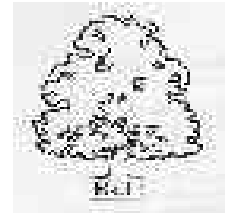


BERKSHIRE CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS



Newsletter no. 179

September / October 2005

Task Reports

7th August – Dinton Pastures – Neil Frankum



After a few summers of using old telegraph poles to prevent erosion on the north bank of Black Swan Lake, it made quite a nice change to be working with slightly more manageable materials. A sunny day brought a good turnout for a day of paddling in the lake



and underwater nailing. After the task, a few of us adjourned to the Wheelwright's Arms over the road from the main gate, although unfortunately they weren't doing food that day, so we couldn't eat.



Above – Lots of volunteers in the lake.



Above – Peter, Eleanor, Nigel, Mark, Richard & Laurence
Below – Phil, David & Lesley





Above left – Richard, Laurence, David, & Eleanor. Above right – Phil, Mark, Dave, & Lesley

26th – 29th August – Langton Herring, Dorset – Neil Frankum

The August Bank Holiday weekend saw us heading down to Dorset for our 8th drystone walling task in the village of Langton Herring, overlooking the Fleet and Chesil Beach. We set out from Reading on Friday night for a drive down that was amazingly free of any bank holiday traffic jams. Following a break and last minute shopping trip at the ‘exotic’ location of Tesco in Blandford Foun, we then had the challenge of finding the village hall we were staying in. Due to a double booking we had had to use a new venue – the village hall in the village of Martinstown near Dorchester. Not too difficult I hear you say,

until you realise the instructions we had started from the church, which we never saw given that it was pitch black when we arrived! Mind you after a second drive through the village we found it.



Above – The village hall



David, Laurence & Maurice demolishing the wall

Saturday morning started with a nice big cooked breakfast, prior to driving down to the worksite at Langton Herring. As John, the ranger we normally see was on holiday in



Laurence, David & Maurice demolishing the wall

Greece, we were met by Jenny, one of the other rangers. Jenny then showed us the weekend’s job. This was to rebuild a collapsed section of the wall right at the top of the hill adjacent to the Coastguard Road. She also took us down to near where we were working last year to see a backup section of wall in case we ran out of work. However, the state of the first section of wall was such that we had to take down more than we first



Mark laying a foundation stone

thought in order to get back to something that was solid enough to build on. We also went past the section we built on my first visit back in 1999, and I'm glad to say it was still standing. Before leaving us Jenny used her landrover to transfer a couple of loads of large new stone to help us on our way. We then started dismantling what was left of the wall. It soon became apparent why it had collapsed – a few layers of reasonably big stones at the top, built on several layers of small stones, dust, and rubble, with no proper foundations! After clearing back to a fairly solid bit of wall, we set to work, using some of the large new stones to give the wall a set of proper foundations. The afternoon was spent putting on the first layers of stone. We finished off by making the worksite stock proof with a wall of

wooden pallets. In the evening we adjourned to Maurice's house in Bridport for a BBQ.



L – End of day 1. Above – Laurence, Mark, Richard, Maurice & David at work. R – David, Maurice, Mark, Richard, Laurence

On Sunday we continued building up the wall, going through more of the usual round of frustration, inspiration, relaxation, and general banter as we worked. Mark also kept on challenging me with finding a home for more and more lop sided / awkward / generally impossible to fit stones. I was able to rise to the challenge on all except the last definitely impossible stone. By the end of the day we actually had something that was starting to look like a wall, although there were still doubts as to whether we would manage to finish. When we finished, most of the group went into Weymouth for a swim in the sea. Maurice and I went back to Martinstown, and after listening to a nail biting and drawn out end to the cricket test match, we went to the pub, only to find it was shut!! When everyone else got back, Richard cooked us a very nice risotto, followed by black forest gateaux, with a few bottles of delicious homebrew wine to wash it all down with.



