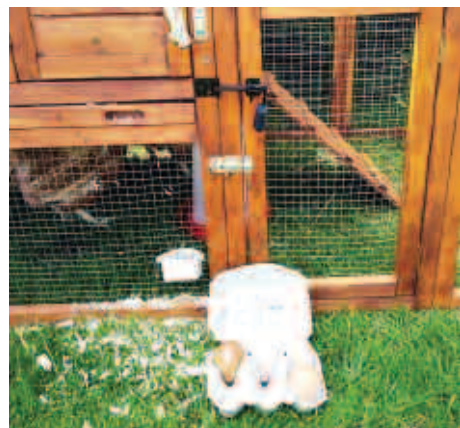


radius but am now going a bit further afield; if you drive just a few miles a whole new range of walks appears. This signpost reminds me of government advice at the moment - pointing in different directions, both unclear!

Also I have taken up the piano (well, keyboard) again after a gap of many years. I'm not good at it but I enjoy it and it's certainly a challenge. I've done some dressmaking, lost some weight and am using the paint box I've had for 20 years to do watercolours. I find that very calming and absorbing.

Letter-writing too has made a comeback. One of my correspondents is a man on Death Row in Texas.

I've applied to the Cinnamon Trust to do dog-walking for people unable for some reason to take their pet out. I don't have a dog myself. And I'm going to get some hens - a lifelong ambition. The henhouse has arrived so I look forward to getting in a pickle trying to assemble it! Then I have to foxproof the garden. And get the hens. And read the book about keeping chickens. Seems a lot of work."



ED – so in July I asked her whether her hens had moved in and these lovely pictures arrived – lucky rescue hens – and their feathers will grow again don't worry.

I am so impressed with your lockdown life activities, not the usual goal of sorting the cupboards out!

Picture left – the first four eggs collected and obviously very contented and happy birds.



VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR AWARD 2019-2020

The Mendip Hills AONB Partnership announced, at their annual meeting back in November last year, that this year's well-deserving recipient of their Volunteer of the Year is Malcolm Parsons, from Hutton. Malcolm wasn't at that meeting so he was presented with his award in March at one of the practical task days he regularly attends across the Mendip Hills AONB with many of the other volunteers. It was just too late to get into our March newsletter, so it's published here now.

The award is made to the volunteer who the AONB Unit think has gone above and beyond a normal volunteering role. Malcolm was chosen for the award as he is a central part in making the AONB volunteers such a welcoming community. Malcolm gets

involved at all levels from helping at practical tasks to supporting the Young Rangers. He is one of the unsung champions of the area, giving up his time to make sure the Mendip Hills remain amazing for residents, visitors and all the other volunteers. Malcolm is also the forth in succession receiving the award to be a Mendip society member!

Lauren Holt, Ranger Volunteer Coordinator, said, 'Malcolm has been volunteering for the Mendip Hills AONB for a few years, he made me so welcome when I started earlier this year and is the first to make new volunteers feel part of the community. He's always the first to respond whenever we ask for help and is an amazing ambassador for our work on the Mendip Hills.'

The AONB Partnership strives to involve people in the management of this nationally protected area and through the AONB Unit offer a wide variety of opportunities. For more details visit <http://www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/caring-about-the-aonb/volunteering/> or call 01761 462338.

Dr. Gerald Offer – by Clive Constance

Those members who attended the memorial event for Gerald last year will remember how lovely the garden was; well this year, with the weather we have had, it was even lovelier.

Clive writes from Durham, where he is presently at the University there: -

"Just over a year ago Dr Gerald Offer, a long standing Mendip society member and a former Area Secretary for the Blagdon district, died of cancer. As well as being a brilliant scientist he was a keen gardener and at Rose Cottage in Burrington he created a garden which has given pleasure to many in the district. He opened it over several years to the public as part of the Village Garden scheme in aid of the Parish Church. Last June (2019) it was opened again in his memory and the garden looked lovely as seen by a number of Mendip Society members. Since then the garden has been maintained by Rose Bowyer, my gardener with a view to opening it again this June, in company with the new garden at Hollymead House next door. However the pandemic has put paid to this plan and we fear it will be past its best when the restrictions ease sufficiently to allow opening again. Nevertheless I intend to continue the upkeep over the coming year and hope to open again in June 2021."



The garden pictures: Left - foxgloves under a spread of loganberries. Below - a rose and clematis trellis arbour.



Terry Gifford

Members will remember Terry's article on the ringing of the Fairy Quarry ravens last year with the young naturalist Mya-Rose, here he writes about this year, unfortunately under lockdown rules.

"The ravens' young at Fairy Cave Quarry should have been ringed this spring for a fourth year in succession. This was obviously impossible, but I thought I might be able, with a bit of 'staying safe' discretion, to get a fledging date for the nest records being researched by Ed Drewit. The locked and fenced quarry was closed to climbers and cavers, so I knew there was no danger of social contact there. I arrived at dawn and stayed only long enough to check out the fledging of three young until there was just one reluctant flyer left - the youngest, weakest and least confident of the brood. These two poems have been drawn from my notes for those last two visits.

ED – These two poems are part of a sequence of eight called 'Ravens in Lockdown'

On Furlough

From adulthood, the last one to leave
the family lockdown, nested under this
overhang of rotten tottery blocks.

It really is a shithole now siblings
have flapped and flown. Now dawns
the true meaning of self-isolation,
making your own fun in jumping
off the nest to a block behind that
little bush offering shade and shelter
from the buzzard's prospecting scans.

Not just on Thursday nights, the others
can be heard play-fighting on the flat balcony
above and even seen on the broken branches
of its buddleia, tempting a break-out, up
onto all that greenery and open space.
One hop more and there's a ledge deep
under another overhang, a cul de sac.
On the south rim Mother can be seen
taking off to lead two teenagers flying
for a little local exercise down the west end.

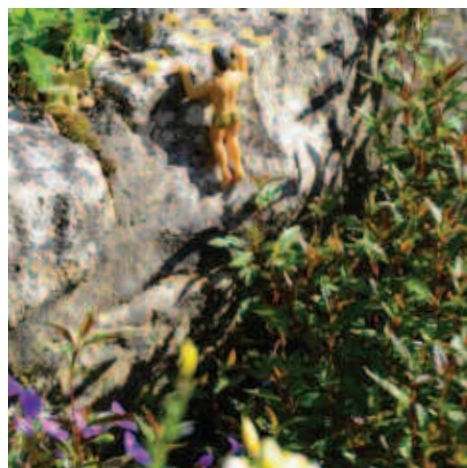
© Terry Gifford

The New Normal

There's a frost melting on the Mendip meadows
as I drive into the sun for the last time this spring.
In the grass patch of the quarry tiny yellow heads
have been burned by ice in May. It's all change
here, at six-twenty, when I round the corner to see
that last youngster on the rim above the nest,
freed of overhanging rock, awaiting a feed.

