

On Sunday 21st November a group of eight adults, two children and one dog gathered at the far end of Hookpit Lane with the aim of implementing some of Michael's proposals from our last walk together along the old Didcot, Newbury and Southampton railway line.

After a briefing from Alison on her site specific risk assessment we headed off onto the disused railway line near the army camp's rear entrance. Here Jonathan, the task leader for the day, explained what he had in mind for us to achieve. The clearance of scrub, rubbish and trees that were currently obscuring the old railway bridge was one of the aims. This would allow the bridge to become more visible and act as a frame for views up and down the line. The second area of work involved removing young trees from in front of a stand of fine old coppiced sycamores. Many of us had been previously unaware of them so the task today was to help to display these old trees better.

Clearance then started in earnest, from small saplings being uprooted to rubbish collection, bramble removal and tree felling. Bowsaws, bill hooks and loppers were put to good use and several sacks were filled with litter. The majority of the felled vegetation was moved to an unobtrusive pile well away from the footpath.

Before long the bridge became much more visible as did some splendid harts tongue and male ferns. Selected trees were retained in order to maintain a degree of shade which should enable these plants to continue to thrive and further colonise the brickwork.

A little way into the afternoon we realised we needed an addition to our risk assessment as a scrambler bike came through our workparty. Fortunately Alison had set up hazard warning notices so the biker was aware of our presence and the likely obstructions ie fallen trees!

Time passed quickly and by 3.30 we were ready for a tea break. Feeling that we had achieved quite a lot in a short time we refreshed ourselves before tackling the remainder of the work. A large willow subsequently came down along with a few more small trees until finally there was a clear view of the elegant brickwork arch, with the autumnal scene beyond.

With the light failing the group collected together the bags of rubbish which Maureen and Connie in particular had worked hard to fill. Rosie the dog was very well behaved throughout, relishing the biscuit provided at half time! The children played their part too in removing some of the smaller trees.

So with a feeling of satisfaction at the achievement of our goals we returned home in the "gloaming".