

# Spring 2010

## Newsletter 43



### Editor

#### Introducing *'Friends of Magog Down'*

The **Magog Trust** was set up as a Company in 1989, to purchase the 163.5 acres of land in Stapleford, now known as **Magog Down**. In the run up to the purchase, public support and contributions were achieved through the sale of 'Gogs', nominal pieces of land 'for common use and for the creation of a Park to give pleasure, delight and the opportunity for Recreation to future generations'.

Under the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Company, the founding Governors (Directors), were able to establish a Membership, allowing those interested in the initial work of restoration and conservation, to contribute financially on a longer term and more committed basis. Currently the Magog Trust has around 500 Members. On average, about 200 visits are made daily to the Magog Down; obviously, not all our visitors are Members.

A **Member** of the Magog Trust is able to vote at the Annual General Meeting either through attendance or by proxy voting. Over the last twenty years, Members have received regular newsletters, now published as well on our website. The Governors of the Trust have the duty to approve Membership applications.

Twenty years on, the Governors of the Trust would like to give *every* visitor to the Magog Down the opportunity to contribute to its upkeep and maintenance. They recognize that not all visitors wish an involvement in Company matters. We do **need** the support of every visitor.

A new category, *friend of Magog Down*, has been introduced. A *Friend of Magog Down* will be able to attend the AGM of the Company, express their views, but will not be eligible to vote. At present, fees will be the same for both categories, but this may be changed in time. A Member can change category to that of a Friend, should they wish and should apply to the Administrator in writing to do this.

### Twenty years on

The weather was glorious for the day of our Downland walks to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the purchase of



the land. The first outing was particularly special, as an oak plaque was unveiled by a coppice of Wild Service Trees, to commemorate the work of Eric Winterflood MBE. Members of his family attended the ceremony which was carried out by Hugh Duberley, Lord Lieutenant of Cambridgeshire and who had awarded Eric with his MBE on the Down.

### Winter on Magog Down.

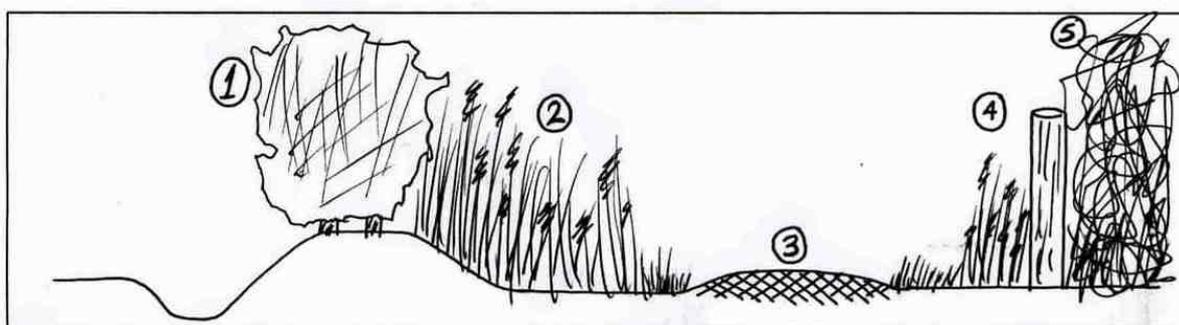
The winter's snow was much enjoyed by the many who used the hillside to its full, tobogganing down its slopes. A newly planted hedge, along the line of Fair Field suffered some damage, though recovery has been better than we thought it would be. It was a joy to see the fun everyone was having.



An important part of the funding for the Magog Down comes from our Stewardship Scheme grant which is financed by DEFRA. An agreement is made with the land owner that, in order to receive annual payments, maintenance works prescribed by Natural England will be carried out for the benefit of wildlife and public access. Two important elements of management are the hedgerows and footpaths. If managed appropriately, they can complement each other and make a more pleasant environment for the walker and a valuable habitat for wildlife. However, if managed inappropriately they can be completely devoid of wildlife and a nuisance to users.

The perimeter path around the Magog Down is very heavily used and is becoming increasingly eroded to the point where it is almost always muddy except during the summer. The quantity of snow which has fallen this year has not helped. This year we spread a layer of woodchips in order to provide a more pleasant surface on which to walk. However, due to the cost, £4,500 in 2009, we are not using contractors, but instead carry out the work on the monthly volunteer days.

