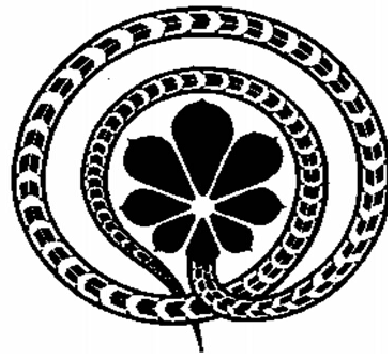


Dorset Countryside Volunteers



No 203
November 2024 - March 2025
Reg Charity No1071723
www.dcv.org.uk



Who we are, what we do, where, why and how . . .

DCV is . . .

- A practical conservation group run by volunteers since 1972 doing practical work in the countryside that would not otherwise be done
- Volunteers are male and female, all ages, from all walks of life and from all over the county
- Work is seasonal, e.g. heathlands and woodlands in winter, in summer dry stone walling, clearing ponds, footpath work, fencing
- Organisations we work for include: Dorset Wildlife Trust, National Trust, Natural England, Amphibian Reptile Conservation Trust
- We work at weekends throughout Dorset
- No super-human strength or special skills needed, or attendance on every task or even for the whole weekend - any time is a bonus for us and for you!

DCV offers . . .

- Practical care for the environment
- Opportunity to learn new skills - training given
- Use of all necessary tools
- Beautiful countryside, social events, fun & companionship

YOU should bring . . .

- Food, snacks for breaks and lunch, a mug for drinks, a bottle of drinking water.
- A basic First Aid kit, suitable for treating minor cuts, scratches, splinters, etc
- Hand sanitiser and/or sanitising wipes
- Face mask in case you need First Aid
- Stout footwear (steel toecaps if possible)
- Old clothes (wear layers) Long trousers and sleeves are best
- Tough gloves (we have some to sell/lend)
- Waterproofs, sun block, sun hat, insect repellent
- Don't forget an up to date tetanus jab

Reaching a task . . .

- Travel links: <http://www.morebus.co.uk/>
<https://www.dorsetforyou.com/travel-dorset/rail>

A DCV day lasts . . .

- 10.00a.m. – 5.00p.m. approximately including breaks for drinks (which are supplied) and lunch (please bring your own lunch)

FINDING DCV . . .

- Maps with the task programme (at the back of this newsletter) show the locations of task sites
- DCV website **dcv.org.uk**
- Look for DCV's yellow arrows near the worksite or the DCV information board may show an explanatory note
- If unsure of the worksite try to arrive before 10.00 to meet other volunteers. The worksite may be some way off. Lost? give us a call on **07929 961532** (after 10.00 a.m.) ring longer than normal
- If the phone goes to answer phone there is no signal on the work site

FOOD & DRINK

- Please bring your own lunch
- DCV provides free hot/cold drinks during the day - bring your own mug
- Occasionally DCV may hold a shared lunch or supper (aka bring a dish) when it is usual for people to bring some food to share around
- **Note:** If you have a medical condition or allergies of any sort, please carry a card and bring necessary medicines. If you wish, bring this to the attention of the task leader. Please complete the "in case of emergency" details at the end of the newsletter, and bring on task. "In case of emergency details" can be inserted into a small key fob which can be attached to your rucksack. Key fobs are available from Richard Meatyard.
- All youngsters are welcome, but should be accompanied by a responsible adult.
- **N.B.** Should you come? - If you or a member of your household has any Covid symptoms or has Covid as confirmed by a positive test then you must NOT come.



How quickly the seasons change and suddenly we are back to the Autumn and Winter cutting season, though let's not forget DCV have done great work in the Spring and Summer in some beautiful locations, coastal, country and riverside.

Thanks to Peter our programme goes up till the end of March with two gaps to be advised that will be filled in later with tasks that haven't been finished, whether too much work or inclement weather setting us back. In the middle of our programme will be the much loved (at least by 20 or so volunteers) DCV Christmas dinner. So book with Helen for fun, food, frivolity, games and presents for those who want it.

It's always good to receive feedback from clients on our work and we are pleased to pass on thanks from Ray Heagarty of Swineham - " Many thanks to you and your team in getting them tree guards taken off and packing them off. It looks like a proper wood now "

DCV membership isn't due until January and we will send out the new form then, so something to look forward to in the new year!

We have a new site this winter, Alners Gorse, deep in the heart of the Blackmore Vale. Owned and managed by Butterfly Conservation it is a relic of the wooded and uncultivated lands that once dominated the Blackmore Vale. We will be clearing away some of the dense scrub allowing more light and plant life to thrive, giving insects a greater chance of survival.

What better way to welcome in winter than the traditional tasks of coppicing and hedgelaying. Age old, seasonal skills when time stands still, connecting us to the past, the shaping of the countryside and to nature. Come out and enjoy our autumn and winter work and all that those seasons have to offer, fresh air, exercise, conviviality on task, Dorset's beautiful countryside and mindful moments that restore our health and wellbeing.

Co-ordinator's report

Richard Meatyard

Unusually for a Summer season the weather became progressively more disruptive as the year progressed with a series of unseasonally wet months, September and October clocked up more than double the usual rainfall per month. While we did manage not to cancel any tasks, some task days were curtailed early to avoid the worst of the weather.

At the beginning of August, with the steps at Weston finally complete, it was a return to the step restoration project on West Hill at Corfe. The first weekend there was blessed with perfect weather for the work but a shortage of materials meant a slightly early finish on Sunday. At the end of August we returned, for a Sunday only final session, to find that due to a failure in communications there were no materials. We had enough remedial work to do to keep us busy for a couple of hours. Forewarned, most people had planned a follow on walk, etc.

The second weekend in August, it was Lower Kingcombe to make a start on a new short section of fence around a recently laid hedge near the entrance to the reserve. A large turnout on Saturday meant that all the strainer posts were dug in and on Sunday with a smaller turnout, the carpentry was completed, the intermediates driven and the sheep net strung. On our return, third weekend in September, a little remedial work on some "wonky" posts that had been noted by the client. The ends of the fence were railed and wired, the

barbed wire strung and signs reinstated. Leaving us to do some bramble clearing for the rather soggy Sunday.

Following a return to Swyre to continue wall repairs started there earlier in the year and to make it ready for over-wintering, and the above mentioned Sunday at Corfe, it was time for the final session of baby scrub clearance for the year on Fontmell. A warm, sticky Saturday with small, scattered scrub made for a slow day, with depressingly small piles of arisings being rolled down in to the scrub bank below as the day progressed. On Sunday, after a drizzly start the sun returned in attempt to broil roast us as the day progressed. The dark cloud rolling in along with the first rain drops accompanied by distant rumbles of thunder brought the day to a somewhat abrupt finish as they were the precursor of an approaching thunderstorm. The final walk to the trailer was accompanied by the first flashes of lightning, not the time to be holding aloft a pitch-fork!

Our annual tool store session was somewhat curtailed by an uncertain forecast which precluded dry weather tasks like painting the tool store roof or repairing the trailer lid. After clearing the vegetation and rubbish that seems to accumulate around the tool store during the year, there was time for a leisurely tool cleaning and sharpening session, trailer cleaning, an opportunity for a general chin wag and share a bring a dish lunch, cakes, etc.

Mid-September and what is

probably our final visit to Swineham. On Saturday morning we removed the last batch of tree guards from the hedgerow on the approach road before heading to lakeside wood to package the thousands of tubes that we have removed on previous visits into dumpy bags so that they could be sent for recycling. A lunchtime finish on Sunday provided an opportunity for a walk around the lake and grounds before heading homewards.

The final Sunday in September and an unusually late first beach clean of the year on Abbotsbury beach. The weather forecast was not promising but the day went surprisingly well. Although, the near gale force easterly made keeping hold of a bag, staying upright and picking up rubbish eventful at times. Amazingly we completed a sweep from the tank traps to the NT boundary at West Bexington before the rain arrived in earnest. Walking back from West Bexington in the wind and rain was quite an experience.

The first weekend in October brought the first pine cutting session of the cut and burn season at Parley Common (West). Dry weather and a brisk breeze meant no fire on the Saturday and on Sunday a poor turn out and the option to "lop & leave" meant no fire would let us get more cutting done. Over the weekend we cleared a larger area than expected. We returned to an adjoining area, the last weekend in October with the benefit of an "Indian Summer." Virtually no wind this time so we did have a fire both

Co-ordinator's report

Richard Meatyard

days, once again good progress made almost doubling the total area cleared.

Between the two visits to Parley we slotted in: The first proper scrub session, with the first fire of the year at Powerstock Common and an initial coppicing session at Ashley Wood.

Powerstock Common and heavy rain overnight Friday into Saturday meant the entrance to the reserve was a river when we arrived and there was more than 3ft of water under the bridge! Although the site was very wet under foot the weather for the

rest of the weekend was dry. Instructions from the client proved slightly confusing but having located a couple of markers we set to and made steady progress on Saturday. Sunday drew an excellent turnout and by mid-morning we finally found a couple more markers that confirmed we had been clearing the right area. A roaring fire both days with a satisfyingly large pile of ash by finish time on Sunday.

It is a long time since DCV has been to Ashley Wood, only a few of the long-standing

members will have been there previously. A forecast of heavy rain and high winds put many off and it was only a hardy few that braved the conditions, being rewarded with the coppice proving to be a good shelter from the wind. Although less so from the rain which eased as the day progressed, stopping in the afternoon. The hazel to coppice is ideal for hand tools and we return here a few more times during the Winter to continue coppicing and dead hedging.

R. Meatyard, Coordinator,
31st October 2024

A COMMON THEME

Commons are special places, for their physical features, natural and human history and the many stories that they hold. Commons come in a variety of landscape and habitat, the moors of Dartmoor, fells of the Lake District, heathland and woodland pasture in Dorset. Many commons have remained largely undisturbed for centuries, still bearing witness to their past and their land use - burial mounds, early man made tools, signs of workings - cart tracks, gravel extraction, and those that left no sign, like smugglers.

There are 1.3 million acres of common land in England and Wales. 88% of those in England have national or international designation, for wildlife, landscape or archaeology. All commons are owned by someone but traditionally local people, commoners, had specific rights allowing usage of the common's natural resources, e.g. foraging, grazing, gathering wood or gorse, furze, or digging turf, peat, for fuel. Increasing pressure of development in the 19th century led to protests, resulting in the foundation of The Open Spaces Society, founded 1865, who campaign for protection for commons, greens and paths. Today commons are valued for the protection of wildlife and ecology and as green space for leisure.

DCV's new worksite in remote north Dorset, Alners Gorse, lies near Lydlinch and Deadmoor Commons, both woodland pasture. There were grazing rights for beasts on Lydlinch although the common was taken over by the Army during WW2, after which grazing did not resume.

Familiar Town Common has seen many uses, Bronze Age burials, Roman lookout towers, 19th century military rifle range, 19th century railway line, First World War trench practice, mid 20th century gravel extraction, an 18th century pest house for smallpox sufferers.

Corfe Common holds Bronze Age and Iron Age remains, together with Medieval field boundaries and evidence of food growing in both medieval times as well as the dig for victory Second World War campaign. Tracks left by limestone hauling horse drawn carts give testament to the building of nearby Corfe Castle.

Parley Common supported grazing of beasts, turf and wood extraction for fuel, gravel and clay for improving track surfaces, a 19th century brick kiln. In 1633 local yeoman farmers were given ownership of long strips of land in a north/south alignment still reflected in the landscape even now. Livestock movement would have left numerous tracks across the Common - perhaps the very ones we access on our tasks here.

Food for thought as we visit these historic places.



ORCHIS / DCV EXCHANGE TRIP 2024



A wonderful weekend, hosted by our Orchis friends, was enjoyed by six DCV members on 20th to 22nd September. The weather was perfect, warm and sunny all weekend, and the ferry crossings both ways were quite calm. We met up early Friday morning at the Poole Ferry Port for the 8:30 sailing to Cherbourg, arriving just after lunchtime. Our French hosts met us at the terminal and we drove from there to Quinneville, south of St Vaast, where we were shown around a small artisan biscuit makers. There were lots of tasty free samples handed round and a tray of them put on a table in their little courtyard café, where we had afternoon tea, followed by a walk along the huge sandy beach at Quinneville. Some people also drove a bit further down the coast to visit the Utah Beach D-Day landing memorial area. We then drove back to our hosts houses, before meeting up in the community room in St Vaast for a 'bring-a-dish' supper with the usual high standard of French home baking!

After a good night's sleep at our hosts, and breakfast the next morning (for me – big bowls of

coffee with croissants to dunk and Joel's delicious home baked brioche bread!), we all met up by the north entrance bridge to La Hougue Fort in St Vaast. Our task for the day was to clear ivy and brambles from the buildings and perimeter wall to the right of the entrance, which is the start of a new public right of way that they are creating, which will eventually link to the area of the Vauban Tower within the fort. About 25 Orchis members joined us for the work, a very good turnout! We started the day with a coffee break (very civilised!), then worked the rest of the morning. There was a story on the local news that day about a load of bags of drugs that had washed up on a nearby beach (from the UK apparently) and we wondered if Doug had found some, as he was bouncing up and down a bit wildly on top of the trailer full of ivy!

Some of us took an hour out and went down to the beach by La Hougue, where we swam and paddled. It was lovely, not too cold. We then enjoyed a big picnic lunch in the Fort, with baguettes, cheeses, pates, ham, salads etc.. then did a bit more work in the afternoon, before

taking a walk around the Fort. In the evening there was a more formal and delicious meal in the community room, with plenty of Kir, wine, cider and nibbles to start. The mayor of St Vaast and a couple of municipal representatives called in to formally thank Orchis and us for work we had done.

On Sunday we spent the first part of the morning with our hosts, going for walks or shopping, then we all drove to Valcanville, where we visited the very interesting, ruined remains of a Knights Templar 'Commanderie', dating from the 12thC. The ruins have been rediscovered, cleared and extensively researched by the current owners of the land and attached manor house. We had a picnic lunch in the courtyard, then the owner gave us a very enthusiastic tour of the buildings with details of its fascinating history.

All too soon it was time to return to Cherbourg to catch the evening ferry back to Poole. A very enjoyable and full weekend, and a chance to practice our dodgy French in a lovely part of Normandy!

Jane Faulkner

LA COMMANDERIE DE VALCANVILLE

https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commanderie_de_Valcanville

The Vauban tower at St Vaast, built by Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban (1633-1707), military engineer of King Louis XIV. His 12 groups of fortified buildings & sites around France's borders, are a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and his work is deemed a major contribution to universal military architecture and a major role in the history of fortification. In St Vaast, coastal observation towers of the Hougue and the isle of Tatihou.

ORCHIS/DCV EXCHANGE WEEKEND
ST VAAST LA HOUGUE
September 2024

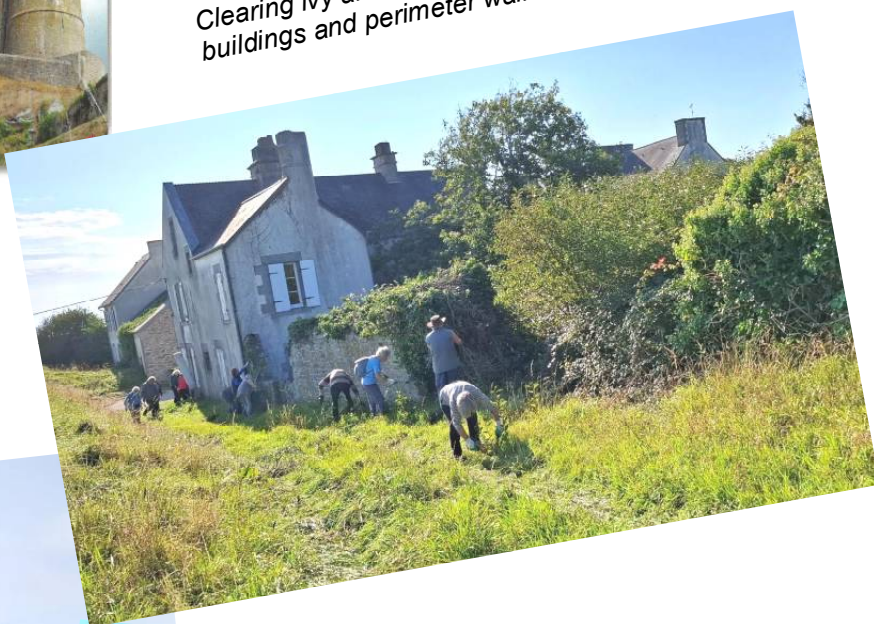


The Fort at La Hougue



Clearing ivy and brambles from buildings and perimeter wall

Top job Doug!



Enjoying a big picnic lunch in the Fort, baguettes, cheeses, pates, ham, salads etc...



Publicity

Portesham Millenium Fayre - 27 July 2024

Many thanks to Helen Thompson, Jane Faulkner, Tess Green who hosted a stall at this millennial celebration, publicising and promoting DCV and its work. Plenty of preparation, photos and information, paid off in a successful day co-ordinated by Tess. The stall looked great.

We had a good day at Portesham Millenium Fayre. 1024 to 2024 Through the Ages for their charter from Cnut, King of England 1016-1035.

Our stand drew plenty of attention and we chatted with lots of locals, which is more relevant for our group than grockles.

The photos of our rural craft skills were commented on favourably especially hedge laying, dry stone walling and coppicing. Many were pleased to see that these skills are being kept alive and acknowledged as wildlife friendly but also that the Dorset landscape features are maintained.

Jane F and I each featured in further publicity. Tess drew our disparate efforts together well.

Helen Thompson

The message below was on our new West Dorset MP's Facebook page, along with the photo of him and Helen in our stall, and a link to DCV website!

"Lovely to visit the Portesham Fayre, although it seems my popularity has already plummeted as I ended up being put in the stocks! I also got to meet the volunteers of the #Dorset branch of the Dry Stone Walling Association of Great Britain, **as well as learn more about the great work being done by Dorset Countryside Volunteers.** Before heading off to the Powerstock Country Fête for a burger and a spot of Wellie Wanging."

He provided a link to DCV too which is great!





A reminder for work site safety

Please Read

REMEMBER it is the responsibility of everyone out on task to think about safety - their own and that of others around them. Here are some important tips and advice to help us all have an accident free winter.

- ◇ Wear stout boots or shoes, gloves and a protective jacket to prevent injuries to feet, hands and body. Be aware of the terrain, is it slippery or uneven?
- ◇ Wear protective goggles (ask task leader) to avoid a poke in the eye - something you'll want to avoid.
- ◇ Carry and use tools safely as instructed.
- ◇ Do not over exert yourself. Don't rush, you may trip.
- ◇ Always be aware of what is going on around you, are others working too close to you, or you too close to them.
- ◇ Beware of areas of danger, usually signposted.
- ◇ If members of the public ask what we are doing be courteous in reply and don't get into an argument with them. Refer them to the task leader.



How to help out on task

Arrive early and help unload the trailer and take tools to the work site.

At break times collect your tools in one place so you can find them again.

Clean tools at end of day and help with carrying them back to the trailer.

If you leave early tell the task leader and ask if you can carry anything back.

Preparing for task

Check for emails and the DCV web site the morning of the task to make sure the task hasn't been cancelled due to bad weather, or the work location hasn't changed due to finishing the work on the Saturday.

Make sure you know where you are going. The maps we produce should have enough information to get you to the parking. If you are not sure where it is have a look on Google Maps and Streetview or gridreferencefinder and type in either Postcode, OS grid reference or Lat/Long.

Is your phone fully charged? Use a waterproof bag to stop it getting wet.

Do bring an extra layer of clothing on task, sometimes the wind strips all your heat away.

Wet feet? - spare socks in car. Also in wet weather bring an extra pair of gloves or consider buying waterproof gloves and a thin cotton inner.

Bring plenty to eat, cool weather uses more energy. DCV supplies hot drinks and sugary biscuits for breaks.

Once parked look at the DCV white board with info and follow the small yellow arrows.

Finally, enjoy being on task! Exercise is good for us, exercise in the fresh air even better, physically and mentally. Take time to look around you and enjoy the nature and wildlife that you see and hear.





Alners Gorse Butterfly Reserve

A new site for DCV

Alners Gorse Butterfly Reserve, near Sturminster Newton in north Dorset, is a 14 hectare (32 acre) relic of the wooded and uncultivated land that once dominated this area of the Blackmore Vale, and is immensely rich in plant and animal life. Butterfly Conservation purchased the land as a reserve in 2005 and have been improving the habitats for butterflies and moths and other wildlife in the years since then.

Historic maps show that much of the land around Alners Gorse has been managed as farmland since at least the 17th century, with the 1607 map of Hazelbury Bryan showing many small fields around the village and a large area of 'Common land' known as "Rudge Common" and later as "Haselbere Common" where local people were entitled to graze their animals and cut wood. Because of the wet nature of the terrain – as a result of the heavy clay soils – large areas of land in the Vale were left as wild woodland.



As a result of the breaking up, or enclosure, of the commons in the mid 1800s and changes in agricultural practices since then, much of the land in the Blackmore Vale has become intensively farmed, with dairy farming being the main activity.



The draining and fertilising of the fields since Hardy's time and especially since World War II have brought about massive changes in the biodiversity and loss of many species of animals and plants that were once characteristic of this rural landscape.

Relics of the former landscape still survive in places like Alners Gorse, as well as nearby Lydlinch Common, Deadmoor Common and Rooksmoor. In these remote and out of the way corners it is still possible to see a wide range of wildlife. Volunteers from Dorset Butterfly Conservation also help manage part of Lydlinch common.



In the early 1950s, the top end of the reserve was planted up with pines, spruces and oaks – a significant part of what is now the woodland was already converting itself naturally to oak forest and the rest was drained and planted. The rest of the reserve was planted with rows of oak and conifer trees in the 1970s after the Alner family stopped grazing it with cattle. A great increase in the blackthorn and willow scrub took place among the planted trees in the central band of the reserve and this is now ideal as Nightingale habitat as they prefer dense mixed scrub for nesting and insect food source.



Work parties have been cutting rank grass and scrub over the years and since 2012 four Dartmoor ponies have been winter grazing the site.

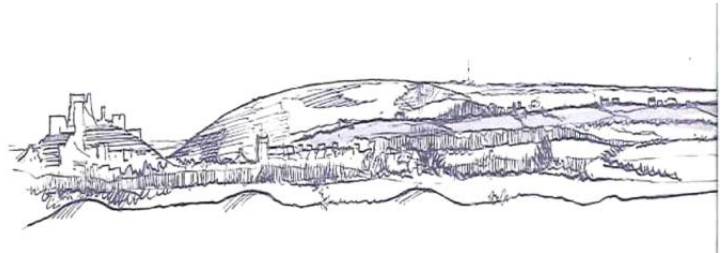
Information from Butterfly Conservation

DCV are working here Sunday 10th November

Read all about the National Trust's Corfe Common

Corfe Common is Dorset's largest common. Covering 140 hectares, it is a Site of Special Scientific Interest for its wild flowers and insects. It was bequeathed to the National Trust by the Bankes family in 1982 including Corfe Castle, much of the village, the family home at Kingston Lacy, and property and land holdings elsewhere in the area.

Corfe Castle is surrounded by chalk ridges where sheep and cattle graze. There have been farms and dwellings along the lower slopes of the ridge since Saxon times and many of these are built on a 'spring line'. When rain falls on the chalk it soaks down into the rock until it meets a layer of clay and then finds its way to the surface as a spring.



During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries sheep were valued for their wool and meat and became a feature of the Purbeck landscape. All the sheep belonging to the tenant farmers were taken up to the chalk ridge by the shepherds during the day. At night they were brought down to manure the fields which made the soil fertile for crops of wheat and barley. The flock of sheep was moved to a different field each night so each tenant's land was covered in turn.

On the common you may notice some slightly raised banks. These are the remains of Iron Age and medieval field boundaries. Along the ridge at the top of the slope there are several large mounds. These are Bronze Age burial mounds and are known as round barrows. They are three to four thousand years old.

The grassy part of the common was ploughed in the 1940s in the middle of World War Two. This was when the 'Dig for Victory' campaign encouraged people to grow as much of their own food as possible including corn and potato.



The fields nearby are known as the Halves. In the medieval period these fields were divided up amongst the villagers so they could grow food for themselves, their horses, cattle and a bit for the Lord of the Manor. The size of the strip was governed by the amount of land a horse could plough in one day!

Along the old tracks thousands of tons of limestone for the building of Corfe Castle were brought by horse drawn cart or sled. These the old tracks are now known as 'hollow ways'. Over time the carts wore away the track and it became a deep gully.



Blashenwell farm used to be a very popular meeting place for ladies of Corfe. The name means 'spring or stream where cloth is bleached'. Minerals from the rocks dissolve in the water and have a 'bleaching' effect on cloth.

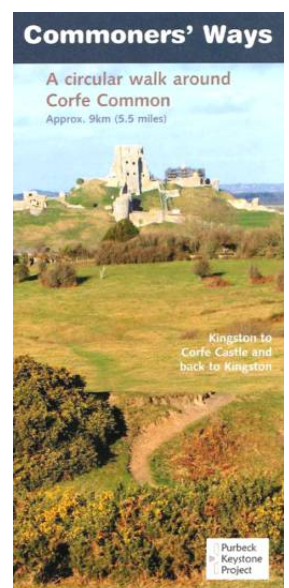
Details taken from the "Commoners Way" leaflet courtesy of the Dorset Council website

https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/documents/35024/283293/Commoners_ways_leaflet.pdf/

DCV have 2 weekends working for National Trust on Corfe Common cutting back gorse and scrub to widen pathways:

4th & 5th January

22nd & 23rd February



History

Early field boundaries of simple marker stones gradually gave way to hedgerows following the Enclosure movement, evolving into the ditch and hedge.

Relatively little practised until the 18th & 19th centuries, gradually hedgelaying became a skilled craft, a well laid hedge a point of pride to farmer and labourer. Some men specialised in hedge cutting, on a contract basis all winter, general farmhands each summer.

Numerous distinct styles of hedging exist, depending on what needs to be kept in or out of the field, by the land itself and what trees best suit it and by the craftsmen who passed the skills down the generations. Dorset hedges are laid flat to the ground and use crooks or stakes instead of binding along the top.

Wildlife

Hedges are invaluable safe havens, "corridors" for Britain's flora and fauna, mainly of woodland origin. Birds, small mammals, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates use the hedgerow for home or food - over 100 types of moth feed on hawthorn alone and nearly as many utilise blackthorn.

At ground level perennial herbs flourish, cow parsley, hedge parsley. Plants of woodland origin - dog's mercury, bluebell, primrose, wood anemone, wood spurge.

They provide shade and shelter for livestock, absorb carbon, slow water run off, form windbreaks, house predators of crop pests.

Preparation

- Take a good look at the hedge to assess it and spot potential problems, gaps etc
- Trim excess growth from nearside of hedge to allow access
- Cut out dead wood - this can be stacked near or at base of hedge
- Remove stems out of line of the hedge
- At this point *do not yet* cut out too much live wood
- Decide which way the hedge should be laid - normally uphill
- Choose a gap to work in - give other volunteers sufficient space
- Stems you cut out may be used as stakes, so keep to one side

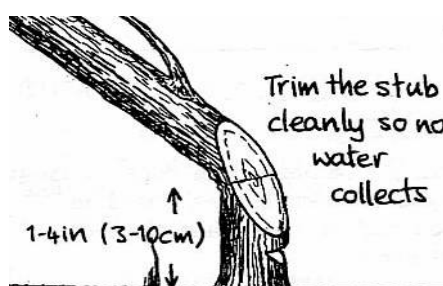
Process

- The aim is to cut part way through stems - pleachers - far enough to allow it to bend, whilst leaving sufficient hinge of bark and sapwood underneath to allow the pleacher to survive
- Before cutting, ensure the pleacher is not tangled up
- Try to make a clean cut, not ragged - you need a sharp billhook
- The pleacher should slope up away from the stump for sap to flow. Ideally, lay all pleachers to the same angle and in same direction
- The stump may be trimmed with a saw
- Position the pleacher so that it sits stably within the hedge. Trim off some of the brushy top growth
- If necessary, stake to prevent pleachers blowing around in the wind. Stakes should be long enough to be stable and project a few inches above the top of the hedge
- If a stem is too big for handtools, call for the chainsaw operator

Tools

Billhooks

- Used for hedgelaying, coppicing snedding - cleaning felled timber.
- Normally used one handed but the longer Yorkshire billhook can be used with both hands
- Never wear a glove on the billhook hand. There is less grip and it may slip
- Keep the billhook sharp, little and often. A blunt blade can bounce off the wood
- Keep a safe working distance from other volunteers. Cut with the grain, not across
- Never leave a billhook stuck in a stump, someone may trip and fall on it. Lay it flat on the ground near to where you are working



Safety and Equipment

As always, steel toe capped or stout boots are recommended
Eye protection is vital
Thick working gloves for hand protection



ARC reserve at Town Common

Details from ARC website and Dorset Life magazine 2006

Size : 128 hectares

Ownership: Malmesbury Estate

Designation: SSSI, SAC, SPA,

Ramsar

Restrictions: Open Access Land, please keep dogs on a lead and keep to main paths. Horse riding and cycling is only permitted on statutory bridleways. No camping or fires of any kind.



Four Bronze age tumuli are positioned along the eastern edge of the hill.

The area was also used by the Romans for lookout towers. Located to the south east of the reserve is the old site of a military rifle range dating from the late 1800s which was still active up to the 1950s. The southern end of the site

The compact long leaved sundew and the round leaved sundew seem to thrive on the damp paths and bridleways using their sticky colourful leaves to attract and trap flies that they then digest to absorb nutrients.

Heather covers the open ground and in summer provide a vibrant purple flowering display, particularly bell and ling heather on the slopes and cross leaved heather which is common on the wetter areas of the hill.

The Town Common area supports other damp-loving heathland plants such as bog asphodel, sphagnum



Town Common is located on the outskirts of Christchurch. The reserve is dominated by St Catherine's Hill which runs north to south through the site, half of which is managed by Christchurch Borough Council, the remaining managed by Amphibian and Reptile Conservation.

The Town Common side of the hill gives tremendous views out to Hengistbury Head and the Isle of Wight as well the New Forest. The reserve mainly consists of dry heath on the hillside grading down to humid and wet heath with areas of acid bog heading towards the Avon Valley.

Town Common is steeped in history due to its topographical height, tactical position, and the lack of tree cover. The coniferous woodland that now covers the top of the hill is a recent introduction from early 1960s onward.

and the top of the hill were used for gravel extraction from the 1950s up to 1966. Running directly through the middle of the site is the now private Dudmoor Lane which was once a railway line active from 1868 to 1935, evidence of which still exists at the northern end within the grounds of the Avon Causeway pub.

The sandy soils on the heath are very acid, even more so than much of the New Forest, and this has led to some plants that are rare or even absent in the New Forest being present, especially in the damper areas. A particularly unusual plant that does well here is the carnivorous sundew. The St Catherine's Hill area supports all three UK species, although the great sundew is rare.



moss and cotton grass, which are easily seen. This flora in turn supports particular fauna that occupy a heathland niche, with some specialist birds, reptiles and insects calling this home.

Reptiles are a real speciality of the area. All six species of native British reptile occur on Town Common's heath and part of it is a nature reserve managed by the



Town Common

Cont'd...

Amphibian & Reptile Conservation Trust and leased from the owners, the Malmesbury Estate.

There are very few areas in the UK where all these species occur, although the secretive nature of reptiles makes seeing them a tricky matter, particularly the rare sand lizard and elusive smooth snake. Some of our scarce heathland birds are a little more easily found, with Dartford warblers singing from gorse in spring, nightjars at dusk and the occasional hobby overhead, as well as the commoner stonechat and buzzard in evidence.

The heathland, dotted with pools and marshy areas and the adjoining river valley make the area very good for dragonflies and damselflies in summer, with a combination of heathland and river species such as keeled skimmer, hairy dragonfly and black darter. The large hawk dragonflies are particularly noticeable – these four-inch insects can be seen in summer purposefully patrolling heathland pools and trees and are often inquisitive enough to give humans a closer inspection!

St Catherine's Hill is also an area of considerable historical and archaeological significance, with evidence of activity over several thousand years, sitting as it does overlooking both the Stour and Avon valleys and with far reaching views of the surrounding countryside.

The Bronze Age is perhaps the most significant era, with a number of artefacts having been found at the southern end of the hill. Individual items include pottery and a type of bronze axe, dating back to between 2800 and 4000 years old, found near the hill's collection of tumuli. These circular mounds of earth were used to cover burial sites and the evidence points to a significant cemetery at St Catherine's Hill.

The Roman era has a lesser but still interesting 'footprint' in the area, with the discovery of material leading to suggestions of the hill's elevated position being used as a Roman military signalling station between 1600 and 1950 years ago, although this has not been proven beyond doubt.

In March 2015 we were shocked by the devastating fire on Town Common, Christchurch during which around 75 hectares of lowland heathland were lost. The following days were taken up with rescue attempts, and a massive amount of voluntary public help allowed us to catch and relocate just over 500 reptiles.

Visiting the site one year on, there is some evidence of new growth, with wetter areas having a covering of heather, but also vast areas that remain barren offering little refuge for reptiles or other heathland specialists.

Over time the lost habitat will re-establish and the animals that were pushed out will hopefully recolonise. ARC staff and volunteers have put in a massive effort over the last year to enhance other parts of the site for its resident wildlife and this work will continue.

Gary Powell

ARC Senior Reserves Manager

Before



Town Common

After



DCV are working here 16th & 17th November, Sunday 29th December and 29 & 30 March

DCV TASK PROGRAMME : November 2024 - March 2025

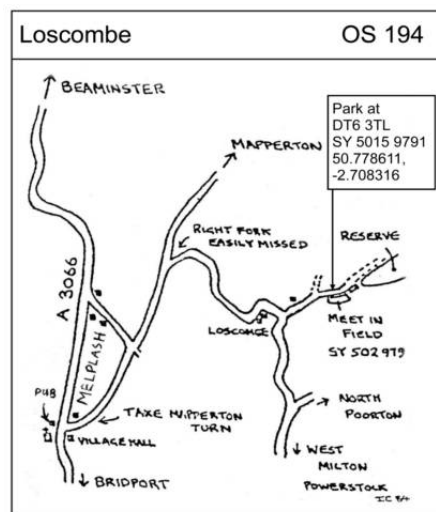
For all tasks please check DCV web site <http://www.dcv.org.uk/> for updates in case we finish the planned work and move to a different site.

2 & 3 Nov: Loscombe, West Dorset. DWT

There is no easy way to get to this secretive little valley, but I think the effort is well worthwhile. The main interest in the site is the unimproved grassland, with its rich diversity of plants and animals. Hundreds of anthills, mostly old, but with some currently in use, add to the variation. Thick hedges surround and divide the grass, providing additional habitats. But scrub, especially gorse, tends to spread, gradually invading the meadows, and would reduce the diversity if left unchecked.

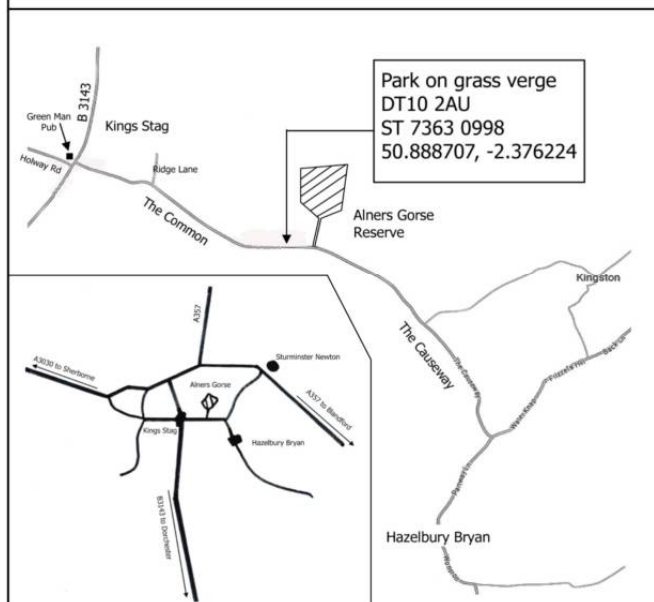
So that is where we come in, to cut back some of the bigger gorse. If left on site, it would degrade the grass, so we will, as usual, be burning it.

