



Friends of
Thetford Forest Park

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Welcome to the second newsletter of 2001. Unfortunately due to the Foot & Mouth problems, many of the Forest activities were somewhat curtailed at the beginning of the year, including one of our meetings. However most of the recreational part of the Forest is now open to the general public again, although areas in or near land containing farm animals are still out of bounds. As a result this newsletter contains rather more pictorial content than usual, and the hope that by the next issue the F.M.D. situation is much improved.

It also has to be said that the weather has not been very kind either so far, in particular Easter was not too warm and the attendance at High Lodge was down on previous years – however in view of the situation we did considerably better than those attractions that had to remain closed. With the re opening of the majority of the area around High Lodge, it's full steam ahead with the wide range of activities and events that the recreation rangers have put together for the next few months. The *What's On Guide* is packed as never before, and let's hope that all their hard work is rewarded with packed events.

For those of you are receiving this newsletter for the first time, and also to those of you who have renewed your membership, we thank you for your subscription, and hope that you find something here to interest you. If you have any ideas or articles for future issues please send them to the editor at the address above for consideration.

THE CONSERVATION GROUP AT WORK

The short sequence of pictures below gives you an idea of the work involved in keeping the local bats in housing - unfortunately a never ending task as the bat boxes suffer from both the weather and the attention of other animals and birds.



Newly assembled boxes waiting to be put up



Nick Gibbons, our leader for the day as usual



Fixing the boxes in the trees at Brandon Country Park



The finished item up in the air ready for occupation.

We are always looking for volunteers to help us with the many little (and not so little) jobs that need doing, but F.E. has neither the time nor resources to undertake, so why not come along and give it a try next time. There's no compulsion to stay the whole of the morning but there's always plenty going on and people to meet. If your child is a member of the Scout movement, work of

tasks are as follows:

SUNDAY JUNE 10th
SUNDAY AUGUST 12th
SUNDAY NOVEMBER 18th

Brash Clearance at Lynford Pit
Making Bat Boxes
Putting up the Bat Boxes

For all three dates please meet at 0900 Hrs at High Lodge Centre. Sessions last until 1300 Hrs, with a short refreshment break around 1100 Hrs. Please wear suitable weatherproof clothing. No previous knowledge or skill expected, just lots of enthusiasm and a willingness to help are required. You may even see parts of forest that you've never seen, or been in, before.

A change of direction for the quiz again this time – the following pictures were all taken in and around High Lodge during mid April – can you place them in their correct locations?



All the above are within easy walking distance of High Lodge Centre, and some are very close to each other. The answers are on page 4.

STANTA VIST MAY 12th 2001

Unfortunately the Ministry of Defence had kept the area closed even for training during the month of April, but we had hoped that by the time of our visit on May 12th things would have returned to normal, however due to the very large number (40,000) of sheep that roam all over the Battle Area they felt it necessary to continue the closure until at least June. This of course meant we had to postpone the visit until we are given a new date by the M.O.D., and all of those that had booked, and paid, had to be contacted and refunded.

As soon as we have a firm date (Due to the increasing pressure on time once the site is re-opened this could be months away), we will keep you informed so that we can re book the coach and make the visit.

FORESTERS LOG

As you will probably be aware public access in the Forest was restricted recently because of the Foot and Mouth disease. This necessary precaution was taken after consultation with MAFF, the Trading Standards Office and the Chief Vet. Since that time risk assessments have been done and the majority of the restrictions have now been lifted. At the time of writing it is still necessary to keep dogs on leads and horseboxes are not allowed in the forest. Please contact the Forest District Office if you need any more information in connection with this.

With this newsletter you will all receive a copy of the latest What's On and be able to see the large choice of events available. We have a few old favourites including the ever-popular Deer Safaris and children's events, and some new ideas such as Wildlife Gardening days, flower arranging and a special event for Father's Day. Our Themed Evenings will transport you as far away as Australia, Thailand and the Caribbean. Our theatre events will take you to Toad Hall and the land of a midsummer dream. And last, and possibly most important, both the Levellers and Jools Holland return to the forest this summer to give concerts on 22nd and 23rd June respectively. For more information and tickets telephone 01842 810271, 815434 or 814612.

On your visits to High Lodge you may notice that the Giant Squirrel is no longer alone. Over the next 2 years we are constructing a new All-ability trail, the start of which is marked by a 4m high Woodpecker play sculpture. He will be followed by a Rabbit, a Spider, a Woodlark and a forwarder (a forest harvesting machine). This project has been made possible by funding from Keystone Community Partnership and Breckland Primary Care.

As you may also have noticed, I am back from my maternity break and am the proud mother of Bethany, a sister for Laurence who is now almost four years old. I am returning to my role in the Recreation Department which includes being the main contact between The Friends and Forest Enterprise, I look forward to hearing from you to discuss any issue relating to the forest.

Frances Evershed

A report from Committee Member Anne Mason on two meetings of interest attended recently:

REPORT ON THE ENVIRONMENT PANEL MEETING 1ST MAY 2001

This session of the Environment Panel was held at High Lodge, as the two main issues discussed were the High Lodge Phase 2 project and the proposed A11 improvements between Mildenhall and Thetford.

There was an update on the heath land regeneration programme, with Steve Rothera of English Nature reporting that clearance had begun at Weeting, Cranwich and Three Hills and that fencing contracts had gone out to tender as grazing flocks of sheep will play a vital part in creating the heath land turf; He also said that the annual meeting of the English Nature Council will be held in Breckland this year.

Mike Taylor, Conservation and Recreation Manager of Forest Enterprise, explained the finalised plans for High Lodge, which will expand the existing building as one unit. The restaurant will be increased in size by building on at the back and the interior will be finished in the same green oak as the existing structure. There will be a new kitchen, more toilets and a cycle franchise extension. Members of the Panel raised the issues of disabled access and the need to ensure that cyclists are separated from the pedestrians. High Lodge was planned originally to cater for one hundred thousand visitors and last year had one hundred and fifty thousand so improvements are very necessary and these plans look extremely exciting and totally in keeping with the ethos of the present High Lodge.

The proposed dualling of the A11 has added implications for 'The Friends' because the new route looks as if it will be nearer to Mildenhall Warren Lodge. Nick Gibbons used detailed maps to show that this route will be in a cutting just to the north of the existing road so there should be little traffic noise and it will be hidden from the warren lodge site. The Panel also discussed the Thetford Southern Link and the problem of pollution already caused to Thetford Heath by lorries being directed along the C633 and the A134 at Barnham. Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils consider that a southern link road would best solve the problems and have put forward three options. Forest Enterprise is obviously doing a great deal of work in assessing and monitoring these options and there is obviously no easy solution.

The application has now been sent to The Heritage Lottery Fund asking for funds to add to the grants from English Heritage and Forest Heath District Council. The application form was accompanied by archaeological reports, the feasibility study from the architects, The Whitworth Co-Partnership, slides and a management and business plan compiled by 'The Friends' Chairman, Brian Roebuck. We are also grateful for the information and help given to us by Mike Taylor and Louise Rackham of Forest Enterprise.

REPORT ON THE BRECKS TOURISM PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL CONFERENCE

This took place on Monday 23rd of April at the Ecotech Centre, Swaffham. It was opened by Jan Godfrey, the Vice-Chairperson. Ralph Barnett, of The Brecks Countryside Project talked about its achievements to date, including the publication of the series of leaflets on aspects of Breckland's heritage, and outlined its future role in helping to promote Breckland as an area to visit. Paul Hill who runs Bike Art and played a major part in organising the conference, spoke about the Brecks Tourism Partnership Sustainable Tourism Development Plan and the need for a co-ordinated strategy between the numerous organisations represented.

The conference then divided into workgroups to discuss the priorities for the next twelve months: Awareness; Access; Accommodation; Activities and Attractions. Each group then reported to the conference on their recommendations but as there was only a limited time for the workgroups this could not be in any depth. There did seem to be a consensus of opinion that Breckland did not have a high profile when compared to The Broads or the North Norfolk Coast in terms of attracting visitors and holidaymakers and the need to upgrade facilities for tourists. Practical suggestions included a diary of events, visitor surveys, signing of 'The Brecks' on the main access routes, an integrated transport system and involving local communities.

The main speaker was Richard Denman of The Tourism Company who presented case studies of how communities in various locations throughout the world had encouraged and provided for visitors without destroying the very landscape and atmosphere that had attracted the tourists in the first place.

I felt that this was most important, that Breckland's unique countryside must not be spoilt or changed to attract 'mass Tourism' because then the very qualities that draw people to the area would in themselves be destroyed.

The quiz answers:

The Squirrel Maze

On The Easy Access Trail

Near High Lodge Centre

The Bike Hire Shed

Squirrel Maze exit

Squirrel Maze

Info Board H.Lodge

Squirrel Maze

That Maze again.....!!...

Friends Events

With the enforced cancellation of the trip into the Battle Area, we are left with a hole in the events calendar and not a lot of time to organize anything, so this would seem a good opportunity to ask if anyone has any particular ideas or requests for anything we could perhaps arrange for our members. During our last committee meeting many ideas were floated, and as it is a couple of years since a questionnaire was sent out to gather information from you we thought it was time to ask directly. Any ideas put forward will be brought up at our next meeting, which is at Santon Downham on the 12th June at 1900.

Forest Events

With this newsletter you will receive the latest 'Whats On Guide' to Thetford Forest, and it's packed with more events than ever before to appeal to a very wide selection of visitors. Forest Enterprise have tried to appeal to everyone, but if you think there is anything different, or something that's missing, tell us and we will make your comments known at the highest level. As the saying goes – If you don't ask, you don't get – and we are here to provide an easy link between you, the users, and the management by Forest Enterprise. It has been a difficult start to the season with the Foot & Mouth restrictions, but let's hope the rest of the year runs smoothly and we get the weather to enjoy it. As I sit here writing this the sun is shining and the temperature is into the 20's so at least it feels like Summer has started.....

Membership Year

Also at our last meeting during the treasurers report an analysis of our membership showed that many people take up the car park Season Ticket offer (giving an overall saving for combined Friends membership & parking season ticket), but as a result of our year running from January-December compared to that of the parking ticket running from April-March, there was some confusion as to when to apply and when to pay. This is causing some administrative headaches for both F.E. and ourselves and we are looking into changing our financial year to match that of F.E. This is not something we can simply go ahead and change, so it will need to be brought up at the A.G.M. later in the year. If there are any objections to the idea in principal we need to hear these views as soon as possible so that we can consider all sides to the problem.