



Friends of Thetford Forest

AUTUMN/WINTER 2012 NEWSLETTER No. 54

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Welcome to the Autumn issue of our newsletter, in which we cover the latest news on the Independent Panel's report back to the Government on the review of the Public Forest Estate. It is fair to say that FOTF had quite an input to the campaign, and this has been recognised at the highest levels. The review is currently with the Government, and we do not expect to hear anything more until the New Year, but they will hear from us in the meantime as we still have more to say on the matter.

It has been an unusual season in the Forest – we started with an early promising period of weather, but as you all know only too well, that came to a halt to be replaced with what seemed like never ending rain and miserable days which meant people were not visiting, or only visiting for shorter stays – This has had an impact on our numbers, but we are hopeful that the return to better weather may show a turn around. October means it's AGM time again, more details inside and there is a free post reply slip enclosed if you want to attend – This year our Guest Speaker is Neal Armour Chelu who will be presenting a talk on the Open Habitats Policy and what it means for Thetford.

STANFORD BATTLE AREA VISIT WITH FOTF BY SUE PENELL, A GUEST

Not many of us who live in Norfolk have the chance to see the 36,000 area of wild Breckland known as Stanford Training Area at close quarters, so those of us who had heard that Friends of the Forest had organized a visit, jumped at the chance to join their coach tour on 17th April.

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Our military guide, Warrant Officer Trevor Geddes, explained that the land had been acquired by the Ministry of Defence in 1942 as a training area for troops during World War II. We were told that the families who lived in, or farmed close to, the six villages of Buckenham Tofts, Langford, Stanford, Sturston, Tottingham and West Tofts were moved out of their homes with the expectation of returning at the end of the war. But they did not return, and the MOD continues to use 'STANTA' for battle training today.

We stopped to explore St. Mary's at West Tofts – the only substantial building still standing in the village. This beautiful church has been restored recently and we were able to examine the colourful decoration that Pugin created in the mid-nineteenth century whilst holidaying in West Norfolk. We learnt that St. Mary's is used for worship by troops on exercise, and that the military also hosts a carol service for former villages and the general public each December.

Few original dwellings are still standing, and those that we could glimpse through the coach windows had been adapted for military training. However, to our amazement, we were able to explore Sindh Kalay on foot. We had not expected to be transported to a village in Helmand Province in Afghanistan, yet we were able to wander through little streets, peer into furnished Afghan houses and shops full of fresh fruit and vegetables. Sindh Kalay is where our soldiers train before going on active service and it is here that they encounter the 'Taliban' – played by Gurkha soldiers – for the first time, and it is here that they come face to face with authentic Afghan life, all in deepest Breckland!

Despite the presence of the military 'STANTA' remains beautiful. The landscape, not changed for seventy years, allows the privileged civilian visitor a glimpse into the past and into an age before industrial farming. The vast vistas over the ranges are of heathland grazed by some twelve thousand sheep to keep the herbage short to allow multitudes of rare Breckland flora to bloom and fauna to thrive. At Frog Hill, we not only admired the spectacular view, but are told that this is where Captain Mainwaring and his Home Guard had filmed Dad's Army.

The coach then returned to the barracks at West Tofts so we could look at the photographs of the training area, the villages and their inhabitants before the war changed their lives forever.

As a guest that evening, I should like to thank you Friends of the Forest for arranging such an interesting visit to this unique, beautiful and mysterious part of Breckland that is 'STANTA'.

FOTF INDEPENDENT PANEL CAMPAIGN UPDATE

Since our last newsletter the Independent Panel on Forestry has published its Final Report and made its recommendations on the future of forestry policy in England to the Government. The Government will make its response to the report in January 2013.

In the run up to the Report's publication and immediately afterwards, Friends was in the thick of the action:

2nd July – FOTF was Invited, with a handful of other leading campaign groups, to meet Lord Taylor, Minister for Forestry, with responsibility for considering the Forest Panel's report. We were also able to meet with Baroness Royall of Blaisdon, a prominent supporter of the grass-roots campaigns to save our forests. A fuller report of these meetings is included in this newsletter.

4th July - The Panel published its report. Friends of Thetford Forest Chair, Anne Mason, was interviewed on local radio, television and quoted in newspaper reports. The Report was broadly welcomed by campaigners as it recognises the value of the Public Forest Estate (PFE) to people, the environment and the economy and proposes that it should be “defined in law as land held in trust for the nation”. Concerns include the membership and balance of any future Board of Trustees.