Below is a diagram explain how we intend to manage the hedge/path and the features which are desirable to wildlife



1. Hedge – cut on rotation over 5-10 year period in blocks and never all sides at once. ; provides food and shelter for wildlife.

2. Vegetation alongside the hedge cut on rotation over 2-3 years in blocks in order to create variation in length but prevent scrub encroachment. Provides cover for birds, mammals and invertebrates. Long grass is ideal for overwintering insects, especially certain butterflies, caterpillars and the eggs of some species.

3. Footpath kept close to the fence with a thin layer of woodchips, topped up regularly and vegetation kept short on either side.

4. Vegetation against inner fence line cut back annually at the end of the growing season.

5. Vegetation on other side of fence cut in blocks on 3-4 year rotation to create mosaic of vegetation types and lengths but preventing scrub encroachment. An important refuge for wildlife

### Badgers

We reported in the last Newsletter about badger activity on Little Trees Hill and its possible effect on the archaeological site. I'm sorry to say that the eviction of the badgers using the Bowl Barrow sett was unsuccessful.

The chain link that was laid along the ground seemed to work well (as evidenced by an attempt to get through at one point which failed), and the gates were effective in preventing access as there was no signs of attempted entry. However we started to see signs of animals exiting via the gates and improved the monitoring by attaching pieces of paper from the door to the frame until we were sure that they were in use. New holes were dug further round and although they seemed a reasonable distance away we believe that the badgers must have linked up with the original sett from these and were gaining entry via the new holes whilst exiting through the old.

This means that we will need to apply for another licence this year and get the gates in earlier, we will also need to include the new holes and possibly increase the area covered by the netting.

## Magog Down Volunteer Groups

Our small band of volunteers has been busy over the winter months.

### **Normally meet 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday of month 2.30pm**

17 February – Wood chippings spread on part of the perimeter walk. The rangers had also done some spreading for which we are very grateful.

We also repaired and gapped up the new hedge by Fair field with some hawthorn plants.

26<sup>th</sup> February - Get together with a social evening

3<sup>rd</sup> March – spreading more wood chippings.

17<sup>th</sup> March - another wood chipping session on the paths.

7th April - Litter clearance and gapped up hedge.

Work identified for future sessions includes a programme for the management of brambles etc on the perimeter fences. The total will be divided into 300m sections with 100m of each section pruned and repaired annually. Brambles are of high value to wild life and this approach achieves control and the benefits of varied stages of growth. Magog Down Volunteers will continue weed control on the Bowl Barrow this year aiming to produce a seedbed for next spring.

The gate opening and closing volunteer team, in addition to the daily task of daily opening and closing the gates to the car park, are monitoring the parking on the verges. We are working in conjunction with the police to try and put an end to indiscriminate and hazardous parking at the site entrance

### **Mid Week Volunteers - Iain Webb (Cambridge Wildlife Trust)**

The bank along Jane's piece has been cut back by the Mid Week Volunteers to encourage the native flora. The Hawthorns along this bank are heavily invaded with Ivy and several are dead. We proposed to remove these trees to improve safety and encourage the grassland flora; a similar environment to Colin's Bank. A hedge would be planted along the top of the bank to prevent access and protect the bank from erosion.

### **Woods**

Thinning will be done in Colin's Wood this year. Alternate trees in alternate rows will be removed. The outer rows will be left and work started on second, fourth rows etc. This will then be repeated in 3 to 5 years on the unthinned rows. Undesirable trees will be marked for removal and attractive trees for retention. A full article will appear in the next issue of the Newsletter.

You can help support this work through donation which will be entered in the Book of Trees and can be in memory of a loved one, or to commemorate an anniversary, birthday or perhaps a birth or a baptism. Please send your donation to [administrator@magogtrust.org.uk](mailto:administrator@magogtrust.org.uk) with subject line **tree support**

### **Dog Walking on the Magog Down**

Adrian Tucker

The Down is a paradise for dog walkers and their dogs. It is a great luxury to be able to allow dogs to run off lead in the designated areas with no fear of traffic or other dangers.

