

JUST TRAINING IN THE RAIN!

The Breckland Society's latest research project got underway with a training day last November. "The Internal Archaeology of the Warrens" project is one of six Society initiatives being financed by the Heritage Lottery Fund as part of the 'Breaking New Ground' Landscape Partnership Scheme. Sue Pennell explains what was involved.

Saturday 22 November 2014 was wet and dismal, but the autumnal gloom did not deter old hands and newcomers alike to Breckland Society projects from gathering at Oak Lodge in Thetford Forest to discover what this second survey of the warrens and lodges of the Brecks would involve. Prospective volunteers were told how the new project will complement the Society's award-winning *The Warrens of Breckland* report of 2010 by researching, locating and recording the internal banks and lodge sites that were not included in the original survey. The majority of the new fieldwork will be on public access land in Thetford Forest, where much of the archaeological evidence remains to be discovered and interpreted.



Getting to grips with surveying equipment

The audience learnt about the development and significance of warrening to the local economy, as well as about the history of Thetford Forest and how volunteer involvement in this survey will be crucial in helping to protect historic sites for posterity. Also explained was the value of studying old maps, where to find them on the internet, and how to relate features on these historic documents to current Ordnance Survey maps and to what can be seen in the landscape.

Fortified by coffee and biscuits, and armed with umbrellas, clipboards and measures, the group set off along the damp forest rides to be shown three parallel warren banks. They learnt how to use measuring poles and tapes to determine the size of the archaeological site and the length and width of the individual banks, as well as how to use a compass to confirm

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WHAT'S ON

forthcoming Society events

Friday 13 February 2015, 7 pm

The History of RAF Watton, a talk by Julian Horne.
Mundford Village Hall.

Members £3, non-members £5, to include refreshments.

Friday 24 April, 7.30 pm

Staging Masterpieces: Art and East Anglia

A lecture by author and art curator Ian Collins, about the landmark exhibition held at the Sainsbury Centre, UEA, Norwich in 2013–2014.

Old School, Thetford Grammar School.

Members £7, non-members £10, to include refreshments.

Friday 15 May

AGM

Time and venue to be confirmed.

Breaking New Ground Projects

Until March 2015: *Brecks Warrens and Lodges*

April to September 2015: *Sheep in the Brecks*

See website for details www.brecsoc.org.uk

For more information about Society events,
please email info@brecsoc.org.uk

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the alignment of the banks. Instruction was also given on how to use a dumpy level (an optical instrument used to establish or check points in the same horizontal plane) to record the height of the banks. This professional equipment will be available for volunteers to borrow, thereby helping them with accurate recording of the sites they survey.

The introductory training day concluded with familiarisation with recording sheets, the health and safety aspects of being out in Thetford Forest, and the assurance that help and advice from the experts was always available in response to an email or telephone call. All those who attended the training day received a follow-up email from Project Manager Anne Mason, asking volunteers to select a warren if they were

The volunteers learn how to measure the length of an archaeological site.



Anne Mason was Norfolk Record Office "guest blogger" in January — read her blog at norfolkrecordofficeblog.org/2015/01/21/researching-rabbits/

interested in doing research. With their warrens selected, volunteer researchers were emailed a comprehensive downloadable pack that included appropriate maps, guidance on how to search the internet for relevant information, recording sheets and volunteer time-and-expense forms. So far, ten of the thirteen warrens with internal banks have volunteers who will be surveying them over the next three months.

The Breckland Society is grateful to Rachel Riley of the Forestry Commission, to David Robertson and Claire Bradshaw of the Norfolk Historic Environment Service, and to Anne Mason, our Project Manager, for their time in preparing and presenting the interesting lectures and explanations. Their enthusiasm inspired many of those present to volunteer to delve further into the history of the warrens and it is this new research that will be revealed in a report to be published by the Society at the conclusion of the project later this year.

Further information is available meanwhile from the Project Manager by emailing anne@providence28.fsnet.co.uk

ANCIENT HOUSE MUSEUM LAUNCHES DULEEP SINGH APPEAL

Thetford's Ancient House Museum, with which the Society has enjoyed a very productive relationship for many years, has launched an appeal to raise the funds required to give more space at the museum to the fascinating Duleep Singh story.

The museum owes its existence to the generosity of Prince Frederick Duleep Singh, son of the last Maharajah of the Punjab. Prince Frederick worked with Thetford Borough Council, giving funds to buy the historic premises and paying for their restoration. The Ancient House Museum was opened on the 11 December 1924. Prince Frederick also generously gave the town items from his personal collections, including oil paintings, Staffordshire figurines and a rare stuffed great bustard.

Prince Frederick's father, Duleep Singh, became Maharajah as a boy, last of the heirs of the powerful Maharajah Ranjit Singh. After the Anglo-Sikh wars of the 1840s, Duleep Singh lived a life of exile. He settled at Elveden Hall near Thetford, where he raised a family with his wife the Maharani Bamba, became 'Lord of the Manor', and held shooting parties for his aristocratic friends. A sense of injustice about his treatment by the British grew inside him and towards the end of his life he rebelled against the imperial power and tried in vain to return to the Punjab.

Prince Frederick grew up to be a great collector, enthusiastic archaeologist and antiquarian, becoming President of the Norfolk & Norwich Archaeological Society during the same year he

established the museum. The appeal was launched as part of the museum's 90th birthday celebrations last November, at an event attended by Elveden Hall's current owners, Lord & Lady Iveagh, as well as Bollywood stars involved in the making of a film about Duleep Singh, which is being shot on location in India and England.

The museum hopes to raise £50,000, which will enable the redisplay of one of the gallery spaces to showcase more of the Duleep Singh family heritage, including items from the Norfolk Museums Service collections, and to celebrate Thetford's Anglo-Sikh connections.

Meanwhile, the museum's latest exhibition, "Thetford and the First World War", continues until 31 October and contains a wealth of fascinating material ranging from masks belonging to early tank drivers to Princess Sophia Duleep Singh's sari, worn while she worked as a wartime nurse.

More information is available from 01842 752599 or ancienthouse@norfolk.gov.uk

PLACES TO VISIT IN THE BRECKS: Red Lodge Heath

Located in the far south of the Brecks adjacent to the rapidly expanding built-up area of Red Lodge, Red Lodge Heath is the last surviving fragment of the former warren lands of Freckenham Manor. Today the heath covers 10.75 hectares, representing only 10 per cent of the warren's original area, but it is nonetheless an important survival of the wild heathland that once covered much of the Brecks.

After rabbit warrening ceased, parts of the heath were used for commercial mineral extraction, which continued until the 1950s. This activity resulted in deep pits and hollows which allowed the water table to create the ponds which can be seen there today. These are similar to the pingos found in other parts of the Brecks, and the water level can vary by up to three metres in a year, depending on rainfall. They provide valuable habitat for rare invertebrates. Meanwhile much of the site was left unmanaged, resulting in the encroachment of invasive gorse and other scrub on the open grassland. It also suffered from off-road vehicle activity and fly-tipping.

The heath was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 2005 because of its unique mix of habitats, which include dry acid grassland, chalk grassland, lichen heath and wet woodland with ponds. The heath is one of the best sites in Breckland for beetles, bees, wasps and ants, with a particular highlight being the rare Five-banded Tailed Digger Wasp. It is also home to some rare and interesting plants, including Breckland Thyme, Smooth Rupturewort, Bearded Fescue, Viper's Bugloss and Harebell.



In 2007 the Red Lodge Conservation Group was formed, a band of enthusiastic like-minded volunteers who help manage the site. Through their work, many improvements have been made to the heath in recent years for the benefit of visitors. Twenty tons of waste, some of it toxic, has been removed from the site, which has now been enclosed by fencing with appropriate gates and openings, helping eliminate off-road vehicle access. Steps have also been taken to make the woodland area more accessible, with informal paths created and bracken and scrub cleared to extend the areas of grassland.

Collaboration between the Conservation Group and Upton Suffolk Farms Ltd, Natural England and Forest Heath District Council is helping secure the heath's future. Interpretation boards have been erected throughout the site, informing visitors of its history and wildlife and making it a safe and attractive area for recreation and educational purposes.

For further information on what to see and how to help, visit redlodgeconservationgroup.org.



The tiny Five-banded Tailed Digger Wasp, a solitary wasp which burrows into loose sand.

AN APPEAL FROM THE CHAIRMAN: THE SOCIETY NEEDS A NEW SECRETARY!

“The Society's Secretary, Sue Pennell, will be standing down at the AGM in May. Sue has done a fabulous job over the last two years, during which time membership has risen substantially and members have enjoyed an exciting and varied programme of events. She has decided that it is now time to hand over the reins, and so the hunt is on for someone to fill her shoes from May onwards. The Secretary looks after the day-to-day admin of the Society and the running of our committee meetings (4–6 per year), as well as helping to plan and coordinate events with other members of the committee.

If you are interesting in taking on this role, or in helping out in any way, please get in touch with me on tel 020 7602 0493, or mobile 07785 320 470.” *Bob Baker*

NEWS FROM BRANDON COUNTRY PARK

from the Park Manager, David Falk

Frosty mornings, a rare bees' nest and a pagan wedding sum up the last few months at Brandon Country Park! I started as the new manager here in October, having spent the last seven years as Suffolk County Council's Countryside Access Manager. Prior to that I'd worked for over 20 years in tourism, so coming to Brandon Country Park was a bit of a dream job!



Let's hope the bees' nest will survive the winter!

The unseasonably warm weather in November kept us all as busy as we had been in August. The car park was full most weekends, with scores of people walking, cycling and enjoying lunch. New signs were installed in the park in October and a flag

with our new Firecrest logo now flutters beside the main entrance. Our very dedicated team of volunteers have been busy maintaining the grounds, clearing 'halos' around some of our specimen trees and keeping on top of the walled garden.

Last summer a very unusual bees' nest was discovered. The nest is fully exposed, wrapped around the branches of a tree. It faces south east, getting full sun, but the recent cold snaps have reduced bee numbers greatly. We are hopeful that it will make it through the winter.

IES Breckland School visit us twice a week, undertaking a variety of projects. In December the children made a



A magical setting for Julia and Steven's pagan wedding ceremony

RECENT EVENTS

For our 2014 Christmas event the Society broke its usual pattern with an evening in the forest, based at Oak Lodge Forest Centre.

After an illustrated talk by a member of the Breckland Astronomical Society, describing what we might see in the night sky (if the cloud cleared!), we were led on a walk by the Forestry Commission's Wildlife Rangers. With shooting stars overhead, we were given an introduction to the different species of deer present in Thetford Forest, with the bonus of being able to try out the Rangers' infrared sights.

It was a bitterly cold night, and it was with frozen hands and feet that we made our way back to the Community Centre, where the bowls of home-made soup, rolls and mince pies that greeted us were all the more welcome. After supper, those who wished were invited to stargaze, with telescopes and guidance from the Astronomical Society.

Thank you to all those splendid people who contributed to making it a lovely evening.

presentation of a litter survey they had conducted. We are now discussing a long-term project for them for later this year.

Our popular tearoom had a very busy autumn and early winter, with Christmas lunches particularly in demand. In early January we were honoured to host a pagan wedding. The bride, wearing a beautiful green dress, arrived on a white horse and a ceremony was held in the walled garden. With a heavy frost that day, the scene had a magical fairytale look.

If you've yet to visit the country park, you'd be very welcome! We're open every day from 10am.

If you would like to contribute to the Breckland Society Newsletter, please contact the Editor by email: liz@dittner.co.uk or tel 01366 727813