Each year, the young family assemble on the south
rim where the other three now waddle into sight.
There's a secret source of worms, and perhaps even
afterbirth, behind the trees of the west end
from where the adults fly to feed these juveniles.
The arching cloudless firmament is egg-blue
for their fledged future in the new normal.

© Terry Gifford



'After rock-climbing was finally allowed again some climbers found that their secret Mendip outcrops were a little overgrown'. - Photo: Gill Round

THESE BOOTS WERE MADE FOR WALKING – Recollections of Dave and Margaret Parker our Rights of Way Officers



We first became involved with public rights of way in 1992, when the then Mendip Hills Warden (Tom Elkin) received a request for help with the waymarking of a new recreational route between the West Mendip Way at Shiphams Green and the Cotswold Way at Cold Ashton. This was the Limestone Link and a small, but very select, group of rangers spent several enjoyable, and at times adventurous months route finding, getting lost in the bad lands beyond Hinton Blewett (alien territory to Mendip Rangers!) and eventually getting our part of the Link fully marked up and usable.

While working on the Link, we saw that the rights of way network within the Mendip Hills A.N.O.B. was in a bad way following many years of neglect and under-funding. Stiles and footbridges, where they existed, were in a poor state, waymarking was largely non-existent and many paths were overgrown or obstructed, with barbed wire a constant irritation. With the agreement of Tom and his deputy (one Les Davies!) we became the rights of way officers for the Ranger Service, received a copious supply of waymarks and were told to get on with it! Between 1994 and 1997, we surveyed every right of way in the A.O.N.B. (all 685 of them) on a parish by parish basis, producing schedules of the works needed for each path to bring them up to a consistent and acceptable standard. These schedules were sent to the County, District and Parish Councils and resulted in an explosion of path improvements throughout the area. We carried out most of the on-path waymarking, visiting places we had never heard of on paths which had seen very little use for decades. It was a real journey of discovery and we startled quite a few landowners by popping up in places where they hadn't seen anyone for years!

With all the hard work done, we settled into a care and maintenance regime, regularly checking paths for safety and obstructions (we learnt the value of carrying a folding saw to deal with fallen trees) and reporting any problems we couldn't deal with back to the relevant local authority. Not entirely an idyllic lifestyle - in the early years, we had a number of stand-offs with landowners unwilling to see the footpath network opened up (very rare now; most landowners accept that a properly regulated network is in the interest of everybody) and also with off-roaders and trail bikers going where they shouldn't and getting stroppy at being stopped ("It's the countryside, innit!"). Although fewer now, at least during daylight hours, 4 x 4's are still a problem - Winscombe Drove is currently shut because the surface has deteriorated to such an extent that it is perilous to all users. Reinstatement will cost thousands and will not be a quick fix.



Photo left – in Slader's Leigh

Since 2011, as rights of way officers to the Mendip Society, our brief has been to consider Modification and Diversion Orders referred to us by the local authorities, including the upgrading of footpaths to bridleways and the diversion of paths for a multitude of reasons including those affected by development and on safety and

privacy grounds (paths passing through farmyards and private gardens are a perennial problem).

Generally these consultations are straightforward, though anything contentious will be referred to the Management Committee of the Society for consideration. We still maintain a watching brief over the path network which, whilst appearing natural, requires constant maintenance if it is to remain usable.

Members can help with this by, perhaps, adopting the footpaths in their home parish, walking them regularly and reporting any problems to their local authority. The simplest way to do this is on line. Google (say) North Somerset Rights of Way and click on 'Report a Problem'. BANES is similar - with Mendip and Sedgemoor you will go straight to Somerset County Council's site, again fairly straightforward. The rights of way teams are small, cover large areas and tend to be very busy but they are good at what they do. Don't expect an instant response (unless public safety is concerned). Problems have to be prioritised but they will be dealt with. It's a good idea to carry secateurs to cut back encroaching vegetation as you go and collecting the odd bit of litter also makes a big difference.

Apart from the health benefits of getting out and about, you will get to see your local area in a new light, find routes of which you were previously unaware and views you've never seen before. You might even learn things useful for pub quizzes - how many people know that the shortest public footpath in the universe is at the bottom of Cheddar Gorge? It comprises three steps down to the river and has a total length of about three feet. It's too short to be waymarked!

Most of all, our rights of way are there to be enjoyed. They are free, change with the seasons and are never boring. Use them and help keep an invaluable asset available for future generations. Happy rambling!





STILL ON THE SUBJECT OF WALKING, RIGHTS OF WAY & LONG DISTANCE FOOTPATHS

KING CHARLES II – ESCAPE OVER THE MENDIPS

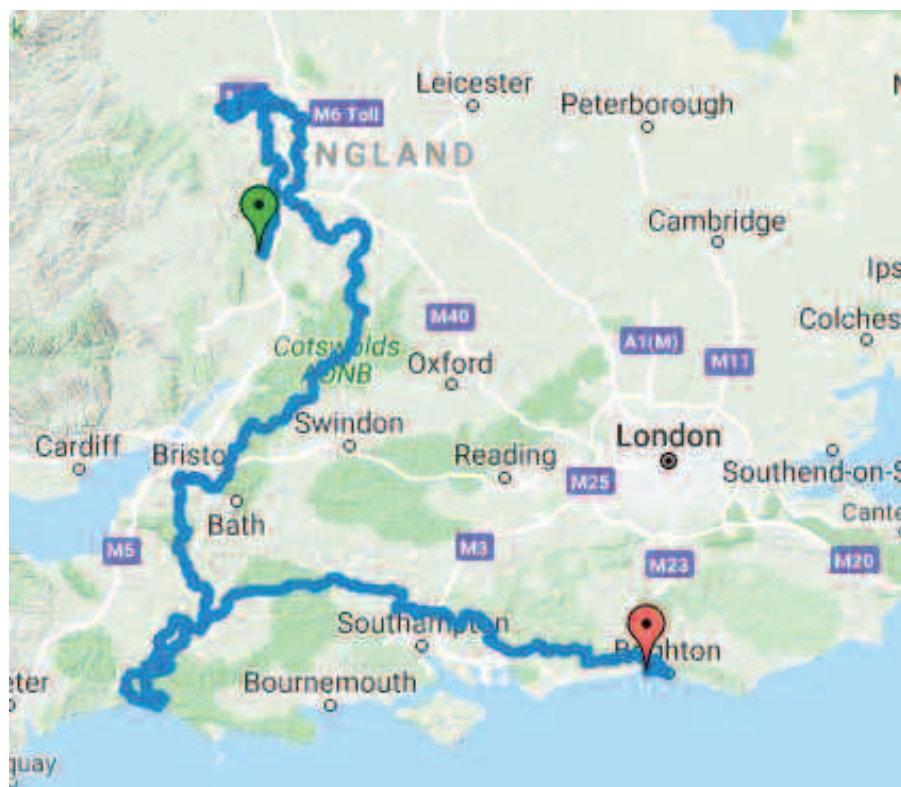
On 16 September 1651, a party of three could have been seen riding over the Mendip Hills, probably crossing the range near Shepton Mallet. Two of the party, Henry Lascelles and Jane Lane were members of the Gentry, the third member of the party, ostensibly their servant Will Jackson was in fact Charles Stuart, already crowned as King Charles II of Scotland, eventually to be crowned as King of England as well. If there was urgency about the way they rode, we should not be surprised. They were fleeing for their lives or, more particularly, the life of the King.

Thirteen days earlier the last battle of the English Civil War had taken place at Worcester when Oliver Cromwell's Parliamentary New Model Army, 28,000 strong, defeated King Charles II's 16,000 Royalists, most whom were Scottish. Charles had narrowly escaped from the city and headed north with a view to escaping to France via the Welsh coast. However, the River Severn was too closely guarded by the Roundheads, and the plan was abandoned. It was then that he was obliged to take refuge in the famous Oak Tree at Boscobel House in Shropshire. Eventually he was moved from Boscobel to Moseley Old Hall and then Bentley Hall near Walsall, where his host was Colonel Lane.

The new plan he and his supporters evolved was for him to ride south, through the Cotswolds towards Bristol and sail from there. The cover story was that the Colonel's Sister, Jane Lane was visiting her friend, the heavily pregnant Mrs Norton of Leigh Court, just west of the City accompanied by her cousin and manservant.

Sadly though, the party drew a blank at Bristol. Discreet enquiries revealed that no boats would sail to France for many months. So the party were to move again, itself a problematic affair as the Nortons were not trusted with the knowledge of the true identity of Will Jackson and Mrs Norton, having miscarried was still reliant on the support of her friend. In the end a story was concocted about an illness back at Bentley Hall which forced their hurried departure.

Which returns us again to 16 September – the party first headed north as a decoy and they, at a safe distance, did a volte face and travelled south where a new Safe House had been arranged at Trent Manor near the Somerset and Dorset border.



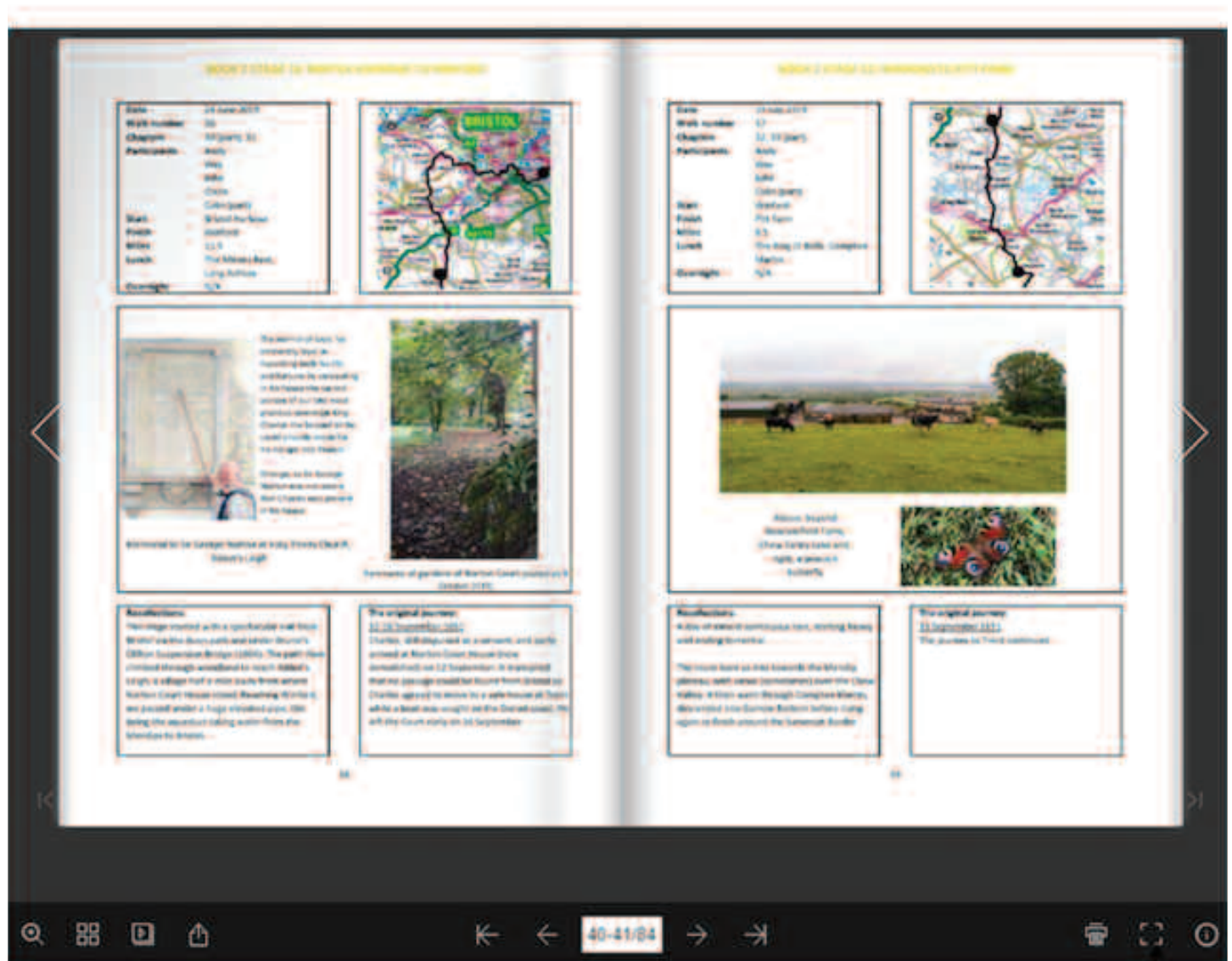
The night of 16 September was spent at Castle Cary and Trent was reached early on 17 September. Charles was to spend a total of 17 nights there, interrupted only by a farcical attempt to sail from Charmouth, near Lyme Regis. Eventually he left Trent for the last time on 6 October, eventually arriving in Brighton and setting sail for France from nearby Shoreham on 15 October. It was an incredible adventure, one of the great stories of British history.

No wonder then that it has attracted much interest. Many of those involved in the escape left behind personal accounts, including the King himself who dictated his own recollections to Samuel Pepys. One other notable move to memorialise the escape was to create a long distance path called ***The Monarch's Way***. The walk does not attempt to follow the precise roads taken by Charles - most such roads have long since been surfaced over. What the

Monarch's Way does instead is to join together the various towns, villages, country houses and inns associated with the escape using walker-friendly rights-of-way. The result is a unique long-distance path - not merely because, at 625 miles, it is comfortably the longest inland walk in England, but also because it covers a wide variety of different landscapes - a comprehensive tour of Southern Britain, covering the entire journey from Worcester to Brighton.

