

Our Past, Our Future

Working together for the New Forest

NEWSLETTER

JULY 2018

Our Past, Our Future is a Heritage Lottery Fund led by the New Forest National Park Authority in partnership with 10 other organisations.

A landscape partnership to ensure the New Forest's distinctive landscape survives despite future changes and modern-day pressures.

The scheme is half way through and some excellent outcomes are beginning to be seen, with positive benefits for the natural and built heritage, people and communities in the New Forest.

Pages four and five highlight some headline figures of what has been achieved in the first two years.

Elsewhere in this newsletter you can find out about some of the brilliant progress that has been made by some of the projects in training, habitat restoration, and conserving our archaeological heritage.

Opposite - Volunteer TaskDay



To find out more about the 21 projects or volunteering for the scheme, visit www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/landscape-partnership or contact us at: Ourpast.ourfuture@newforestnpa.gov.uk

Top right -Seed sculpture at Blackwater

Newsletter produced by the New Forest National Park Authority on behalf of the OPOF partners



Working Woodlands

Historically, woodlands in the New Forest have been used for everything from timber production to food gathering. But of the 9,000 hectares of privately owned woodland in the New Forest, around 40% is now unmanaged. This means many of these woodlands are not great for wildlife, with a decline in woodland species and invading non-native plants crowding out local flora.

This decline has been due to the cost of looking after woodlands, poor access and small sites, fewer people knowing how to look after woodlands and a lack of communications between supply and demand businesses which would help make them more profitable.

To reverse this trend the New Forest Land Advice Service has helped restore 57 ha of woodland between June 2016 and March 2018, with further work planned over 2018. The team is helping to improve the quality of our woods for wildlife and people by providing advice, support and training to woodland owners, and assisting with practical work in woodlands through a combination of volunteer work parties and contractors. This has included reducing rhododendron from sites, with 98% cleared in one location and an average reduction of 83% across the others.



Above & right - Wild Play Site opening at Holbury Manor April 2018

Rhododendron out-competes other species, forms dense clumps that shade out our native plants, is unpalatable to most invertebrates due to toxins in the foliage, and harbours diseases which impact our oak and beech trees. Removing rhododendron will encourage the growth of our native woodland fauna and a programme of ongoing management will prevent it from growing back. The impact of the removal work is being monitored by the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and volunteers over the course of the scheme, but this is a really positive step towards reclaiming our native woodlands.



Above - After removal of rhododendron at Minstead
Left - Before removal of rhododendron at Minstead





Wild Play

Natural outdoor spaces are wonderful for children to play and explore. However the number of children playing in wild areas has more than halved in a generation, with only 10 per cent playing in their natural surroundings.

To help children discover and connect with nature the National Park Authority is creating three permanent wild play sites. These are broadly unstructured play areas in the outdoors, often in natural or 'wild' areas and can have low key features, such as hollow logs or rough climbing areas, to encourage play.

The first site at Holbury Manor was opened in April 2018 by local families and was developed in partnership with Fawley Parish Council. Initial scrub clearance and tree safety works were undertaken in an area of woodland close to the car park and the wood's entrance, and some basic wild play structures were installed, including balance beams and stepping logs. An additional grant through the National Grid's Landscape Enhancement Initiative will fund improvements to the car park and provide signage and a wild play trail.

A second site is under construction at Stanford Rise in Sway and a location for a third site is currently being sought.

Discovering Senses of Place

People respond to places in very personal ways, depending on their previous experience and what they know about it; perhaps an area's importance for nature conservation, landscape character, or history. All these things can contribute to creating a sense of place, so the Forestry Commission has been working on improving people's experiences at Blackwater Arboretum. Local sculptor, Richard Austin, was commissioned to create a new sculpture trail to complement the peaceful setting of Blackwater and represent the variety of trees in the Arboretum. The new sculptures sit along the current short, circular route, which encourages visitors to use their senses to discover the variety of smells and textures of the Forest and enjoy the health benefits of spending time outdoors.

The sculptures depict the seeds from a sycamore, oak, Douglas fir and redwood, and were inspired by the ancient and ornamental woodlands along Rhinefield Ornamental Drive, where some of the oldest and tallest Douglas fir and redwoods in Britain grow.

Richard and his assistant Henry created the sculptures on site and people were able to see them working and learn about the process. Pupils from Hill House School, Boldre, were also invited along to see Richard's skills in action.



Above - Children from Hillhouse school at Blackwater
Left - Sculpture at Blackwater

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WORKING WOODLANDS AND NATURE'S STEPPING STONES

85 ha

of woodland, heathland and meadow restored

NEW FOREST ECADEMY

120,000

New Forest related records searchable online through www.nfkknowledge.org



INVASIVE NON-NATIVE PLANTS

1,000 days

spent by volunteers removing Himalayan Balsam



7 sites

repaired or restored

REDISCOVERING AND CONSERVING OUR ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE

NEW FOREST RURAL SKILLS

535 people trained in traditional rural skills



18 young or new commoners mentored



COMMON CAUSE

30 businesses committed to safe driving to prevent animal accidents.

Verderers' Hall restored



BUILDING SKILLS

300 people

trained in traditional building skills



BETTER BOUNDARIES

4 km of hedgerows restored or created



FOX BURY:

15,100 trees planted



LOTTERY FUNDED

HALF

WAY

WAYS
91 of Way
ched

WILDPLAY



1st
permanent
wild play site
in Holbury

NEW FOREST ARTS FESTIVAL



9,800 people
took part in over **100** arts events

000
hours of
volunteer time
committed to
the scheme

NEW FOREST CONNECTS



4 sensory seed sculptures
created at Blackwater Arboretum trail


3,500
people took part in the
New Forest Walking Festival

HERITAGE ON OUR DOORSTEP



13 groups
supported to develop their
own local heritage projects

CONSERVING THE FOREST FRINGE



3,185m of verge
protected by dragon's teeth,
ditching and banks

Developing Forest Skills

Landowners and managers are crucial in retaining the character of the National Park, but traditional skills in the Forest are decreasing year on year.

