



# Newsletter



Rivelin Valley Conservation Group

Winter 2011 no 77

## Through The Chair

Firstly, let me wish you all a Happy New Year. This is also a very special year for the RVCG being our 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and AGM in April. I would like to invite you all to this event where we will celebrate the group's achievements with a pea and pie supper along with some important guests. We will also be planting a tree to mark this special occasion. If you have any other suggestions then please let us know. This winter has been marked by some record temperature lows and snowfalls. Apart from a minor inconvenience, it was nothing I hadn't already experienced as a child. I remember snow being piled up against the back door of my house and I would help my father dig a path through the snow that was over my head. The sledging was terrific and seemed to last for weeks. The four seasons were more pronounced. We all understood and prepared for the winter period and nature was well adapted to it. In contrast, the more 'warmer' winters and the long grey days with some of the worst storms in living memory have had a serious effect on our wildlife. I'm convinced that this is probably a normal cycle of events over a longer period and that nature will bounce back as soon as conditions allow. I increased my bird feeders and kept them well stocked throughout the winter period and was rewarded by flocks of birds stripping them clean almost every day. It is also important to keep a bowl of fresh water available in icy weather. We would love to hear about your winter wildlife experience so please get in touch

Graham Appleby

## Contacts

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## Donations

Well done again. Donations with membership reached almost £600 for 2010. Thanks this quarter to Skinner, Richards, Tetchner, Betts, Walker and Lofthouse. We are very grateful for this especially in these harder times.

## MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Yes, it is renewal time again. Please use the enclosed form. Also, for **new members** who joined for the first time after September 30<sup>th</sup> last year, please remember that you have membership for 2011 so ignore the renewal form or better still – give it to someone else. If you are in doubt about when you joined please contact M Sanderson.

## Thank you Maureen

For some considerable time Maureen Owen has arranged our programme for open meetings at Stephen Hill. This has meant a great deal of organising and behind the scenes work for RVCG to ensure that we have a speaker in place to entertain and inform us.

Janet Bowring is now taking over this role and would be interested to know if you could recommend any speakers to her. See contacts list

Thank you also to the many other unsung heroes who have donated their time, money and skills to make the RVCG so

successful over the past twenty years.

### **Task Day Report Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2011**

A nice easy walk was the order of the day with thirteen Task Team members turning up for a brisk walk down the nature trail, cutting back and clearing goits. We knew we had a tree down at Hind Wheel which had fallen across the seat and waymarker so this was our target destination.

This walk also helped us identify areas of the nature trail which will need our attention in the near future.

Just what was needed after our annual stuffing!

Keith Kendall

**Contact Keith if you would like to  
join in on our Task Days.**

#### **Military Presence at Redmires**

Some local people will remember Redmires camp during WW2, housing Italian and German prisoners of war. Redmires also figured in WW1 as a training camp for soldiers heading for the Western Front in France, though the two camps did not occupy exactly the same site.

In the frenzy and patriotism at the start of WW1, many young men grabbed the chance to fight for their country and so the Sheffield City Battalion, to become part of the York and Lancs Regiment was formed in 1914. Over 1,300 men enlisted, many from the professions, and were to work, fight and die together.

Initial training took place at Edmund Road Barracks, Norfolk Park and Sheffield United football ground which caused a little concern due to the churning up of the grounds. Also the gardeners at Norfolk Park didn't take too kindly to practice trenches being dug in flower beds.

To further the men's training, Redmires Camp, 1000ft above sea level was built and on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1914 the first men moved in. This was not the most comfortable place to spend their first winter. The weather was bad and the site muddy. The hut doors were sometimes blocked overnight by snowdrifts and a small soldier would have to be pushed out of the window to dig them

out. The wooden huts measured 60ft x 20ft, accommodated up to 34 men, had a coal burning stove in the middle and straw pallets to sleep on. Beds would be folded back and trestles used at mealtimes.

Ablutions, showers and the officer's mess were in other huts on the site.

Soon a YMCA hut appeared and was to become a familiar place for recreation both at home as on the Western Front. This hut was also a canteen, a church, Post Office and social centre.

Christmas meant a short, staggered break with home leave but with some men remaining there on Christmas Day when they were served dinner by the officers, a tradition in the British Army even when serving on the Western Front.

