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# Newsletter

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Rivelin Valley Conservation Group

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**Autumn 2002 no 44**

## **Through The Chair**

### There's No Such Thing As Dead Wood

It occurred to me the other day when watching a nuthatch busily searching along an old decaying oak branch that even the deadest looking piece of timber is actually alive with a host of living things. Our ponds, though silently covered in falling leaves where nothing stirs, have a fantastic wealth of creatures lying below the surface. The same goes for a large amorphous body like RVCG. A handful of Task Teamsters, attendance at an Open Meeting and letters to read about Planning Objections provides only a cursory glimpse of all the work going on. Every member in one way or another helps in the maintenance of activities and support which culminate in a rejuvenated pond or woodland, a new bench or a decision by a Planning Board or a dozen other things which let the public at large know that there is a busy and determined Conservation Group actively working for the wildlife of our valley and the people who enjoy walking in it. Quiet support and strength in numbers is important to support those able to be more active. Don't suppose that the dormant communities are not a vital part of the whole ecosystem!

**Roger and out**

### Contacts

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Treasurer	Dan Higbid	2303919
Group Recorder	Graham Appleby	2660203

### **Please note**

We now have an e-mail address  
[rvcg@supanet.com](mailto:rvcg@supanet.com)

## Task Day Reports

### **Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> July**

After several complaints and letters about the anti-social behaviour late at night at the Wolf Wheel car park, the group decided to respond and provide a gate to close the bottom end of the car park, This is something that had been talked about before and was on our list of jobs to be done, but the complaints brought it to the fore.

So the July task day saw a small group of us down at the car park strimming and removing the self-set trees along the line of the road. This was done with the purpose of opening the neck end of the car park so that it is more open to view from the road.

(Job Approximately 20 man-hours)

### **Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> September**

Back to the Swallow Wheel on this task day. Unfortunately it had suffered a bout of vandalism. Someone had thought it would be a good idea to block the overflow with three large stone slabs. This had the effect of washing away a lot of the bottom overflow, bank and footpath.

Now think what you like but 50/60lb blocks of stone placed into a hole with the precision of a master mason is not done by kids messing about. These intellectuals knew exactly what they were doing and must have been old enough to know better.

So the previous Saturday, four intrepid volunteers went down to remove the stones which proved a lot easier than we first thought and we returned to repair the damage done to the bottom of the overflow.

We started by more than doubling the width of the stone retaining wall around the

overflow and burying it to make it part of the bank. A retaining wall was built at the bottom of the bank and the footpath resurfaced. The bank was then filled in and grass sods placed into it.

Hopefully this time next year, this bank will look completely natural and we can forget about this job.

It annoys us to think that we spend the best part of fifty man-hours repairing something when our time could have been spent elsewhere doing something useful.

### **Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> September**

This Sunday we returned to the Wolf Wheel car park in force to erect the new gate, move the stone stumps and re-surface the new smaller car park.

A hard day's graft but a good turn out, made easier by the hire of a JCB for the day. Many thanks to all who contributed to the success of this job not least Marsh Weld for making the gate and local residents for bringing and keeping this problem to the forefront. It is nice to know that other people are just as keen as us in keeping an eye on our valley.

(Job total for the three task days approximately 85 man-hours – not including the gate manufacture)

Keith Kendall

PS

**If anyone has seen a green motorbike on the nature trail with a couple of teenagers on the back, we would love to know. Or even better, if you have the names and addresses please let us know and we will pass the information on to the relevant authorities. We aim to stamp down hard on any motorcycles on the nature trail before it gets out of hand.**

