

# Downley Common Newsletter

Quarterly Newsletter of the Downley Common Preservation Society - Issue 12. June 2000

<http://www.downleycommon.org.uk>

## Millennium Trail Leaflet

We will be launching the Millennium Trail leaflet at Downley Day and walking the route on Sunday 25 June at 2.00pm so come along and learn your way around the Common. The leaflet provides a potted history of the Common and its environs and gives a description of the local flora and fauna to be found along the trail. The leaflets will be available for a small charge at a variety of local outlets after Downley Day and provides another fundraising opportunity for the Society so do support us and improve your education at the same time.

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## A Green Desert Or .....

Over the years that the Downley Common Preservation Society has looked after the common we have faced a number of challenges. The common is a living entity and it is not possible to preserve it all for the future as it is now. Trees mature, and scrub

## Diary

<b>24 June 2000, 2:00pm</b>	<b>Downley Day</b>	<b>Commonside</b>
<b>25 June 2000, 2:00pm</b>	<b>Millennium walk</b>	<b>Village Hall</b>
<b>2 July 2000, 10:00am</b>	<b>Working Party. Clear bracken around coppice area</b>	<b>Dairy</b>
<b>6 July 2000, 8.00pm</b>	<b>Quarterly Meeting</b>	<b>Village Hall</b>
<b>6 August 2000</b>	<b>Working Party. TBA</b>	<b>Bus turning circle</b>
<b>3 September 2000</b>	<b>Working Party. TBA</b>	<b>Bus turning circle</b>
<b>9 September 2000</b>	<b>Pond Day</b>	<b>Village Hall</b>

can take over areas of grassland. Nevertheless our aim has been to maintain the overall balance between the area of woodland, grassland, and scrub on the common whilst recognising that in localised areas scrub is encroaching or that trees must be extracted. In the past this process of encroachment of scrub onto grassland would have been stopped by the grazing of livestock on the common, and more recently by the grazing of goats and horses.

The grazing of animals on the common also had another beneficial effect which is perhaps less apparent. Not only did the grazing stop the regeneration of scrub but the feeding animals also removed nutrients from the grazed areas of grass. Many of the finer annual and perennial grasses, that look so beautiful as they flower at this time of year, as well as wild flowers, can not compete with the more coarse type of grasses, such as rye grass. Fortunately the coarse grasses require a nutrient rich soil, which is why they flourish in fertilised fields, and do not do well in nutrient poor soils. Over the years the grazing of animals on the unfertilised soils of the common ensured a wide mix of fine grasses that would otherwise have been crowded out by the coarse grasses.

With the loss of grazing animals on the common, the fine grasses can grow freely, taking extra nutrients from the atmosphere and returning them to the soil as the grass dies back in the autumn. As the nutrient levels build up so the fine grasses begin to be squeezed out. If you walk across the common in autumn you can see the first signs of this happening with blotches of still green coarse grasses amongst the fading colours of the fine grasses.

If we wish to preserve the common as it is now for future generations to enjoy we must tackle this problem of nutrient build up. Simply cutting the grass does not help. This year we are going to cut the grass in autumn and then with the help of a BTCV team we are going to rake the grass together and remove it. By autumn the grasses will have set their seed and so next years display will not be disrupted. We may need to cut and gather the grass on a yearly basis to reduce the nutrient levels to those of years past and

we shall be looking at less labour intensive ways of removing the cut grass in years to come. To use BTCV help is simply too expensive for the DCPS to fund every year.

Is this exercise really worth the effort?

We believe it is. Each autumn we mow the area around the bonfire-site. As we drag the trees and branches across the site they rake up the cut grass. Also when the bonfire is finally built we rake the area free of leaves, small branches and (although not intentionally so) grass cuttings.

If you passed this site earlier in the spring you would have been struck by the mass of buttercups in flower, whilst elsewhere on the common only a few isolated specimens were to be seen. Similarly, in autumn, the blue flowers of the Harebell are found here in greater abundance than anywhere else on the common.

Wouldn't it be spectacular, if in years to come, such sights were a feature of the entire common?

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## **Chiltern Commons Network**

The Chiltern Commons Network held its recent Commons Day at Stoke Poges Village Hall on Saturday 3 June 2000 with a subsequent tour around Stoke Common in the afternoon. Norman Belson and Kristina Frydberg from DCPS went along and reported on the subjects discussed. Stoke Common has a long history of being grazed and the pros and cons of grazing by a variety of livestock.

The principal objections to grazing is that it is not a cheap option due to the need to purchase the animals and to manage their welfare which requires both money and the time of local volunteers, both of which are in short supply at Downley. The grazing at Stoke Common is by a small herd of cattle which is funded by the local council. It is also important to generate good publicity for this sort of project and to "get the public on your side" – not an easy prospect!

The Network has also started publishing a newsletter which will be available at the DCPS stall at Downley