



Hello Volunteers

The nights are drawing in – the clocks are about to go back an hour and YIPPEE! It's bonfire time – just what the volunteers have been waiting for all spring and summer. What have the volunteers got to look forward too – more RHODIE bashing; heather seed gathering and no doubt there will be more ride cutting back, especially in King's Wood; blocked outlets to be poked and cleared at the two main ponds and the mud from the adjacent paths. There will be brashings and other detritus from more felled trees to be cleared and burnt and of course the one task that we do all year round – weeding the forest – yes BIRCH pulling along with various other plants that hinder heather growth.

We have seen a few new faces this year and we would like to give them a belated warm welcome, especially some young members of the community, who have now disappeared off to college or University. We hope to see them again during their breaks, but if we don't, good luck with your studies etc.

Sadly, though we did say goodbye to one long serving volunteer this summer – Chris Woodhall – off south to West Sussex to be near family and new volunteer opportunities?



Here Chris (centre in white) poses with the volunteers on Shire Oak Heath during a break from – you guessed it – Birch Pulling!



Volunteers taking a break after 90 minutes of Birch Pulling – we do talk to one another!

Heather blossoms on Lord's Hill



After clear felling, several years of brash burning and repeated, at least once annually, birch, bramble and bracken removal – the fruits of our labour are manifest in these beautiful views of Lord's Hill taken by Phil Irving; who passes on his congratulations to all the volunteers and stated that this an excellent example of what heathland restoration is all about!