Friends of Thetford Forest's full response to DEFRA - and also a briefer outline - can be seen on our campaign web-site www.saveourforests.fotf.org.uk

10th July - Friends was one of a few campaign groups invited to attend a briefing of the Panel's report to stakeholders in London. Also present was Caroline Spelman M.P, Secretary of State for the Environment, the Bishop of Liverpool, Chair of the Independent Panel and officials from DEFRA. A full report of this meeting is also included in this newsletter.

So what happens next?

Until the official Government response to the report is known in January 2013, Friends will continue to lobby ministers, MPs and other decision makers to make sure that the PFE remains publicly owned, properly resourced and expertly managed by the Forestry Commission. We have assurances that DEFRA will continue to engage with us. We will be inviting key policy makers to visit Thetford Forest and we will continue to push the case for multi-purpose forestry in East Anglia.

But we still need your help too, but rather than reprint all the fine detail (there is quite a lot of it) the following links to www sites will give you a chance to show your support:

Please take the time to give DEFRA your personal view on the Panel's Final Report at forestryresponse@defra.gsi.gov.uk

Visit web-sites www.fotf.org.uk or www.saveourforests.fotf.org.uk for opinions of the report.

FOTF WELCOMES OUR NEW CORPORATE MEMBER



Many of you will know that the catering at High Lodge Forest Centre has been taken over by Churchill Catering and subsequently FOTF invited 'Churchill' to join our corporate membership scheme. We were delighted when the answer was 'yes'.

Corporate members of FOTF enjoy a range of benefits, including two complimentary tickets with a picnic hamper for a High Lodge summer concert and a further ten tickets at a 10% discount; complimentary season tickets for High Lodge Forest Centre (Site Entry only) and a special annual event to learn more about the forest. (This year, it was the Wildlife Rangers' Evening).

Corporate members' whose subscriptions of £250 per year have contributed over £13,000 to help with projects within Thetford Forest, including the Goshawk Trail and the installation of a large number of benches around the Forest.

We are always keen to attract new corporate members and there may be FOTF members reading this who could suggest membership to their employer, business or company. Please contact me for more information and details of how to sign up.

Churchill Catering joins EPR Thetford; Lakenheath Forklift Training; Pearsons (Thetford) Ltd; SPC Printers Ltd; Thetford Garden Centre and Viridor. We are extremely grateful for their continuing support.

Anne Mason

FOREST DISCOVERY DAY – Sunday 30th September

Along with all the other FC sites across the country, this event is to promote everything about the Forest and this year FC have asked us to put together a selection of ideas for all ages.

We will be at both High Lodge and Lynford Arboretum, so why not come along and see us on the day.

ANOTHER WARREN HELPED BY FOTF

All that's left of Ickburgh Warren Lodge is one standing corner and this year FOTF, along with members of the Breckland Society and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, has been arranging to consolidate this.

Work has been held up by the wet weather but should have been completed by the time you read this newsletter.

So far, the archival evidence for this warren is sparse. It is named on Faden's 1797 Map as Langford Lodge (the parishes of Langford and Ickburgh were united in 1775) and a mortgage deed of 1742 refers to 'the field by Langford Lodge'. The earliest written date is a 1476 Indenture providing for the "lease for 5 years from the Feast of Candlemas the conyger at the downe and Claper Hill and from thence unto Musden Lyng to Shakerswaye".

Earlier this year, volunteers from the three organisations, overseen by Colin Pendleton, Suffolk County Council Archaeologist and by Rachel Riley of FC, carried out a surface investigation of the site. We were all very excited to find the possible doorway and the corners of the lodge building but it was tiny pieces of pottery and glass that were especially important.

The pottery consisted of partly-glazed fragments of the 16th century; one probably from the Cambridgeshire area, of 15th-16th century date and two of Medieval Coarse Ware of the 12th-14th century. There was also a small fragment of thin window glass of 17th-18th century date and a bottle fragment of the 19th century.

FOTF is very grateful for a grant from Norfolk County Council and a contribution from the Forestry Commission to conserve the remains of the lodge.

A final update will be included in the next newsletter.



AN IMPORTANT TRIP TO LONDON!

FOTF was one of a small number of 'campaigning organisations' invited to an hour's meeting with Lord Taylor, Minister for Forestry, on Monday 2 July, prior to publication of the Independent Panel's Report on the future of our forests and woods.

We were each asked to describe our 'particular forest' and our aspirations for the report's findings. We were all agreed that the public forest estate must remain in public ownership; that the Forestry Commission be endorsed as steward of it, fully resourced to carry out sustainable and multi-purpose management for the nation's timber production, recreation and wildlife.

Lord Taylor could not, of course, pre-empt the report but he spoke very positively about the long-term nature of growing trees and that he therefore

considered forestry as 'long-term' too and not as an industry subject to short-term policy. He acknowledged the importance of both commercial and public forestry; the economic sustainability of forests and the community connection with the Public Forest Estate..

It was a privilege to meet Lord Taylor and have an open exchange of views. Prior to the meeting with Lord Taylor, we had a short meeting with Baroness Royall who wanted to thank us for all our campaigning. Alan Spidy, the Vice-Chair of FOTF, came to London with me as, throughout 'the campaign', he has been the contact with the other groups and this was the first opportunity to meet some of them in person. He wasn't able to be at the meeting with Lord Taylor.

Tuesday, 10th July saw me in London again, this time for the Independent Panel 'Final Report Briefing Event' attended by about one hundred and twenty stakeholders – and three campaigning groups, including FOTF.



The Chair of the Panel, Bishop James Jones, gave a summary of the Panel's findings and acknowledged its expertise and dedication but also thanked all those who had responded to the request for views and hosted visits. He noted the 'extraordinary work of the Forestry Commission over almost one hundred years' and paid tribute to Pam Warhurst as Chair. Caroline Spelman attended for about half an hour, accepting her 'official copy' of the Report. Pam Warhurst welcomed 'the landmark document' with its recommendations as 'a real sense of new beginnings and a challenge to pioneer new approaches'.

In small groups, led by a member of the DEFRA Secretariat, we discussed the key elements for our particular organisations and the actions we might take in the next few months. I highlighted the PFE being confirmed and safeguarded as the highlight for FOTF, as that has always been at the heart of our campaign. I was also able to say that we are in favour of an 'evolved FC' with the same name and the same body of staff, as any re-branding costs money; the public recognises and identifies with 'FC' and it is the proven expert manager and has made the PFE what it is today.

Anne Mason- Chair FOTF



FOTF MEETS WILDLIFE RANGERS

Some of our Corporate Members and many of those who volunteer for FOTF gathered at Santon Downham on the evening of Friday, 22nd June to meet the Wildlife Rangers and learn about their work. After a welcome by Trevor Banham, Wildlife Manager, we were divided into small groups and each group went in turn to an activity illustrating an aspect of deer and rabbit management in Thetford Forest.

We were taken to see the deer larder, a model of its kind, where the strict hygiene rules and procedures were explained to us, including how the deer are prepared for collection by the game-dealers and how the tagging system is operated as the deer enters the food chain.

We saw the specially equipped vans used exclusively by the Rangers, including the winch and trays for collection in the field and the portable ladder style 'high seat' used for viewing a wide area. We also were shown the rifles and the image-intensifying night sights which are used to gather data on the deer populations in the forest.

Set out in the schoolroom were the skulls of the species of deer in the forest : Muntjac, Roe, Fallow and Red. It was fascinating to see the variation in colour and form of the antlers, as well as deformities that were a result of accidental damage or from fighting during the rut. We also took part in a simulated deer stalk where in the woodland behind the FC Office, the Rangers had positioned deer silhouettes.

Our task was to find them, identify the species and decide

whether it was a safe environment in which to shoot, taking into account the nearness of a public path or the dense undergrowth part-hiding the deer or the presence of a calf.

FOTF is very grateful to the team of Wildlife Rangers who gave us such a brilliant insight into their work and how important it is to control the impact of the deer on the forest environment.

The evening was particularly to thank our corporate members and our volunteers and they all agreed that it was a wonderful way of acknowledging the support



DROUGHT, WHAT DROUGHT?

A VIEW FROM LYNFORD ARBORETUM

Throughout much of 2011 there was concern for Lynford's tree collection because of the lack of rain. In June of that year the Environment Agency declared Eastern England in a state of drought, a condition which continued on into 2012 until BBC Look East declared April as being "The wettest drought month on record". Finally, after several months of heavy downpours, the hosepipe bans brought in to protect public supplies were lifted.

After a warm start which prompted many plants into life, frosts proceeded to cut back on the early promise. With much of last year's growth well below par, things looked bleak but then came the rains. Bracken began to burgeon, nettles arched their way skywards and finally the trees. The first were some we had had real concerns for, the younger and smallest, grown from seed collected from long ways off. Then the older, established broadleaf trees and finally the conifers; these showed a myriad of pale green growing tips with the Larch showing their tiny lilac coloured flowers. Soon there were clouds of pollen drifting through the arboretum to the discomfort of Hayfever sufferers. A group of Himalayan Birch planted to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee were enjoying a moist start in their new home. Planted around the few wet spots which result from sub surface smears of clay left during glacial times, Valley Oaks find themselves in conditions similar to those back home in the Eastern United States.