Keith Kendall

### **Open Meetings**

If you haven't been to one before, do try. Bring someone else with you – it does not have to be another member. Everyone is welcome. In September, Terry Howard entertained us with his talk on Heads, Crosses and Corpse roads, not such a morbid talk as you might think but a reminder of all the folk who have gone before us, living their

precarious lives in a far harder environment than us and leaving us the remnants of their societies to wonder over. We started with the 'green man', a pagan symbol of the natural world which leaked out into the Christian era and is seen in church architecture. Go round the back of Fountains Abbey and high up on the wall you will see the green man wreathed in twining leaves which grow from his mouth. Fears that evil spirits could get into your buildings led the Celts to place carved heads around entrances which would keep them out. Crosses have existed since pre-conquest times but many were vandalised in the Reformation and so were taken into churchyards for safety. Crosses were part of processional ways and burial roads and a pattern of crosses would link townships such as Bradfield and Ecclesfield, Sheffield and Hallam Head. The sad thing is that over the centuries so many have been vandalised so only their bases are left but their existence linger on to remind us in our place names. The fondness of our ancestors for making their marks on our landscape, even in more recent times can be seen on Stanage Edge where gamekeepers had holes carved and numbered on the rocks for the purpose of providing drinking water for their grouse. After this talk, most of us realised that we walk around with our eyes closed. Would that more of us could have Terry's happy knack of discovering the signs of our ancient past.

Our October talk was on 'The Woodland Trust' by Neil Kay. Its aim is to preserve woodland, which is a great necessity as the UK is one of the least wooded countries in Europe. Once our woodlands were managed because of their economic use but by the 1930's half of our broadleaved woods were destroyed for such things as golf courses and housing. The trust not only manages woods, some being in South Yorkshire, they are also involved in extensive planting. Many volunteers are needed for their work and it's good to know that they use shire horses for clearance work as they do less damage to the environment than mechanical methods. Our woodlands give enjoyment to many people and thanks to The Woodland Trust their biodiversity is being improved in an age when

we are in danger of losing many species. An interesting footnote to the talk was that here in Sheffield we are very fortunate to have more woods than any other city and all because of pollution! In Victorian times, the Duke of Norfolk who owned much land sent out his inspectors with the aim of removing woodland and planting up with conifers, all the better to line his pockets with, but they reported back that Sheffield was too polluted for them to be economical.

There are lots more events planned for you, our members. Please come along.

M Sanderson

### HELP NEEDED

For quite a few years, our treasurer, Dan Higbid has done a sterling job but now he would like to retire. Is there anyone out there who could help us? Please contact him or Roger Kite if you think you could take on this job or need more information. You do not need to be a financial wizard but would be of great practical help to our group

### Notes from the Chairman

#### Rivelin Mill Pond

You may have read or heard that the scheme to repair the dam wall has been deferred to April. We are assured that this is to make sure that the necessary funds will be available and a properly drawn up scheme has time to go out to tender. The odd letter to your councillor or Parks, Woodlands and Open Spaces at Meersbrook Park will help to keep it at the front of the relevant minds.

#### Winter Bird Feeding

Cold snaps and Christmas cards remind us that this is the time to refill those bird feeders and make sure that a water supply is available for our feathered friends. This is a great way to help wildlife and keep some colour in the garden. See Keith if you need any new equipment. Feeder purchases help the general work of the group.

#### Spreading the Word

Roger and Keith attended the Walkley Community Forum AGM recently where our slide show provided the evening

entertainment after the business. Interest generated resulted in five new memberships, several book sales and more enquiries about our activities. Not everyone in Rivelin knows that many of the improvements down there are our work and not the council's! Please make sure you all contribute to RVCG's PR.

Roger Kite

### Review of the Unitary Development Plan

Sheffield Council is currently reviewing its Unitary Development Plan. This will provide the policy framework for future decisions on planning applications and a range of activities in the Valley. As such it is important that the Group seeks to influence the final content of the Plan. With this in mind, comments have been submitted on behalf of the Group, setting out the issues of most concern. These relate to protection and enhancement of the environment; with a particular focus on the landscape and nature conservation; Green Belt, in particular, control of new development, the change of use of land and buildings and the conversion/alteration of existing buildings; use of land for recreation purposes associated with keeping horses; tipping on agricultural land; and recreational access to the Valley, especially the need to manage and control the public rights of way network.