One of the most enjoyable parts of the route is discovering the various places and sites associated with the escape and I had hoped talking to the Mendip Society members about some of these in the South West (including how I discovered the ruins of Leigh Court) in April of this year. It has had to be postponed of course, but hopefully can be rearranged before not too long. In the meantime here is a link which may be of interest:-

The Fugitive King – my website, including the page **Walking the Monarch's Way** – my, as yet, partially completed account of our walk: <http://www.thefugitiveking.uk/index.php/walking-the-monarchs-way/> John Price



Journal open at p39, on walk no.37 on July 19th 2019. |

full screen symbol here

ED – When looking at John's Journal, you need to view it full page mode- do this by clicking on your own screens symbol, and not on the offer which flashes up. Here is a picture of page 39 of the journal which details the day's walk I am particularly interested in. This is because that stretch of the Monarch's Way, as it goes from Chew Valley Lake across to Compton Martin, (where John and his friends stopped for their lunch at The ring 'O Bells) passes right by the top corner of our nature Reserve Tania's Wood.

The Mendip Society Ventures into the World of Filming

Last year, after much discussion on the why and wherefores of the current situation that the society finds itself in, your Management Committee decided on a bold plan. The situation? Well, suffice to say that membership numbers are slipping year on year and those remaining are getting older (as people do!) and less and less likely to want to take on any responsibility for any of the tasks involved in running a conservation organisation like ours. And with no new, and younger, energy joining our ranks, things will stagnate - and eventually die. We needed a bit of a shake-up!

We decided that the name of the society would have to be made more widely known across the Mendip area, along with what we stand for, the activities we enjoy, the conservation and support work that we do and the enjoyment our members get out of their involvement with the Mendip Hills.

In this modern world the best, and some may say the only way, to do this is by engaging with the media of the digital era and making good use of all it has to offer.

So we talked to someone who works in this world for a living but also knows the Mendips like his own backyard plus a great many of the people who live here, and then we have created our own 'You Tube' channel to communicate our presence to the world at large. Graham Keating of Wavelength Consultancy, together with our President, Les Davies, created a series of six short videos introducing 'the history, the mystery, the myth and the magic' of the Mendip Hills. Anyone knowing Les will not be surprised that he made the tricky job of presenter on these films look and sound effortless, and by putting him together with great filming by Graham the result is six entertaining, and informative films – watched already by several hundreds of people.

Introducing Mendip, by The Mendip Society

305 views • May 28, 2020

17 0 SHARE SAVE

The Mendip Society
37 subscribers

SUBSCRIBED

The first in a series of short films which explore the Mendip Hills. Presented by Les Davies MBE, this episode shows the extent of the Mendip Hills Area of

Up next

- Episode 5 - Water on Mendip 5:53
- Episode 2 - The Mendip Timeline 7:59
- Episode 4 - Human Impact on Mendip 6:24
- Episode 3 - Cheddar Gorge 6:20

Small logo button

If you click the 'subscribe button' we will let you know when a new member video is added.

NOW - It's now over to you - the society members.

Firstly, in order to get the videos known to a much wider audience we are asking everyone who is able, and has contacts in every and any organisation, group or individual person to please share the details and link to the films and the channel itself, through whatever media you use.

THEN - in order to 'pad out' the framework of the six videos and fill in the nitty gritty bits of the society and its aims and activities, we would like everyone who would be happy and able to take a very short video, no more than 2 minutes

long, on their phone or ipad or tablet and send it in to us to put on our You Tube channel. There is an easy way to do this sending and Graham has very kindly said he will make it ready to up load for us. This is a very kind offer – so please- let's see if we can get some 'personal' thoughts, likes and activities of our members to spread the fact that The Mendip Society is alive and kicking. How about your favourite walk, a place to view the world from, or enjoy the peace of, the wildlife you see, the workers of the hills you may see- the farmers, the stone wallers, the Rangers?

At the moment our visits and all events are on hold, but this is not an instant and short project and eventually we will be resuming normal service as it were, then we can include our social occasions, quizzes, our visits to, for example, the Mendip Hospital, mines and caves, Smitham Chimney, a wassail, Wells Museum or Gully Cave dig. The opportunities are many, films can be silent or have a voice over from yourself or a friend, all in one length or in a couple or so shorter clips. But we do need some help with this project from the Society – for the sake of the Society. **Please do your best to have a go!**

If you haven't already, do go to the links below and see the six videos already live on our channel. Or if you just want to bring up the you tube website you can put 'the Mendip society' in the search box at the top and we will come up , then to see all our, and only our films click on the small logo button indicated in the picture above.

1. Introducing Mendip <https://youtu.be/HRENSRwfdF4>
2. The Mendip Timeline https://youtu.be/6_xpAnVSJ-8
3. Cheddar Gorge <https://youtu.be/jWXTNOoqvbK>
4. Human Impact on Mendip https://youtu.be/N_moJs358mc
5. Water on Mendip <https://youtu.be/QwsQ7JarjCE>
6. Burrington Coombe https://youtu.be/-oK_ktNVEiQ



The link to take you directly to The Mendip Society Channel is

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_LyZjID_7Jwp11dZiF9uw

There is also a 45 second introductory film to all the others on <https://youtu.be/ZIW0ckeugsc>

BE PART OF THE PICK



We know that many members were willing to join in during the spring clean-up, and indeed have been picking litter in their own areas during their exercise walks, so we are still keen to join in accumulatively as a society. You can do this in two ways:

- 1 **Organise a private clean-up** with up to five other family and friends.
- 2 **Pledge to do your own individual clean-up**, you can give as little as 15 minutes to the campaign.

When you have done your clean-up please send the details to me to enter /add onto our website record as before. judith.tranter1@btinternet.com

As we wrote about in the March issue, Keep Britain Tidy had a litter campaign planned for March and April, with 680,000 volunteers pledging support, a plan which obviously went out of the window.

Now they are back with the **Great British September Clean (11-27 Sept. 2020)**



Denise Poole in Winford

SENDING US YOUR VIDEO CLIPS

Details of 'how to' from Graham Keating



We'd love to feature your video clips on our YouTube channel so here is some guidance on how to send them to us.

Please make sure that you film in landscape mode and High Definition and try to create smooth, wobble-free video! Ideally, we'd like something that's around 1-2 minutes long in total – you can talk over the video as you film it or just send it with ambient background sound. Your video might be a 'single take' or three or four separate sequences (no more than four, please) that follow on, logically, from each other – if you have on-phone or computer editing capability to cut the sequences together, that'd be great, but if not, don't

worry, you can send us the individual files and we'll do it. Please don't transgress any copyright rules (by adding copyrighted music, for example) and be aware that any video featuring minors must have written parental permission for us to be able to use it.

The video files will be much too large to email, so we recommend that you use a free service called **WeTransfer.com** to do this. You can either do this directly from your phone (make sure you have wifi connection first!) but you may find it easier to copy the video files from your phone to your PC first and transfer them from that. Here's how to do it:

Open the [www.WeTransfer.com](https://www.wetransfer.com) website and fill in the email details as shown here:

You'll be sending the files to Graham Keating who has volunteered to upload them for the Society. His full email address is **graham@wavelengthconsultancy.co.uk**

Click on 'Add your files' and click on the file names that you want to send. The WeTransfer site allows up to 2Gb in total for each transfer.

Please add a brief note in the bottom box so that Graham knows a bit about the video content.

Once you click 'Transfer' you'll receive an automated email back from WeTransfer asking you to confirm the transfer and then you'll see it countdown as the files are uploaded to the Cloud. This may take several minutes.

Once the Transfer is completed, you'll receive an automated email to confirm it. You then get another automated email to confirm that Graham has downloaded the file(s).

Thank you! We reserve the right to edit your video but will always show you a preview of it before publishing. By sending your video footage, you give us permission to publish it on The Mendip Society YouTube Channel, our Website and our Facebook page which are all public spaces dedicated to the communication of the Society's activities; they do not generate any income for the Society. You will be credited as the author and you will retain the right to ask for the video to be removed from the Channel at any time; the Society also retains the right to remove it for any reason.

The screenshot shows the WeTransfer website in a browser. The address bar displays 'https://wetransfer.com/'. Below the browser tabs, the WeTransfer logo is visible. The main content area features a large white box with a blue plus icon and the text 'Add your files' and 'Or select a folder'. Below this, there is a text input field containing 'graham@wavelengthconsultancy...'. Underneath, a label 'Your email' is followed by an input field containing 'myemail@provider.co.uk'. A message box contains the text 'Hi Graham, here are my three video files of the walk along Velvet Bottom. Thanks, Fred'. At the bottom of the form is a 'Transfer' button.

RESERVES SUMMER ROUND-UP – by Judith Tranter

We have spent the time so far since the last reports, under lockdown conditions, but in both reserves work has been done by an individual or by a couple as ‘exercise in a ‘self-isolating’ situation. The weather has again been erratic to say the least, periods of rain or scorching sunshine, which somehow seems to be becoming the norm. In the meadow it held back the orchid flowering and they were much smaller this year, in Tania’s Wood the growth was so prolific as to be over whelming, but still beautiful in its blowsy-ness.

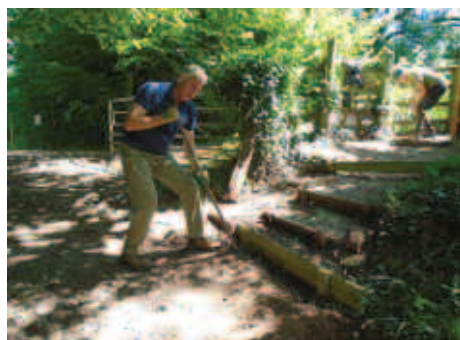
SLADER’S LEIGH – On occasional days we cleared up and burnt the grass left in heaps down the length of the reserve from last years’ mowing and cleared the growth from around the new hedge on the top boundary – it is doing extremely well. Dozens of visitors passed through, walkers, cyclists, runners, families and familiar faces, most stopping on the path to exchange shouted pleasantries; it was a pleasure to see it so popular and serving a useful purpose in these times.

The predominant colour at the moment is from purple and pink swathes of betony and knapweed and self-heal, taking



over from the white splash of prolific garlic and later the frothiness of the meadowsweet, very lovely to see. And extremely pleasing to note is that the small leaved limes have again flowered this summer.

We had our first work party allowed under Government guidelines in mid-July, just six volunteers, who undertook a strenuous day of maintenance work on a rotten gate post and an unsafe



deteriorating flight of access steps at the top entrance. They were thrilled to be there having missed the buzz of work days for months, and also managed to include a session pulling the bracken which is making an insidious comeback, creeping in from the sides. This will now need to be done on a rolling basis to have a result, so we hope this pandemic doesn’t last too long! The finishing touch was to put a colourful new Reserve sign onto the repaired top gate, see the back page for the details of this lovely gesture by John, one of the volunteers.

Photos by Malcolm Parsons – top – getting the rotten post out and the new one finished. Left – working on the flight of steps.

TANIA’S WOOD – After some days of clearing away the debris from the February hedge laying, the result of which is a really nicely attractive growing hedge, we began the hard work of clearing the Deer Leap bank of more than a years’



growth of trees, blackthorn bushes, brambles, ivy and nettles, as detailed in our five year management plan, which also included clearing the ditch between it and the smaller bank with the hedge we laid four years ago on top of it. The week before the six went to Slader’s Leigh, they had their first work day in the wood and finished the Deer Leap off nicely and added a superior ‘bug and mammal hotel’ as well. (Lots of dead wood comes down in the winter gales!)

FINALLY – I’d like to put in a request; the Government has launched a £50 million scheme to boost tree planting rates in the fight against climate change, including replacing trees in already wooded land. Many of our trees are of the same age and some are now losing the battle against the storms which are becoming more prevalent than ever. If any members have, or know of, any small(ish) transplantable native trees which they would be happy to donate to us, we will be having tree planting work days this winter season to fill up our gaps. They will be well loved and looked after, please contact me.

WE'RE STILL WITH THE WALKING THEME – STRAWBERRY LINE EAST CATCH UP

You may remember that a small gang of society scythers visited the Strawberry Line East group last September to help them starting off with their new scythes donated by the Mendip Hills Fund. They have just a mile of cleared line out of Wells towards Dulcote at present, but have been trying for years to get its extension towards Shepton Mallet through the planning system.

Ironically with this Covid -19 pandemic have come the first rays of hope, now the need for more traffic-free paths is more important than ever. Not only will these encourage healthier lifestyles, improve air quality and reduce the strain on the NHS, but the recent lockdown has also highlighted the need for alternatives to shared transport by car or bus. For this reason the Department for Transport recently announced a financial commitment to a “new era of walking and cycling” –meaning essentially increasing and improving access everywhere for walkers and cyclists over cars.

The dismantled trackbed between Draycott and Shepton Mallet is protected as a corridor for sustainable transport in Mendip District Council's Local Plan, in addition, the council this month adopted an ambitious project to “reduce the volume of commuter related car journeys in Mendip”. What better way than to create traffic-free access to one of Mendip's busiest commuter destinations - and so it is hoped that the path will soon be extended beyond Dulcote quarry all the way to the recreation ground at Shepton Mallet and Collett Park, closely following the flat and direct route of the old railway line. This would enable people to commute between Wells and Shepton without any need to get in a car.

So – the Strawberry Line East group has recently submitted a planning application, (Reference 2020/1014/FUL or PP-08746375) to extend the now very popular shared-use path from Wells to Dulcote onwards to Charlie Bigham's food production facility at Dulcote Quarry. It will be an all-weather, sealed surface path following a wheelchair-friendly gradient throughout, and be open to walkers, cyclists and equestrians, connecting the city of Wells with one of Mendip's largest employment sites in a sustainable and picturesque way. From the Dulcote end of the present path, the proposed route would utilise the existing underpass, safely crossing under the A371, then cut into the verge almost immediately and gently ramp up to the old Dulcote-Warminster road (now a bridleway) before exiting at the quarry's access road.



L - The present end of the railway pathway

R - Scything day last September with our members

They need all the support they can muster for this one last push to get this through planning so please go to this link and leave a comment in its favour on the Mendip's planning website.

<https://publicaccess.mendip.gov.uk/o.../applicationDetails.do...>

Walking Etiquette Coronavirus? Thoughts by Malcolm Parsons in May 2020

So, we're awake, enjoying a cup of tea in bed, trying to decide what to do today. The choice however, is very limited. No classes or courses, or volunteering to go to or do- nowhere on Mendip to go to; no doctor appointments, dentist check-ups, grandchildren to baby sit, no library books to return or browse through. Nothing!

So is it worth getting up at all? Why not just stay in bed until hunger drives you down into the kitchen? No, **certainly not**, we will go out in the beautiful sunshine and have a walk.

So off we go, but as soon as we get to the road there's our first dilemma, someone is walking towards us. What to do? What's the new etiquette? Do we move into the middle of the road and risk being run over or stay our ground and hope they move. We draw closer, they haven't moved to give us enough room to pass with our allocated 2 metres distance. Then, problem resolved, they enter their own gateway, our first real test has passed. Continuing up the hill we turn towards what we hope is a quieter route; ha, what fools we are. There are people everywhere, alone or in pairs, some with dogs, all walking. There is a marked change in the type of person out walking; - no longer is it the domain of the regular walker with their usual equipment, sensible, comfortable boots or shoes, a pole or two to aid their progress, rucksack. New people are in flip flops, flat shoes that are usually only used on holiday, in fact, in any sort of foot wear to hand. But, you tell yourself - they're out and that's all to the good.

We continue along the lane, we meet walkers regularly now, some are elderly and treat us like the Grim Reaper himself. They move as far as possible into the hedge, exactly as we were about to do to avoid the slightest chance of an accidental breath or even a glance. We continue and notice that from the right there is a track which joins ours, but there are walkers on the track, and we now have to time our run perfectly. If we are too early and we meet on the junction someone will have to give way, but who? If we slow down to avoid them they may try the same ploy and we end up shuffling along slowly and risk someone coming up behind us. We stop and try the old "stare at something and pretend that it's interesting" trick. They continue quicker and reach the junction so the confrontation is avoided. A new threat appears moving up the track towards us, -: a mountain biker! They are mostly harmless but unpredictable.

Time for a joke?

Knock Knock!

Who's there? ---- Isabel

Isabel who?

**Is a bell necessary
on a bicycle ?**

**Yes, it is ! PLEASE let me
know you are behind me !**



We are not sure how he will react. His movements are restricted by the condition of the track, so we pick a patch of nettles and step in giving him as much room as we can so he can pass and not spray us with perspiration. He passes and ignores us, perhaps he hasn't seen us hiding in the bushes! The path is clearer now, the sun shines and we relax. A couple approach towards us, they move to one side of the path, we take the opposite side, we are all trying to put as much distance between us and as we pass each other, we all smile and nod, but no words are spoken, it's far too dangerous.

This is better, it's lovely to be out and enjoying nature in Springtime. More people move up the path towards us, but we're ready now, we know how to handle this, keep cool and watch which side they are going to take, and then move to the opposite: simple. They move to their right we move to our left, but they change their mind and move to their left, we move to our right. We are close now and must make a decision soon. We are now both on the same edge of the path, luckily there is a gap in the vegetation and we dive into it. They pass us. No words are spoken. No thanks expressed. We move on again, people seem to be reluctant to stop, speak or even look at each other, manners and pleasantries another casualty of coronavirus. No one knows quite how to react to being told to stay away from others.

I'm sure the atmosphere will change as things settle down and we start to approach getting back if not to normality, then something better than what we have at the moment. Certainly there are many more people out walking the hills than before.

Perhaps we should begin to think where all these people have come from, what do they do normally for their exercise? Just because Boris has said we

can have an hour of exercise a day, it doesn't mean that we have to! All exercise classes, swimming pools, golf, sports centres, football pitches are closed, so it's no surprise that there are a lot of folks looking for something to do on a beautiful day. What would we have done if this horrible virus had struck during last winter when it was so wet and we couldn't go out? Sat inside looking out the window with the rain streaming down outside? Maybe we should start thinking that some of these new walkers may want to continue their trips when other forms of exercise are available again, how can we attract them to become new members of the Mendip Society? To do that is going to be difficult, we cannot approach directly and offer details to anyone, so maybe put posters up, make sure the website is visible to searches for information and of course word of mouth from existing members

I hope everyone has a safe and happy exit from lockdown and enjoy your time on the hills.

ED – Things have got better now, for sure, but Malcolm reminds how exactly it was in the beginning.

WALKS FROM HOME – Your favourite local walk. by Sue Gearing

Covid 19 has proved to be a great catalyst in getting people walking from their own homes, their own village, town or parish and finding paths they never knew existed.

With the problem of organising a group Mendip Society walk at the moment during the pandemic, the idea is to get a selection of your favourite walks, **found in 'lockdown'**, not just one you have done many times previously.

These can then be made into a simple booklet, (we could even call it "Found in Lockdown") or published on the Society's website. It will show others that we are still getting out there and enjoying the countryside even in these difficult times.

So, how about sending in a favourite circular walk from your parish/village/town. Sue's Suggestions:-

1. It needs to be something like 3-9 miles.
2. For the starting point, give a 6 figure grid reference and/or a postcode if possible.
3. Give the length of walk and the kind of terrain – hilly, flat, downhill etc.
and if there are stiles and if they are difficult.
4. Give an estimate if you can of the time needed for the walk.
5. Give a short introductory description outlining the walk.
6. Make the directions very clear and **get someone to walk it for you afterwards** to make sure that it can be followed easily and accurately.
7. Give details of any interesting landmarks, history, geology, flora, fauna etc. that you can see.
8. A simple sketch is also always very helpful.
9. A photo of someone walking your route, and/or a photo of something en route would be good.
10. It is worth saying whether it is dog friendly.



Send your favourite walk description to:- The Editor. secretary@themendipsociety.org.uk

ED - As luck would have it, when I asked for contributions from members when the chairman wrote his monthly bulletin in April, Alex Ballard from Congresbury told me of walks she had done around her local area and very kindly sent me in one straight away so I could use it in this newsletter to illustrate what Sue Gearing is describing above.

Look out for many of the numbered suggestions (above) which Sue makes for devising your walk; Alex's walk which follows here, illustrates these perfectly; so armed with this do get devising your own.

Down By the Yeo to Wrington - devised by Alex Ballard (*7 Interesting facts en route, in green*)

Distance 6.5 miles. Varied terrain, with level river walks, some hill climbs with spectacular views, bluebell woods & a pretty village. Suggested lunch stop the Golden Lion or Plough in Wrington.

Start: GR for carpark ST. 439639. Post code: BS49 5DU



- 1 Park in the Riverside car park and walk over the Millennium Green past the blue bridge, on leaving the Green continue to follow the river on the Two Rivers Way, passing the weir. Walk upstream, with the river on your right, through the next gate, then after 200m, turn right through a gate and over a stone arch bridge over the river. **You should see traces of "Somerset Lane", which crosses this bridge. The lane used to cross the moors, passing Pineapple**

Farm and Urchinwood on route to Bristol. It was frequently used to transport teasels for the wool trade.

Follow the path with a rhyme on your left. Go over the bridge with double gates ahead and follow the left-hand boundary to another gate. Go through and go diagonally across the field.

Park Farm, on your right, was at the centre of a late medieval deer park created by the DeRodney family

sometime after 1370. Here go through another gate, following the hedge to the right. After 20 metres, go through a kissing gate, bear right with the hedge still on your right. After 30 metres there's another kissing gate leading to a lane, which takes you to Venus Street.

Venus Street is a corruption of Venny Street, meaning "street leading to the boggy place". Sproads Leaze, an ancient field to the north of Venus Street was named after its owner, Sprud. Turn left and immediately right through a gate.

2 Follow the left hand boundary past a cottage, ***the old corrugated shed in the garden here is the old oil store from Congresbury railway station, thought to be the last remaining building from the site.*** Cross through a pedestrian gate in the SE corner of the field (not the field gate). Head diagonally right to a tree in the far hedge, to the left of a telegraph post. Cross a bridge and walk through the solar farm to a raised area which is the line of the old Wrington Vale railway line. ***This was a branch of the Cheddar Valley Railway. The Bristol and Exeter Railway Company built the track connecting Yatton to Wells in 1869. This became known as 'The Strawberry Line, for its role in carrying Cheddar Strawberries towards Bristol. It was a victim of Dr Beeching's cuts in 1965. The branch from Congresbury Junction to Wrington and Blagdon opened in 1901, with support from the Bristol Waterworks Company who used it to carry material for the construction of its reservoir at Blagdon. The field names in the vicinity, Rydings, Green Earl and Kayses, suggest origins as medieval woodland..*** At the end of the solar farm, take the bridge ahead, and head diagonally left to the right of the electricity substation to a kissing gate onto Stock Lane.



3 Turn left along the road. Take **great care** on the road, for a very short distance before you can get onto a narrow grassy verge. After passing Iwood Lane, ***note the boundary stone here*** turn left after the first house and follow a track. ***Lots of work is going on here to create the new power line from Hinckley Point.*** At Stoneycroft continue straight on through two gates onto a track. Where this bends left, take the kissing gate ahead into a large field. Cross the field diagonally, just to the left of two trees, staying roughly parallel to the power line, to a gate in the far hedge, ***(at some times of year, you may need to walk round the boundary if the maize is too high)*** and after the gate, turn right and continue through two narrow fields, and cross the river by a bridge in the left hand hedge near the end of the second field. Cross the next field diagonally right, heading towards Wrington Church, and cross the stream by a stone bridge.

4 Take the gate onto the Wrington Vale track again, cross the track and take the steps down to a gate. Continue diagonally right across the field to gate and bridge over the stream. ***Wrington Sewage Treatment Plant is on your right.*** Continue in the same direction across 2 fields passing 2 further sets of gates and bridges. Carry on towards some electricity poles, then, leaving a number of gardens to your right, pass through two modern kissing gates and turn right through an older one down to the road (Ladywell).

5 Turn left and left again into Broad Street, Wrington, passing the Golden Lion on the left. Turn left into High Street passing The Plough, and continue up Westhay Road. ***(to miss out the village, you could turn left before the old gate and head up a field with houses on your right until you come to Westhay Road where you turn right to rejoin the walk at Chapel Hill.)*** Turn right into the next road (Chapel Hill) opposite the large stone house, continuing uphill past the chapel to the corner. Proceed up the no-through road Bullhouse Lane. The road becomes a muddy track. Continue uphill for approximately half a mile.

6 Just before the track levels off at the top of the hill turn left through a gate into a field with tin sheds. Cross the centre of the field to a gate, then head diagonally left to a large gap in the hedge in the corner of the next field. From here, keep the wood on your left, and pass two fine oak trees on your right. Take a gate into the woods and follow the path downhill passing the old stone water-catch on your right. ***Water catches were a means of catching rainfall for domestic use. This one was in existence in 1903. One of the earliest instances of water catches, in the 14th century, is in the name 'Watership Down' of rabbits fame. ('waater-scipe' the water reservoir).*** Look out for bluebells in April/May. Fork left (downhill) Follow this path through the wood for about 700 metres, with fields to your left for most of the way.

⑦ Leave the wood by a kissing gate, keeping to the left hand hedge, and go through a gate at the bottom into a field with Llamas. After this field, follow the short drive through some black gates with white horse-heads, on to Wrington Road. Cross diagonally left to a footpath opposite, and follow a track. Go immediately to the left of the bungalow, (not though the gate alongside) following a long narrow path between two hedges to another gate.

⑧ Cross the field diagonally left through a gate and turn right after the gate, joining the Two Rivers Way, which comes from the gate to your left. Head across the next field to a metal gatepost, then follow the right hand hedge and stream over a gate and bridge, continuing diagonally left to a bridge beyond the power lines. Cross the Yeo and turn right following the river to Iwood.



The mill here was first definitely referred to in 1228, but was probably a 'Domesday' mill. Unfortunately, it was burnt down in 1892, before the Banwell Volunteer Fire Brigade could reach it. At that time it belonged to the Sheppy Family, who moved their business to 'Sheppy's Mill' in Congresbury the day after the fire.

At some times of year, the old mill wheel is still visible here, but the water from the river now generates power for Iwood Manor in a modern turbine house. Cross the river by the

stone bridge on Iwood Lane and immediately through the gate on the left following the river back to Congresbury passing the weir. Walk through two more fields and the Millennium Green, to the Riverside Carpark.

