

W e l c o m e

Winter/Spring Edition

Welcome to the latest issue of our newsletter, where we can update you about the re-start of our many volunteering tasks, most of which are now up and running as before, but obviously still with Covid19 limitations at this time.

We were disappointed not to be able to hold our AGM in October at Oak Lodge as usual, but after a risk assessment we had to admit that it was not safe to go ahead with the meeting.

Obviously the 2022 AGM is already pencilled in for next October, but subject to conditions it is our intention to hold a public meeting sometime in the late spring.

We have heard from our members how pleased they were to be back volunteering, and some of their comments are included in this issue.

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Alan Spidy
Treasurer/Membership Secretary

Dave Goodrum
Secretary/Conservation

Katherine Jones
Volunteering Co-ordinator

Clare Tough

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An Ambitious Task for FOTF

There are over 900 trees and shrubs in Lynford Arboretum and FOTF members are currently engaged in labelling them. On 5 and 6 September 2021, Forest Research's Project Leader Chris Reynolds led two training days for us, beginning with an explanation of the importance and significance of the Arboretum and its tree collection. As the most easterly of the arboreta, it demonstrates how tree species react to climate change in this region.



Chris Reynolds has now created a new database and maps for all the trees and shrubs and new labels have been made (see Autumn/Winter 2020 Newsletter 70 at www.fotf.org.uk) so the focus of the training was how to identify each tree from the maps and database and then attach two labels. One label is a metal identification tag which matches the database, the second is a black information tag. This has the identifying

number on but also the trees Latin and common names, it's country of origin and where known, the year of planting.

The morning of 8 October saw some of the trained volunteers undertaking the labelling, with more sessions being planned. Even in the few hours we were there, it was lovely to have visitors taking an interest and enjoying having more information about the trees.





Not only is tree-labelling great fun, I've learned so much and not only about conifers! The number of species in the arboretum really highlights the sheer adaptability of trees. So many come from places where the climate and topography bear scant resemblance to Breckland, yet they can still thrive here. Seeing visitors stop to read the labels we've attached and look up at the tree adds to what has been a very rewarding project. CP



I really enjoyed it, the time flew by, exactly the sort of thing I was hoping to get involved with. Spending a morning with someone who clearly loves what he does, together with his knowledge and enthusiasm about why the arboretum is so important was wonderful. It gives a whole new perspective to the trees. We (people) often visit these places but don't 'see' and it was really interesting hearing the history and geography of where some of the trees came from. TG

Here are some of the comments from volunteers carrying out the labelling:

"It was interesting to learn that there are so many different types of trees in one place, attempting to pronounce the Latin versions was a giggle, plus it was very satisfying finding and completing sections of the prepared GPS map. Thank you FOTF for giving volunteers a chance to be involved is something worthwhile and fascinating." L Askew

It's a spruce! I said with confidence, applying my newly acquired knowledge to the challenge of tree ID. Thanks to Chris Reynolds for explaining the differences between firs, pines, larches, spruces etc.



Special thanks to:

Chris Reynolds for his inspirational training and for giving FOTF this exciting opportunity to be involved in the scientific work that is part of the management of the Arboretum.

And: Mark Sullivan who leads some of the regular work sessions at the Arboretum and rearranges his own workdays to make sure he can do this.

Clare Tough and Anne Mason.

Mildenhall Warren Lodge

Open Day Sunday 26 September 10.00 – 15.30

Fifty people, including families, came to look round Mildenhall Warren Lodge on its annual open day. They were given tours of the exterior and the interior of the 600-year-old building by Frances Evershed, Alan Spidy and me; looked at copies of documents and maps relating to the warren; tried on replica warreners' smocks and watched demonstrations of net-making by Andy Carter.

Gaz Jones, who does the monthly trail check, led a walk around it.

For the five FOTF volunteers, it was a welcome return to an actual open day, as last year's had been a virtual one. The interest shown by the visitors made it all very worthwhile and rewarding.

Special thanks must go to two of Forestry England's Apprentices, Lewis Riding and Cameron Cutler, who helped beforehand by cutting the tall grass around the lodge and trimming back the vegetation overhanging the interpretation panels on the trail.

Anne Mason.



High Lodge Farm House

More discovered

Some of you may know that FOTF members have been investigating the site of the farmhouse at High Lodge, following on from the 'Trailing the Hidden Heritage of High Lodge' Project.

We've found the walling at the back of the building and know from the Bury and Norwich Post of 8th February 1809 that there was 'a farm in Santon Downham called the High Lodge, now in the occupation of Mrs Tyrrell Garner, consisting of a comfortable dwelling-house, a garden wait'd in, a good barn, stable. granary and outhouses and about 1200 acres of land, which have hitherto been used as a warren'.



We didn't have any verified close-up photographs until now! A set of early photos of Thetford Forest, dating from the late 1920s and donated to Forestry England, included several of farmsteads but no locations were named.

However, FOTF Corporate Member Dot Sayer has an aunt who lived at High Lodge in the 1950s and she kindly took the photos to her – and her aunt, Brenda Royal, identified this one as her farmhouse home.

Mrs Royal recalled that there was a walled garden from which a gate led into the 'baccus' - the outhouse area where there was a pumphouse to take water to a tank on the roof. There were four rooms downstairs; the dining room was at the front and the sitting room had bay windows overlooking an orchard of apple and plum trees. Within the kitchen was a black-leaded stove.

There were two windows in kitchen and scullery which had a copper for washing. Near the kitchen was the servant's staircase. Upstairs were four bedrooms and a bathroom - this only had a cold-water supply. The walls were flint and brick. The dining room had a beamed ceiling.

In the second photo, taken in 1947 from the nearby lookout fire tower, you can see the farmstead buildings and just glimpse the gable end of the farmhouse.



The Farmstead from the Lookout Tower 1947

All had been demolished by the 1970s but now, thanks to the dedication of the FOTF volunteers, the site's secrets have been revealed --- or have they? We still have to find the medieval warren lodge which, being built on the highest part of Downham Warren, gave its name to 'High Lodge'.

Anne Mason.

Friends of Thetford Forest checks all trails

All walking trails at High Lodge and in the wider Thetford Forest which are waymarked, have to be officially checked every quarter by FE staff.

Because problems can and do occur between these checks, Friends of Thetford Forest volunteers carry out unofficial monthly inspections, using a standardised reporting form which they submit to FE staff after each inspection. Before they can do this, every volunteer has to receive training, delivered jointly by FE and FOTF.

This training gives the background to the Forestry England and Friends of Thetford Forest partnership; explains why trails need checking and the procedure for checking and reporting; covers risk assessments and FOTF lone working and safety policies and includes a practice session on one of the trails.

This training takes place at High Lodge and also in the wider forest.

The volunteers have to inspect and report on signs and information panels; the condition of any car parking area, the trail itself and the way markers; benches; fences, dragons' teeth; gates and bridges; trees and vegetation. Particularly helpful are the photographs taken to show hazards, litter and fly-tipping which need more urgent action by FE.

FOTF has been very fortunate to increase membership in 2021 and several of these new members have chosen to volunteer – so every trail at High Lodge (Pine; Fir Short; Fir Long; Nature; Heritage and Goshawk) and nearly all in Thetford Forest (High Ash; Lynford Arboretum; Lynford Stag; Mildenhall Warren; Harling; St Helen's and West Stow) now has a monthly check and is safer for all forest visitors and users as a result.

Unfortunately, the trail at Great Hockham does not currently have anyone to check it, so if another FOTF member would like to take this over, please email volunteering@fotof.org.uk

We would like to thank all those who are our current 'trail checkers' across the forest for their dedication and commitment to this very necessary task.

Anne Mason.

Conservation Activities

Once the CV19 rules allowed and our risk assessments re written, we managed to re-start our tasks in May with a joint activity, at Lynford Arboretum with a mix of previous and new volunteers for both arboretum and conservation groups.

All of the sites we have visited for conservation this year were regular ones in the past, but all of them showed that 18 months of no work on them has had a significant impact to both habitat and vistas so at the moment we will be concentrating on these sites for the time being.

In June we went to the Mugwort pit at Mildenhall to do clearance work in the 'new' pit.



