

Friends of Naphill Common

By the time this newsletter appears you should begin to see some changes around the common. The most obvious will be the new information boards. We hope to have replaced the five existing decrepit notice boards at the main entrances to the common with splendid new information boards, complete with a map of the common, other helpful information and room for notices about future FONC events. Made in oak, the boards will be strong, durable and handsome. They cost over £5000 but we were given generous grants by the Chiltern Conservation Board, Natural England, Buckinghamshire County Council and Hughenden Parish Council, including donations from Cllr Richard Pushman and Cllr John Gibbs' fund for local projects. So the Friends

Newsletter No. 4 May 2010

of Naphill Common had to find only about £250, plus the considerable labour of assembling and installing them.

We are aware that not everyone is in favour of notice boards, so be assured that it is not our intention to litter the common with an abundance of notices and signs. However, many people are deterred from using the common because it is so large and has such a bewildering maze of paths, so we feel that there is a need for the information boards at the main entrances and some discreet numbers on the main paths.

Another thing you may notice is that two working parties have cleared back the scrub (mainly holly) from paths near the end of Chapel Lane. The wider paths will enable walkers to skirt round the muddy stretches and, with luck, letting in more sunlight will dry up the clay soil. There will be

no more scrub clearance for a while because we do not want to disturb animals and birds during the breeding season, but there is plenty left to do when we resume.



Before and after photographs show the amount of scrub clearance on a typical path near Chapel Lane.

Natural History

Naphill Common was made a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI Grade 1) in 1951 because it was an example of self-generated woodland which, it was claimed, had never been planted or felled. In fact, there is plenty of evidence of felling - numerous tree stumps and several sawpits - but the designation is fairly accurate since it has never been planted and the felling was never extensive. The present woodland has grown up naturally from the original pollarded beeches and oaks, with birch, cherry, yew, holly, rowan, crab apple and goat willow coming in from elsewhere. Around the boundary there are some hornbeams and at least two whitebeams. Over by the Clumps at the



Above: The new information board at Forge Road.
Below left: The old sign comes down.
Centre: Precision techniques were used in the installation.
Right: A high level of craftsmanship was used in the construction.



Significant Finds

The list of rare and important species on our common continues to grow. Most will know about the internationally rare **starfruit** *Damasonium alisma* found in Daisy Pond, but we also have the not-very-common **Hairy Bindweed** *Calystegia pulchra* opposite Woodbine Cottages. Our surveys last year revealed nationally scarce and even 'Red Data Book' species of insects, many associated with ancient trees. We have a vigorous colony of **purple hairstreak butterflies** which seem to focus on just one oak tree, and look out for the **speckled wood butterflies** patrolling the sunny stretches of path, and the **dor beetles** which seem determined to get themselves trodden on.

Our fame also rests on our fungi. The rare **Hericium erinaceum** appears high up on the old beech pollard by Dew Pond every few years, and the almost as rare 'Old-man-of-the-woods' **Strobilomyces floccopus** has been found nearby. To these we may be able to add an even more significant species found during our foray last October, led by members of the Bucks Fungus Group. They collected a specimen which they thought was **Otidea alutacea**, but which turned out to have unusual features that led to its being sent to Kew for identification. It could be that Naphill Common will be the source of a new species or subspecies. There's excitement for you!

In fact, of course, the more rarities we can find and the more ecological variety we can achieve the better, and the safer is the common; not to mention the greater fascination for us and future generations. We hope to continue surveys and research during the coming months.

Bradenham end there are some more exotic species: horse chestnut, lime, and ash: probably all stemming from specimens planted on the 'Clumps' by the Bradenham estate, perhaps two hundred years ago. A Portuguese laurel is in the hedge where the little shop once stood. English elm clings on in the hedges of the old meadows bordering the common but they suffer Dutch elm disease once they get to any age.

Four remnant junipers struggle in desperate need of help. The largest and most conspicuous was badly

damaged by the snow before Christmas, but we have propped it up on an 'A' frame and, remarkably, it looks as if it has survived. It is a male and is producing prodigious amounts of pollen so, with a fair wind, it may reach its nearest girlfriend on West Wycombe Hill. Cuttings have been taken by the County Environmental Officer and they are already being cared

for in Scotland. The plan is to return them to Naphill Common once they are established.

Our survey of the larger trees (over 2.5m girth) continues. We have measured, recorded and photographed 316 so far. A small, and unfortunately dwindling, number of these are the original oak and beech pollards: magnificent trees, well over three hundred years old and the glory of the common. We are labelling the trees as we record them so if you see a small metal disc don't fear that this indicates a plan to fell the tree!

Our summer visitors are arriving: chiffchaffs and blackcaps have been heard singing but there are no willow warblers yet. The village used to be home to innumerable swallows, martins and swifts but their numbers dwindle each year. None have been seen so far this spring.

Our programme

Ron Collins' **Walks for Health** continue to be very popular but we have a (small) problem.

Ron has found that some people want fairly short walks of two or three miles, while others want to be more ambitious and walk for five or six miles, perhaps adding a lunch at a pub, as happened at

the April walk. Obviously, he can't do both. **Is there anyone among our members who would like to lead a short 'Walk for Health' each month?**

If so please get in touch with a committee member – perhaps Ron on 01494 562240. His walks start at Naphill Village Hall at 10 am on **Monday 17th May; 21st June; 19th July; 16th August; 20th September; 18th October; 15th November and 20th December.** We **Beat the Bounds** of Naphill Common on **Rogation Sunday, May 9th**, and the brave band of eighteen members visited many parts that others have failed to reach.



There will be a trip to visit **Moorend Common** near Lane End on **Sunday 6th June** to see what they have done there by opening up areas of their common, and to admire the early marsh orchids and heath spotted orchids. It is an unusual common because despite being at around 140m (460 ft) altitude, it has small streams that disappear into a sink hole.

The trip will involve car sharing, starting from the **Village Hall at 10 am** to arrive at Moorend by 10.30 am. We will be at **Naphill Fete** on **12th June** and have a **Midsummer picnic** at the **Umbrella Tree** on **Sunday 20th June**, starting from the common end of **Forge Road** at **3 pm** weather permitting. Other events and surveys are being devised and we will have another **Fungus Foray** on **Sunday 3rd October**. Everyone is very welcome.

Lastly, more good news: following a leafleting campaign throughout the village, our membership is now **over 160**.

