



eNews from Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Welcome to August 2013's issue



Welcome to the AONB's summer newsletter. We've had a busy year and can't believe its August already! The review and re-write of the Management Plan has continued with public consultation on line and at our Conference in March. Our volunteer photographers have also been busy on two projects, Fixed Points and Management Plan Photographs. Read more about events, special people and volunteering opportunities.



Photo : From Roger Marsh



AONB Annual Conference

Over 50 delegates attended our annual conference in March at Chase Golf Club. The aim was to look at the existing Management Plan and propose any changes for the new edition due to be published in Spring 2014.



Rebecca Waite, Head of Protected Landscapes at Defra, Roger Owen from Natural England, Adrian McLaughlin from Dunston Business Village and the Local Enterprise Partnership, and June Jukes MBE, Chairman of Friends of Cannock Chase and our Advisory Partnership, made presentations during the day to help guide discussions.

Photo : Delegates in deep discussion at the Conference!



AONB Awareness and Volunteering Days

Our volunteers have been busy out and about in and around the AONB taking part in various tasks, mainly heathland and woodland management, but also field preparation for grazing. We've worked on Hednesford Hills, Shoal Hill Common, Chasewater Heaths, Norton Bog and Etching Hill.



We've also had an exchange visit with Nordic Walkers from our fellow AONB, Clwydian Range and Dee Valley. 50 Nordic Walkers joined 11 of our volunteers on a choice of 2 mile or 6 mile walks from Milford Common. On our return visit to Loggerheads Country Park in Denbighshire, we had a slightly more hilly walk!



The Nordic Walkers have a tradition of group hugs and the Hokey Cokey – a bit new age for us!

We were out at Seven Springs in May talking to members of the public who were dog owners and cyclists. These are two of the main topics of conversations when we are out and about, but hopefully with the help of dog trainer and our new dog owners representative on the Advisory Partnership, Claire, Andy and Gary from Forestry Commission and Steve from Staffordshire County Council, we put over some positive messages about recreation in the area.



Photos : top to bottom – Field preparation at Chasewater Heaths, Nordic Walkers at Loggerheads and Seven Springs, Steve and a four legged friend at the Dog Pit Stop

Upcoming Events:

Tuesday 20th August – Ironstone Heath, cutting & collecting on the grassland.

Thursday 5th September – Hednesford Hills, heathland management

Friday 20th September – Shoal Hill, heathland management

Tuesday 8th October – Connecting Cannock Chase, scrub control on Forestry Commission land

Thursday 17th October – Gentleshaw Common, scrub & woodland clearance

Thursday 7th November – Hednesford Hills, spreading heather seeds

Wednesday 20th November - Connecting Cannock Chase, spreading heather seeds on Forestry Commission land

Thursday 28th November – Chasewater Heaths, fence repair, drainage, scrub clearance on grazing land.

Tuesday 3rd December - Connecting Cannock Chase, scrub control on Forestry Commission land

Thursday 12th December – Hednesford Hills, heathland management

For all practical tasks, tools and equipment is provided, please wear suitable clothing and footwear. Contact Anne on 01785 619185



AONB Volunteer of the Year Award 2012

We held our annual lunch for volunteers in July at Beaudesert Scout and Guide Camp. We had a glorious day for it and the presentation for Volunteer of the Year 2012 was awarded to Walsall Ramblers.

The award was presented to the group for having made a difference in the hours spent volunteering. They have scoped and led walks, undertaken scrub and invasive weeds clearance, helped show the sights of the AONB to visitors from Wales, attended formal meetings to talk about their involvement and are always on hand to help and support volunteer events.



To find out more about volunteering for Cannock Chase AONB, and taking part in conservation work, and more, please contact Cannock Chase AONB on 01785 619185 or email cannockchase@staffordshire.gov.uk

Photo : Cllr Carl Bennett (Joint Committee), Dick Turton (Walsall Ramblers), Anne Walker (Cannock Chase AONB Unit)

Milford Common

Photo: Mike & Jenny outside Milford Information Hut

Volunteers have continued to open up the Information Hut on Milford Common during the summer. When the Hut is open for a few days at a time, we've had a Rabbit Trail on a mile route above the Common and families have been invited to make a bird feeder back at the Hut. If you're in the area and see the door open and the sign out, pop in and say hello. If you'd like to help out for a couple of hours, contact Anne on 01785 619185 or email anne.walker@staffordshire.gov.uk



A recent addition on the car park has been the installation of a new information sign. Working with Staffordshire County Council, Heart of England Way Society, Two Saints Way and Berkswich Parish Council, the new sign has information about each of the long distance walks and the sun dial on Broc Hill. There are also QR codes so that visitors with smart phones can get more information.



Volunteer Training

Our volunteers are increasing their knowledge while helping with the surveying and management of the AONB. We're working with the Forest of Mercia Project Team on a survey of signs and waymarkers, starting with the Heart of England Way. Volunteers have surveyed the condition of the signs and their position. Some will need replacing, so that's the next step – digging holes and replacing!

Volunteers have also completed the Veteran and Notable Trees survey at Shugborough. The survey included the exact location of each tree, its condition and a photo to identify it. The next stage is to look at similar trees in the wider AONB area, but to include tree health in conjunction with the OPAL scheme.



If you'd like to be involved with any of this work, please contact Anne on 01785 619185 or email cannockchase@staffordshire.gov.uk



Corporate Sponsorship

We have been successful in attracting corporate sponsorship for two much needed projects, matched by funding from our Sustainable Development Fund and volunteer contributions.

Decathlon, Wednesbury, part funded the 9 circular walk leaflets written by Walsall Ramblers. Launched after Christmas, the walks have proved very popular with both local people and visitors looking for a walk around the AONB. They are on sale at 30p at Cannock Chase Visitor Centre and at the Information Hut at Milford.

Police Mutual Assurance Society helped to fund the new crime prevention signs car park. They have been installed on all car parks and pull-ins around the AONB, by volunteers.

We'd like to thank Clive Keble for all his hard work bringing in the extra sponsorship and look out for more news on successful sponsorship in the near future.

Photo : Jason Maclean, Forestry Commission, Paul Pearson, Staffordshire County Council, Sam O'Hanlon, PMAS, Bob Collett & Howard Medlicot, Shoal Hill Common (South Staffordshire Council), Stephen Mann, PMAS, Steve Archer, Staffordshire County Council and Ruth Hÿtch, Cannock Chase AONB Unit



Fantastic Volunteers!

Lew Badger BEM was presented with his British Empire Medal at a ceremony at County Buildings by the Lord Lieutenant, Ian Dudson CBE. Lew and his wife Lesley invited their close family and the Chairman of Brocton Parish Council and his wife and Emma and Anne to help him celebrate. Lew was awarded the BEM for his volunteering work with Cannock Chase in the 2013 New Year's Honours. Lew and Leslie were then invited to one of the Buckingham Palace Garden Parties.

Photo : Lew Badger BEM & Lord Lieutenant of Staffordshire, Ian Dudson CBE (Credit: Staffordshire County Council)



Also invited to one of the Garden Parties, were two more of our volunteers, Roger Marsh and Eddie Turvey. Roger has been volunteering with us for a couple of years firstly doing visitor surveys, then fixed point photography, opening Milford Hut and all manner of practical tasks. If you happen by Milford Hut and it's not open, the information board in the window is a result of Roger's and Bob Harrington-Jones' handiwork. Eddie, on the other hand, is a time served stalwart on the volunteering front. He's been involved with the management of Shoal Hill Common for many years as well as volunteering with Staffordshire Wildlife Trust.

And last, but by no means least, Sheena Davies BEM also attended one of the Garden Parties in May. Sheena was awarded her BEM for her community work in Derrington, but still finds time to open the Hut and do survey work for the AONB.

Thank you and congratulations to you all – as well as a big thank you to all those not yet fully recognised!

AONB Unit Staffing

Over the last few months while Emma's been on maternity leave, Anne has been covering some of the work with volunteers. Meanwhile, Denise Watts, who some of you may have met at our events, has been working on the admin side of the business. Denise is due to leave us at the end of August and we all wish her well in the future. It's been great having her around and we hope the experience of working in a slightly different environment has been useful.

Emma is due back at the beginning of September.

Focus on Dick Turton, Chairman, Walsall Ramblers Volunteers of the year 2012

Photo: Walsall Ramblers at work!



Q1 What is your role within the AONB?

My role as Chairman of the Walsall Group of the Ramblers is initially to support Bryan Phillips who is the Ramblers Staffordshire representative at the AONB Advisory Committee and in doing so ensure the links between the AONB and the Ramblers remain strong. I also act as an 'unofficial' coordinator for volunteers from our group who like to work on the Chase and also to be a contact point for any AONB/Ramblers projects that might evolve between the two organisations.

Q2 How long have you volunteered with the AONB and what exciting things have you got up to?

We began volunteering as a group in 2011 and we've done a varied number of activities, including heathland management, Himalayan balsam and ragwort pulling, creating insect scrapes and wildlife environments. Having 'explored' the Chase through 'hands on' events we've produced a series of walks, supported by the AONB, that aim to give visitors the chance to take themselves around the Chase in 'bite-sized' pieces so they can see the wide variation of countryside that exists in this area. (And maybe think about joining the Ramblers as well).

Q3 What is the best part of volunteering?

Overall the best part of volunteering is about what can be learnt about the environments of

Cannock Chase, why it's like it is, what's right about it, what isn't and what can be done to correct things no matter how small that contribution might be and sometimes irrespective of the timescale involved before it takes effect. As a very infrequent visitor to the Chase prior to beginning volunteering, I personally realise how different it is in many respects to what I had always thought.

Q4 What is the worst part of volunteering?

The weather of course can play a big part in any outdoor volunteering activity, but for Ramblers from Walsall who are not exactly on the doorstep, sometimes finding locations for the volunteering events can be a bit more tricky than it is for 'locals' so we rely on the AONB team giving us guidance to reach places we haven't been to before.

Q5 Favourite place

Like many Ramblers in our Group I have favourite places that are best experienced during different seasons, i.e. The Cotswolds in Summer, Shropshire in the Autumn or maybe the Peak District in the Spring. From a volunteering perspective on the Chase I think our group likes working at Shoal Hill best because there is a chance to work in a pleasant location with (usually) great views and a lot of banter with Bob and Eddie the rangers.

Q6 What makes you important to the AONB?

Naturally as Ramblers we're keen to see more people out walking, either with us in our organisation or elsewhere, and for many would-be walkers in Staffordshire, their initial experience is often to say, "Well I've walked on Cannock Chase". When we speak to people who say that, we can now engage them in a more informed dialogue about what they enjoyed about being on the Chase and how it might affect their future thoughts on walking generally. Conversely we can also give them information about walking in the Cannock Chase AONB so that hopefully they will be inspired to encourage others to start walking there, whilst also picking up an understanding of what the area is about and its history.

Q7 What one thing would you change about the AONB if your fairy godmother appeared?

One thing I've noticed (and I'm sure it's obvious to everyone) is the rapid change experienced when entering the AONB from much of the urban landscapes that surround it. To the folks who live in the urban areas the change can be dramatic and the urge to explore sometimes so urgent that the impact of this is not really appreciated. If the fairy godmother showed up I'd say, 'develop a computer/IPod/X-Box/etc. game that allowed a virtual exploration of the Chase with icons that pick up on details of its landscape, history, biology, so that new visitors could come and follow the trails around the AONB and 'live' the reality of it'.

Q8 If you were Prime Minister for the day, what law would you pass?

A compulsory environmental subject to be taken throughout school and college life that would result in a qualification in Environment Awareness that would be used to demonstrate to future employers that besides having an academic background, potential new members of staff have an appreciation of the wider non-industrial world and a commitment to ensure it continues to thrive in the future. Hopefully this might encourage those working in industries to suggest ways whereby the impact of their work on natural resources generally is reduced.



Join Cannock Chase AONB Membership Scheme from just £2 a Month

Photo:

If you love Cannock Chase AONB, and wonder how you can give something back to help conserve and improve the beautiful but endangered landscape, you might be interested in becoming a member of the AONB.

There are lots of memberships to choose from - including individual, partner, family, group and corporate, as well gift memberships.

Ruth Hytch AONB Officer, said: "Cannock Chase AONB is part of 8,000 square miles of protected landscape across England. It is important that we manage this distinctive and precious habitat well. Becoming a member of the AONB is a great way to be kept up to date about any developments, surveys or conservation work in the area, and to give something back to a place you love".

Find out more To become a member, or to find out more, please Cannock Chase AONB on 01785 619185 or email cannockchase@staffordshire.gov.uk



To find out more about the work of Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Visit: our blog at www.aonb-blog.co.uk or our corporate website at www.cannock-chase.co.uk

Sign up: To sign up for e-newsletters email anne.walker@staffordshire.gov.uk