In July we moved onto some more undergrowth clearance, at the Rex Graham reserve to help the rare military orchid that is thriving there and, of course, was not available at all for the annual traditional Open Day during 2020 or 2021 either. Fortunately the undergrowth was not quite as bad as we expected to see, but still plenty of work in the hot sun to do.



August saw a return to the Mildenhall mugwort pit for some more clearance work and also a spring clean of the Warren Lodge site nearby in preparation for the open day in September (see article in this issue)



September saw us at the Goshawk Trail off the Brandon Road, clearing the overgrowth in the area of the second viewing screen.



During the work, seeing the current state of the viewing screen installed by FoTF many years ago, we decided that we needed to try to repair it before it gets any worse. Having woven one in the past at located at the start of the trail, we decided that we gather some willow ourselves.

This led to Octobers task being at the site of Lynford Water removing some excess Willow at the water's edge which we intend to help repairing the screens at the Goshawk Trail at a later date.





If any of you are out and about in the forest and see any area that you think needs some habitat improvement within the scope of small scale works that we undertake, please do let us know.

Dave Goodrum

FoTF Wheelchair Transporter

Update from BikeArt at High Lodge

We were lucky enough, with the very generous funding from a number of businesses, and friends of Bike Art, to get the opportunity to have the Nihola platform bike which is an adapted cargo bike.

This amazing machine can fit a person with limited mobility in a wheelchair in the front bay, whilst the able-bodied driver/rider controlling and cycling the bike at the rear.

It has an electric assist which allows the driver to have an easier time cycling hopefully going further, faster and longer on the bike ! This has been extremely popular within our hire fleet and has been rented out more in the last month than any of our other all ability bikes,



and we are now receiving returning customers so the word is getting around that this great bike can help people with limited mobility, and who are in wheelchairs, to do something they may not have been able to do in the past.



BikeArt

Our hire fleet consists of standard hardtail bikes as well as premium full suspension bikes and even the electric assisted full suspension bikes. We also have a number of all ability cycles ranging from trikes to the amazing Nihola mentioned above.

Thetford Forest Resilience

FoTF was delighted to be recently invited to take part in a Forest England presentation on “Thetford Forest Resilience” and be a part of ongoing plans for this initiative – This extract taken from the FE documentation with permission. Resilience is the “the ability of a social or ecological system to absorb disturbances, while retaining the same basic structure and ways of functioning, the capacity for self-organisation, and the capacity to adapt to stress and change.”

UK Forestry Standard definition.

In practical terms for us, building forest resilience, means managing the forests in such a way that gives them the best chances of self-adaptation in the face of future challenges.

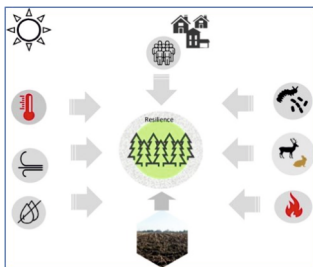
Even with actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions globally, a certain degree of climate change is inevitable. It is essential to plant and manage trees, and forests so they are fit for current and future climates.

Trees play a key role in greenhouse gas removal but can only help mitigate the impacts of a changing climate and provide other vital services if they are resilient to new challenges. As the climate inevitably changes the species composition, structure and active management are also undergoing change.

Why is resilience important?

Together with drier climate, new pests and diseases also threaten the forests.

A fungal disease Red Band Needle Blight (*Dothistroma*) has attacked the Corsican Pine in particular, reducing the needles held on the tree leading to poor growth and, in the worst cases, killing the trees. Slow growing and dead trees affect all aspects of the forest from timber production to habitats.



Some of the other challenges:

- Large deer and grey squirrel populations limit tree regeneration options.
- Growing resident and visitor numbers put increasing demands on the forest.
- Changes to tree species and management systems pose challenges to conservation management of SSSI features.
- Protection of heritage features interacts with the creation and management of open habitats.

The effects of individual factors are amplified by specific underlying conditions of poor soil productivity, semi-continental climate and land-use history creating even-age coniferous monocultures.

How are Forestry England responding to these challenges?

Climate breakdown and the alarming decline of wildlife are the biggest threats to the spaces we look after. We see the impacts today, at a landscape scale.

As the country's largest land manager, we're at the front-line of the fight. Right now, we are adapting for the future and planning decades ahead.

