



FOREST OF **BOWLAND**

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

An outstanding landscape of natural and cultural heritage

Bowland Hay Time Project

At our last JAC meeting we presented a bid made for 'Nature Improvement Area' funding, which aimed to improve the resilience of our peatlands, grasslands and other wet habitats. Unfortunately our bid was not successful in obtaining grant aid from Defra, however, we have now secured funds to pursue the area of work focussed on improving our species rich grasslands and in particular the upland hay meadows of the AONB.

A joint bid with our neighbours at Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust, to the Lancashire Environmental Fund has secured £40,000 for an 18 month project which aims to restore over 20 sites. YDMT already have a very impressive track record in hay meadow restoration, and through this partnership we will gain from this expertise. Working closely with Natural England we will identify grasslands which can be restored through changes in management and the addition of green hay from nearby SSSI meadows, using Stewardship payments to fund local contractors. The project will also include management advice, education, and volunteer and community activities.

AONB Planning Design Guidance

The Principal AONB Officer held meetings with local planning authority officers during early 2012 to discuss the development of planning design guidance for buildings and roads/public realm within the AONB.

A steering group has now been established to guide the development of an initial 'AONB Building Design Guide'. Pendle Borough Council and Lancashire County Council have kindly offered some officer time to act as a smaller 'writing' group, alongside the Principal AONB Officer. It is anticipated that a draft design guide will be produced later in 2012, to be followed by consultation with local planning authorities and other AONB partners.

Gisburn Forest Tramper Trail

The walking trail (White Trail) from School Lane car park has been modified to facilitate tramper access along the whole 2.1km length of the route. This has involved surfacing, modification of gradients and crossfalls, drainage and the installation of culverts. This work will make the route suitable for tramper access at all times of the year and the route will be promoted through the Forest of Bowland website.

Bowland Hedge Laying Competition, 2012

On Sat 3rd March 30 people competed in the Forest of Bowland Hedgelaying Competition and over a period of 4 hours laid over 200m of hedge in the traditional Lancashire and Westmoreland style. This style allows the hedge to naturally regenerate and rejuvenate itself, thus benefitting the biodiversity of the hedgerow habitat and helping to ensure the future successful survival of what is a very traditional type of boundary within the AONB.

The competitors ranged from professionals competing in the championship class to new entrants competing for the very first time. The age range was from 14 to over 70!, with both male and female entrants, and people travelled from all over the north west of England. The work was undertaken to a very high standard and cannot be missed by anyone travelling along the B6245 Ribchester to Longridge Road.

The overall winner on the day was Peter Gibson from Kendal who in October 2010 had also been crowned the Supreme Champion in the English National Hedgelaying Championship.

Hedge Restoration in Bowland Well Supported

The Forest of Bowland AONB runs a Traditional Boundaries programme that includes grant aid towards positive management of drystone walls and hedgerows. Also, as part of this programme, training courses and support towards competitions in the skills of drystone walling and hedge laying are run.

Over seven days in November at Knotts Farm, Quernmore, 13 members of the local community and local contractors gathered to learn and develop the traditional skill of hedge laying in the Lancashire & Westmorland Style with expert tuition provided by Joe Craig and Geoff Whitley.

In total across Bowland 1750m of hedges have been laid at Quernmore, Aughton, Goosnargh, Ribchester, Marles Wood, Bashall Eaves and Sawley.

In addition to this 500m of hedgerows have been replanted in Goosnargh, Aughton and in the Ribble Valley.

Skills in hedge laying started to get lost after WW2 and by the 1970s the loss in hedgerows was happening at an alarming rate. Skills in hedge laying and hedgerow maintenance were in danger of been lost forever. Out of these concerns was born the National Hedge Laying Society, plus the development of grant schemes to encourage the restoration and positive management of hedgerows.

Maintenance of hedgerows is now part of good farming practice and the skills of the hedge layer are in great demand.

Foxendole Lane Bridleway, Higham

The removal and resiting of 40m of established hedge at Foxendole Lane have enabled users to have much safer access onto the bridleway from the busy A6068 Burnley road. This will benefit walkers, cyclists and horse riders using the bridleway. The work has been undertaken by the Parish Lengthsmen from the Pendle Hill area working under the supervision of Dave Padley from the Environment and Community Projects Team.

Peat Restoration & Path Improvements, Bleasdale Fells

Over the winter of 2011/2012 a combination of habitat restoration and public access improvements have been carried out on Bleasdale Fells SSSI. This work has focused on two areas: Fiendsdale Head and Fairsnape Fell top, and has been largely funded through Higher Level Stewardship with support from the Forest of Bowland AONB, United Utilities and Lancashire County Council.

At Fiendsdale Head 840metres of the footpath over Bleasdale and United Utilities land has been restored using a combination of flag path surfacing and subsoil re-profiling with associated drainage and habitat restoration. The eroding peat in the wider area has been re-profiled and heather brash applied.

On Fairsnape Fell plateau a large area has been fenced off and within it the eroding peat hags have been re-profiled and reseeded with heather brash. At the fence junction near the cairn at 1707, use of the kissing gates over the deep eroding peat had become very difficult. Here the gates have been relocated away from the eroding peat and a subsoil/flag path has been created linking people off Wolf Fell to the cairn at 1707.

Lower Gazegill Farm Orchard Project

A traditional orchard has been established at Lower Gazegill Organic Farm near Rimmington in the Ribble Valley. This project has involved the planting of 180 maiden trees of traditional old Lancashire varieties of Apple, Plum and Damsons. The planting and fencing have been undertaken by local volunteers and by students from Ribblesdale School in Clitheroe.

Resilient and sustainable rural communities

Bowland Tourism Environment Fund

The Visitor Pay-Back scheme promoted by the Three Fishes at Great Mitton has proved very successful. They invite diners to contribute 20p towards the costs of supporting the Trampers project in Bowland. This raised £8,500 in just over a year. A big cheque was presented to Trustee Ann Shaw at the end of February.

The funding has already been put to use to pay for a detailed survey and mapping of seven new Trampler Trails totalling over 40 miles around the AONB and will also contribute to groundwork needed in some places to make the trails accessible for powered wheelchairs.

Bowland Experience Ltd

The company has now reached a membership of 88 and has continued to organize business training for members (and others). The company manages a Trampler which is expected to get more use as the new trails (see BTEF) are opened up this year.

New issues of the *Fishing in Bowland*, *Gisburn Forest Mountain Bike Trails* and the *Bowland Tea Shops Guide* are being produced to keep up with demand for this visitor information. New ideas being considered include developing and marketing a programme of Literary Evenings hosted by members.

The company has proved very useful in the administration of the Bowland Symposium to be held in May 2012.

Global Responsible Tourism Accolade for Bowland

The Forest of Bowland AONB is runner-up of the prestigious 'Best Destination' award from The International Responsible Tourism Awards. The award was presented to the AONB on 9 November as part of World Responsible Tourism Day at the World Travel Market in London, sponsored by Virgin Holidays.

The Forest of Bowland AONB are delighted to be the runner-up for the best destination award; the accolade is testament to a collective effort of the AONB team, partner organisations, community groups and most of all the tourism businesses themselves who have worked hard over the last six years to deliver tourism with sustainability at the core.

The rigorous awards process relies on travellers and the industry to nominate exemplars in the field of sustainable tourism. Once all the nominations are received - over 1,000 this year - the judging process really begins. Organised by founder www.responsibletravel.com since 2004, several stages are designed, alongside the International Centre for Responsible Tourism, to really put the nominees through their paces. At each stage the list gets shorter, until their expert panel of judges debates the finalists on an annual judging day. Previous winners of the Best Destination Category include Aspen, Colorado, Cape Town and the New Forest. The winner for 2011 was Røros in Norway.

For further information about the awards visit www.responsibletravel.com/awards

A strong connection between people and the landscape

Education Commission

In autumn 2011 we commissioned Ian Hart to research and develop education resources for schools visiting farms within the AONB. This developing education project has been designed to follow on from the classroom based education project we have been running with RSPB over the last four years. Ian has worked with 10 farmers who have Stewardship agreements to provide educational access, and he has identified what they can offer to visiting schools. He has also worked with primary school teachers to identify what resources they need when visiting farms. His next job will be to bring the two sides together and to produce and promote a suite of resources, which will be hosted on our website.

Deer Parks Research

This project has been led by Nigel Neil and Ruth Thurnhill of the Lancashire Gardens Trust. They have worked with volunteers from Chipping and elsewhere to research the history of two medieval deer parks at Radholme and Leagram, and to see what traces of these landscapes remain in the area today. They have uncovered some remarkable archive material, as well as walked and documented the old boundaries. We plan to produce some interesting interpretive material from their careful research, and to organise some public events later on this year.

Festival Bowland 2012

Festival Bowland – our year-round calendar of events celebrating Bowland's birds, wildlife, landscape and culture - is now well into its 2012 programme. Thanks once again to the collaboration of organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors, this year's programme offers a wealth of events designed to encourage people to get out and enjoy the AONB. Walking, cycling, wildlife watching and photography - not to mention drystone walling, spoon carving and poetry – are all on offer over the coming year, whilst Bowland Arts Festival in June includes open studios, workshops and exhibitions - plus the chance to sing and dance!

The 2012 brochure also sees the introduction of two new features designed to help residents and visitors explore and understand even more. A series of "Discover Bowland" events take a more in-depth look at a range of subjects – all guided by leaders who are experts in their field. The first event in March focused on carboniferous geology and proved extremely popular. Later in the year a new heritage weekend, from 7th to 9th September, will offer a fantastic chance to look behind the scenes at some of the AONB's less familiar places.

