



**MARCH 2004
NEWSLETTER 30**

Friends of

Thetford Forest Park

**WITH GRATEFUL THANKS TO ALL OF OUR CURRENT CORPORATE MEMBERS:
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PEARSONS THETFORD THETFORD GARDEN CENTRE**

The Secretary, F.O.T.F.P., 2 Peacock Chase, Wymondham, Norfolk NR18 0XL - 01953 601105

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T. Butler & Son (Sawston) Ltd is a traditional family owned building contracting company. It has offices, yard and workshop at Common Lane, Sawston where the business is based. It directly employs a workforce of 50, including carpenters, bricklayers, painters, joiners, labourers, scaffolders, drivers, ground workers.

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Butlers are, of course, well known to Friends, as it was their building skills that enabled the restoration of Mildenhall Warren Lodge to be completed within budget and to such a high standard. For those of you that have not yet visited the site, the ideal opportunity to do so would be on Spring Bank Holiday Monday 31st May when we will be holding the annual 'Open Day'. This gives everyone the chance to see inside the building itself – a unique experience – and look at displays about the history of warrening in Breckland, and of this warren and its lodge in particular. You can also take a walk around the signed path across the former warren and view the interpretation boards giving details of 'A Warrener's World' placed around the 2.5 KM circular route.

...continued

You can find the car park, specially made for us by The Forestry Commission, on the link road between the A1065 and the A11, north of Barton Mills roundabout. We will have signs from the major roads on the day and the route to the car park is permanently signposted.

On the same day the Rex Grahame Reserve, managed by Suffolk Wildlife Trust, is also holding its Open Day where you can see the rare orchids that grown in this normally closed area in the south east corner of the warren, it will be sign-posted on the day.

Both sites will have maps to guide you to the other, so please visit and enjoy two very special Breckland experiences on the same day!

Further details are in the FC Spring/Summer 2004 'Whats On' guide or by telephoning 01353 741416.

Subscription Time

It is that time of the year again, where we have to ask you to renew your subscriptions for the coming year. Although the fee has gone up, extra benefits have been added to ensure that you get good value for your membership. If you take into account the reduced price parking ticket, reductions on most of the FC events and the discount available in the shop & restaurant at High Lodge it will be obvious that continued membership is a good idea. This year we are also asking that you encourage a friend to join us at the same time- with postage and administration costs ever increasing, we need the extra income to enable us to continue our work.

2004 will be a very busy year for your committee with various projects underway. You will be aware that the income from the St. George's Day event was set aside for some play equipment for the less able children who visit the Forest. Upon further investigation the costings for such specialised equipment were found to be rather more than we had imagined, so it was decided to expand the project and apply for some grant money to fund the idea. As with all grant aided projects, the time scale is somewhat extended, but we are totally committed to providing a unique experience here in the forest at Thetford. (See the further article on page 3). We are also involved in obtaining funding for the planned extension to the new building (Oak Lodge) which will be the central location for the Friends from then on. We are ever grateful to the staff at Santon Downham for the use of their facilities for our meetings and it will be great to have our own facility.

Last year we started forging links with another Friends group based at Rendlesham, and this will continue this year with an exchange visit planned for the Summer probably on the 3rd July, details to follow.

Despite the disappointing attendance at last years trip out, we will try again this year and the initial idea is for a visit to the ancient woodland sites near Lavenham, but as ever we cannot afford to subsidise the trip to any great extent, so the more people who express an interest in joining us the better. One major aspect of any trip out is the cost of the coach, but if any member has contacts in this area we would love to hear from them!

Please see the subscription renewal slip on page 3 for details on renewing your membership for 2004/05. To qualify for reductions on FC events, a valid membership will be required and FC will be supplied with a list of valid membership numbers.

F(orestry) C(ommission) Liaison

Some of you may have noticed in the last 12 months that we refer to the FC rather than FE as we used to when talking about the controlling body for the Forest. This return to the old title indicates another change in the way the department is organised but, we have been assured by Jim Lyon (the local District Manager), that this has no affect on his aspirations and ideas for the area.

Jim himself regularly attends our committee meetings and as a result we are always up to date on matters affecting the Forest, likewise we have ample opportunity to make our feelings known to the FC when we feel something is not right.

One subject that is becoming more of a concern is that due to the success of High Lodge, the number of visitors has greatly increased, and although the facilities have been extended there is the possibility of a clash of interests when it comes to the near vicinity of the building. We would be very interested in hearing from anyone with views regarding the All Ability Walk Trail, The Go-Ape High Ropes and the Play Equipment areas.

As you may have already read in the local press more musical events are planned for the Summer, and once again we will be there. Many other events are planned by FC and details are of course in the 'Whats On' guide.

www.fotfp.org.uk

The website continues to be visited quite regularly, and we strive to keep it as current as possible. Previous issues of the newsletter are available in text format on the site, together with pictures taken of our projects and events. The site is also linked to, and from, the FC site so you can always be up to date with the local forest news.

