

# Shaping your outdoors

## Outdoor Recreation Service Newsletter



### Active volunteering on Countryside Sites in North East Shropshire: Examples of current and potential activity by Clive Dean, Parks & Greenspace Officer

Active volunteering on countryside sites is not a 'one size fits all activity' and the volunteers and groups involved are a diverse bunch from one or two individuals who clear up when they have some spare time to independent groups of like-minded people who get together on a regular basis to carry out small projects or manage a whole site. Some of them like to hear from me regularly; others are happier when they don't! Here is some idea of the current activity on the sites I manage.



Volunteers at Whitchurch Waterways Country Park

Nesscliffe Volunteer Wardens meet on the first Sunday of every month. The group has its own tools and between six and ten people meet at Nesscliffe Country Park to carry out various management work such as birch and rhododendron clearance, step building and bracken bashing. This year they plan to have an open day showing the public around and explaining the work they do.

There is a small group of dedicated people at Corbet Wood that keep the site in tip top shape by litter picking, dealing with fallen trees and minor wear and tear. Rob, one of that group, has even borrowed tools and vehicles to help clear up windthrown trees from the February storm and scrape several years of mud off the bridleway!

At Colemere volunteers organised as part of the Meres & Mosses Landscape Partnership Scheme have been working to clear Rhododendron around the edge of the Mere to help improve the aquatic vegetation at the SSSI.

A group of Shropshire Mines Trust volunteers work independently at Snailbeach Lead Mine to carry out routine and one off maintenance works and offer guided walks (both underground and surface) to the public and special interest groups.

Two devoted volunteers at Hodnet Railway Line carry out regular patrols to collect litter, check for

problems and carry out path maintenance work such as filling holes in the path caused by rabbits!

Edward, a volunteer at Merrington Green, also patrols the site and car park on a regular basis and deals with small fallen trees, litter and minor problems himself. He is also regularly called on to talk to gipsy and traveller groups wanting to gain access to the common and directing them to more suitable areas.

The local Parish Paths Partnership (P3) group at Wollerton Meadows off the Hodnet bypass have agreed to look after the public footpath that runs through the site.

A community group at Bridge Inn Fields involving around 10 local residents have been working with me on an occasional basis to plant trees, spread seed and hay and monitor the site in order to create a small copse and large area of hay meadow on the recently acquired site in Ruyton XI Towns.

The local Shropshire Wildlife Trust branch in Whitchurch manage approximately a third of Whitchurch Waterway Country Park (WWCP), in Whitchurch, for Shropshire Council. They receive a grant from us once a year which they use to manage Greenfields Nature Reserve. This contributes toward steps, fencing, tree works and tools for the group. They also organise grazing on the site to improve the valuable wildflower meadows. The group also applies for grants to help carry out improvement projects.

A brand new project, Spruce up Sandstone, was launched at WWCP on June 14th by Sarah, a volunteer who works at the local branch of MacDonald's (see the article on Page 4). Sarah not only raised £1000 from MacDonald's but also organised over a dozen volunteers from the company, Whitchurch Waterway Trust and the local community to carry out a tidy up on site. The volunteers will be creating and managing an annual and a perennial wildflower meadow, planting fruit trees and building a bug hotel and bat and bird boxes to attract more wildlife.

All this volunteer activity is essential in helping improve and maintain the local greenspaces that local people enjoy. The add on benefit is that all the volunteers involved are able to keep fit and healthy for free while enjoying socialising in the great outdoors!

If you think you would like to volunteer at one of our sites, we'd love to hear from you. Please contact us at [outdoor.recreation@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:outdoor.recreation@shropshire.gov.uk)

## **Walking for Health in South Shropshire: An update from Helen d'Albert, South Shropshire Walking Coordinator**

**Currently there are 14 Walking for Health walks running across the south of the county, within the communities of Craven Arms, Ludlow, Church Stretton, Cleobury Mortimer, Rushbury, Ashford Carbonel, Clee Hill and Clun.**

Sincere thanks needs to be extended to all the Volunteer Walk Leaders and Back Markers for their hard work, dedication and commitment in providing these walks for their communities. Their help is essential in enabling us to provide this valuable service.

We couldn't do it without you!



One of our Walking for Health walks in action

## New Walking for Health (WfH) projects:

### Clun Walking for Health:

I started WfH in Clun at the beginning of April which I am pleased to say is progressing well, with a variety of short routes in and around Clun. We have a regular core group of six walkers, however volunteer Walk Leaders are needed from the community to sustain the group into the future. We are particularly grateful to Carys Palmer for supporting the project and letting us meet at her tearoom and to the Clun Chronicle for helping us to get the word out to the community. Carys attended our recent WfH Volunteer Walk Leaders Training to be a backmarker for the walks which is great.



