

Green Gym



Sonning Common

"THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

Number 20 June 2009

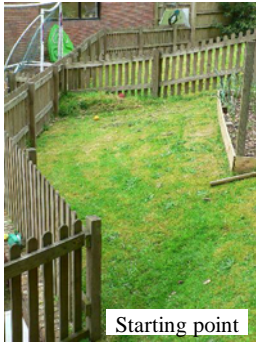
After 4 years of sterling service Jill Kendal has passed the editorial responsibility for the Lopper to Chris Ash (contact details on the back page).

Many thanks to Jill from everyone.

There have also been major changes to the Website thanks to Wim Klaucke, with near real-time images of work we have been carrying out.

So there are going to be changes to the Lopper format, with the centrefold dedicated to an in-depth article on one of the sites we visit. For this issue the other pages will look familiar, but if anyone would like to suggest other changes of focus or style please contact me.

Chris Ash



Starting point

Badgemore Primary School

We returned to the school determined to install the sand pit along with a number of other tasks. First the paling fence had to be removed giving us access to the sand pit location area. The paling fence was reinstated at the same time as work started on the sand pit. Well we did finish both tasks and youngest school class came out to cut the tape. They all look very excited.

Tony Chandler

Thanks from the Headmistress:

This is absolutely fine - the children can't stay out of the sand pit and our peas are coming along very well. Mel



WIP



Done



Site Focus: Aston Rowant

The photo shows part of Linky Down and Beacon Hill West in 1972 just before the M40 cutting was started. Taken from the entrance to Hill Farm on Sheepcote Lane (now Hill Road).

Aston Rowant was designated as a nature reserve in 1958 and is now managed by Natural England as a National Nature reserve (NNR). It is also designated as an SSI due to the unique mix of chalk grassland and Beech woodland and the associated flora and fauna that the environment supports.

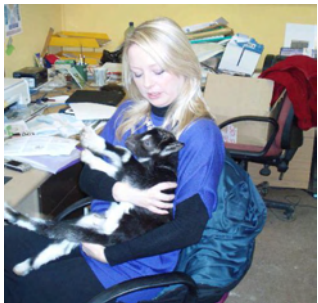
The juniper population at Aston Rowant was estimated as 2,000 bushes in the 1960's. This had declined to only 500 bushes by the late 1990's. As a result measures were put in place both to safeguard the existing population and to supplement this population by using seeds and cuttings, taken from the site.

The Sonning Common Green Gym have been working monthly at Aston Rowant since they were formed more than 10 years ago. They have created a large juniper enclosure on Linky Down as well as planting more than 100 new bushes in Autumn 2007.

The nature reserve has an organic certified flock of sheep to keep the grass 'mown' and introduced a family of goats in 2008 to keep the scrub under control on Bald Hill. SCGG have been involved in the fencing for both the goats and sheep. In 2008 the sheep numbers were increased and two rams introduced to tup the ewes.

The Goats:

The goat family settled in very quickly and produced 5 kids. One male was rejected by mum and vanished overnight. Despite an extensive search of the enclosure he was presumed dead. However one week later he re-appeared and after warming up in the office was taken home by a volunteer to be hand reared and named Lucky. He is now back with the rest of the family and is thriving having become too boisterous to handle.



The chalk grassland and the mixed woodland on the reserve have been surveyed over the years to record the tree, shrub, flower and grass species and there are over 250 present. Possibly the most spectacular are the Chiltern Gentians which cover the hillsides when they bloom in September



The Sheep:

Lambing started in mid-April and the ewes and lambs were housed in at the 'Sheep Hilton' built on a footpath near the office and the speckled face bewlah lambs were queuing for rooms. Most of the ewes had twins with a 50:50 male female mix with all lambs having the speckled face.



The ewes are currently being sheared, which normally is a loss making activity due to the low value of fleeces. Recently an initiative was started to produce wool from UK fleeces and sell it via the Internet.

Last year 400 balls of Nude Ewe 'Speck' organic wool were produced and sold.



Kissing Gates

We had the opportunity to install a one way self closing gate and a medium mobility kissing gate along the footpath from Greys to the bridleway. The former was installed in memory of Clare Bailey, a Health Centre walker and leader.

The task took two consecutive Thursdays and required a lot of prior planning and effort. Both gates required the removal of styles, fence line, installation of gates and the making good of the fence line. Tony Chandler



Style to be replaced



Clare's Gate installed



Kissing Gate crew

Chrissie Phillips-Tilbury (instigator) wrote:-

"" I think they look marvellous. I thought I would be disappointed in the look as I had thought the wooden gates would look so much better but I was wrong. The metal gates blend in so well and are a real asset to the countryside.

On behalf of the Health Walkers I would like to thank you and your team. You have done such a professional and impressive job. Clare would be amazed to know that her life is commemorated in such a splendid manner."

Benches on Kingwood Common

Two benches of a rustic nature were installed by us. The uprights are from old telegraph poles and the horizontals aged sawmill cuts.



Benefits of the Green Gym - Reflections

The immediate benefit of a session with the Sonning Common Green Gym is that you always feel upbeat at the end of it and also that everybody is your friend, such is the optimistic outlook of the group as a whole. The work that we do is varied, and can certainly improve physical fitness.

On Thursday and Saturday mornings I wake up looking forward to the task we are going to complete, even though when doing more technical jobs, I still have so much to learn! However, I remain in admiration of the practical expertise shown by one or two members in particular.

The sites are varied and interesting, and just being out in the countryside in the area around Sonning Common and Henley is very beneficial. If I travel by car, it is much quicker and more comfortable, but on a bicycle, there are several benefits. I notice all sorts of wildlife, I have seen foxes, rabbits, cows, horses, deer, squirrels and the occasional rat, as well as many different types of bird. I have found myself taking an interest in the hedges that I have passed, some of which need to be re-laid.

The social aspect of the Green Gym is one of its strengths and the coffee break would not be the same without those marvellous cakes. I vowed back in 1980 to give up eating cakes except at meal-times, but I have happily changed my mind since joining the Green Gym.

Nick Odell.

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