A FOTFP project for 2004 and beyond – Mike Hume

As you may already be aware Friends has been investigating ways of enhancing the visits to the forest made by young people who labour with challenges in their lives. Various ideas have been considered and one, an elevated wheelchair walkway is being looked at in some depth. However, a scheme like this is a complex, expensive and time-consuming project and it was felt that something more attainable in the interim should be implemented.

To this end, Anne Mason, our chairperson, has been in contact with a company from King's Lynn. This firm can provide bicycles or attachments for such machines that would enable people of any age and ability to enjoy the forest on two wheels. Initial enquiries made of the various parties who would be involved in the running such an operation look promising and especially after a meeting with the bicycle firm on Friday 20th February at High Lodge.

If any of our readers have any knowledge or experience in this field please contact myself (Mike Hume) on 01953 457520. More in the next newsletter.

Subscription Time !

Can we please ask that you renew your subscription to Friends as soon as possible now? The fee for membership for the next 12 months is only £7.50 and of course entitles you to obtain a reduced price season parking ticket from the Forestry Commission, future issues of this newsletter, reductions on many of the events in the FC 'Whats On' guide, and the chance to take part in the varied activities organised on your behalf. Cheques should be made payable to 'The F.O.T.F.P.' and sent to:

Mrs. Sheila Hume, F.O.T.F.P. Treasurer, 33 Elizabeth Close, Attleborough, Norfolk, NR17 1QJ

To ensure our records are up to date, please complete the details overleaf and enclose this slip with your remittance, thank you

East of England Heathland Opportunity Mapping Project. – Mike Hume

Having volunteered myself for the ‘scoping’ meeting of this esoteric scheme, I was the only layperson there. However the meeting, which filled just a morning, proved both interesting and enlightening. Participants, some 20 in all, were drawn from such organisations as the Forestry Commission, the RSPB, and DEFRA, County Councils, East of England Tourist Board and a number of other organisations from both the private and public sector.

Trawling through the Internet prior to the meeting I could not help but be impressed by the amount of work being undertaken in the UK and also in Europe to reverse the decline in heathland. Organisations in the Eastern Counties have for long wrestled with this challenge but their approach, in common with others, has concentrated on the conservation of habitat and species. This new project aims to be a much bolder approach with the emphasis on getting a ‘bigger bang for our buck’. Those attending had been presented in advance with lists and tables for consideration together with a suggested scoring system to enable conclusions to be arrived at. But nothing was set in stone; all was up for discussion, very refreshing.

Amongst the handouts, was a simple flow chart which enables an initial evaluation of a potential site; does the site have heathland soil? Is it already the subject of one the numerous designation orders? And so on, until you reach the point where the potential site requires subjecting to ‘ground-truthing’. At this stage Foundation Criteria are taken into account; these include Ecological Scoring (proximity/linkage to existing Heathland); the presence of significant species within a defined distance; the size of the Potential Heathland Block.

You then arrive at the real innovations in this new approach, the Social and Economic Criteria. Social Criteria include access to the site (an increase or a reduction in access, or no change at all); accessibility (can you walk/ cycle to it, park your car somewhere nearby, come by public transport?) Then there is the proximity to settlement, the proximity to schools; the archaeology of the site. The Economic Criteria are considered and the current or potential profitability of the land is taken into account. Soil condition is taken into account (when last was it true heathland and what has been the predominant land use history since that time?) The impact on the local economy also has to be taken into consideration. Discussion ranged far and wide, much more than there is room for here. However you can be certain that the future of our heathland is a little more assured. More news on the development of the map later in the year.

As you can see from the previous two articles, the Friends Committee do a lot more than just talk about things at our committee meetings, we set ourselves targets and work hard to achieve them. However, none of this would be possible without your support and help, so do please take this opportunity to join us for a further year.

Subscription Renewal Details

Name:.....Telephone Contact No.....

Address:.....

.....Post Code.....

Current Membership Number.....E Mail address.....

From Forest Ranger to Bush Ranger!!!

Hi or should I say G'day mates

Some of you may know me. I was the Chief Recreation Ranger for Forest Enterprise East Anglia up until September 2003 when my husband Andrew and I, along with our fifteen year old cat, Buster and two year old big black Labrador, Jura decided to start a new life Down Under... Perth in Western Australia to be exact.

Jura and Buster came out of 30 days quarantine (seemed like a life time), unscathed, a little bemused but have settled in very well.

Andrew is working for a landscaping company and I have just been offered a job as a Park Management Officer (Ranger) at Kings Park, which is 400 hectares of parkland and botanical gardens of which two thirds is natural bush and it has the most spectacular views overlooking the city of Perth and the Swan River.