Last year's incentivised feedback postcard scheme will run again this year, but over a longer time-frame, with the intention of encouraging a greater number of respondents. We are now also sending out a concise, on-line feedback form to event organisers at the beginning of each month, requesting attendance figures for each of their Festival events from the previous month. The form is designed to be completed easily and should help us to build up a picture of which events are proving popular.

Young People's Art Project Pilot

The AONB has been working in partnership with Lancashire County Council's Young People's Service (YPS) to deliver a series of arts-based workshops to young people in rural areas. The sessions were designed to offer young people between the ages of 11 and 19 the chance to work with an artist to develop pieces based around the theme of "Bowland".

Not only did the pilot sessions allow the AONB to reach a group of people outside the age-range of our more regular audience, they also allowed the YPS to offer their young people opportunities which they would perhaps be less likely to access in normal circumstances: the chance to learn skills from practicing artists.

Workshops were held in Sabden, Slaidburn, Longridge and Newton in March, during which time 29 young people worked with artists Julie Miles (ceramics), Anita Burrows (printmaking) and Anne Somers (fused glass) to produce some great work.

The intention now is to hold an exhibition of the young people's work at the Bowland Visitor Centre, Beacon Fell Country Park, in early summer.

Birds of Bowland Outreach Project

The joint RSPB/AONB education project has proved so successful that it was decided to continue the project for a further year, this time working with six schools around the edge of the Forest of Bowland.

177 pupils from primary schools in Gisburn, Chatburn, Longridge, Melling and Leck have now taken part in three classroom-based sessions delivered by experienced field teachers from RSPB's Leighton Moss reserve.

Both lesson delivery and teaching resources have been designed to be flexible which means that, once again, children from Reception age through to Key Stage 2 have been able to get involved. During classroom sessions the children have learnt about everything from landscape and habitats to camouflage and migration and the quality of display work shows the enthusiasm that exists for the project.

The farm visits, which mark the final stage of the project, are due to take place at Cobble Hey near Garstang and Laund Farm near Chipping during May.

St. James' Church Community Archaeology Project

Phase 1 of our partnership project to uncover the foundations of the original St. James' Church at Stocks-in-Bowland got off to a flying start during autumn.

Working with United Utilities and Slaidburn Archive, and thanks to the dedication and enthusiasm of volunteers combined with expert supervision by professional archaeologists from Lancaster-based Oxford Archaeology North, a significant part of the church foundations have now been revealed.

After only 12 days between October and November, the walls of the entire nave and porch were uncovered, every stone trowelled clean, drawn, plotted and photographed (in triplicate) and a huge amount of soil dug out and barrowed away. During the winter break the foundations were covered with geotextile and sand to protect them from the worst of the weather and the site was temporarily fenced off.

Thanks to continued funding from United Utilities, with support from the AONB, Phase 2 of the project is about to start. Beginning on Saturday 21st April, Oxford Archaeology North will again lead three-day blocks of volunteer days at the site, with the aim of uncovering the final section of the church foundations – the chancel.

All being well the excavation work will be completed by the end of our final work date which is planned for Monday 14th May. United Utilities will then consolidate the newly excavated foundations in order to conserve them for the future. The project is very fortunate in that Slaidburn Archive holds a number of old photographs depicting the area and once practical work on the ground has been completed we hope to install a small interpretation panel on site.

Communications & Branding

Online developments continue including developments of a new 'Green Guide' to Bowland featuring all 37 GTBS accredited businesses and an interactive visitor map, making access to visitor information more inspiring. Both of these new features will be launched on the website in May.

Other communication activity includes a re-print of the popular Gisburn Forest Bike Trails leaflet, and new walking routes connecting tourism businesses, including a cluster of Wyre businesses and new routes interpreting the wildlife opportunities at Deep Clough Farm Holiday Cottages, Littledale.

You can now also follow us on Twitter! This is an opportunity for us to engage with visitors and our community to provide Festival and other event updates as well as new project developments. Follow us at <http://twitter.com/forestofbowland>

A dynamic and effective AONB partnership

National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) - Update

The AONB Unit has worked closely with the National Association for AONBs on making responses to key consultation documents including the Rural Economy Growth Review (REGR), the National Planning Policy Framework and CAP Reform.

In particular, the NAAONB joint response to the REGR has resulted in AONBs being identified by Defra as a key partner in the delivery of RDPE funding to support sustainable tourism within rural areas. Potential collaborative working between AONBs on sustainable tourism is being investigated and will be discussed in detail at the forthcoming 'Bowland Symposium'.

In addition, AONB Unit staff members have attended a number of NAAONB and Northern AONB Group meetings:

- NAAONB AGM in London, October 2011.
- Northern AONB Group meeting hosted by North Pennines AONB, November 2011
- NAAONB Northern Chairs and Lead Officers Meeting in York, January 2012
- NAAONB Lead Officers Meeting in Birmingham, February 2012

Finally, the NAAONB has launched its new website to help raise the profile of the AONB family nationally, under the banner of 'Landscapes for Life':

<http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk/>

Front cover image:

Clear Beck meadow © Jon Hickling