Changes in agricultural requirements, land management practices and land ownership have resulted in a new generation of farmers, commoners and landowners with limited traditional skills and knowledge to best manage this historical landscape. This creates a gradual deterioration of the landscape, fragmentation of habitats and a decrease in biodiversity.

Commoning is a specialised form of farming in the Forest that requires specific skills and many of these are passed down generations and are customary to the community. However changes in the number of practising commoners and health and safety legislation have made certified qualifications an essential part of a commoner's education.

The Our Past Our Future scheme has two elements specifically aimed at ensuring that the knowledge and skills required for sustainable management of the natural environment are retained.

The New Forest Land Advice Service is leading a mentoring scheme, teaming up experienced commoners across the Forest with young and new commoners to pass on their knowledge and help preserve the Forest's traditional practices.



Above - Hedgelaying course Andrew Birnie

Opposite - Lime mortar courses

So far 18 people have benefited from the scheme, spending time with a commoner on their landholdings and getting involved in their day to day work. Sami Blastock, from Bucklers Hard, is amongst the current participants and has been meeting up with Charlie Knight on his farm in Beaulieu several times a week. Sami said: 'Charlie has allowed me to participate in many different aspects of farming including attending Salisbury Market, Beaulieu Road sales, drifts, meetings and talks. When this programme is done I hope to carry on with Charlie for many years to come.' As well as learning lots about commoning, Sami has also benefited from Charlie's wider experience: 'Charlie is an absolute expert on deer especially



Above - Sami Blastock
Left - Sami Blastock and Charlie Knight

fallow, we have watched sika stags on many occasions when checking the pigs, we would sit and watch and he would tell historical facts as well as throwing in what bird he could hear at that time without drawing breath!’

The New Forest Land Advice Service is also delivering a training programme for farmers, commoners, landowners and land managers, providing subsidised courses on sustainable land management, wildlife conservation and farming regulations. During the first two years 500 people have attended courses covering a wide range of subjects and skills such as cattle breeding and management, tree safety and surveying, equine health and marketing produce. The courses are constantly under review and feedback from the commoning communities helps develop courses that meet their needs.

Working with the Forestry Commission, National Trust, Hampshire County Council and Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, the National Park Authority is offering seven Environmental Conservation apprenticeships over four years. We are now into the second year with the Apprentices studying for their City and Guilds Level 2 Diploma in Work-based Environmental Conservation and Level 2 Award in Business for the Environment and Land Based Sector, as well as undertaking placements with the various ranger teams in the Forest.

Historic buildings form the core of virtually every settlement within the New Forest and the special character of these buildings is often irretrievably lost by the use of inappropriate materials and methods of repair. Frequent examples in the New Forest include using cement mortar rather than the traditional lime mortar, using non-lime based renders on cob walls,

and using new materials which are not an appropriate character, as well as being visually obtrusive.

Over 300 agents, builders and homeowners have attended subsidised courses run by the National Park Authority about the importance of traditional buildings to the area’s character. These courses will equip them with skills in specialist repair techniques through both practical and technical training events.



Homeowner courses are aimed at the owners and guardians of historic homes situated in the Forest, covering houses from the Medieval to Edwardian periods. The professional courses are for builders and professional agents who are involved in the care and repair of historic buildings in the Forest. All courses are subsidised and delivered by Kevin Stubbs who is an expert in traditional building techniques.

Training is also provided to volunteers and local groups on topics such as heritage mapping through Geographical Information Systems (GIS,) archival research, practical conservation tasks and habitat and species surveys.



Above - Lambing course

Left - NFLAS scything course

New Forest's Hidden Past

Volunteers are working with the National Park Authority's Community Archaeologist on field surveys, geophysical surveys, excavations and research to locate new sites and historic structures, and update existing records. Their success has allowed many sites to be repaired and conserved for the future.

In the first two years the project has:

- Surveyed 2,401 ha of woodland and discovered new Bronze Age barrows, World War II sites, charcoal pits and saw pits, medieval boundary banks and landscaped grounds such as bee gardens and ornamental avenues.
- Undertaken a small-scale community archaeological excavation at Buckland Rings in Lymington, and a larger excavation at Buckler's Hard in Beaulieu to locate several buildings recorded on old estate maps and to provide a training platform for local volunteers
- Repaired the exterior dome of the Beaulieu Ice House. Further works to complete the restoration are planned for 2018/19
- Repaired Emery Down Almshouse Pump and three listed Lyndhurst church monuments
- Carried out conservation works to a scheduled ancient monument at Stagbury Hill and Mulberry Harbour and D-Day structures at Lepe Country Park.



Beaulieu Ice House before restoration



Volunteers Stagbury Hill

New Forest Knowledge is now live at www.newforestknowledge.co.uk

The site provides access to the wealth of New Forest information held in museums, archives and libraries, both locally and nationally. New archaeological sites, historical articles and points of interest are added daily by the National Park Authority, New Forest Centre, volunteers and local groups. Nine short videos have recently been added to the site as part of a series called 'New Forest History Hits', covering various aspects of the New Forest's heritage, such as Buckland Rings Hill Fort, Bronze Age Barrows and WWII sites (choose 'subjects' and 'History Hits' within the site). You can also find out about recent work on the Forest's history and archaeology by watching a series of presentations recorded at the New Forest Knowledge Conference held in October 2017. Why not visit the site and find out about your local area?



Volunteers rendering Beaulieu Ice House

With grateful thanks to our funders:

