



Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke Newsletter Number Twenty Five

Traffic Restriction Order, ahoy!

When this society was set up in April 2001, one of our aims was to secure a Traffic Restriction Order on the section of the Roman Road between the Balsham-Linton Road and Mark's Grave on the West Wickham-Horseheath Road. As Roger Moreton explains in his article on the subject, obtaining a TRO is a slow business, but it seems as though the end is in sight and not only to an imaginative cabin boy at the top of the main mizzen mast.

Last winter, new notices politely asking 4 x 4 drivers not to use the Roman Road when it had become badly rutted, were taken down and the sign posts thrown into the ditch. The surface, repaired at his own cost by the landowner, was turned into a wide band of muddy trenches, making it hard for walkers to use, but showing that Voluntary Restraint was not a viable policy here. The next stage is a Seasonal TRO, which can be imposed when necessary, mainly in winter. This will require the installation of heavy-duty gates and traffic restriction signs, and also changes in the legal position of the Road. It is hoped that this can be done before next winter. The Friends are most grateful to John Cooper and Dominic Doble of the Countryside Services Team of Cambridgeshire County Council for their help in resolving this long-standing problem. However, I think many of us will also be sad that this old road with its air of freedom and distance can only be protected by more gates and sign posts.

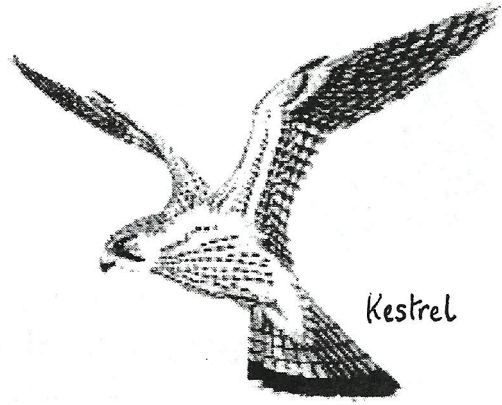
Rabbit Control

The rabbit population has increased, is increasing and needs to be diminished. The problem is particularly bad between the Gunner's Hall path and the Hildersham-Balsham Road. Regular requests from farmers and landowners for a major rabbit control policy have tended to come up against what the Chinese might call 'the Three Impossibles'. The Roman Road is open to the public at all times, which appears to rule out shooting. Gassing can be effective but may kill other smaller mammals and numerous invertebrates, so Natural England (English Nature) cannot permit it. Ferrets can do a good job, but if they get stuck down a hole, the ferreter will have to dig them out, which means that English Heritage could not approve ferreting.

However, at the November meeting of the Cambridge Linear Sites Steering Group, it was agreed that something must be done. Technology has come to the rescue in the form of radio-collars for ferrets. If a ferret gets stuck, which does not appear to happen very often, its owner can locate it and dig directly down to it. It was also agreed that 'lamping', shooting at night, could be done safely if the marksman walked along the hedge, on the field side, moving up the hill so that any stray pellets would travel into the rising ground. After a site meeting with the tenant farmer and the relevant officers, Jon Gibbs, the Head Ranger at Wandlebury Country Park undertook to begin ferreting and lamping in order to assess the extent of the problem. If it is thought possible to significantly reduce the quantity of rabbits, English Heritage may try a method used on railway banks which involves filling the rabbit holes with a kind of grouting material. This sets hard and discourages the rabbits from returning, at the cost of damaging the substrate of the ancient monument. Furthermore, another mostly very warm winter is passing without any serious reduction in rabbit numbers.



Ferret



The Management Plan for the Roman Road

In 2006, Rachel Pateman joined the Wildlife Trust as Conservation Officer. Rachel, who graduated in Biological Sciences from the University of Oxford, had been working for the Trust as a volunteer, a curious modern form of apprenticeship by which many people who want to a career in wildlife conservation finally secure a job! For the last year, in between her other responsibilities, Rachel has been beavering away collating a large amount of miscellaneous information, earlier management plans and botanical records. Out of this a detailed plan has been drawn up for the work which is needed to maintain and enhance the wildlife, especially the flora. At our last meeting, the Friends' committee congratulated Rachel on her work.

This draft plan has now been considered by the various groups with an interest in the site, and by members of the Friends' Committee, in particular Peter Grubb. We are most grateful to him for giving up so much time to walking key parts of the Roman Road and studying the Management Plan so carefully. His knowledge of the requirements of calcareous flora and his experience of conservation work on the Devil's Dyke for which he helped to write a management plan have been an enormous help to the Committee of the Friends of the Roman Road. Since this work was fitted in around a very busy schedule of academic work and writing, we owe him a huge debt of gratitude.

After approval by representatives of the farmers and landowners the plan will be implemented as follows. The best areas of flora will be maintained by skilled contractors and voluntary groups as before. Farmers and landowners will maintain the remaining areas using subsidies from the government's environmental schemes: ELS, the Entry Level Scheme and HLS, the Higher Level Scheme. Cambridgeshire County Council has a statutory duty to maintain footpaths and rights of way by cutting and this will continue as before, but with one significant improvement. See below. **The Rights-of-Way Cut**

It should be useful in the future to have a clear management plan for the whole site, and it will be possible to use such a plan in applications for grants; although inevitably it has to be a simplified version of the ideal plan. However, it is not at the moment certain whose job it will be over the next few years to check that the plan is being correctly implemented from month to month so that action can be taken if something begins to go wrong.

The Rights-of-Way Cut

Anyone working to increase the number of flowers along a footpath or byway will quickly come up against the problem of the rights-of-way cut. Just as the summer flowers come into their full beauty, the County Council contractor comes along and mows a two metre width on a footpath, and a five or more metre width along a byway. It is the statutory duty of the byways officer to keep the paths open. Special arrangements existed for the best sections of Fleam Dyke and the Roman Road, but elsewhere the rule had to be followed. This cut was particularly damaging on the Fulbourn end of the Fleam Dyke which was cleared with money from our Awards for All Grant. The first summer after the clearance of the top of the bank, there was an astonishing flowering of harebells, clustered bellflowers and greater knapweed. The next year, however, the path was given the standard machine cut, although it should have been done by hand with a brush cutter, and for the four years following we lost the flowers and the potential seeds of this narrow band of surviving chalk grassland flora.

Last July, walking the butterfly transect route, I trod on a carpet of harebells, greater knapweed and clustered bellflowers. You can walk a long way in Cambridgeshire without seeing harebells and I know of few places in the county where one can see the clustered bellflower in any quantity. Indeed there are not many places where it can be seen at all. I sent a description of the scene to Rob Mungovan, Ecology Officer for South Cambridgeshire District Council, who sent it on to John Cooper, Senior Access Officer with a reminder of the new legal requirements of NERC.

NERC

Is it a bird, is it a plane? No, it is the **Natural Environmental and Rural Communities Act of 2006**. This unsensational piece of legislation includes the requirement that 'all public bodies shall have regard to biodiversity'. How very useful a little legal phrase can be! Freed of the obligation to mow paths in July, the County Council officers were able to make compromise arrangements for the Roman Road. In April and October the central 2 metres of the path will be cut, together with either the north or the south verge. There will be a mid-summer cut just 2 metres wide if necessary. This regime was begun in July 2007 and the benefit was already clear by August. In the area of the big 2005 clearance, from the Gunner's Hall path to the Hildersham-Balsham Road, there were ripening seed heads of common knapweed, some greater knapweed, St. John's wort, hoary plantain and even two small patches of quaking grass. Unfortunately, they will have to compete with the rapid spread of the common grasses such as false oats, cock's foot, yorkshire fog and creeping bent. The arrangements for Fleam Dyke have yet to be defined, but we look forward to a more flexible cutting regime here as well. (Stop Press. The probable loss of Thurrock Marshes suggests that NERC does not have the legal force hoped for.)

Julia Napier. 25th Feb 2008



Greater
knapweed

Traffic Regulation Orders and Byways by Roger Moreton, Cambridge Ramblers' Association

(This article was written before we had the good news that the County Council expected to be able to impose a temporary TRO this year, JN)

A majority of 'green lanes' in Cambridgeshire, including the Roman Road between the Cambridge City boundary and the Linton/Horseheath parish boundary at Mark's Grave, have been classified as 'Byways open to all traffic' (BOATs for short). This means that they are open to pedestrians, horses, cyclists, farm tractors, motorcycles and any other motor vehicles that can physically be driven along them. The result is that some, unfortunately, have attracted interest from trail-bike and 4x4 enthusiasts, who can quickly reduce un-metalled surfaces to a mess of water-filled ruts so that the byway becomes almost unusable by anyone else.

The County Council has a duty to maintain all public rights of way – footpaths, bridleways and byways – in a fit state for use by every class of traffic that is entitled to use them. For byways, it can control surface damage by improving drainage and clearing overgrowth to spread the usage as widely as possible; by making up or hardening the surface, for example by spreading chippings or road-planings; by seeking to restrain vehicle usage during the wetter months by voluntary agreement with user organisations; or legally by making Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) under Section 1 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. Such orders can be made on a number of grounds, including avoiding danger to other users; preventing damage to the byway; facilitating the passage of other users; preventing unsuitable usage; or preserving the character and/or amenities of the byway and its surroundings. Orders can be year-round, or can impose seasonal restrictions. They can also seek to exclude selected classes of vehicle, for example by restricting width or height, or by excluding only vehicles with more than two wheels, as has been done in the TRO which currently protects the Roman Road between Cambridge and the Linton – Balsham road.

The drawbacks are firstly, that Cambridgeshire County Council, quite reasonably, wishes to respect the rights of all users, so that restricting the rights of some should be regarded as a last resort. Secondly, TROs are expensive – something like £3,000 a time - so the number that can be contemplated each financial year is strictly limited. Following the petition made by the Ramblers' Association to the Council in March 2006, Kate Day (Countryside Access Team Leader for the Council) told us that a rolling programme of TROs was envisaged, but that in each case it would be necessary first to explore all possible options. Clearly this can take some time, during which the state of the byway will deteriorate further. There are some 400km of BOATs in Cambridgeshire (out of a total rights of way network of 3,500km), and although not all will need protection, nevertheless there is likely to be a long queue of byways awaiting attention.

So the way to get protection for the rest of the Roman Road is to keep pushing it up the County Council's agenda. We need records of surface damage, damage to the Roman 'agger', disturbance to wildlife, fly-tipping and rubbish dumping associated with vehicular usage, damage and contamination caused by travellers' encampments. We need to show the Council what a popular route it is, and how many people will be inconvenienced, or even prevented from using the byway, due to the antics of an inconsiderate few. We also need to show how protection by a seasonal TRO can help the Council's task of maintaining the byway, and save money in the long term by preventing repeated damage.

The Council will wish to check, quite reasonably, that the reported damage is indeed due to recreational vehicle usage, and not to legitimate use by farm traffic, and vehicle user-groups will also wish to protect their own interests – for example motorcyclists may seek to be exonerated, on the grounds that their vehicles are lighter and do less damage than 4x4s. Photographic records will help to clarify these points, and records of actual usage by vehicles are valuable (though getting them might be risky in lonely situations). Regarding the Roman Road, the Ramblers' petition included the section not already subject to a TRO, as one of three local examples of byways most needing protection, so the Council already has some evidence as part of the RA's supporting case. What is needed now is just continual pressure of reports, from as many sources as possible, both organisations and individual users.

The address to write to is:

Kate Day, Countryside Access Team Leader, Cambridgeshire County Council,
Box ET1009, Babbage House, Castle Park, Cambridge CB3 0AT,
or send e-mails to cst@cambridgeshire.gov.uk, again addressed to Kate Day.

For more information about public rights of way in South Cambridgeshire, and the role of the Ramblers' Association, contact Roger & Janet Moreton, 23 Emery Street, Cambridge CB1 2AX, e-mail rogerandjanetm@cambsandpeterboroughramblers.org.uk, who would also much appreciate copies of any communication with Kate Day.

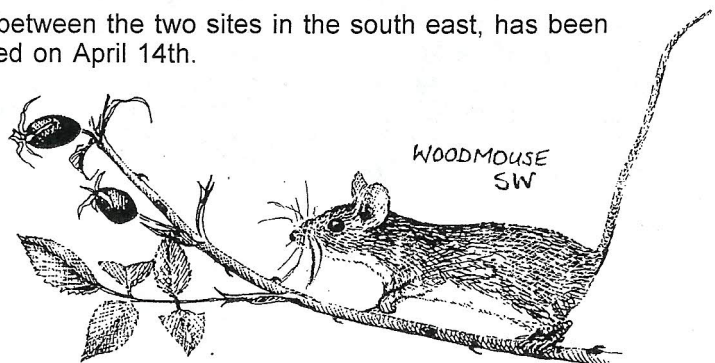
Details of the Road Traffic Regulation Act were obtained from:
"Rights of Way, a Guide to Law & Practice", by John Riddall and John Trevelyan,
4th Edition 2007, The Ramblers' Association and Open Spaces Society
ISBN-13: 978-1-901184-99-0.

Long Distance Walk by Roger Lemon

One of the topics discussed at the Friends' committee meeting in October was the possibility of a 'Long Distance' circular walk incorporating both the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke and linking them in the north west between a suitable start/finish point on the outskirts of Cambridge and Fulbourn and in the south east between Balsham and a point on the Roman Road near the Suffolk boundary, a total distance of about 25 miles. The objective would be to promote increased use of both sites, to provide a further opportunity for outdoor activity close to Cambridge and to support the local rural economy. The Long Distance Walkers Association defines a long distance walk as anything over 20 miles.

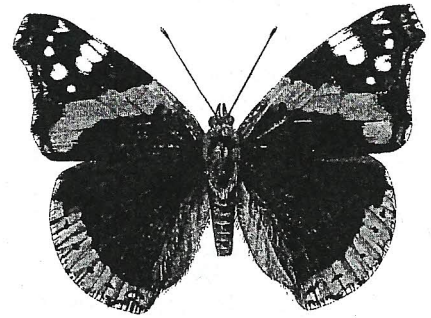
The idea was subsequently approved by the Linear sites Steering Committee and contact was then made with the Countryside Access Team at Cambridgeshire County Council, Roger and Janet Moreton of the Ramblers Association and Helen Ryde of Cambridge Green Vision. They all supported the idea and a meeting to discuss the project in some detail was held on 21st January. Points covered were the options for the start/finish point, the proposed route, possible funding, the name of the walk/route/way, yet to be finalised, and contacts to be made with other organisations.

A walk from Balsham, to decide details of the link between the two sites in the south east, has been arranged for March and a further meeting is planned on April 14th.



The Red Admiral,

by Robert Burton, bird-lover, writer
and Trustee of the Countryside Restoration Trust



More than any other common butterfly, the red admiral lives up to Miriam Rothschild's evocative description of 'dream flowers which have broken loose from their stalks and escaped into the sunshine'. At this time of year, and even into November if the weather remains fine, red admirals are to be seen on the wing, feeding on late blooming flowers such as ivy, or on the juices of rotting windfalls and overripe blackberries.

At this time of year, they are perfect condition. It is sometimes said that the name 'red admiral' is a corruption of 'red admirable' but there is no evidence for this. The original name of the butterfly was simply 'admiral', and it probably referred to the flag of 18th century admirals which featured a plain field with colours in one corner, like today's Red Ensign.

If you see red admirals out at the moment, they are likely to be basking in the sun. They settle with the spread wings facing the sun which it was thought were acting as 'solar panels', by absorbing the sun's heat which was carried by the blood to warm the body. It is now known that the sun warms the body directly and the wings are acting as baffles so that the breeze does not cool the body by convection.

Overall, there is a general southward movement which started back in August. Red admirals are heading south, like swallows, for a warmer winter home. They trickle down the country and gather along the south coast, then launch themselves across the Channel. It is not known how many red admirals complete the journey but a huge proportion dies on the sea crossing. A few stay behind in this country and hibernate on trees. They are occasionally seen flying around on mild winter days (along with small tortoiseshells, peacocks and brimstones). The hibernators are likely to succumb before spring, although more are surviving now that winters are getting warmer.

Apart from the tiny number that survive the winter, the British population of red admirals is built up by immigration from the main homes of the species around the Mediterranean. As soon as winter is over, swarms of butterflies start on the journey north through Europe and many cross the Channel. Breeding starts almost immediately on arrival in England and new generations of home-bred butterflies join the relays of immigrants that continue the northward movement through the British Isles.

