

# Downley Common Newsletter

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Quarterly Newsletter of the Downley Common Preservation Society - Issue 9 October 1999

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## Bonfire

It's coming up to November and it's time to start preparing for the Bonfire. See the list of Working Parties on the notice boards and in the diary overleaf. We will need lots of help especially on the last Saturday and Sunday before the 5<sup>th</sup>.

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## Chiltern Commons Network

The next meeting of the Chilterns Commons Network will be on 3 November 1999 at 7.00pm and will be held at Downley Memorial Hall.

The Network aims to provide:

- A forum for the sharing of information about funding opportunities
- A forum for the sharing of skills, expertise, labour and other support
- Raised profile for Commons
- Training and recreational events for Commons groups and owners
- Increased level of funding for Commons at a strategic level

All are welcome.

## Subscriptions

The AGM is approaching on 6 October which is traditionally the time when subscriptions are to be renewed.

Those who have only recently joined do not need to renew subscriptions until next year.

Please don't forget to return your subscriptions; the Society cannot survive without them.

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## An Evening Lecture on West Chiltern Commons

The DCPS is now well into the execution of the latest Management Plan which involves such projects as coppicing and grass-cutting as well as the more traditional activities. To explain the background to this and how it fits into the overall management of the West Chiltern Commons, there will be an evening lecture given by **Mr Neil Jackson** of West Chiltern Commons Project on

Wednesday 24 November 1999, 7.30pm at the Memorial Hall.

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## Millenium Yew Tree

Downley has been successful in obtaining a "Millenium Yew Tree" which is being distributed by the Yew Tree Campaign organised by the Conservation Foundation. The presentation of the tree will be at Dorchester Abbey near Abingdon on 10 October 1999 to a representative of the DCPS. We are planning that the Yew will be planted on Butterfly Bank on the grass between the two tracks. The choice of the Yew tree for this project rested on the potential for the tree to be still alive at the next Millenium, at which time it is likely to be over 20 feet in girth. Perhaps those in the year 3000 will plant another one!

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## My Favourite Place

The following article was written by Joanna Clegg, the granddaughter of one of our members who has kindly given permission for us to reproduce it here. It presents an enchanting view of the Common through the eyes of a child.

My favourite place, beyond dispute, is the village of Downley. It is where I was born and I lived there until I was ten years old, My grandparents live there now, in a house called Fieldview. I cannot say why I love Downley, or precisely what it is I like about it, but I think that the only way to describe it is to take you for a walk there, in summer, the summer of 1990.

You are standing on the drive outside a house called Fieldview, It is a warm, sunny day. The sky is bright blue with small fluffy white clouds drifting across it on a mild breeze. It is very quiet and you can hear almost nothing except the twittering of birds, the humming of a fat bumble bee in the white roses by the door and the faint drone of a plane overhead. The village is sleeping. You go out of the drive and turn right, up the deserted lane. You walk between tall green hedges which, on your right, give way to Downley Common, green and flat, edged with trees. Behind the trees you can see long grass and then the woods behind that. You keep on along the lane. In front you see, at the end of the lane, the grey front of number two Golf Link Cottages where I lived between the ages of two and four. I would love to show you the garden but there isn't time. Instead turn left, past the row of cottages and the pub, and enter the cool shade of the woods.

The silence of the woods is almost solid. You walk on a carpet of old brown leaves, between the beech and oak

trees. To your left, through the trees, you can see the high fence of the allotments. To your right you can see a grey pony in a field. Ahead the woods stretch out forever. Keep straight on until you come to the dells, oddly irregular pits where chalk was once dug out. Turn left as you pass the holly tree at the edge of a pond. It is still perfectly silent. You go on past the pond and, presently, you come to a path. Turn left and keep straight on until you find yourself in a miniature valley.

There are bushes and saplings dotted around in the long yellow grass on the steep sides of the valley. At the far end a path slopes down to a lane between fields of wheat and corn. The sky is still blue. A tractor is working in a distant field but the valley is peaceful. You move to sit down on a fallen log and a big, bright cock pheasant erupts from behind it, clucking in alarm, momentarily breaking the stillness. Peace settles on the valley again and you sit for a while breathing in the stillness. After a while you notice a path on the other side of the valley and get up and walk towards it. It leads steeply up the side of the valley, then between two hawthorn trees into the corner of a large ploughed field. You walk along the edge of the field for a time, listening to the birds singing in the thick hedge beside you, then you come to a gate with a stile next to it. You climb over the stile into a small paddock and pause to say "hello" to two ponies, a grey and a chestnut who wander over to push their soft velvet muzzles against your pockets, looking for treats. Regretfully, you bid the ponies farewell and climb over the gate at the far side of their paddock, dropping into the lane on the other side.

It is the lane that you walked along earlier. The Common is in front of you, smooth and flat, to your left you can see Golfink Cottages again. You cross the lane and walk over the soft, springy grass of the Common, aiming for a bench in the shade of a tree. You reach the bench, which is really only a plank on two logs, and you stop for a moment looking across the long, rough grass at the woods below, then hurry on towards them. On the way, you stop to acknowledge the old bay mare who is grazing on the long grass, and then you enter the woods.

These woods are different to the ones that you walked through earlier. The trees are closer together, there is more undergrowth and less silence. Birds are singing in the higher branches as you walk down a narrow, sloping path between short holly trees and tall oaks, until you come to the bottom of the wood. Here, a number of paths converge and you have to choose which one to take now: left, towards Hughenden? straight on up Commonsideside? or right down Moor Lane and back into the village? The afternoon is wearing on

and you haven't seen a soul. You decide to return to civilisation and turn right.

Now you have left the woods and are standing in front of the church. You continue along Moor Lane. On your right is the pretty white house known as Diamond Cottage, on your left the gravel drive which leads up to the door of Old Tiles where Carly and Saskia live. You soon see the back of the goatshed through the trees. Scrumpy is out on the Common, but Midge will be inside with her kids. In fact, you can hear them bleating. You walk past, up to the corner where Moor Cottage stands empty, and turn left. At the top of the lane is the crossroads. To your left is Commonsideside where I was born, at number thirty-eight; ahead is Plomer Green Road; behind is Plomer Green Lane and to your right is Grays Lane. You go up Grays Lane and turn right again into Faulkner Way where you take the short cut behind Anisha's house to come out in Gosling Grove, opposite the green.

You cross over the road to the green and walk slowly around the pond, past the place where the frogs live, to the tree where children climb, and often fall into the water; on past the log which makes a bridge to the island where the ducks nest in spring, and the little peninsula where there is supposed to be buried treasure, to the bench which overlooks the shaded shingle "beach". You sit on the bench for a while, watching a suspicious drake swim slowly around in the middle of the pond. You can see, on your right, the high fence surrounding the playground of the Junior School, and the big field with trees at its edges.

You get up and walk across the green and into the cul-de-sac of modern houses opposite. You turn a corner and come to an empty patch where, for some reason, a house has not been built. The area is taken up with long wild grasses, almost waist high, and huge spiky thistles. Now, pick your way carefully through the the grasses, taking care not to bend them and mark your trail, until you reach the centre. Lie down. Vanish from sight, invisible in the long grass. Stare up at the sky, still perfectly blue, with fluffy white clouds. Close your eyes, feel the warmth of the sun on your face, listen to the sounds of the insects around you. Let your thoughts depart, forget everything. You are at the centre of the best place anywhere on earth.

Joanna Clegg

## Diary

3 October 1999, 10.00am	Working party	End of Plomer Green Lane
6 October 1999, 8.00pm	Annual General Meeting	Memorial Hall
17 October 1999, 10.00am	Working party	Bonfire Site
24 October 1999, 10.00am	Working party	Bonfire Site
30 October 1999, 10.00am	Working party	Bonfire Site
31 October 1999, 10.00am	Working party	Bonfire Site
5 November 1999, 6.30pm	Bonfire and Torchlight Procession	Memorial Hall