

Worthies Conservation Volunteers Task 16th January 2005

The task was a further instalment in the improvement of the environment of the very popular disused railway track path and bridleway which commences at Woodham's Farm and runs northwards to and beyond the old Worthy Down Camp Railway Halt.

As arranged we all met at 2 pm near the Veterinary Surgery on the back track to Worthy Down Camp. The task was attended by Alison Angell, Ruby Bown, Martin Bown, Rosie Bown, Clare Eacott, Michael Edwards, Maureen Edwards, Bruce Graham, David Graham, John Lee, Gary Marsh, Sue Marsh, Constance Martyn, Charlotte Smith, Jonathon Smith, Morgan Smith, Imogen Smith and Robert Thompson. Michael Edwards led the task. (John Lee turned up on his bicycle shortly after the task started and got stuck in straight away). Rosie the dog was her usual self and would have liked to have joined in the work, if there hadn't been a lot more interesting things for her to do.

As soon as we were assembled we proceeded along to the work site which was at the old bridge crossing the bridleway at SU480 346. Michael transferred some of the tools to the site in his car, as did Alison who had a number of BTCV tools with her.

We introduced ourselves to the other participants, discussed the task in hand and ran through the risk assessment. Robert Thompson, who is a representative of the Hampshire Paths Partnership and had been invited by the group, introduced himself and asked us to sign a leave for the public use of any photos which might be taken during the task. Robert expressed some interest in joining the group on future tasks.

In line with the task plan a small group remained beneath the bridge to act as a lookout and to undertake the placing of the brush and other cut materials in a dead hedge to be built in the triangle of old elder and scrub just off the south eastern edge of the bridge.

Hazard area warning signs were placed fore and aft of the bridge on the lower track as well as on the approaches to the work area on the upper track. Our new 'A' display board complete with logos and descriptions of the Group and the task in hand, was placed on the southern approach to the work site on the upper track.

Whilst waiting for the cut material to build up Maureen, Clare and several others cleared what little rubbish there was at the base of the bridge. There was surprisingly little but even so it filled several sacks. They found a purse in the scrub, which had obviously been stolen and emptied of money then discarded a couple of years before. Maureen decided to destroy the rather old bank cards found in the purse when she returned home.

Everyone set to work with considerable vigour with loppers and saws to clear an area along the bridge and to either side for a distance of about 20 meters. Some effort was also made to clear scrub from the parapet of the bridge, without endangering anyone. Three mattock wielders dug out as many roots as time allowed so as to slow re-growth. Sue Marsh, a whizz with the loppers, was obviously in her element and would have cleared the entire track length given half a chance!

Overhanging branches over the track were cut and stacked in the undergrowth. As the track is used extensively by riders it is important to keep an eye on these types of overhead obstruction.

Cut material was piled up on the track and from time to time was dropped over the parapet to the north to be packed away in the disposal site, with due warnings and also with an eye to passers-by on the tracks.

We encountered quite a number of walkers (and runners!) and a couple of horse-riding parties during the afternoon. All seem to make favourable comments as they passed. Several took an interest in our 'A' display. We may even get some additional members from among the passers-by.

As 4 pm approached the light was starting to fade and we decided to start clearing up. After some final tidying of stumps and a joint effort to clear material over the parapet and into the disposal area, we finished at about 4-30 pm in time to return home for pots of tea and other suitable refreshment. Everybody seemed to have enjoyed the afternoon and were all looking forward to the next task.

It was very gratifying to note that the now beautifully clear south-eastern aspect from the bridge gave a good view of the sun-set. We now just have to wait for all the wild flowers and grasses to cover over the scars of our work. Some additional work may be needed from time to time to clear some of the remaining stumps and maintain a scrub-free area. Before and after photos have been taken.

Some exquisite Maiden-hair Spleenwort and Hart's Tongue Fern nestle at the base of the bridge on the northern approach. Plenty of Lords and Ladies are starting to show their noses in the undergrowth!

Michael Edwards 17th January 2005.