I have space to mention that last summer I saw a Camberwell beauty in my garden. I nearly mistook this very rare immigrant for a Red Admiral but I realised it was too big and then saw the telltale pale yellow border to the wings. What made this sighting so satisfying is that Robin Page, author of *The Great Butterfly Safari*, has never seen one.

This article was originally written for The Lark, the CRT newsletter



THE COUNTRYSIDE
RESTORATION TRUST

CREATING A LIVING AND WORKING COUNTRYSIDE

Work Parties

The first work party of the season, on Mutlow Hill, was cancelled because the weather forecast was so unpropitious. The day then got better and better! On Sunday 11th November 2007, there was a work party on the northern end of the Roman Road, at the point where a surviving section of the agger runs beside the Golf Course. In the flora survey commissioned by Sharon Hearle in 1998, Sarah Lambert noted a small number of chalk grassland species: rock roses, lady's bedstraw, kidney vetch, bird's-foot trefoil, common knapweed, agrimony and restharrow. Other recorders note the survival of purple milk vetch until 2002 but no one has seen it since then. That is not surprising because the bushes and trees bordering the golf course have grown steadily, casting a shade which encourages lush grass and thick moss. It would be good if some agreement was reached on hedge management sooner rather than later.

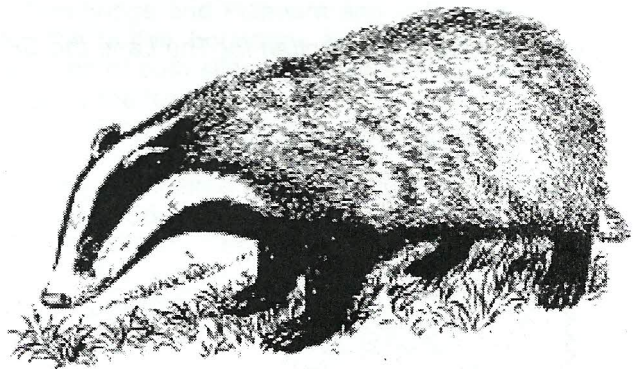
When we mowed and raked this site in November 2006, we found small patches of rock rose in two places only, a bit of lady's bedstraw and not much of anything else. However, the improvement has been dramatic. There are now large patches of rock roses all along the raised bank of the agger and long stretches of lady's bedstraw. Common knapweed and greater knapweed are now abundant. Wild basil has spread across the site in a characteristically opportune manner, and there were eight small spikes of wild parsnip, which I do not recall seeing in 2006. Encouragingly, there were two flowering heads of hoary plantain and a small area of bartsia and toadflax. Neither of these last two plants are rare or peculiar to chalk grassland, but they add to the variety of flora, and will be enjoyed, I hope, by the children who are brought for walks along this section of the Roman Road. They may not be sought-after rarities, but both plants are the specific food plants of a small geometrid moth: toadflax is the food plant of the little Toadflax Pug, and bartsia is the main food plant of the Barred Rivulet.

So, many thanks to the Gang Master, Iain Webb, and the team: Helen Chubb, Richard Fowling, David Seilly, and half a dozen students from Anglia Ruskin University who had been recruited by Iain Webb to help with mid-week and weekend work parties.

I am sorry to say there was some confusion over the February 17th work party, so it did not take place; but there will definitely be a work party on Sunday March 9th. We shall be joined by the stalwarts of Cambs and Essex Butterfly Conservation. We shall be working on the Fleam Dyke, south of the A11, in the area where a small colony of Chalkhill Blues were seen in August 2006 and 2007. You may wonder whether a dozen hearty types trampling up and down the side of the Fleam Dyke in boots might spell doom to a small number of Chalkhill Blue eggs; but they seem to survive. The proof of the pudding is to be seen in the huge increase in the numbers of these beautiful butterflies on the Devil's Dyke, where the Cambs and Essex Butterfly Conservation work parties have mowed and raked off for about 20 years. **Come and help!**

A little local Badger difficulty

Anyone walking along the Fleam Dyke from the A11 southwards will soon come to the extensive spoil heaps of a very large badger sett on the western side. A year or two ago, the badgers broke through the dyke to the eastern side, also while pushing south under the roots of one of the precious junipers. The Fleam Dyke is a Scheduled Monument lovingly protected by English Heritage. The badgers are protected animals, the subject of protective legislation from 1973 onwards, the most recent being The Protection of Badgers Act 1992. So by law, the sett cannot be closed down, and in any case the evicted badgers would soon make their way back to such good accommodation. Problem!



Thanks to Natural England for the drawings of the badger and the kestrel.

The Mid-Week Conservation Programme

The Mid-Week Conservation Volunteers will be working on the Fleam Dyke and the Roman Road this winter, as well as on other areas managed by the Green Belt Project. Good exercise in the fresh air/rain, and pleasant company over a picnic lunch.

Please ring 01954 713500 if you intend to come, in order to check the meeting place.



Other Work Parties and Events

Sunday, 2nd March **Helpers wanted for work on Fulbourn Nature Reserve**
Work Parties last from 10.0 am to 12.30 or so. Meet at Stonebridge Lane. Contact: Nigel Copeman: e-mail: ncopeman@tinyworld.co.uk or phone Julia Napier.

Sunday, 9th March Friends' Work Party on **the Fleam Dyke for the Chalkhill Blue**
We shall be joined by Cambs. & Essex Butterfly Conservation work party. We shall be working on the southern part of the Fleam Dyke, across A11. Meet at Stonebridge Lane, Fulbourn at 10.0am for transport to the site.

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Talks run by the Cambridge City Group of the Wildlife Trust

These talks are held in the Gilmour Building of Cambridge University Botanic Garden. Please note that the entrance is via the drive beside 47 Bateman Street, **NOT** at the Bateman Street gate of the Botanic Garden.

7.30pm. All welcome. Entry: £2 for members of the Wildlife Trust, £3 for non-members

Thurs 27th March **Cambridge, Coprolite City**
Illustrated talk by Toby Carter, President of the Natural History Society and Lecturer in Zoology at Anglia Ruskin University

Thurs 24th April **The Great Fen Project - an Update**
Illustrated talk by Chris Gerrard, the Project Officer

From September 2008, these talks will be held in the hall of the church of St. John the Evangelist, which is on the Hills Road opposite Homerton College. The Gilmour Building will be closed during the construction of new educational facilities and will probably be pulled down.

Contacts

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The Committee of the Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke look forward to seeing you on Thursday 10th April for

The Seventh Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke

7.30pm in the Function Room of the Six Bells Public House, Fulbourn

All welcome. Non-members £2 50

A short AGM will be followed by an interval for coffee, drinks and conversation, after which **Brian Eversham**, Conservation Director for the Wildlife Trust for this area will give an illustrated talk on

Climate Change and Local Wildlife

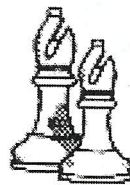
As anyone who has been on a study day with Brian Eversham will know, he is a fount of knowledge about wildlife, especially invertebrates. He is also a lively and inspiring speaker, with a message that is not at all just gloom and doom.

At last year's A.G.M., it was pointed out that the names of the committee are not listed in any newsletter. Until we get round to producing a proper rogue's gallery, with mini-biographies, here is a list of names and some of our interests in relation to this society. JN

Sam Agnew	Chairman, with a special interest in obtaining a TRO
Mike Albutt	Treasurer and work party regular
David Barden	Botanist, minutes secretary and work party regular
Nigel Copeman	Voluntary Warden, Fulbourn Nature Reserve
Peter Grubb	Emeritus Professor, Investigative Plant Ecology, C.U..
Rob Mungovan	Ecologist for South Cambs. District Council
Julia Napier	Secretary and newsletter editor
Jane Robson	Membership Secretary
David Seilly	Voluntary Warden of Lime Kiln Close and West Pit, work party regular
Iain Webb	Green Belt Project Officer
Roger Lemon	Butterfly Monitoring Scheme

My thanks, as always, to the team at Copy Studio and especially to Mark Bishop, for being unfailingly cheerful and helpful.

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