The Clun Walking for Health Group

### Possible Foyer Youth Walks:

Kim Skinner Manager of the Foyer in Ludlow and her staff are considering setting up WfH Youth walks for their residents. I have had an exploratory meeting with Kim and her staff to discuss ideas and they are now considering the next stage.

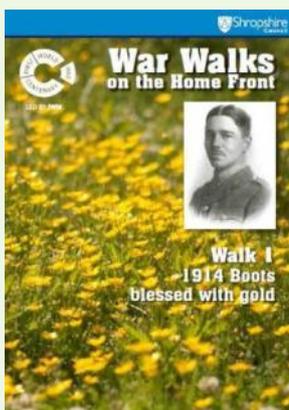
### Bishops Castle:

I am looking into re-starting WfH in Bishop's Castle. WfH was originally tried there last year, but was unable to continue due to a leader's health needs and the lack of attendance for walks, which I understand was largely due to the concerns over having to walk up the hill up the main street.

I have been in contact with past and new walk leaders who are all very keen to restart WfH in the town. So we should have three leaders and some marketing support to give this project a strong foundation. We have been exploring routes at the lower end of the town avoiding the steep hill to dispel the issues that appear to have put some people off, and we will market the walks in a way that highlights this.

## World War 1 walks launch Saturday 24th May

The first of a series of WW1 walks entitled '1914 Boots blessed with gold' was launched on the 24th May. Experts John Newnham, Keith Pybus and Andrew Bannerman guided the walkers around a part of Shrewsbury where the famous war poet Wilfred Owen lived.



The name for the walk comes from a comment Wilfred made to his younger brother on seeing that petals from the buttercups in a field they had just walked through had covered his boots and "blessed them with gold" he went on to immortalise the words in his poem "Spring Offensive". Copies of the walk guide can be obtained from the new visitor information centre situated within the Shrewsbury Music Hall.

There will be 20 walks in total spanning the years 2014 to 2019 showing the effects the war had on the home front.

## The Launch of the Humphrey Kynaston Way

The new 56 mile Humphrey Kynaston Long Distance Bridleway was opened on the 18th of May by the High Sheriff of Shropshire, Mr. Robert Bland.



The route travels from Carding Mill Valley near Church Stretton to Grinshill with four additional circular trails. It was made possible by the dedication of a new stretch of bridleway at Montford Bridge across the land of the Field Studies Centre, the Highways Agency and three local landowners. This enables the busy A5 to be avoided by crossing underneath it. There were over 30 people at the launch comprising of walkers, horse riders and cyclists.

Mr. Mark Weston from the British Horse Society presented Access Creation Awards to the landowners and Shropshire Council's Outdoor Recreation Department.

A guidebook has been produced detailing the route. It is available from Visitor Information Centres, as a download at [www.shropshireriding.co.uk](http://www.shropshireriding.co.uk) or you can request a copy by emailing [outdoor.recreation@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:outdoor.recreation@shropshire.gov.uk)

## Spruce up Sandstone: An example of a community inspired project

A brand new project, Spruce up Sandstone, was launched at Whitchurch Waterway Country Park on June 14th. The project is the brainchild of Sarah Adcock, a volunteer who works at the local branch of McDonald's.

Over a dozen volunteers, guided by one member of the Outdoor Recreation Team and a local ecological contractor, Sian Edwards of OrchardField, worked to tidy up an area of the park that is the first place visitors encounter when walking from the Shropshire Union Canal to the centre of Whitchurch.



People were busy painting over graffiti in the tunnel ready for school children to create a mural, cutting back trees, brambles and long grass to create wildflower meadows and building a huge bug hotel from pallets, broken pots, reeds and bricks to improve the wildlife.

Everyone thoroughly enjoyed their day's activities and there was a strong community spirit with lots of banter. The day was hot and sunny and the drinks provided by McDonald's (endless amounts of coffee, water and a beer!) were very welcome. Everyone proved happy to stay from 10.30am through to 4.30pm!

I met Sarah on site one day in 2013 when she was litter-picking in the Country Park as part of her role with McDonald's and we talked about how much she valued this 'green ribbon' through Whitchurch and had convinced her manager that they should be helping to look after it. Earlier this year Sarah contacted me to ask about carrying out a community project on the site as part of a competition organised through McDonald's. We met up to discuss some ideas, and asked Orchard-Field to help with wildflower meadow creation and management, and the project was born!