The nation's forests are fundamental in responding to the challenges we face, and to ensure a sustainable future for people, nature and climate.

With your support, we're making sure the nation's forests will thrive and be enjoyed for generations to come.

The Programme has a bold ambition to develop a comprehensive large-scale plan guiding the use and management of the Forest in the next 50 years. It marks the next steps in the evolution of the landscape that is Thetford Forest.

M e m b e r L e t t e r

Submitted by John Bowes

"I am writing this as a Stroke Survivor.

On the 24th February 2015 I was admitted to hospital with a life-changing experience – a Stroke!

As a result of the Stroke, I have APHASIA – a life-disabling condition caused by damage to the language centres for the brain. Aphasia is a complex condition. It affects each person differently and may be hardly noticeable or very severe. In me, although I am improving – immediately after the stroke all I could say were two words – "I'm fine." Now, six + years down the line, my speech is really getting better with more 'words' coming all the time.

In conversation, what I am hearing is really not a problem now, but I cannot express myself competently.

Communication difficulties are likely to be worse when tired, unwell or under pressure. I struggle with reading and writing – I know what I want to say but cannot write it down! Having Aphasia is often isolating and extremely frustrating!!

After the Stroke, sadly I had to give up my business and wanted to have something to do to assist with my recovery. Fortunately, I was able to join Friends of Thetford Forest. The best decision I have made in ages!

Right from the start, I was welcomed into the group. Everyone was good enough to give me the time I needed to communicate and understand them.

I have been able to get involved with various projects, from the Heritage Trail to a number of archaeological investigations such as Mildenhall Warren Lodge and High Lodge Labour Camp.

Now I have been invited to assist with tree labelling at Lynford Arboretum. There are so many species and varieties of trees here it has made for such an interesting and educational experience and I am now slowly being able to identify some for myself.

The project leader, Chris Reynolds, from Forest Research is a real expert in his field but has a propensity to use the Latin names of all the species – I have enough problems dealing with the English common names let alone getting around the Latin ones! My memory being what it is – another effect of the stroke – hopefully, I will be able to recall this newly learnt information and put to good use in the future.

My association with Friends of Thetford Forest has been so rewarding to me through difficult times.

Everyone, officers and volunteers alike, have been so inclusive and accommodating of my condition and helped enormously with my gradual recovery over these past few years. Never has the term 'Friends' taken on a truer meaning. I look forward to many more years of happy and fulfilling volunteering to come.

High Lodge

Breeze into the forest:

<https://www.forestryengland.uk/forest-event/events-high-lodge/breeze-the-forest>

British Cycling and Forestry England have teamed up to offer free, women-only group cycle rides for all abilities in the nation's forests. Every group ride is led by a qualified Breeze into the Forest Champion who will organise everything and make sure everyone stays safe.

Join Bethany, our Forest Champion, on this gentle route through the forest. Taking in stunning scenery and wildlife on the debut ride starting on 20th November.

Bike hire is available from High Lodge with a pre booking with Bike Art. Please make them aware you will be riding with Breeze and Bethany.

2 hours hire for just £11 (discounted rate)

High Lodge opening hours:

<https://www.forestryengland.uk/high-lodge>

From November 1st 2021 – February 27th 2022 High Lodge will be open 9am-5pm with last entry at 4pm. The Information Point will be open 10am-4pm daily but may remain open until 5pm if the service is required.

High Lodge will be closed on Christmas day (25th December) and will operate

reduced opening hours on both Boxing Day (26th December) and New Year's Day (1st January) when the site won't open until 10am.

Enjoying High Lodge in the colder weather:

Just because the days are shorter, and breeze is colder it doesn't mean you can't have a fun filled day at High Lodge. There are plenty of waymarked trails to get you out in the fresh air and enjoying the forest. With walking trails ranging from just one mile up to 7.5 miles there is something for everyone, plus the Heritage Trail has a smooth surface suitable for all abilities in all seasons.



The High Lodge onsite business partners and additional attractions are open all year round so you can hire a bike from Bike Art, swing through the trees with Go Ape or try your hand at archery with the Lookout Archery team but make sure you leave time to visit our beautiful oak framed café for a hot chocolate or a warming bowl of soup!