This is how Lord's Hill once looked

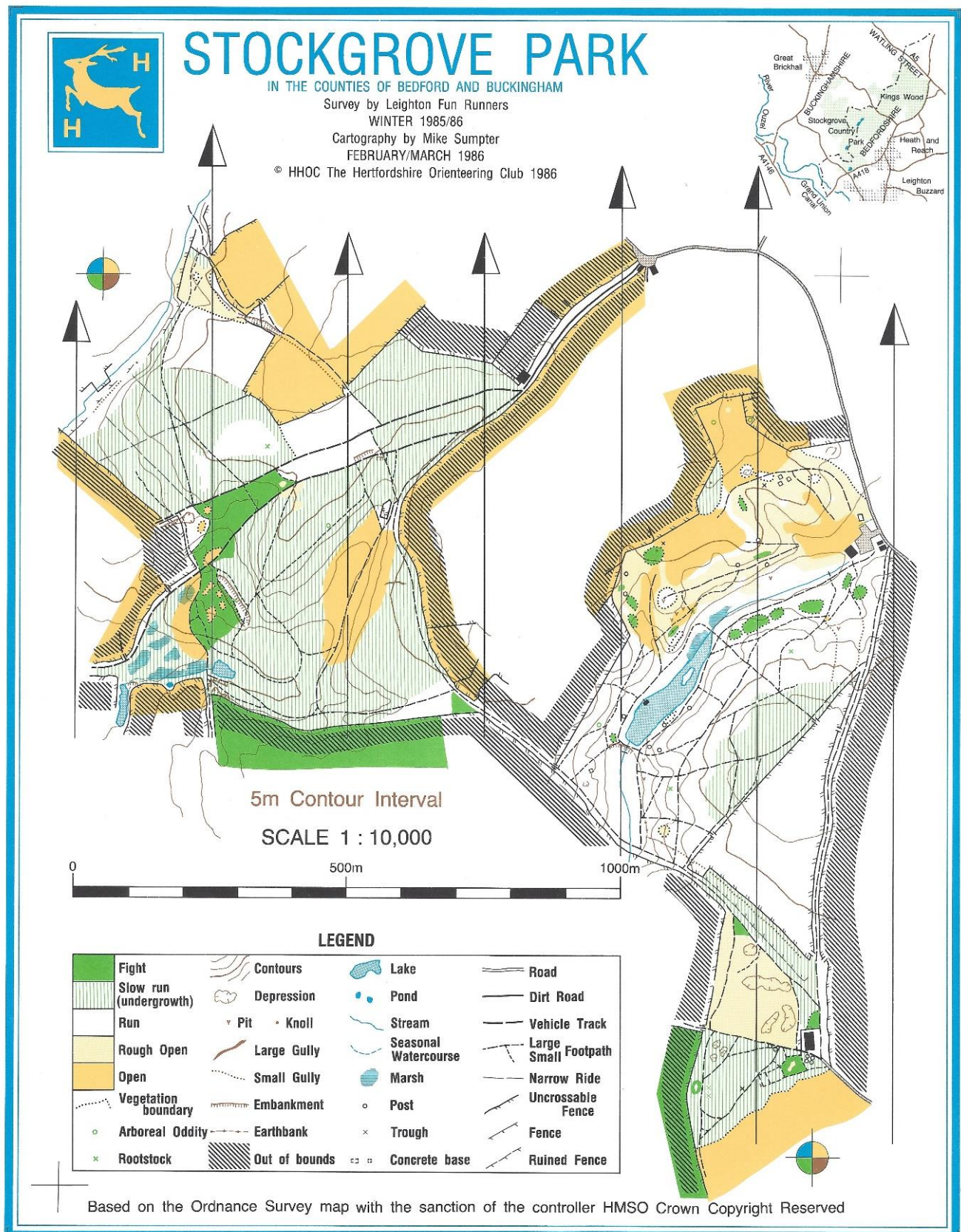




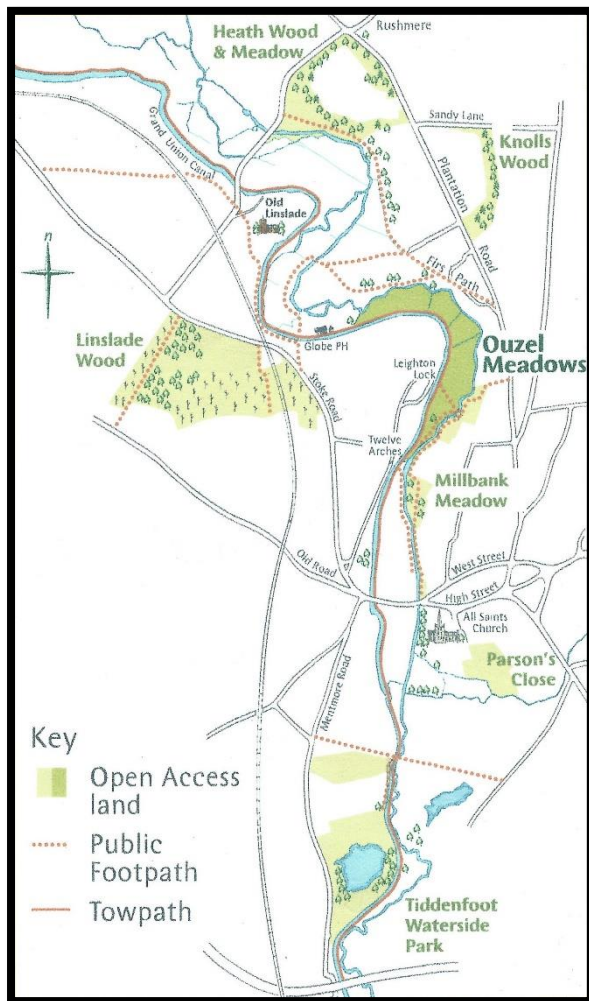
Orienteering at Stockgrove

Thought some of you might be interested to see how Stockgrove Park and Oak Wood looked like to an orienteer way back in 1986. This was the first time I had visited the Park. Back in '80's I was a keen orienteer and this was the first of 3 maps (different areas) I drew or helped to draw for my orienteering club 'Happy Herts' based in Watford/St.Albans area.

Orienteering was the natural product of my sport of running and my job as a cartographer. An orienteering map seeks to show the runability of the ground and as many significant navigation features that the scale can show.



The River Ouzel in Leighton Buzzard



The River Ouzel and its flood plain

The River Ouzel rises at the base of the Chilterns, near Dunstable Downs, and flows northward across the low-lying clay vale until it meets the River Great Ouse at Newport Pagnell. Where the river runs through the Greensand Ridge, just north of Leighton-Linslade, the Ouzel has cut an impressive valley. The steep wooded slopes of the Greensand Ridge rise dramatically from the flat flood meadows beside the river. There are good views of this from the northern end of the meadows. The alluvial (deposited by a river) soils of floodplains are fertile and flooding adds nutrients each year. They were traditionally productive pastures, grazed and cut for hay each year.

The Canal

The Grand Junction Canal was constructed between 1793 and 1805 to carry goods from London to Birmingham at the height of the Industrial Revolution. In 1929 the Grand Junction Canal was amalgamated with other canal companies to form the Grand Union Canal. The canal runs beside the River Ouzel for much of its length through Leighton-Linslade, and played an important role in the

development of the town. Excess water from the canal flows into the river through Twelve Arches Weir at the southern end of the meadows.



Ouzel Meadows

These are **flood meadows**. This means they flood in autumn and winter, but are dry through the summer. This seasonal flooding is not a bad thing – it creates the ideal conditions for a wide variety of plants and animals. Plants such as meadowsweet and yellow iris that grow in the northern end of the meadows are typical of damp grassland. In spring and early summer look in damper areas and ditches for lesser pond sedge, reed sweet grass and the occasional marsh-marigold. As well as being lovely to look at, the wide range of plants in the meadows supports many insects and other invertebrates, which in turn are a source of food that attracts birds, mammals and other animals.



Trees, birds and bats

The pollarded willows growing along the riverbank and ditches are especially important for wildlife. A wide range of fungi and invertebrates live in the decaying wood of their trunks, and holes provide nesting and roosting sites for birds and bats. The Aylesbury Vale area is home to one of the largest populations of black poplar in the country. Several of these rare trees may be seen at the northern end of the meadows. Watch for herons and kingfishers feeding along the river and the canal.



On summer evenings you might see Daubenton's bats flying low across the surface of the canal hunting insects.

Other mammals

Otters were common here until the 1950s when pollution and loss of habitat caused a national decline. They are now recolonising many local rivers and we hope that provision of shelters known as 'holts' will encourage their return to this area.



Water voles were also once widespread, but have drastically declined in recent years, mainly due to the introduced American mink. This efficient predator is very unwelcome addition to the wildlife of the Ouzel Valley.



Grazing

Prior to their acquisition by Leighton-Linslade Town Council in 1999 these flood meadows had not been grazed for many years. This lack of management allowed coarse plant species such as great willowherb to invade the grassland at the expense of the finer meadow plants. Past disturbance of the grassland at the southern end of the meadows resulted in dense stands of nettle and hemlock in this area. Reintroducing cattle grazing and regularly cutting the coarse vegetation will encourage the spread of meadow flowers and the wildlife that accompanies them.

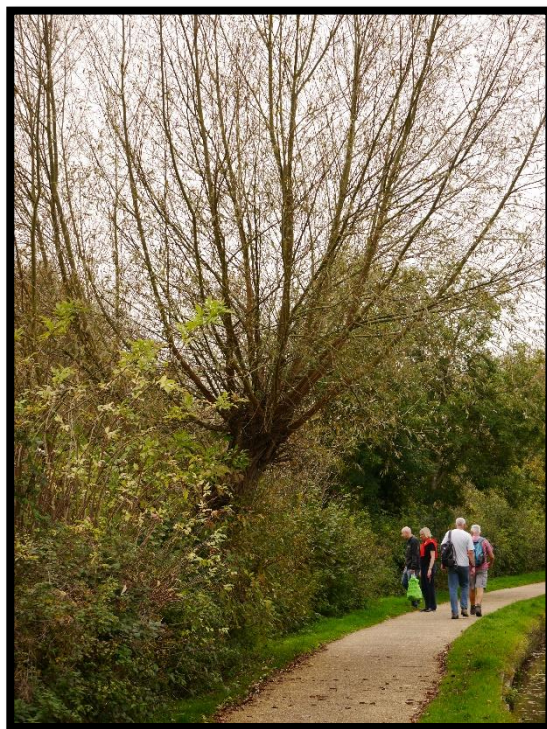


Red Polls currently in residence on the meadows



Willows

The willows that are a typical feature of the riverside landscape were traditionally pollarded to provide forage for livestock, and material for coarse wickerwork such as hurdles and cribs to hold food for cattle. Many of the willows in the meadows are now being re-pollarded to prevent them collapsing under the weight of their heavy branches. The wood is used to construct artificial 'holts', homes for otters as part of a programme to attract them back into the Ouzel Valley.



Meadowsweet



Lady Smock



Purple Loosestrife

Lady'smock or cuckoo flower is a plant of wet meadows. The caterpillars of the orange-tip butterfly feed on the seedpods.

I hope to be able to write a little more about the different willows found in the meadow and along the canal in the next issue.

Who looks after the Ouzel Meadows?

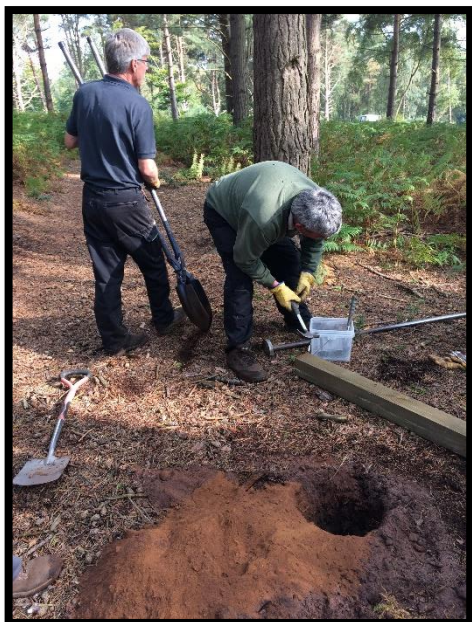
Leighton-Linslade Town Council own the meadows, which are managed on their behalf by the Greensand Trust Ranger Service.

The story of a mountain bike trail marker

The Tuesday volunteers, over the last few months, have been “planting” these marker posts that Matt has planned to identify the mountain bike trails around Rushmere. They will separate bike riders away from horse riders and pedestrians where possible. They will also show direction too! Initially Matt had marked the spots where they were required but as we progressed some were done as he walked the trails.



1. Dig a big hole and then discuss if it's deep enough!



2. 4 nails were partially hammered into each side of the post near the base.

3. The post was then placed in the hole and using a post level checked to ensure that it is upright before filling in the hole.



4. The earth was then tamped down and trod in to firmly hold the post



5. Each post was then taped about 12 inches from the top and painted first with a grey or white undercoat and then finished with a red topcoat

So far over 90 post have been erected

Please, if you have any material, articles, pieces of information, photographs etc that I can use **please please** pass them on to me on Tuesday or Wednesday or email them to:- mikesumpter@btinternet.com

Happy Volunteering
Mike Sumpter

With your help and cooperation I would like to do a series in this newsletter called "Do you know your fellow volunteer". In each edition I hope to introduce 2 or 3 volunteers providing I get the feedback. To this end I have devised a simple questionnaire that I hope will not be too intrusive and please feel free to answer or not answer as you see fit.

Name:

Nickname:

Birth place (town):

Current residence (town):

Occupation when you worked:

Date you first became a Greensand Volunteer:

What volunteer task you like best:

What volunteer task you dislike most:

Any other Greensand Trust task you perform:

Hobbies or pastimes:

Any other volunteer tasks undertaken:

Any comments you might wish to add:

Please attach a current head & shoulders photograph. And return this sheet to me