

Downley Common Newsletter

Newsletter of the Downley Common Preservation Society Issue 32. March 2009

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Spring Meeting

This is a reminder that our Spring Meeting will be held on 2nd April at 8.00pm in the Village Hall. In addition to the usual suggestions for working party activities, agenda items will include:

- Maintenance of tracks on the Common
- Route for Downley Walk and which charity to support
- Suggestions for Downley Day display

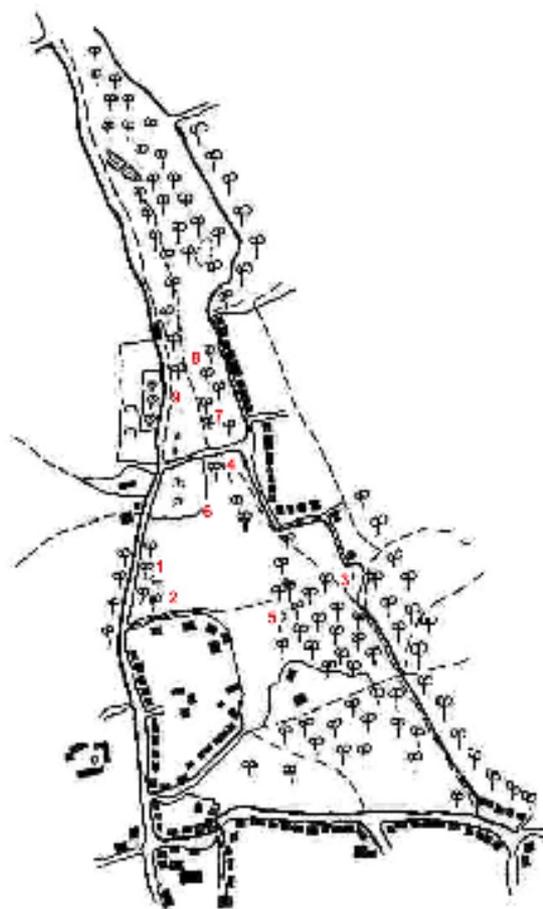
Year Planner

This year planner shows when we typically carry out routine activities that happen every year. Any other suggestions for routine activities are welcome. See the map below to identify location of numbered areas. Those activities marked with a * can be done at almost any time.

January: Nothing planned

February: Plant new whips (eg. ash, hazel, willow) in coppice area (1) near the track to the dairy. Alternatively plant new whips (eg. hawthorn) at selected areas on borders of the Common to replace need for posts

March: Limit flailing in Spring so as to avoid damaging spring flowers. Check posts for rot and looseness*



April: Members meeting at Village Hall (1st Thursday)

May: Flail blackthorn shoots near bus-turning circle (4) and by track to Chilton Cottages (9)

Diary		
2 nd April 2009, 8.00pm	DCPS Spring Meeting	Village Hall
5 th April 2009, 10.00am	Working Party	Meet at Old Dairy
3 rd May 2009, 10.00am	Working Party	Meet at Old Dairy
17 th May 2009, 2.00pm	Rogation Walk	Start at Village Hall
7 th June 2009, 10.00am	Working Party	Meet at Old Dairy
20 th June 2009, 1.00pm	Downley Day	Commonside
5 th July 2009, 10.00am	Working Party	Meet at Old Dairy
July 2009, date TBC	Concert on the Common	Commonside
2 nd August 2009, 10.00am	Working Party	Meet at Old Dairy
6 th Sept 2009, 10.00am	Working Party	Meet at Old Dairy

Cut back blackthorn bushes by hand where necessary*

June: Flail bracken on areas near the dairy (2), glade on the bridle path down to the hydrant (3)

July: Manually pull brambles from heather patch near coppice between (1) and (2), and around gorse bushes*

Select trees for cutting and send form for WDC permission

August: Flail bracken at areas (2) and (3) again if necessary. Cut back new trees/bushes

in grassland areas*

September: Flail glades to north of cricket pitch in areas (7) and (8)

October: Cut trees for bonfire and drag to bonfire site (every week in October). Start building the bonfire. Make the torches. AGM at Village Hall (1st Thursday)

November: Build bonfire and clear up afterwards

December: Cut back overgrown paths*

The Great Mullein or Aaron's Rod

Ove the past few years while walking around the common and surrounding district, I have noticed a plant that grows a spectacularly long flower spike loaded with yellow flowers typically flowering in July and August. Eventually I decided to try and identify what it was and so turned to Google. Typing "wildflower yellow spike, grey velvet leaves" produced a number of promising looking results and it was short work to identify the Great Mullein (Latin name *Verbascum thapsus*). Wikipedia was then able to fill in the details.

"It is a hairy biennial plant that can grow to 2m or more tall. Its small yellow flowers are densely grouped on a tall stem, which bolts from a large rosette of leaves. It grows in a wide variety of habitats, but prefers well-lit disturbed soils, where it can appear soon after the ground receives light, from long-lived seeds that persist in the soil seed bank. It also hosts many insects, some of which can be harmful to other plants. Although individuals are easy to remove by hand, populations are difficult to eliminate permanently.

It is widely used for herbal remedies with

emollient and astringent properties. It is especially recommended for coughs and related problems, but also used in topical applications against a variety of skin problems. The plant was also used to make dyes and torches."



It sounds like we could make good use of this plant on Bonfire Night, I thought.. Reading on, "*V. thapsus* is known by a variety of names. European reference books call it "Great mullein". In North America, "Common mullein" is used. In the 19th century it had well over 40 different common names in English alone. Some of the more whimsical ones included "Hig candlewick", "Bullicks lungwort", "Adams-rod", "Feltwort", "Hare's-beard" and "Ice-leaf". Vernacular names include innumerable references to the plant's hairiness: "Woolly", "Velvet" or "Blanket Mullein", "Beggar's", "Moses", "Poor Man's", "Our Lady's" or "Old Man's Blanket", and so on.

Some names refer to the plant's size and shape: "Shepherd's Club(s)" or "Staff", "Aaron's Rod"."

Acknowledgements to Wikipedia