Megan - FE

Volunteering in 2021

Over 900 Hours Completed!

After the coronavirus lockdowns stopped volunteering for most of 2020 and early 2021, it is great to see so many hours of volunteering have been completed by our groups so far this year. Since volunteering was given the go-ahead from Forestry England to return in late spring over 300 hours of volunteering has been completed at Lynford Arboretum, both at regular sessions and tree tagging days. Volunteers have participated in six conservation tasks, archaeology sessions at High Lodge, and the Mildenhall Warren Lodge open day. We also have more walking trails being checked than we did before lockdowns started. The committee has put in a hefty number of hours, with the usual tasks being supplemented by covid-secure risk assessments for submission to Forestry England, and a successful grant application to help cover the group's running costs. A big thank you to volunteers old and new for coming along to volunteering sessions over the last few months, and we look forward to seeing you again soon!

Katherine Jones

Duke of Edinburgh

Award Scheme

Over the years, Friends of Thetford Forest has been able to offer opportunities to many young people embarking on their Duke of Edinburgh Award schemes.

This year, Oli Cummings has been working at Lynford Arboretum.

A few years ago, Ryan Skeats also spent some time with us, and we are delighted that he has returned to volunteer in the forest after spending some time at university. Their stories are below.



From Oli Cummings.

I joined the Friends of Thetford Forest as part of my Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award volunteering section. I chose to join this group because it is very local to me and I spend a lot of time at the Arboretum, so it made sense to contribute to maintaining the area.

I enjoyed volunteering at the Arboretum, as I learnt new outdoor-related skills, and I found all the different tasks which needed to be completed to keep the area in such good condition to be very interesting.

From Ryan Skeats

I first joined Friends of Thetford Forest (FOTF) in 2013 volunteering with the conservation group as part of my Bronze Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) award. After completing three months of volunteering as the requirement for my award, I continued to attend, completing the volunteering requirement for my Silver DofE award.



In 2015, I left the Thetford area to study at university. Fast forward to 2021, I have since returned to the area and I have been volunteering with FOTF since July. In that time, I have returned to the conservation group to assist with weeding at the Rex Graham Nature Reserve as well as helping with vegetation clearance along the Goshawk trail and the banks of Lynford Water.

I have also joined the FOTF effort to re-label around 900 trees at the Lynford Arboretum.

I have immensely enjoyed all of the activities I have completed with FOTF and that is why I have returned to the group this year. The volunteering events are a chance to socialise, learn new skills and explore the outdoors. I have particularly enjoyed learning about the history of the Lynford Arboretum, the variety of trees there and the importance of the research by Forestry Research to help sustain forests for the future.

Friends of Thetford Forest are now offering a very limited number of free memberships to students with an interest in conservation or horticulture.

Please contact us at info@fotf.org.uk for details. Please note that volunteers under the age of 16 must be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

Volunteering

We offer lots of opportunities – and they all come with the appropriate training:

Checking the Walking Trails.

Monitoring the condition of the various walking trails at High Lodge and in Thetford Forest generally so that they are safe from hazards and litter-free, on a monthly basis.

Looking after Lynford Arboretum.

Carrying out day-to-day maintenance of the Arboretum at Mundford, including tree-planting and looking after the shrub layer, two to four mornings a month.

Conservation.

Enhancing habitats for rare plants and animals “somewhere” in Thetford Forest, under the guidance of the Forestry Commission’s East of England Ecologist, on the third Sunday of every month.

Archaeology.

Monitoring the condition of archaeological sites annually and investigating and caring for archaeological sites within the Forest, as and when required.

High Lodge

Having seasonal work parties to support maintenance of the Heritage Trail and High Lodge in general; helping at the concerts and at special events.

Please email volunteering@fotf.org.uk for further information.

Please note that all volunteers will be required to complete a welfare form and comply with the risk assessments and safety guidance and the current Covid19 regulations.



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With thanks to all of our corporate members for helping us increase understanding and enjoyment of Thetford Forest, and helping us to fund various projects.



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Corporate members receive many benefits from the Friends of Thetford Forest. If you are interested in becoming a corporate member, please see full details at www.fotf.org.uk

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