Sarah not only raised £1000 from McDonald's but also organised the day and rallied over a dozen volunteers from the company, Whitchurch Waterway Trust and the local community to carry out the tidy up on site.

There is more work to be done over the coming months and years. The volunteers will be creating and managing an annual and a perennial wildflower meadow, spreading hay and wildflower seed, planting fruit trees and putting up bat and bird boxes to attract even more wildlife. A local school will be painting a mural on the tunnel walls to reflect the local wildlife and heritage.

Please contact [Clive.Dean@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:Clive.Dean@shropshire.gov.uk) if you would like to get involved!

## Whitchurch Walking Festival

The Whitchurch walking festival in May was a great success, helped by the lovely weather. The three day event included three long walks, and six shorter, themed ones. In addition there was a beer festival, flicks in the sticks, a ceilidh, and a get together for drinks and cake at the end.

The event was a real success and attracted 150 walkers into the town. This could not, of course, have been done without the hard work and imagination of the Whitchurch Walkers dedicating so much of their time and effort for this.



The weary but happy hikers of the 14 mile circular walk around Whitchurch, which also raised £100 for Macmillan.

## Working with the Probation Trust

**We are continuing to work with the Probation Trust to improve our sites for local communities via Community Payback.**

The probation service has recently helped paint play area equipment in Ludlow and Craven Arms. They have so far helped out on Fishmore View and St. John's Road play areas in Ludlow and Whitemeadow Close and Brook road in Craven Arms. The team, managed by Martin and Desmond, carried out the work on the 13th, 14th and 15th of May. They are

going to help paint more equipment in the future and were a real help with the work they have done so far.



## Shelf Bank becomes Oswestry's first Local Nature Reserve

**Shelf Bank is a 3hectare area of natural public open space occupying a small hill overlooking the centre of Oswestry. The site is managed by Shropshire Council's Outdoor Recreation service in association with The Friends of Shelf Bank, local councillors and partner organisations.**

The site was recently designated a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and is a first for Oswestry. In keeping with what an LNR offers, it is our intention to manage the site for its wildlife and heritage and to enable visitors to freely access and enjoy these qualities through good footpaths, seating, information boards, and through appropriate management of the site to maximise its biodiversity and activities.



Active volunteering by Friends of Shelf Bank

In 2013 Shropshire Council's Sustainable Transport Fund financed the creation of a network of footpaths across the site linking the east of Oswestry to the town centre and the

summit, which offers excellent views across the town and the wider Shropshire countryside. A new access route from Elgar Close allows people on mobility scooters and wheelchairs the opportunity to get to the summit for the first time.

The site has a wealth of heritage associated with it, from Wat's Dyke which forms its southern boundary, to the Royal Observer Corps World War 2 and Cold War bunker 'ruins' at the summit.

Visible from the summit of Shelf Bank are a number of features which all contribute to making Oswestry and north west Shropshire what it is today. These include Ardmillan House, the Castle Mound, Oswestry Hillfort, Thomas Savin and the railways, and beyond to Nesscliffe hill forts and the Wrekin. It is hoped that external funding can be applied for later in 2014 to tell the story of this rich heritage.

On Sunday 17th August 2014 there will be a family celebration event on Shelf Bank, with stalls and activities from bug hunts and guided walks to Forest School and kite flying. This is a free event and one we hope will continue in the summer for years to come.

Anyone wanting to join The Friends of Shelf Bank or wanting further details please contact Shaun Burkey, Shropshire Council's Greenspace Officer at [shaun.burkey@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:shaun.burkey@shropshire.gov.uk)

Carol Booth, Chairperson of Friends of Shelf Bank, said:

"The importance to me on a daily basis, both physically and psychologically, of accessing this astoundingly beautiful 'natural' area on my 'doorstep' is priceless, and the news that the area has been awarded Local Nature Reserve status is certainly worthy of celebration. It is reassuring to know that it will be managed sympathetically for the protection and preservation of wildlife, and the enhancement of accessibility it offers local people and visitors too."

Cllr. Martin Bennett, said:

"I am very pleased with the importance of this site and the work and enthusiasm of the Friends group has been recognised. They join the Friends of the Wilfred Owen Green and the Eastern Oswestry

Greenspace Association in showing what the local community in partnership with Shropshire Council can achieve, and I wish them all well in their effort and will be working for more such partnerships in the future.”

Gwilym Butler, Shropshire Council’s Cabinet member for leisure, said:-

“I am absolutely delighted with the designation of Shelf Bank as a Local Nature Reserve; it’s the culmination of years of work in the centre of Oswestry and will bring an added natural richness to the town. Greenspaces benefit mental and physical well-being and add so much to the quality of all our lives, and this designation celebrates that fact.”

## Ifton Meadows volunteers hard at work!

**An Ifton Meadows Management Committee work party in April continued with their valuable and tireless work at this local nature reserve on the outskirts of St Martins.**



Camilla clearing around trees

The management committee recently ordered a number of cinnabar moth caterpillars which will be distributed onto the quite extensive stands of ragwort on site in. It is hoped an increase in cinnabar moth numbers will assist greatly in the control of this plant.

Anyone wanting to get involved with this group please contact: Shaun Burkey at: [shaun.burkey@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:shaun.burkey@shropshire.gov.uk)



## Trefonen Primary School’s Outdoor Classroom

*By Shaun Burkey, Parks & Greenspace Officer*

Adjacent to Trefonen Playing Fields is Trefonen Primary School and in 2011 as part of The Wildlife & Heritage Project an area of the site was restored for the schools use as an outdoor classroom. A glade was opened up in the small woodland, bulbs planted and the area cleared of rubbish and made safe. Since then Trefonen’s Wildlife group has regularly volunteered their time to keep the area free of nettles and safe to use.

June Middleton, one of the school Governors, has sent us a wonderful insight into how the children are really enjoying the site and it’s flora and fauna.

June writes, ‘What wonderful opportunities you have given the children of Trefonen Primary School with the use of the Glade and Heritage Site, on the days visited the children were full of enthusiasm and excitement gathering lots of happy memories (I’m not sure who gets the most excited the children or the teachers).’

During the year all the classes have spent many happy hours in the glade.

**Robins class (Reception/Year One):** They were looking for signs of spring began by listening to different birdcalls and looking to see where they flew, the children noticed the Daffodils that were flowering, the leaves unravelling from buds, some trees showed catkins, they saw Celandines and

some daisies peeping through the grass. They looked for minibeasts and spotted lady birds in the crevices of the wood. The children really enjoyed their spring walk and taking photographs.

**Wrens class (Year 3/4):** The class uses the Glen for quiet reading they all take their books and have a quiet sit, listening to the birds on several occasions listening to the lambs, they read quietly to each other. The children love having their reading time outside and the glade is a perfect place for the whole class to sit. They also found all sorts of interesting things including earwigs, snails, spiders, centipedes, ants, beetles and woodlice.

**Hawks class (Year 5/6):** The children were given tasks including designing an assault course for squirrels, making birds nests or making a home for an elf. The children really enjoyed their tasks and worked extremely hard. The elf houses were so detailed, with kitchens, bedrooms and even play areas for the baby elves. They also use the area for science topics such as Mini Beasts and their habitats.

**Puffins class (Year 4/5):** This class also used the glade for their Science mini beast topic.

Here are some quotes from the children about the time they spent in the outdoor classroom.

'We love going to the glade because it's exciting to do an activity outside. It is fun, we like writing outside. There are lots of homes for minibeasts in the glade and on the field.'

'I saw flowers and a bee.'

'I could hear the birds tweeting.'

'We saw the buttercups and flowers growing in the grass.'

'It is so good to be outside on a sunny day. We could work with a friend and relax a bit after.'

'I enjoyed science today because we were outside in the fresh air learning about how minibeasts look and adapt to their environments. I think we learn more this way because we are actually doing rather than listening in the classroom.'



June concludes by saying, 'The glade provides a quiet and safe environment for all our children. They are also enjoying using the bird box camera which was donated to us and which is wired up to a PC in the classroom as it wasn't possible to be sited at the Heritage Site; the children are really fascinated as they watch. We are really lucky to be this close to nature.'

It is so rewarding to hear how our sites are being used, loved and cared for by those communities they are a part of. Trefonen Playing Fields is a Queen Elizabeth II Fields in Trust field and offers a broad range of activities and past-times making it a site the whole family want to visit and protect.



## A thank you to our volunteers

Our annual Volunteer Celebration Event took place on Tuesday 3rd June at Minsterley Village Hall. Volunteers were able to attend workshops on topics including the Mines Trust work at Snailbeach. There was also a demonstration of a kissing gate installation, guided walks to demonstrate the benefits of the Walking for Health scheme and a presentation about the work of the Landscape Partnership Scheme.