There is a strong sense of community amongst dog walkers and in all the time I have walked my dogs I have never had a cross word with any other owner. The field has a 'club atmosphere' and many friendships between owners and dogs are forged there. We enquire after one another, look out for each other and share experiences of kennels, vets and doggy ailments. I have come to the conclusion that responsible dog owners are a nice lot and the vast majority abide by the Rules and it is only a very small percentage indeed who let us down! It is also a shame that there are still dog owners who have not joined the Trust.

Early morning on the Down are amongst the best times and afternoons in the field often have an air of picnic about them with dog owners sitting, gossiping and enjoying each others' company.

There will always be potential for tension between walkers, runners and those exercising their dogs, but I have not personally encountered them. It is a place where ones faith in human nature is generally enhanced and we have much to thank those 'Founding Fathers' who had the vision to establish the Trust, and those unpaid volunteers and committee members who keep it going.

Walking in bright sunshine with a gentle breeze with ones dogs running happily free is an unrivalled pleasure unique to the area.



On July 11<sup>th</sup> 2009 a group of botanical illustrators on a course at Madingley Hall, visited The Magog Downs to study the wild flowers that grow on chalk. The course was tutored by Valerie Oxley and attracted 16 participants from all parts of the UK, Sweden and Germany.

It was a very happy band of people who arrived at The Magog Down on the Saturday morning in July and the weather was perfect for the field visit. The coach from Madingley Hall was met by Lucy Evans of the Magog Trust and Alan Leslie the local recorder of Cambridgeshire’s wild flora. Alan led the field trip and gently guided the group around the site to look at the interesting selection of plants and associated wildlife. The group were fascinated, many people said it was like “re-living their childhood” when wild-flowers were more abundant and easily accessible. There were clouds of butterflies rising up from the clumps of marjoram *Origanum vulgare*, cinnabar moth caterpillars on the ragwort *senecio jacobaea* and bees and beetles of every description everywhere. Soon cameras were clicking, questions fired and answered, and notes and sketches quickly taken to record as much as possible before it was time to leave.

Permission was given for the group to pick small amounts of plant material where it was abundant, to take back to Madingley Hall to illustrate. The cuttings were placed in plastic bags with drops of moisture; the bags were then blown up like balloons and tied securely. Carrying plants in this way avoids wilt and the plants remain fresh. Coffee and biscuits were shared by the coach with Lucy and Alan before leaving and more questions asked and answered. Reluctantly, but inspired by all around them the students returned to Madingley Hall clutching their bags of downland floral memories.

The rest of the weekend was spent drawing and painting the wildflowers with individual tuition, studying floral details with the aid of magnifying glasses and a microscope, exchanging information and looking up plants in various floras. The peace and tranquillity of the downland was transferred to the classroom!

Madingley Hall is the headquarters of the University Of Cambridge Institute Of Continuing Education.

[For further information about courses at Madingley Hall please see [www.cont-ed.cam.ac.uk](http://www.cont-ed.cam.ac.uk)]

Valerie also teaches courses for beginners in pen and ink techniques and watercolour techniques at the Cambridge Botanic Garden; her book “Botanical Illustration” published by the Crowood Press is available from the Botanic Garden shop and contains guidance on illustrating wild flowers.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Dates for your diary</b></p> <p>1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday of month Magog Volunteers on Down          1<sup>st</sup> Saturday of month Stapleford Bird Club on the Down          24<sup>th</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup> July 2010 Friendship Week on Down          29<sup>th</sup> September 2010 21<sup>st</sup> Birthday Party          9<sup>th</sup> October 2010 Magog Trust AGM Johnson Hall,          Stapleford</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Contact us</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verger’s Cottage, 1 Gog Magog Way, Stapleford, Cambridge CB22 5BQ</li> <li>• <a href="mailto:administrator@magogtrust.org.uk">administrator@magogtrust.org.uk</a></li> <li>• Tel 0779 647 1457</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><a href="http://www.magogtrust.org.uk">www.magogtrust.org.uk</a></p> <p>Registered Company 2426534 Registered Charity 802150</p>
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