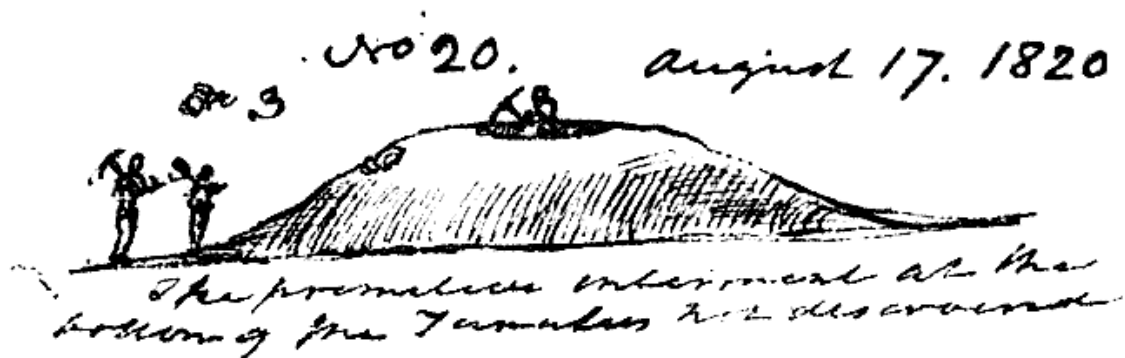


# BEACON HILL WOOD

Beacon Hill Society Newsletter

May 2007



[www.beaconhillsocietymendip.org.uk](http://www.beaconhillsocietymendip.org.uk)

Dates for your diary:

**Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> May & all weekend**  
**Alan Connock Vintage Road up Gang**

A display by a Vintage road repair gang exercising their skills in the maintenance of a vintage road. Work will be carried out to level the ruts in the hollow-way and provide drainage to reduce the amount of storm water which is the main cause of the erosion. Work starts on the Saturday afternoon and continues after a hearty breakfast on Sunday. Visitors are welcome at any time to experience the sounds and smells of early 20<sup>th</sup> century road repair.

**Friday 29<sup>th</sup> June and all the following week (provisional)**  
**Archaeological Excavations led by Peter Leach**

Pending the approval of our grant application, volunteers will be studying a couple of non-scheduled barrows in the wood to see what remains can be found from the Bronze Age. If you wish to participate, or would like further information please contact the Secretary.

**Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 7.30pm at the Kings Arms, Leg Square, Shepton Mallet**

## Next Meeting of the Beacon Hill Society

All members are welcome, please request an agenda if you would like to attend.

### Chairman's Report

Why your subscription is vital.

2007 sees the Beacon Society in good shape. Maybe we will not have the large programme of events that we had a couple of years ago when there was the availability of grant money - however we have a valuable role to play and the subscriptions of members are vital in enabling us to continue to do that.

Firstly our objectives as discussed at the recent AGM

- 1) To continue to work with the Woodland Trust to ensure the preservation of the woods as an amenity available for the public to walk in and enjoy for generations to come.
- 2) To continue investigation into the history, geology, flora and fauna of the woodland. This year we are hoping to get the grant for archaeological investigation into one of the damaged tumuli
- 3) To continue to provide education and information about the woodland to local schools and the public. We have our education CD, our display boards and website
- 4) To involve the public in the woodland through events. We are aiming to have at least one event a year.

For your £5 subscription you will not only be kept informed about everything that is happening but will be providing valuable funds to enable us to continue to meet our objectives. In the broader picture £5 per year is a small price for the significant amount it means to our efforts. Of course we always welcome more people to be involved on the committee, but appreciate that these days time is limited for many. By taking out a regular subscription you can still make a major contribution.

In the meantime I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at forthcoming events and meetings.

Alan Stone  
Chairman

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### Secretary's Report

The AGM on Monday 30<sup>th</sup> April saw the conclusion of another year in the life of the Beacon Hill Society and, of course, the start of a new one.

Not much to report on the AGM, we mulled over the events and activities of the past 12 months and in the absence of other volunteers, the previous committee agreed to stand for a further year. The vacancy resulting from the departure (to Cornwall) of Tony Britton our Treasurer, at the beginning of October last year had been filled by Membership Secretary Mary Newman, who now continues in both roles.

The Society year started with the introduction in May of the NERC Bill, new national legislation intended to control use of motorised vehicles on green lanes. This will reduce the number of road legal motorcycles that ride up the Fosse Way, but it is unlikely to have any effect on the perennial illegal scrambler activity round the rest of the wood (see separate article).

It has been a pretty quiet year in BHW; the archaeological digs had been completed in the spring and reports on these can now be found on the [beaconhillsocietymendip.org](http://beaconhillsocietymendip.org) website; or request a copy from me. Further archaeological work is planned for later this year pending the success of an application for further Aggregate Levy funding (see separate article).

The volunteer work force has been busy finishing the clearance of brash from the linear ditch and bank along the ridge to the east. This now makes a pleasant walk all the way to the east gate. Here it has been agreed with the Woodland Trust to create, by the removal of a few small

trees on the boundary, a viewpoint. When completed this will be one of the few places where visitors in the wood will be able to see the splendid scenery which surrounds us.

It is also planned to create a similar viewpoint from a point on the ridge close to the central area. Several of the plantation trees fell in the high winds earlier this year and the slope does not require much more thinning to open the view.

One sad loss has been a mature beech from the group in the centre. This was suffering badly from fungal attack and, being in such a frequently visited area, had to be taken down for safety reasons. Inspection of the core of the tree reveals just how badly infected it was.