Mark, Richard & Laurence





Monday saw an early start as we had to clean the hall and pack, before heading to site. After a day off playing rugby, Jenny popped by to see how we were getting on. Unfortunately for her, like Maurice, her team mates had been more interested keeping up with the cricket, and had managed to loose the game. After Jenny (and the excuse for standing around chatting rather than working!!) had gone, we set to work with a vengeance, with a target of finishing the wall by lunchtime. I took this challenge to heart, by tackling the big dip in the wall, in the brute force manner i.e. I simply went for the biggest (non-coping) stones that were left, irrespective of size / shape / awkwardness, and amazingly managed to get them all to fit, even the one that had proved impossible the day before. This burst of effort resulted in us getting the wall up to a level where the coping stones could be added to the top. Richard and Mark set to work on this, with Laurence being used as the ‘muscle’ to lift the biggest stones into place. After a brief scare when we thought we were going to run out of coping stones, we managed to find just enough to complete the entire stretch of wall.



Top - Richard & Mark working on the coping stones
 Above - David knocking in a stake for the barbed wire fence.

The barbed wire fence was put back up, to stop the sheep using the wall as a back scratching device. We then had the usual photo opportunities to record our handiwork for posterity. It was also worth noting that on this last day, as the wall finally took shape out of the rubble, that the number of positive comments from passing walkers increased quite noticeably. We even had a thankyou from a passing parish councillor. After a late lunch we drove over to Bridport, for a guided walk led by Maurice from his house up to Thorncombe Beacon for great views along the coast to Start Point in the west, and Portland Bill in the east. We then descended to the beach at Eype, before heading back via the pub. Unfortunately, for the second time in two days, the pub was shut, resulting in the first task I’ve been on down here where we haven’t contributed to the local landlord’s coffers. After some food and drink back at Maurice’s we had a relatively traffic free journey back to Reading.



Above – Finished wall. Below left – David, Mark & Laurence in front of the view along the coast to Portland. Below right – “Don’t Jump!” – on top of Thorncombe Beacon.



Thanks to John for organising the task for us; Jenny for pointing us in the right direction and coming back to check on progress; Richard for the catering (delicious!); Mark for 'leading by example'; Maurice for his hospitality & jokes; and everyone for making it another great weekend away.



Neil, Richard, Laurence, Mark, & David in front of the finished wall.

26th June – Greywell Fen – Neil Frankum



This was a joint task with the Hampshire Wildlife Trust's local group at Greywell Fen. The task was clearing some of the willow regrowth in the fen area. This has the aim of opening up the area to encourage the highland cattle to graze the marshy area rather than staying on the higher ground. A nice task where you could see the impact you were having. Lots of orchids in flower too.



Newsletter
Afraid my printer's still not fixed. Full colour version available on the website.

31st July – Pound Copse – Richard Coles

I was on my own until Ellie arrived. We were only pulling up brambles, so we considered it was safe to start work with only two of us until Rodney arrived. I live nearby so we adjourned to my garden for lunch. I was relieved that we could actually do some work, and not abandon the task, and the brambles are now well under control so that a few people coming in once a year are enough.

10th July – Snelsmore Common – Neil Frankum

We spent a very hot day shovelling, barrowing and raking out 40 tonnes of gravel to surface the picnic area near the car park. Luckily it was a joint task with the local group, and 21 pairs of hands made light work of the job. It was such a nice day that we decided to stay on and make use of the facilities by having a barbeque!





17th July – Yateley Common – Neil Frankum

This was another nice sunny day spent extending the resurfaced stretch of one of the bridleways across the site that we started on the previous task.

Left – Peter, Calum, Nigel, & Richard

Right – the finished bridleway

Below left – finished bridleway

Below right – Calum, Vicky, Peter & Richard



14th August – Snelsmore Common – Richard Coles

We were putting up a low post and rail fence around the picnic area, which meant digging holes through hard gravel. Again there was a poor turnout, with only Peter and me until Laurence arrived in the afternoon. Keith wanted the fence up as soon as possible, so we couldn't abandon the task, but there were so few of us that everybody had to keep working and it was a hard slog.

19th June – Englemere Pond

A day of paddling around in the reedbed, removing some of the invading trees, and using the material we cut to create a dead hedge to try and steer dogs & people away from the area.

3rd July – Task Cancelled

Task cancelled due to circumstances beyond our control.

24th July – Bartley Heath – Neil Frankum

After a bit of a damp start it did eventually stop raining, and the sun did make an appearance! We spent the day doing some heathland restoration by clearing birch regrowth from an area at the south east side of Bartley Heath. At the end of the day we did a short walk round the site to make the most of the sun.





Laurence, Richard & Krishna on the walk round Bartley Heath

21st August – Greenham Common – Neil Frankum

Today’s task was in an area of heathland on a west facing slope, adjacent to a pond on the south side of the common. We were clearing birch, bramble and bracken that was invading the area. Amazingly there was still quite a lot of heather underneath the undergrowth that had not quite been shaded out. Hopefully it will have a chance to come back strongly now that we’ve removed the competing vegetation. Whilst working we saw a couple of lizards, and lots of dragonflies.



Right – Golden ringed dragonfly
Below left – Before.
Below right - after



Toolstore

The lease on the new toolstore at Edenham Crescent (off Berkeley Avenue, at the western end) has been signed, and we hope to move in some time soon. The Council have allowed us access in the meantime for putting up shelves, and David and I moved the bench there one Saturday. We shall move everything in one day, on a Saturday later in September, so if anyone can help, please contact Richard (0118 976 0580). Once we have moved, there will no longer be a pickup at Caversham Court on Sundays, but we shall still be at the Station at 9.30am and will have a new pickup point at Edenham Crescent at 9.15am, which will suit several people. Leaders will need to allow an extra 5 minutes to get from the tool store to the station.

Mobile Phone

The old mobile 'phone has been kept running alongside the new one, in case people use the old number for asking for directions on their way to a task. However we stopped topping it up some months ago so it is unlikely to stay available for much longer: please make sure you have our new number on your contacts list, which is 07875 262129

Congratulations #1

Congratulations to Anna Townsend, who has successfully completed her meteorology studies at Reading University and has graduated with a 2:1. We wish her well in her future career.

Congratulations #2

Congratulations to former volunteer Fran Hudson, who is expecting her first child in November. We wish her well over the next few months.

Social Reports

Cinema Trip – Batman Begins

Probably the best of the films we've been to see this year.

Cinema – Star Wars

This social ended up just being me on my own thanks to the M25 tarmac melting! Not a bad film, although not as good as the Batman film.

Walk – Snelsmore Common

We had a very nice guided walk around Snelsmore Common, and BBOWT's Rack Marsh nature reserve, with a nice pub lunch at the Blackbird in Bagnor. We got to see parts of Snelsmore that I've never seen before. Thanks to Keith for leading the walk.

Walk – Greywell

The bats didn't play ball, but the food in the pub was good!

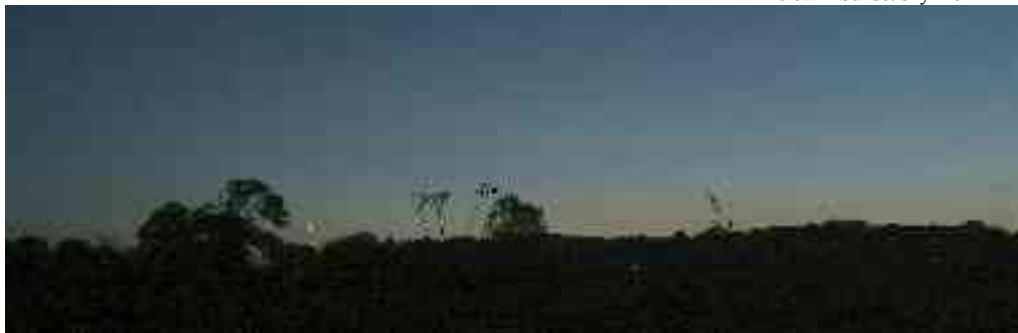
At 1125m, Greywell Tunnel is the 18th longest canal tunnel in the UK, and is situated on the Basingstoke Canal. Long, but considerably shorter than the Standedge Tunnel in Huddersfield which is 5210m long. Originally there wasn't going to be a tunnel on the canal. The plan was to go up through Hook and around the hill. Unfortunately Earl Tylney objected to the canal running through his estate, so a tunnel under the hill was required. Construction started in October 1788, and it was opened on 4th September 1794. The last commercial craft to use the tunnel was in 1901 from the brickworks just to the west of the tunnel, and the last recorded boat went through in 1914, although by this point the canal was in quite a state of disrepair - It had taken this boat about three months to navigate the length of the canal. A roof fall in 1932 caused the final closure of the tunnel. Since then, the tunnel has become a bat roost of international importance, home to Natterers, Daubentons & Brown Long Eared Bats, and is the second largest bat hibernation site in Europe.



Keith photographing butterflies as Nigel looks on.



Above – At the tunnel entrance
Below – Sunset skyline



Cinema Trip – The Descent

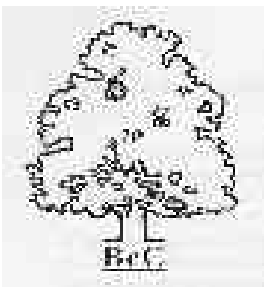
We went to see the Descent. It's a British film, and the basic plot consists of group of girls, one of whom tricks the other girls into exploring some caves in the Appalachian Mountains and it turns into a disaster. As a horror movie it certainly worked, and really made you jump on numerous occasions. The special effects were a cross between Lord Of The Rings and Alien. Good film overall. And the final bit of useless information - most of it was filmed in that most exotic location called Slough!!

BTCV Training Courses

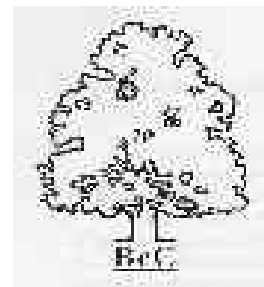
Below is a list of training courses being offered by the BTCV:

COURSE	DATE	PLACE	FEE
Practical Tools Use	10 / 09 / 05	Oxford	S=£60, B=£30, F=£0
Covers the safe use and maintenance of hand tools used in practical conservation work			
Risk Assessment	22 / 10 / 05	Berkshire	S=£60, B=£30, F=£0
Covers how to carry out a risk assessment for conservation and countryside activities			
Tree Felling with Hand Tools	19 / 11 / 05	Gerrards Cross	S=£60, B=£30, F=£0
Gain useful skills for involving communities in local woodland projects			
Willow Work	29 / 10 / 05	Berkshire	S=£60, B=£30, F=£0
Use locally sourced willow to create features in the garden and local environment			
Intro. to Env. Conservation	04 / 02 / 06	Buckinghamshire	S=£60, B=£30, F=£0
Gain knowledge and understanding to carry out practical environmental conservation			
Hedgelaying	11/03/06	Berkshire	S=£60, B=£30, F=£0
How to keep hedges strong and healthy enabling them to provide a rich variety of habitats			
Intro to Leadership Skills	25/03 06	Berkshire	S=£60, B=£30, F=£0
Aimed at people who wish to lead groups on practical tasks and community projects			
How to Build Wildlife Homes	8/04/06	Buckinghamshire	S=£60, B=£30, F=£0
Construct boxes for nesting and hibernating bugs and beastsies			

About the Courses: **Duration** : Courses typically run from 9:30am to 4:30pm. **Refreshments** : Drinks provided, please bring own packed lunch. **Fees** : Course costs are show alongside the course descriptions. Categories are: (S - Standard cost to individuals not qualifying for discount; B - BTCV Supporters Club or member of an associated group; F - Free for those in receipt of benefit) **Certification** : Certificates of achievement are available to all who satisfactorily complete the course requirements. To book or find out more, contact: BTCV, 16 Bridge Street, Caversham, Reading, RG4 8AA Tel: 0118 947 5049



BERKSHIRE CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS



Annual Report 2004-5

Introduction

Berkshire Conservation Volunteers (BeC) is a voluntary organisation founded in 1975 to carry out practical nature conservation work in and around Berkshire. We are a "Roving" Group - we do not have a site of our own, but work on a wide variety of sites throughout Berkshire and S. Oxfordshire and N. Hampshire, such as nature reserves, common lands, public open spaces, woodlands, heathlands, grasslands, ponds & wetlands.

We go out every Sunday and work a whole day, from about 10 to 4.30 (depending on daylight). We have a van to carry tools and volunteers. The work involves in many different skills including coppicing, hedgelaying, fencing, dead hedging, path work, pond clearance, heathland restoration etc. Anyone can join, no prior knowledge or skills are required, and people of all ages are welcome.

We are affiliated to the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, BTCV, which explains why we are known as BeC rather than BCV, to avoid confusion. We follow BTCV practice for task organisation and methods, and for safety.

This report summarises the group's activities over the period 1st April 2004 – 31st March 2005.

Membership

By the end of 2004 the group's paid up membership had reached 42 (20% up on the previous year).

Task Leaders

This year's tasks were led by 9 people:
 Richard Coles
 Philip Allen
 Neil Frankum
 Mark Clay
 David Fiddes
 Nigel Mason-Flucke
 Laurence Herniman
 Anna Townsend
 Owen Lewis

Committee

The committee for the year 2004-5 was:
 Richard Coles Chair & Tools
 Phil Allen Treasurer
 Rodney Chapple Van Admin
 Laurence Herniman Task Co-Coordinator (To Oct 2004)
 David Fiddes Task Co-Coordinator (From Oct 2004)
 Neil Frankum Membership, Newsletter & Website
 David Fiddes Social Secretary (To Oct 2004)
 Nigel Mason-Flucke Social Secretary (From Oct 2004)
 Peter Harrison Committee Member

Toolstore

During the year Reading Borough Council informed us of their desire for us to vacate our current toolstore at Caversham Court due to plans to re-develop the site. They offered us an alternative location at Edenham Crescent just off Berkeley Avenue. However, in the period covered by this report no move actually took place.

Van

In September 2004 we replaced the van. The new van is a second hand Ford Transit 12 seat minibus, with the back row of seats removed and converted to a tool carrying area.

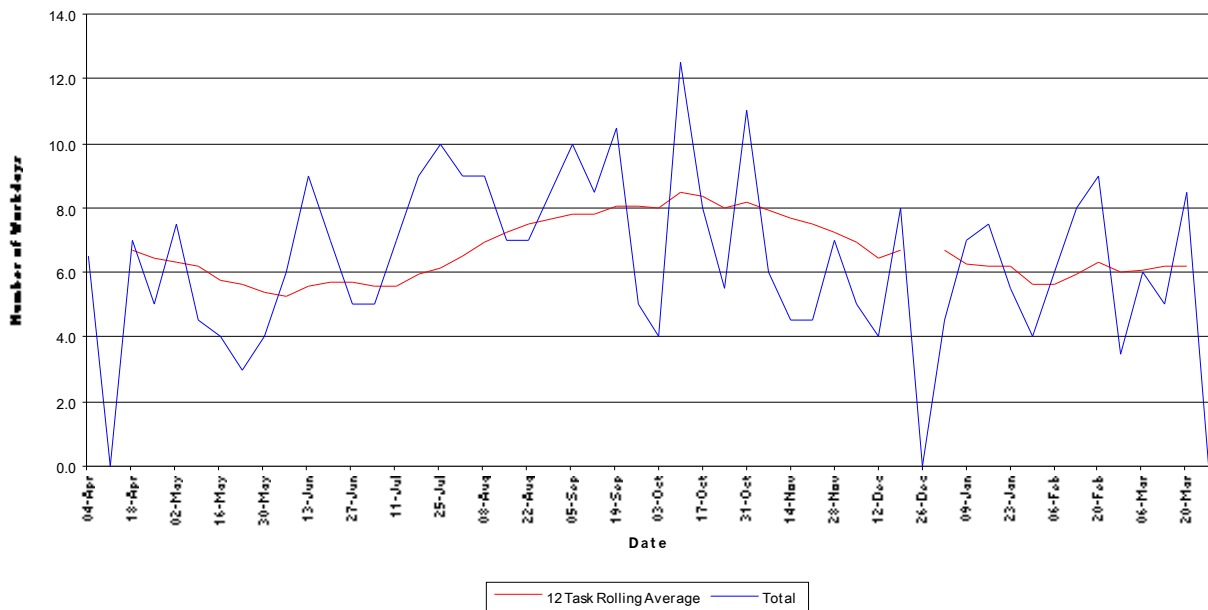
Socials

Post task trips to the pub were a regular feature during the year, as was the occasional trip to the cinema.

Task Attendance

During the period 1st April 2004 – 31st March 2005 we had a total of 42 volunteers out on task. This was down on last year. Top volunteer again was Richard Coles with a total of 44 workdays. The year has shown a similar pattern to last year, with peaks and dips in numbers at similar times to last year.

BeC Task Attendance 04 - 05



Tasks

During the year we carried out a total of 48 tasks at 20 different sites.

Userbody	Site	No. Of Tasks	No. Of Workdays
West Berkshire District Council	Snelsmore Common	10	58.0
Hampshire County Council	Yateley Common	6	42.0
BBOWT	Kingwood Common	4	32.5
West Berkshire District Council	Greenham Common	4	30.5
West Berkshire District Council	Padworth Common	4	22.0
Wokingham District Council	Heathlake	2	17.0
Child Beale Trust	Beale Wildlife Park	2	16.0
BBOWT	Wildmoor	2	15.5
Arborfield Parish Council	Pound Copse	2	13.5
Wokingham District Council	California Country Park	1	11.0
Dorset County Council	Langton Herring	1	10.0
Hampshire Wildlife Trust	Pamber Forest	2	8.5
Wokingham District Council	Wargrave	1	8.5
Wokingham District Council	Dinton Pastures	1	7.5
Bracknell Forest Borough Council	Englemere Pond	1	6.0
Reading Borough Council	Clayfield Copse	1	5.0
Hampshire Wildlife Trust	Greywell Fen	1	4.5
Ecchinswell Parish Council	Ecchinswell Village Pond	1	4.0
Ruscombe Parish Council	Ruscombe Village Pond	1	4.0
Hampshire Wildlife Trust	North Wamborough Greens	1	4.0
		48	320.0

Userbodies

During the year we worked for 12 different userbodies across Berkshire, north Hampshire, and south Oxfordshire. There was also a weekend away in Dorset.

Userbody	No. Of Workdays
West Berkshire District Council	110.5
BBOWT	48
Wokingham District Council	44
Hampshire County Council	42
Hampshire Wildlife Trust	17
Child Beale Trust	16
Arborfield Parish Council	13.5
Dorset County Council	10
Bracknell Forest Borough Council	6
Reading Borough Council	5
Ecchinswell Parish Council	4
Ruscombe Parish Council	4
	320.0

Task Details: 4th September – 6th November 2005

To book for task, please contact the task-leader listed below (If possible, by the Thursday before the task). Transport is available from the Tool Store at Caversham Court at 9:10am (will be ceasing some time in September), and from the front of Reading Station (near the taxi rank) at 9:30am. Other pick-up points can sometimes be arranged – please contact the task-leader.

You are advised to wear old clothing, and stout boots or wellies (preferably with steel toecaps). Also bring waterproofs and a packed lunch, BeC will provide Tea/Coffee/Squash and Biscuits. As it is moving in to autumn we could experience any type of weather, so wrap up warm / bring the sun cream??!!

Whenever possible, please do let the task leader know you are planning to come on task. Occasionally task details change at short notice, and we can only let you know of changes if we know you are planning to attend the task. However we do always take enough tools and biscuits for a few extras, so if you get the urge on Sunday morning, but haven't booked, you will still be made welcome.

We usually go to the pub after task, so remember to bring some money (and a change of clothes if it's likely to be a very muddy task) if you want to join us.

SNELSMORE COMMON, Newbury**4th September 2005**

Task: Fencing

Leader: Richard Coles 0118 976 0580

Meet at: 10:15 at the site (Grid Ref SU463710). Snelsmore Common country park can be found north of Newbury and is located along the B4494 road from Donnington to Wantage. The entrance is sign posted from the road opposite the entrance to Mary Hare Grammar School.

Userbody: West Berkshire District Council.

KINGWOOD COMMON,**11th September 2005**

Task: Scrub bashing and heathland restoration task.

Leader: Neil Frankum (0118) 975 1528

Meet at: 10:15 at the site. Meet immediately south of Great Davids at ref. SU 696829 From Reading take B481 north. Just after Sonning Common (at the top of the 1st hill) fork L towards Stoke Row. At second junction turn R but go to left of Unicorn pub down Colemore Lane. Follow lane for 1km and park on left.

Userbody: BBOWT.

TBA,**18th September 2005**

Task:

Leader: Contact David Fiddes (0118) 950 0735 or look at the website for details.

Meet at:

Userbody:

GREENHAM COMMON, Newbury**25th September 2005**

Task: Scrub clearance.

Leader: Mark Clay 07810 838916

Meet at: 10:15 at the site. This is a LARGE site, so contact Mark for details if you are planning on making your own way to site.

Userbody: West Berkshire District Council.

SNELSMORE COMMON, Newbury**2nd October 2005**

Task: Scrub bashing / tree felling and bonfire.

Leader: Neil Frankum (0118) 975 1528

Meet at: 10:15 at the site (Grid Ref SU463710). See 4th September for details.

Userbody: West Berkshire District Council.

ECCHINSWELL VILLAGE POND**9th October 2005**

Task: Controlling the reeds invading the village pond and some bramble clearance on the banks.

Leader: Owen Lewis 07740 766517

Meet at: 10-15am at the site (Grid reference SU503606). Head south from the roundabout on the A339 at Kingsclere. Where the road bends round to the left turn right (straight on) towards Ecchinswell. In Ecchinswell turn right, drive north past the church, & the pond is on the right in about ½ mile.

Userbody: Ecchinswell Parish Council.

PADWORTH COMMON**16th October 2005**

Task: Scrub clearance

Leader: TBA – Contact David Fiddes (0118) 950 0735

Meet at: 10-15am at the car park (Grid reference SU619648). Head west along the A4 from Junction 12 of the M4 for approximately 3 miles. Just before you get to the roundabout at the junction of the A4 and A340 turn left into a minor road signposted towards Padworth. Follow this road for approximately 2 miles. The car park is on the right just before you reach the T junction with the Burghfield Common to Tadley Road.

Userbody: West Berkshire District Council.

LAVELLS LAKE, Dinton Pastures**23rd October 2005**

Task: Coppicing
 Leader: David Fiddes (0118) 950 0735
 Meet at: 10-15am at the reserve. Access through a gate into a field off of Sandford Lane (Grid reference SU782729). From the main entrance to Dinton Pastures turn left towards Hurst. Take the first left turn into Sandford Lane. Park in the Black Swan Sailing Club car park on the left as it is covered by CCTV cameras (do not use the car park across the road from the Sailing Club, which is prone to vandalism). Cross the road into the other carpark, turn left and follow the footpath parallel to the road for about 500m.
 Userbody: Wokingham District Council.

TBA,**30th October 2005**

Leader: Mark Clay 07810 838916

TBA,**6th November 2005**

Leader: Richard Coles (0118) 976 0580

Socials**Pub – Sundays after task**

If everyone feels up to it we sometimes adjourn to the pub after task. We'll usually decide where we are going on task, when we've found out what everyone wants to do.

Cinema Trips / Other socials etc

These get arranged on an ad hoc basis - turn up on task, contact one of us, or sign up for the Email mailing list to find out the details.

Diary Dates

Sun 7th Aug. Newsletter copy date. Any (printable!) contributions to the newsletter are always welcome. Any items for inclusion in the next newsletter should be Email to me on or preferably before this date.

TBA Please contact Richard Coles for dates of tools evenings.

BeC Contacts

Chair & Tools:	Richard Coles	(0118) 976 0580
Treasurer:	Peter Harrison	
Van Admin:	Rodney Chapple	(0118) 986 4438
Task Co-Coordinator:	David Fiddes	(0118) 950 0735
Membership & Newsletter:	Neil Frankum	(0118) 975 1528 *
Social Secretary	Nigel Mason-Flucke	(01276) 469432
Committee Member	Philip Allen	(0118) 941 0471 *

* Answerphone available

Address for Correspondence: Berkshire Conservation Volunteers, PO Box 165,
Reading, Berkshire, RG1 4LD

Email: membership@berkshire-conservation-volunteers.org.uk

MOBILE: We have a mobile phone for task use – although primarily for use in emergencies, volunteers can also use it to contact us if they are having difficulties locating the worksite. The number is **07875 262129**. **NB:** this will only be switched on during tasks.

www.berkshire-conservation-volunteers.org.uk