

REIGATE HEATH NEWS

Friends of Reigate Heath Newsletter Spring 2007 Issue 5
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Combating Climate Change:

'Why are you cutting down *more* trees?!'

This is major concern of some people who have seen the work around the heath of the Reigate Area Conservation Volunteers (RACV), the Borough Council and the Golf Club as part of ongoing programmes to regenerate the heathland this winter. We are told through the media again and again that we '*must plant trees*' – surely climate change is a greater priority than heathland restoration? In actual fact, as a recent Radio 4 programme 'Home Planet' explained, the big media push to plant trees in order to combat climate change and offset carbon emissions has been in part misguided particularly on sites with peat deposits such as heathlands and moorlands.

Recent research indicates that dry and wet heaths are a greater store of carbon than woodland. They are areas where peat deposits naturally develop, acting as **carbon sinks**. These sites however have been severely degraded over the past 200 years through poor management and tree encroachment. Carbon is locked up in a peat bog far longer than relatively short-lived birch and pine trees which not only take the carbon out of the soil but also dry out the habitat. Tree leaf litter encourages microbial action within the soil which, as the peat breaks down, is released in the form of methane – a greenhouse gas, like CO₂.

Some of our rarest wildlife lives on heathlands with mosaics of dry and wet heath. On a recent visit to Reigate Heath, Rob McGibbon of the Surrey Heathland Project praised the conservation efforts achieved so far but says there is much more that we could be doing. He observed that Reigate Heath has great potential to restore and expand its areas of both wet and dry heathland while also respecting its rich archaeological heritage.

Stop Press: As part of the Management Plan, Reigate and Banstead Borough Council are funding an appraisal of landscape views on Reigate Heath.

Susan Medcalf, Secretary

Since its formation, the Friends of Reigate Heath have been collecting donations from individuals and businesses in a **Heath Conservation Fund**, which exists to support the enhancement of the heath's biodiversity and SSSI status - crucial for the security of its future. See over for more details.

Surrey Heathland Project Exhibition at Reigate Heath-



'Change on the Heath'

This fascinating exhibition is visiting Reigate Heath Cricket Pavilion from 25 June to 8 July – exploring how Surrey's heathland landscape has changed, along with the lives of the people who have lived and worked on it. This has been commissioned by the Surrey Heathland Project. We are supplementing this with some amazing 'then and now' images of Reigate Heath as well as other information including a copy on hand of the Management Plan. Please put the dates in your diary and spread the word! Special thanks go to Mrs Martindale for an invaluable family photo from 1971 of the 'gallops' and to Paul Walters of www.oldreigate.com for letting us use his vast collection of important & beautiful historical images.

Opening hours will be determined by how many volunteers come forward to man it. We shall need two at any one time. If you think you can help even for a few hours, please indicate using the slip overleaf.

For those of you who enjoy painting, please see the enclosed leaflet regarding our **art competition** for original works inspired by heathland. Excellent prizes, notable judges and if you're lucky you might be selected for exhibiting! There will be opportunities for artists to sell their work on behalf of the Heath Conservation Fund if they so wish.

We look forward to seeing you there!

The Annual Reigate Heath Steering Group Walk around the Heath is at 6pm on **4 July 2007**. This is your opportunity to hear first hand about the Heath's management *in situ* and to put your questions to members of the Steering Group. Meet at the Flanchford Road noticeboard by car park.

"Britain's heaths and moors hold the key to reducing carbon emissions"

The Independent 15 March 2007

The heather moorlands of Britain are considered by scientists to be a vital weapon in the struggle against climate change, removing carbon from the air as they grow and storing it in their wet, peaty terrain. But scientists at York University's Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) warned yesterday that the moorlands had become a "timebomb" in the fight against global warming as the combination of a warming climate and bad land management are drying them out, releasing carbon on an industrial scale. National parks are already looking as a matter of urgency at how they might preserve peat bogs on the moorlands as carbon sinks.