The constant appearance of camp fire remains in this area is worrying and the availability of portable barbecues is making its presence felt in the wood. Several 'empties' were picked up by a recent litter collecting party and the memorial seat found to be badly damaged by careless use. Why some people come to such a beautiful area to enjoy the atmosphere and then pollute it with radios and litter is one of those little mysteries of human behaviour beyond my comprehension.

The occurrence of this antisocial behaviour can perhaps best be discouraged by clearing up as soon as it occurs and visiting the wood as frequently as possible; it is still a splendid and fascinating place to spend the odd hour or so.

See you there perhaps?

Peter Banks  
Hon. Sec.

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## **Archaeology in Beacon Hill Wood 2007**

Following our investigations of ancient quarrying sites and remains of the Fosse Way Roman road within the wood last year, we are seeking to extend our research through a programme of exploratory excavations targeting some of the prehistoric barrows. The wood preserves the remains of part of a cemetery of bronze age round barrows, some of which are protected as Scheduled Ancient Monuments. Others not so protected were damaged during forestry planting in the 1950s, and is the intention to sample some of these by trial trenching. Our principal objectives would include assessments of the condition and survival of archaeological structures and deposits, including the mound, the possible presence of an outer ditch, survival of any burials, to identify any earlier antiquarian excavations, locate any surviving buried soils, and to obtain material suitable for palaeoenvironmental sampling and for carbon 14 dating. Ultimately, the objective is to further enhance understanding of the rich archaeological heritage preserved within Beacon Wood and the appreciation of all those who enjoy it, as well as providing an opportunity for local public participation in such a project.

Our earlier programme of investigation was facilitated by a grant from the Somerset Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund, which also enabled the creation of the Beacon Hill web site. To pursue this latest research proposal we have submitted a further request for SALSF grant support, primarily to fund specialist analyses of remains recovered and for professional direction and recording. Finance apart, the success of the project depends upon voluntary participation of Beacon Hill Society members, as well as other local groups and individuals, including archaeology students from Strode College, Street. Final confirmation of the project must await the outcome of our grant application, but subject to this being successful the intention is to investigate the sites of two damaged barrows in the western half of the wood during the first week of July 2007. Subject to results then a further programme of excavation may take place in the Autumn. More details should be available before the end of May for circulation on the website and to all interested participants; we hope to see you there!

Peter Leach

## Rights of Way Update

A substantial change in National Rights of Way legislation occurred on 2 May 2006 with the implementation of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC). Part of this Bill has the effect of reclassifying any Road Used as Public Path (RUPP), as shown on the Highways RoW Definitive Map, to a new category to be known as a Restricted Byway (RB). The effect is to make illegal the use, by the public, of any motor propelled vehicle (MPV) on a route so classified. Horse drawn vehicles and bicycles are still permitted to use the routes, as are adjacent landowners. The RoW (Fosse Way) from Yellingmill Lane up through Beacon Hill Wood is therefore now classified as RB, but not the green lane which continues north towards Oakhill or the route south down Martin's Lane towards Shepton Mallet; these are unclassified (county) roads (UCRs) and they remain legal for motor vehicles; provided, that is, they are taxed and insured, etc. for use on public roads.

A basic summary of the effect of NERC is that, blacktopped public roads aside, the public may now exercise a vehicular public right of way only on byways open to all traffic (BOATs) and unsealed roads recorded in the highway authority's 'list of streets' (UCRs).

There remain a few routes, not currently BOATs or UCRs, where NERC has not extinguished underlying existing MPV rights. These exceptions are mainly on routes where an application for a definitive map modification order (DMMOA) was lodged with the order-making authority before 20 January 2005 in England, and 19 May 2005 in Wales. These applications will be processed into orders and then through to completion, and as any MPV rights have not been extinguished (at least until the order finishes its passage and vehicular rights are not found to exist) it remains open to a driver threatened or charged under s.34RTA88 to plead these underlying vehicular rights in defence.

Despite submitting a large number of applications throughout Somerset, I understand the local Trail Riders Fellowship did not enter one for the route through Beacon Hill Wood until after the deadline. So, a kick in the teeth for the nice guys from the TRF who behave themselves and who helped us clear the mud and debris from the hollow-way, they are now barred from riding through. These chaps also helped repair the damage done by illegal users of 4 x 4 and scramble bikes.

But will it stop those who have been using the wood illegally? Appears not; there are plenty of recent signs of continuing use, with 4 x 4 tracks entering the wood beside the permissive bridleway entrance and the tyre tracks of scramble bikes using the central barrows as jump off points!

Peter Banks

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## A letter from Pru Piper

*On Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> March the Frome Society for Local Studies held its AGM.*

*After the official business, Peter Banks gave a wide-ranging and well received talk to a packed hall of members about every aspect of Beacon Hill Wood. This he illustrated by many of his excellent photos. He also made use of geological diagrams provided to him by Jim Hanwell. He told members about recent archaeological digs and surveys, and of the many walks and events the Beacon Hill Society has put on during its first ten years. The display boards and some geological and archaeological specimens were provided by Peter for the further interest of Frome based Mendip residents. He encouraged people to join as members and volunteers.*

*The Chairman thanked Peter warmly for his talk. Beacon Hill Society will lead a Bluebell Walk in the wood on 12<sup>th</sup> May and a coach party from Frome is expected!*

*Thank you Peter, for doing such a grand job.*

*Pru Piper*