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Covid 19 Lockdown – Issue 3



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Capturing Memories Of War – Dunkeswell War Stories

By Lisa Turner, Blackdown Hills AONB

High, flat land close to the Atlantic and the English Channel gave the Blackdown Hills unique strategic importance in the Second World War and the AONB is home to three historic airfields from the time. It was the ideal base for air crews protecting supply ships from attack by German submarines.

Dunkeswell Airfield was built in 1943 on farmland close to the Blackdown Hills village of the same name. During the war, it was the only US naval air base on British soil, with the US Navy patrolling the Atlantic from their airbase high in the Blackdowns. We knew it was a significant place with a special story to tell and so several years ago our Dunkeswell War Stories project set about telling the story of Dunkeswell during this period of its history.



Through first-hand accounts from local people, some who were evacuees, and from some of the US Veterans who as young men who travelled from far away to support the war effort, we heard the stories that illustrated life in wartime Dunkeswell. The children of the time recalled the Americans mostly being a friendly bunch (even though they carried guns), who they got to know, the sentries calling out and chucking oranges to them as they walked to school and 'candy' in the playground. Others had memories of children and airmen having snowball fights and tobogganing together.

With recent commemorations of 75 years since VE Day, it is worth remembering that for the Americans the war didn't end for another few months, but for the people of Dunkeswell there are memories of the relief and celebration of the end of the war, of the village parties and parades in nearby towns. If you are interested in hearing more yourself, then visit www.dunkeswellwarstories.com.

Strange Piles In Woodlands

By Andy Stevenson, Quantock Hills Ranger

Those of you who walked regularly at Cothelstone Hill before lockdown may have noticed piles of brash and tree branches in areas of the woodland and wondered what was going on. After many years of no activity in the woodland, the AONB service have managed to get the site into a Woodland Grant scheme and have started work.

The Rangers manage the whole of Cothelstone Hill on a day to day basis on behalf of the South West Heritage Trust (SWT) who lease it from Somerset County Council. As well as the ponies and the open grassland, there is over 44 hectares of woodland outside the fence line with neighbouring woodland on all sides, Buncombe Wood to the south and east, Merridge Common to the north and Paradise to the west. The first work in the woodlands with help from volunteers from the Working Well group and paid contractors was to open up the woodland access corridors (rides) by felling some of the dangerous trees and cutting back some of the smaller branches and shrubs.



This allows butterflies, bats and birds to move around the site more easily and allows more light to reach the ground surface encouraging wildflowers, such as primroses and bluebells, to emerge.

Similarly, an open area (glade) along one of the rides has been enlarged by the Rangers and members of the Quantock Conservation Volunteers, Volunteer Rangers and Estates Team by cutting back some of the scrub and thinning some taller ash trees.

The piles of brash you may have seen are part of a traditional woodland management technique called coppicing that dates back centuries; it has been identified that coppiced lime and oak was used to build the Sweet Track in 3806 BC. Areas of woodland trees (coupes) are cut down to near ground level on a rotational basis, perhaps once every 10 or 15 years. The cutting of the tree stems promotes new growth and provides numerous products such as walking sticks, firewood, charcoal, fence materials and wood for furniture and building.

The stumps or stools can then be covered up with branches to allow new growth without being browsed by deer. Some of the hazel poles cut this winter with volunteers have been used by SWHT to create a new round house at the Avalon Marshes site on the Somerset Levels. As with the rides and glades, opening up the canopy of the woodland in the coppiced area allows light to reach the ground and encourages wildflowers to emerge.



Coppice coupes before and after

Stowey Wood

By Roy Osborne, Quantock Hills Volunteer

AONB staff, volunteers and the public in general may welcome an update on Stowey Wood, where light-touch management work has continued over winter and even into Covid19 lock-down. Stowey Wood is a PAWS (Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site) and is believed to have been wooded even as far back as 1700. Over the past couple of years Stowey Green Spaces Group, helped by the Quantock Countryside Volunteer (QCV) team and a grant of £1,170.00 from the Greater Quantock Landscape Development Fund, have planted around 1500 saplings of 28 native species in the Wood, replacing a monoculture of somewhat neglected Sitka Spruce (partially felled by students from Bridgwater College).