By 1915 musketry training took place (the use and care of guns) though muskets were no longer in use. Physical training, route marching and all the spit and polish of army life filled the day. The men were made to run up and down Lodge Lane and the path that follows Wyming Brook. Trench digging was practised and a recent archaeological dig has revealed this site up by the dams. In between training, the men took part in sports, soccer being a favourite. Sports Day attracted 10,000 visitors and would include a five mile steeple chase around the dams. The winner of the inter-platoon one mile race took 7 minutes 45 seconds and this would be in full fighting order, carrying rifles and 50lb weight. Try that!

On the 12<sup>th</sup> May 1915, the men left Sheffield for more training, marching down Sandygate Road into town with presents of cigarettes and chocolates from the matron and nurses at Lodge Moor Hospital. By 1916, they were in France and on July 1<sup>st</sup> fought in the battle of the Somme. Of the men of this Battalion who first trained at Redmires Camp, 248 were killed in action or died of wounds inflicted on that day. Some of these Sheffield men were not found for several days and others would lie in 'no man's land', rotting in the mud of the Somme until the following spring. It was too dangerous for them to be retrieved. The following year, this area was once again occupied by men from Sheffield -

this time the 2/4 York and Lancs Battalion and Redmires continued to train more soldiers.

M Sanderson

*Thanks to the York and Lancs Museum, Rotherham and the wonderful Gibson and Oldfield book 'The Sheffield City Battalion'.*

### **Life on the Land**

This is the story of one of our longstanding RVCG members. In 1942, Kit was newly married to a serving soldier and working in a local Co-op. She was a cashier. These were the days when your money was taken by the assistant who placed it in a canister where it was whizzed along an overhead wire to the cashier. But life was about to change. She joined the Land Army. During WW2, many women worked on the land replacing the men sent to war.

At first, she had one month's training in Northamptonshire. She did woodwork, painted a beehive but managed to spill pink paint on it! She also learned how to look after poultry. She and her friend spent a whole day on their knees planting one beetroot seedling every four inches. They were so exhausted that they fell asleep propped up by the gatepost and were late for tea.

At the end of training, a concert was held but while other students performed songs from Madam Butterfly, these two Yorkshire girls sang "On Ilkley Moor Ba T'at".

After training they were sent to a farm at Hasland, near Chesterfield where they were woken up at 6.45am every morning by the farmer with a cup of tea and then they took the milk to the dairy to be cooled and bottled. Once Kit managed to let water into the milk and lived in fear of being found out by the inspector. At hay time, they had heavy work rolling the swathes over and at lambing time she fed motherless lambs their last feed at 10p.m. Once, a young bull got in the cowshed and she tried to tie it up with string much to the amusement of the farmer. Life on the farm carried on with the planting of turnips, delivering milk, stacking straw, and hand weeding. Christmas Day was not a day's holiday but

by the afternoon, the farmer would say, "Gerof hoam". Kit has fond memories of the Siamese cat that spent the night keeping warm up the chimney. It had to be removed before the fire was lit in the morning. The 'make do and mend' ethos of wartime led her to crocheting circles to patch up holes in the heels of her stockings.

Kit loved her work and she kept in contact with the family after the war. She attributes her sturdiness to the hard physical work of her Land Army days and she still manages her very large garden overlooking Rivelin.

M Sanderson

### **Wadsley and Loxley Commoner Events**

#### Saturday 5th March

Birds in Winter, Loxley Common with John Robinson. Meet 9am at Rural Lane Car Park.

#### Monday 21<sup>st</sup> March

A Walk Along Local Canals. Talk by John Quick. 7.30pm Wadsley Church Hall 7.30pm.

#### Monday 18<sup>th</sup> April

Reviving the Bradfield Festival of Music. Talk by Mike Threlfall. 7.30 pm.

For enquiries ring 2335331

### **RVCG VISIT**

#### **The National Coalmining Museum (Near Wakefield)**

**Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2011**

**Cost - £7 per person £3.50 for children**

#### **We hope you can join us on this visit.**

The museum has plenty of attractions including pit head baths, Victorian steam winder, nature trail, train ride around the site, shop, exhibitions, horses and ponies. The tour underground is very entertaining, led by ex miners and takes up to 1¼ hours. This is the highlight, but there are safety restrictions. Underground, you are not allowed to take matches, cigarettes or anything electronic or with a battery such as watches, cameras, car keys or mobile phones. These can be left in safe keeping at the lamp room before descending in the

pit cage. Children under the age of five are not allowed underground. The ground is uneven so it is best to wear sensible footwear, also you must wear a safety helmet, a light and a battery pack weighing around 2kg. The temperature underground is usually 12°C but can be colder.

There is a licensed café and a picnic site. We will leave Stephen Hill Church at 10am, leaving the museum at approximately 3pm. Please use the enclosed form.

### **Some Recent Events**

#### **12<sup>th</sup> October Biological Recording**

Paul Richards gave a talk on the importance of biological recording for both 'alien' and native species and also rare visitors, all valuable in a time of climate change.

Already our museum has 197,000 specimens and Paul helps to identify and record them.

#### **9<sup>th</sup> November Working Sheepdogs**

Kathy Burkinshaw gave another talk on life on the sheep farm. Once more this was accompanied by her wonderful photography, this time of her working dogs. Her first dog, Dan would find sheep in snow drifts pointing where to dig. A good dog will find sheep at the back of rocks and in bracken. Her puppies are trained with praise, not treats and taught to ignore wildlife and learn to work as one with their master.

#### **Don't forget- come to our Open Meetings**

#### **THE RECORDER Winter 2009**

After the lovely, warm, sunny Autumn – which seems such a long time ago – we are back to the cold, wet and windy weather. This is a hard time for the birds, getting buffeted and drenched regularly. If they do not find food and a dry sheltered roost they can soon become weakened. It is never too late to put up a nesting box or a roosting pocket. The birds will appreciate the protection from the weather and predators, and, of course, keep feeding the birds with food, such as seeds, which have a high fat content to keep them

warm.

There may still be hedgehogs desperately trying to fatten up for the winter. There was a dead one on the road outside Lydgate Middle School on 23<sup>rd</sup> November. Sadly hedgehogs are in steep decline. It is thought that they could even be extinct by 2005. This is a horrifying prediction. Imagine our great grandchildren only knowing about hedgehogs from story books. A lot are killed on the roads and others poisoned by chemicals. I despair when I see piles of blue slug pellets in gardens. There are other methods friendlier to wildlife, and I would prefer to see a hedgehog than perfect rows of plants any day. The U.K.'s gardens are the nation's biggest nature reserve by area. They provide corridors for wildlife when so much of their natural habitat is being destroyed by human activity. We should strive to provide as safe a haven as possible for our native species. We also benefit physically and emotionally from the pleasures of gardening. If you are lucky enough to have a visiting hedgehog, a saucer of cat or dog food will help them fatten up – milk is not good for them.

Has anyone seen a waxwing yet? Last year they were here on 28<sup>th</sup> November. Please let me know when and where you see them, and also if you have seen a hedgehog this year. Foxes are also becoming more vocal now. I hear the shrill cry of the vixen regularly. They are noisier in the mating season of January and February. Another spectacle at this time of the year is the rooks weaving their way to their roosts, often flying in pairs, just before sunset. On 24<sup>th</sup> November I saw many hundreds converging on Ecclesall Wood from all directions. As this is ancient woodland, rooks may have been roosting there for many centuries. We have 250+ rooks daily in our valley. Where do they roost, and has anyone got a rookery near them? The flight path of our rooks changes according to the time of year. In the summer they fly up the valley then turn SE beyond Bell Hagg. As the days shorten, they fly in the same direction but directly over Den Bank.

For the last few years I have picked a rose from my garden on Christmas Day. An interesting project would be to see what was in flower in our gardens on that day. If enough people do this we

could publish the results in our next newsletter, and maybe it could become an annual event, giving us interesting information on changing climate.

## **RECORDS**

Margaret Sanderson – continues to get a variety of birds including female Great Spotted Woodpecker and male Bullfinch.

Graham Appleby – Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Long – tailed Tit and Great Tit.

Joan Buckland – Blackbird, Sparrow, Wren, Collared Dove, Wood Pigeon, Starling, Chaffinch, Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Great Tit, Robin, Dunnock, Jay, Magpie, Goldfinch, Jackdaw and Rook.

Joan Buckland – RVCG Recorder