

Our Past, Our Future

Working together for the New Forest

NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2018

Our Past, Our Future is a Heritage Lottery Fund scheme 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 has been running for two years and some excellent outcomes are now beginning to be seen.

The **Discovering Forest Skills** projects continue to provide heavily subsidised rural skills courses for farmers and commoners, and traditional building skills courses for builders, agents and home owners. Our two new Apprentice Rangers are introduced on page 8.

The **Discovering Forest Heritage** projects have provided a variety of ways to get involved and find out about the New Forest, including exhibitions, open days, family wild play days, an arts festival, guided walks, talks, films, training and improved interpretation at some key locations for visitors. Pages 2 and 3 outline some highlights of the last 6 months.

Volunteers continue to provide many hours of their time to help support the scheme's work. Pages 4 and 5 explain more about what our volunteers have been up to and how you can get involved.

The **Restoring Lost Landscapes** projects are producing significant benefits for privately owned woodlands, hedgerows, meadows and the freshwater environment. Non-native invasive species have been removed over large areas including rhododendron, Himalayan balsam and work is underway to reduce diffuse pollution in the Beaulieu catchment. Many new archaeological features have been discovered, whilst others have been surveyed and repaired. Pages 6 and 7 explain some of the excellent progress that has been made through two of the projects so far.

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

This new website provides access to the wealth of New Forest information held in museums, archives and libraries, both locally and nationally.



Top right - OPOF Project Officers at Acres Down

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



Celebrating the Charter of the Forest

2017 was the 800th anniversary of the Charter of the Forest, which gave rights back to many Forest citizens. This charter established rights of access and use for the Royal Forests in England and recognised that the land and its resources should be held in common, protecting the environment and providing for sustainable land use by local communities. It removed the harsher punishments for breaking 'Forest law' and gave new rights to 'free men'. The Our Past, Our Future landscape partnership scheme celebrated this pivotal moment in the New Forest's past with a number of events throughout the year.

An exhibition was held which explored the Forest's link to the Charter of the Forest and the new national Charter for Trees, Woods and People. The exhibition at the New Forest Centre explored the Charter of the Forest, what it was and how it still resonates today. Visitors were able to find out about the history of the Charter of the Forest through a number of exhibits, films and interactive activities. Artists who were involved in the 2017 New Forest Arts Festival also displayed elements of their work during the exhibition.

The **'Tree of Life'** provided a creative space for people to add their favourite memories and stories of the Forest's trees and woods to celebrate this special area. Their memories, stories and wishes for the future of the Forest will join the hundreds of other leaves added by people as it travelled around the National Park during the Arts Festival in June.

An **'audio-composition'** created by local artist Deborah Gearing following her residency at the Observatory at Buckler's Hard could be listened to as part of the exhibition. Also on display was an illustrated diary of the artist's time spent at the Observatory.



Above - Two participants and the log they kept from their residency at the Observatory at Buckler's Hard



Below - Tree of life exhibition

An exhibition of the touring **den building** activity work by Forest Arts was on display together with a mini den building activity.

Visitors to the National Park Authority's stand during this year's New Forest Show created characters and scenery to be used in a short stop motion **animated film** about the Charter of the Forest. Visitors discovered the different characters living in and around the Forest, the roles they played and more about this period in the Forest's history. They also had the opportunity to assist the animation team with 'filming' the scenes. The animation team produced a seven minute long film which played during the exhibition. The film can be viewed on our YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/user/NewForestNPA



Above and right - Animation workshop

The **Tree Time Challenge** was an interactive activity where visitors to the exhibition learnt about dendrochronology (the dating of trees using their rings) and matched the tree rings to an important historical event in the Forest's past.



Visitors attending the exhibition who presented a National Lottery ticket were able to claim their limited edition commemorative bookmark. Each bookmark (two designs) included a gold wafer with the NFNPA logo embossed into it. This was part of the Lottery's 'Thank you' to Lottery players campaign.

Above - Tree Time Challenge and exhibition open day bookmark

A special **'People and Trees'** event was held at the exhibition on Saturday 25th October. In addition to all the activities at the exhibition visitors were also able to make a willow sculpture and other tree inspired crafts, and have a go at medieval style calligraphy. On the same day there was a performance at the newly refurbished Verderers Hall of 'It's in the Trees' a play by Paul Hewitt following his residency at the Observatory at Buckler's Hard as part of the Arts Festival.

The 2018 OPOF exhibition will focus on commoners and commoning and in 2019 it will explore the natural heritage of the New Forest.

Below - Medieval style calligraphy



Focus on volunteering

Volunteers have contributed over 5000 days during the past two years and their hard work has been crucial to the success of the scheme. We are now in contact with over 500 people who are regularly updated on all upcoming volunteering opportunities that range from helping out at events, undertaking habitat and species surveys, practical conservation work, archaeological surveys and research.

All the work that the volunteers do helps achieve the overall goal to ensure the survival of the New Forest's distinctive landscape into the future.

Protecting our valuable woodlands

Volunteers have been working with the New Forest Land Advice Service to help restore woodlands by removing rhododendron and other non-native plants. The aim of this project is to get neglected and currently unmanaged or partially managed woodlands back into active long term sustainable management. This can result in enhanced biodiversity and by connecting woodland owners directly with the timber supply chain, there can also be economic benefits for the landowners. A normal volunteer day will involve meeting up on or near the site, which are often privately owned, and after a brief health and safety talk the task is explained and volunteers set to work. Often the work involves cutting back willow or birch trees or removing rhododendron. There is often a roaring fire to burn the scrub and hot drinks and biscuits are provided to keep everyone fuelled! Up to 15 people take part in the task days and jobs can be found for the least to the

most experienced. Volunteers find the days really enjoyable, as it's a chance to get some fresh air and exercise, meet new people and get a great sense of achievement: 'I have really enjoyed being out in the fresh air and doing something beneficial for the wider community. Whilst I have always felt a connection to the New Forest, I now have a better understanding of the need to preserve the biodiversity in the area.' (Volunteer at a recent woodland task day).

Below - Volunteers at a Working Woodlands task day



A big thankyou to all our volunteers

New Forest National Park Authority Volunteer Coordinator Richard Austin said:

'There's a real tradition of volunteering in the New Forest and it's great to see new people coming forward to take part. It can be life changing to get involved and it's also really beneficial for the future of the New Forest.'

Our Past, Our Future will be at the New Forest National Park Volunteer Fair at Lyndhurst Community Centre on Sunday 28 January 2018, where we will be recruiting further volunteers to get involved with the wide variety of projects. Alternatively contact the project team to find out about all our upcoming volunteer opportunities.



Volunteers at Stagbury Hill

Removing non-native invasive plants from New Forest Riverbanks

Volunteers have spent over 1,000 days helping Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust pull up the non-native plant called Himalayan balsam which has invaded the banks of rivers and streams in the New Forest. As well as regular volunteers various local groups such as Cubs and Guides and also corporate groups have helped out as part of team-building events. Himalayan balsam was introduced to the UK by the Victorians as an ornamental garden plant, however it is highly invasive, spreads rapidly and out-competes our native wildlife, forming large colonies of plants sometimes up to five metres tall. Removing Himalayan balsam is ideal for volunteers as it is easily recognisable, has short roots and is easy to pull up so a large area can be cleared by a work party in a day, which adds to the satisfaction of a job well done! Regular volunteer Patsy Baverstock said: 'I volunteered to pull Himalayan balsam this year and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. We went to many different places, some where the balsam was very dense and other places where the impact of previous pulls could be seen. I found the work satisfying and very enjoyable, being on land the general public don't get to, with the peace and beauty of the area being an added bonus'.

Volunteer Patsy Baverstock pulling Himalayan balsam



Discovering lost heritage

The NFNPA's archaeology project has a number of volunteer opportunities including surveying and recording a variety of archaeological sites including woodlands, heathland, churchyards and industrial sites, excavations and conservation work. During a week in August 2017 a number of volunteers surveyed Keyhaven Marshes near Lymington and made over 100 records of surviving evidence associated with the areas salt working history. A community open day was well attended during July at the scheduled 'bowl barrow' at Stagbury Hill where volunteers and local residents were engaged in how we might work to make improvements to the scheduled monument so it can be removed from the At Risk Register. Volunteers have also spent two days cleaning and repointing the exterior of the listed ice house dome on the Beaulieu Estate using traditional lime mortar techniques. The grit used in the mortar mix was sourced from the Beaulieu Estate and matched the grit size and colour used in the original construction. The next phase of repairs will take place next spring (with Listed Building Consent) when weather conditions improve and will involve a local contractor reconstructing missing portions of the brick roof of the entrance structure.

Foxbury

The National Trust's site at Foxbury in Wellow is gradually being restored to its natural state of lowland heathland and native broad-leaved woodland habitats, after years as a commercial conifer plantation. The aim is to create a manageable and sustainable area for responsible recreation which can take the pressure off the wider Forest.

So far volunteers have planted 10,000 trees (of the planned 20,000) in the first two years of the project. With traditional grazing introduced and the gradual planting of native broadleaved trees, the classic lowland heath landscape for which the Forest is famous is returning, and with it the wildlife. Last year Foxbury recorded its greatest ever number of breeding nightjars, 27 males and six females. The controlled access to the site has also dramatically reduced the risk of disturbance to the nightjar and other endangered ground-nesting birds, like the woodcock. Alan Snook, New Forest ornithology specialist and Chairman of the New Forest Bird Group said: 'Foxbury is a huge success story for wildlife. I think it's safe to say it now holds the densest population of nightjars in the New Forest – an amazing achievement in such a short space of time. The scattered trees provide the necessary perches for nightjars to 'churr' from, and the heath provides prey in the form of moths and beetles. Ironically, because footfall is managed and the birds aren't constantly disturbed, more people have had a wonderful nightjar experience on a summer's evening because of the National Trust's guided nightjar walks.'

Tree planting at the National Trust's Foxbury site



Above - Wooden cabins provide shelter and storage space for groups visiting Foxbury

Below - Heathland vegetation at Foxbury



The project has also helped to build new infrastructure within Foxbury such as an additional car parking area, an all access composting toilet and three wooden shelters. This infrastructure facilitates educational and recreational activities by providing better access, shelter and storage, and enables the participation of a wider range of groups. Since the work has been completed over 50 events, including an Easter family day, orienteering and horse riding events have been hosted at Foxbury as well as numerous guided walks, and educational visits. A Forest School is held at the site, this provides an alternative educational approach that focuses on developing children's personal, social and emotional development through outdoor experiences. National Trusts Community Ranger Jacob White said: 'Foxbury is the ideal place for a venture like this. It's safe because we control access to the



Freshwater survey as part of the Living Waters project

and includes practical work to reduce diffuse pollution and improve water quality, monitoring and raising awareness.

The project is working with two farms and a plant nursery to install water harvesting, sedimentation ponds and other practical measures to help reduce nutrient and sediment pollution into local water courses. Further work is planned to install eel brushes to the dammed sections of Hartford Stream to enable eels to move more easily upstream. Wildlife pond creation and management is also planned for 2018.

site at all times, but at the same time it's a very stimulating environment for young children. The combination of freedom and responsibility that they experience at Forest School sessions really seems to help children with low confidence or challenging behaviour. And as they become emerged in the natural world at Foxbury you see that their ability to communicate and work in a team really starts to build.'

Tree planting continues this winter and further works are planned to improve interpretation and access around the site.

Living Waters

The New Forest's freshwaters include rivers, lakes, ponds, ditches, mires and streams, and supports outstanding freshwater biodiversity of national and international importance. However there are still pockets of pollution and some species have declined. The Living Waters project, which is led by the Freshwater Habitats Trust on behalf of the New Forest Catchment Partnership, was set up to ensure the ongoing protection of our best freshwater habitats. The project is focusing on the River Beaulieu catchment

The water quality of the Beaulieu catchment is being monitored by 30 volunteers who are using simple kits to measure nitrates and phosphates in the water courses every other month at some 60 locations. This is an opportunity to get data from sites which would not otherwise be monitored and to obtain baseline data to see how effective the practical work is in the catchment in the long term. A professional survey of 17 sites for wetland plants and invertebrates shows waterbodies in the catchment support rich freshwater communities – as can be expected from the New Forest!

Thanks to the support and engagement of landowners, land managers, volunteers and the local community, the project is going well and will be reported in an exhibition event later in 2018.

Water Harvesting work at the Countrywide Education Trust



Apprentice Rangers

The New Forest National Park Authority is working together with the Forestry Commission, National Trust, Hampshire County Council and Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust to offer two Environmental Conservation apprenticeships per year over four years. The second year Apprentice Rangers are now in post and have begun their placement with the Wildlife Trust. Martyn Meaker and Peter Dovey both have a passion for working in the outdoors. Over the next year they will attend a course in land management at Kingston Maurwood College in Dorchester, and gain experience from working with the various ranger teams in the New Forest including reserve management, habitat management and practical conservation, visitor management, education, community engagement and running events.



Martyn and Pete starting their Apprentice Training



OPOF Project Officers at Acres Down

OPOF Team Day

All the partners and project officers got together in November at local commoner Lyndsey Stride's small holding in Emery Down. It was a chance to find out more about commoning and after tea and cake Lyndsey took us on a tour of her family's small holding explaining the typical life of a commoning family and some of the work that she is doing for OPOF to help raise the public profile of commoning. She also took us on a walk through the surrounding Forest explaining the intrinsic links between commoning and the rich mosaic of habitats and species. It was a beautifully clear day and we were treated to views across to Southampton and the Isle of Wight from Acres Down, one of the highest spots in the Forest, as well as seeing some amazing lichens and other species. It was a great morning and a really good opportunity for everyone to find out more about each other's projects and how they all work together to achieve the vision for the Forest.

The partnership would like to acknowledge funding from the following



If you want to find out more about any of the work mentioned above, any of the 21 projects or volunteering for the scheme then please contact the team:

Email Ourpast.ourfuture@newforestnpa.gov.uk

For more information about the scheme, please visit www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/landscape-partnership