NB: If the ground is dry, parking will be in the DWT parking area, but if wet we may arrange an alternative, so check the website, or look out for signs.



Alners Gorse

OS 194



Sunday 10 Nov: Alners Gorse, North Dorset. BC

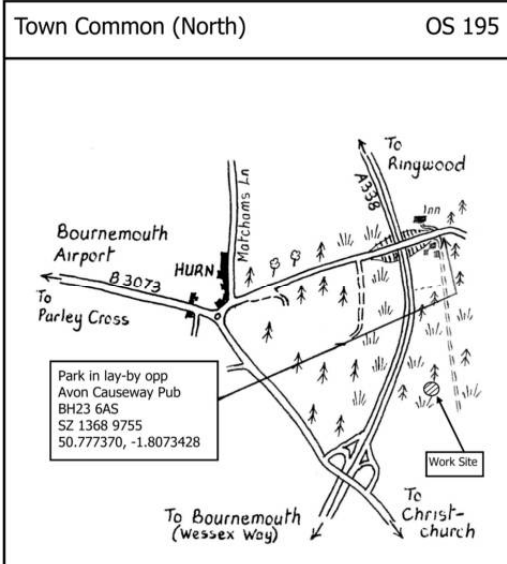
This is a new site to me, and I don't recall the DCV going there before. It is a relic of a Medieval hunting Forest, likely to have been a diverse mix of dense old woods, open canopy grazed wooded areas, and herb rich meadows. Several rare species have survived here, including Nightingales, Brown Hairstreak butterflies, and a number of rare moths. They rely on the grassland, which 4 Dartmoor ponies graze, but some help from us is needed to clear bigger invading scrub.

NB: There is parking on the roadside verge near the easily missed site entrance, which is just after the Hazelbury Bryan signboard. The trailer may be parked off road in the small car park. Google Streetview is a good tool to familiarise the road and entrance layout.

16 & 17 Nov: Town Common, Christchurch. ARC

This big area of heathland stretches for about 2.5 miles from the outskirts of Christchurch up towards the airport. As with all ARC reserves, it is an important refuge for Dorset's rare reptiles, and many other animals and plants adapted to life on this apparently unpromising, sandy heath. We will be doing our usual job of removing self sown pines. It is vital work - closed canopy pine growth will kill almost all of the interesting and diverse plants and animals. As piles of material left on site are a fire hazard as well as degrading the site, we will be burning it unless it can be stacked in an already degraded plantation area.

NB: Parking is through a rather easily missed turning off Avon Causeway just after the A338 bridge, opposite a sign for the Avon Causeway Hotel. The worksite is 1.3km to the south, hopefully the tools and equipment at least will be taken most of the way by vehicle.

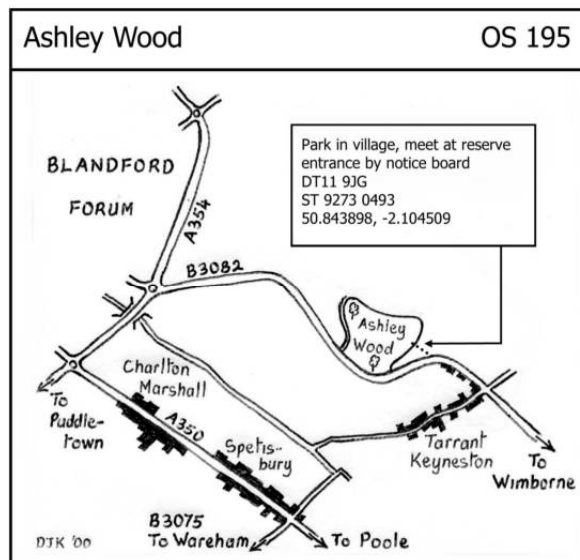


DCV TASK PROGRAMME : November 2024 - March 2025

23 & 24 Nov: Ashley Wood Nr Blandford. DWT

We will be continuing with coppicing our area in this lovely old wood. We will need lots of long straight poles to build a fence & dead hedge to keep deer out of the newly coppiced area. If allowed free access, they do a very good job of preventing re-growth. So we will stack these on the site. Shorter, bent or forked logs will go in firewood piles, and much of the rest in heaps around the edge for the dead hedge. If the weather is cold or wet, we will find enough wood for a fire to provide warmth for our breaks. If anyone wants pea sticks, bean poles or firewood, they will be welcome to take as much as they want.

NB: Please park considerably in the village, if the Village Hall is not in use, we can use its parking area. Look out for signs to say if parking there is or is not available. The Wood entrance is the other side of the B3082, about 600m to the North. There is pavement or walkable verge all the way, cross the B3082 where the pavement ends.



Rempstone

OS 195

DTK '05

Meet at Rempstone Fm for onward travel
BH20 5JH
SY 9890 8287
50.645533, -2.016913



Sunday 1st Dec: Rempstone Forest, Purbeck. Rempstone Estate

Being in the middle of the largest onshore oilfield in Western Europe might sound unattractive and industrial! But in fact it is one of the most peaceful and beautiful places you could wish for, and a real haven for wildlife. A lot of it is SSSI, and it is part of a major wildlife area including Arne, Hartland Moor & Studland heaths. All these areas are the result of a combination of human and natural forces over a long period of time, and work is needed to maintain them in good shape. Pushing back old, dense gorse, and clearing unwanted pine invasion are two jobs likely to be on the menu for this task.

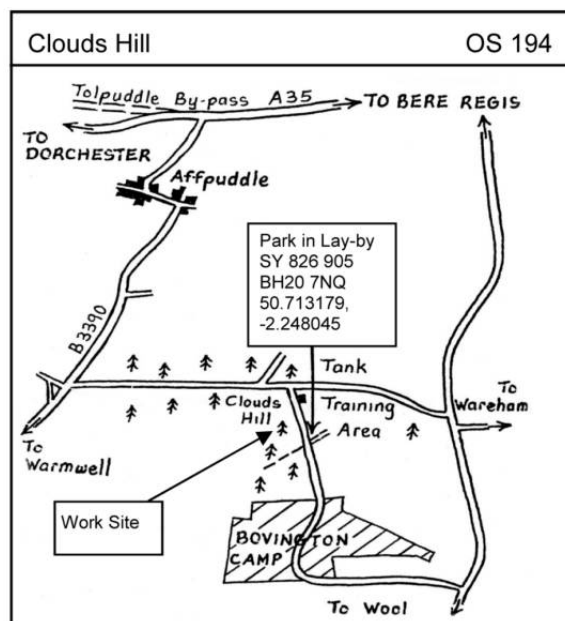
NB: Turn off the Studland road at the cross roads on a little summit and wait by Rempstone Farm for onward travel. Otherwise follow the signposted route to the electric gate, and phone the number on the DCV white board or the DCV mobile for the gate code.

7 & 8 Dec: Clouds Hill, Bovington & DCV Christmas dinner

It is that time of year again, Christmas trees to find, lots more pines to remove, and our famous Christmas dinner at Winfrith Newburgh Village Hall. Time for the grumpy ones to be extra grumpy, and mutter about too much of this, that and the other. Time for the cheerful ones to be extra cheerful and share presents, and to enjoy good food and good company. Either way, it is an event not to be missed.

There will be plenty of useful work to do, clearing pines from Dorset's invaluable heathlands, to either build up an appetite, or work it off, or both if you are really keen!

NB: Park in the tank viewing car park right at the North end of Bovington, the gate to the reserve is almost directly opposite. Follow signs to the worksite.



DCV TASK PROGRAMME : November 2024 - March 2025

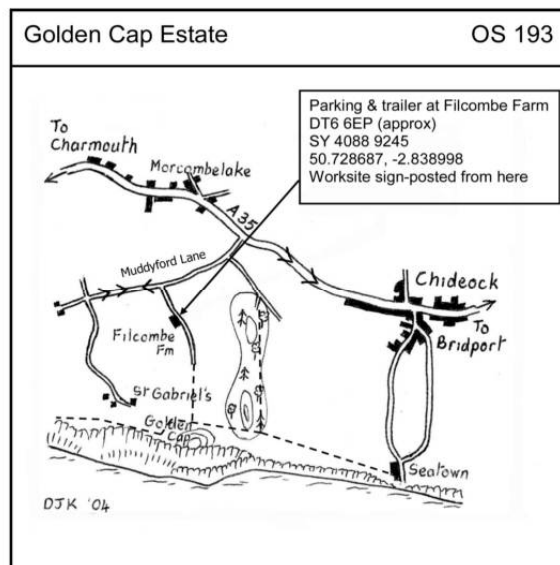
Sunday 15 December: Loscombe, West Dorset. DWT

Continuing the important gorse cutting work from the start of November. For details and map see 2 & 3 November.

21 & 22 December: West Dorset, Hedgelaying. NT

This is an opportunity for us to re-learn or learn a bit about the old skill of Hedgelaying. The Dorset style is quite basic compared to some regional styles, and much depends on the material available. In simple terms, the living stems are cut part through, and then laid over almost flat along the hedge. The pleachers so formed can stay alive, keeping a living barrier, while new wood grows up from the stumps. On the next cycle, the old pleachers will be removed, and the new growth should be ideal to repeat the cycle. Though these days it rarely works quite like that!

NB: Currently it may be at one of 2 sites, Max Gate (no map) on the edge of Dorchester at Alington Avenue DT1 2FN, or Filcombe Farm near Chideock, (see map). Check for emails or the website for confirmation of which one it is.



Sunday 29 December: Town Common, Christchurch. ARC

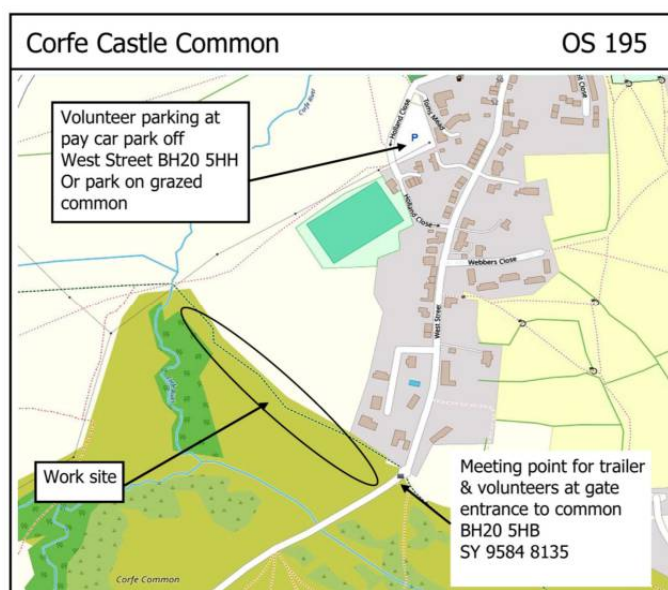
We have a one day task for New Year, returning to Town Common to continue our important work removing invasive self sown pine. The work and meeting details are as in 16 & 17 Nov. There should be some Christmas goodies to enjoy, assuming you can cope with any more, of course!



4 & 5 January 2005: Corfe Common, Purbeck. NT

This 140 hectare ancient Common is mostly SSSI, for the insects and plants that it provides a valuable habitat for. It is also popular for walking, with a published circular walk. From Bronze age barrows, through Iron age & Medieval field boundaries to quarrying and agricultural use, it is rich in history. People and wildlife don't always go together very well, but there is plenty of room here for both. And to help in both respects, we have been requested to cut a wide path or ride through some scrub, mainly gorse. Somewhere people can walk in comfort, and wildlife can come in from the protection of the surrounding scrub at quiet times when people and dogs are absent.

NB: Look out for an email the week before to confirm parking arrangements. We may park by the cattle station just on the heath, if not then the closest parking is West St car park (payment TBC), or we may be able to transport people who arrive early enough from the NT car park or the layby below the Castle.



11 & 12 January: TBA

This weekend is deliberately left unallocated to allow for programme changes due to bad weather or uncompleted work etc. Please look out for emails & check the website for latest updates.

DCV TASK PROGRAMME : November 2024 - March 2025

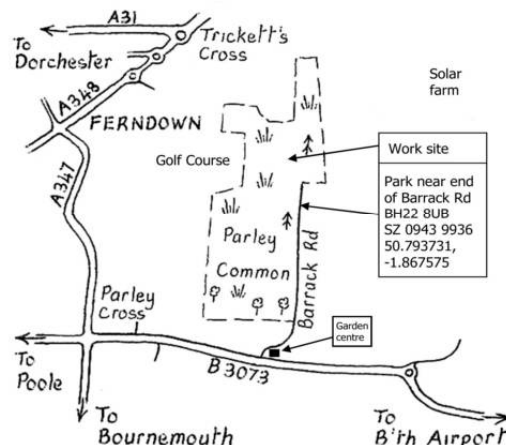
18 & 19 January: Parley Common, Ferndown. ARC

The pines will not stop growing on Dorset's heaths until the last tree is removed! These self sown trees grow quickly and soon shade out the sun loving heather and all the wildlife that depend on it. So our annual job of removing them continues. This time we are working on the eastern side, north of the road end, through the ARC gate to an area we haven't been to before, between the golf course and the solar farm.

NB: The meeting point is down Barrack Road, 400m past ACE reclamation. Barrack Road is a small turning down the side of In-Excess garden centre, off the B3072 Airport Road.

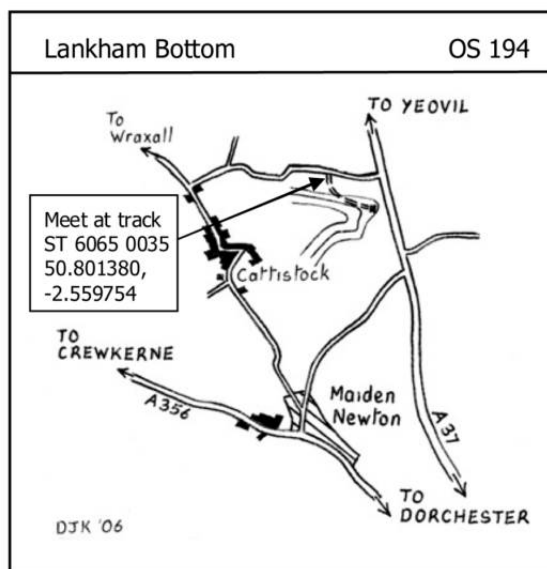
Parley Common East

OS 195



Lankham Bottom

OS 194



Sunday 26 Jan: Lankham Bottom Nr Maiden Newton.

This Butterfly Conservation reserve is owned by Wessex Water to guard their boreholes here from agricultural contamination. This has protected the area, giving it great diversity, typical of the surrounding West Dorset chalk hills. But retaining the open grassy areas requires work, the light cattle grazing alone is not enough. So this site is familiar to most regular members from the summer Ragwort pulling we do.

This visit we are cutting back scrub on the flower rich grassland to keep it in good condition.

NB: Meet inside the upper gates, from where most of the site is visible, and follow directions or signs to the work area.

1 & 2 February: West Dorset, Scrub Control, DWT

The Hooke valley area of Dorset is a beautiful, diverse and quite unspoilt area, with many woods, thick hedges, meadows of all types, steep hills and deep valleys. It is off the main tourist trails, quiet even in the height of Summer, and quieter still in Winter. The DWT has several reserves there, most of us know them well.

NB: It is currently not fixed as to which site we are working on, most likely one of Loscombe, Powerstock or Kingcombe. So please look out for Emails or Web-site updates with more details.

8 & 9 February: Clouds Hill, Bovington. ARC

This ARC reserve is inside the MoD tank training range at Bovington, but has not been used for many years. It has benefited from this protection, remaining a useful area of heathland that is a refuge for rare plants and animals. But Pine trees do not obey the Keep Out signs, so we need to venture in to deal with the offenders. As usual, they will be cut down or pulled up, then disposed of in a hot fire.

For details see map 7th & 8th December.

DCV TASK PROGRAMME : November 2024 - March 2025

Sunday 16 February: Ashley Wood Nr Blandford

This will be our 4th planned day working on our Coppice coupe in this old woodland.
Details same as for 23 & 24 November.

22 & 23 February: Corfe Common, Purbeck. NT

We return to this ancient Common to continue the work from 4/5 Jan. If we complete the main ride, I am told there are some other paths to clear as well, so don't worry about there not being enough to do!
For details are same as 4 & 5 January.



1 & 2 March: Parley Common, Ferndown. ARC

When looking at the wide open vistas over this heath, we can feel satisfied that without our help, many of those views would now be blocked by pines, steadily degrading the important heathland habitat beneath them.
For details same as for 18 & 19 January.

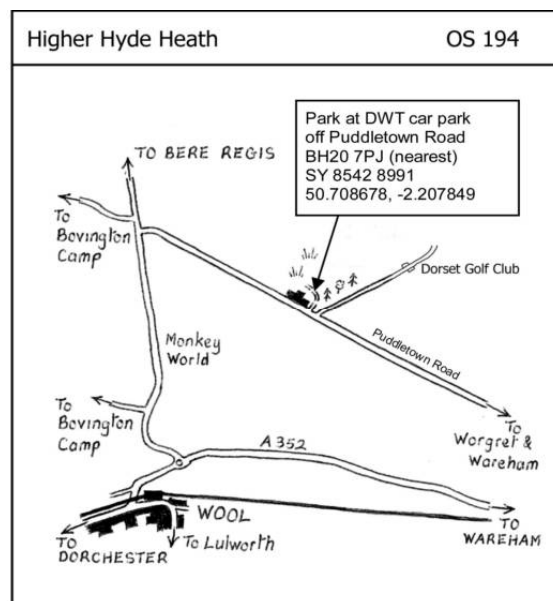
8 & 9 March: (day or w/e) TBA

This is the 2nd weekend deliberately left unallocated to allow for programme changes due to bad weather or un-completed work etc. Please look out for emails & check the website for latest updates.

15 & 16 March: Higher Hyde Heath Nr Wareham, Path & Bird Hide work, DWT

Higher Hyde reserve was once quarried for sand, gravel or clay. Now left for nature, the banks, hollows and ponds offer many habitats for wildlife. In this muddle of woodland, grass-land and heath, all 6 of England's reptile species have been seen. Also many butterflies, moths and lots more insects can be found over the summer. We have cleared Gorse, and built steps, a boardwalk and a fence there. This time we will be clearing the path to the Bird hide, doing repairs to the hide, and possibly making a screen to conceal the access from any birds in the pond or wet area.

NB: Park in the DWT car park just before the Golf course turning off Puddletown Road. Follow the path down to the hide.



Sunday 23 March: Ashley Wood, Blandford. DWT

Hopefully we will have finished the coppicing, and will return to build a fence & hedge around the coupe. It is essential to try to keep deer out of the coupe as much as possible, they love the young hazel shoots, and will browse them to death, quite literally, if allowed to. A netting fence is planned along the ride, using the long, straight poles cut earlier. Plus a dead hedge round the rest, made using the brash left there held in place by more long poles. It only needs to last about 3 years, then much of the re-growth should be out of reach of the beasts. I am sure they will find plenty to eat elsewhere!

Meeting details are same as 23 & 24 November.

29 & 30 March: Town Common, Christchurch. ARC

This will be our last session of pine cutting for this season. So let's make it a good one. Burning may be weather dependant, and there is a belt of large trees we can stack it under, not too far away.

Meeting details same as 16th & 17th November.

D C V DIARY November 2024 - March 2025

Date	Task Site	Client	Work
2 & 3 November	Loscombe, West Dorset	Dorset Wildlife Trust	Gorse cutting
10 November Sunday	Alners Gorse, North Dorset	Butterfly Conservation	Scrub cutting
16 & 17 November	Town Common, East Dorset	Amphibian Reptile Conservation	Removing self sown pine
23 & 24 November	Ashley Wood, Nr Blandford	Dorset Wildlife Trust	Coppicing
1 December Sunday	Rempstone Forest, Purbeck	Rempstone Estate	Pine bashing
7 & 8 December	Clouds Hill, Bovington, Purbeck	Amphibian Reptile Conservation	Heathland management
7 December Saturday	<i>DCV Christmas Dinner Bring your own drink</i>	<i>Winfrieth Village Hall DT2 8LR Bring Santa gift if you wish Christmas jumpers optional</i>	<i>BOOKING ESSENTIAL Contact Helen Gorman</i>
15 December Sunday	Loscombe, West Dorset	Dorset Wildlife Trust	Gorse cutting
21 & 22 December	West Dorset <i>check website nearer the time</i>	National Trust	Hedgelaying
29 December Sunday	Town Common, East Dorset	Amphibian Reptile Conservation	Removing self sown pine
4 & 5 January 2025	Corfe Common, Purbeck	National Trust	Ride clearance
11 & 12 Jan	TBA	<i>See website nearer the time</i>	
18 & 19 January	Parley Common, East Dorset	Amphibian Reptile Conservation	Pine bashing
26 January Sunday	Lankham Bottom, North Dorset	Butterfly Conservation	Scrub cutting
1 & 2 February	West Dorset <i>check website nearer the time</i>	Dorset Wildlife Trust	Scrub Control
8 & 9 February	Clouds Hill, Bovington, Purbeck	Amphibian Reptile Conservation	Heathland management
16 February Sunday	Ashley Wood, Nr Blandford	Dorset Wildlife Trust	Coppicing
22 & 23 February	Corfe Common, Purbeck	National Trust	Ride clearance
1 & 2 March	Parley Common, East Dorset	Amphibian Reptile Conservation	Pine bashing
8 & 9 March	TBA	<i>See website nearer the time</i>	
15 & 16 March	Higher Hyde Heath Nr Wareham,	Dorset Wildlife Trust	Path & Bird Hide work
23 March Sun	Ashley Wood, Nr Blandford	Dorset Wildlife Trust	Deadhedging
29 & 30 March	Town Common, East Dorset	Amphibian Reptile Conservation	Removing self sown pine