What is 'Common Land'?

Helen Neve, Land Management Services

We all appreciate our commons – those sweeps of open space which add such character to our landscape; Reigate and Redhill are particularly blessed in this department. And of course we all know about common land – don't we?

In fact, there are more misconceptions about common land than almost any other type of open space. The biggest myth is that common land belongs to us all - it most certainly does not! Common land is owned by an individual, or organisation, in just the same way as any other piece of land. Perhaps a quick glance back at the history of commons will help to explain what they were and what they are now.

Common land dates back to the medieval farming system and Reigate Heath appears to be a classic example. The land may originally have been farmed for grain or other crops but the light soils were quickly exhausted and reverted to grasses and heathy vegetation, useful for stock grazing. The lord of the manor continued to own this 'waste' but local cottages and farms had legally recognised rights, typically to run stock, cut turf or take underwood, small branches and bracken for fuel, repairs or animal bedding. These rights were usually attached to a dwelling rather than

an individual and the lord of the manor could not enclose the land (which would deny access to those with common rights) without parliamentary permission.

With the drastic changes in farming in the twentieth century, many of these rights were no longer exercised and fell into disuse and many commons, particularly in Surrey, were sold to local authorities for use as public amenities. Reigate Heath was no exception and, following the death of Lady Henry Somerset in 1922, the Heath was sold to Reigate Corporation.

There has been a range of legislation in the 20th and 21st centuries, which has affected the way commons are used and managed. The Commons Registration Act 1965, for instance, required registration of common land and common rights if they were to continue to exist (Reigate Heath has no registered rights) but it was not until the Countryside and Rights of Way Act in 2000 that we really got the 'right to roam' – responsibly - on many of our commons. Today, the Commons Act 2006 aims to help local management of common land.

Commons are a precious resource. We need to respect their history while enjoying the marvellous opportunities they offer us.

Friends of Reigate Heath: helping to rebuild the biodiversity of the heath

Reigate Heath is a *Local Nature Reserve* and is also designated a *Site of Special Scientific Interest* by Natural England, largely through its botanical interest. The accidental discovery in 1998 of a rare mining bee *Andrena ferox* suggested that the insects and other invertebrates of the heath might also be of interest. A 2005 survey by Roger Hawkins, commissioned by English Nature and the Borough Council, brought to light many interesting invertebrates including 14 Red Data Book species. An ongoing Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group survey is also offering essential information for improving the site for the reptiles.

Specialist surveys provide records for the Heath with invaluable management advice on how to improve habitats for specialist heathland species. Yet funds for these are thin on the ground. This is where the Friends of Reigate Heath is now able to step in thanks to the generosity of many of those on our mailing list and some local businesses. We will fund surveys on moths and bats- two important groups for which there are minimal records.



You can help with conservation work by joining in on RACV task days!

The heath is blessed with the ecological and practical expertise of the RACV leaders but – the more hands available, the greater the amount can be done. No experience necessary just enthusiasm!
For more details, check out www.racv.org.uk or contact Simon Elson on 242644.

Please send to: c/o Friends of Reigate Heath, Heath Farm, Reigate Surrey RH2 8QP or FoReigateheath@aol.com

Name, address & phone no.....

Have you enclosed a donation? (cheques made payable to 'Friends of Reigate Heath') _____

Exhibition Helping Rota: To give us some idea, please indicate when you might be able to help. It's not binding!
We will need two volunteers present at any one time. (Please delete as appropriate)

Mon 25 June pm/eve Tues 26 am/pm Wed 27 am/pm Thurs 28 am/pm Fri 29 am/pm Sat 30 am/pm Sun 1 July am/pm
Mon 2 July am/pm Tues 3 am/pm Wed 4 am/pm Thurs 5 am/pm Fri 6 am/pm Sat 7 am/pm Sun 8 am/pm.

Comments: