

LOHP Members' Newsletter: March 2004

Welcome to the fourth LOHP newsletter. Since the last issue, in August 2003, and the News Update we sent in September, activity in the project area has continued apace. For more frequent news updates, and information on work parties and events, those of you with internet access can visit our website at www.lohp.org.uk. We are endeavouring to keep the site up-to-date and any comments on the site, suggestions for information to be included, or useful links we could post, would be welcome: e-mail us at lohp@wavcott.demon.co.uk, or contact any of the Trustees. ...

Walks and Talks

Our AGM in November was very well attended (40 People), and our thanks go to Graham King of Norfolk County Council, who gave the audience a really informative talk on the European TEN project. The project covers the valleys of the Little Ouse and the Waveney, and LOHP is a major partner. There are European partners in the Netherlands and Germany and in June 2004 the Norfolk/Suffolk partners in TEN will be hosting an international seminar, when representatives from the European projects will visit the area.

During the Christmas holidays forty people joined our guided walk, taking in our sites on the Frith and the Lows, and the Suffolk Wildlife Trust reserve at Redgrave & Lopham Fens. Thanks go the SWT Visitor Centre staff, who opened up especially to provide the walkers with a much appreciated soup-and-roll lunch at the end of the walk. More recently we organised a Sunday morning walk from Redgrave village to Hinderclay Fen. The 14 people, who braved the cold were rewarded with lovely sunshine rather than the anticipated snow showers. We rounded the walk off with a fine lunch at the Cross Keys. Further guided walks are planned through the year - see the events diary below.

TEN funding used for the LOHP's first land purchase

Thanks to our European funding through the TEN project, we are delighted to announce that we have been able to purchase the western end of Blo'Norton Fen. We are very grateful to the vendor, Mrs Betty Williams, and will keep her connection with the Fen and the village alive by calling the site 'Betty's Fen'.

This land forms part of the Blo'Norton Fen SSSI and the Waveney and Little Ouse Valley Fens SAC (Special Area of Conservation). Its international importance made it a very high priority site for the LOHP. Aerial photographs show that much of the site was still open fen in the 1960s but subsequent lowering of the water table in the valley resulted in colonisation by scrub and loss of most of the open fen. We are creating a management plan for this area in consultation with English Nature, with the intention of extending the area of open fen while retaining much of the mature alder woodland. The fen is currently very wet - it has some deep old peat diggings and access is both difficult and potentially dangerous. We hope to build a raised path across it to allow visitor access and to link with the permissive walks already available in the main part of the fen.

The Frith this winter

The Frith restoration project has seen real progress this winter. The huge heap of scrap and rubbish, collected by our volunteers, has been removed by Mr Freddie Wilson, making a big improvement to the view across the field from the gate. Those of you who have attended our work parties may have begun to feel we have been doing rather a lot of tree and scrub removal. However, that's only half the story - in recent months we have been doing some more constructive tree work on the Frith. Specialist tree surgeon Henry Streatfield and his team have re-pollarded some of the oaks along the northern boundary of the field and created some new pollards from younger trees. Our volunteers cleared and burnt all of the brash from the pollarding. At the January work party they planted over 100m of new hedge along the north boundary

of the field. The new Watch II Club, for older members of Wildlife Watch, will be planting a further stretch of hedge and tagging all of the oak trees so that they can monitor their management and wildlife.

Our remaining winter task was to plant some standard trees in the field to maintain its characteristic landscape of pasture with scattered trees. The name 'Frith' comes from the Old English for scattered woodland and suggests that this landscape has ancient origins. New tree planting within the body of the field requires strong stock-proof shelters and Peter and Michael Frizzell have very kindly volunteered their expertise in helping to build them. Oaks, alder and clumps of hawthorn and gorse have been planted, along with some Scots pines, donated by Forest Enterprise. Pines are a traditional feature of the Frith and are marked clearly on the 1904 Ordnance Survey maps. One clump of pines in the south-west corner of the field appears to have been planted as a circle. Commemorative circles were much loved by the Victorians and we have renewed the tradition, and re-planted the circle, to commemorate this Heritage Lottery Fund restoration project.

We were delighted that children from the Lopham's Primary School and Trustees of the South Lopham Estates Charity were able to join us on Friday 5th March to plant some of these trees. We hope that the children will enjoy growing up with their trees and that visits to the pine circle will become a feature of family walks in the valley. Once the tree planting is finished, we can look forward to the return of Sarah and Dennis Jenkins' sheep in April and hope that the spring and summer flowers which started to re-appear last year continue to increase! Please remember that it is even more important that dogs are properly controlled in the spring once the stock return and there may be ground-nesting birds. For those crossing from the walks on Redgrave and Lopham Fen to the Frith, a new 'pedestrians in road ahead' sign now warns motorists of the B1113 crossing.

Other activity in the project area

We are planning management work on Hinderclay Fen in the near future (again, thanks to the funding from the TEN project). Some of the alder trees in the wettest area at the western end of the fen will be cleared to extend the open fen habitat.

The Environment Agency have been carrying out maintenance work on the stretch of the Little Ouse river running past Hinderclay and Blo' Norton Fens. They have been removing trees that have fallen into the river, or are otherwise obstructing the flow of water. Later in the year there will be some removal of reed and water plant growth from the channel. This is a routine river maintenance operation that has been agreed after negotiations with English Nature to ensure that damage will not occur to the protected sites along the river.

Work parties and other events

Work parties through the winter have been very successful, with a record turnout of 20 for the December one on the Frith (that may have had something to do with the mince pies and mulled wine on offer!). A list of work party dates is attached to this newsletter - as you will see, we have a busy year ahead, and any help you can offer is always appreciated. Remember, although we are able to employ contractors for some of the management work, LOHP is run entirely by volunteers. There are plenty of other jobs available if you don't fancy the outdoor work - we need people to help with publicity for the project, putting up posters for our work parties and walks, organising events, recruiting new members, the list is almost endless!

In addition to the continuing work party programme we are also arranging training events for our regular volunteers: Reg Langston and Jo Pitt have recently completed a chainsaw training course, we are offering training in use and maintenance of hand tools at our next work party, and brushcutter training in the summer. We will also be organising some first aid training sessions in the near future.

Events diary

In addition to work parties, we have a number of events planned - full details will be available nearer the time, but dates for your diary are:

Friday May 7th - evening guided walk, The Frith , The Lows and Little Fen, Blo' Norton

Sunday June 20th - a leisurely Sunday morning cycle ride round the LOHP area

Sunday July 25th - Open day on the Frith and Lows

New trustees

We now have two new trustees - Bob Hayward, who is the nominated trustee from Redgrave, and Rob Webb, who has replaced Luke Broome-Lynn for South Lopham.

Subscription renewals

Yes, it's that time of year again. Your membership renewals letter and form should be enclosed with this mailing: please let us know if we have mis-recorded any of your details. Anyone who has joined since Christmas won't need to renew their subscription until next year. We very much value your continuing support for our work to conserve and enhance the wildlife, landscape of the valley and to increase public access..