But what of the Drought? Ground water maps published by the Environment Agency in June 2011 showed a depressing picture here in the east. Come forwards a full year and the situation has changed markedly with the Agency's maps depicting an apparent abundance of water in the ground. However is this, the whole picture?

Yes we have enjoyed and or laboured with large amounts of rain here in Breckland but a Lynford Team Member who resides close to the arboretum and who records rain fall, reports that totals from January 2012 are only those of an average year for the Brecks. We shall continue to harvest rain falling on the two small buildings on site, weed and mulch with gusto and otherwise nurture our charges.

Mike Hume

FOTF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

This year the 2012 AGM takes place at Oak Lodge on Thursday 11th October commencing at 7 o'clock. Our guest speaker will be Neal Armour Chelu who will give a presentation on the Open Habitats Policy in relation to Thetford Forest. Please use the enclosed (freepost) reply slip to let us know if you are coming along, Thank You

MOTHS & MEADOWS

Moths are to be found in a wide variety of habitats; who is to be found where depends much on the geology of the area, which in turn determines the soil type and therefore the larval foodplants which grow there. Some species prefer calcareous (e.g. limestone and chalk), others acidic (heathland, moorland or bogs); yet again dry or wet areas are favoured by others (e.g. sand-dunes or marshes). Geography also plays a part, whether it is low-lying areas or the uplands, inland or coastal and sheltered or more open. Somewhere in amongst these various parameters sits Lynford Arboretum.

It is certainly set in the lowlands for its highest point only reaches 22 metres asl; for the most part it is dry, though there are some interesting 'damp spots', set within several square miles of forest it enjoys a sheltered position. As for soil types, chalk is never far below the surface, however there are areas of acid soil and a quick scout-around in daylight reveals bracken cheek by jowl with nettles, an indication of what is below. One such area is the large open section which stretches down the gentle slope from the old water tower to the lake. Though free of bracken and nettles this large plot contains much else of interest to botanists and the lepidopterist.

This section of the arboretum had, for many years, been mowed and kept open; shortly after Friends became involved with the tree collection it was decided to turn it into a wildflower meadow. Mowing ceased and, at some expense, wildflower plugs were planted by the hundred, much to the delight of the local Canada Geese who feasted richly on them. Though disappointed the team persevered, or

rather, did very little in fact. It was a form of benign neglect with only very rank weeds being removed as and when necessary. A recent examination by an expert in meadows from the Norfolk Wildlife Trust together with the Forestry Commission's Ecologist showed that nature had taken the site in hand and is doing very well thank you. Only one observation was made, why not enlarge the meadow, there is room. Within the week, with a change in the mowing regime the area was almost doubled. Yes it will take several years for the new areas to catch-up, but they will.



A Cinnabar Moth - © Jim Wheeler



A Cream Spot Tiger - © Jim Wheeler

continues...

The annual moth survey of the arboretum was undertaken recently; this had been postponed from early June because of poor weather. The very wet spring and early summer has left much wildlife in a poor state, though it will bounce back of course, it generally does.

On a somewhat unpromising evening in late July eight people gathered to see what was abroad. By the early hours of the Saturday morning the total of species record within the arboretum had risen from 427 to an impressive 455; most of our old friends were seen again in good numbers, also were ten species not recorded before. For those who may be interested in this , a full list is available from mikehume40@btinternet.com

For those who may be interested in the subject generally, a good book is of great help. But which? There are many to choose from, however there are two with which to make a start:

Waring P. and Townsend M. (field Guide to the Moths of Great Britain and Ireland) 2003, Published by British Wildlife Publishing. ISBN 0 9531399 1 3.

Clifton J. and Wheeler J. (Conifer Moths of the British Isles) 1st Edition 2012, Published by Clifton and Wheeler. ISBN 978 0 9568352 1 5.

Friends of Thetford Forest

Your Committee as
elected at the 2011 AGM

Anne Mason Chair/ PFE
Campaign
Alan Spidy Vice Chair / PFE
Campaign

Dave Goodrum Secretary
/newsletter + www /
Conservation

Sheila Hume Treasurer /
Membership

Mike Hume / Lynford Group

Annie Swann

Janet Simmons

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