

Downley Common Newsletter

Quarterly Newsletter of the Downley Common Preservation Society Issue 19. March 2002
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Bridleway at North End

The repair of the bridleway has now been largely completed and the hard surface now extends from the junction with Cookshall Lane at the north end of the Common to just south of the Chilton Cottages where the bridleway emerges from the woods.



I am pleased to report that the requests we made have largely been granted and the second section of the path is much obtrusive than the original part and some effort has been made to landscape the edges and reduce the height. Posts have been installed at the north end to prevent vehicular ingress and the section next to Mannings pond has been

surfaced with "hoggins" rather than the planings used elsewhere. The large surfaced area by Cookshall Lane still exists but it is clear that the excess has been marked out presumably for future removal.

The Society will be keeping an eye on how the vegetation regenerates around the bridleway and we will, if necessary, do some planting to try and soften the impact. However, experience in the past suggests that regeneration occurs quite rapidly.

Track to the Dairy

The use of old road planings seems to be getting more popular as witnessed by the resurfacing of the track to the Dairy. There has been some concern expressed that this represents a "metalling" of the track. Although the newly rolled track does give the impression of having been tarmaced, our understanding is that it is equivalent to laying a new surface of chippings as new asphalt is not used in the surface. Admittedly planings are not perhaps the most environmentally sensitive of materials (hence our objection to

	Diary	
4 April 2002, 8.00pm	Members Meeting	Village Hall
7 April 2002, 10.00am	Working Party. Clearing dells near Vale Cottage	Dairy
5 May 2002, 10.00am	Working Party. Clearing path by Sunnybank	Dairy
5 May 2002, 2.00pm	Downley Walk	Village Hall
2 June 2002, 10.00am	Working Party. TBD	Bus turning circle
7 July 2002, 10.00am	Working Party. TBD	Bus turning circle

their use on the bridleway), but neither are the cars and lorries that use the track.

Drainage at the Bus-turning circle

This newsletter seems to contain nothing but news of highway maintenance! The track leading downhill from the bus turning circle has for some years been gradually eroded away and a request was made two years ago for a drainage scheme to improve things. It looks like this work is just about to start. We will keep you posted.



A Sticky Business?

Many people think that a walking stick is only for the very old and decrepit, or the victim of a nasty accident. But walkers who like to get off the beaten track will tell you that when you are scrambling down a slippery slope, climbing over a rickety stile or negotiating barbed wire or fallen trees, a good stout staff is an invaluable aid. If you have also made sure you have the right sort of handle, you are equipped to pull down sloes for your sloe gin, or damsons for your jam-making (or catch the odd sheep or two if you have a shepherd's crook!)

Here in Downley we are lucky to be surrounded by woods and hedgerows where the diligent stick-spotter can find beautifully straight hazel and holly, and knobbly, spiky blackthorn and hawthorn. The merit of using these is that they grow almost like weeds and cutting a stick out here and there does no harm to the countryside.

Keeping you eyes open for the perfect stick (which you never find) adds interest to every walk; it is amazing how much more you see at the same time: perhaps a piece of hazel or ash which has developed a fascinating twist because it has been strangled by honeysuckle, or a branch which has grown in such a peculiar way, you can see with a little judicious cutting here and carving there you can fashion a horse's head handle or something even wierder.

A most satisfying experience is to take a thorny, dirty crooked, bent piece of blackthorn, put it away to season for a year or two, then file every knot to shape, strighten it (it can be done), emery paper it then begin the long process of linseed oiling it, and watch as the beautiful dark red glow slowly appears. A separate operation is find a suitable handle, if it hasn't got one all of a piece. Then a peg will have to be cut on the shank and a hole drilled in the handle and the two glued together and carved to match.

Finally, if you wish to put a little spring in your step, you can look for a nice striaght piece of elderberry, push out the pith (if you are lucky enough to have found a piece of sufficient diameter), skin it and shape it, put holes in the right places and make yourself a flute or whistle. You can then have music while you walk.



To find out more, see:

- "The Craft of Stickmaking" by Leo Gowan
- "Walking and Working Sticks" by Theo Fossell
- "Stickmaking, A Complete Course" by Andrew Jones & Clive George

Norman Belson