The way in which the ground flora has responded to light has been striking, with an explosion of plants and flowers. In March 2018 the QCV team removed a dense patch of rhododendron from the pond/quarry area of the Wood and this spring primroses and bluebells have had light and space in which to re-establish and bloom there. In the newly-planted areas Foxgloves should be the next to flower. Butterflies seen this spring have included brimstone, orange tip, small tortoiseshell, green-veined white, peacock, speckled wood and comma, while birds have included chiff chaffs, dunnock, at least four singing blackcaps and on 26 April my first (and so far only) cuckoo of the season!



In July 2018 Somerset County Council (as landowners) licensed Stowey Wood to Stowey Green Spaces Group, to be managed for the benefit of wildlife and the community.

There can be little doubt that biodiversity has increased, while the designation in 2019 of a new public footpath through the Wood has linked two neighboring footpaths, thereby completing a circular walk from Nether Stowey recreation ground.

Coronavirus lock-down has meant that the path has come into it's own, offering a welcome way for people to exercise and enjoy some fresh air while taking in the sights and sounds of spring.

'Back Garden' Bathing

By Kristen Lambert, Nature & Wellbeing Project Officer

In the previous newsletters we have focused on what we can see and hear in order to support us to connect with nature and keep our attention in the present moment (being mindful). These practices are forms of open-monitoring meditation, where you allow yourself to monitor what is going on around you, without judgement. This week's practice allows you to continue to practice this, with the help of natural environments but also introduces focused-attention meditation.

When taking your exercise or when you are in your garden/outdoor space, focus on the present moment by taking note of 'movement' What do you see around you in nature that is moving? Perhaps trees in the breeze, is there something you notice that has grown/changed in the last few weeks? Are there any insects moving on the ground beneath you, or birds, butterflies and bees in the sky above? Notice how nature moves, is it slow, rapid, what sort of motion does it make?

You could also try some focused-attention meditation by really concentrating on your walking. Play with pace, adjusting your movements and pay attention to every step you take. Notice when you lift your feet, when you move you feet forward and when you place you feet back down. Really recognise the feeling you experience in each step you take. When placing you feet down, notice how it feels – do you feel grounded and connected to the earth beneath you? If not, try placing your feet down again and perhaps stand for a while. If you are attempting this in a public place ensure you have plenty of space and are able to social distance effectively and safely. If you are trying this at home, consider taking your shoes off to help you to connect.



I took notice of the movement of water in a stream near my house. It was moving quite slowly but I watched as it's pace changed when going over and around rocks and stones.

Myths, Legends & Traditions

(Answers on the back page)

1) According to legend The Gurt Vorm was a dragon that lived in Shervage Woods and terrorised the local communities, eating their stock and stopping them from collecting firewood. Legend has it the Gurt Vorm was killed by a Woodcutter, but where did the woodcutter come from?

- a) London
- b) Crowcombe
- c) Stogumber

2) Beech trees are an important tree species in the Quantock landscape, forming majestic avenues across the Quantock Hills. In folklore if you carried a sliver of beech wood it would:

- a) Stop you getting colds
- b) Bring you good luck
- c) Allow you to clean your teeth

3) There are many myths about John Walford and his unfortunate wife Jane Shorney. John a charcoal burner from Over Stowey had an unhappy marriage to Jane, which end with him murdering her in 1789. He was hanged and hung in a gibbet on the hills where all could see his corpse swinging gently in the wind. Folklore says the gibbet fell when John's ghost had made peace with God, but how long after he was hanged was that?

- a) 1 month and a day
- b) 1 year and a day
- c) 10 years and a day

4) In the 1840's there were over 2,000 orchards around the Quantock Hills, unfortunately many of them have disappeared. A tradition associated with orchards is the wassailing of the apples trees during the winter months. By singing to the tree's it is hoped to wake the apple trees and scare away evil spirits to ensure a good harvest. The word 'wassail' comes from Anglo-Saxon but what was its meaning

- a) Drink until you fall
- b) Be in good health
- c) I don't like pears

5) According to folklore everywhere west of the River Parret was pixie land, including the Quantock Hills. Indeed, there was thought to be a hoard of pixie treasure under Ruborough Camp Hillfort. There are many mythical magical creatures, but which is NOT one of them?