Pictures - above coffee break on the river Yeo bank; R- The Millenium Bridge.



ED – hopefully , this great walk by Alex has given you inspiration to get pen to paper and do one for us too.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES



Photo – Mick Bush

Member Mick Bush has written before about the Somerset County Council plan to get all existing 'saved' old finger posts revamped and fit for purpose, and we previously featured the Somerset Forge's work for this project. So it's very nice to see a re-instatement of a sign in progress. Mick came across painter Karl Sorensen, working for Chew Magna Parish Council, in the middle of completing the renovation job. The fingerpost is situated at the Pagans Hill roundabout between Chew Stoke and Winford and he told Mick the method he uses to bring the arms up good as new. 1. First he sands them back to base metal; 2 they are coated with red oxide paint; 3 they then get two coats of white Hammerite paint; and finally 4 the lettering is picked out in black enamel paint. Very smart and clean looking, they just need a little cleaning occasionally to keep them that way. (However Mick, I notice the finial is missing, I wonder if they will be able to find it, or perhaps Somerset Forge can cast one for them?)

MENDIP ROCKS 2020

Organisers of the annual MendipRocks! festival which celebrates the geology of the Mendip Hills has postponed this years events that were due to take place in September and October. Although the events are much later in the year the organisers have made the decision now to save any confusion.

Each organisation behind the festival is coping with different priorities at present. The Somerset Earth Science Centre staff are all furloughed, volunteers from the Mendip Society have other situations to deal with and the Mendip Hills AONB Unit is focusing on managing visitor pressure.

The Mendip Rocks programme has run for the last nine years attracting thousands of people to lots of events that get people closer to the foundations of Mendip. There have been tours of working quarries. armchair caving, art workshops, big family events and many walks with interesting experts.

Jim Hardcastle of the Mendip Hills AONB Unit said, 'this has clearly been a very unusual start to the year and all the partners would be well underway planning this years event. As we have more than 30 events that form the programme it takes a lot of planning and we can't just rush at it later in the year. We look forward to a whole new series of events next year.'

In the meantime you can keep up to date with the latest news about the festival on the **Mendip Rocks! page** of www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk





News from the Hills

From Jim Hardcastle, Manager of the Mendip Hills Unit

“Mendip Hills AONB Unit, Covid-19 & Boots on the Ground”

The Mendip Hills AONB has a long history of ‘boots on the ground’, conserving and enhancing the area through practical work, involving local people and having a wide network of community links. Our relatively small size of 198 sq. km. compared to some AONBs has allowed us to maintain a ‘reactive’ element over the years; a one-stop service for anything to do with the environment of the hills. We are proud of our impartial status and work hard to maintain this; we are not the local authority, we are not Defra, we are not the police and we are not landowners. We are the ‘voice of the designated landscape’. We are also easy to contact and actively promote that people do contact us and call in, our office is at the geographical centre of the AONB. For all these reasons people have always contacted us to report problems and issues, seek guidance, ask for the best routes to use and even what the weather is like ‘up there’, for many years.

While our project work, volunteer practical tasks, habitat management, events and campaigns have been cancelled or postponed we have increased our ranger role and central point of coordination. As we treat the Mendip Hills in their entirety we have been able to step in undertaking site visits on a regular basis to all visitor car parks regardless of their ownership, providing consistent signage regarding coronavirus regulations, keeping a tally of cars, dealing with issues on the spot and reporting all of this back regularly to site managers and police in order for them to have a clear picture of what’s happening across the whole area.

Recreational pressure has been at unprecedented levels leading to much more contact from the local community. Sometimes there is little we can offer apart from sympathy but they feel better as they’ve spoken to us. Our ranger vehicle provides a reassuring presence when seen.



Photo AONB unit – on patrol in Cheddar Gorge on May Bank Holiday weekend.

We have all worn uniforms with logos since 2016 so we are easily recognisable and approachable when on foot.

Our volunteer rangers have played a vital role and again demonstrate why it is so important to have informed, skilled, motivated volunteers within the local community. Although we had to cease official volunteer ranger duties these are people who live in the area and on their daily exercise continue to report issues to us and then spread advice and guidance as ambassadors through their local networks.

We have made it clear to Defra that whatever is adopted from the recent Glover Landscapes Review of AONBs and national parks we must retain this ‘boots on the ground’ approach on the Mendip Hills.

FAREWELL TO SARAH – *from the Editor*

Very many members, especially the volunteers and walkers, will have come to know Sarah Catling, in the AONB office, in either their or our, gazebo at an event for the society, in our meadow or MendipRocks or - the list is endless, as Sarah is a ‘doer and fixer’ kind of person.

But now she has decided to work nearer home and her family; she will be greatly missed but we do wish her all the best in her new job – thank you Sarah for just being Sarah.

SOCIETY ROUNDUP

**Professor Desmond T. Donovan,
21.06.1921-23.12.2019** – by the Editor

Sadly, we have to announce the death of Desmond Donovan, one of the founding members of the society at the grand age of 96 years. I had the privilege of serving on the Committee with him and latterly getting his reports for them, as he was our B.A.N.E.S. planning scrutiniser for some years. His daughter, Tessa Donovan-Beermann, kindly supplied me with a résumé of his life and achievements which is quite frankly astounding in its breadth and diversity, but unfortunately is too long for this newsletter.

However, it will be filed with the papers of the Committee as part of the history of the Society, and if anyone would like to receive a copy please let me know. But one paragraph sums up the man I knew from the last 20 years, which I quote –

“Desmond was an old-style polymath, interested in and knowledgeable about many things, and never lost his curiosity. His great intellectual ability was disguised with a very modest and unassuming manner, and a gentle sense of humour. He was always very generous with his time and knowledge and would help anyone who came to him with questions”

Shortly before his last short illness he was out and about with his family and sent a photo to prove he was still enjoying life to the full.



There was a celebration of his life in Wells planned for the 13th June 2020 to which our members were invited but it was unfortunately yet another casualty of the pandemic lockdown.

A President's View



Les, pictured here in his natural environment is away for this issue of the newsletter; it was taken during the filming for the society of the videos of Mendip. Back next issue.

Photo – Graham Keating

SOMETHING NEW FOR SLADER'S LEIGH

Slader's Leigh Nature Reserve adjacent to the Strawberry Line at Shute Shelve has had to take rather a back seat as far as being looked after as the reserve at Tania's Wood has needed more time these last few years.

But this month the first work party of the lockdown period did a splendid maintenance job on the fence and gate at the top entrance. Pride of place went to the beautiful new Reserve Sign, made extra special because it was donated by one of the days' volunteers,

Dr. John Steers, and even more so because it was



designed for us by his daughter Chloe. John said he wanted to give something in return for the pleasure that working in such lovely surroundings has given him over the years. Thank you very much John.

For the rest of the Reserves news have you read the article on p13?

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