Derek Hastings

#### A Woody Tale

Here's a local story related by the Sheffield historian, Leader (source unknown but reprinted in the Wilson book). It concerns Tapton Hall which was bought by Edward Vickers in 1853 from Mary Shore (the aunt of Florence Nightingale who sometimes stayed there). Vickers rebuilt the house and someone involved in the building work heard that a particularly fine oak was being felled in Smithy Wood. He was desperate to acquire this oak for the laundry floor but apparently the oak was so desirable that others were after it too. It was then that a peculiar method was devised to gain ownership. Not for them the more lucrative way of selling to the highest bidder. There was going to be a race. Imagine the wood, with wild brambles to hamper

speed and the contestants lined up. Vickers' builder had a plan. Nobody had said you had to stay in the wood. While the others battled through the undergrowth with not a thought in their heads that their aspirations were to be so deviously squashed, he slipped over a wall, ran through the fields and re-entered the wood alongside the desired tree. His rivals were still struggling and scratching themselves in the brambles. He got the wood and the laundry got its floor.

*From the Wilsons of Sharrow MHF Chaytor*  
M Sanderson

### **Ten Years Ago**

Here we are at the end of our first ten years of RVCG. What was happening in our first year? A Daubenton's bat, a noctule and pipistrelles were discovered on our first bat walk. We also had our first fungus foray. Our reserves were very small then so we were very appreciative of our first donation of £200 from Stephen Hill flower fund. Our membership was 77 (now around 200) and there were pleas for help on the task force – nothing new there! We had a walk through the valley where only three turned up and note was taken of the damage to paths and danger to others of bike riders through the valley. We had an article about the Rivelin Water Tunnel which can carry 10½ gallons of water from Derwent Valley every day. You can see the outlet on Wyming Brook Drive where it finishes its 4½ mile journey mostly through millstone grit under Hallam Moors. Our chairman reported on the plans to open up the allotments off Hagg Lane by clearing footpaths and managing the woods. How many times has our Task Force been down there since and can you remember what it used to be like? Thanks to all those who clear, build, repair, plant, dig, restore, deal with finance, paperwork, newsletter distribution, welcome packs, publicity, planning, refreshments, visits, recording, events, open meetings, raise money, remove rubbish, deal with new technology, send donations and the myriad of other jobs big and small which constitute our group.

### **Recorder**

I am pleased to announce the groups web site 'www.rivelinvalley.org.uk' is now available although still in the early stages of construction. I can't claim total responsibility as the site has so far been constructed by 'Scott' of Sheffield Community Information (SCI) who we would all like to thank for his

innovation and design talents. I am quite thrilled with the site and for those who have access I'm sure you'll agree that he has done a fine job. Thank you Scott! Your comments and suggestions about the site are important to us and we will be pleased to hear from you. For those unable to access the web site, don't worry, your quarterly newsletter will still be delivered to your door but for those interested in receiving it via e-mail, please just let me have your e-mail address and we will run a test distribution.

Reports this quarter

Vera Large has gone one better this time and has sent me photographic evidence of a Grey Heron paddling in the Rivelin back in July. It is quite a smart looking bird with a pale grey plumage on its back and very long neck. It has a slightly darker undercarriage with yellow legs and beak and looks more like a missile than a bird. It has a small black bonnet with a thin black line extending to its eyes; almost as though it's wearing reading glasses. Vera has seen the bird in two locations namely Wolf Dam and Frank Wheel and she also spotted a KingFisher down by the Rivelin Post Office. Perhaps it was delivering 'air mail'!

Maureen Owen sighted a Badger on her neighbours drive opposite on Den Bank Crescent also in July. Derek Hastings, whilst out walking on the 9<sup>th</sup> September witnessed Swifts lined up along telephone wires ready to embark on their migration. Swifts actually very rarely land and can even roost on the wing. He also reported seeing a flock of Gold Finches on a footpath off Lodge Moor Road and also saw a Sparrow Hawk take a small bird in mid flight along Brownhills. Other members of our committee also reported seeing some of our rarer species. Janet having seen a Red Kite at Lodge Moor and Rita, a Merlin. Roger also reported seeing a Black Redstart.

Graham Appleby

### ***WE NEED YOU ALL***

***Our thanks to you for being members.***

***We look forward to our next***

***ten...twenty...thirty....forty.....fifty years.....***

***A Happy New Year with RVCG***