- a) Fairy
- b) Gnomes
- c) Gargoyles

6) Like many areas of the British Isles the Quantock Hills has the legend of the Black Dog, a huge jet black dog which would stalk people as they walked across the heathland at night. The dog has glowing red eyes and its coat is so purely black that it cast no sheen in moonlight. But how is the Black Dog of the Quantock Hills different to many of the others from around the country?

- a) Its tail is always wagging
- b) It is the harbinger of doom on whoever sees it
- c) It will watch and protect untended children who wander lost across the hills.

7) The bench ends of some of the Quantock churches have wonderful carved bench ends with the Church of the Holy Ghost in Crowcombe having some of the finest. There is one depicting villages fighting the Gurt Vorm and three others depicting which mythical figure?

- a) The Green Man
- b) The Yellow Woman
- c) The Blue Child

8) Hunky Punks are decorative features found on middle to late medieval buildings, usually Church's in Somerset, with good examples at Kingston St Mary. They are usually short squatting figures but why are they different to gargyle's?


- a) Gargyle's always have a spout to take water away from a roof and walls of a building
- b) Hunky punks always point upwards and gargoyles always face down
- c) Hunky Punks have a tongue poking out

9) We know that fairies, elves or goblins like to live in toadstools which are common on the Quantock Hills but what type of toadstool was their typical home?


- a) Panther cap
- b) Death cap
- c) Fly Agaric

10) Andrew Crosse was a pioneering scientist and poet who lived at Fyne Court from 1784 – 1855. His scientific experiments upset and scared the local community who called him the –

- a) Thunder and lightning man
- b) Cheese and onion man
- c) Copper wire man



Quantock Hills
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



Blackdown Hills
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Word Search

M	Y	V	S	W	A	B	H	G	E	O	L	O	G	Y	D	E	C
U	A	O	C	C	O	C	I	A	B	U	Q	H	J	T	E	N	O
D	O	L	O	Y	H	O	O	O	B	N	M	W	T	D	C	V	U
F	N	U	O	O	A	I	D	A	D	I	R	L	V	B	I	I	N
L	B	N	M	J	V	S	S	L	S	I	T	X	N	L	D	R	T
A	N	T	B	V	N	M	K	T	A	T	V	A	V	P	U	O	R
T	E	E	E	A	A	I	F	B	O	N	V	E	T	V	O	N	Y
S	I	E	M	E	A	D	O	W	S	R	D	X	R	S	U	M	S
U	E	R	Y	U	C	O	M	M	U	N	I	T	Y	S	S	E	I
K	D	I	G	R	A	S	S	L	A	N	D	C	W	V	I	N	D
K	A	N	C	E	C	O	S	Y	S	T	E	M	S	Y	A	T	E
C	O	G	W	I	L	D	L	I	F	E	H	E	A	T	H	S	Y

Find the following words in the puzzle.
Words are hidden → ↓ and ↘ .

AONB	ECOSYSTEMS	MEADOWS
BIODIVERSITY	ENVIRONMENT	MUDFLATS
COAST	GEOLOGY	VOLUNTEERING
COMMUNITY	GRASSLAND	WILDLIFE
COOMBE	HABITATS	WOODLAND
COUNTRYSIDE	HEATH	
DECIDUOUS	HISTORIC	



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Quiz Answers:

1(c) Stogumber 2(b) Bring you good luck, 3(b) 1 year and 1 day, 4(b) Be in good health, 5(c) Gargoyles, 6(c) It will watch and protect untended children who wander across the hills, 7(a) The Green Man, 8(a) Gargoyles always have a spout to take water away from a roof and walls of a building, 9(c) Fly Agaric, 10(a) Thunder and lightning man

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BLACKDOWN HILLS**
Two of the
AONB Family