The job starts in July so that gives me a few months to start learning some of the native flora and fauna...there are only 12,000 species of plants in WA with over 700 species being Eucalypts!!!!...Should keep me busy for the next few months or years!

One of the training courses I will be attending is how to use snake handling equipment... umm didn't tell them at the interview that I wasn't keen on snakes, and the spiders here, especially the Huntsman...ahhhh huge, completely harmless but HUGE!!

Life is very different here, apart from the wonderful weather, it is so much more laid back and the weekends really start on Thursday afternoon. I think the Aussies see the weekdays as just a necessity and an inconvenience until the weekend arrives and then it is valuable time spent on the beach, on your boat, playing sports, big family picnics or just being with friends and sharing a few 'tinnies'...it has taken us ages to realise that we don't have to do the housework or cut the grass or wash the car at the weekend...we can actually just chill out and enjoy ourselves....

Regards Louise (Rackham)

Conservation Group

The last 12 months have seen us very busy on a number of tasks in and around the forest. We have replaced many bat boxes and have cleared some of the Pingoes at Hockham Hills and Holes in preparation for the re introduction of the Pool Frog.

Our latest project is to be involved in the clearance work for the construction of a second bat hibernaculum in the forest at Two Mile Bottom. Details of our conservation days are on the website, or can be obtained from the secretary. We meet around every 6 weeks on a Sunday morning and as ever you only need to bring yourself and some enthusiasm – all tools and refreshments are supplied!

The next dates planned are as follows – All are Sunday Mornings, 0900 Hrs start.

March 14th Bat box replacement and checking at Brandon Park and Downham
Meet at High Lodge car park (coach drop off area)

April 25th Pine Clearance at 'Macs Seat' and possibly build new seat
Meet at Santon Downham Offices

May 23rd Mildenhall Warren Lodge. Prepare site for the Open Day.
Meet at Mildenhall Warren Lodge Car Park

June 20th Heathland restoration at Cranwich
Meet at Cranwich Camp entrance off the Mundford - Methwold Road
at grid reference TL 776941

Most of the Conservation tasks we undertake are labour intensive, and as a result the more people that come along the more we can achieve during the morning. We really don't mind if someone cannot stay

for the entire morning – any help is more than welcome!

Fridays -June 17th, July 2nd and July 16th Nightjar survey dates. Contact FC 01842 810271 for details

An Evening at Oak Lodge

On Friday, 6th February, Oak Lodge was used for the first time by Friends of Thetford Forest Park for a wonderful lecture and slides by Chris Knights, the British Wildlife Photographer of the Year, 2003. Chris Knights' family has farmed the land around Gooderstone for two generations, growing vegetables on contract for the large supermarkets. At the same time, Chris Knights has had another career, as a wildlife photographer and film-maker. For twenty- five years he made films for Anglia TV's Survival series, travelling all over the world but it is Breckland which remains his home.

Through his superb and breath-taking slides and his informative and often very amusing commentary, he took us on a tour of his farm through the seasons. There were very beautiful views of the Breckland landscape and stunning close-ups of birds, so detailed that you could see each feather, and entertaining stories about how the slides came to be taken.

It was a lovely evening for the twenty-five Friends, guests and members of Brandon Photographic Society and we are very grateful to Chris Knights and to The Forestry Commission for jointly hosting this event with Friends.

Music in the Forest

The line up for the 4 summer concerts has now been confirmed and tickets are priced as follows:

Saturday June 12 th	Bryan Ferry £26
Saturday June 13 th	Paul Weller £26
Saturday July 31 st	Sugababes £20
Sunday August 1 st	Fun Lovin' Criminals £20

With such a varied line-up, we hope to see some of you during these evenings at High Lodge.

Project updates

Ideas regarding the new all-abilities play equipment have been delivered to the civil department, who have taken them on board with regard to looking into the possibilities.

There have been suggestions that the equipment could perhaps be located away from the Forest Centre, at Lynford Lakes for example, while other members suggested that it could replace some of the existing play equipment at High Lodge. Following discussions regarding the possibilities, Jim Lyon responded that he would prefer that the new equipment be added to that which exists already, as opposed to replacing it and also that it should remain at High Lodge rather than being built further away at Lynford.

The matter regarding information about the facilities and access for people using wheelchairs has also been discussed. It was confirmed that the Forestry Commission are undertaking a review of all current leaflets that are available, inclusive of such information. A wheelchair user has been requested to audit the facilities, with regard to gaining some insight as to how the current leaflets and the actual access work together.

Both these subjects are close to the Committee's heart, and you can be assured that we will be closely following the progress made on both fronts. We would also welcome comments and feedback from you, our members, especially if you have any experience of wheelchair use at High Lodge.
