



Friends of
Thetford Forest Park

JUNE 2008

NEWSLETTER No. 44

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Welcome to the latest newsletter, this being the summer issue it would be nice to say I was sitting in the sun writing this but alas 'Flaming' June would hardly be the right way to describe it so far. Hopefully this will not prevent you making your way into the forest for some healthy exercise, or just plain relaxation, or to listen to some music of course.

Although Friends have been very involved with FC's changes to the parking arrangements as detailed in the later article, we would still like to hear from you if you have any comments (good or bad) once it is up and running properly. A huge amount of effort has gone into trying to get it right first time, but that's not say things cannot be changed if they are not right.

Thanks to the generous benefits package offered by FC to our members, we are pleased to report we have broken through the 800 barrier for the first time this year, so this newsletter will reach many people who may not have heard of us before. We would recommend that you visit the website www.fotfp.org.uk for more details on what we are about, or feel free to mail us with your questions – All will be answered, although not always by return !!

With so many new members we would like to invite anyone who feels they have anything to offer us in terms of admin, manual labour for Conservation or the Arboretum to contact us – There are always things to do and we promise you'll feel good afterwards as we pride ourselves on making the work fun as well as fruitful, and we always manage to fit in a tea break at some point.

The Editor

FC have now finished the re-vamp of the High Lodge shop & restaurant to bring it more up to date.

The major changes are to the shop area, which will concentrate more on books and information, and there is now more space to walk around. The changes were made as a result of feedback from the general public, but as always any comments you have would be welcome, and we will pass them onto the management of the site. Please take the time to pay a visit and let us know what you think.

The Secretary, FOTFP, 2 Peacock Chase, Wymondham, Norfolk NR18 0XL

Changes to the parking system at High Lodge

The Forestry Commission in the East of England is endeavouring to make High Lodge a more viable business enterprise, as well as providing a place of recreation for all the family. After much consultation over many months, including with Friends, it was decided to introduce an automated access payment collection system for car parking. Other options were also considered together with the necessary infrastructure such as the required alteration to the forest drive; services and power availability.

The system is very similar to those found in other car parks where a ticket is issued at the entry barrier; payment is made before return to the car and the ticket then used to raise the barrier at the exit point – also known as ‘pay on foot’

If you have been to High Lodge recently, you will already have noticed that work is being done to facilitate the scheme which is due to be operational on 24th June. Those with current season tickets will be sent replacements for use with this new system. To pass through the entry and exit barriers, season ticket holders will insert their ticket which will activate the barrier and allow them to pass through. There are also clear instructions on all the machines, should they be needed.

This pay-on-foot scheme makes charging fairer for visitors staying only a short while as they will pay £2.00 for up to 1 hour; £6.00 for up to 4 hours and £7.00 beyond that. From November to March, it will be £2.00 on weekdays, excluding school and public holidays.

Season tickets will now be valid from the date of purchase for twelve months so Friends’ membership terms have been altered to match this. Thank you to all those who took the trouble to vote about this change.

Lynford Arboretum

Time ticks by, the seasons change, things grow and the work goes on; however if one stands back the difference is there to be seen. Last years assault on the bracken and nettles, whilst it has not stopped them, has diminished their vigour and they are becoming easier to deal with. More of the rank shrub beds have worked on and at the appropriate time others will receive attention, some will appear to have been decimated but their state requires it.

The group has been presented with fifteen, two year old Fraiser Firs *Abies fraseri*, these have been grow from seed collected up on the Blue Ridge Parkway in the Great Smoky Mountain National Park, Tennessee (just think of the Lurel and Hardy theme song, same mountains, different state) These will, in the fullness of time, be planted out in the arboretum as part of conservation measures to safe guard the species. If anyone would like play host to one or two babies for a year or so please contact me; full and detailed training will be given, an arduous process which will take approximately five minutes.

We are, at the moment, awaiting the results of soil analysis following sampling in mid spring this year. On this hinges the arboretum’s future; no point in trying to grow something which is not suited by the ground into which it is placed. One thing that does appear to do well are Dogwoods, a shrub noted for its winter colour, consequently plans are afoot to extend their number and range this coming autumn.

Finally, should you find yourself at a loose end, with time on your hands, an urge to drink coffee in the open air and to put the world to rights, why not join us?

A New Opportunity for Friends to be Archaeologists !

Working in partnership with Colin Pendelton from Suffolk County Council's Archaeological Unit, Friends has been asked to help clear the site of Brandon Warren Lodge so that we can see what remains of the building, currently buried beneath layers of brambles and other vegetation.

Throughout the Middle Ages and until the beginning of the twentieth century, Breckland was one of the most important areas in Britain for the commercial farming of rabbits for their meat and fur. There were over twenty warrens, defined by boundary banks, in which rabbits were nurtured, protected and trapped by a warrener. He lived in a building called a lodge which resembled a small castle keep as it was necessary to provide defence against poachers, some of whom operated in armed gangs.

The warrener occupied the upper floor and the rabbit carcasses nets and traps were stored on the ground floor. Mildenhall Warren Lodge, restored by Friends with grants of £50 000, is only one of two warren lodges to survive as a standing building (the other is Thetford Warren lodge).

I've been researching the history of warrening in Breckland and identified the sites of most of the warren lodges. Brandon Warren was owned by the Bishop of Ely in the Middle Ages and documentary evidence has survived for it. A 'new lodge' was built in the 1380s, but a reference to 'coney caught with the lord's nets' in 1200 suggests that a warren was in existence by that date.

Most interesting for us is that there are detailed accounts for the 1380s construction of Brandon's warren lodge. It had to be '14 foot long and 12 foot wide to start from a firm foundation ... the walls shall be 20 foot high the first chamber shall be 12 feet high from ground level, the second chamber 8 feet high'. Costs are listed too : 'the solar and les corbell of the lodge walled with clunch dug for the same 4 shillings; in a quarter of quick-lime bought for pargetting the walls in contract with 1 mason for whitewashing and plastering 2 shillings and 4 pence' and even 'one Baltic board for closing the door 2 and a half pence'.

The work we will be doing involves cutting back the vegetation to see what remains of the building and exploring the site in general. Colin Pendelton will provide guidance and training. If this event is successful, we may be able to work on other archaeological sites within the forest park in the future and use research equipment familiar to us from 'Time Team'.

The site is just to the north of the Brandon - Bury Road. Just after the signed turning to Mayday, turn left up the forest track marked as Fire Route 10 (**This entrance to the site is normally locked and not used by the public**) and a few hundred yards on the left is a large open grassed area. The lodge site is in the left-hand corner. Please park on the grass as directed.

You will need to bring gloves to protect your hands while working and clippers or shears to cut back the brambles. Because of insurance, each person working on the site has to be a member of FoTFP. Please contact me if anyone who wishes to come with you is not a member.

So a date for your diary: Saturday 26 July 9.30am -12.30pm at the site of Brandon Warren Lodge Grid Ref TL798837.

Please could you let me know by Monday 21 July if you are coming to help. Tel 01760 755685 anne@providence28.fsnet.co.uk

Friends Visit to Bedgebury Pinetum

Would it happen or wouldn't it? Friends have, for a number of years, attempted to organize outings for members to places of interest which have an arboreal background; in keeping with the organisation's purpose in life, however without success, until now.

As part of its response to changing conditions the Forestry Commission is taking a long and very hard look at the way trees are likely to respond. FC has a total of nine arboreta and seven forest gardens scattered throughout England, Scotland and Wales. It was during an inspection by the curator of the Bedgebury Pinetum of Lynford Arboretum, that Friends were invited to visit the UK's finest collection of conifers.

Promptly at 8 o'clock on the morning of Saturday 12th April a group of 20 members and their friends left Santon Downham; picking others up along the way, en route for Goudhurst in Kent. The day was blessed with good weather and a warm welcome from Chris Reynolds, Bedgebury's curator. The visit commenced with a morning tour of the main collection. Bedgebury is set amongst the folds of the High Weald, an area noted for its sand stone, thus an ideal place for this vast collection of conifers. For me, two things stood out during this part of the visit, firstly Chris Reynolds' enthusiasm for and encyclopaedic knowledge of, his subject; also his ability to sense when someone had lost the thread of what he was talking about. Secondly the board walks, something usually found in marshy conditions. These came about, because of the need for more and better foot paths, prompted by the increase in visitor numbers. Trees are, especially in urban areas, harmed by soil compaction brought on by footfalls or the construction of solid footpaths which damage their roots. These less intrusive and pleasant thoroughfares seem to be the answer.

After a light lunch in a bright and very pleasant log cabin the group set off for an interesting tour of the propagation facilities. These were a series of very ordinary glass houses and small poly tunnels (no money wasted here) all intensively used. Working with other FC staff from the Forestry Research Station in Surrey, Westonbirt Arboretum in Gloucestershire, Kew and the Royal Botanic gardens in Edinburgh, tree seeds are collected from around the world, some for long term storage in the Millennium Seed Bank at Wakehurst Place in West Sussex (Kew in the countryside), or for immediate propagation. Again, the staffs' enthusiasm for their job was evident, some of which has rubbed off on members and their neighbours; we are looking after young trees destined for Lynford, grown from seeds collected in the Great Smoky Mountain National Park which is situated in Tennessee – North Carolina, USA.

Everyone left impressed, their minds buzzing with information, yet relaxed by the tranquillity of the place; here FC have successfully separated strenuous activities from those seeking peace and quiet. In all a good day out, and next year ?.... Plans are a foot.

For a number of years now The Friends' Conservation Group has met regularly and has undertaken many worthwhile tasks, however we are at a stage when we need some new members to come along and join in to keep the stirring work going. We are considering changing the start time to a slightly more civilised 9:30 in case this is what's stopping you! To anyone interested in knowing more, please mail me on goodrum.dave@gmail.com
Thank you

Finally:-If any more of our members would like to join the mail list to save paper & postage by having their news-letters by e-mail in future, please send an e mail to membership@fotfp.org.uk showing a subject of e-mail newsletter and we will add you to the growing list which is now 6% of the total membership. Thank you.